

At Mzab
An Amazigh society in Algeria
confronting a crisis
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Foreword

The At Mzab¹ (with emphasis on the z) are part of the Amazigh and constitute an ancient civilisation for which evidence dates from prehistoric times. Their history has left the At Mzab in possession of a traditional architecture of world-wide reputation. Since 1982 the Mzab has been listed among UNESCO's world heritage sites. Its palm groves and its technically sophisticated irrigation systems, its celebrated skill in tapestry, its social structures - these have sustained and inspired this oasis society through the last twelve centuries.

Whilst the focus of this article is to bring factual information, it will also succinctly show the viable relationship between a harsh natural environment and an Amazigh society still deeply attached to its own values, but which it would be wrong to assume inflexible. In this society, the Amazigh language is the necessary bedrock for its existence; religious practices are followed, often more profoundly than many might imagine: and younger generations are exhorted to live in the world of humanity which progresses at a dizzying pace, yet learn from and apply the lessons of the past.

Prehistoric stone-age sites have been located in the region, and the evidence points to the presence of early troglodyte communities with their dwellings carved out of the limestone hillsides. Letters belonging to the Lybico-Berber alphabet have been confirmed throughout the Mzab. Yet an enormous amount of work remains, from exploration and discovery to collecting and deciphering these symbols. Whilst the several dozen uninhabited towns of the Mzab indicate the presence of Amazigh prior to the arrival of the Ibadi movement (we know the Ibadi rite was developed in the area among the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, some thousand years ago) it remains true however that knowledge of the early people groups living in this area before the arrival of Islam is still very limited.

¹ The phonetic form "At Mzab", which in a former arabisation process is transmitted by the Arabising elite in the forms "Beni Mzab / Mozab / Mizab / Mosaab" consists of three components: "At+M+zab". Briefly, according to the historical and linguistic evidence which cannot be detailed here, the second component "M" must have derived from "N", which is a preposition attesting ownership in the Amazigh language. Oral tradition among the Imuhaq people has maintained the "NZab" pronunciation to this day. The phenomenon of switching "N" to "M" is attested for in Tamazight. It is worth pointing out that the anthroponym At N Zab is in itself a historic document, revealing useful evidence to scholars.

Geography, climate and demography

The Mزاب is a very arid region of Algeria, characterised by a dry atmosphere and intense evaporation - enemies of natural vegetation. It is situated in the northern Sahara, 600 kilometres south of Algiers, in the Wilaya de Ghardaia (Tagherdayt², in Amazigh). The region is a geomorphological entity stretching over a dry rocky blackish-brown plateau where the average altitude is about 500 metres. The plateau had been subject to strong river erosion at the beginning of the Quaternary period which fashioned in its southern part great flat-topped outcrops and gouged valleys around Iyzer³ Mزاب (Oued Mزاب / Mزاب Valley). The tight interplay of these valleys has led to the region being referred to as a net. In terms of rainfall, it must be stated that for certain exceptional years, as at the beginning of 1991, in Autumn 1994 and recently at the beginning of October 2008, flash floods bore down on Iyzer Mزاب with loss of life and great material destruction.

In the absence of any reliable census figures, yet without straying into the realm of unreality, we can say that the Amazighs of Mزاب are currently 55% - plus or minus 5% - of the population of Wilaya (181,500 - plus or minus 16,500). By virtue of its assets, the region of the Mزاب has experienced over more than a century now a consistent influx of Arab-speakers, especially nomads of Melkite persuasion . Furthermore, since independence there has been an inflow of Amazigh and Arabic speakers working in the various sectors of the economy.

Ethnic origins of the At Mزاب people

The scenario is far from being simple. We need to acknowledge that the increase in population of the Mزاب was not only as a result of the collapse of the Rustumid state and the permanent exodus of the peoples of Warejlen (Ouargla) and Isedraten (Amazighs who had absorbed Ibadi culture). It was also caused by the previous migration of families from the Aurès region, from eastern Algeria, from part of Libya and from what is present-day Tunisia. If the geographical origins of Amazigh Tamazgha evident in Mزاب society do indeed overlap on any level, the current culture is blissfully unaware of the fact.

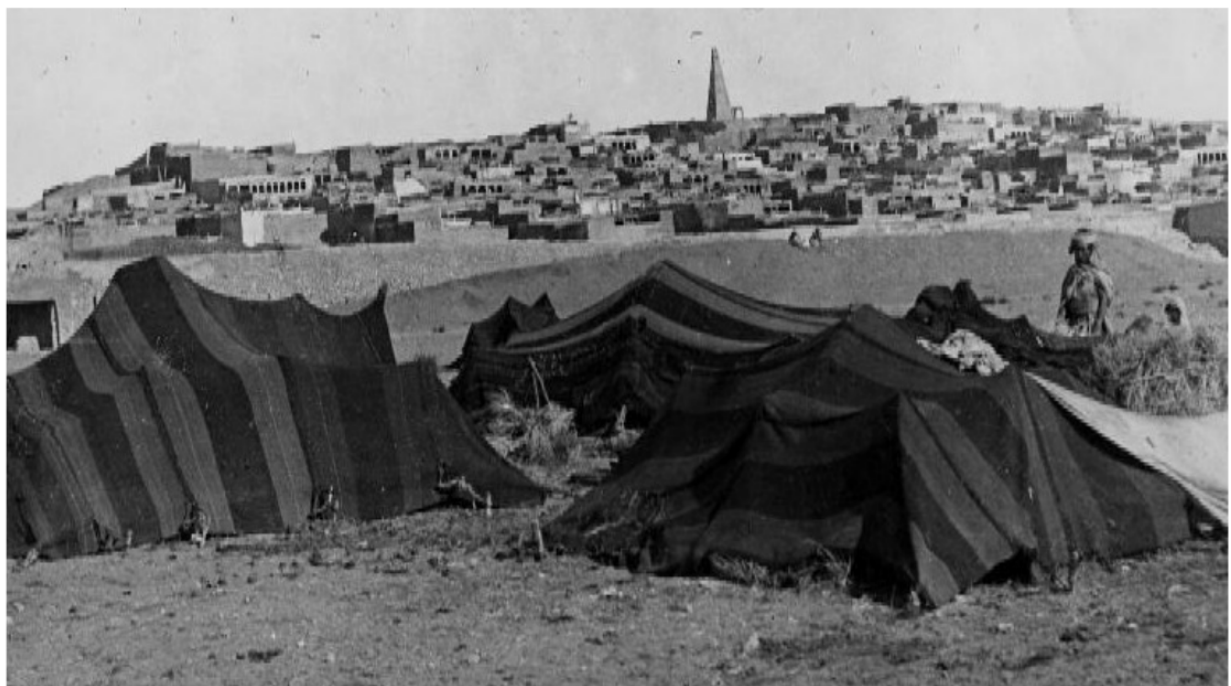
² This toponym, for reasons too complex to explain here, has a form and a meaning related to the language of the human settlement occupying it since the dawn of time. The semantic form of Tayerdayt that some equate with tayerdat / tayerdayt, the feminine form of ayerda "mouse", is a nonsense derivation, being a homonym that is erroneously linked with the toponym Tayerdayt. According to a hypothesis which has been supported, the toponym Tayerdayt, meaning "hollow / depression in the ground" is made up of: "ta-t" (feminine singular marker, in Tamazight) + gher (deriving from iyer / ager meaning "field") + adday (lower part, below, low). This fits with the meaning of "hollow / depression". Elsewhere, in Tamazight language of Adrar Nfusa in Libya, the word Tazerdayt is well documented, and means "land situated alongside the wadi or riverbed".

³ Ighzrt Mزاب, Amazigh in origin, is the authentic toponym of "Oued Mزاب / Mزاب Valley". Widely used in written documents, the name Oued Mزاب is constantly trying to supplant the Amazigh form Ighzert Mزاب.

All the substantial evidence leads one to embrace Ibn Kheldoun's theory: the ancestral line of the At Mzab goes back to the eponymous Zenete people. According to this the At Mzab are the brothers of the At Toujin, At zerdal and At Abdelway. Moreover, these three branches are descended from the At Badin tribe, brothers of the At Rached, whose ancestry dates back to Udjana, the presumed ancestor of the Zenete people (izenten, in Tamazight). This eponymous family line goes back to Imedyasen via the Getules during the pre-Christian period, some of whom joined the Garamantes. The linguistic evidence for the At Mzab belonging to the Zenete branch is incontrovertible. There is plenty to suggest that the Amazigh variant used these days by the Mzab Amazighs is a close relation to those Zenete variants such as Tacawit in the Aures, Tazennatit in the Adrar region, Tunisian Matmata ... and Tarifit from northern Morocco. Regarding the establishing of the black and Métis community in the Mzab, it is largely the product of trans-Saharan trade links, which in the old days was flourishing, but which was stopped around 1848 when slave labour was outlawed. The matter of the existence of the At Mzab community is self-evident, since it clusters together clans and homogeneous families. The underlying principles defining the At Mzab can be grouped under four criteria:

1. Linguistic criterion (the use of an Amazigh variant called Tumzabt).
2. Historical criterion (the At Mzab have a pre-history and a social history stretching over thousands of years).
3. Cultural criterion (the At Mzab participate in Ibadi Muslim rituals).
4. Cultural criterion (lifestyle, arts and crafts, practical knowledge, traditions...).

Historical Overview



One of the Mzab ancient towns towards the end of the nineteenth century.

When approaching the history of the At Mzab people, we can state that they must be considered as a part of Tamazgha (North Africa). To understand the Mzab today requires us to pick up the threads of a wider history, rich in incidents and lessons learned.

The historical proto-Tumzabt Amazigh people-group living in the Mzab since time immemorial had absorbed Amazigh families who found refuge in this area during various invasions, particularly Roman: these peoples had built pre-Islamic igherman (towns). After the arrival of Islam, and in the seventh century the Christian era, the Amazigh peoples in the area adopted the new religion. A great number of ancient ruins bear witness to the particular presence of pre-Ibadi Amazigh people living there, such as the Talezdit, the Awlawal, the Tmazert, the Bukyaw... This Amazigh population - semi-nomadic we suppose - chiefly survived on livestock breeding and seasonal crops. From the eleventh century the Mzab experienced a golden age and a veritable renaissance, characterized by the Ibadi rituals adopted by the At Mzab people more than 10 centuries ago. This change in mindset and a renewed population growth encouraged the birth of the At Mzab community as it is known today. From that point on five igherman were built on rocky outcrops, namely Ghardaia (Tayerdayt in the Amazigh language), Melika (At-Mlicet), Bounoura (At-Bunur), Al-Atteuf (Tajnint) and Beni-Isguen (At-Izgen). Two further towns – Berriane (Bergan) and Guerrara (Zegrara) are part of the At Mzab territory, although they are situated outside the Mzab valley: the first one 45 km. to the north, the second 110 km. to the north-east.

Life in Society

Mzab towns are organized according to family lines: the lineage (or taddart according to local nomenclature) is a succession of descendants claiming common ancestry: a patrilineal system traced through the males, unlike the structure of Imuhaq (Touaregues) society. The suff⁴ (political alliance between groupings) is a nexus of several lines each bringing solidarity and sympathy, an alliance whose nature lacks any institutional aspect and which can be reconfigured at any time. The option of leaving or remaining within the suff depends on one's lineage. The choice depends on common interests: one is defined by virtue of one's family and its affiliation. Each town brings together clans that themselves constitute suff alliances. The tribe is structured as a complex pyramid having three levels. The first level comprises the tribal groupings (tiâcirin); based on genealogy they bring together the tiddar (extended families with the same official name and established eponymous

⁴ It should be noted that the suff is not based on ethnicity reflecting any split into nomadic / sedentary, or Arab / Amazigh. Quite the opposite is true: it embraces all divisions because belonging to a lineage is a requirement which takes no account of the nature of the group, or of its origins or its religious affiliation.

ancestry). The fraction or grouping is a foundational administrative entity managed by a representative council.

It has common assets, particularly a central building where it holds its assemblies and conducts wedding celebrations. On the second level, a cluster of fractions constitutes the tribe; this is not essentially a matter of genealogical ancestry but rather a permanent political alliance of fractions and clans. Lastly, the third level: an alliance of tribes under the aegis of the lâezzaben⁵ (Ibadhi clerics). This is why E. Masqueray pointed out that the agherm in the Mzab is a second-ranking town which, tripartite in structure, shows striking similarities to the ancient Greek city state.

Today among the modern generation the feeling of belonging to the suff has disappeared. The changes in the life of the region have had a marked impact on social manners and behaviour. New forms of individualized thinking are emerging, and attitudes reflecting more varied patterns of society are increasingly prevalent.

Structures of urban life and architecture

The organization of urban life in the Mzab is Amazigh in its essence and Islamic in its doctrine. In order to understand the influence of the Ibadi ritual it is necessary to examine closely the socio-cultural setting of the Amazigh peoples which have embraced Ibadism⁶. The architecture of Mzab - in its specific environment and responding to strict requirements – is characterized by simplicity. That is why there is a practical hostility to wealth and ostentatious behaviour. Everywhere in the towns of the Mzab communal energies have – over the centuries – been channelled into the building of the seven igherman, the workforce exercising the prime knowledge and practical skills consolidated during the golden age of Tahert, knowledge highly esteemed throughout, and mastered by the At Mzab. It is worthwhile stating that the Mzab forms a continuity of Isedraten⁷ (Sedrata), ephemeral and long buried under the desert sands. The founding of the current seven towns (igherman, singular agherm) had been spread over a period of almost seven centuries, with the founding of the final town Bergan towards the end of the seventeenth century. These cities are distinguished by their unique architecture, and the arrangement of religious and profane spaces (mosque and cemetery, dwellings and market-place), interior and exterior planning for the family home as well as for the town itself. The landscape of

⁵ The word lâezzaben is derived from the singular lâezzab which means "recluse" and by extension member of council of the mosque.

⁶ It is a wrong version of history which teaches that the islamization of the Tamazgha (North Africa) is due to the conquest of Okba Ibn Nafea. He did not manage to propagate the new religion in North Africa by force of arms. Proof of this is that he himself had been killed in battle by the Amazigh agellid (warlord) Aksil (Kosseila). The most objective historical accounts reveal that the islamization of the Amazigh people is the work of various non-belligerent missionaries belonging to the Ibadi branch of Islam.

⁷ The toponym Isedraten originates from an Amazigh tribe of the Izenten (Zenetes). The putative date of its destruction by a leader called El-Mançour El-Machriq (of unknown nationality) goes back to 1274, Gregorian era. Once this town had been abandoned by its inhabitants, it was buried by sand.

the Mزاب offers a contrasting palette of colours: the pinks and ochres of the hillsides, the greens of the luxuriant oases, the vivid blue of the sky and the pastel blue of the townships where houses are stacked one on top of another.



Interior of a house showing ammas n tiddar (patio), tisefri (living room), tisunan (stairs) and innayen (traditional kitchen).

The typical ayerm is built on an exposed knoll or hillock, in order to satisfy four fundamental principles:

1. To protect it from any incursion and / or attack from outside, by exploiting the hilly terrain surrounding the ayerm
2. To protect and to free up land for cultivation.
3. To provide protection from flooding for the urban dwellings and associated activities within the ksar (city, citadel).
4. To ensure the best possible protection against the harsh climate.

Planting the ayerm with palm trees forms the hub and focus of human activity within a geographical expanse. The key social spaces that the settled population has are:

1. Ayerm (walled town): a protected habitable space allowing family and social life to thrive.
2. Tijemmiwin (palm tree plantations): place for growing food and for outdoor life.
3. Tindal (cemeteries): space for the dead.

Each ayerm is organised around three spaces or structural elements, with a network of streets (main street, side street, smaller dead-end alleys): The spaces are:

1. Religious and social centre: the mosque (tamesjida).
2. Private dwelling place (tiddar).
3. Public centre, male and non-religious, the market place (souk).

The siting of each ayerm meets these requirements, and the facts seem only to emphasise the notion of a desire for isolation and security in the context of oasis life, where the safety and familiarity inside sits in contrast to the hostile and unknown space beyond. As a result of this, Mzab society was forced to provide completely for its very life-giving, substantial needs just as much as for its palm plantations created in the desert. Elsewhere, Ibadism and Tamazight as language and culture make up the dual entity, such that it is difficult to dissociate an umzab (Mozabite) from Ibadism.

Culture

A culture which fails to be contemporary becomes an anachronism and is bound for oblivion by the direct route. Diversity, self-expression, transformation and prosperity are the fruits of vitality in a culture; such diversity is as precious as biodiversity. In the Mzab there has always been a literary and cultural life, even though the culture is based on oral traditions. At the moment this invisible heritage is documented by a great wealth of manuscripts relating to various domains, be they historical, linguistic, religious, legal, social ... and literary. Such rich diversity had in no time caught the attention of Europeans who harvested it for use in much interdisciplinary research.

It is culture which expresses the most profound wealth of the Mzab. Each period of history has left a rich legacy of technical prowess and knowledge which constantly evolves in each generation. Regarding the current generations, it is their evident duty to consider how the cultural heritage of the Mzab can be preserved to reflect its true glory, whether the range is expressed via poetic, technical, or artistic means. The presence and power of popular culture is a national reality; its status is given legitimacy through its structures. The future of the At Mzab depends fully and more pervasively than ever on the relationship of these structures to the particular linguistic and cultural elements of Amazigh culture, in harmony with their universal religion.

The long list of oral folk tales (tinfas, in the Amazigh language of the Mzab) - in their latest stage successfully resisting oblivion - requires an act of rescue through the written form. Traditional story-telling is situated at the interface of two types of

society, one traditional, one emerging. It is an inventory offering a varied menu of themes and typologies. Simplifying the pattern somewhat, we can class the stories in three categories:

1. Legends inspired by holy texts, yet shaped to the realities of geography, culture, economy and social life.
2. Stories with their roots in the Mزاب region, and whose particular themes are embedded there.
3. Stories inspired by well-known works belonging to other cultures (such as "A Thousand and One Nights") with no specific links to the historical reality of the region.

Excluding the stories of the first category, the others show common features, as follows:

- Regarding their content, the stories are short, sometimes very short (anecdotal and pertaining to legend)
- The anecdote recounts the origin of an adage or a legend.
- The hero is always of lowly birth: a widow, an orphan, a pious person, a young girl, etc.
- Being oral in form the narrative is flexible – details emerge and disappear depending on the story-teller.
- The traditional story has no named source; it stems from the world of popular anonymous story-telling.
- A considerable number of the stories have no title. Where there is one, it is the hero's name or is a traditional short formulaic one.
- The oral story is related by a woman keeping vigil.
- Unlike the art forms of song and dance, the popular story is also appreciated by holy men.
- Stories told in the Mزاب, like those in the rest of Tamazgha, have corresponding versions in the Mediterranean tradition.

Oral expression is the marked feature of various intellectual and artistic forms originating in the Mزاب. Despite the long-standing oral heritage (stories, wise sayings, poems, proverbs, songs or other forms of expression) being the conveyor of a whole treasure-trove of intellectual, moral and artistic worth, everything has given the impression that for literate Arabic-speakers only import of a religious nature is worth writing down. Today it can be stated that the transition from an oral cultural production to its written form was signalled in the 1980s by the creation of the Tumzabt council and its resolute male members. These men marked out the beginnings of the path for the Amazigh language in the Mزاب to move from the oral stage to the written. Currently, the Mزاب numbers dozens of men who have produced hundreds of poems and prose. The number of poets has been rising steadily, especially since the 1990s, and poetry collections achieve publication these

days. Moreover, the early 1990s saw the beginnings of Tamazight being taught in the Mzab at the Tagherdaght El-Islah institute, with courses on the Tumzabt language and its literature – a significant marker along the path from oral to written form. This teaching, which has resisted all sorts of attempts to discourage it, continues to this day.

Furthermore, since the 1980s Mzab students have eagerly taken ownership of their language and culture by pioneering cultural exhibitions at universities and within certain associations, the most well-known being the Bergan (Berriane) association, for the protection of the environment and cultural heritage. In this context, after making requests to the HCA (Haut Commissariat à l'Amazaghité) there took place from 22nd to 24th March 2000 the second edition of the festival of Amazigh poetry at Bergan. During this time two shows were put on (Tifawt and Izmulen). As for mass media, apart from the presence of tumzabt on Channel 2, the Ghardaia local channel has since its inauguration been devoting - in a very low-key way - the bare minimum of broadcasting time to various Mzab Amazigh language programmes.

The arts

It is generally accepted that the Mzab region is behind the times with regard to Amazigh-language songs⁸, despite the priceless richness of the region's heritage. This and the whole environment can now give birth to a previously unexpressed and original dynamic and verve; this is especially the case for singing, where so many artists have been active since the 1970s. This coincided with the advent of singer Aadel Mzab, the pioneer and father of Tumzabt singing, who alone succeeded in earning regular audiences in the Mzab and in Kabylie.

Despite a history of more than three decades the present circumstances of Mzab singing in the Amazigh language is not easy to master, for various reasons. Stagnation threatens to weigh upon the process of producing songs in the Amazigh language in this region. In this essay it is important to note that the aim is to highlight briefly – without involving us in the thematic and musicological details - how contemporary singing arose in the Mzab, and under what circumstances it then developed.

⁸ It should be pointed out that the Mzab region had had amateur singers since the 1940s. Out of respect for the hostility and the ban on song within the Mzab region, these singers performed their songs secretly, and imitated the singers of Chaabi, such as Dahmane Benachour and Med Hadj El-Anka. Up to this point in time no singer had ever dreamed of taking the initiative of beginning to sing in the Mzab Amazigh region.

It is appropriate here to distinguish this singing from traditional songs performed at various social occasions (weddings, religious usage, etc) and not accompanied by musical instruments playing the tunes. In the current historical retrospective one can discern three main phases in the life of Amazigh singing: the first phase being from the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s; the second from the end of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s; and the current stage beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The first stage had its inception with Aadel Mzab's determination that history would remember his name over the generations. Aadel Mzab has remained very much in tune with the At Mzab society and life which surrounds him, as is obvious from his choice that his performer's surname should include Mzab – the name Mzab refers to the Amazigh-speaking part of Algeria's northern Sahara – acting as a rallying point and means of identity for the At Mzab people. Through faithful commitment to his artistic mission and his role as a singer, he has been part of the effort to safeguard his culture and his mother tongue.

Thanks to his perseverance over decades Aadel Mzab has been able to give singing an important role in helping to safeguard Amazigh culture, precisely at a time when numerous difficulties were also at play. Having managed to bring song to a point of breaking away from anti-musical practices, he succeeded in extricating this art form from a state of paralysis and fatal backwards drift, at the same time challenging the dire circumstances of the 1970s-1980s; at that period song was considered a taboo – akin to a sin, threatening to stifle this artistic endeavour in its infancy. Concerning the word "taboo / sin", it is worth noting that in religious traditions, everything that related to artistic musical genres, such as singing, acting and poetry were strictly forbidden by the clerical circles of *iâezzaben*. Thus the fact of dreaming and of being committed to song embroiled the author in merciless hostility, excommunication and repression.

The singer Aadel Mzab, like other Mzab singers, managed to overcome the ban by expressing boldly the life of Mzab Amazigh society. Thus this artistic manoeuvre had as its context the whole calling into question of the established order of the 1970s and 1980s. The songs with social themes full of feeling take pride of place in his artistic output stretching over many decades. His songs present a whole range; they are worth analysing closely because they guide us through this experience.

The topics of Aadel Mzab songs were varied. The artist ranged over social phenomena, religion, prophets, the role of young women in his country, circumcision and marriage, birth and death, festivals, nature, and significant events of contemporary life in the Mzab. We may note in passing that the sung poem "ay anuji" was rescued under extreme circumstances from a traditional (anonymous) collection. This highlights that a large part of the non-visible artistic heritage risks

disappearing from the field of our experience, as long as this stays buried only in the collective memory.

In the development of song during the 1980s, this chiefly focussed on the advent of two other singers, namely Slimane Othmane and Djaber Blidi, who had brought out his only album during the course of the 1980s. The demand had altered from a preliminary stage to one where there was a considerable increase in uptake.

The second stage sees the sudden appearance of new singers and musical groups still committed to the challenge of leading the new expression for singing to a confident phase where all practitioners can come into their own. Thus Adel Mzab, Slimane Othmane and Djaber BLIDI are joined by the groups Itran and Utciden, by the singers Alga, Amar KHELILI, Said TAMJERT, Bassa AKERRAZ and many others who have - to a greater or lesser extent - been an influence on the new expression.

So that posterity should recall this development, right at the beginning of this second stage, towards the end of 1988, a number of singers (Zitani Hammou, Djamel, Adel MZAB and Baslimane Mahfoud) organised a two-day study seminar at the Berriane Cultural Centre; it concerned the modest journey taken by Amazigh singing in the Mzab. Adel Mzab took part, as did nearly all the young singers of the day, as well as folklore actors from the town of Berriane. The organizers of these two days laid an emphasis on the vital need to encourage new singers to express themselves in the Amazigh language. These two study days on Amazigh language singing brought a new lease of life to the genre by igniting the dynamism and spurring the young singers to embrace sung expression in Amazigh.

This second stage can be distinguished from the first in two ways: country-wide the Algerian political scene had changed; and locally there was a new breed of singers ready to seize the opportunities for their art. This generation of artists were notable for a spirit of mobility and creativity; thanks to their efforts the scope of the music and the lyrics both benefitted from the increasing richness in quantity and quality. To accomplish this work and ensure the thematic content of the songs, the most notable poets of the Mzab region were brought to the task, among others: Abdelouahab AFEKHAR, Salah TIRICHINE, Hammou ZITANI, Ahmed HADJ YAHIA, Youcef LASSAKEUR, Omar BOUSSADA, Omar DAOUDI and many others. A great deal is owed to all these actors for participating in bringing a fresh awareness to the public and a new dynamic to artistic expression. From this point the singing reached far and wide across the Mzab thanks to the new vehicles of cassette tape and CD. It is worth remembering that the mass media applied to audio and / audio-visual expression were inevitably the means by which, very effectively, all song production was made available to the awakening conscience of the Amazigh public.

It is right and proper to mention that, apart from the genre of song in its strictest sense, a number of choirs have been created since the 1970s. The most well-known

are Omar DAOUDI, Omar BOUSSADA, Omar BADJOU, Moussa RFISSE, SELLAS and others as well.

The contrast between two distinctive social stages - past and present, new and old – signifies among the younger generation a definitive break with the traditional vision of society; the rupture indicates how the Amazigh dimension expressed in song has come of age. For more than a decade Mzab Amazigh-language singing had quite markedly superseded a first step itself crucial for those stages that followed.

The third stage underway at present has seen the distribution of a Chaâbi-style album sung by Slimane Othmane. In addition, Djamel IZLI, ex-leader of the Ucciden band is putting together the next musical collection. This album - the result of careful preparation – will be launched on the international market in May 2009. Comprising 8 songs, the album is entitled "TAMEDDURT" (Existence).

In the Mzab the genre in its current stage needs encouragement and more researchers into the musicology and the themes for it to eventually bring together the conditions and the know-how required to establish the profile and identify the raw material for Amazigh-language song to develop. The current stage - sketched out in some of its dimensions – is of special interest for the artistic class by virtue of the role needed to give new impetus and broader range, involving actively those on the broad fringes of this artistic endeavour, not least poets and singers. This means increasing the appeal of song by leading it out of its present confines. One step towards this is a festival of Mzab Amazigh-language song being organized in Ghardaia (Tagherdaght) from 12-18 May 2009.

Links with other Amazigh artists

A general linking up between various Amazigh singers needs to occur, in order to facilitate a fruitful cooperation involving the Mzab and other Tamazigh regions (Amazighie); the departure point must be an awareness of a shared historic and prehistoric space, in language and culture, expressing common tradition and civilization. It is as well to note that cooperation between the Mzab and Kabylie has existed in the past – one recalls the Mzab songs being taken into the repertoire of singers from Kabylie. We mean the song "ay anuji" by Aadel Mzab taken up by the Tagrawla group from Kabylie, the poem "Tamut n Sehra" by Salah TIRICHINE sung by Ferhat MEHANI, the song "ay anugi" by Aadel MZAB interpreted by the singer Ferroudja. She also sang the poem "a lalla zet izetwan" by Salah TIRICHINE. The time is right to bring the Amazigh song genre into a new era, adapting it and allowing it to develop steadily, an historic journey which all Amazigh-speaking regions can be part of.

The medium of song was, is and will continue to be one important and efficient way - among others - of raising awareness of Amazigh culture and identity. Song as a creative endeavour remains an investment for the generations; it is not, of course, a tangible material asset, but it contributes positively towards the thriving of society. The rising generation holds these days pride of place as a forum for listening, consuming and producing Amazigh song. In short, the youth of the Mزاب is the ideal medium; they are the right audience to allow Amazigh-language song an opportunity to develop both its range of themes and its musical content. Predecessors are to inspire these new artists in this "chanson genre", and create a vibrant dynamic with potential to steer Mزاب Amazigh-language song away from any great risk of stagnation.

The crisis - all too obvious everywhere - needs to hasten an awareness to match the onward march of humankind. The awareness needs to dawn quickly to rescue Algeria's rich cultural diversity from disappearing, yet this has to involve a critical examination of a number of fraught issues touching upon administration, politics... and philosophy. And it is this which continues to act as a hindrance in the onward march of history.

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