



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE
READING APPROACHES**

Reading Slimane Azem as a Poet of Wisdom

Ghalia Bedrani

Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, Algeria
Email: bedrani_84@yahoo.fr

Abstract

The celebrated Kabyle singer Slimane Azem is known as a poet of exile due to his expatriation in France. His mastery of the mother tongue is inherited from both the Kabyle oral tradition and great poets such as Si Moh Oumhand. His repertoire tackles a variety of themes such as freedom, exile, culture and identity, in songs that celebrate peace and tolerance. His poems “Syadi L3uqal,” “Si Moh Yenna-d” and “A Yul-iw Utub” are calls for self salvation through reliance on both God and origins. Others such as “A Taqbaylit a Tigejdit” and “Ssut n Tsekrin” reconsider the status of women in Kabyle society, and “A Wid ljebden Leqlam” vindicates the Kabyle identity. Though Azem is an engaged poet, his texts are devoid of provocative language, and this is what distinguishes him from many other Kabyle singers. This article aims to study Azem’s transcendence of violent language in songs that convey revolt against entrenched social, cultural and political issues. In particular, it analyzes his work in reference to Paul Baltes’s psychological implicit theory of wisdom, distills seven properties of wisdom. His principles are prominent in Azem’s songs which venerate ancestral values of respect, peace and equality on all levels.

Keywords: Slimane Azem; poetry; Kabyle; wisdom; peace; origins

Wisdom is a complex concept whose definition remains a “very challenging task”.¹ Historically, both Western and Eastern traditions associated it with both moral conduct and governance.² Though the former emphasized only the cognitive dimensions of wisdom, and the latter focused on both cognitive and affective dimensions, both traditions stressed courage, justice, humanity, temperance and transcendence as key virtues of wisdom. Different religions

¹ Ali Intezari, “Conceptualizing Wisdom: Theoretical Perspectives,” in *Practical Wisdom in the Age of Technology: Insights, Issues and Questions for a New Millennium*, eds. Nikunh Dalal, Ali Intezari, and Marty Heitz (London: Routledge Publishing, 2016), 1-15.

² Intezari, “Conceptualizing Wisdom,” 4.



are also built on wisdom. On the one hand, the Bible's teachings are predicated on a definition of wisdom as "the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best of action, based on knowledge and understanding."³ On the other hand, Islam also is a religion of wisdom which is embodied by the Holy prophet Muhammad: "No other human has left an impress so deep and so permanent on the pattern of human life, as it is has developed since and, indeed, on the course of human history since his day."⁴

Recently, the notion of wisdom has been studied in a wide range of fields, including leadership, education, and management, among others. Nevertheless, psychology still remains the leading branch in studies of wisdom.⁵ Even if its conception has varied from one psychologist to another, studies such as those of Erik Erikson's and Vivian Clayton's correlated wisdom with experience and age, something "to develop over time through an insightful and sober reflection on, and a critical evaluation of, one's actions in relation to others."⁶

In ancient Kabyle society, which is characterized by the wisdom of mainly the old man (*amghar azemni*), much importance is given to orality and the art of speech. In the general assembly of a village (*tajmat*), the mastery of discourse is the most powerful weapon influencing great decisions. That is why traditional Kabyle education focuses on teaching children how to become masters of speech (*ibbajen n wawal*). In such a context, poetry holds a central position in society as a means through which people express and transmit their culture and imagination. Children are initiated to the poetic and rhetorical arts through proverbs, riddles and enigmas to make of them good orators and responsible future citizens.⁷

Among the great Kabyle poets, Slimane Azem remains the fountainhead of inspiration for both young and old generations. His wisdom, knowledge and poetry are acquired from his daily life. Ever attentive and observant, Azem makes use of his personal as well as others' experiences in order to reflect on life.⁸ His rich oeuvre, rife with constructive moralities and messages, makes him one of the great masters in Kabyle culture.

Slimane Azem inherited the gift of poetry from his mother, Yamina n Lhag,⁹ and from his grandmother who used to tell him tales when he was a child.¹⁰ His grandmother taught him not only his mother tongue but also maturity. Unlike other kids, Azem preferred to befriend old people, and with much curiosity he started to question the order of life when he was still young. Azem had a gifted and adventurous life in which some decisions were

³ Cliff Leitch, "Wisdom of the Bible," 1996, www.ChristianBibleReference.org.

⁴ Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, *Wisdom of the Holy Prophet* (United Kingdom: Islam International Publications Limited, 1988), 3.

⁵ Intizari "Conceptualizing Wisdom," 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷ Abdelhak Lahlou, "Poésie orale kabyle ancienne: histoire, mémoire et patrimoine," *Quaderns de la Mediterrania*, 27 (2018): 110.

⁸ Menouar Belaid, *Slimane Azem le maitre de la chanson Berbere*, (Boghni : Edition Mehdi, undated), 14.

⁹ Youssef Nacib, *Slimane Azem le poète* (Kouba: Zyriab Editions, 2016), 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

made by conviction and others by force of destiny. The poet's artistic gift allowed him to give grand expression to his worries and faithfulness to his origins, culture and identity. The curse of exile, however, ruined his dreams and deepened his sufferings.

The legendary Kabyle poet Si Mohand Ou Mhand also had a great impact on Slimane Azem. In the village of Azem, the poems of Si Mohand were transmitted orally, and quoted everywhere. This is why Azem placed such importance in his work. The poetic and artistic relationship between the two may be considered as a historical, even prophetic kinship. Azem and many other founders of the Kabyle "Song of Exile," such as Allaoua Zerrouki, Cheikh El Hasnaoui, Sadaoui Salah, and others have adapted and recreated Si Mouhand's *Isefra*¹¹ according to their own taste, personality, and experience of migration. The *Isefra* contains the exile of which they sang to exorcise themselves of the burden of living far away from their homeland.¹²

Both the poet and the singer share the same destiny, and their paths resemble each other in many ways. On the one hand, Si Mohand was stripped of his social rank and privileges as was his family as a result of his position against the destruction of the ancient values of *Tamurt* (country). Consequently, Si Mohand found himself homeless, poor and ill, with no assistance.¹³ Being a *harraga*¹⁴ of a history imposed by the colonizer, he had no other means apart from verse to express himself and the injustices of his time.¹⁵ Azem was also accused of treason, exiled, and his songs were banned in his homeland until 1988. Like Si Mohand, his only means of self-defense were art and poetry. It is this experience of exclusion and forced rupture from origins that the two legendary poets have in common, infusing their compositions with nostalgia.¹⁶

Review of the Literature

Slimane Azem is an expatriate poet who has never ceased to vindicate his identity. He is first and foremost an engaged poet in exile. The director and screen writer Rachid Merabet contends that his oeuvre is in continuity with that of Si Moh, since both poets have denounced the subjugation of their culture to a foreign power. Merabet highlights Azem's patriotism and his revolt against the French. His anti-colonial song "Effegh ay Ajrad Tamurt-iw" ("O Locusts, Leave my Homeland") is an appeal to French intruders to leave his land, and "A Rebbi a Lmudebber" ("O God the Decider") is a fervent prayer in search of a remedy for the misfortunes of his Algerian brothers. Azem expressed

¹¹ *Esfra, poèmes de Si Mohand Ou M'han*, a collection of Si Mohand's poems translated and published by Mouloud Mammeri (Paris : F. Maspero, 1969).

¹² Rachid Mokhtari, *Slimane Azem, Allaoua Zerrouki Chantent Si Mohand U Mhand* (Algeria: APIC Editions, 2005), 13.

¹³ Mokhtari, Slimane Azem, 15.

¹⁴ An Algerian neologism created from the Arabic word "hrag," meaning "burn" or "those who burn" the borders. It is used to describe irregular North African immigrants who attempt to leave for Europe by boat.

¹⁵ Mokhtari, *Slimane Azem*, 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

his worries about his culture and identity mainly during the 1970s. Songs such as “a Wid Ijebden Leqlam” (“You Who Wield the Feather”) in which he defends his Kabyle language against replacement by Arabic, expressed the grief of marginalized and confused communities after Algerian independence.¹⁷ Merabet also stresses the impact of exile on the poet. “Despite his fame and public renown, Azem will sink in the throes of exile, and this banishment buried in the limit of madness.”¹⁸ His pain and sufferings are conveyed in his song “Chfigh Ttugh” (“I Forgot and I Remember”) in which he describes his country’s oscillation between a quest for happiness and its collision with its harsh reality, which is the rejection of Amazigh language and culture.

Azem, in the eyes of some scholars, is a spokesperson of just causes. His anti-colonialism and defense of the Algerian nationalist cause is asserted by his activism within Messali Hadj’s Party of the Algerian People.¹⁹ In his aforementioned poem “Ffegh ay Ajrad Tamurt-iw,” he compares colonialists to locusts which invade others’ fields and sow desolation. Similarly, to Merabet, the sociologist Leila Assas focuses on Azem’s revolutionary use of Amazigh language in his poems and sung poetry. His song “Ghef Teqbaylit Yuli Wass,” (“Dawn on Kabyle Language”), composed after the demonstrations of the Berber Spring (Tafsut n Imazighen) in April 1980, reclaims Tamazight as an official language. In her analysis of the theme of exile in Azem’s poetry, Assas refers to the sociologist Ali Sayad’s study on the solitude of exiled people.²⁰ According to Sayad, these individuals suffer from sexual and emotional crises as a result of living far from their spouses and mothers, who were left in their native lands. Thus, forced exile has a great impact on the psychology of the poet.²¹

The topic of exile in Azem’s songs has been especially generative. Particularly, Youssef Nacib in his book *Slimane Azem le poète* stresses the importance of this theme in Azem’s poetry. For Nacib, the poet considers immigration an obligatory passage toward survival since Kabyle mountains are unable to feed their sons. However, it remains a narrow door for those who dream of eternal life / paradise. Like other immigrants, Azem reflects on exile as a path that leads to hell. This is well-expressed in his first song “Ma Atteddu Anruh.” (“Let’s Go if you Want to Leave”).²² “Ma ruhegh, ulac idrimen. Ma qimmegh, ugadegh lmut” (“If I return, there is no money. If I stay, I am afraid of death”).²³ The suffering that exile has resulted in the heart of the poet is strikingly apparent in this song.

Nacib also refers to Azem’s reverence for his origins, stating that historical identity for him is like “an inalienable biological equipment which is woven

¹⁷ Rachid Merabet, “Slimane Azem, poète-chanteur de l’exil,” *Horizons Maghrébins - Le droit à la mémoire*, 47 (2002): 59-61.

¹⁸ Merabet, *Slimane Azem*, 60. (The translation is mine).

¹⁹ Algerian People’s Party, created on March 11, 1937.

²⁰ Leila Assas, “Slimane Azem: poète de l’exil, de la révolte et de l’insoumission,” *Pan African Music*, September 18, 2020, accessed December 3, 2023 : <https://pan-african-music.com/slimane-azem-poete-de-lexil-de-la-revolte-et-de-linsoumission/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 194.

with noble materials such as ancestors, religion, homeland and Kabyle language.”²⁴ His poem “Ljdud” (“Our Ancestors”) is a call to preserve the old traditions of our forebears who kept faithful to origins. It also praises their courage and resistance to both poverty and hardship. The religious song “Selliw af Nnbi” (“Pray for the Prophet”) is another request for people to follow the right and only path to God’s salvation. The author’s nationalism is well-revealed in the two famous poems “l’Algérie mon beau pays” (“Algeria My Beautiful Country”) and “A Tamurt-iw Azizen” (“My Beloved Country”), in which he expresses his pain due to forced separation from his homeland. Finally, in his poem “A Wid Ijbden Leqlam” (You Who Wield the Feather), Azem denounces the rejection of Tamazight and pities this language which is unjustly despised and put on the margin.

As these discussions demonstrate, much scholarship has focused on the examinations of the themes of revolt and exile in Azem’s poetry. Nevertheless, other trenchant and conspicuous themes have been obscured with the focus on these two topics. Specifically, wisdom, the core subject in his poems, is only referred to randomly and superficially. This article stresses the wisdom facet of Azem’s poetry. By focusing on how wisdom functions in his poems, we will gain more insight into how this quality (wisdom) triumphs in his verses despite the fact that most of his poems are revolutionary cries against the injustices of his time. In other words, this analysis demonstrates that the poet’s multilayered revolt at different levels, including the social, the religious, and the feminist, is palliated by his wisdom.

Paul B. Baltes’s definition of wisdom is crucial for this analysis. Though Baltes’s birth in 1939 coincided with the outbreak of WWII and his childhood with the aftermath of the war, he adopted a specific “joie de vivre”²⁵ that is well-translated in his outstanding studies on behavioral science. Baltes was a founding member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and a foreign member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His career was marked by the publication of 250 texts on different aspects of developmental psychology. Upon his death in 2006, Baltes was one of the highest-ranking developmental psychologists at the time.²⁶

Baltes’s “Implicit Theories of Wisdom” are based on research in psychology in association with folk-psychological or common sense approaches. A group of theorists including Clayton, Holliday, and others raised the issue on the uses and definition of ‘wisdom’ in daily life. For them, wisdom bears a particular meaning, distinct from related concepts such as intelligence, maturity, and creativity. It is related to human functioning, and it identifies a state of mind and behavior that comprises intellectual, affective, and motivational aspects. Wisdom is also related to personal and interpersonal competences such as the capacity of listening, evaluating, and advising.

²⁴ Ibid., 57. (The translation is mine).

²⁵ John R. Nesselroade, “Paul B. Baltes (1939-2006),” *American Psychologist*, 62.7 (October 2007): 696.

²⁶ Ibid., 696.

Importantly, wisdom entails good intentions and operates for the wellness of both the self and others.²⁷

Since cultural memory is the mother of wisdom, it is a culturally-produced concept. Paul Baltes identified seven properties of wisdom based on cultural-historical and philosophical analyses.²⁸ This Baltesian taxonomy is as follows:

- (1) Wisdom addresses important and difficult questions and strategies about the conduct and meaning of life.
- (2) Wisdom includes knowledge about the limits of knowledge and the uncertainties of the world.
- (3) Wisdom represents a truly superior level of knowledge, judgment, and advice.
- (4) Wisdom constitutes knowledge with extraordinary scope, depth, and balance.
- (5) Wisdom involves a perfect synergy of mind and character, that is, an orchestration of knowledge and virtues.
- (6) Wisdom represents knowledge used for the good or well-being of oneself and that of others.
- (7) Wisdom, though difficult to achieve and to specify, is easily recognized when manifested.²⁹

Applying these wisdom criteria in the order in which they are listed above to Azem's repertoire will reveal the manifestations of wisdom in his songs.

Manifestations of Wisdom in Azem's Poetry

Though the perception of some poets is that poetry is limited to beauty, others never disassociate it from its original connections with wisdom. Holding the second view, Samuel Johnson declares "poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to help reason."³⁰ Poetry reflects the concerns of society from which it originates, and at the same time it influences and forges it. Every period has its themes of predilection, and poets pursue the events of their societies. They take part in the immortalization of facts by transmitting them from one generation to another.³¹ Azem, the celebrated poet whose texts constitute a basic reference of wisdom for both the young and old, is no different. Wisdom reigns in his songs and sung poetry.

Baltes argues that wisdom negotiates significant life issues.³² Azem's poetry also raises various questions about human existence in general. His masterpieces deal with social conflicts, identity, justice, and equality. Each of his poems advances a certain morality, and at the end of each song good always

²⁷ Paul. B. Baltes and Ursula Staudinger, "Wisdom, A Metaheuristic (Pragmatic) to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue Toward Excellence," *American Psychologist*, 55.1 (2000): 123.

²⁸ Baltes and Staudinger, "Wisdom," 123.

²⁹ Paul B. Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration of Mind and Virtue* (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for Human Development, 2004), 17.

³⁰ Ni Wayan Swardhani, *Defining Poetry and Characteristics of Poetry* (2014), 9.

³¹ Aicha Ait Berri, "Rituel et Oralité chez les Ait Soukhmanes. Le cérémonial du mariage: une pratique en mutation," (PhD diss., Sorbonne, 2017), 198.

³² Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

triumphs over evil. Though Azem is not motivated by scholasticism, nature and mountains are the main source of truth and happiness for him, his primary source of inspiration.

The bond that connects Azem with his natural world echoes Ralph Waldo Emerson's thoughts on the virtues of nature. In his essay "Nature," Emerson considers solitude in nature as the foundation of peace and happiness and the only way to truth.³³ Azem's deep attachment to nature is revealed in his poem "Awi Istufan" ("Happy Who Would Have the Time"). Azem considers nature in Greater Kabylia as a main source of knowledge: "yiwen n l3ilm d amegran, deg durar ak d ighezran" ("There is immense knowledge in the mountains and streams").³⁴ Like Emerson, he also stresses the importance of solitude in nature and the joy it plants in the hearts: "wa ara nessu d lğiran, d ledyur ak d lhiwan, anemsefham melba lhedra" ("Who would then be our neighbors? Birds and other animals, we would understand each other without words").³⁵ Azem's focus on silence is reinforced by the interaction he creates between humankind and non-human creatures.

According to Azem's relatives, the first grains of wisdom were very noticeable in him from infancy. As a child, he started to question existence like an older person would do. Once, his sister admitted that he sang about matters they did not know themselves. Wisdom is a gift from God to Azem. It is also said that an old man offered him a choice to fill in his spirit or his pockets, and the young Azem answered that he wanted to fill in his mind.³⁶ Another version reported that when Azem was given a choice between being wise or having a house and children, he preferred wisdom (which is borne out by the fact that he never had children). One of his prominent songs on the meaning of life is "Dunnit akka i Telha" ("Such Is Life"). This song synthesizes his own conclusions about man's existence:

How life could be arranged
So that dreams will be realized
And justice will be recognized

Whoever can flay the other
And then devours him later
Like a beast, man is a monster

We all know that wrong is harmful
And injustice is painful
But words without acts remain doubtful³⁷

Another song that questions the order of life is "Akem Ihdu Rebbi a Ddunit" ("May God Lead you to Where You Should Be, O Life!"). Azem starts his

³³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," (1836).

³⁴ See Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 273.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 400. Original text: Amek ara tseggem ddunit // I waken a tteffegh target // Anga yella lhaq ad iban // Win iw3an wayed iselx-it // A melmi is yezmer yeççit-it // Am yergazen and lhiwan [] Nezra yak tlem diri-t // Labatel daghen nkerh-it // Neqqar-it- id d awal kan.

complaining about life by personifying it as an individual who should be graceful mainly with the weak. The song encourages people to be patient in life and to rely on God in order to achieve their goals:

And if you want to understand
 But life imposes its views
 He who is with common sense
 Thinks about life's reward
 Ponder and keep reasoning
 And never say: I am imagining³⁸

All what is far can be near
 Only despair is execrable
 All what you doubt to be near
 Remember that God is able
 I advise you to be fair and clear
 His blessings are immeasurable³⁹

The poet's wisdom triumphs by admitting that man is alone responsible for his existence.

Baltes's second claim is that wisdom comprises knowledge about of knowledge's limits and the uncertainties of the world.⁴⁰ Azem's poetry is not limited to his native land because he is a wise observer of issues that have a worldwide validity. He is not indifferent to international political conflicts, such as the WWII or the Cold War. He is conscious that behind such wars it is the poor nations that are in danger. In his song "Amek ara Nili Susta" ("How Then To Be Serene?"), he depicts a world in which only the fittest survive since the planet is technologically-advanced by powerful nations. The song is an alarm to the Global South to hurry and catch up the historical lag by investing in education:

When war had finally finished
 We thought that violence vanished
 Yet, between Russia and America
 Fire had not yet distinguished
 With each side's provocation
 We think about our tombs
 We fear extermination
 By their atomic bombs⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 577. Original text: I lukan iwen-ihwa adtfhemem // Mana akka is-yehwa iddunit // Win isan rray iseggem // Ad ithebbir I meddit // Sexdem rray-ik xemmam // Ur seqqarara d target

³⁹ Ibid., 578. Original text: Ayen ibaden yak yeqreb // Ay diri siwa layas // Ayen tckuked yeqreb // Ma d rebbi yeshel fell-as // Belhara ad-k wessigh // Seggem, lexzayen-is meqritatas.

⁴⁰ Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

⁴¹ Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 465. Original text: Mi tefra lgirra antik // Nnan-as ak tura dayen // Lakin Rrus d Lamirik // Tekker ddawa gar-asen // Kul wayeqqar-as: dir ma fik // D nekni i yettxewwifen // Xedmen labumb atumik // Neggad ad gh snegren.

Azem makes use of both satire and irony in order to convey political messages and tackle national and global issues. His knowledge of the danger presented by atomic bombs and nuclear war is a reflection of this investment in a larger dimension of humanity in his poetry.

In Baltes's words, wisdom corresponds to a frankly advanced level of knowledge, judgment, and advice.⁴² Indeed, Azem acquired a distinctive experience and an impressive knowledge that endowed him with a specific reasoning about life. His poetic oeuvre is a library from which he distills this knowledge for the sake of future generations. In his song "Syadi Luqal" ("My Wise Masters"), he exhorts the wise men to be reasonable and tolerant with him. He tries to convince people of the good intentions behind his compositions. His aim is to raise people's awareness about different life issues and their rights. The poet is to tell the truth and provide advice but never formulate judgment:

As you know wise gentlemen
Our intention is not festal
When we sing on what worries men
Truth is our only real capital
This is why I repeat words
Which are pronounced with warmth
Our hearts beat with purity
When lies lower our strength
Patience becomes a necessity⁴³

Though you are wise and fame
And you can do whatever you want
They will hinder you with their game
They will smash you like an ant
He who wants to get a name
Should remain silent, but we can't⁴⁴

Wisdom is therefore manifested in the ability to provide instructive lessons and precious advice.

"Zher di Ççina" ("Luck in an Orange") is another song that shows Azem's wisdom through his wide knowledge and experience in life. The poet here uses the space of the poem to correct the falsified beliefs of the young

⁴² See Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

⁴³ Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 357. Original text: Akka a syadi l3uqal // Tezram maçi d lmuhal // Ma ncennu ghef wayen nezra // Nehsa tidett d ras lmal// Daymi neketter di leqwal // Nenna-ten-id s lehrara // Ma d ul isfa d amellal // Lekdeb yessdub yessefcal // I ysebren d tamara.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 358. Xas attilid d l3alem // Ay akken tebg hid xdem // Ad k-g hummen ur tahared ara // Win ibghan ad yes3u isem // Ilaq-as ad yessusem // Ma d nekni ur nezmir ara.

generations about life, which they think is based on luck and destiny. The poet advises the youngsters to work hard in order to succeed, drawing on the old adage that “God helps those who help themselves.”

God knows the hearts
And he never does wrong
Destiny is divided to parts
Patience and satisfaction make us strong
But he who is mad
Always says: “My luck is so bad.”⁴⁵

In fact, religion also plays an important role in the life of the poet, who considers Islam as a source of salvation. His poem, “A Yul-iw Utub” (“Repent, O My Heart”) is a synthesizing lesson of all that is mentioned in the Quran for all believers. Azem asks God for forgiveness, saying:

O my heart, please repent
Pray to God at the right time
To erase your sins, be bent
Here while there is still time⁴⁶

Though Azem spent most of his life in France, the religion of Islam is undeniably present in his texts. Since he defends the values of traditional society, Azem feels the need to evoke God with great reinforcement.⁴⁷

“Wisdom represents knowledge with “extraordinary scope, depth, and balance.”⁴⁸ Unlike any ordinary person, Azem has inherited from his family and the poets who predated him, specifically Si Mohand, an unusual intuition that allows him to understand the world around him as well as a balanced way of reasoning. Si Mohand had a lasting influence on him, and as an homage for him, Azem gathers some of his poems in a song which is entitled “Si Moh Yenna-d” (“Si Moh Said”). This poem is a contemplation of life and its mystery, which is the result of man’s egoism and his strong desire for domination. The poem is an appeal to unity and brotherhood as secrets for success and happiness:

Brothers’ concord is the best heritage
When they agree with one another
Naturally, you can guess their courage
If they mandate the eldest together
Gabriel will protect them from damage

⁴⁵ Ibid., 339. Original text: Rebbi ye3lem s leqlub // D lmuhal ad yessesxer // Yefka-yagh-d akl-mektub // Yerna-d leqni3a d sber // Ma d win yellan d ameslub // Yeqqerkan: “ulac zher.”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 309. Original text: Wiyyak a yul-iwutub // Ddleb Rebbi di lewqat // Bac akken attemhud ddhub // Di ddunit qbel ad- k-ifat.

⁴⁷ Dahbia Abrous, “Slimane Azem,” in *Encyclopédie berbère* (Aix-en-Provence: Èdisud, 1990), 1-3.

⁴⁸ Baltès, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

But if they argue with each other
 The enemy will receive the message
 And welfare will disappear in an hour⁴⁹

The influence of this poem on Azem resulted in another text which advances the same message “Azger Yaqel Gma-s” (“The Bull Recognizes His Brother”). In this poem, he uses the metaphor of young bulls that are compared to young brothers who are united in childhood but separated by life affairs in their adulthood:

The bull recognizes as a brother
 The one that toils with him
 But the son of his own mother
 Left him sad and grim⁵⁰

Like the previous one, this poem promotes solidarity and concord among brothers for a better life.

The combination of knowledge and virtues is highlighted by Baltes where he writes, “wisdom involves a perfect synergy of mind and character, that is, an orchestration of knowledge and virtues.”⁵¹ Azem’s songs combine both knowledge and virtues: while the first is related to mind, the second is linked with the poet’s character. In his two songs “Ssut n Tsekrin” (“The Songs of the Partridges”) and “A Taqbaylit a Tigejdit” (“O Kabyle Woman, Pillar of the House”), Azem makes the best use of his knowledge about Kabyle women and their roles either inside their homes or in society as a whole. His attitude is favored by the virtues he stored in his mind about them. In the former song, he praises and describes women in a celebrating tone.

I heard the partridges chirping
 As I passed by
 Between Ait Yaala and Beni Mensour

The wind that carried it
 By the almighty divine
 Shakes the trees everywhere

It was the Kabyle women
 Who were picking up olives
 And singing different melodies
 I saw them between olive trees

⁴⁹ Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 249-250. Original text: Yelha lxir deg watmaten // Ma yella msefhamen // Meb3id id-zwar tissas // Ma fkan leqder I yiwen // I wmuqran degsen // Jebril fell-asen d a3essas // Ma yfatmexerwaden // Kecmen-ten ye3dawen // Yekfa lxir deg yiwen wass.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 521. Original text: Azger ye3qelgma-s // D widnettayetmahhen // Ma d win id-s’ayemma-s // Iruhye3ga-t di lehzen.

⁵¹ See Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

They emerged like corals
In the early afternoon

Old men, children and women
Men and girls
Are like a flock of birds⁵²

The poem conveys the pride Azem takes in Kabyle women as both homemakers and valuable laborers.

Similarly, the second song renders a vibrant homage to Kabyle women who stand as the main pillars of houses in Greater Kabylia. The poet admits that the whole of life depends on women, and without them, everything falls apart.

O Kabyle woman, the main pillar
On which the whole house stands
Morning and evening you are the tutelary
So that your husband understands

The central pillar is you
The entire life is built upon you
And the beams are fastened to you
The grain jar leans on you
And the one of oil depends on you
You are the sleepless guardian
If you make a misjudgment
And you become a bad custodian⁵³
Damage is the worst experiment

The wider use of knowledge is part of Baltes's theory of wisdom, which holds that wisdom stands for the knowledge that is made useful for the benefit or well-being of both oneself and others.⁵⁴ Azem has a deep mastery of language, but he did not keep it to himself alone. He instead chooses to make the best use of his wisdom and knowledge by endeavoring to transfer them to the younger generations. His valuable life experiences are transferred to the youth who are still relying on him as a basic reference. His poem "Baba-s d Mmi-s" ("The Father and his Son") transmits the life lesson that an old man, who is nearing his death, bequeathed to his son. The father advises his son to follow his path

⁵² Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 163. Original text: Sligh issut n tsekrin // Assmaken id-3eddagh din // Ger at Ya3la d Bni Mansur [q] Abehrinni t-id yebbwin // I txeddem lqedra n wehnnin // Ansi yekka ithhuzzu ttjur [q] Zighen ar d tiqbayliyin // S icewwiqen d teghratin // Ir ay leqden azemmur [q] Ttbanent-ed ger tzemrin // Amzun d timerjatin // Tameddit lewhi n thur [q] Imgharen arrac tulawin // Irgazenak d tihdayin // Amzun d aglaf n zzerzur.

⁵³ Ibid., 221. Original text: A taqbaylit a tigejdit // Ghef yebna wexxam // Sbah tameddit argaz wessi-t // Bac ad yeddu s lweqam [q] D kem i d tigejdit // Ghef tebna ddunit // Ghurem ak i cudden isulas // Ghurem it- senned tkufit // D ucayli n zzit // D kemmini I d a3essas // Ma yella array-im dir it // Ur tersi yara tgejdit // Kullec ad irab aflsas.

⁵⁴ Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

and to stick his principles. The son, on his end, promises to remain faithful to both origins and traditions:

Father:

My son, listen to my advice
 The advice of a moribund
 Remain as your father's apprentice
 Only truth will never end
 In life all that I realized
 On truth it is based

Son:

Father, I swear an oath
 That I will follow your footsteps
 I will follow your path
 Good lies on the respect of your steps
 I will sow all your instructions
 For the future generations⁵⁵

The conversation between the father and the son is an illuminating experience that shows the dialogical potential of poetry in Amazigh language.

Wisdom is not divorced from its manifestations in real life. Baltes opines that wisdom, though difficult to reach and to denote, is straightforwardly recognized after its manifestation."⁵⁶ Among the dozens of poets and singers in Kabylia, people continue to admire Azem thanks to the wisdom that penetrates his verses. Since he deals with a variety of issues and raises consciousness about their culture, origins, and particularly their mother tongue, Azem is among the most referenced Kabyle poets. Against the backdrop of Tamazight's long-running marginalization, poets like Slimane Azem and others, allowed Kabyles to start writing their mother tongue, making its current exuberance possible. Azem's song "A Wid Ijebden Leqlam" ("Those Who Wield the Feather") is a plea to remember those who devoted their lives to their culture and identity. The song also calls for union and cooperation between Kabyle people in order to reassert themselves in a country in which they are marginalized:

All those who think straight
 If they are really brave men
 With honor they should face the plight
 I pity our own language

⁵⁵ Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 658. Original text: Bab-as: // Aqli a mmi 3zizen ad k-wessigh // Aqli gher tizi n rwah // Cfu ghef wayen ik nnigh // Ulac i yecban sseh // Di ddunit ayen ak bnigh // Lsas ighza gher sseh [q] Mmi-s: // Nek a baba aqli ad k-3ahdegh // Ar d ddugh di lğerra-k // Abrid-ik ad t defregh // Zrigh abrid-ik d leslak // Lewsaya k ar d tt-zer3agh // I dderya n dderya-k.

⁵⁶ Baltes, *Wisdom as Orchestration*, 17.

Which is despised and barred from usage
And led to a state of alienage⁵⁷

Kabyles' wisdom becomes apparent thanks to Azem. After several decades, time has confirmed all that Azem had said in his songs. His wisdom is well-recognized, and people still wonder how this outstanding poet was able to predict the future from his position in the past.

Conclusion

Slimane Azem died on January 28, 1983, in Moissac, France, where he was also buried. Though his life is spent outside his native land, he succeeded in leading toward the path of wisdom. Azem is heard and quoted everywhere, and his simple but deep language is understood by everyone. His wise spirit has made him a favorite poet of many Kabyles, and his faithfulness to origins serves as a great lesson for all exiled Algerians. Having a poet like Azem honors the Greater Kabylia to which he belongs, and with which he had consolidated his bonds of love and respect. His pride and sense of belonging to such a beautiful and prosperous region is well-expressed in "Tamurt-iw Tizi Ouzou," ("My Homeland Tizi Ouzou"). This song has such a phenomenal presence that even children enjoy listening to its lyrics. On the broader significance of his wisdom, Azem is considered a reliable source by Kabyles, who return to his poetry and songs whenever they fail to fully understand life.

⁵⁷ Nacib, *Slimane Azem*, 225. Original text: Kra n wid i yetmeyizen // Ma yella llan d irgazen // Ilaq ad ten yawi nnif // D llugha negh iyi ghaden // Amek alami ittheqren // Tettwa3zel tughal di rrif.