

## BOURDIEU'S SOCIOLOGY AND ALGERIA

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### Introduction :

....“Algeria is what enabled me to be accepted myself. The glance of understanding ethnologist that I took on Algeria, I could take it on myself, people of my country, my parents, the accent of my father, my mother and recover all that without drama, which is one of the major problems of all the uprooted intellectuals, locked up in the alternative of the populism or contrary to the shame of oneself related to the racism of class”.... (Bourdieu, 2003)

The works of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have emerged as one of the most substantial and innovative bodies of theory and researches in contemporary social science. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) had an enormous influence on social and cultural thought in the second half of the 20th century, leaving a mark on fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, critical theory, education, literary criticism, art, history, and media studies.

From his childhood in a rural French village, to his fieldwork in Algeria, to his ascension to the Chair of Sociology at the Collège de France, Bourdieu's life followed a trajectory both complex and contradictory. In this article, we will try to offer fresh insights on Bourdieu's work on Algeria by drawing on the perspectives of sociology and ethnography. Based on the ethno-sociological studies conducted by Pierre Bourdieu between the late 1950s and the early sixties on war-driven Algeria, this article reveals that Pierre Bourdieu's writings on the Algerian war were as politically engaged as those of *La misère du monde* published in 1993.

Some even considered Pierre Bourdieu as the intellectual father of Berber cultural militancy. The purpose of this article is to show that the power, the elegance and the scientific and political insightfulness

of Pierre Bourdieu's ethnological and sociological work on Algeria, and more specifically on Kabylia, lies, in fact, in the “polished” and “depoliticized” nature of his style, his approach and his relation to his scientific objects and to politics itself.

### 1-From a “modest” origin to a dominant position

The biographical elements make it possible to give an account of some “objective” properties of this author. Born in 1930 in the Atlantic Pyrenees, his father was a civil servant of the postal and telecommunications authorities. Married into 1962, he had three sons. He studied at the High school of Pau then Louis Le Grand then with the ENS (in aggregate fate of philosophy). He taught then as an assistant between 1958 and 1960 in Algeria where he carried out his military service, which provided him a privileged ground of study. Then, he was named with the FAC of Letters of Paris, before going to Lille. In 1981, the pulpit of sociology of the college of France occupies; in 1993, he obtained the Gold medal of CNRS. Since its creation in 1975, he directed the review « Acts of social Sc research ». He died in 2002. To understand his conversion from philosophy to sociology; in the Sixties, the existentialist philosophy of Sartre, which denied science for its manipulator character, was on the decline. Moreover, the university economic situation (because of the baby-boom, slight increase amongst new professors) was favourable to the reconsideration of the academic models, with the profit of the social sciences. Bourdieu, into this context “was reconverted” initially, as an ethnologist.

Bourdieu drew from the conceptual field of various currents while trying to combine

them. He did not recognize himself in any sociological current of the time: structuralism, interactionism, and subjectivism; nor of today between the methodological individualism of Boudon, the strategic approach of Crozier, and the “actionnalism” of Alain Touraine.

Pierre Bourdieu is regarded as one of the most eminent representative's contemporary French sociology. With the confluence of a triple tradition, that of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, he is regarded as the representative of a “sociological school”, that of genetic structuralism or structuralism critical. The approach of Bourdieu makes school in the whole world. It is a new grid of reading of the social facts used including in authors who do not share integrally his thought. The scientific projections most outstanding are done in the field of the culture in the broad sense (art, music...).

The work of Bourdieu exceeds the framework of sociology and appears in other social sciences as history by offering perspective constructivist of the social classes and policy.

Bourdieu kept his distance from the forms of commitment of the intellectual militant, present on all fronts and incarnated by Sartre. According to him, the sociologist must avoid prophecy (to claim to find solutions with imposed social problems of outside). Moreover, he must take care not to be made impose his “philosophical object” by the social problems themselves or silent partners of sociological studies. The sociologist should not be a prisoner of the challenges, of the ideological conflicts. That does not exclude a disinterest for the policy, on the contrary! Sociology should neither be a neutral science, nor a political ideology but must have a political use: To provide elements of comprehension of the social world which will make it possible to fight against the strategies of domination.

## **2-Bourdieu's use of photography in Algeria :**

Initially called quota in 1955, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) remained for the second time in Algeria, where he taught with the Faculty of Arts of Algiers of 1958 to 1961. It was in this country shaken by the war that the vocation of this young philosopher for sociology continued. And it was at that same context that he used photography as support with his research. As an autodidact, he then will develop an approach of the social world with breast height.

Photography, “manifestation of the distance from the observer which records and which does not forget that it records”, are appropriate for the “theory of the practice” which he is initiating. It is especially for him, in these emergency moments and of permanent taking risk, “a way of trying to face the shock of a crushing reality.” Photography offers to Pierre Bourdieu a formidable conversion of the glance and, while enabling him to apprehend a method in construction, his images add a facet essential with his ethnographic and sociological studies. They are also, by their documentary value, an information source on the Algerian company and a means of comprehension of our common stories. The beauty of his photographs holds in the force of their framings and the special attention that Bourdieu carried to our country, and these men and these women whom he wanted to rehabilitate in his images.

Pierre Bourdieu placed his photographic work in the context of his sociological work, while underlining the bonds of affection which he maintained with our country. From Algiers to Kabylia, he collected Algeria in full change. One half-century passed and, still today, his images are tantamount to testimony. At the time of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the agreements of Evian, which reflect fine with the war of Algeria, Jeu de Paume presented at the Castle of Towers a selection of one hundred fifty pulling black and white resulting from the stereotypes

taken by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria between 1958 and 1961.

If a negligible part of these images were used as illustration with the publications of the author, most between them, hidden during four decades in paperboards, were revealed with the public only after his death, at the time of the first presentation of this exposure in 2003.

They testify to an initiatory travel and a major conversion for Pierre Bourdieu. Resulting from research that he carried out in a country in full conflict, these photographic archives, approached here in the light of his scientific approach, are put compared to extracts chosen among the talks and writings of the sociologist. This dialogue between images and texts thus makes it possible to apprehend his glance incipient on the social world and to recall a singular adventure which was determining for the whole of his career.

### **3-The course of bourdieu in Algeria**

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), which was director of studies at the School of the advanced studies in social sciences and professor at the "Collège de France", remains one of the sociologists most read and with accompanying notes of his time. He left an immense work, in which the conceptual development of a general theory of the social world is articulated with investigations into the most varied subjects, of the uses of photography to the school inequalities, of the celibacy to the artistic production.

The thought of this committed intellectual will be deeply marked by the Algerian experiment. With the autumn 1955, Pierre Bourdieu, young person philosophize shining, like many others of his generation was sent in Algeria, where he carried out his military service. In spring 1956, he was affected with the service of documentation of the general government in Algiers, where he had a remarkable library. Then he accomplished a second stay in Algeria, during which he taught

with the Faculty of Arts of Algiers of 1958 to 1961. It is in this environment shaken by a particularly brutal anticolonial war that he completed various works of ethnology and that affirmed his vocation for sociology.

As an autodidact, he then will develop an approach of the social world with breast height. Mobilizing his students, he launched out in investigations whose central object was the transformations of the rural world and the urban world into Algeria. He wanted to understand the colonial fact and the effects of the terrible regroupings of populations which the French power operated. Surrounded by a group of enthusiastic students, among whom Abdelmalek Sayad who served to him as interpreter and advising, Pierre Bourdieu multiplied the observations, the talks and very often investigates under perilous conditions. As of these years - there, he wrote a series of texts of very built synthesis already and will write of them others on his return to France.

### **4- Bourdieu's interest to Algeria**

It is significant that the first work by Bourdieu was devoted to ALGERIA. There the aggregate young person of philosophy had discovered this country in 1955, while coming to make his military service. Two years, named later attending the university of Algiers, he undertook his first research with, in prelude, the publication of a critical assessment of the official and erudite knowledge « Sociology of Algeria » ( PUF 1958)<sup>1</sup>. Through this work Pierre Bourdieu tried to show his own vision of Algeria ; He also offered us through his photographs a real documentary value, an information source on the Algerian company and a means of comprehension of our common stories. One sees there with work a scientific glance not stripped of aesthetic direction. The beauty of his photographs holds in the force of their framings and the special attention that Bourdieu carried to « Algeria » as a country, Kabyle peasants

off-set in the centers of regrouping or unloading in the big cities and their forced inactivity; the families with the precarious life which lived in the slums of the metropolises under miserable conditions; the misery of the unemployed and million uprooted people.

Pierre Bourdieu placed his photographic work in the context of his sociological work, while underlining the bonds of affection which he maintained with our country. From Algiers to Kabylie, he collected Algeria in full change. Thus, the photographs carried out by Pierre Bourdieu at the time of the Algerian war of liberation enable us to share under another angle his glance on the social world. Feeling completely stripped vis-a-vis this immense social laboratory, in a state of war which made ground a true adventure, it was inevitably thrown in work, tried out and used all the techniques of ethnological and sociological research possible. Solved adversary of French colonialism and military oppression, Pierre Bourdieu made his research a radically political and engaged work: he wanted to testify to all that he observed, he wanted to understand a social world confused and crossed contradictions and anachronisms.

#### **4- Bourdieu's sociology**

Pierre Bourdieu is one of the largest French sociologists of 20th century, he marked of his print the sociological analysis, providing to this one a large number of concepts now used by students, journalists and any other person having a minimum of general knowledge.

Indeed, the concepts of authorized capital, violence symbolic system, habitus... entered the language running of the cultivated public. Bourdieu is not only one sociologist of education; he is in a broader way one critical thinker of modernity. This aspect of his thought was underlined little, just like the report in Algeria, country where he worked out what will become a sociological theory with his own concepts.

He observed there individuals torn off by colonization with their system of self-subsistence without being for as much prepared with the culture of the market which supposes, inter alia, a design of time different from that of the traditional companies <sup>(1)</sup>

The writings of Bourdieu on the school, the culture, the tastes, the literature, Algeria... belong to the same critical breath and are marked by a land of anthropological pessimism. Whereas he supported the independence of Algeria, he did not admit the theses of Frantz Fanon at one time when they were in vogue in the university field, developing a sociological analysis which warned against the millenarian Utopias. Bourdieu's sociology insists on the oppression of the dominated man and object of violence symbolic system. The man, he says, is a slave of the authorized capitals which have him and which inherit him, more than they do not have them and them héritent <sup>(2)</sup>. Reified and disembodied, he is dispossessed of his humanity by social structures in permanent conflict.

The sociology of Bourdieu does not relate to the social structures but she stresses the importance of the authorized capitals which treat on a hierarchical basis the individuals and who found violence accepted symbolic system because perceived like legitimate. The conflict between agents \* – individuals who act as much as they are acted – is permanent. It is the state of nature Hobbesian where violence symbolic system is hegemonic, and is present including in domestic space. The reproduction of the authorized capitals is necessarily done in a conflictual situation, in a competition, being held in a company which then seems as an articulation of contradictory and antagonistic interests, forming a pyramid where, except for the two ends, all the agents are simultaneously dominated and dominant. The petit-bourgeois is dominated, but he dominates in his turn those which are in a position lower than

him. Even the worker pertaining to the bottom of the scale is in a dominant position in domestic space with respect to his wife; from where the concept of violence symbolic system which is exerted on agents which undergo it and which reproduce it because of habitus inculcated as of infancy.

The oppression of the man, while adding to it of the social inequalities reproduced by the institutions like the market, the school, the State... Pessimistic thinker like Rousseau, Pierre Bourdieu is convinced that modernity decreases the man by giving him the illusion of freedom. He is not however nostalgic of the traditional company; he is neither Tocqueville regretting the Former regime, nor on the other hand Saint-Simon or Auguste Comte who believed that science and industry will make the happiness of humanity.

His work is inspired by the social criticism of the man connected by the sociological determinisms founded on hidden mechanisms that sociology reveals without being able to put an end to it because any shot down habitus will be replaced by another. In his vision, the man has a tragic destiny that modernity worsened <sup>(3)</sup>. To show this thesis, he undertakes the ethnography of the Kabylia village to study a company which he presents like a sample of nonindustrial civilisation before the fall in modernity oppressive<sup>(4)</sup>.

The direction of the honour, the moral and physical courage, the « franc-parler », the report of man with man without mediation, the contempt of the material wealth, the spirit of solidarity, the natural behaviour and without artifices... is as many civic virtues than Bourdieu detects at the Kabylia villager, and these are precisely these virtues which the Western man would have lost in contact with the modernity establishing of the inequalities. At the Kabylia ones, known as Bourdieu, all the men with the birth inherit an authorized capital – the honor – which will

be borne fruit or wasted by sound owner under his only responsibility<sup>(5)</sup>.

Pierre Bourdieu created an epistemological space called the “sociology of the habitus”, where the agent, while having the illusion to be free, obeys to his habitus inherited from the past. The habitus is, for him, the made need virtue, he says : « it is also the capacity of adaptation of the individual according to his psychological resources and the nature of his authorized capitals, in a situation where it is difficult to imagine to exceed the objective limits of his daily own life. The habitus is the built-in past which attaches - statistically - the agent to his position in the social hierarchy, according to what he has - or - did not inherit. The habitus is the interiorization of the externality, the perception of the social world and the membership of the company in its lower parts, average or higher ».

Bourdieu chose Kabylia, and sought the universal image of the man there to denounce the misdeeds of the Western civilization materialist which reduced the man to an object, guided by an exacerbated individualism rationalized by the political economy. The social life in Occident borrows from now on its laws from the market where the authorized capitals compete with same manner as the goods. The value of the individuals is not measured on the criterion of what they are, but what they own.

So, The individuals are what they have, but they are also what they do not have <sup>(6)</sup>. Not to have become a qualitatively overdrawn social being compared to a quantitative standard. The relationship between the men is reduced to the competition of their authorized capitals which give means of being distinguished and to position on the social scale <sup>(7)</sup> Bourdieu in Kabylia seems like Rousseau denouncing the artificial and iniquitous character of the modern company <sup>(8)</sup>. It is also the Utopia, but Utopia used like a weapon in the dispute of

the privileges and the injustices <sup>(9)</sup>. The Kabyle village indicates that modernity added to the natural inequalities and the artificial inequalities that are legitimated by the habitus. Bourdieu develops the Kabyle Company compared to the modern society, by explaining why the traditional companies, with the indisputable charm, “knew to make coincide the habitus and the habitat, the vision of the world and the structure of domestic space or the hopes and their chances to be realized”.

This vision, rather near to that of Rousseau, is not backward-looking; on the contrary, it removes the sacred character from the institutions and the reports of authority by indicating that they are human constructions which draw their legitimacy in the assent of domination. “Denaturalizing” the social link, these problems nourish a dispute asserting the abolition or the reform of institutions from now on perceived like unjust and thus illegitimate. Pierre Bourdieu is also known for his vision of revolution. He believes that the revolutionary project is not a “confrontation without antecedent of the subject with the world” as seems to affirm it J-P. Sartre <sup>(11)</sup> which rises not without reason, against objective sociology (I would say objectivist) who can seize only sociality of inertia <sup>(12)</sup> ”.

But if the objectivism which underestimates the capacity of the individuals to make the revolution is to be drawn aside, the subjectivism which over-estimates it is also to reject because this one does not concern the pure intention of the subject. This last is carrying a habitus which reconciles “the thing and the direction” in a balance between fidelity with oneself and the desire to change. But what is important for Bourdieu, it is neither one nor the other, but the capacity to change and create a different real world, abolishing contradiction that become unbearable for the individuals. The larger this capacity is weak, is temptation to entrust the change to

imaginary which enchants reality instead of transforming it. Having been dominated by a violent colonial system, Algeria was large of a revolt directed against the injustices of the colonial order which led the Algerians to start the war of independence whose Frantz Fanon was the most outstanding theorist. Pennon seized with its right value the anger of oppressed with regard to the colonial system and analysed violence aiming at destroying this system. However, taken in enthusiasm nationalist combat, he over-estimated the capacities of the Algerians to think the policy in its autonomy and especially to institutionalize the reports of authority.

The post-colonial company has neither the serenity, the stability of the traditional social groups which make correspond the hopes to the chances to carry them out, nor structures of the modern society where the agents have the ability to be organized to resist arbitrary of the power.

This assumption, formulated implicitly, prevented Bourdieu from pouring in the third worlds, underlining the incapacity of the companies of the third world to conceive the change with a perception of the future in relation to the control of the present in the reproduction of the daily life. They are not poorest, he says, which will make the revolution even if their living conditions lead them to revolt. He supports this position by a quotation of Durkheim, extracted from the rules of the sociological method: “It is because the imaginary medium does not offer to the spirit any resistance that this one, feeling contained by nothing, is given up with ambitions without terminals and believes possible to build or, rather, to rebuild the world by its only forces and with the liking of its desire <sup>(13)</sup>”.

Pierre Bourdieu had a very strong report in Algeria which was for him a source of inspiration, but also a ground of development of a sociological theory intended to refute the existentialism and

structuralism. It is indeed in this country that he undertook a work of ground in anthropology during which he worked out his "theorie sociologique"<sup>(14)</sup> by observing the Kabyle village. But Algeria was more than one ground of research, because they were initially men, women and children confronted with the hardness of the colonial system which inserted them in misery and the underdevelopment. This was in a crucial period in which they wished, above all, to have an independent national State. Bourdieu was for the independence of Algeria and was sorry that the "black feet", which all were not of the privileged colonists, were cut off the Muslim population of which they did not share the nationalist aspirations.

Themselves victims of the colonial system, they lived in the illusion to rank above the "Moslem natives" of which they did not understand the revolt. For criticisms which are work of Bourdieu towards the colonial order, showing that this one does not allow colonized people to leave the destitution, they were neither in the pessimism nor in an obliging sociology of the "culture of poverty". Pierre Bourdieu does not believe besides in the revolutionary virtues of the misery which mutilates the man by delivering him to the imaginary one. His sociology does not excite poverty; it without doubt denounces her causes to fall into the populism. Refusing the voluntarist theory of the revolutionary awakening rising from the philosophy of the subject of Jean-Paul Sartre, Bourdieu took care not to lend to the militant of the FLN revolutionary qualities because, he explains, the "subjective hopes have dependent part with objective conditions"<sup>(15)</sup>

Finally, we can say that Pierre Bourdieu maintains a special relationship with our country, our society and our traditions and habits which has always constituted an inspiration for him. The years he spent in Algeria made of him a real nationalist who defended with enthusiasm the Algerian

cause. The Algerian experience made of him an original author who broke the academic insulation of sociology by privileging the topics relating to the misery of the world and the reproduction of social inequalities. According to him, the inequality between the men will never take fine. This rule, he applies to the Algerian nationalism and which he supported in the combat against the colonial system and which will reproduce, he thought, once acquired independence, the mechanisms of domination of an authoritarian regime.

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### References:

1- Cf. Marie-France Garcia-Parpet, "Of the outsiders in the market economy. Pierre Bourdieu and work on Algeria", *Awal*, n° 27-28, 2003. The author counts fourteen works and articles of Bourdieu on Algeria

2-This idea, borrowed from Marx, crosses all the works of Bourdieu. In two of its works, (*Le sens pratique*, éditions de minuit, 1980), and (*Le bal des célibataires*, éditions du seuil, 2002) he puts in opening chapter this sentence of Marx: "The recipient of the majorat, the son first-born, belongs to the ground. He inherits."

\* In connection with his report with the Marxism, here what he wrote four years before his disappearance: "I had the practice for a long time, when the question was put to me, generally badly disposed, of my relationship with Marx, to answer that for all to take, and if it were necessary at all costs to be affiliated, I would say Pascalian rather", "Bourdieu, Meditations Pascaliennes, threshold, 1977,p.9.

3-an abstract of a radiophonic discussion with Antoine Spire, he summarizes his position by an explicit sentence: "If the social world is bearable, it is for me because I can be indignant ". The maintenance was reproduced in the form of small work /book of 61 pages to the editions of « Aude » in 2002

4-this was not the first time that an anthropologist chooses an exotic area to work out comparisons with its company of origin. C. Lévi-Strauss went to Brazil, E. Evans-Pritchard in Sudan and Ruth Benedict with Japan, either to show the universality of Western civilization and its superiority on all the others, or to show its deficit compared to those

which remained closer to nature Breakfast of the MOM April 19th, 2007

5-Cf. extracted from his article “the feeling of the honour” in P. Bourdieu, Draft of a theory of the practice, Droz, 1972

6-Cf. L. Addi, « L’anthropologie du capital social » in L. Addi (sous la direction de), *L’anthropologie du*

*Maghreb : Berque, Bourdieu, Geertz et Gellner*, Awal-Ibis Press, Paris, 2003

7-P. Bourdieu, distinction, editions of Midnight, 1979

8-The first who compared Bourdieu with Rousseau is Pierre Encrevé in an article entitled “A realistic philosophy of freedom”, Awal, n°27-28, 2003

9-We would be wrong indeed to believe that the thought of the one and other is only speculation and revolt without exit, because even if the “good savage” never existed historically, and even if Bourdieu idealizes the Kabyle village, it does not remain less than their respective works help to measure the deficit between the potential of

humanity and social reality. And if one becomes aware of the deficit, they seem to say, it is possible to act to reduce it, without however to make it disappear.

10- P. Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes*, seuil ed, 1977, p. 178

11- P. Bourdieu, Algeria 60. Economic structures and temporal structures, éd. midnight, 1977, p. 89

12- P. Bourdieu, the practical direction, éd. midnight, 1980, p. 76

13- Emile Durkheim quoted by P. Bourdieu, Draft of a theory of the practice, op. cit., p. 267

14- Sur l’importance du travail de terrain ethnographique en Algérie dans l’élaboration de la théorie sociologique de Bourdieu, cf. Lahouari Addi, *Sociologie et anthropologie chez Pierre Bourdieu. Le paradigme anthropologique kabyle et ses conséquences théoriques*, La Découverte, 2002.

15- P. Bourdieu, *Algérie 60. Structures économiques et structures temporelles*, éd. de Minuit, 1977, p. 89