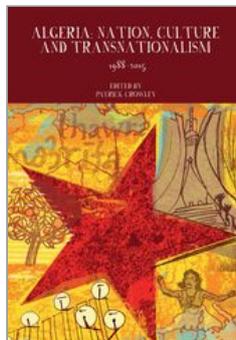


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### Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism: 1988-2015

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In the Shadow of Revolution

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#### **[–]** Abstract and Keywords

This chapter surveys Algerian society and politics from 1999 to 2012, considering the country's domestic and international situation in the context of the transition from the violence of the 1990s and the regional upheaval of the 'Arab Spring' revolutions of 2011. In an era of neoliberalism, generational change, new forms of regional and global connectivity and a renewed wave of popular protest, Algeria's revolution and the once-imagined future of the Third World that it long stood for remained an inspiration and, at the same time, a long-unfulfilled aspiration. As Algeria celebrated fifty years of independence, the wave of protest and change engulfing the Arab world from Tunisia to Syria largely bypassed the region's most iconically revolutionary nation. The chapter will consider the long- and short-term reasons for this, and explore how, after the war of the 1990s, Algeria's political system has been able to maintain a status quo that, however structurally untenable in the longer term, seems capable of reproducing itself indefinitely for the present. Behind the successive revolutionary experiences of the 1960s-70s, 1988, and 2011, remain the unfulfilled promises of the insurrection of 1 November 1954, the unresolved question of establishing the rule of law and that of a state constituted by and for its people.

*Keywords:* Algeria, Revolution, Arab Spring, Society, Politics

On 13 September 2015, the man widely believed to be the real centre of power in Algeria officially left office. General Mohamed ‘Toufik’ Mediène, sometimes nicknamed *rabb dzair* [the lord of Algeria], the 76-year-old head of the country’s intelligence and security apparatus – never seen in public, rarely glimpsed in unverified photographs, the incarnation of the opaque, unaccountable, faceless form of *le pouvoir* – had retired, ‘relieved of his functions’ in the terse formulation of a presidential communiqué as reported in the press. Whether he left the office he had occupied unchallenged for 25 years of his own choosing or under pressure from the coterie around the ailing 78-year-old President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was unclear – and relatively unimportant. The move could have been significant. ‘Toufik’ was the architect of the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS, Military Intelligence Services), the iron core of the ‘deep’ state that had waged its merciless war on, and of, terror through the 1990s and had become indispensable, untouchable, all but unnameable, known to every Algerian and answerable to no one. Observers of Algeria and human rights activists both in the country and abroad had long recognized that any meaningful move towards more democratic, accountable and law-bound government must necessarily pass through the removal of the DRS from the centre of the state and its subordination to legal oversight; doubtless for their own factional reasons, as well as or more than on principle, Algerian political party leaders regularly demanded the dismantling, or at least the thorough ‘restructuring’, **(p.28)** of the political police.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, and for several years before, the rumour mill of the Algerian media was regularly fed with accounts of the ongoing tussle between the presidency and the DRS, and in the course of the summer of 2015 the agency did indeed see its prerogatives reduced, transferred to elements of the army, in what some saw as a significant clipping of the sharp-clawed secret services’ wings. In the context of a long-deferred ‘transition’ away from Algeria’s apparently calcified authoritarianism, the retirement of Toufik might indeed have signalled a real departure, ‘la fin d’une époque’ [the end of an epoch] (Ouali, 2015), ‘un véritable séisme dans la vie politique nationale’ [an earthquake in the nation’s political life] (Mesbah, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

But there was no such transition. The appointment of Toufik’s successor, Major-General (retired) Athmane ‘Bachir’ Tartag, previously ‘number two’ in the DRS and most recently, since his earlier retirement from the military, in a holding position as a counsellor to the presidency, was a strong signal of continuity. Tartag, like Toufik, was a career soldier recruited into the Boumediene-era Sécurité Militaire and trained by the KGB in the 1970s. During the 1990s, he commanded the notorious Centre Principal Militaire d’Investigation (CPMI, Principal Military Investigation Centre) at Ben Aknoun in the south-western suburbs of Algiers, a detention centre nominally charged with combating Islamist influence in the army, but by most accounts one of the DRS’s main centres of torture and extrajudicial killing, where civilian suspects and soldiers were held, interrogated and murdered (Algeria-Watch and Salah-Eddine Sidhoum, 2003). What distinguished Tartag from Toufik was simply the fact that he was a decade or so younger, a child during the struggle for independence (which Toufik apparently joined, as a 22-year-old, in 1961), and a student in the early 1970s when he responded to Boumediene’s appeal for graduates to enlist in the army. Like Toufik, Tartag rose through the ranks in the mid-1980s and found himself in a critical position of power in 1990 (‘Athmane Tartag’, 2014; Mesbah, 2015). Like Toufik, he would be a relentless ‘eradicator’ and a leading practitioner of the policy of ‘the management of society by violence’.<sup>3</sup> Hardly **(p.29)** signalling a generational transition, even less did this suggest an institutional change or even a modification of policy. But the change from Toufik to Tartag was another small instance of the slow, inexorable passing away of the generation born in the late 1930s, the generation of the revolution, of the youthful, energetic and forward-looking

men of 50 years ago, of whom Bouteflika himself now remained the last, visibly fading, representative, clinging to power as to life, by his fingertips.

The disarmingly insignificant removal, or retirement, of Toufik, and his replacement by a man whom Bouteflika, on assuming his first mandate in 1999, had himself pushed into retirement for having played an especially brutal role in the 'dirty war' of the 1990s, who had more recently shown himself less than adroit in handling the hostage crisis at the In Amenas gas facility in the Sahara in January 2013 (Black, 2015)<sup>4</sup> and who had been returned to office by the factional manoeuvres of the president's brother, was also, however, a sign of other changes.<sup>5</sup> It illustrated the continuity of the 'fierce state', the degree to which Boumediene's desire, after 1965, to create institutions capable of outliving personalities, had been realized, at least in respect of the secret services and the informal powers around the presidency that had been at the core of the state since Boumediene's time. But it also illustrated their state of disintegration, their ageing, along with the men who ran them, and their reduction, at the very centre of power, from instruments intended to serve the construction of a strong state that would make its people strong, to bickering fiefdoms, instruments of cliques and coteries serving to divide the spoils of the state among themselves.<sup>6</sup> *Le pouvoir*, intended by the wartime FLN, then by Ben Bella (p. 30) and Boumediene, and still by Chadli and at least some of those around him, to generate and direct energy into the construction of a progressive and prosperous society under its firm but beneficent guidance, had collapsed into a black hole, sucking resources, opportunities and the very future of the country into itself. American diplomats in 2007 characterized the regime as 'fragile in ways it has not been before, plagued by a lack of vision, unprecedented levels of corruption and rumblings of division in the military [...] a government drifting and groping for a way forward'. In 2009 they wrote of the system as 'a series of largely incompetent institutions [...] spinning their wheels independently, with nothing to connect the dots' ('Ailing and Fragile', 2007; 'Bouteflika's Army', 2009).<sup>7</sup> By 2015, even the terrible, omnipotent DRS had seemingly become a frayed, thinning institution (Rabia, 2015).<sup>8</sup>

At the centre of *le pouvoir* as throughout the political system, with its ramifying party clientelism, its proliferation of independent local candidates and their local means of patronage, and throughout the day-to-day economy from which many, perhaps most, Algerians earned their livelihood, it was the 'informal sector' rather than ostensible institutions that now held sway. And while, again ever since the wartime FLN, the 'informal', personal and factional, interior realities of the state had always had primacy over its formal, impersonal and constitutional external appearance, that informality now worked less through the institutionalized forms of the 'shadow cabinet', the departments of the presidency and the DRS than in personal cliques divorced from any real arm of the state, no more law-bound than the old primacy of informal politics had been, but without their stability and capacity for self-perpetuation. And this, at a time of regional turmoil, with civil war on the country's borders, an ailing president and an interminable, insoluble succession crisis, and suddenly falling oil and gas prices. The war (p.31) that tore Algeria apart in the last ten years of the twentieth century had been over for more than a decade. Algeria was as far from the resolution of its conflicts as it had ever been.

### A Desert in Springtime?

As Algeria celebrated 50 years of independence in 2012, the wave of protest and change engulfing the Arab world from Tunisia to Syria ironically seemed to have bypassed the region's most iconically revolutionary nation. In December 2010 and January 2011, at the same time as the first protests began against the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, after the self-immolation of the young street trader Mohamed Bouazizi, similar protests erupted in Algeria, and for similar

reasons. A police crackdown on unlicensed pavement trading in Bab el-Oued, and the lifting of subsidies that caused a spike in the prices of essential commodities, provoked what became known as the *zzit wa sukkar* [oil and sugar] riots. Such popular protests had been common in the assertive public spaces of Algeria – unlike its more tightly compressed neighbour – for a decade already. And, in terrible counterpoint to the capacity for collective action in some instances, dozens of Algerians, whose names would go mostly unnoticed by the outside world, had similarly burned themselves, sometimes to death, in desperate, isolated protest outside local offices of the state. More would do so in the first months of 2011, in a wave of dramatic protests that would continue sporadically for the next three years.<sup>9</sup>

But by November 2011, while Egyptians were protesting against the post-Mubarak military authorities' attempt to maintain the unaccountability of the army relative to the new civilian government that was expected to emerge from the elections that were about to begin, while Tunisia witnessed the swearing-in of a new constitutional assembly and Islamists and leftists entered a coalition government, and while elections in Morocco following that country's constitutional revision saw the emergence of the Islamist PJD as the largest party, in Algeria, life carried on as normal. In Tizi Ouzou, a demonstration by the National Federation of Retired Workers brought pensioners from villages all over Kabylia to stage a sit-in at the regional government office, with placards reading 'We want our rights' and 'No to poverty'. In Sidi Bel Abbès, residents of the Sidi Amar shantytown put up **(p.32)** roadblocks and stopped the traffic for several hours, demanding that the state take action to rehouse them. In Boumerdès, university students went on indefinite strike against the expulsion of their activist peers. In Mostaghanem, a young man shot by police lay in a coma, and other young men rioted in protest. Elsewhere, and all that month, other roads were closed by inhabitants of other underserved peripheral housing projects, other students protested in other universities, other workers went on hunger strike, other young people confronted other policemen and rioted in other towns ... (Tighilt, 2012; Alim, 2012; Ouahab, 2011; 'Boumerdès: les étudiants', 2011; 'Boumerdès: la RN24', 2011; 'Draa el Mizan', 2011).

In the context of the Arab Spring, Algeria seemed to have been left in the shade – and as the Spring withered and turned sour, with counter-revolution and civil war overwhelming democratic aspiration in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, Algerians increasingly agreed with regime spokesmen that they were best spared the tumult. But it would be better to explain what was happening, what would and would not happen, by recognizing that Algeria – which, as ever, had its share of dramatic events in and after 2011–2012 – was less in the shade of its neighbours' history than in the shadow of three revolutions: the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings of 2011, and what they were thought to portend for the region (which, in Algeria, was earlier seen more pessimistically than elsewhere), for sure, but also and more importantly Algeria's own upheaval of 1988–1990, which ended the era of the single party there earlier than in other Arab states, and, still fundamentally, the inheritances of the founding revolution of 1954–1962. It was from their shadows, in a rather darker sense, that Algeria's contemporary history was, and ordinary Algerians were, struggling to emerge. The seemingly perverse 'normality' of Algeria in 2011–2012, and the absence of any more substantial transition at the departure of Toufik three years later, indicated not an absence of change, but both a conjunctural relation of social and political forces, and longer-term historical dynamics at work, the cumulative effect of which was recognition that there were good reasons, in the Arab world's new revolutionary moment, not to have a new revolution in Algeria.

To be sure, demonstrators in Algiers in January and February 2011 echoed the spirit of others in Tunis and Cairo with the slogan 'Boutef dégage' [Boutef get out]. Bouteflika had been in power for a much shorter time than Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, let alone Muammar Gaddafi or Hosni Mubarak, but was at least physically not unlike the other ageing presidential incumbents in the region, whose departure had suddenly become the focus of regional aspirations for social and political change. At 74 years of age and suffering for years from an illness that visibly (on the rare occasions when he **(p.33)** was visible) verged on incapacitation, Bouteflika's long and tenacious decline mirrored that of the revolutionary generation as a whole. His clinging to power, however, was evidence less of his own wilful tenacity than of the general impasse at the summit of the state, the resilience of *le pouvoir* in the wake of the civil war, but also its incapacity to imagine the resolution of an unavoidable, impending generational change. As Algerian political sociologist Nacer Djabi observed, it was the whole '*tab jnanou* generation' – the generation whose time was done, in Bouteflika's own words – not just Bouteflika himself, that needed 'to organize its departure', but seemed incapable of doing so (Cherfaoui, 2011; Meddi, 2012).<sup>10</sup>

Bouteflika's entrenchment in the presidency was the most obvious sign of this incapacity to chart a course to a managed transition: the constitutional amendment of 12 November 2008 allowed the incumbent a third mandate, reversing the provision of the 1997 constitution that had fixed a limit of two five-year terms to the office. The two subsequent electoral campaigns were notable only for the political class's failure to use them as opportunities to address the country's systemic malaise.<sup>11</sup> In place of open, public politics, Algerians had only the unedifying theatre, played out via the press and online, of the internal tussle within the regime. This, it was widely thought, was not simply a matter of the DRS versus the regular military and partisans of Bouteflika, as was sometimes reported, but also a function of splits within the DRS, between factions among generals, and their respective business interests and party political allies or mouthpieces: corruption scandals, imprisonments and cabinet reshuffles were all decoded for evidence of the changing configuration of influence.<sup>12</sup> If *le pouvoir* had become a fragmented, **(p.34)** polycentric system, this was in part because of an at least limited generational shift: it was no longer under the sway of the *janviéristes*, the putschist generals of January 1992 who, with the exception, as yet, of 'Toufik' Mediène, were now all out of power, or relatively tamed and on their way out.<sup>13</sup> Khaled Nezzar had already opted for retirement in 1994. Mohamed Lamari was pushed out in July 2004 and died in February 2012. Larbi Belkheir, sent into ambassadorial exile in Morocco in August 2005, died in January 2010. The especially opaque Ismail 'Smain' Lamari died in August 2007. In 2011, aside from Toufik, only two strongmen *décideurs* remained, both by negotiation with the president: Abdelmalek Guenaïzia, who went as ambassador to Switzerland in 1993, had returned at Bouteflika's behest in 2005 to the post of minister-delegate for defence (in effect heading the defence ministry, the defence portfolio itself being held by the president), which he occupied until 2013; Mohamed Touati, known as 'El-Mokh' ('the Brain'), had first retired in August 2005, and returned in 2011 as presidential advisor for security affairs, but would finally be removed in July 2014.<sup>14</sup> Bouteflika, it seemed, had done away with all the men who had, reluctantly, brought him to power at the end **(p.35)** of the war.<sup>15</sup> But their war, and the recomposition through it of a formalized party political system as the expression of their own, and the broader political class's, factional interests, had nothing new to replace them; and nor, apparently, had Bouteflika any viable notion of how to replace himself.<sup>16</sup>

In the face of this impasse, Algeria's 2011 protests were relatively muted. According to the Interior Ministry, protests and rioting between 5 and 10 January left five dead and perhaps eight hundred injured; one thousand arrests were made ('Apaisement en Algérie', 2011). In late January, the Coordination nationale pour le changement et la démocratie (CNCD, National Coordination for Change and Democracy), a coalition of political parties and some civil society groups, emerged to organize opposition to the regime, and demonstrations were held in Algiers in February and April. In response, the regime made symbolic gestures to buy time: the state of emergency, in force since 9 February 1992, was lifted on 24 February. A 'reform process' was announced in March, and a commission headed by the President of the Senate, Abdelkader Bensalah, held a flurry of highly publicized meetings with prominent personalities in May and June. Its report, submitted in July, was never published; draft laws on the press, elections and the regulation of political parties and civic associations, published that August, indicated, if anything, a regression of public liberties. There was also, inevitably, repression: while the state of emergency was lifted, a ban on public demonstrations in Algiers was declared instead, and the attempted marches in the capital on 22 January, 12 and 19 February, and in particular the students' demonstration of 12 April, which almost succeeded in reaching the vicinity of the presidential palace at El Mouradia, were met with overwhelming numbers of police ('Les étudiants forcent le passage', 2011).

At the same time, more significantly, the regime stepped up the strategy that had been followed since Bouteflika was met with endemic protests against economic conditions during the 2004 presidential campaign and throughout his second term: *l'arrosage* [splashing around] money from the state's deep foreign currency reserves to buy acquiescence. In 2005, a development plan for the south amounting to some US\$3.4 billion had been announced in areas where the 2004 re-election campaign had been especially hit by local rioting; in 2011, public sector salary hikes varied between 30 **(p.36)** and 100 per cent ('Malgré les augmentations', 2011). The price rises in basic commodities - oil and sugar - were reversed. These responses effectively stifled the immediate dynamics of protest which, in other countries, were at that time gaining momentum.

### The Logic of the *Régime*

But this was not the whole story. The CNCD lacked popular traction, found no echo among the general population. Its few demonstrations were almost comically divided between inimical factions: during a rally at the highly symbolic Place du 1er mai [1 May Square], where in the 1930s communists and trade unionists had united against fascism, and which Algiers bus drivers still called *chamaneuf* (for the pre-1962 *champ de manœuvres*), the fiercely secularist Said Sadi, head of the political party Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie (RCD, Rally for Culture and Democracy), found himself awkwardly in company with the former Front Islamique du Salut (FIS, Islamic Salvation Front) firebrand Ali Benhaj; while supporters of the latter chanted 'Ya Ali, ya Abbas, al-jabha rahi la bas!' [Hey Ali (Benhaj), Abbasi (Madani), the Front's still going strong], other demonstrators shouted 'Boulayha barra!' ["Beardie" (Islamist) out!'] ('Un premier pas', 2011). Algerians across the country were protesting, demonstrating, rioting and striking on an almost weekly basis, and had been doing so for years. But no broader, coalescing movement of opposition emerged from these many sporadic, fragmentary but at the same time endemic and constant local protests. Partly, this was due to the CNCD's own lack of credibility, especially the prominence within it of Sadi and the RCD, a party long seen as having been partly created in collusion with the security services, and which had lost much of its support by remaining in Bouteflika's 'presidential coalition' government for some time after the beginning of the 'Black Spring' in Kabylia a decade earlier. More important were basic

differences between Algeria and its neighbours, both in the structure of the public sphere and its management by the regime, and in the nature of the opposition and of social protest. Both are important to understanding the inertia and the long-term dynamics of Algeria in 2011–2015.

Unlike Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, Algeria's presidency had perhaps become an office for life, but not a family business. Bouteflika, for all his longevity, was not seen by most Algerians as an embodiment of the system in the same way that Ben Ali or Mubarak were by Tunisians and Egyptians. Algerians well knew that there were multiple centres of power within the regime. Oppositional energy was thus somewhat dispersed for lack of a single focus, a dispersal accentuated by the considerable space within the system **(p.37)** for the absorption of stress. Unlike the tightly controlled, indeed virtually asphyxiated public sphere in Tunisia, Algeria's rulers since the mid-1990s had taken care to create plenty of 'free' space for the channelling and dissipation of social and political energy: the political parties (two Berberist parties, two legal Islamist parties, a Trotskyist left, a secular-republican regime party, as well as the historic and renovated FLN and a plethora of younger movements) and the proliferation of privately owned newspapers, in French and Arabic, expressing every shade of opinion, provided no end of avenues for the distribution and cooling of social energies. When demonstrations did occur, care was again taken to give no focus to popular anger – unlike in 2001, and unlike in Tunisia, there were to be no funerals of martyrs. The police hardly needed to use relative restraint, given the balance of forces on the street, in which an estimated 30,000 policemen faced perhaps 2,000 protestors. Several hundred protestors were arrested on 12 February, but all were reportedly released soon afterwards, in some cases within less than an hour.

But more crucial even than the regime's management of the protests was the fragmentation of the opposition and the fact that it existed, not in a simple face-off with *le pouvoir* as a bloc, but as a disjointed series of separate protests that in fact worked within, not against, the logic of the *régime* – in the more technical sense of the political economy of state-society relations. Not only did the political landscape encourage disunity, and not only did the CNCD, and especially the RCD, suffer from a lack of credibility. The organization of protest by professional groups, *corps de métiers*, unions, neighbourhoods, meant that each could be repressed or bought off as the particular situation demanded, or as local political interests dictated.<sup>17</sup>

As had been true throughout the long colonial period and through the convulsions of the war of independence, the tumultuous surface events and the consistently intractable underlying logics of political life at the summit of the state made up only one, and perhaps not the most significant, layer of Algerian history. Below *le pouvoir* on the heights of Algiers lay a society that was still robust and resilient, with a system of functional, if episodic and informal, engagement between society and the more local instances of the state: the provincial governorates (*wilayas*), the municipal assemblies (APCs), even the local political parties (*kasmas*) of the FLN and the RND. And, in some places, informal mechanisms of influence and arbitration still **(p.38)** embodied very old forms of local consultation: councils of *aarouch* in Kabylia or village *thajmaaths*, sometimes remodelled as 'patrimonial associations', preserved the function of the ancient male, adult consultative assembly; meetings of 'tribal' heads of families in Tebessa or Timimoun; *halqas* of scholars and community leaders in the Mzab. At these local and pragmatic levels of political life, Algeria's authoritarianism was not, in fact, as calcified as it might seem; it too was flexible, resilient, capable – as long as it had money to distribute – of a selective responsiveness to popular demands, assertions of sectional interest or bargains of patronage and clientelism.

Thus had the political economy of rioting had operated throughout the country, on a more or less permanent basis, throughout the past decade. There was no connection between protests across national political space because, whatever they shared, each riot, sit-in or demonstration was for both protestors and authorities a local protest over primarily local issues, resolved or kept in deadlock by local mediation and the local deployment of the state's resources – electricity, housing and salaries, or batons, bullets and tear gas. It was only when there was no network of such collective action available, and – of course – no political traction to be gained from the bureaucracy by the law-based demands of the individual citizen, that this informal but relatively functional system broke down: it was in these circumstances that Algerians set themselves on fire. But there was no risk of a wider conflagration. This was not because Algerians were collectively 'traumatized' by the experiences of the 1990s, a supposition often made but not borne out by observation within the country and made questionable by the sheer pace of demography.<sup>18</sup> Rather, fears of a return to violence, however severe, were outweighed by the generalized popular political demobilization that had been the more readily observable effect of the 1990s. Rather than being simply afraid to speak out – which in fact they did, loudly, and all the time – Algerians were for the most part, more simply, as they regularly put it, *dégoûtés* [disgusted] with the thoroughly distasteful, compromised business of politics. If there was no (p. 39) linkage between endemic social protest and anaemic political opposition, this was partly because there was simply no interest in the latter among those, very many, people involved in the former.

This was above all, perhaps, visible in the differences between January's social protests – what became known as *zzit wa sukkar* [oil and sugar] protests in the popular quarters of Algiers where they occurred, Bab el-Oued and Belouizdad (Belcourt) – and the attempted mobilization for 'change' in February. The organized political rallies were largely boycotted by those who had been involved in the spontaneous popular protests only weeks earlier. As journalist Ghania Mouffok astutely observed in reporting the words of the apparently 'pro-Bouteflika' youths who briefly formed a counter-demonstration at *chamaneuf* on 12 February, these were anything but 'pro-regime' protestors:

We're just fed up, that's all, they can go have their fights somewhere else, this is our patch [*quartier/Houma*], our homeland [*patrie*]. Us, when we demonstrate, they call us scum, thugs [*de racaille ... de voyous*] [...] So why do they come and have a go at us? Us, when we go out on the streets for two days, at least we get the price of oil and sugar down. And them, what do they want? These parties just use us to climb up to positions of power.

(Mouffok, 2011)<sup>19</sup>

As one taxi driver in Oran put it, again drawing a clear line between attempted political mobilization and the past winter's local social protests: 'Us, we know them. They're doing that for themselves, not for us. There'll be nothing happening in our neighbourhoods, because that lot, they did nothing for us in the riots'.<sup>20</sup> Endemic social protest thus combined with a disinterest in the vacuity of 'politics'. If this was, in part, the result of post-1990s circumstances, it also indicated longer-term factors at work.

### The Shadows of Revolution

In 2011–2012, Algerians looked back at their own earlier revolutionary moment of 1988–1989 that had ended the post-revolutionary single-party era, ushered in a brief moment of apparent ‘democratization’, and then the protracted crisis of society and state, accompanied by atrocious violence, that had lasted through the 1990s and, though more sporadically, into the **(p.40)** past decade. As many Algerian commentators observed, rather than being ‘left behind’ by the revolutions of 2011–2012, they were in advance of their neighbours, having already ‘been there’ 24 years previously. Whatever political manoeuvres may have lain behind them as proximate cause, the massive youth protests of October 1988 were undoubtedly the expression, most basically, of demography, of the generational shift since independence and the demand of a disenfranchised populace for a more responsible, accountable state that would live up to the essential demands of its people for the guarantee, and equitable distribution, of public goods.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent conflict, from 1991 to 1999, not only crushed but also effectively delegitimized utopian Islamism as a revolutionary solution that would ‘re-enact’ the revolutionary dynamic of the war of independence, as some FIS militants in 1989–1991 had understood themselves to be doing, instead fragmenting the Islamist constituency, isolating, manipulating and undermining its most radical factions while co-opting and taming others. It also effectively demobilized the general public, which was terrorized by both Islamist insurgency and state repression. The climate of insecurity undermined social solidarity, destroying trust even between neighbours and within families, and instilling not so much pervasive fear as a pervasive *dégoûtage* with all things *bulitiq* [politics].

This is all the more striking a result given the extremely high level of popular politicization in Algeria and the country’s very assertive popular political culture, built up by oppositional social movements of all political colours during the 1980s, but developed in the momentum of state and nation-building in the 1960s and 1970s, and born in the revolutionary war of national liberation. And, indeed, behind memories of 1988–1989 lay the presence of that first revolution. In the Algeria of 2012, the foundational revolutionary legacy of 1954–1962 remained as potent and relevant as ever before, in the shape of the Algerian state itself and in its relationship to Algerian society; in the languages Algerians used to express their situation and aspirations; in both the consequences it had had for their history ever since independence and in the potential it had left unrealized.

But the legacy of the war of independence, and the revolutionary state formation that came out of it, has been neither simply heroic nor secretly traumatic, but profoundly ambiguous. The FLN’s counter-state, like other such movements in Africa and the Middle East in the years of the Cold War, was both a popular revolutionary and an authoritarian military state, **(p.41)** including ‘the people’ as a whole in its distribution of wealth while excluding them from a share in their own sovereignty. It was a popularly responsive kind of authoritarianism, with the state as guarantor of basic living standards, as agent of a project of improvement and uplift in which – even if results were slow in coming – people could generally believe, and as the distributor of goods that – even if few and far between – were thought to be made available on a reasonably equitable basis to all. ‘The people’, homogenized, heroized, unified, was the basis of the political community and the ground of ownership of public goods. At the same time, the state was factional, secretive and unaccountable, with power located not in formal, open, law-bound institutions nor even in the party, but in the army and its intelligence services, where it was divided and negotiated between changing configurations of factions that only sometimes – under Boumediene – recognized a common arbiter whose decision would be respected by all. All they

shared otherwise was their unwillingness to submit their hard-won positions of influence and access to privilege to the uncertainties of popular electoral consultation.

As the socialist experiment first foundered, by the late 1970s, and was then unravelled in the late 1980s, and as neoliberalism crowded in, opening markets and opportunities, democratizing corruption and vastly inflating the value of the stakes in play, the putative higher purpose of the stability which the system sought evaporated. Ferociously re-establishing that stability, and the *status quo ante*, against the threats of both Islamism and a more genuine democratization through the 1990s, by 2015 the regime had rendered itself fragile, hollow and with little idea of what to do next save accelerate its rapaciousness. As the veteran of the wartime FLN and leading political personality Abd al-Hamid Mehri put it, 'the current system contents itself with a democratic facade and a single-party reality [which] can maintain itself, but not solve the problems [that it faces]'.<sup>22</sup> 'The people' had long since spilled out of the unified, homogeneous, heroic mould into which the new nation state had tried to press them, asserting their differences – sometimes to a horrifically violent degree – against each other, but also demonstrating their plurality, their belonging to a shared universe of references – linguistic, religious, cultural – different interpretations of which provided the grounds of their contests among themselves (Rahal, 2012). But of its distributive function, the system that governed them had retained only the capacity to buy short-term acquiescence; of its guarantees of law and order only the ability to repress; of the revolutionary state only the secretive, factional habits of what was now a gerontocracy, whose privileges could be exploited by those who had grown up in its charmed circles.

**(p.42)** The legacy, the long shadow of Algeria's revolution, and of the revolutionary era in the Third World as a whole – of which in the 1950s and 1960s Algeria was such a powerful symbol – has been double-edged, an enduring inspiration and an unfulfilled aspiration. The promise of 1 November 1954, of a democratic state established by and for its people, integrated into a fraternally united Maghrib, remained the unfulfilled requirement for the solution of the country's pressing social, economic, environmental and political challenges. In Mehri's words, 'to return to the origin of the FLN is [in this sense] also to respond to the reality of the present moment',<sup>23</sup> but it was the factional politics of the nationalist past, not its project for the future as imagined at the outset of the revolution, that remained hooked in power 60 years later.

The generational shift that has produced Algeria's contemporary population and its aspirations for change thus confronts the maintenance of a status quo untenable in the longer term but capable of reproducing itself apparently indefinitely for the time being. And, at the same time, one of the ways it could do so, at least while hydrocarbon prices remained high between 1999 and 2015, was by reverting, after the 1990s' straitjacket of indebtedness and structural adjustment had been removed, to the old ruling bargain of redistribution, albeit in a stripped-down, episodic, crisis-management mode, without implying any more genuine inclusion of participatory politics in the government of the country. In the shadow of the revolutions of 2012, Algerians thus engaged not in frontal opposition to the state but in the demand *for* a state, and for the public goods that the state, according to most Algerians, is supposed to deliver. But in the ways Algerians have thus organized themselves, outside the sphere of formal politics and in a striking recomposition of more fundamental, locally constructed social movements, Algeria's contemporary impasse also points to the resilience of society, its capacity, *faute de mieux*, to get by without, or in the absence of, the state. And this, perhaps, is one of the longest-term and deepest structural factors of Algerian history, reaching back through the colonial period and

indeed well before the French conquest: less the sound and fury of revolutionary politics than the quiet endurance of a resilient society.

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### Notes:

(1) This was particularly the case of Amar Saïdani, secretary general of the FLN since 2013, whose sorties against the DRS were widely seen as reactions to the agency's own (no doubt equally opportunistic) widely mediatized investigations into corruption involving some of those close to Bouteflika, especially the president's younger brother Saïd, a close ally and patron of Saïdani.

(2) Other well-placed observers suggested that Toufik's official departure was, in reality, no such thing, but merely a retirement further behind the scenes.

(3) The phrase is that of a former minister in the governments of 1988-90. Interview, Algiers, 7 June 2007.

(4) On In Amenas, see Chrisafis et al. (2013).

(5) Having formerly been Toufik's 'right-hand man', in the drawn-out succession struggle from 2011 onwards, Tartag appears to have returned to favour, to a post at the presidency and then to the direction of the DRS, through Saïd Bouteflika's attempt to counter the DRS and shore up his own position at the head of the 'presidential clan'.

(6) The great exception to this pattern, the Algerian Foreign Ministry and its diplomatic corps is all the more remarkable in this context. Despite the protracted impasse in domestic politics, it was able, in 2011-2014, to reposition Algeria once again as a major arbiter in the region, between the collapse of Libya, the near-collapse of Mali and the troubled transition in Tunisia. Since the wartime establishment of the FLN's foreign relations, skilled diplomacy abroad has been as consistent a characteristic of Algeria's political class as has factional sclerosis at home. On the origins and importance of Algeria's foreign relations during and immediately after the war of independence, see Connelly (2002); Byrne (2016).

(7) See also McDougall (2007). I owe the image of *le pouvoir* as a 'black hole' to an Algerian colleague. Conversation in Algiers, May 2009.

(8) The various sorties in the press, sometimes mutually vituperative, of former DRS officers Hichem Aboud and Mohamed Samraoui - both authors in the 1990s of books denouncing the state's complicity in massacres of civilians, and both, from 2012, involved in factional politics once back in Algeria (Aboud campaigning against Saïd Bouteflika, while Samraoui was allegedly - an allegation he denied - 'recuperated' by Bouteflika's faction) - illustrated the extent to which the service's most prominent former dissidents, neither of whom denied that they subsequently remained in touch with their former colleagues, had become part of the game around the succession crisis, inconceivable a decade earlier, though both were then already at odds over their respective credentials.

(9) Self-immolations in Algeria were reported as early as May 2004. A list was compiled on *Wikipedia* of 45 cases reported in the press between January and October 2011. See, for example, '2011 Algerian Self-immolations' (n.d.); 'Voyage dans l'Algérie des immolés' (2012); 'Un homme d'une trentaine d'années' (2014); 'Chômeurs, enseignants' (2014).

(10) For a fuller exploration see Djabi (2012). The expression *tab jnanou* - literally 'its garden has ripened' - refers to something having passed its time. Bouteflika used the phrase in a widely commented speech in Sétif on 8 May 2012, when he said, to general surprise, 'Jili tab jnanu, tab jnanu, tab jnanu' [The time of my generation is done, done, done].

(11) Presidential elections were held in September 1999, April 2004, April 2009 and April 2014.

(12) This had been the case at least since 2004, when Ali Benflis, the FLN's secretary-general and Bouteflika's 1999 campaign manager, ran against his former patron with support from the army chief of staff Mohamed Lamari and others. The campaign was especially acrimonious, and led to a hard-fought split in the FLN, which by 2009 had been brought back into line by supporters of Bouteflika. Other notable incidents included the assassination, on 25 February 2010, of director-general of the *sûreté nationale* (DGSN, the national police force or *aman al-watani*) Ali Tounsi, at his office in the Algiers police headquarters, by one of his colleagues, Chouaib Oultache, who was jailed in November 2011 in a corruption case along with several other DGSN *cadres* (having not yet faced trial for the murder); the removal in May 2010 of the long-serving and powerful Nouredine 'Yezid' Zerhouni, a Sécurité Militaire veteran, from the post of Interior Minister that he had occupied since 1999; and the spectacular corruption scandal at the national oil company SONATRACH that brought down Chekib Khelil, the former World Bank petroleum expert, SONATRACH president from 2001 to 2003 and Energy Minister from 1999 to 2010.

(13) The palace *coup d'état* of January 1992 - which forced President Chadli Benjedid from office, ended the electoral process that the Islamist FIS was more than half-way to winning, and instituted a formal transitional régime under a Haut Comité d'Etat (HCE, High State Committee) fronted by civilian political personalities - was engineered by a group of army general officers: Khaled Nezzar (b. 1937), Minister of Defence; Mohamed Lamari (b. 1939), commander-in-chief of ground forces who became chief of the general staff in 1993; Belkheir (b. 1938), Interior Minister and Chadli's principal chief of staff (*chef de cabinet*) with responsibility for security affairs; 'Smaïn' Lamari (b. 1941), a veteran of the Sécurité Militaire and head of its department of internal security and counter-espionage; Mohamed Touati (b. 1936), an advisor to the general staff; and Abdelmalek Guenaïzia (b. 1936), chief of the general staff. Mohamed Mediène (b. 1939), had taken charge of the Sécurité Militaire, soon to be renamed DRS, in 1990.

(14) In 2011, Touati would also be a member of the Bensalah commission established to consult on political reforms (an exercise that was merely window dressing; see further below).

(15) US diplomats noted as much in 2009, during Belkheir's prolonged illness. See 'Biology favors Bouteflika on election eve', Thomas F. Daughton, Algiers to Secretary of State, 23 March 2009, 09ALGIERS278\_a. Available at [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ALGIERS278\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ALGIERS278_a.html) (consulted on May 20 2015).

(16) On elite reproduction and (lack of) political system change, see Werenfels (2009).

(17) This argument has been made independently by several observers besides myself; I am indebted especially to Robert Parks, Mohand Akli Hadibi, Mohammed Hachemaoui, Daho Djerbal and Hugh Roberts for discussion of this question. See also Roberts (2002); Goodman (2013); Hachemaoui (2012); Parks (2013; 2015).

(18) Although many Algerians, individually and within family groups, undoubtedly continued to suffer from the effects of the war (including psychological trauma as clinically defined, which some studies suggest might be transmitted intergenerationally), many of the young people protesting in 2011 could themselves have had little or no conscious memory of the worst of the violence between 1992 and 1998. By 2010, 20.8% of the population was aged between 15 and 24 (i.e., born between 1986 and 1995); the under-15s, fully 27.1% of the population, had been born mostly since the peak of the conflict in the mid-1990s. See 'Demographic profile of Algeria', UN-ESCWA. Available at <http://www.escwa.un.org/popin/members/algeria.pdf> (consulted on 2 November 2015). See also McAllister (2013).

(19) Circulated by email. All translations from French or Arabic in this essay are by the author.

(20) 'N.', Oran, communicated by personal email, 14 February 2011. See also Parks (2013: 115).

(21) For these expectations as durably underlying Algeria's popular political culture (and as considerably more important than more procedural or 'liberal' constituents of 'democracy' as conventionally understood by democratization theorists), see Parks (2011; 2015); McAllister (2014).

(22) Interview, Algiers, 25 March 2007.

(23) Mehri interview, Algiers, 25 March 2007.



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