

**Representations of Work among Algerian Workers between Cultural
Structure and the Logic of Industrial Organisation:
A Critical Sociological Reading of Algerian Scholarship**

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Abstract

This study seeks to deconstruct Algerian workers' representations of work within the industrial enterprise through a critical sociological approach grounded in an analysis of the most significant Algerian studies that have addressed the question of work and industrial organisations since the postindependence period. It proceeds from the central hypothesis that the industrial enterprise in Algeria has not succeeded in producing a complete rupture with traditional cultural structures; rather, it has become a space in which local social relations are reproduced within a modern organisational framework. This study adopts an analytical and interpretative method through a reading of the works of several Algerian scholars, including Gherid Djamel, Ali El Kenz, Morad Moulai Hadj, Ahmed Henni, Mohamed Mebtoul, and Djillali Liabès. It concludes that Algerian workers do not construct their relationship with work according to a purely economic logic but rather through an intricate system of social and cultural representations in which values of belonging, dignity, authority, and personal relations intersect with the requirements of modern industrial organisation. The study further shows that the failure of the Algerian industrialisation project to achieve the desired cultural transformation is primarily attributable to its neglect of the

social and cultural specificity of Algerian society and to the attempt to import a ready-made rational model that does not accord with the local symbolic structure.

Keywords: social representations, Algerian worker, industrial organisation, organisational culture, rationality, industrial enterprise.

Introduction

Since the early years of independence, the project of industrialisation in Algeria has been associated with an ideological and political background that regarded the factory as a central instrument for reshaping society and constructing modern human beings. Industrialisation was not merely an economic choice aimed at increasing rates of production or generating wealth; rather, it was a comprehensive societal project that sought to bring about profound transformations at the level of values, modes of life, and social behaviour. From this standpoint, the industrial enterprise became a symbolic space upon which the national state relied to produce a rational, disciplined citizen capable of adapting to the requirements of industrial modernity.

However, from its very beginning, this project encountered a set of structural contradictions linked to the nature of Algerian society, which remained governed by a historically rooted cultural and social system based on personal relations, kinship ties, local affiliations, and the logic of traditional solidarity. This tension was clearly reflected within the industrial space, where modern bureaucratic organisation was unable to fully impose its rational logic; instead, workers' groups reproduced their cultural and social patterns within the factory itself.

In this context, a group of Algerian sociological studies emerged that sought to understand the nature of the relationship between the Algerian worker and industrial work and to reveal the social representations that frame workers' behaviors and attitudes within the enterprise. These studies constituted a highly significant scholarly contribution to the development of the sociology of organisation and work in Algeria because they moved from the technical economic analysis of work to the analysis of the symbolic and cultural dimension that governs professional action.

On this basis, the problem of this study centers on the following question:

To what extent have local cultural and social structures contributed to shaping Algerian workers' representations of work within the industrial enterprise?

This problem gives rise to a set of subsidiary questions:

- How has Algerian sociological scholarship addressed the concept of social representations of work?
- What is the nature of the relationship between traditional culture and modern industrial organisation within the Algerian enterprise?
- Why did the Algerian industrial project fail to produce the model of the rational industrial worker in the modernist sense?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a critical analytical method through the deconstruction of the sociological discourses that have addressed industrial work in Algeria and through relating them to the social and cultural contexts that produced them.

1. The Theory of Representations

Discussion of the representations of local workers can be established only on scientific foundations whose features are derived from the theoretical legacy that has undertaken the task of deconstructing this vast scholarly field. It is therefore incumbent upon us, as researchers undertaking this research experience, to provide a theoretical framing of the concept of the theory of representations, in which the fields of philosophy and sociology intersect. In terms of representations, it is by no means possible to discuss representation apart from, or in isolation from, the imaginary or the imagined.

1.1. The imaginary

The imaginary is “a complex concept, with fixed and multiple, polysemic meanings, and it has extensions in psychoanalysis, anthropology, and the new history, particularly in the field known as the history of mentalities, *histoire de mentalité*.”¹

In other words, the concept of the imaginary adheres to the human subject and to the psychological and mental structure it bears, which has resulted from the influence of history and society upon its architecture and formation, whether at the level of the imagining subject or at the level of the collective imaginary. The latter is regarded as a field of knowledge in which several intellectual and scientific currents, such as social psychology, sociology, and history, converge. This makes the science of the imaginary a field with diverse epistemological sources and multiple approaches. To proceed from it in the study of societies and the history of societies enables the researcher to extract from his research a broad field of truths.

When we return to the description offered by Cornelius Castoriadis, in his statement that “history goes beyond the reductionist model that relies on causal determinism and is, at the same time, based on the principle of noncausality, such that it becomes impossible to explain the history of societies on the basis of a deterministic relation of cause and effect. This is due specifically to the nature of history as a mental process, insofar as it is self-creation (*autocréation*).”²

In this proposition, the researcher highlights the considerable importance of approaching history. He does not view history from the perspective of causality and consequence in the form of a rigid conditionality bearing a predictive character. For him, history assumes a flexible form in dealing with historical events from the perspective that “the historical phenomenon has multiple scientific points of entry”. In this context, one may also put forward what Mohammed Arkoun introduced

¹ Abdelkader Soumar, “The Collective Imaginary and Intellectual Representations: Idea, Meaning, Concept” (PhD diss., Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Djillali Liabès University, Sidi Bel Abbès, 2016), 48.

² Giovanni Busino, *Autonomie et autotransformation de la société: La philosophie militante de Cornelius Castoriadis* (France: Droz, 1989), 101.

through his approach to the concept of the imaginary, when he states: “The imaginary is an anthropological composition and structure present in all individuals and in all human societies; however, different its forms and types may be according to historicity and spatial conditionality.”³

He also added that “the imagined is the set of shared representations that may appear among a particular people, countries, or a particular social category. There is also an Algerian imagined or a French imagined, and so forth. In other words, a particular people share a set of symbols that it practises at the level of its lived reality.”⁴

This point of departure leads us to discover that the concept of the imaginary is broader and more comprehensive than the concept of representation since it has a wide and encompassing extension through its connection with large societies that share historical and cultural symbols by which they measure most of the practices and actions that constitute the identity and culture of society. This proposition refers us to Charles Taylor’s indication that the imaginary is “that common understanding which makes social practices possible, in addition to a general sense of legitimacy.”⁵

1.2. Representations

Émile Durkheim, in his definition of representations, holds that they are phenomena distinguished from the various phenomena existing in nature by virtue of the properties that characterise them. There is no doubt that they possess causes and reasons and that they are, in themselves, causes. The production of representations does not occur because of certain ideas and opinions that attract individuals’ attention; rather, they are products of past experiences. They are acquired habits, preconceived ideas, desires that control us unconsciously, and, in a word, everything that constitutes our moral qualities.”⁶

Émile Durkheim, in his conception of the concept of representations, focuses on the question of their sources. He does not link them to ideas and cognitive or intellectual conceptions; rather, he defines them as acquisitions in whose formation and consolidation past experiences and history have played a role at the level of the mentality of the social individual, such as the habits and cultural and social acquisitions that the individual has received over time. He depicts them as a cause, meaning that the question of representations is among the complex and thorny issues, since it is linked, par excellence, to the symbolic.

³ Mohammed al-Shabah, *The Concept of the Imaginary in Mohammed Arkoun*, 1st ed. (Lebanon: Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, 2014), 22.

⁴ Mohammed Arkoun, *Secularism and Religion: Islam, Christianity, and the West*, trans. Hachem Saleh, 3rd ed. (Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi, 1997), 26.

⁵ Sayid Mattar, *Questions of Plurality and Difference in Western Liberal Systems: A Study of the Works of Charles Taylor* (Lebanon: Arab Centre for Research and Studies, 2015), 33.

⁶ Djamel Farfar, “University Students’ Representations of Socio-Cultural Values: Students of the Faculty of Letters, Languages, and Social and Human Sciences at the University of Mascara as a Model” (PhD diss., Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oran, Algeria, 2014), 49.

2. The Theory of Social Representations

Émile Durkheim may be considered one of the first scholars to approach the element of social representation. He offered an important approach to social representations in his article published in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1898 under the title “Individual Representations and Collective Representations”. In this article, he shows that the nature of social representations, for him, depends on the architectural system of social representations.⁷

In defining the theoretical origins of social representations, he turns to the concept of collective representation to distinguish between the characteristics of collective thought and individual thought. This is an issue whose importance for social psychology is clearly considerable. However, research into the delayed emergence of this scholarly concern, “social representations”, came as a result of the influence of two major currents: behaviourism in psychology and positivism in the philosophy of science, both of which were concerned with bringing the social sciences into the domain of the natural sciences.⁸

Serge Moscovici also established an important theoretical reference for the concept of social representations. He views them as a product of human thought, which constructs an image of itself and of its surroundings to think and act. According to him, representation is the symbolic interface between the individual and his or her environment. He adds that, through representations, the individual provides interpretative models and symbols that enable him to find meaning and give significance to the world around him.⁹

In his definition of representations, Gustave-Nicolas Fischer regards them as a social construction of prior knowledge prepared through a set of values and beliefs upon which there is consensus and which individuals share among themselves. These may be projected onto different levels, “events and social categories”, and they have the function of unifying their view of events, just as they have manifestations at the level of social interactions.¹⁰

Discussion of representations leads us to the field of philosophy because the origin of the concept of representations is, par excellence, philosophical, through its appearance in research related to mental activity in philosophy. This is because advocates of knowledge in philosophy sought to demonstrate that the idea is nothing more than a mental construction.

This is what led Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) to state that knowledge is nothing but representations, meaning that our ideas and the knowledge we obtain are the result of a mental

⁷ Pierre Mannoni, *Les représentations sociales*, 1st ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), adapted.

⁸ Farfar, “University Students’ Representations of Socio-Cultural Values,” 40.

⁹ Mohammed Khaldi, “Representations of Organisational Authority among Industrial Workers in Algeria: A Field Study at the Mantal Blanket Manufacturing Enterprise in the City of Tlemcen” (master’s thesis, University of Algiers, 2006), 32.

¹⁰ Aida Muhajir Abu Taba and Mohammed Mousa al-Naimat, “Folk Medicine in Ma’an Governorate: Social Representations and Forms of Practice,” *Dirasat wa Abhath* 9, no. 28 (2017): 119.

construction. He adds that true knowledge of reality is almost impossible because it is wholly bound to the thinking subject more than to the object in itself.¹¹

From what has been mentioned above concerning the identification of the basic sources and theories that have attempted to define the concept of representations, we conclude that they are an issue linked to society, considered as the real nucleus in which representations are formed, and from which the individual, in turn, draws conceptions and mental representations that are reflected at the level of behaviors and practices.

What we are attempting to say in this proposition is that the question of representations is complex because it bears the character of construction within the human subject. It is an accumulative matter that the individual possesses within his social milieu, and these representations lead him to reconstruct his reality anew. Through them, the question of consensus arises concerning what we call “social values, particular customs, and possible ways of life”.

The process of excavation into the concept of representations has led us to conclude that the question of reality is a relative question or that it is a constructive rather than a given question. In other words, the individual constructs his actual reality on the basis of prior representations of action. He defines reality through the sources and origins from which he has absorbed his concepts and definitions of reality. Reality, in this sense, is constructive, and every individual in society constructs his or her reality through his or her representational absolutes concerning it. This raises the idea that reality is not singular but rather a set of realities, *au pluriel*, that differ and vary according to the diversity of individuals’ representations. This is what makes this concept, “representations”, a fertile field for research and gives it considerable importance in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and psychology.

3. The Study of Gherid Djamel

The ideas of Gherid Djamel emerged in the context of the current endeavour to reconsider the concept of culture and to attempt to provide definitions of the nature of the cultural structure of Algerian society after independence. It may be considered that Gherid Djamel’s theoretical system is, from one angle, the product of the researcher’s extrapolation of global anthropological thought and, from another angle, the product of contact with field reality through field studies, such as the field of industry and society in Algeria at the end of the 1970s.¹²

Through his field research, Gherid Djamel sought to align himself with critical thought, which does not accept assumptions and self-evident truths, whether at the theoretical or ideological

¹¹ Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan, “Une notion clef des sciences humaines,” *Sciences humaines*, no. 27 (April 1993): 16.

¹² Zaoui Fekrouni, “The Dialectic of the Traditional and the Modern: A Reading of Djamel Gherid’s Analysis of the Duality of the Constant and the Changing in the Algerian Cultural Structure,” *Journal of Social Change* 1, no. 2 (2016): 377.

level. This led him to choose that his work and thought should be grounded within the scope of specificity, that is, at the local level.¹³

Gherid Djamel's research provoked wide-ranging discussion and debate through his approach to the category of Algerian industrial workers, both within the field of cultural sociology and within the field of the sociology of organisation and work. His descent into the field of research enabled him to extrapolate a set of data that is of considerable importance for anyone wishing to conduct research in the field of culture and cultural anthropology, since his research, in its substance, sought to reveal the nature of the cultural structure of Algerian society.

Among the studies conducted by Gherid Djamel were those in which he sought to shed light on the category of Algerian workers by deconstructing the question of industry in Algeria from the perspective of approaching the new face of the Algerian industrial worker, which was the result of the wager on industrialisation in Algeria. Its principal aim was to educate Algerian society and transform its members into modern citizens. In other words, the industrial project in Algeria had as its primary aim socialisation for the construction of a modern citizen. In light of these premises, what are the most important findings reached by Gherid Djamel through his approach to the category of Algerian workers?

The researcher Gherid Djamel conducted a study targeting the category of workers within the SNS factory, the zinc enterprise in Ghazaouet, with the aim of analysing the conceptions held by this category regarding SNSs in an attempt to understand the relationship between the workers and the factory in which they work.

In this research, the researcher proceeds from two different approaches that nevertheless converge on essential matters, as he states: the common understanding of Marxism and liberal sociology. Both view the factory as a world of rationality and efficiency and regard it as an institution of socialisation.¹⁴

This approach is attached to the theory of modernisation, as this theory insisted on the necessity of the factory to reproduce a human being capable of becoming civilised and, at the same time, spreading civilisation. This is what European societies wagered upon at the beginnings of the stage of industrialisation.

Gherid Djamel's reliance on this approach was based on the political wager made by the authority during that period to bring about that qualitative shift in Algerian society. This occurred through the attempt to shorten the distance towards civilisation and modernity by skipping stages and excluding the cultural and social condition, which constitutes the vital nerve of any particular shift or attempt to move to a better stage.

Gherid Djamel reached a set of findings in his study of the SNS factory, the most important of which were as follows:

¹³ Ibid., 381.

¹⁴ Djamel Gherid, "The Common Worker: Elements for an Approach to the New Face of the Algerian Industrial Worker," *Insaniyat* 1, no. 1 (1997): 11.

a. **The strategy of withdrawal:** In this element, the researcher concluded that the worker inside the factory is, in most cases, of no benefit to himself. This position is that of workers without specialisation, since their presence within the enterprise is merely physical, without any awareness of the enterprise's objectives or of the principal tasks assigned to them.¹⁵

b. **Workers' conception of their work:** The researcher states that, for workers lacking qualifications inside the factory, the most important matter is to obtain a job and not necessarily to obtain it at SNS, because this is better than being unemployed.¹⁶

c. **Workers' conceptions of managerial staff:** The researcher discovered that workers have a negative mental image of managerial staff. If the manager does not impose himself by virtue of his technical competence, then his presence expresses the image of social authority. He concluded that the presence of the manager inside the workshop is not the presence of technical competence or practical knowledge but rather a presence grounded in social domination. Gherid concludes this element by stating that neither the manager nor the worker truly exists; what exists is the contradiction between them.¹⁷

d. **The common worker:** The researcher derived this element from field data to answer the general problem from which he proceeded, namely, the political wager upon which the authority relied to produce an industrial worker, a civilised individual who would disseminate civilisation and modern culture through the socialisation he receives in the factory. The researcher arrived at a model of the worker produced by two fundamental currents: the first is the rational modernist current of factory culture, and the second is the traditional local cultural current, represented by the common worker.

What occurred in societies that wagered on this modernising method, such as European society, was that the cultural factor had the lion's share in the success of this orientation. "To compare Algerian industrialisation with classical European industrialisation and to believe that the same causes lead to the same results, is an attempt to move into the unknown."¹⁸

The Algerian context differs culturally from the European context in several particulars and manifestations, the most important of which are religious culture and the nature of the cultural structure built on the question of rent, both culturally and economically.

The common worker is the worker whose presence we observe strongly within factory units but who is entirely ignorant of the rules of the game operating in the industrial enterprise, particularly the modern and institutional forms of resistance and demand-making.¹⁹

¹⁵ Mohammed Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria: The First Generation*, 2nd ed. (Algiers: Algerian National Library, 2019), 91.

¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷ Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria*, 46–47.

¹⁸ Gherid, "The Common Worker," 11.

¹⁹ Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria*, 42–43.

4. The Study of Ali El Kenz

Ali El Kenz examined the field of industrialisation in Algeria through his thesis on “the relationship between industrialisation and Algeria”, through which he sought, first, to reveal the deep meaning of industrialisation in Algeria and, second, to investigate the ways in which managerial staff and workers practise this industrialisation. The El Hadjar factory served as its field, where the researcher discovered several findings that contributed to the failure of El Hadjar’s mission, which “was intended to be a pedagogical factory in which society would be formed according to the new techniques and the new behaviours unknown in Algeria”.²⁰

Among the most important findings reached by the researcher through his fieldwork is that there is a working class that refuses integration into, and belongs to, the factory. This is due to:

a. Prevailing Social Relations within the Organisation

The fundamental wager for which the factory was created was the attempt to build society through it, that is, to train workers in organisational and rational culture to disseminate it within society. “This is what made the field of the factory, in Ali El Kenz’s approach, a pedagogical field par excellence. This orientation was comprehensive at all levels.”²¹ This exceeds the capacities of the factory, for the factory was created, in its proper structure, to perform a purely economic function, absorbing human capital ready to perform its practical tasks. In contrast, Ali El Kenz states that what the factory was asked to perform was greater than its real capacity. It was unable to undertake two tasks: the first was industrialisation, and the second was socialisation. The existing reality is not workers who produce and understand factory culture; rather, what exists are the prevailing social relations that draw from traditional Algerian culture, which is characterised by personalistic loyalty.

b. The Identity Crisis Represented in Duality

The local managerial staff working in industrial enterprises distributed throughout the country were entrusted with the task of transforming society from a “backwards” society into a “modern” society. This generated a kind of incomprehension of the existing situation and of the contradictions present inside the factory, which led to the emergence of a dual identity. A crisis of terminology appeared in the discourses of managerial staff, and these terms did not fulfil their role at the level of reality. In other words, these terms were produced in an environment different from the Algerian environment; they are the product of Western capitalism.²²

This situation caused the local worker to lose his old forms of integration without establishing new forms of integration.²³

²⁰ Nassira Zerual, “Social Values as a Depth of the Algerian Industrial Development Project,” *Studies in Development and Society* 2, no. 2 (2015): 79.

²¹ Sarah Azizi and Ali Zoui Nabil, “Organisational Culture in the Algerian Enterprise: From Theoretical Foundation to the Empirical Field,” *Journal of Social Studies and Research* 10, no. 2: 49.

²² Mohammed Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria: The First Generation*, 2nd ed. (2019), 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Practices and actions were produced inside the factory that were wholly distant from the forms imagined by managerial staff in their discourses, which they believed to constitute contractual norms upon which new relations of production would be founded.²⁴

5. The Study of Morad Moulai Hadj

We have sought to approach Morad Moulai Hadj's study through two field studies conducted by the researcher. The first was in 1999, entitled "The Rural Origins of the Industrial Worker in Algeria", whose field of study was the zinc enterprise in Ghazaouet. The second was in 2006, entitled "Industrial Workers in Algeria: Practices and Representations: A Field Study in Three Industrial Enterprises in the Trara Region".

In these studies, the researcher sought to focus on workers' representations of the question of rural origin, their traditional cultural rootedness, and the extent of its influence on the industrial space by relying on the approach of "individual modernity", which proceeds from the premise that the industrial enterprise has the capacity to teach the individual new representations and new cultural values.

On the basis of this introduction, it is possible to present some of the findings reached by the researcher throughout the stages of his field research.

a. Findings of the First Study, "The Rural Origins of the Industrial Worker in Algeria"

- This study proceeds from a fundamental hypothesis according to which the overwhelming majority working inside Algerian factories are of rural origin, and some of them still reside in these areas.²⁵

The researcher obtained percentages that confirm his initial hypothesis, which we have sought to present as follows:

- In this study, 38% of workers were born in rural areas, and 37% were born in semirural areas.
- Similarly, 76 percent stated that their fathers had been peasants, 65 percent stated that they had practised agricultural activity, and 37 percent owned agricultural land.
- In view of these percentages, which constitute decisive evidence of the validity of the hypothesis from which the sociological researcher proceeded, it is possible to justify Algerian industrial workers' feeling of nostalgia for rural life, provided that the basic conditions exist for securing an income better than that which they earn within industrial complexes.
- The researcher concluded that industrial workers are more attracted to rural work than to industrial work. According to the researcher, this is because the rural environment provides them with a degree of freedom and reinforces their sense of belonging, whereas work in the factory exposes them to authority and to adherence to time.

²⁴ Ibid., 32.

²⁵ Morad Moulai Hadj, "The Rural Origins of the Industrial Worker in Algeria," *Insaniyat*, no. 7 (1999): 39.

b. Findings of the Second Study, “Industrial Workers in Algeria: Practices and Representations: A Field Study in Three Industrial Enterprises in the Trara Region”

- This field study intersects with the first study through a theoretical approach that consecrates the principle of “individual modernity”. It reached a set of findings, the most important of which are as follows:
- “The successful enterprise, in the view of the respondents, is the enterprise that is able to preserve their jobs.”²⁶ In other words, industrial workers’ attachment to the enterprise is not a purely economic attachment; rather, it is an instrumental attachment that provides them with a guaranteed income and protects them from the evil of poverty.
- Their feelings of stability and job satisfaction are linked to the nature of the social situation through which the country is passing, in terms of unemployment and the absence of job opportunities. This existing situation strengthened the issue of preserving their enterprise.
- Workers’ view of the category of managerial staff is linked to the extent to which these staff members preserve the enterprise and push it forwards, which earn them a degree of satisfaction since the workers know in advance that they have high-level training.²⁷
- Industrial workers’ representations of the trade unionist are built upon narrow calculations consisting of obtaining certain advantages.
- Workers’ representations of women’s work appear in the form of their not objecting to women working; that is, there is a major transformation in workers’ culture.

6. The Study of Ahmed Henni

- In his book *Le cheikh et le patron: Usages de la modernité dans la reproduction de la tradition*, Ahmed Henni proceeds by studying the network of relations woven within the Algerian industrial enterprise, in an attempt, first, to understand how these relations are formed through their construction and the identification of their elements, and, second, to understand how they operate, in an attempt to determine their most important objectives.

This process proceeds from a hypothetical orientation centred on determining how the question of authority is embodied at the level of the industrial enterprise and how the network of labour relations is produced within this combination, *la combinaison*: authority plus the workers’ society. In light of this introduction, what are the sociological positions that Ahmed Henni wished to convey to the reader in his work?

The attempt to delve into Ahmed Henni’s ideas enables the reader to understand that the researcher sought to shed light on a fundamental issue centred on the connection between the traditional variable and the modern model of authority, embodied in *le patron*, the manager or

²⁶ Morad Moulai Hadj, “Industrial Workers in Algeria: Practices and Representations: A Field Study in Three Industrial Enterprises in the Trara Region,” *Insaniyat*, no. 34 (2006): 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

leader, within the Algerian industrial enterprise. This led him to a set of findings, the most important of which are those that we shall address in this element.

a. The Time of Capitalism Precedes the Time of Algerian Patterns of Social Relations

At the beginning of the book, the researcher focused on the question of the paradox between the culture of capitalism, which he considered to have sound European traditional roots, and that which was intended to establish itself in a social environment in the Algerian manner, *à l'algérienne*, through the conflict between the two cultural currents concerning the model of operation. The first calls for rational bureaucratic operation, while the second is traditional and calls for the nature of clientelist social relations with traditional solidaristic sources.²⁸

b. Le cheikh et le patron: What Relationship?

With respect to this element, the researcher focuses on a fundamental issue centred on highlighting the model of the representation of authority within the industrial enterprise by shedding light on a reality manifested in the model of the emergence of the system of sheikhdom in the management of the enterprise. The influence of the “sheikh” appears in place of the *le patron* within the network of social relations.²⁹ He continues his analysis by stating that there is a new social system within the bureaucratic organisation under different names, appearing in the form of the *cheikh moderne*, who is able to penetrate the bureaucratic system and economic relations and to weave fraternal and kinship-based relations founded on social status, in contrast to professional competence in bureaucratic construction. The success of this model is linked to the social position it occupies within this workers’ society.³⁰

c. Tradition Corrupts the Form of Industry in Underdeveloped Societies

The researcher emphasises that the industrial enterprise was brought into being through the need for it to meet economic needs in the first instance and then social needs to produce new patterns and behaviours. This occurs through the question of accumulation and through tradition’s impetus towards it, insofar as tradition is the principal source of its existence.

This model, which occurred in the European environment, differs from what occurred in the Algerian environment through the Algerian authority’s choice and wager of importing this European model to bring about a qualitative shift within the sociocultural structure in Algeria. However, this technical newcomer, the “factory”, did not find a foothold within the traditional cultural and social structure. The Algerian worker is unable to produce purely rational economic labour relations; rather, he reproduces social relations of an Algerian nature.³¹

²⁸ Ahmed Henni, *Le cheikh et le patron: Usages de la modernité dans la reproduction de la tradition* (Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1993), 10.

²⁹ Lakhdar Azzouz, “An Inferential Reading of the Entrepreneurial Thought Heritage through the Book *Le Cheikh et le Patron* by the Algerian Researcher Ahmed Henni,” *Jil Journal of In-Depth Legal Research*, no. 48 (2021): 97.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

³¹ Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria*, 121.

7. The Study of Mohamed Mebtoul

In his study, Mohamed Mebtoul addresses the question of social life and sociocultural practices. In his study of the industrialisation movement in Algeria, the researcher proceeds from a fundamental hypothesis according to which social life is the basic pillar and the nucleus through which activity inside the factory is established.³²

The researcher reached a set of findings, the most important of which appeared in the form of the following elements:

a. Sociocultural Logic Determines the Meaning of Work

With respect to this element, the researcher highlights the importance of the workers' social and life milieu through its influence on the work milieu inside the factory. This is based on a logic from which the researcher proceeds, namely, that it is not possible to subject a social and cultural composition merely by introducing its members into a place intended to change their behaviours and culture.

The total social structure is dominant and cannot be stopped at the gates of the factory. The factory will be part of the total structure, whether it wishes this or not. The researcher explained this as follows: "It is an illusion to ask workers to accept a type of social discipline inside the factory while all life outside work remains in profound rupture with this type of discipline."³³

b. Representations of the Meaning of Work among Industrial Workers

In this element, the researcher proceeds by exposing the actual situation through which practices and actions inside the factory are determined. This is done by providing a justification for pathological and morbid practices, which are due to the worker's rejection of a condition of subordination to a set of bureaucratic laws and regulations that, at the level of his representations, make him feel that his dignity and personality will be wounded. "The Algerian personality is built on determinants of dignity, solidarity, paternalism, and so forth."³⁴ These determinants are almost absent within rational bureaucratic organisation, which causes our local worker to activate the engines of resistance, *la résistance*, and to trigger the reflexive action of the worker's function. In this case, he replaces the status built on labor power with the search for a group or social network that provides him with status and protection.

c. The Social Actor before the Bureaucratic Machine

The researcher concluded that our local worker rejects hierarchical relations within bureaucratic organisations through the forceful intervention of the social man within the modernist system of production. In other words, there is an intervention of a traditional cultural and social player before the economic and productive game, whereby the social actor creates broad zones of manoeuvre and play, as Michel Crozier indicated through his definition of the industrial worker

³² Ibid., 108.

³³ Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria*, 108.

³⁴ Ibid., 109.

“who is able to create for himself zones of uncertainty and doubt in order to manoeuvre and possess a form of authority within the organisation”.³⁵

In conclusion, Mohamed Mebtoul states that the attempt to apply “Taylorism” at work or “material incentives” has lost its meaning in view of the social reality of the factory.³⁶

8. Study of Djillali Liabès

Djillali Liabès’s thesis appears in a context that may be described as one in which he sought, first, to distinguish himself in the model of his proposition and his conception of a model of developmental and industrial take-off and, second, in his critique of the reality of industrialisation produced by the political system. He does not criticise industrialisation policy from the perspective that it is a rational system that produced alien living conditions related neither to tradition nor to modernity; rather, he views it as an ideology unless the social conditions corresponding to it are available. In other words, it is an ideological product under the heading of rationality, seeking to impose new traditions upon a society that possesses authentic traditions that cannot easily be relinquished. The researcher thus sets out his theory of the concept of rationality as being of social and cultural origin, indicating that rationality consists of rationalities. That is, rationality is nothing other than reality; reality is the source of rationality. This means that the mental architecture of the concept of rationality, with its rationalist philosophical origin, leads, in his view, to ideological containment, which bears the character of transcendence and arrogance toward lived reality. For this reason, the researcher calls for the reformulation of the concept of rationality under particular local conditions.

This concept may be regarded as one whose content approaches the early signs of the emergence of a new theory at the level of rational architecture or the grounding of the concept of rationality in its original vessel, represented by the social, cultural, and historical dimension. This proposition brings us back to an approach close to that of Malek Bennabi, who also considers that the conditions of renaissance are, par excellence, of local particularity, through his equation “soil + human being + time = civilisation”.³⁷ The content of this equation intersects with the content of what Djillali Liabès proposed, even if the terms and propositions differ. However, there is an essential link in their two propositions, represented by “the local”, *le local*.³⁸

Djillali Liabès explains that the problematic of underdevelopment has its fundamental source in our failure or inability to understand our reality through a scientific and rational vision that helps

³⁵ Jean-René Tréanton, review of Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, *L’acteur et le système*; Gérard Adam and Jean-Daniel Reynaud, *Conflits du travail et changement social*; and Stewart Clegg and David Dunkerley, *Organisation, Class and Control*, *Revue française de sociologie* 23, no. 2 (1982): 312.

³⁶ Bashir, *Sociologists of Organisations and Work in Algeria*, 115.

³⁷ Malek Bennabi, *The Conditions of Renaissance: Problems of Civilisation*, trans. Abd al-Sabur Shahin (Syria: Dar al-Fikr for Printing, Distribution, and Publishing, 1968), 42.

³⁸ Djilali Liabès, “L’entreprise publique locale: Division du travail et articulation d’intérêts: Quelques observations sur la P.M.I. publique,” *Cahiers du CREAD*, no. 4 (4th quarter 1984): 54.

us to produce correct and appropriate solutions for ourselves.³⁹ Rationality, in his view, is the field of interpretation, whereas realism is what supplies rationality with the material required to provide balanced interpretations.

Thus, when we attempt to understand what the researcher has put forward, he is pointing to a revision of the concept of rationality by removing it from a single lamp, represented by Eurocentrism, and placing it under the questioning of the local through the question of how we rationalise our reality or how we understand and rationalise our local reality.⁴⁰ His critique of rationality was not from the angle of the theoretical foundations from which it proceeded; rather, he directs most of his criticism toward the attempt to bring it into an environment different from it, whether at the level of the idea or at the level of activation and practice.

Djillali Liabès sought to highlight the importance of reality and the variable of society in the process of designing any industrial or developmental project by warning against falling into the contexts of ideologies that operate under the cover of rationality through global economic systems. He gives considerable importance to the culture of society, which, in his view, means that every society produces its own intelligibility. He links reason to experience. His conception of industry, for example, is a conception that does not depart from the scope of the cultural context and the manner of investing in it to produce added value. In other words, he does not oppose the outputs of European rationality but rather opposes the manner of their application. For him, this manner is connected to the social and cultural particularity of the local society, which is capable of creating wealth through local driving forces.

Conclusion

The sociological reading of Algerian workers' representations of work reveals that the industrial enterprise in Algeria was not merely an economic space devoted to production; rather, it constituted a social and cultural field within which workers' groups reproduced their own symbolic and value-based patterns. The industrialisation project upon which the national state wagered after independence proceeded from a modernist conception that regarded the factory as an instrument capable of reshaping the Algerian human being according to the logic of rationality, discipline, and bureaucratic organisation. However, the field reality highlighted by Algerian sociological studies demonstrated the limits of this conception, owing to its collision with a social and cultural structure possessing deep historical extension.

Studies addressing Algerian industrial workers have shown that traditional culture did not recede within the industrial space; rather, it continued to direct professional behavior and determine the nature of relations within the enterprise. The Algerian worker did not view work as a neutral technical practice or as a purely economic activity but rather as a social practice linked to the values of dignity, belonging, protection, and symbolic recognition. Hence, the factory remained a

³⁹ Zaoui Fekrouni, "Rationality in the Thought of Djillali Liabès," *Social Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2017): 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

space within which the logic of modern organisation coexisted with the continuity of personal relations and networks of traditional solidarity.

Algerian sociological scholarship has also shown that the failure of the industrialisation experience was not merely a technical or economic failure but primarily a cultural failure because industrialisation was treated as a mechanical process of transferring technology and Western organisational models without taking into account the social and cultural specificities of Algerian society. This led to the emergence of a state of structural tension between the requirements of modern industrial rationality and the logic of the local society, which continued to govern individuals' representations and practices within the enterprise.

The findings of the study confirm that the Algerian worker reinterpreted industrial organisation according to his own cultural references, which rendered the economic enterprise incapable of producing the model of the rational industrial worker as envisaged by classical modernisation theses. The findings also revealed that informal relations and personal loyalties continue to play a decisive role within industrial organisations, in contrast to the weak effectiveness of formal bureaucratic rules. Therefore, understanding the reality of work and industrial organisations in Algeria requires moving beyond narrow economic and technical approaches and opening up to sociological and cultural analysis that links the enterprise to its broader social context. The success of any future reform or developmental project remains dependent on the extent of its capacity to assimilate the cultural specificities of Algerian society and to build an organisational model emerging from local reality, instead of reproducing ready-made models that are incompatible with the existing social structure.

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