The Marabout and the Muse
New Approaches to Islam in African Literature

Edited by
Kenneth W. Harrow
Michigan State University

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

JAMES CURREY
London

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Chapter 1

Jihad, Ijtihad, and other Dialogical Wars in La Mère du printemps, Le Harem politique, and Loin de Médine

GEORGE LANG

Western audiences, out of ignorance, yield too easily to fundamentalist Muslim claims that Islam is prescriptive in simple ways. To argue otherwise requires knowledge of Islamic hermeneutics, dialectics, and dialogics.

FISCHER AND ABEDI, *Debating Muslims (p. 147)*

An initial disclaimer is imposed by the epigraph standing above. It would be remiss for me to allege deep knowledge of the intellectual traditions of Islam for the same reasons, discussed below, that the Berber Azwaw Aït Yafelman had only a rough grasp of Arabic prior to his conversion and immersion in the Qur'an: not that conversion is prerequisite to immersion in Islamic thought, only that knowledge is relative, and my own in this case that of an apprentice. Appreciating *La Mère du printemps* (1982), *Le Harem politique: Le prophète et les femmes* (1987), and *Loin de Médine* (1991) at their worth, nonetheless, requires willingness to engage with the argumentative and interpretive strategies they "borrow" from Islamic traditions. Such willingness is already a first step away from the ignorance referred to in the epigraph. That this step leads into a realm riven not only by the schisms heralded so tellingly in *Loin de Médine*, but also by conflict fueled by simple prescriptions on all sides comes, as they say, with the territory.

Of course Driss Chraïbi, Fatima Mernissi, and Assia Djebar belong to the traditions from which they "borrow." Two predicaments nonetheless arise from their special situation as Maghrebian writers in a postmodern age. On the one hand, their use of French tends to lull unwary francophones into neglecting the extent and the originality of their adap-

tations. On the other hand, their having adopted certain Western literary modes makes them suspect in conservative Islamic eyes. All three authors exploit in conscientious and consciously innovative ways the intellectual resources of Islamic rhetoric, jurisprudence, and historiography, but the transgressions of genre and discipline they commit might offend some exegetes of Islam. Even Fatima Mernissi's essay, the most conventionally procedural of the three, resides at a generic crossroad, and draws upon a personal vision. As she says, "This book is not a work of history. This book is intended as a memory-narrative (*récit-souvenir*): an opening towards the sites where memory wavers, dates become clouded and events blur, as in those dreams that give us force" (p. 19). Mernissi's description of her examination of misogyny in the sourceworks of Islamic historiography aptly fits both Assia Djebar's and Driss Chraïbi's novels. Though there are significant differences among them, each undertakes what might be called revisionist explorations of early Islamic history. Moreover, these three narratives are connected by an implicit thematic thread, one I have conceived of by way of the kind of pun common in French and now North American critical theory, though the terms in question are transliterations from the Arabic: jihad/*ijtihad* ("holy war"/"free interpretation")—distant cognates, aspects of one other, and not especially irreconcilable countenances of Islam.

Given the widespread pejorative acceptation of jihad, I must first offer some clarification about its history. Then I shall address *ijtihad*, of which Fatima Mernissi's essay is a consummate example, and which Assia Djebar uses to characterize her own "intellectual quest for the truth" of women's experience during the early years of Islam.[1] Finally, with the tools provided by this exploration of the dyad jihad/*ijtihad*, I shall explore the dialogics of transcultural conversion as exposed by Driss Chraïbi.

The notion of *ijtihad*, which has wide currency in Islamic political and theological debate, deserves nativization into English, since jihad and *ijtihad* each anchor one end of a dialogical continuum running from holy war through conversion, maieutic, and on to the hermeneutics of *ijtihad*. War is, after all, innately dialogical, but interpretation has an intrinsically agonistic side, and the continuum jihad/*ijtihad* has as well a particular configuration in the Maghreb, where texts are intensely transtextual—an expression preferable to "intertextual" to emphasize their invasive nature, a characteristic rooted in the history of the region and in the imperative practice of Islam, which began, after all, with God's edict to Muhammad at the first moment of revelation: *iqra!* (read/recite).

Jihad, like other derivatives from the root *j-h-d*, had the pre-Qur'anic meaning of striving, laboring, or toiling, and in the thirty-six instances where the word occurs in the Qur'an was used "classically and literally

in [that] natural sense" (Ali 1977, 165), especially with reference to exertion and to commitment, one connotation conveyed by Assia Djebar's translation of *djihad* as "internal struggle recommended to all believers" (p. 6). That said, emergent Islam was certainly bellicose, as Chraïbi and Djebar illustrate in their novels, with some admiration on the part of the former for the virility of his antagonists, and on that of the latter for the tenacity of her heroines. Within *shari'a* or juridical tradition therefore crystallized a number of precepts and behavioral codes regarding the particular forms of striving that consist of war and confrontation. Whereas it is common to restrict jihad to types of aggression, as Mervyn Hiskett does in *The Development of Islam in West Africa* by glossing only *jihad al-sayf* ("jihad of the Sword, armed jihad") and *jihad al-qawl* ("a period of preaching that usually precedes resort to jihad by arms") (1984, 32), jihad has a much larger range. To cite one example from what one might call the moderate school, in the twelfth century A.D. the Spaniard Averroes (Ibn Rushd) devoted a chapter to jihad in his elegantly titled *Bidayat al-Mudjtahid wa-Nihayat al-Mustasid* ("The beginning for him who interprets the sources independently and the end for him who wishes to limit himself")—whose terms are of more than passing interest here, since a *mujtahid*, derived from the same root that gives *ijtihad*, is an interpreter, albeit a rational or philological one. A second more contemporary monograph in this vein is that by the twentieth century Egyptian reformist Mahmud Shaltut, whose *Al-Qur'an wa-al-qital* ("The Qur'an and fighting") was composed in 1940 when "this topic [was] of practical importance in our times, as wars [were] being fought all over the world"—though he pertinently added that "many adherents of other religions constantly take up this subject with a view to discredit Islam" (Peters 1977, 27). Despite their distance in time, both Averroes and Shaltut converge insofar as their emphasis falls on jihad as a social obligation largely assumed for defensive reasons, like the draft. Averroes's stance can perhaps best be explained by his adherence to the Malikite School, one of the four major currents of Sunni jurisprudence, and whose doctrines still have influence in the Maghreb. Its originator, Malik Ibn Anas (d. 795 A.D.), justified his attitude by citing the Prophet as saying, "Leave the Ethiopians in peace as long as they leave you in peace" (Peters 1977, 31). For his part, Shaltut, invoking the right to free *ijtihad*, established through his own readings of the Qur'an that meaningful conversion could not be obtained through compulsion, either "manifest" (by iron or fire) or "secret" (by awe-inspiring tokens). He consequently argued that jihad was essentially defensive, not intended to be coercive: "The Qur'an instructs us clearly that Allah did not wish people to become believers by

way of force and compulsion, but only by way of study, reflection and contemplation" (Peters 1977, 31).

These moderate positions should be weighed against the "radical fundamentalist" critique that a purely defensive conception of jihad is necessarily defeatist, as in the following assertion: "writers on jihad who are defeated spiritually and mentally do not distinguish between the method of this religion in rejecting compulsion to embrace Islam and its method in destroying those material and political forces which stand between man and his God" (Moussalli 1992, 205). Such forms of jihad aim at altering any institutions that impede free adhesion to Islam: "Those who [see] jihad only as defensive [do] not understand Islam; it is true that Islam defends the land it exists on, but it also struggles to establish the Islamic system wherever possible" (p. 206). Seen in this light, Islamic radicalism partakes much more of the dialectic between free will and determinism than it might appear from the outside. Free adhesion to Islam, radicals argue, is not possible where materialist value systems and institutions prevail, nor where ideological hegemony is in the hands of non-Muslims. Politically subordinate to the West, which has forced them to compromising and demeaning terms, moderate Muslims have been tainted by "non-Islamic notions" and disoriented by "attacks of the orientalists" (p. 206): they are not free to choose Islam.

Somewhat ironically, Assia Djebar and Driss Chraïbi have set their novels "within the continuous surge of Islam at its dawn" (Chraïbi 1982, 145), the century when Muhammad's immediate successors were subduing the Arabian peninsula and North Africa, and jihad was not only aggressive but aimed like an arrow at the heart of the religious and political institutions standing in the way of conversion of non-Muslims: Bedouin polytheism and the Berber paganism and Christianity that subsisted in the rump of the Roman Empire still under the Byzantine regime. Djebar's lack of sentimentality over the explosive expansion of Islam by the sword and the fact that several of her heroines are accomplished military leaders on both sides of battle suggest that a critique of military jihad was far from her mind. In fact she posits jihad as another of the customarily male domains that her heroines can and should invade and occupy (along with prophecy, predication and poetry, as a collective profile of her manifold heroines reveals). The connection between Djebar's feminism and her sense of jihad is, to be sure, understandable in an author who was an early militant in the Algerian revolution and who, like her sisters, was repressed after independence. Jihad in its military sense too, Djebar implies, is a right of women by virtue of its practice by women at the hour of Islamic origin, though the "gaping holes in the collective memory" (p. 5) that have erased those

moments of empowerment must be filled by committed fiction like her own.

As for Chraïbi's Berber hero Azwaw Aït Yafelman, preemptive conversion to Islam is the only possible defensive ploy to the irresistible invasion led by Uqba ibn Nafi, for whom jihad was first and foremost an agent of mass conversion: "Uqba did not consider himself a warrior and had never wanted to be one. His own war was a war of faith" (p. 148). Though Chraïbi does not seek to veil the military aspects of jihad, he sees it essentially as a convulsive purgation, one exemplified by Uqba's destruction of the corrupt city of Qayrawan, the fortress at the edge of the Tunisian desert from which Islam subsequently spread across North and West Africa.

> Uqba carefully visited the city of Qayrawan which General Houdaij had founded a few years before and which was so widely discussed in the Arab empire. He had it razed to the ground. . . .
>
> "Fell these trees for me," he ordered. "Open up the banks of the wadi. I want to see the full course of the water. Pull out the weeds. I don't want there to be a sole human from the past, not an animal, snake or scorpion. This is also part of our war. That is what holy war is" (pp. 159–60).

Not to be forgotten, however, is that jihad also brings "a few days behind it the chariots full of the greatest scientists of the century, doctors of law, professors, architects, builders, artists" (p. 148). As Chraïbi affirms in the interview just below, his prime interest is the genesis and the decline of civilizations, including the decay of Islam, certainly implied by the words attributed to Muhammad in the epigraph of *La Mère du printemps*: "Islam will become again the foreigner it began by being." In this regard Chraïbi is and sees himself as a faithful descendent of the Maghrebian historian Ibn Khaldun:

> As far as civilizations go, they are beautiful at the moment of their birth. And I know nothing that is as beautiful as birth, be it the birth of a child or the birth of Islam, for example. We see it born, this civilization, whichever one it might be, and then enter adolescence, maturity and then its autumn—and here I am referring to my distant relative Ibn Khaldun . . . , the 14th century founder of modern sociology (Dubois 1986, 22).

On the surface, *La Mère du printemps* deals with Azwaw's strategic response to Uqba's jihad: his hasty conversion to the then nascent civilization. As radicals might suggest, and here Chraïbi would agree, there can be no civilization without an ideological hegemony of some sort, one established through jihad (by this or another name), and consolidated through conversion.

Neither Chraïbi nor Djebar falls back onto a defensive reading of jihad precisely because committed inner and outer struggle with and against

other political forces is, for both, a feature of life lived to the fullest. In addition, each in their own ways and by means of literary devices one might call postmodernist, transforms the terms of the above-mentioned key controversy within Islam, the polemic between modernists accused of pandering to the West by recasting jihad as defensive, and radicals for whom jihad is an unrelenting struggle to implement the conditions in which all peoples are free to accept Islam. Unlike the cautious Islamist modernists who preceded them, Chraïbi and Djebar take jihad seriously and relate it back to its root meaning of intense struggle; unlike the radicals, they question the homogeneity of the Islamic system jihad is committed to bring into existence. Both suggest, in fact, that heterogeneity was part and parcel of submission to Islam from the beginning.

Ijtihad needs even more background explanation than jihad, since the former is far from common in English or French. It took approximately three centuries for Sunni Islam to develop consensus about its corpus, up to which point a definitive frame of reference for the Qur'an was not in place. Interpretation was open, though conflict was far from purely hermeneutic. In fact the great schism between Sunni and Shi'ite currents anticipated in the first pages of *Loin de Médine* dates from the second Islamic generation, and the Maghreb itself was the scene of intense military and doctrinal clash, starting with the appearance of the Kharijis around 740 A.D. More than the result of political rivalry, however, the subsequent hardening of doctrines—the closing of "the gate of *ijtihad*" (*bab al-ijtihad*)—might also be understood as an inevitable consequence of what one might call Islamic epistemology. Like the big bang, the revelation of the Qur'an triggered a proliferation and dispersion of meaning that threatened to expand forever. To cite one evocative passage on the matter: "The text of the Qur'an reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rocks at sea."[2] Likewise, Chraïbi speaks of "the gigantic emotion, the bursting commotion at hearing the Divine word" (p. 145). Sealing off *ijtihad* meant at least confining the reverberating realm of reaction to the Qur'an within the closed circuit of extant Hadith, sayings about and by the Prophet, and previously certified *isnad*, the chain of mouth-to-mouth and eventually scribal transmission of traditions upon which the authenticity of Hadith was predicated.

Taught as a fundament of Islamic learning, the procedures of isnad verification can be conceived monologically as the proper stringing together of discrete utterances. In their remarkable *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*, Michael M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi cast isnad into a more dialogical perspective:[3]

> The entire structure of Qur'an and Hadith is a fun house of mirrors playing upon appearances and resemblances (*mutashabih*) that may or may not be grounded (*muhkam*), depending upon the perspective and knowledge of the interpreter. It is a structure necessitating a critical sense, but one ambivalently also permissive of uncritical belief and false leads (100).

As Fischer and Abedi go on to observe, dispute and argumentation, which are inevitable parts of "the Hadith game," must be understood

> dialectically (i.e., aware of the range of counterarguments in a given historical period), hermeneutically (i.e., aware of the allusions and contexts, nuances and changes in word usage), and dialogically (i.e., aware of the political others against whom assertions are made). It is an ethical discourse in the sense that it is always conducted in a communicative environment that assumes persuasive dialogue with others, that attempts to persuade those others to join one's own moral and political community (p. 146).

Hadith interpretation is, in other words, inherently agonistic, struggle.

In *Le Harem politique* Fatima Mernissi makes clear that she is willing to play the Hadith game by the rules, and in fact insists upon it (pp. 48–49), since her goal is to demonstrate that there have been patriarchal distortions of isnad procedures in a series of injunctions against women, for example those concerning the veil or the ill-advisedness of women in politics (the latter she tracks to a disciple of the Prophet whom she catches out as having tailored the Prophet's words *post facto* for his own political purposes); or, again, those that ignore or otherwise censor the fact that Muhammad's youngest wife Aisha herself engaged in jihad, and against the Prophet's own cousin and son-in-law Ali, this at the very moment when the primary unity of believers was shattered by *fitna* (disorder). Mernissi's reasoning is founded on the major commentary on the Qur'an, that by al-Tabari (d. 922 A.D.), on treatises on the *nasikh* and *mansoukh* (Qur'anic verses that were replaced by subsequent contradictory revelation, apocrypha of sorts), and on the massive collection of Hadith by Bokhari (d. 852 A.D.), plus other central texts of Islamic science. Both Muslim and feminist, she directs her attack on misogynists within the community of believers, all the while remaining respectful of the principles of Islamic scholarship. In other words, as tempting as it might be to some Western feminists to adopt Mernissi's cause, it is essential to understand the logic of her jihad, her *ijtihad*. The edifice of her argumentation makes no sense without its ultimate reference to the Qur'an and to the Prophet.

Le Harem politique can be profitably read as a companion piece to *Loin de Médine*, itself a tapestry of Hadith and interweaving of strands of textual transmission. Despite her characterization of her own essay as

dream and memory-narrative, Mernissi accepts the principles of rational and linear interpretation, and in fact turns the irrationality of patriarchal readings against them. Djebar, however, sets her "desire to interpret" (p. 6) within an implicit theory of information in which heterogeneity and non-linearity prevail. Classical Sunni *ijtihad* was a ratiocinative procedure whose aim was to establish consensus among scholars alone "competent to exercise [it]" (Hourani 1991, 68)—a status to which Mernissi provocatively lays claim not only as grounds for her refutation of aberrant (patriarchal) isnad, but as ipso facto proof of her defense of women's rights within Islam. For her part, Assia Djebar so closely ties the question of isnad to alternative lines of narrative development that her *ijtihad* falls beyond ratiocination. In the first place, by speaking of her personal will, she connects renewal of interpretation with inner struggle, a notion by no means alien to Islamic thought but suspect from the point of view of the *uluma* (the learned), whose goal was *ijma* (consensus), and who holds the monopoly on *ijtihad* as usually construed. Furthermore, by constructing a montage of substitute fictional episodes that various isnad generate, Djebar undermines the procedural rationality that was the premise of both classical *ijtihad* and modernist revisionism dating from the colonial period (like that of Mahmud Shaltut quoted above). Juxtaposition of alternative narratives has been familiar in French fiction since the *nouveau roman*, in fact before, but the application of this literary device to the Hadith—and, to mention only its first occurrence in *Loin de Médine*, to a scene as sanctified as Muhammad's death in the arms of Aisha—is nothing short of revolutionary. Unlike Salman Rushdie, whose representation of Muhammad's harem in *The Satanic Verses* was certainly provocative and also based in part on Hadith, Assia Djebar calls into question the very procedures of Islamic rationality.

Though I have so far left aside feminist aspects of *Loin de Médine* in favor of its originality within Islamic hermeneutics, this novel is another of Djebar's explorations of women's repressed potentiality and denied virtuality, and can and should so be read. In her preface, for example, Djebar explicitly links women's dispossession and disempowerment with the entropic disintegration of the Qur'anic revelation once conveyed into human hands:

> In the course of the period evoked here, which begins with the death of Muhammad, the fates of numerous women imposed themselves on my imagination: I have tried to resuscitate them. : . . Women in action "far from Medina," that is to say outside, either geographically or symbolically, the site of temporal power that irreversibly deviates from its original source (p. 5).

There is thus a double movement within *Loin de Médine*. On the one hand, Medina is portrayed as a site of temporal power from which women have been excluded; on the other hand, the men of Medina from Muhammad on as well as its women are condemned to a progressive degradation and loss of spiritual purity, a loss reflected in ever-widening circles of political rivalry and clashing interpretations of the past. Moreover, what one might call the Amazonian virtues of women's jihad, plus other powers traditionally monopolized by men (prophecy, predication and poetry), are only part of the full spectrum of women's experience. As is apparent in her other novels, Assia Djebar insists that love, desire, and familial fulfilment are also valid concerns, hence the increasing focus, as *Loin de Médine* develops, on the family around Muhammad, his wives and daughters as well as his friends and allies.

Foundational Islam was a family matter—albeit that of an extended polygamous family—and its future schisms were smoldering within Muhammad's household and network of family alliances. Whatever else it might be, *Loin de Médine* is a fictional application of gender criticism to the primordial family drama of Islam.

Muhammad left no surviving sons. As the author repeats several times: "if Fatima had only been born a son" (pp. 58–60). The consequences of Fatima's female birth were devastating for the future of Islam within the cultural context of Arab society in the seventh century A.D., since the patriarchy in question, Muhammad's, was therefore unable to assure its legitimate transmission in an unambiguous and unassailable manner. In a sense, there is no need to deconstruct the patriarchal heritage of Islam; it deconstructed itself.

> Six months after the death of Muhammad his favorite daughter Fatima died, she who, in the absence of the son of Muhammad (who was *abtar*, without a male descendent) transmitted through her own children—who were almost twins—a double male descendance —the principal tie through blood. It is as if the presence of the beloved daughter, once her father was dead, proved to be a blankness, an emptiness, almost a fault line (p. 58).

The language of this passage will ring familiar to readers of Kristeva and Irigaray, but its application to the genealogy of the Prophet's family is original, intentionally provocative, and cuts two ways. Most obviously (and this is the aspect likely to be picked up in the West), Djebar is harshly critical of the patriarchal nature of Islamic society. At the same time, though, she suggests that the family setting of nascent Islam is the ideal framework within which to construct fresh feminist perspectives, precisely because the

impotence of the patriarchy (as conceived in its own terms) translated its void, blankness, emptiness, and inner fault (*un blanc, un creux, quasiment une faille*) (Djebar 1991, 58). In other words, Western feminists should know more, not less, about Islam, which has been embedded within a most fertile paradigm for thought about gender.

Among her heroines, Djebar is especially drawn to Esma the healer, "she who will sooth the abrasion" (p. 210). In Djebar's fictionalization Esma (wife of the first caliph Abu Bakr and thus Aisha's stepmother), intimate friend of Fatima (wife of Ali), is the pivotal figure who resides on "a border invisible then, a border that will open up, deepen, bring progressive dissension, then violence to Medina" (pp. 231–32). Esma thus replaces Aisha, the young and faithful wife (albeit a whore in Shi'ite tradition and troublemaker among misogynist currents in general), and Fatima, the loyal daughter (though wife of the somewhat dubious Ali, in Sunni eyes), as exemplary female figure because she, Esma, is "the only one to subsume the seething contradictions that will appear, the only one capable of surmounting them" (p. 219).

At this point *Loin de Médine* offers two distinct but compatible lines of interpretation. According to the first, the Great Dissension should be attributed to the corruption polygamy introduced into Islam: "as if the body of Islam had to divide, to give birth by itself to civil struggles and quarrels, all that as tribute paid to the polygamy of the Founder" (p. 59). According to the second, however, this issue is moot, in so far as Djebar displaces the focus of Islamic tradition from Muhammad and his successors to the women around him, who are portrayed as the true actors in the drama that is unfolding. As she says of her first heroine, the anonymous Yemenite Queen: "far from being reduced to the role of simple intriguer, she is the very soul of the machination" (p. 22).

Ijtihad per Djebar has consequences for both moderates and radicals, since the world of the first and second Islamic generations provides an interpretive frame without which the Qur'an itself can have no *social* meaning, precisely the reason why the Hadith and their understanding are necessary foundations of shari'a. Yet Djebar's foundational realm is not that of Muhammad and the early caliphs, but of the women around them. The epistemology underpinning this domain is, moreover, polyvalent; events are not amenable to definitive readings. It is as if the social fact of polygamy, which engendered the conflictual relationship among rivals for Muhammad's succession, has as its implicit counterpart the proliferation of diverse meanings activated by the revelation of the Divine Word to humanity, except that the male desire that has produced polygamy when agency is in male hands has as its complement an equally omnivorous and

polymorphous female desire thus far occulted from history, but now almost prophetically revealed by (female) *ijtihad*.

Two final points about *ijtihad* and Djebar's allusion to it need be made. First, reopening "the gate of *ijtihad*" (*bab al-ijtihad*) is fraught with potential contradiction, as Olivier Roy explains.

> In fact, the reopening of *ijtihad* devalues the corpus in so far as commentary upon it is no longer the primary task of he who knows and especially in so far as the corpus is only a point of departure, even a mere reference, always in danger of being transformed into rhetorical reverence, into proverb, epigraph and interpolation, in short into a pool of quotations. . . . The call for the reopening of *ijtihad* does not lead to innovation, but pastiche (Roy 1990, 272–73).

Roy's critique pertains to militant intellectuals and not necessarily to creative writers, but its concluding admonition should be pondered. To what extent, one might ask, is *Loin de Médine* a *bricolage*, a pastiche of bits and pieces of early Islamic history without any relevance to legitimate *ijtihad*?

Those who would think so, undoubtedly the majority of Islamic scholars—the majority of whom are, it goes without saying, male—have an easy response at hand. Unlike Fatima Mernissi's *Le Harem politique*, which must be answered and has been contested in terms of the rational *ijtihad* it engages, *Loin de Médine* dispenses with the apparatus of argumentation and turns the multiplicity of isnad into a source of creative inspiration. It is as if Djebar has converted a juridical procedure, say cross-examination, into a literary device, certainly not unheard of in the West, but tantamount to heresy if law and religion overlap, as they do in Islam. If, on the other hand, it were argued, as Djebar would, that all interpretation participates in ambiguity and has since the instant of revelation when humans began to fall away "irreversibly from the original light," then there is no absolute certainty of interpretation: *ijtihad* is finally and truly open, irreversibly decentered. It is crucial to observe, nonetheless, that the corpus Djebar is decentering resides on *this* side of the Qur'an, of which she in no way impugns the authority and whose words paradoxically play but a minor part in the novel, present only in and of themselves, not subject to the fracture and mosaic relativization of Hadith, isnad, and chronicle. Put another way, the words of God remain what they have always been within Islam, absolute and transcendental, unlike human language, which is relative and circumstantial.

Approaches to *ijtihad* within Sunni and Shi'a are dissimilar yet, as is often the case in the Maghreb, Assia Djebar's *ijtihad* seems to sit somewhere between the two camps, and does so in a complex manner. For example, some Shi'ite scholars question that the "Sunni tenth century

alleged theory of the closure of the gates of *ijtihad*" was more than pure casuistry, a "façade hiding a more significant social issue" (Mallat 1993, 34), or worse, a nineteenth-century Western orientalist fabrication pawned off onto modern Muslim jurists (Mallat 1993, 202). Assia Djebar does share the spirit of social critique that is the heritage of Shi'ia, since she explicitly links the repression of women's truth(s) with the closure of *ijtihad* and the crystallization of patriarchal interpretation of the rights of women within Islamic society. Still, Djebar's very claim *as a woman* to the right of *ijtihad*, to say nothing of the intellectual consequences of her metafictionalization of Islamic foundations, make her as suspect from a Shi'ite as from a Sunni position. Beyond their differences, Shi'ia and Sunni remain dubious about free *ijtihad*, since the *mujtahid* (or interpreter) is allowed his freedom solely in terms of a prior submission either to consensual rationality or to higher figures of authority. Hence the pejorative connotations sometimes attached to *ijtihad*, apparent in Mervyn Hiskett's glossary entry for it: "individualistic interpretation of the Islamic scriptures"—as opposed to *taqlid*, "unquestioning obedience to established religious authority" (pp. 328-29). Whoever says "individualistic" is not far from saying "eccentric" and eventually "erroneous." Djebar's use of the principle of ijithad to condemn the patriarchs who have closed off feminist readings of the Hadith could be seen by the latter as confirmation of the inherent dangers of undisciplined *ijtihad*, the very incarnation of *fitna*—disorder, as noted above, but also in some contexts "female beauty."

Driss Chraïbi's *La Mère du printemps* is, like *Loin de Médine*, based on historical chronicles and engages with them dialogically, although less obviously so.

Chraïbi has described the genesis of his novel in anecdotal terms: Coming across an issue of the travel magazine *Geo*, he reacted strongly to the photo of a Moroccan girl on the banks of Oum-er-Bia (*La Mère du printemps*, the Mother of Spring), the river that empties into the Atlantic and on whose banks Chraïbi himself was born. Offended by the exoticization of the young Moroccan, he decided to extract her figment from the post-colonial media stereotype and revive her, as it were, at the moment Islam reached the shores of the Atlantic.[4] Riparian images thus dominate the novel, and culminate in the sequence where Azwaw's wife dies, and his son Yassin and daughter are carried away by the invading Muslims.

Two literary impulses blend in *La Mère du printemps*. The lyric manner is sustained throughout, and exemplified by the lute melody the Berber Naquishbendi plays to greet the Bedouin conqueror Uqba ibn

Nafi when he finally reaches the end of land, his horse striding into the surf (p. 185). Yet the novel also partakes of epic and many of its passages are drawn from Arabic chronicles, in particular the works of Ibn Khaldun and writers associated with him, such as the fourteenth century A.D. Egyptian encyclopedist En-Noweiri. By "epic" I do not mean the Bakhtinian denotation of the term, predicated as it is upon a closure of time and a refusal of dialogism, rather the loose sense of epic as a poem encompassing history. In fact, Chraïbi goes to great length to make readers conscious of the multiple and ever-evolving contexts for language, especially striking in his first chapter (the epilogue, he calls it) which takes place in the historical here and now and where Berber and Arabic, both glossed and free-standing, are sprinkled into the French. This heteroglossic bent is no less present in the main sections of the novel, called *marées* or tides. In fact, Chraïbi insures that his text remains not only interlinguistically but intersemiotically eclectic by inserting both a page of Qur'anic text in the original and three different melodies in musical transcription. Chraïbi's employ of historical chronicle is, however, more covert than Djebar's, who foregrounds her sources and comments authorially upon them. For the Moroccan, the subtle use of literary traditions in Arabic, a language unknown to the majority of his readers, suggests that the story of Azwaw Aït Yafelman, a pure fiction, is grounded in collective historical truth as far as such can be known, though like Fatima Mernissi, Chraïbi warns his readers: "this is not a history book, but a novel" (p. 11).

It turns out, however, that both the passage quoted several pages above on Uqba's destruction of Qayrawan and those dealing with Uqba's arrival on the Atlantic shores have close parallels in En-Noweiri's fourteenth century chronicle. Chraïbi's text reads:

> Uqba had given the order to empty the beach. Not a single human allowed, except for him. Very slowly within the silence of men and the symphony of the waves, *he entered into the sea until the waters rose to the brisket of his horse* [my emphasis]. . . . "Lord of all the earth, of the seas and all humans, I take Thee as my witness: this is the end of the earth, glory be to Thee! Your kingdom has become again what it was at the beginnings."[5]

En-Noweiri has:

> Having continued his march, he came to the surrounding sea without having run into resistence, and he *entered into the sea until the waters rose to the brisket of his horse* [my emphasis]. . . . He cried: "Lord, if this sea did not stop me, I would go in the far countries and to the kingdom of *Zul-Qarnein*, fighting for your religion, and killing those who do not believe in your existence, or who worship other gods than Thee."[6]

Chraïbi's possible omissions from the tradition are perhaps as telling as the apparent parallels between the texts, of no great substance in and of themselves, since the scene of Uqba's arrival at the Atlantic, like the snakes and vermin Uqba banished at Qayrawan, are part of the oral heritage of the Maghreb.[7] In fact the orientalist Paul Casanova, who appended En-Noweiri's account to Ibn Khaldun's *Histoire des Berbères*, considered it a mere *roman*, a novel, with a fabricated eyewitness and much embroidered invention (Casanova 1926, 313), which suggests how widely the images of Uqba ibn Nafi had been diffused in North Africa by the fourteenth century.

The Qur'anic sources of *La Mère du printemps* include Suras 36 (*Ya-Sin*, a co-name for Muhammad alluded to throughout the novel, since Azwaw's son is given this name), 91 (the ecstatic *Shams* or Sun sura quoted on pp. 21 and 146), and 96 (*Iqraa*, the first revelation to Muhammad containing Allah's imperative to recite, quoted directly on p. 145). It is accordingly curious, given Chraïbi's propensity for Qur'anic citation, that he did not seize upon the potential of En-Noweiri's allusion to the Qur'an, one that is admittedly invisible in translation but patent to readers of the Qur'an, since Zul-qarnain, cited by En-Noweiri above and associated with Uqba ibn Nafi, is the major figure of the last part of the "apocalyptic" Sura 18, regularly read on Fridays, and "all that Islam has in the way of weekly liturgy corresponding to the Christian Eucharist" (Brown 1991, 69).[8]

I do not mean to attribute monumental significance to an omission that may not have been deliberate or even possible if it turns out that Chraïbi was unfamiliar with the En-Noweiri source. What I would like to do is briefly explore the Qur'anic sub-text of traditional depiction of Uqba because the episode of Zul-qarnein's three missions in Sura 18 treats the relationship between the ideal Islamic conqueror and the peoples to whom he introduces the faith, and by implication the modalities of conversion and transculturation under Islam.

The parable of Zul-qarnein, sometimes identified with Alexander the Great, posits three types of cultures: the first, in the land of the setting sun, represents a kind of default situation in which the ruler simply delivers Islamic justice with no cultural interface, and rules with God's full delegation though a just governor, referring ultimate judgment of human behavior back to God: "Whoever doth wrong, him shall we punish; then shall he be sent back to his Lord; and He will punish him with a punishment unheard of" (Qur'an 18:87).[9] In the land of the rising sun, however, Zul-qarnein encounters a "people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun" (18:90). In his wisdom, Zul-Qarnein "left them as they were," God alone "understanding what was before him" (18:91),

the implication being that the customs of "primitive" peoples need not be judged by the same standards as those of the civilized. In the words of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Zul-Qarnein "left primitive peoples their freedom of life" (Ali 1946, 753). Finally, Zul-Qarnein came across "a people who scarcely understood a word" (18:93), but who sought his protection against the incursions of the wild tribes of the Gog and Magog. In this last case, the powers conferred upon Zul-qarnein enable this people, different in speech and customs from his own, to muster their technological skills and construct a wall of iron against savagery. Zul-Qarnein takes no credit himself; rather he directs his subjects' attention to the might of God, and to the fact that even walls of iron will crumble on judgment day. Traditional readings emphasize the text's eschatological tenor, yet the sociological paradigm implicit in this sura underlies Ibn Khaldun's political theory predicated on the distinction between *badawa* (primitivism) and *hadara* (civilization), and on the forms of *asabiyya* (group solidarity) particular to each (Rabi 1967, 48–55).

We might ask whether Uqba fits better in the first or third category of the paradigm provided by the parable of Zul-qarnein. His sense of justice was certainly unmediated by what we might today call crosscultural sensitivity. At first glance he therefore conforms to the first model, that of absolute ruler over a people of his own culture. Yet the fact that the Berbers were "a people who scarcely understood a word" (Qur'an 18:93) of Arabic would seem to put Zul-Qarnein in the third category. Moreover, as Chraïbi repeats on several occasions, the advent of Uqba and of Arab Islam meant the arrival of higher civilization, literacy, jurisprudence and poetry, architecture, engineering, and medicine. Civilization and technology, in Zul-Qarnein's words and even in the Bedouin Uqba's mind, are "a Mercy from my Lord" (Qur'an 18:98). Although the radicalism of Uqba's jihad implies that Islamic civilization is predicated on publicly professed faith in Islam, his care to inculcate higher forms of knowledge in the new society he was founding recalls Zul-Qarnein's third case, that in which superiority of material capacity plays a pragmatically persuasive role in Islamization. True conversion, according to Mahmud Shaltut's above argument, cannot be obtained by either "manifest" or "secret" compulsion, but proceeds from conviction, something like Assia Djebar's *djihad* or "inner struggle." But sincerity of creed in a transcultural setting is not always easy to ascertain, as Chraïbi demonstrates first in the penultimate chapter with the pivotal scene of the encounter between the vanquished Berber chieftain Azwaw Aït Yafelman and the Arab conqueror Uqba ibn Nafi, and then in the final chapter with Azwaw's fully Islamic betrayal of the man who converted him.

The showdown between Azwaw and Uqba is the third of three set piece dialogues in the novel: the first is between Azwaw and Dada, the *sage-femme* who first helps him and then becomes his mortal enemy; the second between Azwaw and Azoulay, the Jewish seer who persuades the Berber to name his son Yassin, though with no explanation why. In relating the third and final staged dialogue, Chraïbi resorts to a narrative trick of some consequence because, unbeknownst to the reader at this point, the narrator, the muezzin Imam Filani, is none other than Azwaw himself thirty years later, now become deeply devout and renowned for his rousing calls to prayer (p. 203). Filani's account of the confrontation between Azwaw and Uqba is thus ironic, since he is in some sense a fusion of both characters: a former non-believer transformed by jihad and conversion as well as a true believer active in the Islamization of the Maghreb. The dialogue Filani records is thus between two inner voices long since confounded, so much so that Uqba speaks Berber, at least in Azwaw's memory. Seconds later, though, as Azwaw had planned and practiced for over two years, he breaks out into the Arabic of the Qur'an: "*Ya-Sin. Wal Qo'rani al-hakim!* Yes, thou [by implication Uqba] art indeed one of the true apostles" (Chraïbi 1982, 203; Qur'an 36:2–3). This purported oath of allegiance provokes the following revealing exchange:

> "Ha!" approved Uqba, who was still laughing. "So you have religion?" "Yes" replied Azwaw, sincere in his lie. "I am a Muslim like you. That is why my people did not take up arms against you." "Ha!" repeated Uqba with vigor. "How can that be? When did you become Muslim? Explain. And also: was it by chance you converted just before I arrived?" "No. I reflected at length, for months, maybe even years," Azwaw replied, "And I subsequently came to the religion of God." "Subsequently? As if dragged by wild horses? And all by yourself? Ha!" If anyone heard the laugh of Uqba ibn Nafi on that day, it was myself, Imam Filani [then Azwaw]. A full-throated laugh, radiant as the sun whose light was spilling down upon us. "You see," said the Emir, "I know all winds, just as I know all there is to know about men. . . . You are not a Muslim. You are *not* a Muslim! But you will be, thanks to me! And your people will be Muslims too, thanks to you."[10]

Emir Uqba's interrogation touches upon two essential points of doctrine. He realizes that Azwaw's conversion must be factitious. As he says: "One does not use a word, not the least, from God's Book as an item of trade, politics or exchange, as you have just done before me. I ought to have you killed" (p. 205). The Qur'an must remain monological, as it were, its meaning free from the mesh of human motives. At the same time, as Uqba also knows, one can no more convert in isolation than a camel can pass through the eye of a needle. One cannot learn, should in fact not even study the Qur'an alone, but do so with a spiritual leader or guide who will convey the intricacies of the text and its sense as understood by the community of believers. As Fischer and Abedi put it:

> [According to Qur'an 2:1–6] the Qur'an is not self-explanatory, one cannot just read it and be guided. . . . One needs guidance so as not to be misled. Such guidance comes in various dialogic forms: in the teacher-student, Imam-follower, or student-student debating of dialectical argument-counterargument to clarify the basis for decision making. *One may not study alone, with the text alone* (pp. 111–12, my emphasis).

Hence Uqba's skepticism: *All by yourself? Ha!*

The paradox is compelling: conversion, the outcome of dramatic inner struggle, is dialogical. There can be no transformation of the self without an other. Nor can a society renew itself without contact with another, a principle implied in Sura 49: *[We] made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other).*

As the interview cited above shows, Chraïbi's concern in *La Mère du printemps* was the birth of the Islamic Maghrebian civilization that arose, symbolically, from Azwaw's conversion. Uqba's jihad was based on physical force, but insofar as the conquest also transformed the material and intellectual life of the Maghreb, it worked "perceptible miracles," forms of secret compulsion (Shaltut in Peters 1977, 38). Islam, in Azwaw's mind, was "the key to the new era" (p. 57). Conversely, as Azwaw perceived, converting to the invader's religion was "the ultimate weapon" (p. 208) against jihad: "We will enter into these new conquerors, inside their soul, into their Islam, their mores, their language" (p. 138). Chraïbi did not, however, portray Azwaw as an ironic victor over his conqueror Uqba. Azwaw's conversion was procured by means of a reciprocal yet diverse, that is, dialogical apperception of an utterance by a converter and a convertee. In the words of Emerson and Holquist in their translation of *The Dialogical Imagination*, "at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meterological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at the time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions" (Bakhtin 1981, 428). For Azwaw the first vocable of the Qur'anic passage he disingenuously recited before Uqba, *Ya-Sin*, was above all the name of his long-desired first son Yassin (Azwaw having "succeeded" where Muhammad did not). Yet *Ya* and *Sin* were, he had learned in his study of the Qur'an, the letters that inaugurate Sura 36 and comprise one mystic title for Muhammad. Invested with personal resonance for the Berber, the words were nonetheless from a foreign tongue to which he became an apprentice in order to carry

out his strategy of preemptive conversion. At the same time *Ya-Sin* referred metonymically to his own conqueror and converter, a "descendant" of the Prophet.

Chraïbi does describe Azwaw's self-imposed study of Arabic and the Qur'an in decidedly dialogical terms:

> With the help of Boucchous who had resided in Qayrawan and with several "learned" refugees, he learned Arabic—or at least some. Also, and especially, he learned by memory and by ear whole suras from the Qur'an, among them the most dazzling. He could not distinguish between a letter and a tree. But he persisted, like a Berber, meditated, compared words between his and their language, their differences of meaning and their correspondences about earth and on humans.[11]

Here Chraïbi, cleverly, is alluding to Muhammad's own legendary illiteracy prior to revelation, but in so doing he also describes the foundations of Azwaw's mediated grasp of the word that would trigger his conversion.

As for Uqba, the vocable *Ya-Sin* had the standard meaning it did within the rapidly expanding Islamic interpretative community (a meaning of which Azwaw would have had only an approximation): *Ya-Sin* gives rise to *insan*, "man" or "human," but is here understood to mean "the Leader of man, the noblest of mankind, Muhammad the Prophet of God" (Ali 1946, 1169). Yet as Uqba revealed to Azwaw, *Ya-Sin* had personal import for the Bedouin, since it is the first word of the first sura this faithful disciple had learned in his youth, and was imbued, for himself, with exceptional charisma.

> "Wait! The first sura I memorized in my youth begins with those words: '*Ya-Sin! Wal Qo'rani al-hakim!*'"
>
> His voice broke. I, Imam Filani, was looking at him. Thirty years later, a whole lifetime afterwards, I still do not know how that breach opened up within me at that very moment, and how through it poured the intense emotion of that man.[12]

Azwaw's conversion to Islam transpired at that instant, and though he later goes on to betray Uqba by means of a call to prayer, his adhesion to the new society jihad was creating and to the ideological hegemony necessary to that society was galvanized at that flash of communion.

I find Douglas Robinson's words in *The Translator's Turn* useful to sort out the social and the emotional aspects of the conversion Chraïbi depicts:

> Ideological control is wielded, and collective meanings therefore shared, precisely through the mediation of the body—though the society's ideological . . . programming of each individual's limbic system, seat of the emotions, habit, and rote memorization. We learn shared meanings by learning the proper (ideologically controlled) feelings that drive them; and we share them with other people through the empathetic power that bodies have over other bodies, emotional states over other emotional states (p. 10).

This analysis, taken a step further, leads back to jihad, since ideological control, authority over interpretation, over *ijtihad*, is what is at stake in social struggle. The "power that bodies have over other bodies" is not solely empathetic, though, and the empathetic power of conversion is two-faced. Nor does the matter remain at this point, since the single interchange between Azwaw and Uqba, as definitive as it might have been for both individuals, is only one link in a much longer chain. Uqba not only converts Azwaw, but turns him into a converter: *But you will be [a Muslim] thanks to me! And your people will be [Muslims] too, thanks to you!*

Still, Azwaw Aït Yafelman eventually betrays Uqba ibn Nafi. Attached to Uqba's forces as muezzin, Azwaw seizes a strategic moment decades later to warn the rebel Berber forces led by Kusayla: "I betrayed my Emir. I informed Kusayla in the only manner I could: from on high of the minaret, qur'anically. Uqba and his Bedouins perished in the gigantic ambush that had been laid for them. The only survivors were my tribesmen, the Aït Yafelman" (p. 212).[13] Azwaw's long range strategy thus bears fruit. His Berber tribesmen survive, not the invading Bedouins. But they have become irreversibly Muslim.

For Chraïbi, I am arguing, jihad is dialogical. Much more than mere self-defense (per Averroes and Mahmud Shaltut above), it is, rather, an active engagement with an ideological enemy before, during, and after defeat, to the point in fact that one becomes confounded with the enemy: "The war is no longer between Berbers and Allah's warriors, but strangely enough between each Muslim and himself" (p. 198). Jihad is more of an environment than a self-contained action; it is an interaction of parry and blow, strategy and tactics, dialogue and dialectic, hermeneutic and conversion. Even from a "radical fundamentalist" perspective jihad is "a movement that operate[s] in stages and takes time and effort as well as organization. [It] can take the form of writing, assisting others, teaching, self-discipline, and many others" (Moussalli 1992, 208). For Azwaw, conversion was dictated by military forces on the ground, but it became a kind of jihad itself, one rooted in the ambiguities and potential modalities of the transculturation defeat brings, a new field of battle as much inner as outer. The assertion that conversion is based on free choice would thus make as little sense to Chraïbi as to radicals, whose critique of the limits of free agency within an alien ideological hegemony echoes, incidentally, much contemporary Western cultural criticism.

To return, by way of conclusion, to Fatima Mernissi and Assia Djebar, each of these authors struggles, albeit in different ways, to revise and reverse misogynistic traditions of interpretation of the early years of Islam that have been subverted by the patriarchy to its own ends. Both avail themselves of the tool of *ijtihad*, long denied not only women but all believers who are not accredited mujtahid. Mernissi has chosen to work within the conventions of the Hadith game, but Djebar's grasp of *ijtihad* verges on *différance*, the Derridean concept Fischer and Abedi have begun acclimatizing into Islamic dialogics, and which they define as occurring when "an attempt to freeze one meaning through an initial writing or context can be undone by reviving alternative meanings" (1990, 152). *Différance* would seem to be a facet of *ijtihad*—and of jihad as well.

The framework of both radical and moderate jihad has habitually been a monological one in which mediating cultural idioms have been accorded no weight. Chraïbi's vision of the birth of Arabo-Berber civilization in the Maghreb is, on the contrary, predicated upon the intuition that cultural difference cannot be simply "erased" but is folded and blended into new hegemonies in ways that their own agents may not realize. There is thus "constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others"—Emerson and Holquist's gloss for the condition of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981, 426).

To repeat Sura 49: "[We] made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other)." Jihad and *ijtihad* each offer dialogical forms of the transcultural knowledge of which the Qur'an speaks.

Notes

1. Translations not otherwise attributed are mine throughout. For discussion of the concept of *ijtihad*, see Hiskett (1984, 328), Hourani (1991, 68, 160), Roy in Kepel and Richard (1990, 272–74, 283), Mallat (1993, 29–34), Moussalli (1992, 215), and Peters (1977, 2–5), as well as Djebar's own allusion to it, my point of departure (p. 6).
2. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, quoted in Norman O. Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam" (1991, 90). Of note is that both Brown and the duo Fischer–Abedi repeatedly refer to Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* when discussing Qur'anic interpretation.
3. Although Fischer and Abedi's study is written from a Shi'ite perspective, its observations about Qu'ranic exegesis in general are illuminating, and I am especially indebted to the chapters entitled "Qur'anic Dialogics"; "Fear of *Différance*," on the Hajj; and "Postscriptual Perergon," on Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.
4. This is what Chraïbi claimed at a public conference on April 14, 1994, Faculté St.–Jean, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

5. Sur la plage, Oqba avait ordonné de faire place nette. Pas un humain, excepté lui. Très lentement, dans le silence des hommes et la symphonie des vagues, *il entra dans la mer jusqu'à ce que l'eau baignât le portrail de son cheval* [my emphasis]. . . . Seigneur de toute terre, de toute mer et des hommes, je Te prends à témoin: ceci est la fin de la terre, gloire à Toi! Ton règne est redevenu ce qu'il était à l'origine (Chraïbi 1982, 190).
6. This is the standard French translation: "Ayant continué sa marche, il vint jusqu'à la mer environnent, sans avoir éprouvé de résistence, et il *entra dans la mer jusqu'à ce que l'eau atteignît le portrail de son cheval.* [my emphasis]. Il s'écria: "Seigneur! si cette mer ne m'empêchait, j'irais dans les contrées éloignées et dans le royaume de *Dou–'l–Carnein*, en combattant pour ta religion, et en tuant ceux qui ne croient pas à ton existence ou qui adorent d'autres dieux que toi" (Casanova 1926, 333).
7. In conversation after the conference mentioned in Note 4, Chraïbi confirmed that he had used Arabic chronicles, but insisted the ones in question had not been translated, so there might still be a more direct source than the one I am proposing. The En–Noweiri text translated into French is an appendix of the 1926 edition of Ibn Khaldun's *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale* (Casanova 1926). The passages on the destruction of Qayrawan are on pp. 327–28.
8. The French translation of En–Noweiri has the following footnote for *Dou–'l–Carnein*: "Le roi Dou–'l–Carnein s'avança vers l'Occident jusqu'au lieu du coucher du soleil, et vit cet astre descendre dans un puit rempli de boue noire. Cette histoire authentique est racontée dans le Coran, sourate 18" (p. 333) ["The king Zulqarnein went as far west as the setting sun and saw this body sink into a well full of black mud. This authentic story is recounted in the Qur'an, Sura 18"]. In any event, the association between Uqba and Dou–'l–Carnein is extremely appropriate for reasons discussed immediately below.
9. I am following Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, a heavily annotated bilingual text provided by the Islamic Propagation Centre. I have slightly modified his typography.
10. Ha! approuva Oqba qui souriait toujours. Tu es de la religion? Oui, répondit Azwaw, sincère dans son mensonge. Je suis musulman comme toi. C'est pour cela que mon peuple n'a pas pris les armes contre toi. Ha! répéta l'émir avec force. Et comment cela? Quand l'es–tu devenu: Explique–moi. . . . Et dis–moi: c'est juste avant que je n'arrive que tu t'es converti à l'Islam? J'ai beaucoup réfléchi, des mois sinon des années [a dit Azwaw]. Et je suis entré dans la religion de Dieu par la suite. Par la suite? A la queue des chevaux? Tout seul? Ha! . . .
    Si quelqu'un a entendu le rire d'Oqba ibn Nafi ce jour–là, ce fut moi, l'imam Filani. Un rire à gorge déployée, rayonnant comme le soleil qui nous baignait tous. Vois–tu, dit l'émir, je connais tous les vents comme je connais les hommes... Tu n'es *pas* musulman. . . . Tu n'es pas musulman! Mais tu le seras grâce à moi! Et ton peuple le sera lui aussi grâce à toi (Chraïbi 1982, 205).
11. Avec l'aide de Boucchous qui avait séjourné à Kairouan et de quelques réfugiés "savants", il a appris l'arabe—ou peu s'en faut. Appris également et surtout des sourates entières du Coran, parmi les plus éblouissantes, de vive voix. Il ne sait pas distinguer une lettre d'un arbre. Mais il a veillé avec sa tête

de Berbère, médité, comparé les mots, de sa langue à leur langue, leur différence de sens ou leurs correspondences en regard de la terre et des hommes (p. 174).

12. Attends! La première sourate que j'ai apprise dans mon enfance commence par ces mots: "*Yâ–Sin! Wal Qo'rani al–hakim!* . . ."
Sa voix se brisa. [Moi, l'imam Filani,] je le regardais. Trente ans plus tard, toute une vie après, j'ignore encore comment une fêlure s'était faite en moi, juste à ce moment–là, par où entrait l'émotion intense de cet homme (p. 206).
13. This episode also has antecedents in the chronicles of Ibn Khaldun and En–Noweiri, in so far as tradition has it that Uqba ibn Nafi fell to the treachery of Kusayla (Kusaïla), a Berber chieftain whose conversion to Islam had wavered (Casanova 1926, 211–12, 334–36).