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The Right to Philosophize: Characteristics of the Contemporary Algerian Philosophical Experience

Abstract

The question of the “right to philosophize” in the Algerian and Arab contexts is seen as an intellectual battle against Western centralism, which has confined philosophy to the “Greek miracle.” Philosophy is not the preserve of a single civilization; rather, it is the fruit of the accumulation of multiple civilizations and human experiences, seeking to defend pluralism and difference and to consolidate the intellectual sovereignty of societies, enabling them to understand themselves above all and to communicate with others. This article highlights Algerian intellectual models that have worked to localize philosophical studies in the local social context, delving into its specific problems and concepts. These models include Abdallah Charit, who emphasized the “battle of concepts” against symbolic alienation and the domination of imported concepts; Bukhari Hamana, who transformed the Algerian Revolution into a philosophical event establishing a local historical philosophy; Ben Mizian Ben Sharqi, who called for the activation of communicative rationality in the Algerian public sphere; and, finally, Zaoui Hussein, who used philosophy as a tool to dissect the Algerian identity crisis and transcend its false dualities.

Keywords: *right to philosophize, Algerian thought, concepts, revolution, communication, identity*

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Fəlsəfələşmə hüququ: Müasir Əlcəzair fəlsəfi təcrübəsinin xüsusiyyətləri

Xülasə

Əlcəzair və ərəb kontekstində “fəlsəfələşmə hüququ” məsələsi fəlsəfəni “Yunan möcüzəsi” ilə məhdudlaşdıran Qərb mərkəzçiliyinə qarşı intellektual mübarizə kimi qəbul edilir. Fəlsəfə tək bir sivilizasiyanın qoruğu deyil; əksinə, plüralizmi və fərqi müdafiə etməyə və cəmiyyətlərin intellektual suverenliyini möhkəmləndirməyə çalışan, özlərini hər şeydən əvvəl anlamağa və başqaları ilə ünsiyyət qurmağa imkan verən çoxsaylı sivilizasiyaların və insan təcrübələrinin toplanması nəticəsində yaranan bir bəhrədir. Bu məqalədə fəlsəfi tədqiqatları yerli sosial kontekstdə lokallaşdırmaq, onun spesifik problemlərini və konsepsiyalarını dərinlən araşdırmaq üçün çalışan Əlcəzair intellektual modelləri vurğulanır. Bu modellərə aşağıdakılar daxildir: simvolik yadlaşmaya və idxal olunmuş anlayışların dominantlığına qarşı “konsepsiyalar mübarizəsini” vurğulayan Abdallah Charit; Əlcəzair inqilabını yerli tarixi fəlsəfəni quran fəlsəfi hadisəyə çevirən Buxari Hamana; Əlcəzair ictimai sferasında kommunikatativ rasionallığın aktivləşdirilməsinə çağırən Ben Mizian Ben Sharqi; və nəhayət, fəlsəfədən Əlcəzair kimlik böhranını təhlil etmək və onun yalançı ikiliklərini aşmaq üçün bir vasitə kimi istifadə edən Zaoui Hüseyn.

Açar sözlər: *fəlsəfələşmə hüququ, Əlcəzair düşüncəsi, anlayışlar, inqilab, ünsiyyət, kimlik*

Introduction

The debate on philosophy in Algeria perhaps encourages us to re-examine and question the very nature of philosophy. This question perhaps stems from an issue that troubles contemporary Arab thought, and not only Algerian thought: does contemporary Arab philosophy truly exist? Why do we call our subjects of thought “thought” and not “philosophy,” unlike the term philosophy used for these same Western intellectual subjects? We could even go further than this denigration of our ways of thinking by calling it “discourse” in Algeria. Thus, before exploring the philosophical horizon available in Algeria and the nature of this way of thinking in relation to major philosophical subjects, let us ask ourselves the following questions: What is philosophy? What are the forms of thought and expression that we can associate with philosophy or call philosophy?

The right to philosophize

Anyone who follows the path of philosophical thought through its successive stages will find that each historical stage has added its own personality to the era in which it emerged, always shaping the spirit of that era with all its historical, political, cultural, sociological, and other dimensions. Thus, philosophy has always carried, in the minds of philosophers and even the general public, the definition most deeply rooted in human consciousness: the love of wisdom. Wisdom is not a codified model of thought, because every statement carries within it human dimensions, however diverse and numerous they may be, and constitutes *par excellence* a form of philosophy.

It is well known that “there is no universal philosophy born in one place; rather, there are multiple histories of philosophy, each with its own language, questions, and pains” (Derrida, 2000).

Hasn't the time come to redefine philosophy as “all forms of thought that reflect the spirit of the times” and begin to study it from the Code of Hammurabi, for example, or from the oldest narrative manuscript written by humankind, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, as a starting point for human inquiry into questions of life, death, and immortality?

Research

With the end of the system, philosophy no longer has a specific subject, and its themes have diversified, addressing topics that had not been explored in its long history. Post-systemic philosophy has attempted to imitate human reality with all its theoretical and procedural ramifications. On the theoretical level, philosophy has begun to seek a function within contemporary fields of knowledge, reframing its problematics. Philosophical work has thus become inseparable from the characteristic that marked philosophy after Hegel: it no longer has a subject, and it now works on itself and rereads its history in order to transcend it (Abd al-Salam, 1991, p. 82).

With the increasing legitimacy of scientific knowledge and the capacity of reason to establish new cognitive mechanisms based primarily on the experimental scientific method, philosophy attempted to find its place on the map of knowledge, striving to make scientific consciousness the basis for building a theory of knowledge grounded in a unified structure of existence and manifestation in relation to consciousness as a whole (Al-Arabi Miloud, *Identity and Otherness in Paul Ricoeur*, 2012).

This is why, at this particular historical moment, a revolution in thought and methodology was needed against the idea of centrality and against the monopoly over the right to philosophize. One cannot rely on the European heritage and believe in its absolute right to revive the spirit of philosophy. Rather, it is necessary to mobilize and unsettle it. Did not Nietzsche say: “Truth is born only from the marriage of impudence, suspicion, brutal rejection, hatred, and discord in life. How difficult it is to make all these premises agree and unite” (Nietzsche, p. 230)?

Discussing the right to philosophize is, in itself, a legitimate right for every human mind. Certain texts outside the Greek corpus have been obscured. It is therefore necessary to question and critique the concepts that underlie Western thought itself—concepts that have, over the centuries, acquired the character of sacred truths.

This becomes evident in certain Algerian philosophical readings that have attempted to engage with the history of philosophy not for the mere pleasure of repetition, but rather to interrogate the central concepts upon which Western thought, in general, is founded. Discussing philosophy in

Algeria can generate a certain ambiguity regarding Algeria as a place, or regarding Algerians themselves. This discussion is not about Saint Augustine, Jacques Derrida, or Albert Camus. Rather, it concerns a contemporary Algerian generation that has sought to revive the right to philosophize within a society marginalized by colonialism.

This task was nearly impossible in the early years of independence due to the limited familiarity with major philosophical texts and the dominance of political ideologies over intellectual inquiry. However, our aim here is not to construct a historical overview of the stages of philosophical study in Algeria. Instead, we seek to highlight the specificity of Algerian philosophy through selected philosophical texts that attempt to transcend the history of philosophy and pose questions that engage Algerian reality in its problematic dimension, with a measured philosophical tone, while asserting their right to philosophize.

As examples, we examine three texts that appear to us to possess a distinctly Algerian philosophical character: *The Philosophy of the Algerian Revolution* by Professor Boukhari Hamana; *Philosophy and Public Space* by Professor Ben Meziane Ben Charki; and *Doubt and the Sources of Resentment in the Philosophy of the Algerian Scene* by Professor Zaoui Houcine. These works aim to integrate philosophical concepts into the Algerian philosophical, political, social, and cultural landscape.

Boukhari Hamana: The Algerian Revolution from a Philosophical Perspective

One of the most significant works of contemporary Algerian philosophy is Dr. Boukhari Hamana's book *The Philosophy of the Algerian Revolution*. In the introduction, the following statement highlights both the author and the work: "The work addresses an important and crucial issue in Algerian intellectual discourse, linked to the question of national identity... What adds to the brilliance of this cognitive achievement is that its author is considered one of the pillars of philosophical research in Algeria" (El-Boukhari, 2005, p. 9).

Returning to the book, which examines one of the most decisive moments in contemporary Algerian history—the November Revolution that shook the world politically and militarily—Professor Boukhari Hamana approaches this revolution from a philosophical perspective. While many global revolutions were grounded in pre-existing humanist philosophies, such as the French Revolution, the Algerian Revolution did not originate from a philosophy but rather generated one. It produced a philosophy of history distinct from Hegelian philosophy, which the author terms the "November Philosophy." This philosophy intertwines Islamic and Islamist, scientific and secular, populist and Marxist elements. Al-Boukhari does not interpret the Algerian Revolution through purely material premises; instead, he perceives within it the presence of a guiding human intention behind events (Attar Ahmed). Here, philosophy, in its conventional sense, diverges from revolutionary philosophy. Philosophy, as Al-Boukhari argues, is not "a philosophy for the sake of philosophizing, devoid of meaningful engagement with lived reality and its ever-renewing challenges. Rather, the philosophy we seek is one that emerges from our own depths and is capable of expressing our hopes and sufferings, our authenticity and openness, through its connection to the data of our time and the positive dimensions of our past" (El-Boukhari, 2005, p. 37).

A purely Algerian definition of philosophy through the philosophy of the Algerian Revolution allows us to glimpse Professor Bukhari also claiming the right to philosophize for our society. We do not need to propose the same Western philosophical concepts or address the same topics, but rather to philosophize through our history and our present, seeking to modify something of its complexity, in accordance with Marx's words and his call that philosophers must change the world, not merely explain it. When he says, "The role of philosophy is no longer just to interpret the world, but to contribute to changing it, because thought that does not touch reality remains suspended in a void" (Marx, 2000), he emphasizes this transformative role. Indeed, the philosophy of the Algerian Revolution was the best transformer of the reality of an entire society, which attempted to establish its philosophy through a set of theoretical and procedural elements mixing the political, the social, and the cultural, all within the crucible of the philosophy of the Algerian Revolution, or the Algerian philosophical revolution.

Ben Meziane Ben Charki: The Public Space as an Essential Starting Point for Philosophy in Algeria

The second model we have chosen to demonstrate our right to philosophize is a work by Professor Ben Meziane Ben Charki entitled *Philosophy and the Public Space*. Perhaps the professor spares us the effort of searching for forms of philosophy in his text and making evaluative judgments about them. He seems instead to have focused on the epistemological problem that confronts us as Algerians—and even as Muslims and Arabs—namely: do we have the right to philosophize and to think philosophically about our reality and about our private and public spaces?

Let us consider these sentences that Professor Ben Meziane chose to place at the beginning of his book: “Philosophy is a right and a duty for every human being, regardless of their status, homeland, gender, or language—not for any reason other than that philosophy is the human being himself. Therefore, if philosophy is undergoing a process of migration today, it is a necessary stage in its history. It is sufficient for us to philosophize, and to philosophize within this natural diversity that characterizes the history of philosophy itself” (Ben Meziane, 2007, p. 12).

The author thus sought to exercise this right to philosophize within our public space, attempting to explore the possible spaces of communication within our society according to its specificities, and not in isolation from philosophical theories of communication. For example, Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, distinguishes two spaces through which the flow of communication is organized: the public space and the private space. This interaction between public and private spaces later constituted Jürgen Habermas’s attempt to establish communicative rationality (*communicative rationality*) as opposed to instrumental rationality (*instrumental rationality*).

Communicative rationality creates spaces of social connection within the public sphere, enabling rational communication between members of society without oppression, violence, or coercion, in accordance with the ethics of communication. It is this ethical dimension that Professor Ben Meziane explores in his work, moving between private and public spaces and examining the limits of the Algerian communicative philosophical experience by presenting a set of themes that combine general philosophical inquiry with social reflection and Algerian cultural heritage.

By theoretically studying what remains unthought in the social imagination, the authority of reason is embodied in the activation of the public space. Among the themes addressed in this work are the stranger, reconciliation, signature, hospitality, the university, avarice, and others.

All of these themes represent the depth of philosophical thought by exploring the profound meanings of the concept of the human being and their relationship with the other through a set of ethical and existential dimensions.

This is the new form that Professor Ben Sharqi seeks to present in this text: namely, the revival of the ethical dimension of the human being and its establishment as a shared self-identity for both the self and the other. The matter is not merely the resurrection of a new and different human being, but rather an attempt to establish a project of humanity in a different way—a concept that has long been misused and misapplied. This new concept of the human being is linked to diversity and richness, to recognition and care, and to action and interaction (Al-Arabi Miloud, *The Debate on Identity and the Experience of the Stranger*, 2016).

If we reflect on texts dealing with these themes, we find that they call for liberation from institutional, environmental, and gendered forces that restrict human choice and rational control over life. These forces are often taken for granted, perceived as inescapable and beyond human control. Therefore, understanding derived from critical awareness of our private and public spaces is considered liberating, as it enables us to identify the true causes of the problems facing humanity.

Liberating knowledge emerges through self-liberation produced by reflection, which leads to a “transformation of consciousness.” The phrase “transformation of consciousness” resonates with the title of the book’s conclusion, “Resuming the Beginning,” since the wheel of philosophy never stops and knows no boundaries. On the contrary, it renews its movement and resumes its beginning in all spaces, without exception (Habermas, 1998).

Zaoui Houcine: Identity Conflicts within the Algerian Reality

The final model we have chosen to shed light on the horizon of philosophy in Algeria is a work by Professor Zaoui Houcine entitled *Doubt and the Sources of Malice in the Philosophy of the Algerian Scene*.

The title of the work clearly shows that the Algerian scene has its own philosophy, linked to the challenges facing society. These challenges, as Professor Zaoui argues in this work, need to be addressed and understood through scientific and philosophical methods, far removed from sterile political and intellectual debates.

The author addresses the most important issues facing the Algerian reality, perhaps the most significant being the problem of identity in the specific sense and the problem of the self and the other in the broader sense. Algerian society suffers from a state of alienation that can be addressed by relying on philosophy, whose methods and content are capable of creating a kind of rupture within this social and cognitive challenge.

Professor Zaoui Houcine emphasizes the issue of historical consciousness in understanding the self in its identity dimension. He warns against the dangers of ideologization, which provides fertile ground for the instrumentalization of political slogans and programs, using identity as the most conducive ground for the success of such projects.

Through this work, the author seeks to clarify the nature of the crisis facing Algerian society and the artificial values it has produced, characterized by a binary nature operating according to the logic of “either... or.” This has given rise to several conflicting ideological and doctrinal dualities: men and women, religion and state, positive law and Muslim law, and others.

The author considers these artificial dualities to be carriers of a false conflict, as they lack an identity-based approach grounded in historical knowledge and a philosophically reflexive dimension. Thus, Professor Zaoui Houcine attempts to diagnose the reality of doubt and the sources of resentment within the Algerian context, including intellectual ideologies, identity conflicts, and the ambiguity surrounding the nature of these debates.

We find him examining these crises closely and presenting what he considers the most appropriate intellectual approach to overcoming them: a philosophy capable of revealing weaknesses and complexities and providing the necessary justifications to transcend these artificial problems (Ricoeur, 2005).

The main reason for the worsening of these crises is the “weakness of local and national intellectual references,” which has gradually contributed to the emergence and growth of what is termed the identity problem (Zaoui, 2005, p. 38).

In Defense of the Right to Philosophize

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Dutch humanist thinker Erasmus exclaimed, “Oh, how wonderful is this century that I see opening before us!” This exclamation reflected the fascination of Renaissance thinkers with their time and their sense of genuinely participating in a unique and exciting intellectual adventure.

Do we think we will welcome the dawn of the twenty-first century with the same enthusiasm, admiration, and optimism? This question is legitimate, because Erasmus’s case is not exceptional. Indeed, we too can be optimistic about this Algerian philosophical experience, which represents a genuine transformation in scientific research in general and belongs to all of humanity.

A scholar, a thinker, and a researcher do not belong to themselves alone. The late French philosopher Jacques Derrida was once asked, “What does it mean to be a French thinker and philosopher?”

He replied that we should not question any philosopher about their nationality or passport, nor require a visa, because their thought is human and far removed from the notions of citizenship and the state.

Conclusion

After presenting these three models that attempt to move the philosophical text from its original spatial context to other spaces and places, we must recognize that the right to philosophize is a right that must be exercised in all areas of our lives, in the face of all our problems and crises. This right is not a requirement imposed from outside; rather, it depends on our ability to master the mechanisms of philosophy so that it remains the unifying foundation of all minds.

At the heart of this approach, serious intellectual attempts have emerged in Algeria, seeking to establish a philosophy that stems from local experience and responds to its challenges. These attempts share the conviction that the practice of philosophy is an existential right.

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