

Cultural generations or a reproduced generation in Algeria? An epistemo-sociological reading of the thought of Nacer Djabi

Kamel Sallay¹, and Lahouari Bouzidi²

¹ University of Oran 2, Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria. Email: Sallay.kamel@univ-oran2.dz

² University of Oran 2, Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria. Email: bouzidi.lahouari@univ-oran2.dz

Abstract---Through his approach to “possible conflictuality” between generational moments in Algeria, the sociologist *Nacer Djabi* raises a set of epistemic issues that have unfolded amid new waves of social movements that have characterised the world since the dawn of the third millennium. At the forefront of these issues lies a fundamental question: *What challenges do the third generation continue to face in mobilising contemporary society?* However, the hermeneutic coercion that has persistently stifled the mechanisms of reflection on these matters has remained confined to the realm of logical absolutes, which have uncritically endorsed the coordinates of an “Algerian-style transition”. This has prompted us to investigate the genealogy of the knowledge system that has shaped this *episteme* in an identitarian manner. Accordingly, this article aims to develop a critical reading that reassesses, first, the conceptualisation of the “cultural generation” and, second, the narrative of “generational conflict”. This will be achieved by engaging with two principal questions raised by the researcher: Does Algeria's demographic stratification reflect cultural diversity indicative of historical blocs? Moreover, do the youth-centred tendencies of new university graduates constitute a cultural generation?

Keywords---cultural generation, new university graduates, generational conflict, reproduced generation, cultural mobilisation.

1. Introduction and Problematisation

The wager of change in Algeria has continually rested upon a traditionalist conditionality in which the operative mind is preoccupied with the following question: *Who leads this change [and/or toward this]? Moreover, who will govern under its new reality?* This has caused the act of mobilising society to forfeit its

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strategic mechanisms under the weight of oppositional collusion, produced by the paradox between, on the one hand, the "political will of the authorities" and, on the other hand, the "popular legitimacy of society." However, the task of engaging with the question of the "need for change" in a world where transformations are in crisis and altered by the instrument of crisis has proved inattentive to the essence of the anxious questions that confer legitimacy upon this reality within the limits of its condition and trajectory.

Notably, the need for change emerged in the Algerian context, having arisen in a centralised framework indifferent to the multitude of communal and local pluralities upon which the Algerian *anthropos*, generally speaking, are grounded in the history of the present time. The task of entering into such a preoccupation, probing more deeply into this emergence, must necessarily stem from the rationalities embedded within it: dialectical justifications grounded in archaeological reflection on the philosophy of everyday life. This leads to the following consideration: *Has the question of reflecting upon the very possibility of raising the question of the need for change been posed locally and interlocally?*

If we were to actualise this philosophy in applied terms, *how does the local mind approach the question of the need for change in a manner that is both different and jointly purposive?* In particular, the need to meet the requirements of what is purposive-strategic will draw us toward yet another inquiry: *does the local society, through its diverse individuals and complex groups, possess the cultural apparatus that enables it to live with the "aspirationality of change" and coexist with it?*

In truth, amid the endeavour to engage with the practice of "questioning society" sociologically, there is no escape from the need to bridge these dialectics with the structural impediments experienced by the "generational moment" in Algeria, on the one hand, and with the magnitude of "social imaginaries" and "cultural narratives" that herald the "return of active subjects" in the age of new social movements, on the other hand. Hence, the approach of cultural empowerment for youth, guided by emerging social dynamics, becomes a fundamental pivot for understanding whether the "youth demographic bloc" constitutes a "historical bloc" receptive to and inclined toward change. This is particularly pertinent given that seeking change through a youth culture constitutes here and now a challenge and a wager shaped by the conceptual personality that transfers the "idea of meaning" inherent in the "youth elite" from abstraction to embodiment; in other words, the mobilisation of society with a transformative inclination following youth rationality may well be coupled with the *noology* embedded within the Algerian spatiotemporal condition. Thus, *are Algerian youth conceptualised within the university milieu as a cultural generation? Moreover, do they bear the seeds of emergent elite thought?*

Such reflections lead us to the central thesis upon which the thought of the sociologist *Nacer Djabi* is founded, articulated through the triad of "the third generation" (that is, the youth generation), "social movements" (meaning direct actions), and "transition scenarios" (or the possibilities of change). The *philosophical-intellectual* anchoring that shaped this critical configuration drove him to the conclusion of a "generational conflict in Algeria," first, and to the axiom of an "Algerian-style transition," second. Accordingly, it remains incumbent upon us to examine the epistemic undertakings pursued by the researcher to understand the ontology of the generation devoid of the conditionalities of the "culture of domination" (in his view), on the one hand, and to probe the fundamental components of the reality whose potential for conflictual transformation was contemplated, on the other hand.

The Djabian proposition has asserted exclusively that the social history of present-day Algeria is marked by three culturally distinct generations, which, in turn, inhabit the crucible of "centralised homogenisation," signalling a pragmatically driven exclusion of "othered selves." Thus, our cultural simulation and our philo-scientific adjudication of such principles and logical absolutes require a return, first, to clarify the "regularities of ideology" on which the knowing selves within a single generation are constituted and, second, to examine the "trajectories of utopia" as conceived through knowledge by the active selves within that same generation. What emerges from Nacer Djabi's perspective derives

specifically from the epistemic system through which he interprets the scientific theme in the context of its reality, as well as from the conceptual foundations by which he theorises what he experienced through knowledge of that very reality as a cultural bearer. Accordingly, we may ask Djabi, *“By means of which epistemic rhizomes was the generational question in Algeria anchored, particularly within a model traversing cultures and local communities?”*

2. The Epistemic Grounding of the Generational Question in Nacer Djabi: In search of Mannheimian Tendency?

We must begin with the historical and social trajectories that have shaped the pressing questions raised by Nacer Djabi within the field of political sociology, as he interrogated the praxis of change through social movements across various temporal chronologies witnessed by Algerian society since independence. These may be summarised as follows: the summer of 1962; the Amazigh movement of 1980; the October 1988 events; the Islamist movements of 1991; the cultural movements of 2001; the January 2011 events; the unemployed movements of the South in 2012; the Ghardaïa events of 2014; the popular Hirak of 2019; and others. These questions collectively contained the following concerns: To what extent has the historical conflict of the past exerted an influential presence on the magnitude of current generational struggles? Is society's movement toward changing the outcome of a cumulative, generational, conflicting process? How did the generational moment first emerge in Algeria at its very inception? What mechanisms do elite organisations employ within the contemporary cultural history of Algeria? Moreover, what are the methods that contribute to mobilising society for change in Algeria, in both its present and its future?

What such an opening of questioning directs us toward is an examination of the composite equation adopted by the Djabian proposition regarding the question of the need for change in Algeria, the thrust of which is as follows: first, that “change is change through generational social movements”; second, that “change in the Algerian manner is grounded in a conflict of generations”; third, that “social movements are associated exclusively with the third generation”; and, last, that the striking element in this triad of problematics lies in our conceptualisation of the intentionality of “the Algerian generation” (or “the generation in Algeria”), which he seeks to interpret *philosophically intellectually*. This is especially significant given that the concept of generation Djabi states is among those categories that do not enjoy a high degree of consensus regarding their sociological explanatory value. Nevertheless, it has substantial explanatory power in the Algerian case, even though it may be weaker in other societies that have undergone historical developments different from those of Algerian society.¹

Thus, what does it mean for there to be a generation in Algeria beyond its interpretive dissemination and epistemic substance? The necessity of relying on the particularity of the sociology of the history of societies, in order to associate the generation with the cultural garment that distinguishes its human ontology and existential being so that we may rightfully render it, in identitarian terms, an “Algerian generation” requires recourse, above all, to the history of ideas, and thereafter to elucidate the theme through which the dyad of “ideology” and “utopia” has become intertwined in forming a structure of intersubjective collective consciousness that thinks *within and through* its generational moment. It is as although, under such a perspective, we stand before a rationality cognisant of its own knowing self, on the one hand, and aware of the range of epistemic and cultural divergences and differences distinguishing it from other knowing selves, those marked by the notion of the “proximate other” on the other hand.

The remark advanced by Djabi, namely, that “the signification of generation possesses considerable explanatory power in the Algerian case”, leads us to conceive of the generation as exceeding, in this context, the confines of its demographic description, insofar as it is a population density, and as never

¹ Nacer Djabi, *Citizenship... Without Permission* (Algiers: Manshūrāt al-Shihāb, n.d., 2006), 128.

merely reflecting its biological datum, insofar as it is an age cohort. Consequently, *does the generation, for Djabi, constitute a historical bloc?*

We may answer this question by saying both “yes” and “no” simultaneously despite the paradox this response entails. Djabi, who affirms through a central holistic lens that he is not speaking here of the biological concept of generation, which may differ from the historical generation that shares the same historical reading and the same mode of engagement with events owing to its experience of the same historical occurrences that distinguish it as a generation subjected to the same socialisation, as formulated by Karl Mannheim,² is the very same Djabi who signals through a localised, atomistic lens that the younger generation (or the youth generation/the third generation) does not necessarily possess the same characteristics as the first generation, nor does its political and social experience. It is a more localised generation, having pursued all its education across its various stages within its own village, a village that had expanded extensively after independence. Even the university to which one would relocate has, in turn, relocated to it; thus, it is no longer able to sustain interaction with individuals from other regions.³

If we are to subsume the meaning of the “youth segment” within the concept of “generation,” it is because its justification rests upon a single reason, which Djabi attributes to the variable of “social movements.” In keeping with the Mannheimian episteme, he considers these movements to be the event that generates “the unity of the generation,” and a fundamental indicator in clarifying the extent of the differences spread between the structure of the “emergent” generation and that of the “existing” generation formed by generative events in a previous period. However, Djabi, following this Mannheimian mode of theorisation, does not clarify, while operationalising his conceptual system, the condition of the actors involved in the generative event prior to their formation as a generational entity. Or, rather, it is appropriate to question him: *Are those who enact the generative event and those who are produced by that generative event the same activist subject?*

Given that attempting to discern the dyad of “generational unity” and the “generational moment” compels us to expose the epistemic obstacle within Djabi’s intellectual approach, we find ourselves situated in an ontological context that reveals the validity of the tension between his concept of “unity” as a structural composition and spatial entity on the one hand and his concept of the “moment” as a historical existence and temporal entity on the other.

We prefer to adhere to what indicates that the basis upon which the process of social change rests, according to Karl Mannheim, derives from thought, belief, and logic, which stand in complete contradiction to the material basis.⁴ Hence, what we discern in the formation of the “embryonic generation” here corresponds to the nature of the historical self, constituted by natural individualities that are conscious of their shared cultural heritage in the past, present, and future. The birth that characterises such a self inscribed within collective imaginaries to express the “definition and identity of the generation” must necessarily be subjected to the question of presence: the presence it embodies within its lived reality, first, and within its paradigmatic narrative discourse, finally.

Accordingly, a generation may exist in nature as a physical possibility or a social statistical category. However, its existence *in culture* depends on the context in which it emerged, the ideological and utopian intellectual system that characterises it, and the effect it enacts in both mind and practice.

Moreover, when *Nacer Djabi*, in the manner of *Karl Mannheim*, asks: *What establishes the unity of a generation? Moreover, from where does the strong density of relations appearing among the members of the same generation arise?*

² ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Djabi, “Myth, Generation, and Social Movements in Algeria: Or the ‘Failed’ Father and the ‘Leapfrogging’ Son,” *Insaniyat*, Centre for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Oran), nos. 25–26 (July–December 2004), 44.

³ Djabi, *Citizenship... Without Permission*, cited above, 126–27.

⁴ Iḥsān Muḥammad al-Ḥassan, *Advanced Social Theories: An Analytical Study in Contemporary Social Theories*, 3rd ed. (Amman, Jordan: Dār Wā’il li-l-Nashr, 2015), 134.

Mannheim negates the dense influence of the material presence of new actors and replies: "The first thing that emerges when we imagine the unity of a given generation is the profound affinity among the components that fill the consciousness of each individual. From a sociological point of view, these components are important not because of their meanings and significations, but because they transform isolated individuals into a group, for they possess the force of socialisation."⁵ The most salient aspect accompanying this understanding is that such a necessity directs us to inquire together with Djabi and against him into the nature of the intellectual reservoir carried by the cultural bearer, who acts within such movements, so that we may ascribe to it the designation of *generation*.

Knowing the operational tendency that shapes *how* this generation forms, through presenting its diagnostic markings, is knowledge added to the rational interpretation of the *knowledge of knowledge* through which Djabi came to apprehend the Mannheimian epistemic system. For, as Edgar Morin states, once open epistemology concerns itself with the results and problems of the sciences related to knowledge, it becomes exposed to the effects of these results and problems; consequently, it is subject to the retroactive influence of the very components that govern it and thus becomes governed in turn.⁶ From this point precisely, were we concede that the generation, as a natural self, is inclined to struggle for survival, we would nonetheless refute this inclination once it confers upon its biological existence a cultural sensibility through which it seeks a social position, which, in one sense, is a search for the power that reflects the strength of its presence. Thus, the generation refers decisively to a form of self-preoccupation (and by *self* we mean the *we-tendency*) with recognition, insofar as the pursuit of recognition is bound to the characteristic of differentiation that marks the cultural intersubjectivity of its members, to attribute a descriptive or classificatory dimension to the "generational being." Accordingly, in light of this epistemological proposition, our concern in contesting Djabi's argument is not whether this generation is accepted or rejected within society but rather the cultural and intellectual burden that renders the designation generation a reality of presence.

If we are to concur with *Karl Mannheim* that there can be no change without conflict and no conflict without an intellectual and principled confrontation among opposing groups, factions, and forces,⁷ then this suggests that conflict, at its foundation, is a negation of the very existence of recognition.

3. Is there a generational conflict in Algeria? A Search through the Djabian Sociology

It is fitting to return to the genealogy of the paradigmatic rationality underpinning Djabi's proposition to grasp the anticipatory points that led him to attribute what he refers to as "generational conflict" manifested in the widening gap between traditional and modern social categories to the duality of, on the one hand, the "sectoral logic of the state" and, on the other hand, the "penetration of populist culture," resulting from ideological and linguistic "elite fragmentation."⁸ This attention he directs to the matter has been linked to the cumulative context that has characterised and continues to characterise the political historicisation experienced by independent Algeria.

Alongside *Ali El-Kenz*, this led him to assert that the Algerian condition, once marked by exemplary transparency, rapidly transformed into an opaque and incomprehensible state, whose "black box" must one day be opened to decipher and interpret its codes, as "the observed inadequacy of explanations (as they propose) lies largely in our failure to consider the variable of 'time' in our study of social reality."⁹ However, by means of this information, we may initially infer that the exacerbated conflict observable

⁵ Nacer Djabi, *Why Did the Algerian Spring Delay?* (Algiers: Manshūrāt al-Shihāb, n.d., 2012), 13.

⁶ Edgar Morin, *Method: The Knowledge of Knowledge/Ideas*, trans. Yūsuf Tabis (Casablanca: Dār Afriqiyā al-Sharq, n.d., 2013), 35.

⁷ Al-Ḥassan, *Advanced Social Theories*, cited above, 135.

⁸ Nacer Djabi et al., *Social Elites—The Case of Algeria and Egypt*, ed. Aḥmad Zāyid (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabiyya wa-l-Ifrīqiyya, n.d., 2004), 137.

⁹ Sulaymān al-Rayāshī et al., *The Algerian Crisis: Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Backgrounds* (Article: Nacer Djabi and Ali El-Kenz, "Algeria in Search of a New Social Bloc"), 2nd ed. (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'Arabiyya, 1999), 256.

in the lived present is the cumulative product of disputes embedded within the collective memory and the political history of contemporary Algerian society.

However, any researcher is entitled to question and interrogate such a proposition by asking the following questions: *Is every social conflict a historical conflict?* Moreover, why does Djabi concede that conflict “in the Algerian manner” is, at its core, a generational conflict, particularly given that the peak of the social movements he refers to, arising from such variables and representational and actional indicators, led him to confine the rationality of individual and collective mobilisation both in its spontaneous and organised forms to certain major features that characterise protest movements? These are framed within an overarching causal determinism grounded in a projective analogy between *the Algeria of yesterday* and *the Algeria of today* (which necessitates epistemic doubt regarding the latent question within Algerian society, namely, *does Algeria truly move?*),* the thrust of which is as follows: first, that youth constitute the principal axis in activating these movements; second, that they represent a quasiraw form of social movement marked by weak organisation, fragility in their critical dimension, and rapid emergence and dissolution; and third, that they are concentrated in major cities and their popular neighbourhoods.

If we engage together with the Djabian proposition with protest movements, following his temporal periodisation (at least since the 1980s), as a model of social conflict between generations, because they are less tied to labour and economic demands and are therefore religious–moral in their expressive forms and thus *rebellious movements rather than negotiated movements*,¹⁰ then we must subject them, epistemologically, to the following inquiry.

First, what does it mean to adopt, with Djabi, the view that youth-driven demand movements are strategic indicators of generational conflict? We observe in his analyses that the indicators of youth inclination toward social action remain unable to transcend fixed elements such as unemployment, school dropout, living conditions, social monotony, and violence. We scarcely discern within them anything that reveals the contours of an intellectual rupture, or, more precisely, anything that signals the emergence of a nascent cultural wave. This is especially pertinent given that generational conflict, as Mannheim holds, particularly the conflict between the youth generation and the middle generation and between the latter and elderly individuals, stems from differences and divergences in ideas, interests, values, inclinations, and orientations among these generations.¹¹

The problem that has come to be observed is precisely what led Djabi to state that social movements in Algeria underwent structural transformations within the span of a single decade, from the eighties to the nineties, when they shifted from their livelihood-based demands to their ideological and identity-based characterisation. During this shift, the dominance of symbolic cultural framing over other framings became evident, resulting in a sharp divergence over cultural matters, near consensus on social issues, and profound silence on economic issues.¹² This very feature, he argues, was among the factors that drove Algerian society into the tunnel of what came to be known as the “civil war,” which prevented the various parties from negotiating or moving toward consensual solutions.¹³

However, through such a conclusion, he affirms that social conflict can arise only in a purely economic and class-based form. This compels us to ask through him about the background of the tendency toward *culturalist* framing in the nineties, especially given that the prevailing discursive narrative from that time to the present insists that the golden period during which the elite intellect was radiant,

*See Nacer Djabi, *Algeria Is Moving* (Algiers: Dār al-Hikma, 1994).

¹⁰ al-Rayāshī et al., *The Algerian Crisis*, cited above, 258.

¹¹ al-Ḥassan, *Advanced Social Theories*, cited above, 137.

¹² Nacer Djabi et al., *Society and the State in the Arab World under the New Capitalist Policies* (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth al-‘Arabiyya wa-l-Ifriqiyya, n.d., 1997), 46.

¹³ Nacer Djabi, “Algeria: Independent Trade Unions and the Faltering Democratic Transition,” Arab Reform Initiative, 2021, 22.

enlightened by knowledge, philosophical argumentation, and ideological debates of difference, corresponds to the eighties and the years immediately following until the turning point known as the Black Decade.

None of this, of course, enables the perceptive researcher to apprehend, through inferential reasoning, the nature of "generational conflict" when the history of mentalities is excluded or effaced, first, and when intellectual and cultural confrontations are subjected to nihilism, second. What, then, is the value of discerning the generational character of conflict among the active subjects of social movements without anchoring such discernment in the cognitive burden, whether utopian or ideological, that distinguishes them?

If we were to attach the "alienation of conflict" to the "intellectual descriptor" according to Djabi's thought, there would be no objection to formulating an epistemic paradox as follows: ideology, in its partial sense, refers to material egoism in political life and to the conflict of opinions and biases. It is a meaning-laden term with a psychological charge, ranging from deliberate deception to error stemming from class rupture. The matter is entirely different, however, with respect to the *total* concept.

When we ascribe to a historical period one mental world and to ourselves another, or when a specific social group thinks through categories different from our own, we do not refer to partial cases to explain the content of ideas within that group; instead, we refer to systems of thought that diverge at their very foundations and to modes of experience that differ most fundamentally.¹⁴

Our subsequent adjudication is as follows: by virtue of what surveyable sphere was *Nacer Djabi* able to justify that every factional protest within a local domain constitutes a generational conflict? We would then find ourselves compelled to draw value-based distinctions *within the same generation*. Here, we refer specifically to the youth generation along oppositional lines such as {*unemployed/employed, rural/urban, residents of popular quarters/residents of upgraded districts, religious/secular, etc.*}. This would, in turn, lead the researcher, including ourselves, to investigate the historical bloc that renders the designation "youth fragmented in presence" a generational unity and moment (or an existential entity).

We may then understand that the differential indicators characterising the living conditions of youth across major geographical spaces (the metropolitan society being a model) direct us to highlight the extent of intellectual fragmentation affecting the youth group or segment in general, since the analytical conditions necessitate a local traversal for the sake of conceptualisation and modelling. Accordingly, the central generalisation implied in the label "generational conflict" becomes encumbered by a reductionist view of the very notion of generation (as previously indicated), thereby *fragmenting the already fragmented*, preventing youth from appearing in a culturally composite form.

Thus, does a generational conflict truly exist in Algeria today? Moreover, was there, in fact, ever a youth generation and hence a youth/elder conflict in accordance with Djabi's scenarios of conflict? A quick answer to this question is insufficient unless it is accompanied by successive interrogation of the nature of the emergence of social movements, at times in different spatiotemporal forms, and at other times driven by a single teleological motivation. This becomes apparent when, together with Djabi, we pose the problem that goes back to the 1990s and was brought forth by the events of October 1988, in the following terms: Does this protest upsurge represent a cultural extension of the transformative event activated by the generational moment in the summer of 1962, thirty years later?

In this context, a side question that Djabi adds to his implicit interrogatives arises: how was the symbolic memory of the heroic image specific to today's protest youth formed? He derives his responses to the issue in its then presentness on the basis that the current youth generation does not undertake an ethical critique of the preceding generation (which refutes what he indicated above). This,

¹⁴ Muḥammad Sabila, *Ideology: Toward an Integrative Perspective*, 1st ed. (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, September 1992), 44.

in turn, strengthened the idea of defending the spoils among the first generation and struggling for them among the third generation, not to mention that the intensification of the struggle for power and influence produced the early emergence of values of nonrecognition of the legitimacy of the rapid coups carried out by the new proprietors, as an embodiment of the act of youth generational domination (as a specific segment distinct from others) and a mythologisation of its historical presence in its lived reality.

From here, it becomes clear that we must pause before *Nacer Djabi's* "material conflict paradigm," wherein he affirms that the separatist relationship that has come to govern and continues to govern the generations in Algeria stems from a question that surfaced publicly after having long remained unspoken, namely, "*Why have we not yet benefited from the revolutionary condition?*" in the voice of the third generation, of course. This is even though the characteristic features now witnessed and experienced by the youth generation, the "third generation" in his terms, carry indicators such as belonging to the urban middle class; possessing higher and modern education; having an urban upbringing; technological proficiency; strong use of foreign languages; and embodying a contemporary pluralistic culture, among others. All these values, he argues, are sufficient to draw variables such as "power, governance, acquisition, and position" into this generation's concrete equation.¹⁵

However, these indicators, which produce a discourse of legitimacy among the third generation, "soon acquired," Djabi observes, "the attire of the new populist discourse, steeped in a religio-political background (in its first presence within ideological arenas of power)." ¹⁶This constituted a new coup-like act against the first youth generation, which had acquired legitimacy through deception, force, and nonconsensus. Such a confrontational stance emerged initially from an attempt to erase the revolutionary legitimacy of the preceding generation and to eliminate the notion of social differentiation on the grounds of a shared historical destiny linked to 1962.

Djabi cites here the generational language prevalent at the time, expressed in phrases such as "*We are all born of nine months*" and "*We all have a right to this country.*"¹⁷

The culmination of this proposition regarding such a mode of positioning leads us to inquire into the *youth elite* that carries this discursive language, on the one hand, just as it led the researcher, on the other hand, to affirm that the divisive practice adopted by the national state aborted the project of social and cultural consensus within both the elite community and the institutional system. Historically, society, according to him, has often borne values of doubt, suspicion, and traditional hostility toward its educated and intellectual members.¹⁸

The significance of this precedent points to an understanding of the pattern and manner through which political transition is determined, "the Algerian way." In his book *Why Did the Algerian Spring Delay?*, the researcher notes the existence of generational conflict, expressed through "three generations and two scenarios," emphasising that the process of political transition will not be political alone but also demographic. This, he argues, attests to a qualitative shift in the attributes of *youth* from the 1990s to the third millennium.

What, then, is this shift? Moreover, on what basis was it established that its bearer constitutes a generation?

In response to this inquiry, the researcher *Nacer Djabi* attributes several characteristics to what he calls the "third generation", including "the generation of direct action, the generation of protest movements,

¹⁵ See Nacer Djabi, *Algeria: The State and the Elites—Studies on Elites, Political Parties, and Social Movements* (Algiers: Manshūrāt al-Shihāb, 2008).

¹⁶ 'Abd al-Nāṣir Djabi, *The Predicament of Democratic Transition in Algeria: Three Generations and Two Scenarios* (Doha: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, February 2012), 14.

¹⁷ Djabi, "Myth, Generation, and Social Movements in Algeria," cited above, 50.

¹⁸ Djabi, *Citizenship... Without Permission*, cited above, 119.

the rebellious generation,” and so forth. He also holds that its political birth coincided with the period of the state’s declining projects and the deepening institutional fragility of its foundational structures, beginning in the 1980s, especially with the deterioration of institutions of social change such as schools and industrial enterprises.

Thus, the youth generation came to stand at the forefront of the victims of the setback to the national project’s trajectory, bearing in mind that it is an urban generation burdened by the structural crises upon which the postindependence transformations of the city were built. This, in turn, drove it to initiate protest as a principal mode of expressing itself and its demands, rejecting any integration into the existing official institutions and even those later established by the opposition, such as the party, the association, and the trade union.¹⁹

From what may be outlined prospectively *in Djabi’s terms* is that Algeria may witness a smooth transition, meaning a transfer of political power from the generation of the Revolution, which led the War of Liberation and achieved national independence, that is, the generation born between the second and third decades of the last century, which he referred to in this study as “the first generation.” He wires on a political transition in favour of “the second generation,” born in the final years of the Liberation War and the early years of independence, a generation he regards as better educated and more urbanised than the first. This calm transition of authority from the first to the second generation could be facilitated by the communicative relationship and positive outlook that link the two, which would steer the country in the right direction towards greater openness to contemporary age and greater societal acceptance.

On another level, however, and in contrast to this scenario, which he views positively, the researcher points to a second scenario, one that would be more turbulent and ruptural in terms of the generational moment. This concerns the scenario of transferring power from the first to the third generation, the latter being younger and different in socialisation and political characteristics, given that it is the “generation of direct action,” born, raised, and brought up in the postindependence period. It may well be regarded as the generation that led the protest movements, which enabled it to foreground values of the “self,” values sufficient to propel it back into the public sphere not merely as a collective bloc but also as having individualistic backgrounds and an individually marked mode of expression, following the deepening sense of the difficulty of collective change in Algeria.

Accordingly, through its protest and distinctive dynamism, it expressed its rejection of its conditions, whether to elevate its own being or to castigate it, not to mention its opposition to the ruling groups, their political authority, their institutions, and their political discourse as well.

In general, one final point remains to be clarified regarding the relational dimension among the three generations, as claimed by Djabi himself, so that we may, together with him, infer the exceptional premise that he assigns to the Algerian mode of democratic transition. We may thus state that the generational connection, especially the connection of the third generation with the first and second generations, takes the following form:

First, the bond between the second and third generations is the most objective and proximate; even though it is characterised by tension and conflictiveness in some of its manifestations, it is not a relationship of rejection or psychological distance because the two generations share the same strained social and economic fate. Their conflict concerned the same spatial domain, represented by economic interests, in which the third generation accuses its predecessor of being a “selfish generation.” However, this conflict did not extend to political or intellectual dimensions.

¹⁹ Djabi, *Why Did the Algerian Spring Delay?*, cited above, 23–24.

Second, the relationship between the youth generation and the first generation was marked by coldness and an eliminatory rupture. For just as the third generation rejected communication and identification with the first intellectually and practically, the generation of the Revolution and the building of the national state likewise looked upon the youth with contempt, continuing to label them as “the ungrateful generation,” “the disruptive generation,” and so forth.²⁰

From this starting point, we ask: through what *philological–intellectual* proximity may we examine the thesis of the researcher *Nacer Djabi* on the plane of our epistemic inquiry, which seeks to identify the being of the youth elite generation within Algerian local society today?

4. The New Young People at the Crucible of Cultural Generation: In search of an Identity-Formation Crisis

It is reasonable, from the very outset, to refute a fundamental issue that challenges the Djabian proposition concerning what he terms the “scenarios of the dual conflict of the generational triad in the Algerian manner.” What various communal segments in Algeria have lived and continue to experience across different spatiotemporal contexts after independence has never been expressed in the form of *cultural generations* firmly grounded in their epistemic rhizomes and intellectual inclinations. Instead, they have continued, in a performative and spectacle-based manner, to replicate the waves of ideological fluctuation that marked the tides of Western modernity and global political transformations.

Thus, the cultural mind, within its factional sphere, persisted in consuming culturalist narratives and imitating sociological practices produced by the dynamism of metropolitan societies. This ultimately confined the notion of the local human being both as exemplar and as a mode to a binary mirroring that conjoined the “act of modernisation” with the “act of renovation.”

Consequently, an ontological distortion was produced around the intentionality of youth in all its gestures with respect to the process of interpreting its own self. It withdrew into the proposition of “thinking of the Other within the Self,” rather than engaging in “thinking of the Self within the Other,” a shift that hastened the erasure of the *we-oriented* instrument that would have granted it recognition as a “historical bloc.”

In this sense, it has become clear to us *epistemo-methodologically* that Djabi’s reading of youth cultural action at the head of every decade has not departed from its descriptive prism, bound to *eventiality*, which led his analytical hesitations concerning the *liminality* of practical reasoning, *that is, the preoccupation with the question of “why” actors think and act in this manner or that* remain dispersed within the texts of “the unspoken, the unthought, and the culturally concealed.” This, in turn, led to the practice of *sociologization*, which overlooks the anthropo-epistemic dimensions of the Algerian communal temperament, dimensions that, in turn, render the socially active self definable through its own *philological–intellectual* criticalities.

The capacity to excavate the causality of social movement indeed requires, in this very context, comprehensive engagement with the *field of cognitions*,^{*21} which investigates the temperamental phenomenon within the limits of its sociocultural system and its historical situatedness.

Our intent here is that behind every causal procedure lies a cultural narrative that has emerged ethnographically within the individual and collective imaginary of the *barakists* and/or *hirakists*. Thus, if the critical investigation of the evental practices of the social movement at the local level is neglected, the consequence will be to cast the scientific assessment of the social simulation of active selves into the

²⁰ Djabi, *Why Did the Algerian Spring Delay?*, cited above, 27–28.

²¹ *Arthur Lovejoy (1873–1962), the leading theorist of the history of ideas in the first half of the twentieth century, writes: “Ideas are among the most migratory things in the world... their first appearance upon the scene in one of the conventionally distinguished fields of history—often philosophy—regularly passes into half a dozen other fields.” In truth, I consider the field of cognition to be the domain in which this maxim is most fully realised. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥsib, *Cognitions: Epistemological Dimensions and Applied Directions* (Amman: Dār Kunūz al-Ma’rifa, 1st ed., 2017), 9–10.

snarers of the prevalent discursive commonplace. From this arises the need to establish an epistemic distance that necessitates understanding each identity formation of the communal movement separately; thereafter, to undertake the scrutiny of the interrelational ties that transform the signifying features of the movement as an event generating a temperament of mobilisation into a generational matter. Absent this examination, we scarcely find any theoretical specification upon which the scholar *Nacer Djabi* relies in justifying the essence of "youth." Here, it becomes legitimate to ask: *Does this epistemic avoidance permit us to consider the researcher as having a Bourdieusian inclination, following the sociological theorist Pierre Bourdieu, who maintains that "youth is nothing but a word" (La jeunesse n'est qu'un mot)?*

We summarise here what we will elaborate later and say: what Djabi calls the "generational triad" is, in our view, nothing other than a "reproduced generation" across its cultural iterations and the archaeology of its epistemic system. This is especially the case given that the cultural temporality within which the Algerian *anthropos* live has obscured two fundamental meanings of social imagination and action. The first is *self-recognition of its generational identity*, as the cognitive condition of the knowing self arises from the depth of its presence within the cultural present that it constitutes. Here, we understand that the coordinates for making visible the existential presence of youth historically depend on intellectual awareness of the two properties of *subjectivation* and *intersubjectivation*, rationalised by shared inclination at one moment and activated by a shared destiny at another.

This is particularly important because the conditions under which a given social bloc is affiliated with its cultural history are what confers upon it the dimension of the "generational moment," extended across the *spatiality of its incursion into the public realm*, on the one hand, and its symbolic influence upon the cultural narrative as a *manipulated memory* (la mémoire manipulée)²² and as a state of "composite homogeneity," on the other hand.

To this end, we may add the second signification revealed regarding youth, namely, the absence of *recognition* of its generational identity by others. This is because the processes of *socialisation* and *mobilisation* have remained dominated by the "culture of the system" rather than by the "culture of lived life." Consequently, the cultural circulation of selves belonging to natural time has continued to reproduce its modes of presence within structural problems and, ultimately, to reproduce the normativity of its personalised populist referential framework.

In this context, it is sufficient to recall, with *Paul Borel*, that "the most effective method for a society seeking to make its members behave in the desired direction is not to inculcate in them scientific knowledge, but ideological knowledge."²³ Moreover, the process of acquiring the attire of "myth" emerged from the *mythologisation of the present moment of youth unity*, which oscillated between two heightened poles: the first seeking *recollection*, the second *experiential living*.

The reason we adopt this view lies in the function of "other-culture" within every knowing/acting self, which generates its aversion to the Other according to the following principle: {*self-singularity* = *other-possessiveness*}. The background of this exclusionary tendency toward difference clearly does not indicate the necessary existence of *two* conflicting generations; instead, it suggests the repetition of "youthful aspiration" in the first party within the "youthful destiny" of the second. Thus, the mechanism of contestation between the two structures rests on affirming the notion of youth as a "mass of needs." From that point onwards, the task of embracing the totality of the "generational moment" has placed the acquisitive mind concealed within this needfulness in a state of heightened immediacy, shaping its formation through a dual polemical dialogue. In this duality, the "recollected youth rationality" seeks to

²² Abd Allāh Abdallāwī et al., *Paul Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of the Human Condition* (Oran: Laboratory "Philosophy and the History of Present Time," University of Oran 2, 2016), 23.

²³ Idris Boulkaïbat, *The Middle Social Class: Rise and Collapse—A Sociological Study of the Structure of Algerian Society*, 1st ed. (Algiers: Dār Alfa li-l-Wathā'iq, 2018), 225.

instill a "culture of waiting" in the Other, whereas the "lived youth rationality" confronts the complex of the "culture of departure" to surpass the Other.

At this juncture, if we are to speak of a social conflict in Algeria, it is a *symbolic* conflict for the sake of "living through the youth generation," rather than a conflict between culturally distinct generations differentiated biologically or demographically. Here, the core of the conflict concerns *two youth exemplars* belonging to *two different temporalities*: the first embodies a *youth rationality grounded in memory*, which Djabi terms the postindependence "first generation"; the second represents a *youth rationality grounded in reality*, which he calls the "third generation."

This, indeed, refutes the thesis of *Olivier Galland*, who views youth merely as "a passage from one age to another, or a moment in the life cycle."²⁴ In contrast, and in our estimation, the opposite is true: we regard the "youth moment as an elite cultural time," through which the "glory of being" is formed in its existential presence, across all of its biological, demographic, political, economic, and social readings. Accordingly, we also describe the youthful present of the locally active self as the essential history of its cultural identity.

In a specific sense, it becomes necessary to associate "new young people" with the notion of *presentness* before invoking the "we-condition" that concerns them. The actual reality of time, in Bachelard's view, is the *moment*; duration is merely a construction without any absolute reality, imposed from the outside by memory.²⁵ In this regard, there is no hesitation together with Karl Mannheim in affirming that the tragedy of social and human thought lies in the following: it is either determined by a social reality that "no longer exists," wherein we deal with ideological thought, or by a social reality that "does not yet exist," wherein we deal with utopian thought; that is, *the distortion and emptying of social reality occurs in all cases*.²⁶

In effect, we may say that "modern youthfulness" constitutes the developed or regressed version of consciousness of "primary youthfulness," wherein it is bridged and embodied through the accumulative heritage of culture and through the renewedualisation of its anxious questions.

If we were to formulate the matter differently, we would say that the historical bloc upon which "modern youthfulness" is founded indicates its preoccupation with the instrument of *momentary independence* from, first, "ideological falsity" and, second, "utopian ambiguity." These two antagonistic constraints within *presentness* must indeed be criticised, yet without severing from them altogether. From ideology, one must take its *epistemic capital*; from utopia, it must take its *strategic method*.

Accordingly, it is appropriate to engage with the notion of "the new young people" as a *cultural aspiration* among the youth segment (considered a biological entity) because the *praxeological wager* is precisely what the identity formation of the "momentariness of the youth generation" in Algeria strives toward. Thus, "new young people" are, in essence, *pure consciousness* seeking procedural modalities that enable them to *embody themselves* by initiating the moment of transition from a *demographic* to a *historical being*.

5. Conclusion

We do not claim that our examination of the question of *cultural generations or a reproduced generation in Algeria*. Has fulfilled its epistemological measure in either answering or arguing when we placed the sociology of the researcher *Nacer Djabi* upon the dissecting table of critique. However, through our epistemic engagement with what he has produced scientifically, we were able to grasp the merits of the paradox that binds together concepts marked by verbal ambiguity *in the Aristotelian terminological sense*

²⁴ Abdelali Dabbala, *Introduction to Sociological Analysis*, 1st ed. (Algiers: Dār al-Khuldūniyya, 2011), 83.

²⁵ Muḥammad Khadraoui and Mahdi Ben Betqa, "The Concept of Time between Duration and the Moment: A Dialectical Study," *Ḥawliyat Jaḡa'ir* 1 34, no. 4 (2020), 858.

²⁶ Abd al-Ḥamid al-Ṣāliḥ, *Principles of Philosophy*, 7th ed. (Damascus: University of Damascus Publications, 2001–2002), 180.

among them: {“the youth generation/the new young people,” “generational conflict/the reproduced generation,” “the generative event/evental inclination,” “the first generation youthfulness by memory/the third generation youthfulness by reality,” “the generational moment/cultural time,” etc. This is especially so given that the epistemological obstacle that hindered our complete comprehension of the researcher’s theoretical effort lay in our difficulty in understanding the epistemic system through which he grounded the duality of “social movement” and “the youth question” within the diversified multiplicity of communal cultures in Algeria.

Local *knowledge-of-knowledge* has not merely failed to test the legitimacy of reflecting upon the possibility of raising the question of the need for change; it has also placed the pivotal actor in the dynamics of change upon the crucible of searching for its own being and cultural presence. Thus, when we oblige Djabi to attend to the “precision of the concept” and, thereafter, to its “local contextualisation,” it is not our intention to strip his sociological inclination of its scientificity; instead, through this critique, we attempt to uncover the *philological–intellectual* mind that has configured the youth movement according to a “Mannheimian modality.”

This becomes especially pertinent when we ask him: *Is the youth generation in Algeria a transformative tool or a transformative agent?* Djabi himself does not indicate to us how this generation thinks, what its essential concerns are, whether it carries a national cultural preoccupation, how it views its internal and external worlds, whether it is an elite generation, and so forth.

It is by no means exceptional to describe Algerian youth today, as yesterday, and the youth of the world, as characterised by values such as *enthusiasm*, *vigour*, and impulsiveness. However, what compels us to confront the “generational moment” with “cultural historicisation” is the interpretive scrutiny of the history of mentalities and the diachrony of ideas. This endeavour bridges the relationship between the “structure of consciousness” and the “structure of reality.”

Nor is it unfounded to conclude a lack of cultural meaning attributed to the youth generation in Djabi’s analysis in the decades of the third millennium, especially after he traced the *causa* of the “failure to effect change” among what he calls the third generation to the strategy it adopted in dealing with the variables of lived reality. Its focus, he argues, is centred primarily on *individual salvation* rather than on collective solutions. This critical objection returns us to our opening question: *What does it mean for a generation to exist while lacking collective identity?* Or, more precisely, *can a generational entity be formed when its historicity is stripped?*

We answer categorically, negating the possibility: it cannot. To affirm the existence of a “generational identity” ontologically, chronologically, and sociologically, we must acknowledge the presence of a cultural and intellectual heritage capable of generating a conscious dynamism that dismantles the present of the past to find the present of the present; a present that must itself be dismantled insofar as it becomes a new past to construct a future-present that enacts “momentary independence.”

Accordingly, embodying the notion of “the new young people” as a *lived* rather than a systematic culture requires undertaking triadic critical questioning: *Where do we begin? How do we enact this beginning? Moreover, toward what do we aim as the intended end of such a beginning?*

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