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Dancing Algerian Revolution(s): Cooperation with Soviet Azerbaijan, Participation in Pan-Africanism and the Decolonization of (Male) Bodies in 1970s Algeria

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**Arab-Soviet Internationalism – Socialist Internationalism, International Organizations and the Politics of Revolution in the 20th and 21st Centuries  
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**Introduction**

In 1968, *Zdravstvui Al'zhier*, a documentary film produced by Azerbaidjan fil'm studio, featured Alibaba Abdulaev and his group of dancers of the National music and dance ensemble of the Soviet Azerbaijan Philharmonic touring Algeria, notably visiting Algiers international Fair and Boumerdes (former Rocher Noir).<sup>1</sup> There they had been warmly welcomed by Soviet Azerbaijan expatriates, working in an oil and gas institute recently equipped by the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>. Five years later, a couple of dancers and choreographers from the State Opera and Ballet Theatre of Soviet Azerbaijan, Rafiga Akhundova and Maksud Mamedov, signed the choreography of the ballet *Les 3 R*, to a music written by the Soviet Azerbaijani composer and former Ministry of culture of Soviet Azerbaijan Republic, Rauf Gadzhiev. The ballet was performed in the main hall of Algiers during the festivities commemorating the revolution of November 1, 1954, i.e. the launch of the insurrection against colonial France. As suggested by the title, namely the three Revolutions – industrial, agricultural, cultural- that embodied the political project of postcolonial Boumediene's Algeria, the argument of the ballet, initially programmed for the Algerian National Day, was about recent Algerian history and about politics. Moreover, the artistic trajectory of the two choreographers suggests that the aesthetics of the ballet itself participated in the idea of revolution, or at least that it belonged to modern dance, originated in the Western world while taking inspiration from extra European cultures.

Both histories highlight the artistic cooperation that started in the 1960s between the Soviet Union and Algeria, with the South Caucasus Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan mediating between Soviet Russian culture and newly decolonized Algeria. The leadership of the former French colony aimed at building an Algerian nation that would blend imported socialist modernity and genuine Arabic and Islamic roots. While the contribution of the Soviet South to the Kremlin's foreign policy has already been highlighted, the specific role of Azerbaijan has never been truly researched<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Alibaba Abdulaev, Tofik Sultanov, *Zdravstvui Al'zhier*, Azerbaidzhanfil'm, 1968

<sup>2</sup> Gérard Viratelle, « La coopération entre Alger et Moscou se renforce, surtout dans le domaine des échanges économiques », *Le Monde diplomatique*, décembre 1968, p.8 <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1968/12/VIRATELLE/28719>

<sup>3</sup> Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism*, Mac Gill University, 2020, Mark Nash (ed.), *Red Africa. Affective Communities and the Cold War*, Black Dog Publ., 2016.

Furthermore, focusing on cultural cooperation in the field of dance allows us to interrogate the question of transfer in directions such as gendered representations and emancipation of the body, and the reclamation of traditions in relation to the construction of a decolonized national community.

Despite its actuality, the relative failure of the ballet to embody durably the new Algeria reflects the ambiguity of Algerian leadership towards its official friendship with Soviet Union and with communist Eastern Europe, thus minoring the supposedly mediator's positive effect of a non-European Soviet republic. Algerian leaders were trying to insert the country in another geopolitical ensemble, namely Pan-Africanism, and their ambition to make Algeria a crossroads between Arabic countries on the one hand and Black Africa and more generally revolutionary non-European countries and liberation movements on the other hand led the cultural development of postcolonial Algeria in another direction than the one indicated by an exclusive relationship with the Soviets, even represented by a non-European Soviet Republic. Culture, including dance, was supposed to be a key aspect of the promotion of this non-aligned coalition, as manifested in ambitious festivals, from the 1969 Algiers Festival to the Lagos 1977 Festival, somewhat bifurcating from the Dakar 1966 Festival hosted by Leopold Senghor.

While Western modernization of dance in the Xth Century, drew on cultural borrowings from Africa and Asia, with a clear acceleration since the mid-1960s, the quest for national Renaissance in Algeria led to a reluctance to any foreign appropriation. If modern dance has not to be systematically opposed to folk dance and can lead to a kind of hybrid, the quest for authenticity in folk dance is on the other hand a brake on the revolution of the bodies by the dance. At the end of the decade of the 1970s, as the notions of Pan-Africanism and revolution were floundering, the repertory of the Algeria National Ballet was a clear indication of the evolution of a postcolonial society and its effect on body and gender politics.

### **The ballet *Les 3 R*, a produce of the Soviet-Algerian cultural cooperation**

#### *The Soviet Union and cultural nation-building in decolonized countries*

As illustrated by the documentary film *Zdravstvui Alzhier*, cultural cooperation between Soviet Union and Algeria could be seen as a by-side effect of a far more powerful axis: the multidimensional help Soviet Union provided to decolonized countries in order to build new armies and to launch the basis of an economic growth based on some version of planned socialism already implemented in Communist Eastern Europe since the end of World War II. The relations between Soviet Union and Algeria were complexified by the kind of society envisioned by the Algerian leadership, of which Arabism and Islam were supposed to be the key pillars, as well as its pretention to remain the hub of all emancipatory and liberation movements, mostly but not exclusively rooted in colonial Africa<sup>4</sup>.

Arabization and the firm stand for Islam as a major component of the new Algerian nation, supposedly rooted in a mythologized past anterior to the French colonization, were supposed to be compatible with the building of a modern, socialist state, thanks to the so-called Revolution launched in November 1954.

While highly depending on foreign cooperation and expertise, Algerian leadership tried to diversify its partners, in order to avoid Soviet hegemony, that could be seen from Algiers's point of view as a colonial power of its own. It is also possible that for Algerian elite,

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World War*, Oxford 2016

socialized in French culture during the decades that predated the independence, the European wind that breezed in Prague, Warsaw or even East Berlin seemed more familiar than the Bolshevik puritanism and desperate shortage of everything that characterized Soviet life even in the capitals<sup>5</sup>. Among Eastern European partners, Bulgaria had also its specificity, as a Southern alternative to the Mediterranean countries. Yugoslavia and Cuba were supposed to develop an original way of reaching justice and prosperity. Therefore, the Soviet Union was only one partner among others. It was in no way an indisputable model and, as we will see, its presence in Algeria even tended to be minored in the public discourse, in accordance with the claim of non-alignment of the Third World and the reality of Algeria's exchanges with foreign countries.

The proclamation of a ceasefire in March 1962 and the violence prevailing in the following months had achieved the final departure of most of the European population, as well as most of the local Jews<sup>6</sup>. With them, most of the economic and cultural experts had disappeared. The use of foreign expertise was therefore an urgent task, including in the early years the use of French experts and educated people mostly in the primary and secondary education. The challenge was all the greater because French colonization had left the Muslim population almost uneducated and poorly medicalized, despite the French claim to equalize colonization with school and hospital. While a tiny minority of Muslims had had access to the higher educational institutions, in Algiers as in Paris, the vast majority had remained illiterate. Therefore, the need for new teachers was not only dictated by the replacement of those who had left, but far more by the goals of the Algerian leadership to implement compulsory schooling.

It is with this background that one has to examine the development of any cultural cooperation that was not directly connected with this primary task, which would remain by far the highest priority of the postcolonial Algerian leadership. The question of what should be a cultural Algerian elite was an unresolved issue. Leaders mostly socialized in the French institutions and the very language of the colonizers launched crusade against the remnants of French cultural colonization, even when they had themselves some difficulty to think Arabic and to cut all the ties with the European and mostly French culture.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in the fields of high culture too everything had to be built from almost nothing. In the fields of musique, opera, dance, colonial France had given no access to practice and to attend performances to the Muslim population. At the end of the period of French colonization, Algiers had a classical dance department at its Conservatory headed by Mona Gaillard, a former prima ballerina who had made a career in metropolitan France before moving to Algiers in 1945 to work as a ballet mistress, dance director and teacher at the Opera and Conservatory.<sup>8</sup> The repertoire was in no way different from that of the metropole, and Mona Gaillard's students came from the colony's European or Europeanized Sephardic

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<sup>5</sup> For a quite disappointed discovery of Soviet capitals by African students, see Maxim Matusevich, « Expanding the Boundaries of the Black Atlantic . African Students as Soviet Moderns », *Ab Imperio*, 2012/2.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvie Thénault, *Histoire de l'Algérie*, Malika Rahal, *Algérie 1962*, La Découverte, Paris, 2021 ; Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir métropolitain. Politique d'intégration et parcours de rapatriés d'Algérie en métropole, 1954-2005*, Editions de l'EHESS, Paris, 2010

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, *Mémoires d'un Algérien*, 3 tomes, Casbah, Alger, 2006-2013

<sup>8</sup> CDHA (Centre de Documentation Historique sur l'Algérie), Aix en Provence, Archives Germaine Largy, 02 ARC 23 (on the death of Mona Gaillard, three articles by Germaine Largy, *Dépêche d'Algérie*, 13/02/1962); 02 ARC 10 Curriculum Vitae file for the recruitment competition for a dance teacher at the municipal conservatory of the city of Algiers

Jewish populations. The stage of the Opera of colonial Algiers was moreover a passage obliged of the Western ballet companies, to begin with that of the Opera of Paris<sup>9</sup>.

In the wake of independence, choices seemed open: one of them would have been to develop the institutions of which the Algerian Muslim population had been deprived throughout the French colonization and thus to give access to the greatest number of people to cultural practices and performances qualified as universal, although mainly imported from the Western world. In a sense, this is what the Soviet Union had applied on its own territories, including the non-European Soviet republics, after a so-called nationalization, for each of them, of the most elitist cultural genres: symphonies, operas, ballets ...<sup>10</sup>. Another choice would have been to ban any demonstration of Western cultural domination and to develop Algeria's genuine cultural forms, in a continuation, in a sense, of colonial France which had not failed to collect the cultural manifestations of the populations of its colonized territories, in spite of the assertion of the new decolonized countries according to which the colonization had had for goal to annihilate their authentic cultures<sup>11</sup>.

Facing the urgency of the task and developing a multiplicity of partnerships was a way not to choose between these options but to be exposed to a variety of influences, while the monopolistic organization of culture, as in any field of public activity in new postcolonial Algeria, allowed a limited development of forms and its strict ideological control.

In the early summer 1973, an Algerian cultural week was organized for the first time in the Soviet Union, under the aegis of the Soviet-Algerian Friendship Society founded in 196. The delegation visited Moscow and Baku. The Soviet reception had remained modest on the protocol level: Viacheslav Elioutine, Minister of Specialized Secondary Education and President of the Friendship Society, seems to have been the highest-ranking personality among Soviet officials, and Algerian artists performed on the stage of the Likhachev Palace of culture, a notorious piece of constructivist architecture in northeastern Moscow<sup>12</sup> but far from the honors of the Bolshoi Theater<sup>13</sup>.

However, this was not the first time that artists had performed in the Soviet Union: the National Ballet of Algeria had already visited the USSR in 1965.

Four months later, in November 1973 a week of Soviet culture in Algeria brought about the arrival of Soviet artists, in particular the Folk Dances and Songs Ensemble of Northern Russia, as well as a program of Soviet films including the young Kyrgyz filmmaker Bolot

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<sup>9</sup> This account of a repatriate of Algeria offers a partial view of the repertory of the Opera of Algiers, under the direction, from 1945 to 1962 of Pierre Portelli: <http://andrelimoges.unblog.fr/2010/02/12/figures-algeroises-2/>

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Walker, Marina Frolova-Walker, *Music and Soviet Power, 1917-32* (Boydell, 2012, Marina Frolova-Walker, « National in Form, Socialist in Context, Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 331-371.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance research and publications in the field of Andalusian music of Rodolphe d'Erlanger, commissioned by the King of Egypt to organize the Congress of Arabic Music in Cairo in 1932, who embodied colonial orientalism and patrimonialization. Charlotte Jelidi, « Le transfert intra-maghrébin d'une politique patrimoniale en contexte colonial : le baron d'Erlanger, Sidi Bou Saïd et la préservation de l'architecture dite « arabe » en Tunisie (1910-1932) », in Charlotte Jelidi (Ed.), *Les villes maghrébines en situations coloniales*, IRMC-Karthala, Paris, 2014, p. 269-295. **François Bensaïgnor**, « Congrès de musique arabe du Caire », *Hommes & migrations* [En ligne], 1311 | 2015, mis en ligne le 23 février 2016, retrieved on July, 05, 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/hommesmigrations/3378> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/hommesmigrations.3378>

<sup>12</sup> <https://divisare.com/projects/320782-alexander-victor-vesnin-cemal-emden-likhachev-palace-of-culture-1930>

<sup>13</sup> « La culture algérienne à Moscou », *El Moudjahid*, June 30, 1973, p. 11. See also July 5 and July 9, p. 11.

Shamshiev. The latter combined the affirmation of a new national identity of the Central Asian republics<sup>14</sup> and international success, including in the West, thus giving a clear signal to independent Algeria, even if the Algerian critics were above all impressed by the aesthetics of Tarkovsky's cinema exalting the Russian identity<sup>15</sup>.

In the musical field as in other aspects of the postcolonial Algerian cultural life, the diversity of past foreign influence prevailed. In the biographies of the Algerian leaders of the new cultural front former attendance at the best educational institutions in the metropole was the rule, as it was the case for the talented Djelloul Yelles, born in 1922 in Tlemcen, partly educated in the Paris Conservatory and Schola Cantorum with Olivier Messiaen as a teacher. Back in colonial Algeria, after having abandoned the possibility of becoming a conductor in the metropole, he had been appointed head of the Conservatory of Sidi Bel-Abbes, then administrated by a French Communist mayor, René Justrabo, before to become a key figure of the development of new musical institutions in early post-colonial Algeria. As the director of the National Institute of Music he had founded, his path crossed that of Rauf Gadzhiev (1922-1995), the aforementioned Azerbaijani composer, who spent many years in Algeria. The two men were in excellent relations, according to Professor Mourad Yelles, son of the former<sup>16</sup>. A former student of the Moscow and Baku conservatories, and a recent Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Azerbaijan (1965-1971), Gadzhiev collected Algerian folklore in many regions as did Mouloud Yelles, who is the author of an anthology of reference in three volumes edited in Algiers in 1975-1982, *Al-muwashshahat w-al-ajzâl*<sup>17</sup>. The two men shared a Western musical education at the highest level with an interest in non-European musical forms and a deep involvement in their transmission, a profile not so common in early post-colonial Algeria, that probably remained a rarity.

In Azerbaijan, Rauf Gadzhiev is reputed to have been part of the institution-building in the musical field of new postcolonial Algeria, a mission of which almost nothing is known<sup>18</sup>. Back to Baku he became the head of the Union of Composers of Soviet Azerbaijan until his death in 1995.

His long stay in Algeria inspired him with ambitious pieces, echoes of which can be found in his personal archive in Baku and in the repertoire of Algerian artists. Rauf Gadzhiev was thus the composer of the music for the Ballet "Les Trois R". He apparently had invited the couple of Soviet Azerbaijanis, Maksud Mamedov and Rafiga Akhundova, to come to Algeria, in order to select a group of dancers and to stage the choreography of the ballet<sup>19</sup>.

As already mentioned in reference with *Zdravstvui Algiers*, the connection between the Soviet South Caucasian republic and Algeria was not a novelty in the early 1970s. An expertise in oil extraction had probably determined privileged relations, with Azerbaijani engineers, geologists and other experts teaching and working in new Algerian institutions specializing in oil and gas extraction. The same reason can explain another oil-music-dance nexus between

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<sup>14</sup> Florin Moritz, *Kirgistan und die sowjetische Moderne, 1941–1991*, Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht Unipress, Göttingen 2015; see also Artemy M. Kalinowsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development. Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> *El Moudjahid*, November 6, 1973, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> Phone interview with Professor Mourad Yelles, February 12, 2022

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.algerie360.com/djelloul-yelles-une-memoire-musicale-algerienne-disparait/>

<sup>18</sup> According to the Internet site kinoteatr.ru, Rauf Gadzhiev contributed to the creation of the Algerian academies (Institutes?) of Music, Theater and Dance. <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/composer/sov/48112/bio/>. In the correspondence stored in his personal file in the State Museum on Musical Culture of Azerbaijan in Baku, he was a professor of the National Institute of Music (see AMMDM DK 15622/249). The State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan. I am very grateful to Professor Alla Bayramova, Director of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan, for her kindness and professionalism.

<sup>19</sup> Interview of Rafiga Akhundova and Maksud Mamedov, Baku, November, 2021

Soviet Azerbaijan and Iraq: at the end of the 1960s, the Azerbaijan composer Tofik Kuliev had left to Iraq in order to create an academic school of music and in 1970, Gamer Almaszade (1915-2006), a ballerina trained in the ballet school of the Bolshoi Theater and Leningrad choreographic School, and renowned for being the first Azerbaijani ballerina to dance the first ballet composed and staged in Baku by an Azerbaijani composer in 1940<sup>20</sup>, then the head ballet master for the Azerbaijan State Opera and Theater, was sent to Damascus for two years to create an academic school of dance and an Iraq Folk Dance Ensemble<sup>21</sup>.

The fact that these artists came from a former Muslim Soviet republic may have played a role in their selection, although it also turned out to be part of the misunderstanding that ultimately characterized their cultural cooperation with Algeria. Nevertheless, one should not overinterpret the religious factor : Soviet Armenia, for example, also sent ballet dancers to Iraq and Syria, to the delight of its Arab leaders<sup>22</sup>. If the presence of strong Armenian communities can explain this fact, it should be remembered that Algeria sent Algerian artists to train in Soviet Europe and in the countries of Eastern Europe as well: a background supposedly Muslim plan could have been of some help for the acclimatization of artistic practices still foreign to post-colonial Algeria, but it was clearly not essential.

#### *Azerbaijani Choreographers as a link between Russian ballet, neoclassical dance and new orientalism*

Rauf Gadzhiev and the two choreographers belonged to the same Soviet Azerbaijani cultural establishment. Maksud and Rafiga had just choreographed a new ballet to a music by Rauf Gadzhiev, *Azerbaijani Suite*, that had been selected for the Paris international dance festival in 1969. Actually, the couple embodied the long journey of Soviet Azerbaijani ballet from the incorporation of Russian classical ballet at the Stalinist times and the heavily adorned staging of national ballets to the post-Stalinist turn to a modernist choreography that rejected the *drambalet* while retaining arguments drawn from epics of the past and contemporary heroes embodying the national identity. Trained in Baku and then in Moscow, they both incarnated an Azerbaijani variation of what has been already described for the dancers and choreographers based in Moscow, from Iakobson to the younger Grigorovich<sup>23</sup>. After having danced the lead roles at the Baku Theatre since the 1950s, including *Seven Beauties*, for which the composer Kara Karaev had been rewarded by a Stalin prize, beside the classics like *Swan Lake*, they started in the 1960s to choreography using short forms, abandoning the heavy costumes for the work clothing (including oil worker's overalls) or colored leotard and tights. *Shadows of Gobistan*, to a music by the young Faradzh Karaev and decorations by the Azerbaijani avant-gardist Togrul Narimanbekov, the major ballet that led them to Paris and then Montecarlo in 1969, sounds like a manifesto in favor of modern dance, before their cooperation with Kara Karaev in the 1970s resulted in a rewrite of the score of the ballet *Path of Thunder*, set in South Africa, and in a choreography clashing with the former version the

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<sup>20</sup> *Gizi galasi (The Maiden's Tower)*, composer Afrasiyab Badalbeyli (1907-1976)

<sup>21</sup> VAHİD ÖMƏROV, « Azərbaycan-İraq mədəni inteqrasiyası (XX əsrin II yarısından müasir dövrədək) », February 2014, retrieved July, 2022 : <https://sesqazeti.az/news/kivdf/396389.html>; specifically on Gamer Almaszade, see Gamar Almaszade, "My Life as Azerbaijan's First Ballerina", *Azerbaijan International*, Autumn 2002 (10.3), p. 56-59, [http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai103\\_folder/103\\_articles/103\\_almazade.html](http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai103_folder/103_articles/103_almazade.html), retrieved July 2022

<sup>22</sup> In September 1980, the irremovable Syrian Ministry of Culture Najah al-Attar congratulated Armenia for sending a real classical dance troupe to the international fair in Damascus, instead of small groups of folk dances like many guest countries, National Archive of Armenia, f. 326, op. 4, d.90, l. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Christian Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin. Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, University of Pittsburg Press, 2012.

conservative ballet master Konstantin Sergiev master had created in early post-Stalinist Leningrad.

We don't know to what extent the aforementioned debate between the supporters of the *drambalet* and the proponents of choreographic symphonism reached the Baku stage. Rafiga Akhundova had also been strongly impressed by George Balanchine and the 1962 New York City Ballet tour of Soviet Union, that included Tbilisi and Baku<sup>24</sup>. In a sense, it was again connecting the history of the ballet with its Russian origins, since the young Georgian had been trained in Petersburg before the 1917 Revolution and had received its first success in early Soviet Union, while developing all his life, once in exile, strong professional relationships with prominent Russian émigrés such as Diaghilev and Stravinsky. Nevertheless, George Balanchine's 1962 tour, sponsored by the US State Department, made a strong case for the new ballet as an American art form. Whatever the interpretation, the influence of Balanchine reached a wide Soviet audience, including via the meeting of the troupe with the Soviet dance professionals. Not incidentally, the most acclaimed dancers were men, notably Edward Villella -who left an horrified account of this Soviet tour<sup>25</sup>- and Arthur Mitchell<sup>26</sup>. Both exemplified alternative version of the male dancer, the short, athletic Mediterranean Villella and the elegant black American Mitchell, magnified by a choreography that had abandoned the vision of male dancers confined to supporting roles, mostly as ballerina bearers, inherited from the 19th century ballet. It now blended virtuosity and sensuality with an economy of means that contrasted with large machines like the Bolshoi *Spartacus*.

In addition to these reflections on the renewal of dance and the art of ballet, the 1960s had seen the emergence of a renewed orientalism in the Soviet ballet in order to both promote an Eastern identity that stretched beyond the Soviet frontier and allowed for a new array of sensual expressions. Premiered in 1961 at the Kirov Theater, the ballet *The Legend of Love* illustrates the - albeit limited - capacity of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union to go beyond the so-called national ballets and to ally artists from different Soviet horizons. The young Azerbaijani composer Arif Melikov had set to music a libretto by the Turkish writer exiled in Moscow Nazim Hikmet, inspired by a tale famous throughout the Eastern world. The choreography by Grigorovich established his reputation as an innovative choreographer, with Nureev in the lead role of Ferkhad. The ballet was performed on many stages in the Soviet Union and abroad, including the Baku Opera and the Bolshoi (apparently on the intervention of the prima ballerina Maya Plisetskaya who had danced the role of Banu while on tour in Bakou)<sup>27</sup>.

#### *A new generation of Algerian dancers in the wake of the independence*

Contrasting with the institutionalization of dance in the Soviet Union, and the relative renewal that had run through classical ballet since the end of the 1950s, the national Algerian ballet did not have ten years when the Azerbaijani dancers arrived in Algiers. In a retrospective interview, the dancer and choreographer Abdelkader Nadir Roumani recounted his participation in the birth of the Algerian national ballet. A law student in the 1960s, he

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy Reynolds, "The Red Curtain: Balanchine's Critical Reception in the Soviet Union", Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars, Riverside, University of California Riverside, 14-15 February 1992, p. 47-57; Anne Searcy, *Ballet in the Cold War. A Soviet-American Exchange*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Villella with Larry Kaplan, *Prodigal Son. Dancing for Balanchine in a World of Pain and Magic*, Simon and Schuster, 1992, p.116-130.

<sup>26</sup> Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats. American choreography in Cultural Exchange*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 76-77, 80-81.

<sup>27</sup> Chulaki, *Ia byl direktorom Bol'shogo teatra.....*, Muzyka, Moscou, 1994.



reported that he had also taken dance classes, without elaborating further. The new Algerian radio-television (RTA) had thus called on him to create a ballet "which had not lasted six months". Then, the young man agreed with the Ministry of Tourism to create the ballet El Manar. In 1966, the Institute of theater and dance in Bordj El Kiffan, on the model of the National Institute of Music mentioned above, was created to train future teachers and executives of the arts of theater and dance. In 1967, thanks to the Bulgarian dancer Abrachev, "the first nucleus of the Algerian National Ballet" was born<sup>28</sup>. Roumani was then sent to France, as a student of the Ecole Supérieure de chorégraphie de Paris, before returning to Algeria in 1968 and presenting two ballets which will be discussed later, *Eveil de l'Afrique* and *Rites et cérémonies d'Algérie*.<sup>29</sup>

The vita of another active member of the Ballet, El-Hadi Cheriffa, mentions before the participation in the ballet of the Radio Television d'Algérie the role played by the organization of the Auberges de jeunesse (Youth Hostels). He was a soloist of El Manar between 1962 and 1966, while being a student of the Conservatory of Algiers. If the students were more likely Arabs after the independence and the quick and massive departure of the European population, teachers were still French and provided instruction in classical dance as anywhere else in the conservatories of the metropole.<sup>30</sup> He then spent one year in Paris at the Ecole Supérieure d'Etudes Chorégraphiques, a private institution then hosted in the Parisian mansion of the founder and director Erlanger rue de Villiers. The teaching was centered on the theory and history of dance, much more than on the practice<sup>31</sup>, in sharp contrast with the prestigious Academy of Choreography of the Bolshoi Theater where he was sent the next year, with two ballerinas of the Algerian National Theater: Fatima Senouci Namous and Faroudja Lalam Cherif Zahar<sup>32</sup>. In Moscow from 1968 to 1971 thanks to a student grant, their training was completed later, still in Moscow, by the GITIS<sup>33</sup>. Back in Algiers, they would teach at the Bordj El Kiffan Institute and dance in the Algerian National Ballet.

Brahim Behloul also mentions the youth hostel movement, first led by the French, then Algerianized, as the first contact with dance: on this occasion a ballet of folk dances was formed to represent decolonized Algeria in international youth events. Four folk dances (dance of the Ouled Naïl, the Kabyle dance, the Alawi dance and a Tuareg dance), mapping

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<sup>28</sup> In an article devoted to the Bordj el kiffan Institute, Abrachev is mentioned as the « chorégraphe-maitre de ballet, responsable de la section folklorique de l'école » with Mme Radiaskova as his assistant.

<sup>29</sup> *El Moudjahid*, Entretien de Souhila Dekkar avec Nadir Roumani « Après la longue éclipse »

<sup>30</sup> In his vita, El-Cheriffa indicates that he had first learnt classical dance in the class of Edwige Audouy. Archives of Centre National de la Danse, Pantin, file « Elhadi Cheriffa »

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cairn.info/revue-reperes-cahier-de-danse-2008-2-page-20.htm>

<sup>32</sup> A short biography of Faroudja Lalam Cherif Zahar is to be found here: <https://fr.ulule.com/flamenco-tribute/news/presentation-des-co-choregraphes-de-la-compagnie-111979/#anchor>. Before being sent to Moscow, she apparently spent one year in the Conservatory of Paris.

<sup>33</sup> On sending Maghreb students to the Soviet Union, see Constantin Katsakioris, "The Socialist Countries, North Africa and the Middle East. The Educational Connection", *Contemporary European History*, 1-16. However, the field of dance and music has been far less researched than the training of African filmmakers. See especially Gabrielle Chomentowski, "Filmmakers from Africa and the Middle East at VGIK during the Cold War", *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 13, 2 (2019), p. 189-198, Gabrielle Chomentowsky, "L'expérience soviétique des cinémas africains au lendemain des indépendances", *Le Temps des médias*, 26, 1, 2016, p. 111-125; on training of North African filmmakers in Eastern Europe see Olivier Hadouchi, « Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina and Boubaker Adjali: The Careers of two Algerian Filmmakers who attended FAMU in Tereza Stejskalova, ed., *Filmmakers of the World, Unite! Forgotten Internationalism*, Czechoslovak Film and the Third World, Prague, Tranzit Edice, 2017, p. 123-136, Marie-Pierre Bouthier, The Transnational Trajectories of Moroccan Filmmakers, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 54, 2021 n°3, p.355-376.

new decolonized Algeria, were first performed in Dublin in July 1963, then recorded by the BBC in London and performed again in Scotland. New Algeria Radio Television and afterwards the integration of the Algiers National Theater, then headed by the poet and playwright Mohamed Boudia, were the following steps.<sup>34</sup>

In 1968, Bouhloul spent one year in Hungary, learning the methods of ballet, solfeggio, and step notation (Knust Laban method), and worked with a Hungarian researcher at the Academy of Art on the revaluation of folklore. Back in Algiers in 1969, he taught at the National Institute of Music before taking over the direction of the National Ensemble of Popular Dances of the TNA. Contrasting with the repertoire of the National Ensemble, a modern ballet intended to honor the 10 years of the independence had been programmed, then delayed by the overload of work devoted to the rehearsals and the tours, turned to the folklore. It was the prehistory of the 1973 Ballet *Les 3 R*.

With about 45 dancers, the National Algerian Ballet first performed in Europe in the early summer 1964. In France they were invited by the Théâtre de Paris, for a gala organized by the French-Algerian Friendship Society (l'Association d'Amitié et de Solidarité Franco-algérienne), in favor of « Algerian disinherited childhood » (au profit de l'enfance algérienne déshéritée); Boualem Moussaoui, the Algerian Ambassador in Paris, Ait El Hocine a member of the «Bureau Politique», Ben Khelfat the Algerian Consul in Paris as well representatives of the political association of Algerian emigrants in France (AGTA, l'Amicale des Algériens en France) attended the show, that was performed thereafter at the Gérard Philippe Theater of Saint-Denis, in Lyon, Marseille, that is in all main places of Algerian migration in France.<sup>35</sup> The artistic and political importance of the tour was also underlined by the presence of the director of TNA, Mohamed Boudia (after Boumédiène took power through the 1965 coup, he left the country before being probably assassinated by the Mossad). Under Boumédiène, the National Ballet continued to perform partly abroad. In 1970 notably, they performed on the stage of the Volksbühne in East Berlin. The *Berliner Zeitung* enumerated the countries already visited by the young Algerian ballet: Soviet Union, Rumania, Canada, Spain, Iran, Morocco<sup>36</sup>. For the journalist the apex of the show was the Tuareg dance, performed by dancers in arms. Besides, he had been particularly impressed by the diversity of national costumes, in particular those of the women.

In addition to the mission of embodying the populations of Algeria through dance, a little room had been reserved for innovation

Algiers was also the destination of international tours, performing mostly folk dances. However, international modern dance was sometimes programmed: in the fall of 1973 Maksud and Rafiga had the opportunity to attend a performance of Maurice Béjart's Ballets du XXème siècle, probably the first time in their lives<sup>37</sup>.

## **Dancing the Algerian Revolution(s)**

### *State culture and the constant commemoration of Liberation War and Algerian Revolution*

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<sup>34</sup> « Brahim Bahloul, chorégraphe : « Les arts populaires agonisent », propos recueillis par Mustapha Hirane, *Alger Républicain*, February 22-28, 2005

<sup>35</sup> Al Djazair, July 2, 1964, in the File «Ensemble national de danses populaires», Archives of the Centre Culturel Algérien, Paris.

<sup>36</sup> M. Weule, «Anmut aus Nordafrika», *Berliner Zeitung*, April 1, 1970

<sup>37</sup> A program with an autograph by Maurice Béjart is to be found in the personal file of Rauf Gadzhiev preserved in Baku, AMMDM DK 15622/126. Compare with Maia Plisetskaya on the difficulties to perform Maurice Béjart choreography in the Soviet Union.

If the role of Algiers was modest in terms of ballet, it became for almost a decade the hub of any liberation movements in Africa, notably from the Portuguese<sup>38</sup> without speaking of the Palestinian fighters who were day after day on the front pages of Algerian newspapers, as well as other freedom fighters around the world, especially Vietnamese.

Welcoming for all the more or less Marxist decolonizing forces, Algerian leaders had also their own political agenda, revolving around the multilayer revolutions the country was experiencing. Revolution had been the key word since the beginning of the armed rebellion against French colonizers in 1954, it was still on the front lines almost twenty years after the starting of the Liberation war and a decade after the Independence: industrial, agricultural and cultural revolutions had now to be completed<sup>39</sup>. In 1973, the agricultural revolution especially was at the center of all the attentions: listing all the properties, dividing the owners in three categories, distributing land, building new villages, with the urban population, especially the students, invited to lend a hand with the work in the fields<sup>40</sup>.

New Algeria was in the making, but it was also constantly commemorating the recent past. The war of liberation does not cease until today to be the starting point and the undisputed matrix of the new Algerian nation: the courage of the combatants, the blind violence and the cruelty of the French, the figure of the martyrs constituted an inexhaustible source to galvanize the Algerian identity. Arts sponsored by the new Algerian state, especially the film industry, merged with a popular culture that conveyed through songs the ordeals and hopes of the war' years.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, staging the Algerian Revolution and commemorating the Liberation was not a novelty, as evidenced by the memorable days of festivity throughout Algeria in 1962.<sup>42</sup>

These thematic saturated especially the cinematographic production plan, that depended directly on the Ministry of Information and Culture. The vividly acclaimed *Bataille d'Alger* by the filmmaker Gillo Pontecorvo, an Algerian-Italian coproduction awarded by a Golden Lion at the 1966 Venice Film festival, received an international audience and remained a reference, but other films recounting the colonial past and the war of independence were regularly shot in Algeria and positively received, especially by the former colonizers, as demonstrated by awards received at the Cannes Film Festival by Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina for two films that dealt with the Independence war and its aftermath (the Cannes festival's Best First Work Prize for *Le Vent des Aurès* in 1966 and especially the Golden Palm for *Chronique des années de braise* in 1975).

Inspired by the dictatorial context in Greece, *Z* by Costagavras had also been shot in Algeria and was awarded at Cannes and by the Oscar of the best Foreign Film and the Golden Globe in 1970 on behalf of Algeria. The emerging film industry was thus demonstrating to an international audience that decolonized Algeria was a promised land for all the freedom fighters of the world. For the limited audience of the Algerian intelligentsia, cinema was a powerful vehicle for reporting on all the political battles around the world, as illustrated by the programming of Latin American cinema in the movie theaters in the capital and probably in the main Algerian cities.

In the same vein, another part of the films made in the new Algeria was devoted to the problems faced by post-colonial society. In his memoirs, the former Minister of Culture Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi states that he personally asked scriptwriters and directors as early as

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<sup>38</sup> Natalia Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation. The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961–1975*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2022

<sup>39</sup> James McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017

<sup>40</sup> For a contemporary account, see Bruno Etienne

<sup>41</sup> James McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, p. 235-236.

<sup>42</sup> Malika Rahal, *Algérie 1962. Une histoire populaire*, La Découverte, 2022, p. 217-237.

1973 to stop focusing solely on the war of liberation "to also draw inspiration from the socio-economic realities of the country". *Le Charbonnier* by Mohamed Bouamari (1972) featured an ALN veteran participating in the rural "revolution" while convincing his wife who has found a job in a nearby factory not to wear the veil anymore. It was screened the same year as the first staging of the ballet *Les 3 R* in Algeria.

Algerian movies accounting for independent Algeria were far less present on the French and Western screens<sup>43</sup>. They were mostly shown in Algeria and in international festivals in the global South devoted to the non-European cinema, from Tashkent to Ouagadugu. *Le Charbonnier* for exemple was discreetly awarded by the Georges Sadoul Prize at Cannes but received the Silver *Tanit* at the recently founded Carthago film festival.

In Algiers, the promotion of African, Palestinian, Iraqi, Argentinian cinema rubbed shoulders in the movie theaters of the capital with French hits and spaghetti westerns, and also with Soviet and Eastern European cinema.

The reading of cinema programs therefore offers the sometimes comical reflection of the eternal dilemma between belonging to a Third World in full political and cultural affirmation and the continuation of the dialogue with the aesthetics (and values) of the former metropole, conveyed by the maintained familiarity with the world of the French movie stars, from Alain Delon to Annie Girardot. Finally, this programming, admittedly very limited in terms of audience, offered a profound complicity with the cultural universe of any Western progressive intelligentsia.

#### *Revolutionary choreographies*

In the field of dance too, revolution, emancipation and decolonization found an echo in Algiers after 1962. Young Algerian choreographers, trained mostly in France, took inspiration in trends of modern dance encountered there in order to transmit a genuine discourse. Unfortunately, for all the choreographies evoked it is not clear whether any audiovisual recording had been made and stored. At the end of the 1960s, the few ballets staged on the National Theater inspired by the idea of revolution reflected anticolonial struggles far beyond Algeria, as a political tool for history in-the-making: just returned from his three years at the Ecole Supérieure de Chorégraphie de Paris, the former head of the ensemble El Manar, Nadir Roumani, described the argument of his ballet *Eveil de l'Afrique (Awakening of Africa)* as follows: "It is the story of a South African warrior poet. I stage his martyrdom. We see him die in the first part where we also witness the exteriorizations of the victorious enemy soldiers. In the second part I show the state of exploited African workers. There is even one among them who gets up to whip them. The women, for their part, express discouragement. The third part corresponds to the call to struggle. Voluntarily, I do not give him a conclusion: the fight is not over yet. In the middle of the action a silence, like a question." The percussionist Nouredine Boukhatem, trained in Paris by Diego Masson, a composer, conductor and percussionist performing among others Stockhausen and Boulez, aimed to convey "the suddenness of the attacks", using a hinge and a timpani.

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<sup>43</sup> On the broader context of North-South and East-West encountering through cinema during the Cold War, see Caroline Moine, *Screened Encounters. The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival 1955-1990*, Berghahn Books, 2018, Andreas Kötzing, Caroline Moine, Bill Martin (Ed), *Cultural transfer and Political Conflicts : Film Festivals in the Cold War*, Gottingen : V & R unipress, 2017

Ahmed Boussaboune's *Peuple en lutte (People in Struggle)* was a ballet vaguely set in Vietnam, that depicted "a troop movement, wounded, dead."<sup>44</sup>

As already mentioned, Rafiga Akhundova and Maksud Mamedov had already choreographed ballets on contemporary themes, but never related to war or revolution. In the Soviet South, the time was no longer for glorifying 1917, but for affirming a cultural identity distinct from that of the Russians, while at the same time being part of a modernization trend more or less secretly inspired by the West.

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to see how they resolved in the language of ballet the issue of putting on stage the political discourse and historical facts that were the argument of the 3R.

A few pictures found in Algerian newspapers, as well as programs that gave the distribution of the ballet and the names of the other artists and technicians involved in the performance are the only means to get an idea of its choreography. Notably the FLN periodical *Jeune Afrique* published photos staging French paratroopers surrounding a woman, suggesting collective rape, and collective tableaux with Algerian *fedayin*, including women and fellahs.

A depiction in the theater program of the four tableaux as critics published by the French-speaking newspaper *El Moudjahid* gives us some hint of their content.<sup>45</sup>

In his article, the critic M. Benbaghdad pointed out that the rape should have been represented more efficiently: the dancers should have put away "the artistic spirit of dance/l'esprit artistique de la danse" in order to make the spectators understand the full importance of the scene<sup>46</sup>. This appreciation is not so clear but the critic probably regretted the elliptical or aesthetic character of the scene. Benbaghdad's remark is all the more remarkable, as rapes committed by French soldiers on Algerian women were apparently frequent but did not appear in the public representations of the war in Algeria<sup>47</sup>. In France, Simone de Beauvoir's 1960 article published by *Le Monde* and devoted to Djamila Boupacha, a young woman tortured and raped for months after her arrest, because she was suspected of having planted a bomb in a café, was quite explicit on the issue of rape<sup>48</sup> and the committee for the defense of the young woman had the biggest French intellectual celebrities. Defended by the feminist lawyer Gisele Halimi, the young FLN militant had become at the very heart of the war the symbol of torture, including rape of Algerian women. Nevertheless, this kind of crimes were denied by their authors, who most of the time have never been tried nor convicted. As for the rapes of anonymous women during control operations of the French army, most of the time in rural Algeria, they left virtually no written record, if not in the minds of the victims and the perpetrators<sup>49</sup>. In post-colonial Algeria as in any other society, this type of crime has been silenced, unlike the torture exercised against men. Tortured male bodies were frequently

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<sup>44</sup> « De jeunes artistes à la pointe de la création chorégraphique », *El Moudjahid*, November 15, 1968

<sup>45</sup> The prologue was composed of a first dance during which a *Fedayi* and a young girl were arrested by French soldiers. The *fedayi* managed to escape and entrust his weapon to an old man. The following dance, performed by nine dancers, to the music of the hymn Djazairouna, represented a front born of the freedom-loving people who had sworn to fight until the final victory. The first picture, dedicated to the Industrial Revolution, was danced by the whole Ensemble. It represented a people in love with economic freedom, symbolized by oil. The second picture devoted to the Agrarian Revolution insisted on the faith and participation of "our students". AMMDM DK 15622/125 (4) (to compare with the program preserved in the archive of the Centre Culturel algérien, Paris)

<sup>46</sup> M. Benbaghdad, « Le Ballet Les 3 R », *El Moudjahid*, November 23, 1973

<sup>47</sup> Malika Rahal, *Algérie 1962. Une histoire populaire*, La Découverte, Paris, 2022

<sup>48</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, « Pour Djamila Boupacha », *Le Monde*, 2 juin 1960

<sup>49</sup> Raphaëlle Branche, « Des viols pendant la guerre d'Algérie », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, n°75, 2002, p. 123-132 ; Stef Scagliola and Natalya Vince, (in collaboration with Khedidja Adel and Galuh Ambar), « The places, traces and politics of rape of the Indonesian war of independence (1954-1962) », Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Bart Luttikhuis (Ed.), *Empire's Violent End. Comparing Dutch, British, and French Wars of Decolonization, 1945–1962*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2022, p. 96-119

represented on Algerian screen, with no mention, however, of rape that had also been a weapon of the French army against the *fedayin* and male FLN militants.

The resurgence of rape in a few rare testimonies published at the turn of the century seems to show, however, a particularly strong resistance of Algerian society to explicitly evoking the fate of rape victims, just like the persistent impunity of officials on the French side and the importance of their denial<sup>50</sup>.

The photographs of the ballet also showed women in battledress, along men, a reflection of the image developed after independence in the public sphere (films) of Algerian women in arms, who had in reality constituted only a tiny minority of the National Liberation Army's personnel during the war.

The music of the ballet is no less forgotten, as I was not able to find the score neither any recording. (I have not had the opportunity to hear other pieces by Rauf Gadzhiev related to his nine-year stay in Algeria either, despite the presence of some scores stored in its personal file in the Baku Museum of the History of Music: "Algerian miniatures", "Algerian Suite", "Second Algerian Ballet"...). Nevertheless, a sentence of one article characterized the score as widely and openly inspired by Algerian traditional music: "A music of a purely national character since it borrows its themes in turn from the *touchia*, the *nouba* or folklore, all modernized and rhythmized for the needs of the ballet"<sup>51</sup>.

The modernization of folklore to which the critic alludes was probably foreign, however, to the rhythms which developed to pulsate a part of Algerian youth and of which we find echoes in the cult film of Algerian cinephiles, Mohammed Zinet's *Tahya ya Didou* (APN, 1971)<sup>52</sup>, the soundtrack of which is partly due to the avant-gardist French and American musicians performing free jazz<sup>53</sup>, or in *Omar gatlato* directed by Merzak Allouache (ONCIC, 1976), awarded by a silver medal at the 10<sup>th</sup> Moscow Film Festival, whose main character collects Chaâbi and Indian music cassettes. Unlike Béjart or Balanchine who had also choreographed music directly inspired by urban dances, Rauf Gadzhiev had written the music of the ballet on the Algerian revolutions mostly based on Andalusian music, now consecrated as the heart of the Algerian musical identity, as had been the muqam in Soviet Azerbaijan, supplemented by rhythms from rural Algeria and the martial cords of the patriotic march "Djaizarouna".

The few photographs published by the Algerian press do not reflect the sets, which were designed by Liliane El Hachemi, born in Swiss and trained at the School of Applied Arts in East Berlin, where she had met her husband, El Hachemi Noureddine, an Algerian theater artist who was then on a training course in the GDR. Living in Algeria since 1963, she contributed to other ballets, including the modern ballets of El Cheriffa, in addition to the decorations for the plays of the Algerian national theater (her first set were designed for Shakespeare and Brecht staged by the Algerian National Theater, with *The Caucasian Chalk*

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<sup>50</sup> See especially the case of Louisette Ighilahriz. Louisette Ighilahriz, *Algérienne, Entretiens avec Anne Nivat*, Fayard-Calmann-Lévy, 2001 and *Casbah, Algiers*, 2006. See also Djamila Amrane, *Des Femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie. Entretiens*, Karthala, Paris, 1994, Djamila AMRANE, *Les femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie*, Plon, Paris, 1991.

<sup>51</sup> « Une musique à caractère purement national puisqu'elle emprunte ses thèmes tour à tour à la *touchia*, à la *nouba* ou au folklore, le tt modernisé et rythmé pr les besoins du ballet », Mouloud Achoura, **Le ballet moderne : un art encore inexploité** », *Algérie actualité semaine 25 nov-1<sup>er</sup> dec 1973*

<sup>52</sup> the distribution of the film remained in any case limited mostly to the Cinémathèque of Algiers

<sup>53</sup> The French composer Michel Portal close to Stockhausen and proponent of the free jazz, the French percussionist from the avant-gardist French Music initiated to the Persian zarb, Jean-Pierre Drouot, the American jazzman Barre Phillips are credited for the soundtrack, along with El Hadj M'Hamed El Anka who had recorded his first records for Columbia in 1928. Algerian music performed by the National Algerian Army Band (Fanfare de l'Armée Nationale Populaire) in the new stadium of Algiers with live compositions applauded by enthusiastic veiled women is also to be heard.

*Circle* by Bertold Brecht (1969), adapted by Mohamed Mahboub Stambouli and directed by Hadj Omar, that was awarded at the Arab Theatre Festival in Damascus), as for the Algerian cinema and television.<sup>54</sup>

### *Denial*

In Algerian newspapers, if Rauf Gadzhiev was credited as the composer, neither his citizenship nor his nationality were mentioned, even if his Russianized last name was a clear indication of his origin. In the same vein, the TNA program credited the Azerbaijani couple with the choreography, but their names are nowhere to be found in the few articles Algerian newspapers devoted to the ballet. Instead, the *Moudjahid* presented a young Algerian artist, Brahim Belhoul, as the author of the ballet.

In his memoirs, the Minister of Culture at the time, Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, in a kind of inventory of the achievements of Algerian cultural institutions under his leadership, mentioned only one ballet performed by the Algerian National Ballet, but supposedly crowned with success, in Algeria as well as abroad, the ballet *Les 3R* : “A last word on the national ballet which is making appreciable progress, particularly in its presentation of the "Three revolutions" which has been a huge success both in Algeria and abroad. «<sup>55</sup>. Perpetuating in his memoirs the success of the ballet, the former minister does not say a word about its Soviet authors

Written at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi's memoirs aimed at rehabilitating Boumediene's government as a major moment of nation-building in early postcolonial Algeria (1965-1978). A Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then in charge of Information and Culture, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi does not deny the role of the Soviet Union in foreign cooperation but he puts it very clearly in the background, after the cooperation with France but also with Arabic countries: Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Palestinians. In the field of higher education, he likes to list the names of Arab professors who would have particularly marked these exchanges, with a “special mention” for Syria, alongside a few French jurists. By contrast, no name of Soviet academics or even of specialists from Eastern European countries appears under his pen.

On the whole, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi does not hide his hostility towards Soviet Union, mostly rooted in his own experience. Back from his first official journey with president Boumediene in December 1965, he allegedly informed him of his doubts about the viability of the regime, clearly linked to its repressive nature, especially towards religion<sup>56</sup>. During the spring of 1969, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi visited Uzbekistan after Moscow and returned to Algeria convinced that the Russians have developed there a colonial system of their own that reminded him of interwar Algeria. He predicted again the breakup of the Soviet Union to Boumediene with whom he would also discuss the publications of the dissident Solzhenitsyn in the subsequent years.

In this context, the cooperation with the Soviets appears as a pis-aller that had to be minimized, or even better retracted. As Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi wrote more generally as a concluding remark on foreign cooperation: “The best expert is the one you can do without”<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Boumaila Belkacem, « Elle fut la première femme scénographe: Liliane Hachemi était une artiste complète », *Le Temps d'Algérie*, 30 juin 2018 (<https://www.djazairiss.com/fr/letemps/1017660>)

<sup>55</sup> « Un dernier mot sur le ballet national qui réalise des progrès appréciables, notamment dans sa présentation des « Trois révolutions » qui obtient un énorme succès à la fois en Algérie et à l'étranger », Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, *Mémoires d'un Algérien. Tome 2 : la passion de bâtir (1965-1978)*, Casbah Editions, Alger, 2008, p. 143

<sup>56</sup> Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, *Mémoires d'un Algérien. Tome 2*, p. 239

<sup>57</sup> Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, *Mémoires d'un Algérien. Tome 2*, p. 65.

This sounds surprising for a ministry of Boumediene, who had spent his last months in Moscow in order to delay the hour of his death (but not so much surprising after all, as Ibrahimi doesn't look very impressed by the quality of Soviet medicine and also suggests that the Israeli services actually poisoned Boumediene who returned from his Russian stay incredibly weakened and died very soon afterwards).

Denial was not a particularity of Ibrahimi, as a dialogue of the film *Tahia ya didou*<sup>58</sup> illustrates: a former French colon comes back to Algeria with his wife who points the number of building sites in the streets of Algiers. While his husband claims that Russian engineers are at work, in order to denigrate the capacities of the Algerians, the camera shows on the contrary the unique presence of Algerian experts.

This public denial of cooperation with the Soviet Union is in stark contrast to reality, including in the field of music, even though the Soviet contribution and that of Eastern Europe more generally should be more firmly assessed. The very fragmentary correspondence preserved by Rauf Gadzhiev thus shows the repeated requests of Yelles, head of the National Institute of Music to the Soviet embassy to provide him with musical instruments and teachers. One can also find concert programs such as the one May 8, 1974 at the Atlas Hall, during which the Algerian conductor Akim Benatia had conducted both Beethoven and Chaikovsky, with Miroslav Russin as soloist. Born in 1937 in Moscow, the receiver of international awards, a violin teacher at the National Institute of Music in Algiers since 1972, Russin had already performed several times in the Middle East.<sup>59</sup>

The pianist Igor Brodov also appears in the programs of this period, id est the early 1970s, as on the program of the ballet of *Les 3 R*. Maksud and Rafiga had brought him from multinational/ cosmopolitan Baku to accompany their rehearsals on the piano and probably to live their friendship under the sky of the Mediterranean. The exacerbated anti-Zionism that reigned in Algiers may have darkened the last months of his stay, in the midst of the Yom Kippur War. He currently lives in Israel.

The discretion of the Algerian press contrasts with the warmth of the message of thanks dated November 10, 1973 sent by the director of the Algerian national theater to the Soviet Minister of Culture Furtseva in which he congratulated the four artists from Baku and he assured "enormously" regret the departure of the Soviet Professors<sup>60</sup>.

### *Revolution, Dance, Gender and Body politics*

National pride of decolonized Algeria can explain this attitude of denial. The very content of Soviet expertise was undoubtedly at stakes also. While Arabization and rediscovery of the Islamic legacy were the key principles of Algerian cultural policy, the Russian ballet probably incorporated notions that had nothing to do with the kind of Algerian identity promoted by the Revolution, with Algerian leaders actually divided on this issue. The fact that Russian ballet was exported with the mediation of Azerbaijani artists was probably not sufficient to impulse

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<sup>58</sup> "Alger insolite", Mohamed Zinet, Algiers APC, 1971

<sup>59</sup> ADMM DK 15622/100

<sup>60</sup> « « Nous nous permettons de vous exprimer toute notre satisfaction et notre reconnaissance pour le travail que les professeurs MM Maksoud MAMEDOV -RAFIGA -Raouf GADJIEV et Igor BRODOV ont effectué pour le programme de l'Ensemble National de Danses Populaires « Les 3 R ».

Nos collaborateurs à tous les niveaux et particulièrement les éléments du ballet regrettent énormément le départ des professeurs qui ont œuvré sans relâche pour la mise au point de ce programme dans les meilleures conditions.

Tout le personnel et nous même remercions infiniment les Artistes Soviétiques pour leur participation et leur engagement sans réserve pour la formation technique de notre Ensemble National de Danses Populaires.

Nous sommes convaincus que cette assistance renforcera davantage les liens culturels de nos deux pays. »ADMM DK 15622/255



a policy tending at developing ballet school in Algeria. This reluctance matched with the absence of cultural experts anyway in the former French colony.

In decolonized Algeria the emancipation of the body was at the agenda with the development of sports, the building of giant stadiums and the adjunction of physical education in the primary and secondary school curriculum. During the commemorations punctuating the new Algerian calendar and the festivities associated with major political events such as the hosting of the Non-aligned summit (September 1973), Boumédiène would attend in a newly-built stadium living shows where the bodies of the participants dressed in brightly colored clothes drew alternately slogans and symbols of the Algerian Revolution.

However it could not go as far as developing the strong discipline of ballet as understood by the rigorist Russian school. The actress Doudja Achachi accounts for instance how she was recruited in the National Algerian Ballet in the early 1960s. Born in a small village, she had joined Algiers and lived first on small jobs. “It was in the 60s and there was a while that I held a laundry. Passing by, Nadir Romani and Brahim Bahloul proposed me to be part of the first national ballet, El Manar, newly created. I went to see, I liked it, I left the store for the ballet. Afterwards I did a little training at the youth center of Bordj El Kiffan and then that was it.”<sup>61</sup>

Virtuosity had not really its place in this notion of dancing, even at the highest level of the country. Dancing was not about physical prowess but collective figures of folk dances reflecting seasons and ritualized everyday life. Ballerinas like Faroudja Lalam Cherif Zahar and Fatima Senouci Namous<sup>62</sup> were exceptions, as they had been trained at a relatively young age in the Conservatories respectively of Algiers and Oran probably immediately after the Independence, before experiencing the extremely demanding teaching of the Russian ballet school at the Bolshoi Academy.

The way the young and pretty Doudja Achachi had been recruited suggests also another major plague for those who tried to build a ballet troupe: the perpetual lack of volunteers. This issue concerns obviously the female part of the ballet, it should have been even more problematic for its male part.

Both Rafiga and Maksrud Mamedov came from a society where embracing the profession of ballerina or male dancer was not so well accepted, with Western music and dance remaining foreign to most of the population in interwar Soviet Azerbaijan, including to them, at least in their childhood. According to Maksrud Mamedov, born in 1929 in Gandja, his uncle, a pilot who was killed during the Great Patriotic War, encouraged him to enroll in Russian ballet as the young boy excelled in his folkdance ensemble. It was a sign of westernization that was probably shared only by a minority in prewar Soviet Azerbaijan. Makhmud made his way in the school dance in Baku then in the prestigious Moscow school of Choreography before being part of the Bolshoi troupe. When he came back to Baku, he was surrounded by dancers who were not Azerbaijani by nationality. In the documentary film *Rodnomu narodu*<sup>63</sup> promoting the Baku ballet in 1954 that featured both the young Maksrud and Rafiga, the lead male dancers are both European: Konstantin Batashov, a Russian born in Tbilissi who joined

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<sup>61</sup> « C'était dans les années 60 et il y avait un moment que je tenais un magasin de pressing. De passage par là, Nadir Romani et Brahim Bahloul m'ont proposé de faire partie du premier ballet national, El Manar nouvellement créé.

J'ai été voir, ça m'a plu, j'ai quitté le magasin pour le ballet. Par la suite j'ai fait une petite formation à la maison de jeunes de Bordj El Kiffan et puis voilà. », Meriem Mokrani,

“Le milieu artistique est très dur” - Entretien avec la comédienne Doudja Achachi, *Le Maghreb*, June 7, 2008 <http://africine.org/depeche/entretien-avec-la-comedienne-doudja-achachi/21873>

<sup>62</sup> on the training of Fatima Senouci Namous, <https://www.djazairess.com/fr/liberte/203995>

<sup>63</sup> *Rodnomu narodu*, 1954

in the 1930s the Baku Opera Theater in Baku, and Anatolii Urvantsev, born in Samara in 1910. By contrast, the documentary film features only Azerbaijani ballerinas. They form a link between the Russian males and the Azerbaijani men and women encountered during this tour in provincial Azerbaijan and seem to have no problem negotiating their distinctly Westernized appearance with their Azerbaijani origin. An Azerbaijani, the aforementioned lead ballerina Gamer Almaszade looks like a Hollywood star among the collective farmers the troupe is visiting and nothing is said of the troubles that arose when she had decided to become a ballerina against her father's will.

The presence of non-Azerbaijanis among the star dancers of the Baku ballet is a feature that continued until the 1980s and the end of the Soviet Union. Vladimir Pletnev, born in 1946 in provincial Azerbaijan, had been trained in Baku, Moscow and Leningrad where he had been taught by Messerer and Pushkin, Rudolf Nureyev's mentor. With his wife the ballerina Chimnaz Babaeva he formed a model couple such as the Soviet ballet world presents in number until a terrible disease deprived him of the use of his legs. At the 1969 Paris Dance Festival, Pletnev had shared the main roles with the Armenian dancer Rafael Grigorian, to whom Maksud and Rafiga would continue to give the main role in the ballets they created until his departure from Baku then plagued by anti-Armenian mass pogroms.

The biography of George Balanchine may exaggerates when he claims that "a career in ballet was considered in the Russia of that time (as in the Soviet Union today) an honored and respected one for a man to pursue"<sup>64</sup>. Indeed, Soviet ballet was promoting the male dancers against common reluctance from European and non-European Soviet republics, that was echoing the same kind of resistance prevailing in Western societies.

For the 1962 Soviet tour, the ballet master Messerer had designed a new ballet, showing the major steps of ballet training from the youngest ages to the young adults. The little girls were opening the floor and ballerinas were undoubtedly the queens of the show. Rows of little boys in black tights, however, were also performing, but separately, the classic dance positions and working on their pointe shoes.

The Soviet Union also published its manifesto for the non-European public : during the same year 1962 *Ia budu tantsevat'* was released on Soviet screen and was a huge success. For decades Chechen dancer Makhmud Esambaev would embody the legitimacy of becoming a male dancer, receiving love, admiration and respect at the highest level, as artist of the people. Shot in the Azerbaidjanfilm studio by film director Tofik Tagizade, on the script of the Ingush writer Idris Bazorkin, the film takes place in the just reborn republic of Chechnya-Ingushetia. It had thus a precise setting, even if nothing was said about the 1943 mass deportations and the liquidation of the Republic by Stalin. Nevertheless, dances, fixed by the Azerbaidjani choreographer Alibaba Abdullaev to the music of Rauf Gadzhiev, reflected more widely a Soviet-era interpretation of Caucasian music and dances, mixed with performances of classics of Russian and European ballet and opera, and also with Indian music, of which Esembaev was a key promoter for the whole Soviet Union, first on the impulse of the Soviet Ministry of Culture headed by Furtseva<sup>65</sup>. In the movie, the Chechen young boy turns into both an artist of his people, as needy as an engineer or a doctor, and the performer of universal art. At the

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard Taper, *Balanchine. A Biography*. Revised and updated, Macmillan, 1974, p. 39

<sup>65</sup> Alaudi Musaev, *Makhmud Esambaev*, Molodaia gvardiia, Moscou, 2011, p. 134ff, in particular p. 146 ; see also Esembaev's own account in 1973 for the Soviet television, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzD9JGNh4\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzD9JGNh4_c); Andreas Hilger, *Sowjetisch-indische Beziehungen 1941 - 1966. Imperiale Agenda und nationale Identität in der Ära von Dekolonisierung und Kaltem Krieg*, Böhlau Verlag, 2018.

end of the film, the reconciliation of father and son had also universal resonance, in global South as in the Italian American working-class family of Edward Villalela<sup>66</sup>.

The aesthetics developed from New York to Baku in the 1970s, with bare-chested dancers wearing flesh-colored tights mimicking full body nudity, remained difficult if not impossible for an Algerian dancer to adopt.

The reflections of dancer and choreographer El-Cheriffa on how dance was intimately linked to daily life in his early Algerian childhood, and his own discovery of Western classical dance echo the testimony of Azerbaijani Maksrud Mamedov and Rafiga Akhundova. Unlike the latter, however, the practice of classical ballet never prevailed in his own professional trajectory after his return from the Soviet Union: “In Algeria traditional dance is not taught in conservatories, it is not necessary, the transmission is still very present on a daily basis. The first toys of Maghreb children were darboukas or bendirs. They have fun dancing, playing rhythms, having little parties ;;; as far as I am concerned, at first I practiced traditional dance in a group of amateurs at university, then I joined a small troupe of semi-professionals. It was then that I felt the need to learn other gestural techniques. (...) I wanted to become a professional dancer. So I joined the Algiers conservatory in the 1960s. we were only taught classical dance, more contemporary approaches did not yet exist”<sup>67</sup>. The way the body is solicited in Maghreb dances in which he had grown up is radically different from academic Western dance, as El-Cheriffa further explains: “North African gestures are based on relaxation, spontaneity, naturalness and connection to the ground. The choreography is danced to repetitive music, many of which bring you back to trance.”<sup>68</sup>

Finally, in addition to the question of the training and exposure of respectively female and male bodies, their reunion on stage deeply renewed by Western contemporary dance probably constituted a major obstacle to the adoption of Western ballet. The sensuality of the pas de deux were unavoidable moments of any show and any tour of the Bolshoi, the Kirov or any other Soviet ballet companies. Azerbaijani ballet *Legenda o liubvi* offered a renewal of the old association between themes inspired by the legends of the Eastern world and sensuality.

According to the fragmented information available for the leading artists of the Algerian National Ballets, they all had been exposed to this conception of dance, from Paris to Moscow, even if Maya Plisetskaya has accounted how difficult it was at least until the end of the 1970s to make accept too explicit choreographies.<sup>69</sup>

The ballets dedicated to the Algerian revolution however made it possible to dodge the question of duets, to favor the collective and to forget tights and overalls and instead to wear stage fatigues, echoing traditional male war dances.

The ballet *Les 3R* was not totally isolated in the production of Algerian new ballets.

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<sup>66</sup> Edward Villella with Larry Kaplan, *Prodigal Son*, *op. cit.*, especially p. 60.

<sup>67</sup> Interview in *Musiques traditionnelles en Rhône-Alpes*, April-May-June 1998 n° 29 (File in CND, Pantin)

<sup>68</sup> Djamila Henni-Chebra Djamila, Christian Poché (Ed), *Les danses dans le monde arabe ou l'héritage des almées*, L'Harmattan, 1996 ; Christian Poché, *Dictionnaire des musiques et danses traditionnelles de la Méditerranée*, Fayard, 2005

<sup>69</sup> See for example la progressive réintégration sur la scène du Bolchoï au début des années 1970 d'un adagio litigieux de Carmen-Suite, chorégraphié par le Cubain Alberto Alonso en 1967, à la double faveur d'un coup de pouce silencieux de Kossyguine en 1968 et d'une tournée à Londres en 1969. *Ia Plisetskaia*, Moscow. Some ballets performed by the New York City Ballet during their 1962 Soviet tour that had so impressed Rafiga Akhundova were so suggestive that they were ban for a long time by the US television.

The choreographer Elhadi Cheriffa, who is credited as a lead dancer in the program of *Les 3 R*, choreographed *El Lahib*, a ballet in seven tableaux about the Liberation War that ended with Independence. Designed for the festivities commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Revolution, it was performed the first time and then in several occasions over years. The music was still by Rauf Gadzhiev and it had been planned that the composer, his wife, herself a Soviet teacher in Algiers, and El-Cheriffa would come to Moscow in November 1974 to record the score.<sup>70</sup> His ballet *Hourya* (1979) is also devoted to the agrarian revolution. During the fall of 1977, he also trained the young dancers of l'Institut national d'art dramatique et chorégraphique (INADC) of Bordj El Kiffan for a ballet named "Sur une légende des Aurès". The purpose was clearly a political one as it was supposed to stage the conflict between "the feudal class and the mass of the workers". Still, the ballet was now set in a legendary past. Rauf Gadzhiev had again composed the music. He himself commented the score, underlining the presence of modern elements such as adagio and variations, but obviously the music was mostly drawn on the "rich Algerian musical legacy"<sup>71</sup>.

### **Another path to Cultural emancipation ?Panarabism, panafricanism and the promotion of the Non-Aligned folklore**

In a sense, the ballet choreographed by Maksud Mamedov and Rafiga Akhundova sounds really in tune with the spirit of the time, saturated with the notions of Revolution. A ballet entirely devoted to the Algerian revolution(s) could only match the demand of the Algerian leadership if not the taste of all the Algerian society.

#### *Festivals of the African cultural Renaissance*

Nevertheless, the fate of the ballet and the absence of development of modern ballet in Algeria points to the inadequacy of the project. By contrast, the much better status of the ballet specialized in folk dances corresponds to a vision of postcolonial identity where the exhumation of traditions allegedly muffled by colonizers and the rebirth of folk art constituted a major goal of any cultural policy. Moreover, Algerian leadership, as already suggested, envisioned the development of their country inside a geopolitical space that mostly avoided both the Western world and Soviet Union. Algeria's fate was supposed to be part of a Pan-African revolution, defined along Marxist terminology. This had clear cultural implications, since "return to origins" was for all the continent the only way toward final emancipation and self-determination<sup>72</sup>. Whether open cultural borrowing or cultural blend could be allowed or desirable depended on each country's political circumstances.

By virtue of its primary identification as a nation that overcame colonialism to build a socialist society, Algeria, as suggested above, inscribes its evolution in the ensemble of peoples waging a revolutionary struggle. Geopolitical entities such as the Maghreb or the Francophonie thus found little official echo in postcolonial Algeria, whereas its support to the Polisario Front in its fight against Morocco deepened the political fracturing of North Africa. The affirmation of an Arab and Muslim identity was embodied much more in its links with

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<sup>70</sup> AMMDM DK 15622/253 (letter to the Soviet Ambassador in Algiers, November 25, 1974)

<sup>71</sup> *El Moudjahid*, November 8 1977

<sup>72</sup> Andrew APTER, *The Pan-African Nation. Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005.

Gaddafi's Libya and the Middle East, and in the first place with the Palestinian movement, with which it shared a virulent anti-Zionism. As well, Algeria asserted itself as an African nation, and participated in the pan-African movement which reached a peak in the 1970s, although not without being contested (the belonging of Algeria and North Africa more generally to Panafricanism evolving around a black identity being strongly contested especially by the Senegalese leadership).

*Dance as demonstration of national identity and continental power*

Dance played a major role in the great events that marked the affirmation of a pan-African identity both political and cultural in the process of decolonization. Commissioned by the Algerian government, the American filmmaker William Klein has left unforgettable pictures of the blend of cultures that invaded the street of Algiers in 1969 during the Pan-African Festival, with groups of veiled Algerian women attending performances by bare-breasted dancers with painted bodies and faces. On the other hand, *fantaziya* performed by turbaned Tuaregs on horseback with guns in their hands were the favorite representation for Algerian nation. Revolutionary liberation movement from Guinea and Angola displayed fighters in military jackets who played scenes of martyrdom and revolutionary songs, the tense fist of the ANC militants dressed in tee-shirts echoed the gesture of the Black Panthers whose participation had been particularly underlined by Western historiography<sup>73</sup>. In the reputed hall Atlas, Archie Sepp's free jazz group performed a session complemented by Tuareg musicians. Whether the confrontation of the jazzmen claiming "We have come back to our land of Africa! Jazz is an African power, jazz is an African music!" with the "roaring sea of the North-African percussion" was a landmark of Pan-African spirit can be estimated by listening the recording that was released by the French label BYG/Actuel in 1971<sup>74</sup>.

Nevertheless, colored folk costumes, drums and all kind of instruments foreign to the Western orchestra definitely prevailed in this explosion of sound and color that aimed at demonstrating that revolution was African and distant from the notion of *négritude* that had been defended in Dakar during the 1966 Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres (The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966) hosted by Senegal President Senghor<sup>75</sup>.

Eight years later, in Lagos, the World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, better known as Festfac 77, was officially the Second grand messe promoting black citizenship after Dakar 66. Meanwhile, Algiers 1969 had challenged the way some African powers defined this citizenship and essentialized race while pacting with the former colonizers. As a retaliation, the question of the status of Arab cultures was raised again in Lagos. Harshly attacked during the 1969 Pan-African Festival in Algiers, Senghor now asked for an exclusion of the North Africans from the symposium that would discuss exclusively black cultural and philosophical themes and he proposed to give them a second-range status of non-participant observers. The demands of the Senegalese representatives provoked a momentary clash inside the organizational structures of the Festival. Senegal lost the battle, as their proposal was considered discriminatory and pointless. The presence of bare breasts dancers was also sharply debated, and the final ban of the wearing of wigs and the exposure of breasts by

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<sup>73</sup> Samir Meghelli, "From Harlem to Algiers: Transnational Solidarities between the African American Freedom Movement and Algeria, 1962-1978", p. 99

<sup>74</sup> Archie Sepp, Live at the Pan-African Festival, BYG Records, 1971.

<http://surrealdocuments.blogspot.com/2007/07/archie-shepp-live-at-pan-african.html>

<sup>75</sup> David Murphy (Ed.), *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966*, Liverpool University Press, 2016, especially H el ene Neveu Kringelbach, "Dance at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts: Of 'Fabulous Dancers' and Negritude Undermined", p. 64-82

female participants in FESTAC could be considered as the alignment with standards foreign to Black Africans (even if according to Andrew Apter the ban was more on the paper)<sup>76</sup>.

Festfac 77 was also a demonstration of power for the military leadership then governing Nigeria. As it has already been the case in Dakar<sup>77</sup> - and probably in Algiers? - The Festival responded to an urbanistic challenge, with foreign companies accommodated in a special village and performances taking place in halls of huge dimensions, the Centre for Black African Arts and Civilizations (CBAAC) being one of the most outstanding architectural legacy of this mass event. The National Algerian Ballet performed his major show during the night of January 18 1977 in the National Stadium with an audience of 1800<sup>78</sup>. The show was sufficiently powerful to attract the attention of the audience. *Fantaziya* with rifle and horses and above all Hoggar war dances had been the most applauded. Algerian press correspondents reported that music and rythms of South Algeria, performed by *tazemart* (metallic flute) and the drums of *tbel* sounded familiar to African Blacks. The number of dancers, the spectacular character and sound of the show (the *youyou* performed by the women, rifles of the men), the flamboyant costumes were all essential elements to fulfill the contract and to be part of a great pan-African mass. A journalist noticed during the rehearsals in Algiers that the heavy costumes masked (and undoubtedly limited) the movements of the bodies. But he conceded that at the end it was a true folkloric show that had been offered to the international audience in Lagos<sup>79</sup>.

Lagos Festival features among the international cultural events during which the Algerian National Ballet was awarded, along the Murcia Festival (1968), Izmir Festival (1973), Samsun Festivals (1985) that mapped geopolitical areas with Algeria at the crossroads of Mediterranean, Arabic and African worlds.<sup>80</sup>

Beyond cultural issues, Lagos Festival was again about postcolonial order and politics of the whole African continent. After the 1969 Algiers Festival, the OAU (Organization for African Unity or Organisation de l'Unité Africaine, created in May 1963) tried for the second time to insert its political agenda within the elaboration and demonstration of a genuine African culture that would have the power to attract other parts of the world's population considered as diasporic elements. Under the constant pressure of Algeria, with Taleb Ibrahimy as a member of its executive Council since 1968, UNESCO which had sponsored Senghor's Dakar Festival in 1966, was now pushed to collaborate with OAU upon the protection and promotion of the liberation movements fighting in Africa against colonization and apartheid. UNESCO's implication in Festfac 77 was then a recognition of the political agenda of the event, albeit clearly in a less revolutionary mood than in Algiers in 1969.

Since the mid-1950s Marxist revolution and decolonization had fueled this seemingly organic solidarity between separate parts of a mythic African identity, reuniting in the 1960s Black Africans, Black Panthers from the United States and North Africans and therefore creating a bridge with the Middle East, which was now eroding in the late 1970s.

#### *A counter model : when East meets West at the Shiraz international Arts Festival*

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<sup>76</sup> Andrew APTER, "Beyond Négritude: Black cultural citizenship and the Arab question in FESTAC 77", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2016, Vol. 28, No. 3, 313-326  
Andrew APTER, *The Pan-African Nation. Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005

<sup>77</sup> Eloi Fiquet, « L'impact durable d'une action artistique : le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres de Dakar en 1966 », *Africultures*, n° 73, 2008, p. 18-25.

<sup>78</sup> Tahar Djaout, *Le Ballet National Algérien à Lagos*, *El Moudjahid*, January 26, 1977

<sup>79</sup> Djaout, art.cit.

<sup>80</sup> File « Ensemble National de Danses Populaires », Algerian Cultural Center, Paris

Beyond internal differences, the Pan-African festivals in Algiers in 1969 and in Lagos in 1977 contrasted sharply with another large-scale cultural manifestation of global South: the annual Shiraz Arts Festival, founded in 1967 by the wife of the Shah of Iran, Farah Pahlavi. There, oil money also used to flow but in the service of a political project diametrically opposed. In a quite different aesthetics, Western avant-gardism in dance and music, Béjart, Xenakis and Stockhausen among others, with ballerinas and male dancers in costumes suggesting naked bodies performed on the Iranian landscapes and antic ruins's background next to Southern folk dance and music companies in rich costumes, including the Algerian National Ballet. This attempt to bridge East and West, North and South sank with the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Iranian Islamic regime<sup>81</sup>.

#### *Post-Boumediene's Algeria's retreat into a national identity*

The progressive erasure of the big federalist visions (Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism) developed by postcolonial leaders, the initial goal of nation-building devoted to the politics of folklore initiated by the Algerian government after the Independence with the creation of the National Institute of Music headed by D.Yelles (creating a record archive, notating melodies and texts, teaching solfeggio, making use of a range of dissemination media) and the trend to "festivalization" in newly independent Algeria<sup>82</sup> that led to mass cultural events generally held during the month of Ramadan along a pyramidal structure (from local to national) remained a major aspect of cultural life in post-Boumediene Algeria. The Algerian National Ballet was part of this project, although it was never the object of attention so sustained as the African Ballets had been in postcolonial Guinée under Sekou Touré. Unlike the Algerian ballet, the African ballets created by Fodéba Keïta in Paris in 1950 had a colonial past of nearly a decade, although their change in status in the wake of independence led to profound changes. Hosted by the Théâtre national, itself an under-resourced institution that lacked a modern building and equipment, the dancers were nevertheless appointed as state's dancers<sup>83</sup>.

The tours abroad in countries with high Algerian emigration (and repeated manifestations of xenophobia), a warm welcome from the diaspora was part of this nation building, even if the recognition by the local population of the host countries was an even bigger challenge.

Dance therefore remained a tool for consolidating a national identity, with each performance containing dances from various regions and ethnics of the Algerian territory, a major issue, particularly in the context of rising opposition from Berber speakers<sup>84</sup>.

#### *The fate of isolated artists*

Algerian dancers and choreographers trained in France and Eastern Europe, including Soviet Union then appeared (and still appear) as isolated islands, whose talent and knowledge

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<sup>81</sup> Mahasti Afshar, Festival of Arts Shiraz Persepolis,:

<https://asiasociety.org/files/uploads/126files/Festival%20of%20Arts%2C%20Shiraz-Persepolis%201967-77.pdf>

and the documentary film *Sound the Trumpets Beat the Drums* (1968)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOHqZQd7jM0>

<sup>82</sup> Jane Goodman, *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video*, Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 59 ff

<sup>83</sup> See the 1980 mission report of François Rouchart, an expert for UNESCO,

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000042247?posInSet=22&queryId=N-ee80457d-ebec-4f4d-8171-11b34233bf4b>

<sup>84</sup> Jane Goodman, *Berber Culture ...op.cit.*, James McDougall (ed), *Nation, Society and Culture in North Africa*, Cass, London, 2003

remained largely marginalized, or under-exploited, even before the Black decade of the 1990s.

Waciny Laredj's novel *Les Ailes de la Reine*<sup>85</sup>, illustrates fictionally these biographies, staging the Russian Anatolia, who choreographs *The Marriage of Figaro* of Mozart and *Scheherazade* of Rimsky-Korsakov but also passionately seeks the traces of Kabyle music to create a new ballet, *La Berbère*. At the end of the 1980s, twenty-five years after her installation in Algeria, she is fired by the director of the Institute of dance who is now growing a beard and she is driven out of the country. Miryam, the young Algerian woman she had taken under her wing to teach her to dance, whose father, a fighter for the FLN, had been assassinated by the OAS, is shot in the head during the demonstrations of October 1988 and ended up dying.

Back to a non-fictional world, fragmented information on the fate of the dancers and choreographers who have been mentioned in this paper suggest the high difficulty to implement Western classical ballet and modern dance in Algeria, the departure to France, the former metropole, in the 1990s and also a strong commitment to transmit the Algerian heritage abroad, in addition to other Mediterranean influences<sup>86</sup>.

Conversely, attempts by dancers from Algerian emigration to develop a new ballet came up against a lack of means and above all perhaps a lack of (male) recruits<sup>87</sup>.

The trajectory of Fatima Zohra Namous Senouci, now the head of Algiers Opera seems an exception or can be viewed as an attempt to take advantage of international cultural expertise, even if in a distinct pattern, still staging folk dances and patriotic tableaux<sup>88</sup>. China's construction of a modern building for the Opera in a new district of Algiers signals the arrival of new players in cultural cooperation... while remaining largely apart from international competition in this field in global South.<sup>89</sup>

More generally, a prosopographical study of the dancers and choreographers of the National Ballet of Algeria, including in particular the dancers who participated in the ballet *Les 3 R*, whose names appear in the preserved programs, but of whom nothing is known apart from the few mentioned above, would be of great interest in order to grasp the modalities of appropriation of a certain conception of the body and of dance calling into question more traditional conceptions<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Waciny Laredj, *Les Ailes de la Reine* translated from Arabic(Algeria) by Marcel Bois in collaboration with the author, Actes Sud, 2009 (Sayyidatu-l-maqâm, Cologne-Beyrouth, Al-Gamal, 1993; Mise en musique de la vie de Fadhma Aït Amrouche par Mohamed Iguerbouchen

<sup>86</sup> Liliane El Hachemi returned to live in reunified Germany in the mid-1990s and worked, among other things, for the Cottbus theater. See Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

<sup>87</sup> Projects developed by French dancers and choreographs Abou Lagraa, Nacera Belaza ou Ahmed Khemis, see <https://www.lefigaro.fr/culture/2010/10/11/03004-20101011ARTFIG00433-du-sang-neuf-au-ballet-national-d-alger.php>; cf aussi [https://www.liberation.fr/theatre/2009/07/20/la-danse-reprend-pied-en-algerie\\_571407/](https://www.liberation.fr/theatre/2009/07/20/la-danse-reprend-pied-en-algerie_571407/). On Nacera Belaza's project, Entre deux rives de Nacera Belaza, <https://www.cie-nacerabelaza.com/>; see also more recently Walid Bouchakour, Je danse donc je suis, *El Watan*, April 29, 2017, <https://www.elwatan.com/pages-hebdo/arts-et-lettres/je-danse-donc-je-suis-29-04-2017>; on the difficulties of the National Ballet after the Black decade, see <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/171772/politique/alg-rie-cinq-danseurs-du-ballet-national-obtiennent-l-asile-politique-au-canada/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.lnr-dz.com/2021/07/06/la-diversite-du-patrimoine-culturel-algerien-celebree/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.dezeen.com/tag/opera-house/>; Nari Shelekpayev, "Making Opera in the Steppe"; The new Opera may have look like an empty shell, before the nomination of Fatima Zohra Namous Senouci at its head: see Mohamed Mouloudj, "Du rifici à l'opéra d'Alger", <https://www.vitamedz.com/fr/Algerie/du-rifici-a-l-opera-d-alger-6959060-Articles-0-0-1.html>

<sup>90</sup> As an example of similar trajectories, in a documentary film, several dancers of *Les Ballets Africains de Guinée* have been interviewed and give a priceless account on recruitment, training, rehearsals, foreign tours of



## Conclusion:

In 1947 in Algiers, the French composer and musicologist Léopold Louis Barbès, born in Algeria and a specialist of Arabic music, made a comparison between Soviet non-European Republics and French Algeria that was quite unfavorable to France: » Did not the Soviet Muslim, Tatar or Caucasian republics see, thanks to music, taught with enthusiasm, the emergence in a few years of high-class singers and virtuoso instrumentalists, at the same time as first-rate composers? Is the dream so absurd to see, one day, on the stage of Algiers an opera in Arabic, with music written by a native musician, brilliantly magnifying some episode of the rich history of this country? Finally, will not progress find, through such well-understood and appreciated teachings, to manifest itself by provoking among Muslim musicians the temptation to also know European music, to taste it at its value and to enjoy it fully? »<sup>91</sup>. Leo Barbes' dream never materialized, at least under French rule<sup>92</sup>.

As a matter of fact, the graft did not really take between Soviet and Algerian worlds either. The mediation of Soviet Azerbaijanis did not bridge the cultural gap between the different conceptions of the role and function of art as performance and creation - especially in the field of dance: in the West in the XXth century, the competition between a conservative and highly-elitist definition of the classical ballet and a permanent search for innovation made of borrowings from non-European cultures while remaining strongly centered on norms inherited from (Russian) classical ballet, in European Soviet Union the search for a form of perfection defined by a Russian ballet that had been the matrix of classical dance in the first decades of the twentieth century, and finally in the former French colony an obsession with cultural renaissance freed from Western cultural hegemony. The temptation to inscribe Algeria in a pan-African context was, however, challenged by the injunction at the same time to protect an Arab-Muslim identity.

Finally, the role of urban dances first developed in the Western world appeared to be the most powerful vector in the revival of dance in Algeria after the Black Decade of the 1990s, in a pattern very different from post-Soviet Azerbaijan, where cultural hierarchies remain those inherited from the Soviet period, despite a strongly weakened link with the former capitals as a place of training and cultural prescription.

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the company at its beginning, when the troupe, founded in 1950 in Paris, turned into a symbol of new decolonized Guinea after 1958.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZDeSodjyUQ>; on the decline of ballet from the second half of the 1980s and the dramatic situation of dancers, due to a dramatic shift in Guinean cultural policies, Clarisse Juompan-Yakam, " Ballets africains: quand la Guinée abandonne ses danseurs", April 14, 2015, Jeune Afrique, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/229374/culture/ballets-africains-quand-la-guin-e-abandonne-ses-danseurs/>

<sup>91</sup> "Les républiques soviétiques musulmanes, tatares ou caucasiennes n'ont-elles pas vu, grâce à la musique, enseignée dans l'enthousiasme, surgir en quelques années chanteurs de grande classe et instrumentistes virtuoses, en même temps que compositeurs de premier plan ? Le rêve est-il si absurde de voir, un jour, représenter sur la scène d'Alger un opéra en langue arabe, avec musique écrite par un musicien autochtone, magnifiant avec éclat quelque épisode de l'histoire si riche de ce pays ? Enfin le progrès de trouvera-t-il pas, par de tels enseignements bien compris et appréciés, à se manifester en provoquant chez les musiciens musulmans la tentation de connaître aussi la musique européenne, de la goûter à sa valeur et d'en jouir pleinement ? "

<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Barbès contributed to the documentation of the ecstatic dances evoked by El Cheriffa in a way characteristic of colonial science. Emile Dermenghem et Leo Louis Barbès, « Essai sur la Hadhra des Aïssaoua d'Algérie », "Revue africaine", tome XCV, n° 428-429, p. 289-314

As peripheral as it may seem, the development of dance as a public art illustrates the strongly differentiated kind of domination exerted by colonial France on the one hand and Soviet Russia (or more accurately Soviet Europeans) on the other hand in their respective non-European, Muslim territories. It also illustrates how the abyssal gap between Algeria at the wake of independence and post-Stalinist Soviet Azerbaijan, far from being overcome in the cultural field since the mid-1960s, led to very different cultural paths to these days, including after the fall of Soviet Union and the turmoil in terms of cultural values and identity experienced by post-Soviet independent Azerbaijan.