

# Algeria's democratisation process: a frustrated hope

MOHAND SALAH TAHI

## Introduction

The main obstacle to democratisation in Algeria is not so much the Islamists as the persistence of old ways of thinking.<sup>1</sup> Islamism and *integrisme* (or religious fundamentalism) are the logical outcome of a regime which, having failed to respond to people's material expectations, sought to base its legitimacy both on Islam and the buried bones of the martyrs of the Algerian war of independence.

Over two years after the *coup d'état* interrupted the electoral process in January 1992, and following the state of emergency, nothing serious has been done to bring the country out of chaos and confusion. Three presidents and three prime ministers have succeeded each other without any sign of progress, and without introducing any important concrete reforms. The ruling authority seems unable to present a political solution or propose a clear economic programme that will dispel the turbulence in the country. The *Front Islamique du Salut*—The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), in spite of being outlawed in March 1992, is still able to muster support within society, which is at the edge of an explosion because of mass unemployment and the hardships of everyday life. Because of falling world prices, oil revenues, which represent 98% of Algeria's exports, are insufficient to keep the economy working and to service its \$27 billion external debt. As a consequence, the country has no other choice but to swallow its pride and submit to IMF conditions by restructuring its economy and rescheduling its debt, despite the consequences for the already unfavourable social conditions. After 30 years of euphoria, during which the revolution and independence provided the ideological bases and oil the economic resources, the realisation is dawning that little has been achieved in Algeria.

Today, three politico-ideological currents dominate the Algerian landscape. They are the Islamists, the Baathists and the Berberists. For the first, the present drama is the result of a lack of rigour in the observation of the religious principles of Islam; for the second, it emanates from a failure to recognise the purely Arab character of the Algerian people and its culture; and lastly for the Berberists, any solution must be preceded by the recognition of the Berber language as a national and official language.<sup>2</sup>

The increasing wave of daily violence and terrorism demonstrates the depth of the multi-dimensional crisis and political deadlock. Two totalitarianisms are contesting for the monopolisation of power. One arbitrarily and illegitimately uses public power, the other 'authorises' itself to commit all kinds of violence in the name of divine power.

### A deficit of legitimacy

Resorting to symbols is an old method of seeking legitimisation of every kind. Since Algeria's independence in 1962, the ruling elites have sought to keep their grip on power by relying on their legitimacy in the War of Liberation, with the first of November 1954 (the date of the outbreak of war) serving as a point of reference and a source of validation. The rulers have often identified this value as their own and that of the people, since, for them, the power is that of the people. Status obtained in the army and in the shadow of the single party have for long been of more value than the highest academic qualifications. The 'revolutionary' generation has, therefore, been transferred into a caste in power in a country where over two thirds of the population today were born after the revolution. Not until the 1980s did knowledge start to claim its share of power at the expense of the historic and revolutionary legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the 'November generation' had the qualities to make war. Yet it was wrong to think it possessed the qualities to create peace and ensure development. When social contradictions started to grow during the 1980s, the populist discourse of the November generation began to lose its effect. Between the egalitarian discourse and a social reality which contradicts it, there resides an unbridgeable gap, which led to a reduction in the credit of the *Mujahid* (freedom fighter), particularly among the young. The regime reacted with an arrogant paternalism which permitted the injection of some new blood into the hierarchy. The new generation accepted this paternalism with difficulty, because it considered it simply an attempt by the elders to remain in power.

In reality, it is reasonable to say that the old generation has not yet understood the profound change that has taken place in Algerian society; hence it can no longer lead the country. Indeed, the present situation is a consequence of its stubbornness and mismanagement. Attempts at rewriting history so as to underpin the legitimacy of the single party's work of restructuring the state—supposed to have been dismantled in 1830 by the French—have only served to inflame anti-French sentiment. Haranguing was the favourite occupation of Ben Bella (Algeria's first president from 1962 to 1965) who organised numerous meetings and symbolic ceremonies. During the Boumedienne era (1965–1978) the regime, whose main obsession was the legitimisation of its assumption of power, endeavoured neither to inject a democratic culture nor to promote an ethos of hard work among the people, especially as the oil boom of the 1970s served to make development an easy task.

A turning point came in October 1988, when there was a popular revolt against a system legitimised by the ideals of November '54. The single party was denounced as being a system contrary to the principles of November '54. The 1988 'storm', however, did not bring about the collapse of the system. Instead, in order to extend its life the FLN party–army alliance helped to create a new kind of totalitarian party in Algeria. Against this background, the first ever free general elections in the history of independent Algeria, held in December 1991, were annulled, and the 'most popular' party (the FIS) was banned. Now the institutions of the constitutional state have been dissolved. In response to the protests that followed these decisions, 'security camps' have been opened and thousands of Islamists have been 'deported' to the Sahara.

At the same time a new breed of 'democrats' has appeared: the Republicans. They too claim to serve the ideals of November '54, but they have also demanded that the state eradicate the seeds of Islamist extremism in the country. They have advocated a 'new war of liberation against integristism and obscurantism'. As a result, the country is now experiencing an unprecedented wave of violence. Bomb attacks, assassinations, abductions...a river of blood has submerged the country, yet the system has still not collapsed.

### The coup d'état

In December 1991, 49 out of the 64 legalised political parties participated in the general election. The popular verdict revealed that a great majority of them had no weight or grassroots support. Only three political formations came out with seats. These were the FIS, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the National Liberation Front (FLN). Those on the 'democratic' front who failed to get elected were among the first to call for military intervention and to speak against any negotiated solution. These came later to be known as the '*Eradicateurs*' (Eradicators), 'Modernists', and 'Republicans'. They mainly include the Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie—Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD); the former Algerian Communist Party—Parti de l'Avant Garde Socialiste (PAGS) which changed its name in 1993 to Ettahaddi (the challenge); and finally the leadership of the Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens—Algerian Workers Union (UGTA).

The January 1992 *coup d'état* was not a response to the FIS's election victory, simply because this party and a number of other Islamist parties had been legalised by the regime and were doubly legitimised by it and the other opposition political parties which took part in the election. In reality the coup was incited by a fear of the emergence of a genuine democratic force. The FFS march of 2 January 1992, which gathered the biggest street crowd in the history of Algeria (between 800 000 and one million), aimed at mobilising the silent majority, particularly the 42% of the population who abstained, to vote in the second round. The marchers brandished slogans against both the existing 'police state' and a 'probable *integrist* republic'. This was a major cause of the coup. After all, the FIS is the product of a regime with which it could have cohabited. All the institutions drafted since Algeria's independence have devoted their first articles to the glorification of Islam and its consideration as the state religion. Moreover, the comparatively small turnout of voters appeared to magnify the importance of the FIS.

A genuine democratic force from outside the existing system and opposed to it would certainly threaten the interests and privileges of those who, for three decades, had been drawing huge profits from their positions. Contrary to the Western democracies, where the bourgeoisie has the right of ownership and for this reason governs, in Algeria the *nomenklatura* governs and for this reason has rights of ownership. The army did not intervene to break a drift orchestrated by the FIS, but to break the 'democratic' constitution. The generals who had kept the country under their sway for 30 years understood that a consensus was being established in order to bypass them, and that power in Algeria was in the process

of being taken away from them. They probably sensed that the FIS was not going to make mistakes that would call the army to resume power. In such circumstances the *coup d'état* was in no way anti-Islamist. It was a *coup d'état* against the emancipation of Algeria.

A few months after the 11 January *coup*, and the terrible repression that followed, the Islamists, holders of the national legitimacy, went into armed resistance. The thesis which now prevails in the West, and particularly in France, is that the Islamists are murdering the intelligentsia. This, however, needs substantiation. First, the assassination of intellectuals has never been entirely proven to be the work of the Islamists, especially those who claim allegiance to the FIS; Second, and more importantly, a number of the assassinated 'intellectuals' not only supported the military junta but also served as members of the Conseil Consultatif National (CCN)—a group of 60 people co-opted by the regime to play the role of a puppet parliament at a time when the elected 'deputies' were in the Sahara camps. These appointed members of parliament are fiercely anti-democratic, for otherwise they would not be there. A democrat who stands before army tanks in Tiananmen Square is a thousand times more democratic than a 'democrat' who calls for the intervention of army tanks in the streets of Algiers.

### Constitutional confusion

When President Chadli's 'official resignation' became public on 11 January 1992, rumours were circulating that the army would take over to prevent an eventual establishment of a theocratic republic. In view of the conditions of Chadli's 'resignation', Algeria found itself in a constitutional deadlock as the National Assembly had already been secretly 'dissolved' by the resigning president.

According to the constitution, the President of the Assembly (Parliament) would take charge of the state for 45 days pending the election of a new president. But the Constitution did not anticipate the double vacancy of the National Assembly and the Presidency. In this situation the army's intervention was apparently 'requested' by the Prime Minister, Sid Ahmed Ghazali, to 'ensure' the country's security.

To this, the FLN reacted by declaring that 'nobody was entitled to stop the electoral process'. The Islamists were outraged by the plot, which they saw as aimed at 'confiscating the people's struggle and its project for an Islamic State'. The FFS saw in Chadli's 'resignation' a *coup d'état* which opens the path for illegal and arbitrary solutions.<sup>4</sup>

### The HCE: two years of instability

Three days later (14 January) the Haut Conseil de Sécurité (HCS), the only body of power which remained constitutional, announced the installation of a collective leadership called the Haut Comité d'Etat (HCE) composed of five members. Immediately this collective leadership was denounced by the FFS, the FLN and the

FIS. The five members of the HCE were: Mohamed Kheiredine Boudiaf, who was recalled from his exile in Morocco, as president; Major General Khaled Nezzar, the patron of the army; Colonel Ali Kafi, the General Secretary of the ex-Servicemen's organisation—Organisation Nationale des Moudjahidine (ONM); Tidjani Haddam, Rector of the Paris Mosque; and Ali Haroun, Minister of Human Rights.

In place of the defunct Assemblée Populaire Nationale (APN), the HCE set up a new judicial instrument, the Conseil Consultatif National (CCN), presided over by Redha Malek, which would legitimise the decisions of the authorities. Among the immediate decisions of the HCE were a proclamation of a State of Emergency, on February 9, 1992, for the duration of one year over the entire national territory; and the dissolution of the FIS by a decision of the Administrative Chamber of the Tribunal of Algiers on 4 March. Following the assassination of the HCE President, Mohamed Boudiaf, on 29 June 1992, Colonel Ali Kafi became president; the Foreign Minister, Redha Malek, became the fifth member of the HCE.

### **Mohamed Boudiaf: a man of contradictions**

Following the results of the first round of the legislative elections in December 1991, Boudiaf, still in Morocco at that time, warned against the intervention of the army which he said had no programme. He also delivered harsh criticisms against the then Prime Minister, Sid Ahmed Ghazali, whom he described as the rotten *magma* of the FLN. He defended the people's verdict and the FIS's right to rule the country according to the people's wish.

However, as soon as he was installed at the head of the HCE, he embarked on practices that were in sharp contrast to his words. The electoral process was brought to a halt. The elected Islamists were thrown into concentration camps. He declared a state of siege and became a pawn in the game of those whom he had earlier criticised. His behaviour becomes more explicable if we review his past.

When, in 1981, Boudiaf dissolved his left-wing Trotskyite party, the Parti de la Révolution Socialiste (PRS), which he had founded in 1962 to oppose Ben Bella's regime, he declared that he had been mistaken to think that the majority of Algerians, 'with whom he shared profound aspirations', would espouse his ideas. Now his argument was that there was no need for an opposition party because the Algerian people 'like' dictatorship! This judgement came after having seen masses of people attending Boumedienne's funeral in December 1978.

Later the erstwhile Trotskyite was reported to have been an extremely pious Muslim who, on several occasions, interrupted work or an important audience to accomplish the duty of a good Muslim (ie to pray) on his over-used personal carpet brought from Morocco. He also went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, acquiring therefore the religious title of *Haj*. In fact, speaking of Islam, he once declared: 'Islam in this country is the religion of everyone and all the revolutions that succeeded on this land throughout history were proud of it. They glorified, protected and defended it'.<sup>5</sup> This kind of speech can in no way be described as that of a democrat, nor of someone who knows the history of his own country

well. In Algeria there exist atheists and non-Muslims. To say that all the revolutions that occurred in Algeria were in the name of Islam is to detach the country from its origins and to overlook a large part of its history. Takfarinas, Jugurtha, the Donatist religious schism...had all led revolutions well before the arrival of Islam in North Africa. Both the Berber Queen, Kahina, a Jewish convert, and the Christian Berber leader, Koceila, led revolutions against invading Muslim armies in the 7th century.

Paradoxically, Boudiaf, the HCE and his Rassemblement Patriotique National (RPN) drew their staunchest support from those who claimed to have as their first priority the resuscitation of Algeria's pre-Islamic history and culture; namely the RCD.

### **The road to the national conference**

If Boudiaf had turned his back on the opposition political parties and engaged in a populist euphoria communicating 'directly' with the people—especially through the RPN, constituted in May 1992—the Ali Kafi version of the HCE devoted its second year to appearing to 'seek' a compromise with political parties and 'to find a better formula' for the resolution of the crisis. Thus it was on 14 January 1993, the first anniversary of the HCE, that its president proposed an extension to the transitional period during which the management of state affairs was to be ensured by political parties and associated movements. The HCE called for the opening of dialogue with political parties and social and professional organisations. The first step on this path had already taken place on 21 September 1992, when the HCE received the FLN, HAMAS, NAHDA, RCD and the FFS, with the objective of reaching 'national reconciliation' to solve the crisis following the interruption of the electoral process.

On the political front, the HCE put forward two objectives: the eradication of terrorism and the 'constitution' of a political system ensuring the principle of rotation of power. However, the idea of a referendum on the transition and on amendment to the Constitution was to be quickly abandoned because of the security situation.

The HCE started direct dialogue with political parties and associations on the basis of preparing a draft on the transition. On 13 October 1993, however, three months before the end of its mandate, the HCE entrusted the dialogue to a commission of five civilians and three military officers—the Commission de Dialogue National (CDN)—with the objective of preparing the ground for a national conference. The constitution of the CDN was in fact an indication of the failure of earlier negotiations led by the HCE.

On 23 November 1993, following a meeting with the eight members of the CDN, the HCE decided to take measures to defuse the situation, such as a relaxation of the curfew, as a first step towards a return to civilian peace. It then hinted at the possibility of integrating the actors which, until then, had not participated in the dialogue. These procedures were part of the list of demands of the most representative political parties, who form part of what is known as the 'Conciliateurs' (Reconcilers).

In fact, in December the CDN proposed that the FIS become associated in the

dialogue and the national conference, provided that the party change its name! This leads us to believe that the CDN viewed the FIS as a mere collection of letters forming an acronym, rather than a politico-religious party and holder of a new goal for society. This further suggests that the decision makers were still not interested in the real issues and the right solutions.

Within three months the CDN met 47 political formations and some 40 organisations and associations representing civilian society, but always without the participation of the FFS, which was a heavyweight democratic formation. The goal of its leader, Hocine Ait Ahmed, was a sovereign national conference independent of the authorities, whose decisions should be respected. Thus, as early as 6 December 1992, the FFS announced that it would boycott all meetings with the HCE, and it refused to play the regime's game 'which seeks the cover of the opposition in order to legitimise its initiative'.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the desire to rehabilitate the FIS, the RCD and the PAGES (Ettahaddi), which came to be known as the 'Eradicateurs', demanded the departure of the HCE, while in the Islamist camp, HAMAS and NAHDA expressed their consent for the HCE to remain in power after January 1994. To this end the FLN proposed a meeting between the HCE and the major political parties (the FFS, FLN, HAMAS, NAHDA and RCD) in December 1993, in order to prepare for the national conference and give it sovereign authority over the decisions taken.

The dialogue, however, was far from successful. Political parties that had received over 100 000 votes in the annulled legislative elections declined to follow the HCE in its approach. The FIS, despite its dissolution, was able to wield considerable influence. In spite of the different steps taken by the dialogue, the positions of the HCE and those of influential political parties were incompatible. In reply to the demand of the major parties for a return to the electoral process, the HCE maintained its objective of another period of transition first. And in the face of this apparent deadlock, the army threatened, through its Minister of Defence, Liamine Zeroual, that it would not remain passive in case of disagreement.

After the 10 January decision by the FFS not to participate in the national conference of 25–26 January 1994, the FLN made a similar decision on 22 January, followed by the RCD a day later. The issue became one of the legitimacy and credibility of such a conference if the only political parties who commanded popular support declined to participate.

According to the FFS leader, Hocine Ait Ahmed, the conference 'has the prime objective of seeking to gain time, to concoct small equilibria among the apparatuses, clans and regions. And when the game had been played the opposition was called to participate in a big show called 'national conference' in order to endorse the enthronement at the head of the State of a candidate issued from the seraglio to the amazing contempt of the population and political parties. The army, meaning to avoid the perils of direct management, would improvise a show of 'national consensus' in order to back the results of an umpteenth family secret meeting.'<sup>7</sup>

In addition to its demand for the liberation of political detainees and the participation of the ex-FIS in the national conference, the FLN argued against the substitution of the HCE by another provisional presidential institution. Accordingly it recommended the extension of the HCE mandate until the date of the

organisation of presidential elections. Ali Kafi, the HCE president, a *cacique* of the FLN and the General Secretary of the ex-servicemen's organisation—ONM, even allowed himself a lapse of memory at the Extraordinary Session of the ONM in late January 1994, when he declared: 'We say to all parties, stop your manoeuvres, participate in the conference and work for its success by giving new hope to the people who are suffering and watching us. Permit hope so that trust will return between the citizen and 'his party' and between the citizen and his State.'<sup>8</sup> Of what party did the President of the HCE speak? Evidently the FLN.

Finally, the National Conference for Consensus took place in the absence of the major political parties. The dialogue sponsored by the authorities failed as it was so obviously the concern of a regime reluctant to leave power. The attempt by the authorities to create a base of support by encouraging the development of non-political associations could not threaten or weaken the political parties most representative within society.

Secretly the HCE contacted Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a *baron* of the FLN and one of the pillars of Boumedienne's regime, who had been at the head of Algeria's diplomatic service from 1963 to 1979. Bouteflika initially accepted his candidacy for the post of president, but he put forward some conditions, including suppression of the post of one or two vice presidents, for he demanded control of national defence. This was obviously a throwback to the Boumedienne era. Unable to obtain control of national defence and the power to proceed on nominations within the military hierarchy, Bouteflika then declined the offer of the presidency proposed to him by the regime.

In fact the army would not have accepted a president who yearned to control it anyway. Besides, Bouteflika's origins in western Algeria would have weighed against him, as regionalism plays an important role in Algeria's political life. As it happens, most of the top leaders today are—and always have been—from eastern Algeria. The famous acronym BTS (Batna, Tebessa, Souk Ahras) has for long designated the geographical triangle which produces the governing elite.

Finally, the Minister of Defence, Liamine Zeroual, was designated president by the HCS for a transitional period of three years, in conformity with Article 6 of the 'Platform on National Consensus'. He is the Supreme Chief of all the armed forces as well as responsible for national defence. He therefore retains the defence portfolio, which he has held since July 1993, in succession to Major General Khaled Nezzar. He decides on and leads the country's foreign policy, and can call on people for a referendum on all questions of national interest. While Commander of the Land Forces and assistant to the Head of the General Staff, Liamine Zeroual was, in late 1989, in conflict with President Chadli on the question of the reorganisation of the land forces. After resigning from the army, he was nominated Algeria's Ambassador to Romania. However, he left that post in less than a year to retire to his native town, Batna (where he was born in 1941).

In his first speech to the nation on 7 February Zeroual drew attention to the need for a dialogue between all Algerians, beyond their ideological, political, cultural and economic differences. His declared priority was a return to peace through dialogue, which was to be accompanied by a just and global solution to the political, economic, social and cultural problems. Rejecting confrontation he declared: 'We are convinced that the political crisis can only be solved through

dialogue and the participation of all political forces without any exclusion'.<sup>9</sup> This meant the inclusion of the moderate elements of the ex-FIS. It was also seen as a positive gesture towards the major political parties, particularly the FFS and the FLN. The latter have constantly called for reconciliation and the resumption of the electoral process. Such discourse, however, was far from pleasing to the 'hawks' in both the army and civil society; those who came to be known in the new political jargon as the '*Eradicateurs*'.

### The Eradicateurs and the Conciliateurs

The situation in Algeria in 1994 resembles that of the FIS's landslide election victory in December 1991. The most widely used word, 'dialogue', is a parody. It is important to give a new sense to a number of words which have made their way into the vocabulary of Algerian politics, such as '*Conciliateurs*', '*Eradicateurs*' and '*Dialoguistes*'.

Some political parties, rejected at the ballot box in December 1991 and allied to the leadership of the UGTA, the trade unions organisation, have done everything they could to encourage the army to interrupt the electoral process. They came to be labelled the '*Eradicateurs*', in opposition to the '*Conciliateurs*', who are favourable to the reintegration of the FIS and a quick return to popular legitimacy. Backed up by the mass media and relying on fear, the '*Eradicateurs*' moved on to the offensive and advocated a new *coup de force*. The army for them was the ultimate resort against the Islamists. Yet, by calling for military intervention, they have failed to realise that a more dangerous situation could arise within the army, which is inevitably riven by the same ideological currents that divide the opposition parties and civilian society. As for the '*Conciliateurs*', the reactivation of political life means putting different factions of the Islamic movement before their responsibilities so that the factions themselves can decide on participating in the dialogue. Such measures would produce a fissure between the extremists and those who are ready to accept playing a legal game.

Today, an unequal struggle rages between the '*Eradicateurs*' on the one side, led by the RCD, Ettahaddi and the leadership of the UGTA, who refuse to risk a referendum and demand the banning of the FIS; and on the other side the '*Conciliateurs*', who include the FFS (a party ideologically in opposition to the rest of the camp), the FLN, MDA, HAMAS and NAHDA, and who demand a gesture of receptivity from the authorities and the inclusion of the ex-FIS in the dialogue. The '*Eradicateurs*', whose electoral weight is derisory, have the power of the media. Since March 1994, they have been openly calling for the creation of civilian self-defence groups, and demanding that the state distribute arms 'against the *integriste* threat'. The appeal to a 'permanent popular movement supervised by the state, in the words of the UGTA Secretary General, Abdelhak Benhamouda,<sup>10</sup> is the ultimate development of the internal and external offensive launched by the '*Eradicateurs*' against the new Head of State, General Liamine Zeroul, after his official announcement of the resumption of dialogue. Benhamouda's appeal was echoed by the RCD leader, Said Sadi, in late March 1994.<sup>11</sup>

In fact from 1989 up until the aborted legislative elections of December 1991,

the regime did everything it could to polarise political society between the FLN and the Islamists of the FIS (a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea, or, as many Algerians term it, between plague and cholera). After the 1991 elections the FLN moved gradually into opposition. Thus the equation of polarisation has been transferred into an 'apparent' ideological confrontation between the Islamists and the 'Eradicateurs', who call themselves the 'Republicans'. This is in addition to the polarisation of violence between the Islamists and the military regime. This strategy of polarised confrontation has as its objective the weakening and isolation of the more genuine democratic forces.

### *The Eradicateurs*

*The Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD)*. This political formation, though anti-constitutional,<sup>12</sup> was the first political 'party' to be created on 10 February 1989, well before the Constitution of 23 February and the Law of July 1989 which allowed the creation of 'Associations of a Political Character'. It was included within the strategy of the regime to serve as a counterweight to the Islamists; to divide the opposition, but particularly to play a clientelist role in the Berber region of Kabylia; to weaken and suppress this region or to agitate it when necessary. Now it is widely admitted that, before the creation of this party, a meeting took place between its 'future' top leadership and the patron of the secret services, Minister of the Interior, Larbi Belkhir. The leadership of the RCD has continuously played the role of speaker on behalf of a government faction or army clan.

After having been rejected by the electorate in the aborted legislative elections, the RCD leader, Said Sadi declared that he was dealing with the wrong people ('Je me suis trompé de peuple!'). Accordingly, he came out strongly in favour of the interruption of the electoral process and the intervention of the army. Thus, together with the PAGES (Ettahaddi), the RCD provided essential support for Boudiaf and his HCE. The two parties formed the real pillars of the short-lived RPN, a populist movement created by Boudiaf in the hope of mustering a base for himself and weakening the political parties opposed to him. It was not until the last stage of the HCE, when it felt abandoned after the assassination of Boudiaf, that the RCD tried to disassociate itself from the authorities. Yet it seems still to be under the influence and manipulation of the secret services, and it reflects the ideas of the army 'hawks' in its discourse.

After the results of the June 1990 local elections, following which the RCD received less than 4% of the votes and the FIS over 54%, the two party leaders, Said Sadi and Abassi Madani, were brought into a televised confrontation. The FLN, which received 28% of the votes stayed away from this confrontation. On this occasion Said Sadi threatened Abassi Madani with: 'We will not let you get through!'. Sadi's threat proved serious, as witnessed by the interruption of the December 1991 general elections and the subsequent army intervention. This was in fact a clear indication of Sadi's role as spokesman for the army hard-liners. Said Sadi has been seen by many Algerians not as representing simply a political organisation born of political pluralism, but rather as an 'official' speaker on behalf of the Berber region of Kabylia which, from time to

time, he threatens to mobilise towards civil war. He does so despite the fact that his impact on the region is not that important, as demonstrated by the crushing defeat he suffered at the hands of the FFS, which swept the entire region during the legislative elections of December 1991.

As the RCD appeared 'very small' for an ambitious leader like Said Sadi, the latter, with the help of the authorities and the mass media, embarked on the creation of a 'wider' movement in which he hoped to assemble all 'the patriot republicans'. Thus on 25 November 1993, some 5000 Algerians met around Sadi to create an anti-Islamic gathering, the *Mouvement pour la République* (MPR), which declared its opposition to any rapprochement between the authorities and the Islamists. By creating the MPR Said Sadi demonstrated his intention to pursue his ideas whatever obstacles stand in his way. Yet he failed to realise that a mutation from the RCD to the MPR would cause him problems, particularly that of convincing his base to accept the dropping of the 'Berberist' cause (which would appear in the eyes of his militants as high treason). Even if he succeeds in bringing some Berberist voters to the MPR, he will still have to face the contradictions within this movement. The movement is likely to end in failure.

But for the present time Sadi and the RCD and for that matter the MPR, are still useful tools for the hard-liners of the regime. The man himself, having played all his cards, will end up a political skeleton.

*The Parti de L'Avant Garde Socialiste (PAGS-Ettahaddi)*. This is the oldest political party in Algeria, as its roots go back to the birth of communist parties in Europe. Initially it constituted a fringe of the French Communist Party. During the Algerian War of Liberation it played an insignificant role, and it was not until 1956 that a number of its militants moved over to the FLN.

After Algeria's independence in 1962, the Algerian Communist Party, le Parti Communiste Algérien (PCA) was disbanded by Ben Bella in 1963, to re-emerge three years later under the name of the Parti de l'Avant Garde Socialiste (PAGS).

Thanks to the suspicions the conservative tendency of the FLN held towards Boumedienne's 'socialist' orientation, the latter relied on the PAGS in order to carry out his ambitious programme and legitimise his authority. The PAGS was highly influential in student circles and led an 'unofficial' parallel life with the FLN.

After the death of Boumedienne and the surfacing of the right-wing faction of the FLN, particularly with the designation of Chadli as president, the influence of the PAGS began to wane. The party then went back to 'clandestinity' and started to issue veiled criticisms of Chadli's liberalisation measures. In fact it provided what it called 'critical' support to Chadli's regime. With the 'democratisation' process that followed the 1988 bloody riots, the PAGS came back into the open. It participated in the June 1990 local elections but failed to win any seats. Given its insignificant weight and lack of influence over Algerian society, it decided to boycott the legislative elections of December 1991. Together with the RCD, it called for the interruption of the electoral process and the intervention of the army. It subsequently provided unconditional support to Boudiaf, his HCE and the RPN.

Heavily infiltrated by the *sécurité militaire* (SM)—the secret police—the PAGS

has insignificant grassroots support, but its anti-Islamist discourse has been loudly publicised by the mass media. Being at the heart of the ‘*Eradicateurs*’ and playing an agitating role, the PAGES has, since 1993, become known as Ettahddi (the challenge). Yet, in spite of the exaggerated media attention it receives, Ettahddi is without an audience. Ettahddi and the RCD, together with the leadership of the General Union of Algerian Workers, have now come to be known as the ‘Republicans’.

*The Securite Militaire (SM).* Being aware of the dangers of an army *coup d’etat*, Colonel Houari Boumedienne, who himself seized power through a bloodless *coup* in June 1965, thought of counterbalancing the ever threatening army by strengthening Algeria’s secret services the SM. As the army was essentially composed of soldiers and officers who originated from the eastern part of Algeria, Boumedienne endeavoured to offset this by leavening the ranks of the SM with elements particularly recruited from the Berber region of Kabylia and the Oran region of western Algeria. Through the Kabyle elements he could both counterbalance the army as well as control any potential threat that might come from seething Kabylia.

The SM leader from 1962 to 1979, a Kabyle named Abdellah Khalef, known as Kasdi Merbah, was assassinated in August 1993, which indicates the extent of divisions within this murky organisation. After its ‘official’ dissolution by Chadli in 1989, this ‘Thought Police’ has gradually become uncontrollable and even more dangerous, as it infiltrates all forces at work on the Algerian political scene. This includes the army, political parties, and in particular, the mass media. Its pivotal role has been to spread confusion and rumours, as well as defamation against potential opposition leaders.

At the moment it looks as if civilian society will never succeed in structuring itself properly. Whenever a movement begins to emerge, the SM reacts by creating one or more similar associations—smoke screens to sow confusion and chaos. The short-lived FFS2, the Coordination Nationale of the Mouvement Culturel Berbère (MCB), and the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), are but a few examples. FFS marches are not simply characterised as being against a ‘police state’ and an ‘*integrist Republic*’, but also by calling for the abolition of the secret police. This and the continuous intransigence of the FFS towards successive regimes, made this party the first target for devastating attacks by the SM particularly under the cover of the RCD.

Moreover, the appearance in October/November 1993 of clandestine commando groups in which observers saw the hand of this or that faction of the SM aimed perhaps at sowing terror in the Islamist camp, aggravated the chaos even further. Thus, the Organisation de la Jeunesse Algérienne Libre (OJAL), and the Organisation Secrète pour la Sauvegarde de la Révolution Algérienne (OSSRA), are two organisations about which little is known, but which threaten to revenge all the ‘acts of the *integristes*’.

Many ask about the ‘incursions’ observed in the Berber region of Kabylia, which presented an occasion for calls for the creation of armed self-defence groups, especially by the RCD leader Said Sadi. The FFS had earlier warned

against these acts of provocation and propaganda in Kabylia. In the collective mind of the Algerians, civil war means Kabylia against other regions of the country. Kabyles versus Arabs!

### *The Conciliateurs*

The '*Conciliateurs*' are those political formations which demand from the regime a return to the electoral process and respect for popular legitimacy, as well as engagement in a global dialogue that would include the ex-FIS. These demands are shared by political formations from different horizons. They include the HAMAS Movement of Mahfoud Nahnah and the NAHDA Movement of Djabellah Abdellah on the Islamic camp; the FLN of Abdelhamid Mehri and the Mouvement pour la Démocratie en Algérie (MDA) of Ahmed Ben Bella on the nationalist side; and finally the FFS of Hocine Ait Ahmed of the democratic opposition. The latter's political ideals are in clear opposition to those of the two previous movements.

Politico-religious parties such as HAMAS and NAHDA, whose political agendas and objectives—the ultimate establishment of an Islamic state in Algeria—are identical to those of the FIS, were created by the regime and the SM, in order to split the Islamic movement. Similarly, the secular RCD was created with the objective of weakening the FFS and to play a clientelist role in Kabylia. These satellite parties, however, failed to meet the aspirations of the regime as their electoral weight proved insignificant. HAMAS and NAHDA are yet to rid themselves of the complex of the FIS's overwhelming victory. Since the interruption of the electoral process and the incarceration of the FIS leadership, the two parties have endeavoured to seduce the FIS's grassroots supporters but their efforts so far seem to have been in vain. Despite the openly declared objectives of HAMAS and NAHDA, the regime has always worked to bring them to the forefront of the political scene. For example, in December 1993 the NAHDA leader, Djabellah Abdellah, declared that his movement rejected the 'Platform for National Consensus', elaborated by the CDN, because it did not start with '*Bismi Allah*' (in the name of God). Djabellah Abdellah castigated the attitude of the secular parties which he considered to be 'anti-constitutional' and among the 'worst enemies of democracy'.<sup>13</sup>

*The FLN: from 'power' to 'opposition'*. In 1962 Algeria numbered some 10 million inhabitants. By 1994, the population has almost trebled to reach 27 million. Three-quarters of these were born after independence. These young people do not know the colonial era or the War of Liberation. In return they have suffered thirty years of 'FLN authority', which provokes, among most of them, a feeling of rejection. This was well illustrated in the FLN's defeat in both the local and general elections of 1990 and 1991.

Certainly, differences between the *nomenklatura* in power, heirs of FLN's nationalism, and the partisans of the Islamic republic, are not ideologically as deep as it seems. During the Boumedienne era (1965–1979) and that of Chadli (1979–1992) some *Walis* (regional governors) did not wait for the arrival of the FIS to ban alcohol, mini-skirts and long hair for instance. And by adopting the

National Charter of 1976 and the Family Code of 1984, the FLN deputies demonstrated that they are a clear match for the Islamists in that domain.

Meanwhile, the FLN had been a military party, led by colonels and heads of Military Regions. Kaid Ahmed, Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui and Mohamed Cherif Messadia all had military careers in the shadow of Boumedienne. It was not until the return of Abdelhamid Mehri at the head of the FLN after the events of October 1988, that this party took on a new civilian patron. And when, in March 1989, army patrons symbolically presented their 'resignation' from the FLN Central Committee, they seemed to mark a turning point in Algerian political life. Apparently henceforward the FLN and the army would be divorced.

The consequences of the army's move were decisive and the two bodies (the FLN and the army) have drawn some immediate advantages. The FLN thought it would no longer have to defer to the army over its important decisions, especially in its conferences where high-ranking officers traditionally forced decisions. The army, on the other hand, wanted to distance itself from a seriously discredited party, which was thought to have been buried for ever. Yet, if the FLN has progressively 'succeeded' in its own mutation, the army is still seeking a way out. The army cannot forgive having been somehow abandoned by the FLN. The latter appears to have remained faithful to the line traced since December 1991: it remains in opposition and will not return to power except through the ballot box. The army patrons were amazed to see the FLN refusing to endorse the military decision to interrupt elections. The military has remained structurally the same, while the FLN has undergone change. The arrival of Abdelhamid Mehri at its head was the first sign. He is a man who has never belonged to the army. The case of former Prime Minister, Mouloud Hamrouche, is even more serious in the eyes of the military. He is an army officer and the son of a martyr, who wanted to turn the army away from politics. Being a reformer, Hamrouche has been waging a hard battle against conservatives in the FLN in order to impose his tendency within an apparatus heavily conditioned by monolithic practices and vision. He hopes to revive the FLN with more dynamic and younger elements.

The FLN is now struggling to consolidate its image of an opposition political party, after having been the pillar of the system. The double boycott of the National Conference for Consensus and of the military-installed parliament, the Conseil National de Transition (CNT) has completed the divorce between the regime and the party of Abdelhamid Mehri. The FLN Secretary General is being accused of agitation in order to promote and then dominate other political parties such as HAMAS, NAHDA and the MDA of Ahmed Ben Bella. In fact there still exist many sociocultural affinities between the rank and file of the FLN and those of the FIS, HAMAS, NAHDA and the MDA.

*The FFS: democratic opposition.*<sup>14</sup> The FFS was founded in September 1963 in opposition to Ben Bella's dictatorial regime. Since then it has been calling for the establishment of a democratic system and for respect for human rights. The FFS is a social-democratic party whose discourse, despite its name, has never referred to Marx or to class struggle. The party won 25 seats in the first round of the aborted legislative elections of December 1991, coming ahead of the FLN and sweeping over the entire Kabylia region. It stood against the interruption of

the electoral process and the *coup d'état* that followed. This led the party to become the target for attacks from the HCE and its satellite political parties, particularly the '*Eradicateurs*'.

Eternal opposition has been considered the hallmark of the FFS and its leader, Hocine Ait Ahmed. Yet contrary to this reputation, Ait Ahmed is not intransigent by nature. He simply has principles which he refuses to compromise. Democracy has always been his perpetual struggle. It is because Algeria has been permanently ruled in an authoritarian manner that he found himself in opposition for 30 years. With the first signs of democratisation in 1989, he returned to Algeria to lead the struggle against the 'police state' and a possible '*Integrisme republic*', as well as the much feared SM.

After the interruption of the electoral process and the installation of the state of siege, the FFS called for a genuine dialogue. A dialogue with the army, because it is the one group which possesses real decision-making powers, and a dialogue with the political parties that enjoy the people's confidence. The FFS was reluctant to speak to the HCE, insisting instead on the involvement of the army in the dialogue because it holds the keys to the future. The army must talk to all the parties and not only the FIS. It must also guarantee the implementation of any agreement reached. Accordingly, in December 1992, the FFS stopped responding to invitations for dialogue from the HCE. Later the party withdrew from the dialogue with the CDN, which it considered not to be independent, but guided by the HCE. Finally, on 10 January 1994, the FFS was the first political party to decide not to participate in the national conference of 25–26 January, arguing that the democratisation process was seriously compromised. For the FFS the future of the regime seemed to be more important than the future of the country. The party considered that the national conference as it was conceived 'appears a vital necessity for the regime...It means the army can avoid the perils of direct management...to keep its political hegemony and the privileges of power'.<sup>15</sup> The consequences, according to the FFS, were that, as envisaged the conference simply constitutes a bridge towards a new authoritarian period. 'We return again to the process of legitimisation based on a single regime, single language and single thought. We build a "democratic" and "republican" state in the shadow of Islam as the religion of the state, and Arabic as the only national and official language.'<sup>16</sup>

For Ait Ahmed: 'The political parties have been called upon to approve the results of a family conclave of the ruling *nomenklatura*...For two years the authorities promised to return to the democratic process...and now they are opening another three-year transition period.'<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the plethora of other political parties that have mushroomed after 1989, the FFS was created outside the regime and in opposition to it. For the three decades of its life, the FFS has always remained faithful to its ideals: those of struggling for a genuine democracy which would guarantee political and cultural pluralism as well as respect for human rights. It remains the only political formation not to be manipulated and corrupted by the regime.

### **The army: from colonels to generals**

Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has been led by the army.<sup>18</sup> Ahmed Ben

Bella was brought to power by that part of the army stationed on the Moroccan and Tunisian borders, under the command of Colonel Mohamed Boukharouba, known as Houari Boumedienne. Three years later, in June 1965, Boumedienne himself toppled Ben Bella through a bloodless *coup d'état* and set up 13 years of direct military and Jacobinist dictatorship. After his death in December 1978, the choice of his successor went to a high-ranking officer, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid who, until then, was the Commander of the Second Military Region (Oran). Chadli's departure in January 1992, was the result of a silent *coup d'état* which installed the collective leadership of the HCE to manage the country's affairs for a transitional period of two years.

The army's 'official' retreat from the 'political scene' in March 1989, by deciding to withdraw from the FLN Central Committee and preserve its 'neutrality' with regard to the opposition political parties, was in no way taken seriously. After all it was the army which had forced Chadli to resign. The collective leadership of the HCE was under the control of the powerful Major General Khaled Nezzar. There were also three army officers out of the eight CDN members.

The failure of the national conference of January 1994 led to direct military rule of state affairs through the nomination of General Liamine Zeroual as the new Algerian president. He also kept the post of Minister of Defence, a portfolio which was abandoned by Chadli to Major General Khaled Nezzar in 1989. If the arrival of Zeroual cannot be seen as a surprise, his hold on the post of Minister of Defence is a 'fake surprise'. In fact, if everyone agreed to the candidacy of Zeroual for the presidency, his replacement in defence raised problems within the General Staff. A good number of the military leaders did not accept his heir apparent, General Mohamed Lamari, a hawk. Failing to agree, they reached a compromise, permitting Zeroual to accumulate both portfolios.

Within the army, some have always dreamt of assuming direct power. But a number of high-ranking officers fear that army's direct implication in political affairs could end badly. After all, the Algerian army is not a group isolated from the rest of the society. It is a popular army divided by the same cultural and ideological currents which split the civilian society. There is only a façade of unity. Hence, some army officers, such as Major General Khaled Nezzar, General Mohamed Touati and General Liamine Zeroual argue in favour of an opening of dialogue with the FIS. Others, such as General Mohamed Lamari, Head of the General Staff, are opposed to such dialogue, and call for open confrontation with the Islamists. They are apparently supported by a number of colonels and commanders who are conscious of becoming the first victims of an Islamist victory. At the moment the army's strategy lacks clarity. On the one hand it is fighting armed Islamists, and on the other hand it has been in continuous contact with the incarcerated Islamist leadership. Zeroual himself has admitted meeting Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj in December 1993. Rumours have been circulating about Zeroual and the retired General Rachid Benyelles meeting the incarcerated FIS leaders on 23 January 1994.<sup>19</sup>

The war which is opposing security forces to armed Islamist groups has serious consequences for the army. Some 800 soldiers are reported to have deserted in 1993, twice the number presumed for 1992.<sup>20</sup> At the same time

Islamist 'contagion' within the army could take on alarming proportions. The '*Eradicateurs*' too have their factions within the army. General Mohamed Lamari—a powerful man who leads 25 000 troops engaged in an anti-terrorist struggle—and the patron of the SM General Mohamed Mediane, are considered to be supporters of confrontation with Islamist groups. The promotion of the Chief of Staff, Major General Mohamed Lamari, to the newly created rank of Army Corps General, on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the start of the War of Independence, 'coincided' with Zeroual's announcement of the failure of the dialogue with the leadership of the FIS and his declared 'determination' to crack down on terrorism. Indeed, this was a clear signal that the '*Eradicateurs*' were gaining the upper hand in the army.

It is clear that in the face of the 'aggressiveness' of the Islamists, the near paralysing of the state and the inability to constitute a credible civilian authority, and the weakness and isolation of the democratic forces, the 'choice' appears to remain only with the army!

Today, Algeria is once again witnessing bipolarisation. But this time that of violence. On the one hand armed Islamist groups are gradually gaining ground; on the other hand an isolated and discredited regime is unable to mobilise the population.

The resignation of the government of Redha Malek, succeeded on 11 April 1994, by the former Minister of Equipment, Mokdad Sifi, carries a particular warning. Redha Malek had become too talkative. The army General Staff issued a clear message through Liamine Zeroual: it is the military, and not civilians, who are responsible for the management of the crisis. And it is they who decide on the attitude to be adopted with regard to the Islamist groups. The departure of Redha Malek was a continuation of the previous 'cleansing' at the summit. It is paradoxical that Redha Malek, whose diplomatic career was particularly appreciated by the Americans, was forced to resign. His 'resignation' came two days after a 'letter of intention' was handed over by Algeria to the IMF as a prelude to the signing of an agreement that would open the path for new loans and a rescheduling of Algeria's external debt. Redha Malek's mission was by then virtually accomplished. The military, anxious not to have their protégé become too important, forced him into early retirement. By distancing himself a little belatedly from the '*Eradicateurs*', Redha Malek failed to persuade of his loyalty to the army which was then leaning towards dialogue with the Islamists. The fact that he had described Islamist groups as 'barbarians', 'traitors', and 'anti-nationalists',<sup>21</sup> had irreversibly placed him among the '*Eradicateurs*' and their supporters of all-out security and hostility to dialogue with the ex-FIS. This attitude was awkward for the military hierarchy, which is, more now than at any other time, determined to maintain an appearance of unity and cohesion.

Before his forced resignation, Redha Malek was exposed by the press to attacks from the RCD leader, Said Sadi. Belaid Abdeslam before him, as well as Sid Ahmed Ghazali, had also been targets for Sadi's attacks in prelude to their 'resignation'. This offers a clear indication of the role of the RCD in Algeria's political puzzle.

### The Islamists: Djaz'arists and Salafists

In October 1988, when young Algerians thronged the streets of Algiers to express their frustration and anger against the regime, they did not do so in the name of Islamic ideals. It was not until a week later that the Islamists started to come forward, particularly after Chadli's invitation to some religious leaders, apparently to help him defuse demonstrations on the streets.

In fact the history of the FLN is punctuated by similar guarantees given to the Islamists. Thus, Ben Bella, in Mao's collar, banned the marketing of alcohol; Boumedienne chose Friday, the day of prayer, as the new weekend day; and finally Chadli promulgated the 1984 archaic Family Code which turned every Algerian woman into an object.<sup>22</sup>

In 1989 the regime legalised the FIS and other politico-religious movements and let them besiege mosques and transform them into political forums, allowing preachers to inflame youths with sermons of justice, revolt and blood. With five prayers a day and one oath on Friday, the Islamists hold five meetings every day and one conference every week.

Today's brand of Islamism is not spontaneous generation, but rather is a product of the system which it is apparently fighting. Algerian Islamism is not an accident of history. It is the result of an exploding alchemy, a mixture of a discourse based on the *Ulama's Islah* (reform) of the 1930s, borrowed from the theses of the Egyptian spiritual leader Mohammed Abdu, godfather of the *Salafiya*, which particularly impressed the FIS leader Ali Benhadj, and that of Michel Aflaq, which serve as an authoritative source for Arab *Baathism*. This cocktail was served by the system in a glass moulded in Marxism, a theory fashionable to the liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

*Integrisme* has been prepared on the ruins of nationalist and socialist ideologies, which proved their inability to face up to the economic and social challenges of the country. Besides, political Islam, just like any other extremist ideology, nourishes itself essentially on poverty and hopelessness. Economic insecurity breeds fear, and fear breeds intolerance and violence in Algeria just like anywhere else.

In order to remain in power, and in the face of its failure to meet the people's expectations, the Algerian state has turned to Islamic legitimisation notably by asking religious dignitaries to attest that their regimes are essentially in conformity with Islam. Accordingly, in a country where there is no prestigious religious institution comparable to Al Azhar in Cairo, Zeituna in Tunis or Qarawyin in Fez, the state built an Islamic university at enormous cost in Constantine, the capital of eastern Algeria and between 1984 and 1989 imported two Egyptian *Ulemas*, Mohammed Al Ghazali and Youssef Al Qardawi, both close to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The presence of these two at the head of this institution was supposed to demonstrate, the 'good Muslim' character of the Algerian state and therefore discredit the criticisms of the radical Islamic groups. The two Egyptians have, however, contributed to the formation of cadres of re-Islamisation movements which we eventually find in the FIS and then in the armed Islamic groups after the dissolution of the FIS in March 1992.

### *The Djaz'arists*

Beside the underprivileged, the Islamic movements have recruited an important number of their militants and cadres from among the young elite in the mass educational institutions. These well qualified young people face a lack of job outlets that correspond to their qualifications and meet their aspirations, as well as a lack of access to any posts of responsibility, which are controlled by the *nomenklatura* at the expense of any meritocratic promotion. Members of this 'counter elite' have made their presence felt in the FIS tendency known as the *Djaz'ara*,<sup>23</sup> (Algerianisation or Algerianists), led particularly by Lounis Belkacem (known as Mohamed Said) and the petrochemical engineer, Abdelkader Hachani. The latter were the architects behind the FIS victory of December 1991, as they convinced their party to participate in the legislative elections, despite the incarceration of its principal leaders, Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj.

This movement (the *Djaz'ara*) hopes to become ruler of the country by gradually Islamising the institutions and political vocabulary and favouring social promotion of qualified young generations. However, their agenda does not really contain a revolutionary dimension which would offer underprivileged masses more than vague promises of 'justice according to the Quran'. A number of these Algerianists, who were elected in December 1991, fled to Europe or the United States after the interruption of the electoral process and the dissolution of the FIS.

Between these elements and the most Arabist and Islamist tendencies of the FLN, which Algeria's humour dubs 'barbèfelene' (bearded FLN), there are contacts which suggest an eventual coalition around a conservative and re-salamisation project. Such a project would maintain the essential of the existing social hierarchies while permitting a certain rotation of elites.

The rural guerrillas led by Mustapha Bouyali between 1982 and 1987, resisted the army and the *Gendarmerie* for five years. With the October 1988 events and the legalisation of the Islamic movement, the struggle was transferred to the 'political' front. The arrest of the FIS leadership, however, forced some Islamists to resort, once again, to taking up arms. Hence, the appearance of the Mouvement Islamique Armé (MIA) under the leadership of Abdelkader Chebouti, a former lieutenant of Mustapha Bouyali.

Yet while the MIA was determined to follow up the armed struggle, the *Djaz'ara* tendency decided to take part in the legislative elections. Later, the interruption of the electoral process and the dissolution of the FIS led to an apparent break-up of the MIA, giving birth to a more radical group determined to continue the armed struggle against the regime until the achievement of its objectives.

### *The Salafists*

In contrast to the *Djaz'ara* tendency which aspires to take power 'legally' through elections, the *Salafists* work for the establishment of an immediate Islamic state after the taking of power by arms.

The decision by the *Djaz'ara* to participate in the legislative elections and the

frustrations that followed seem to have led the hard-liners of the MIA to break away and form a more determined armed group known as the 'Groupe Islamique Armé' (GIA). The latter opposes any gesture of reconciliation with the authorities and has been engaged in a merciless armed struggle against the regime and all those who support it. It claimed responsibility for the assassination of former Prime Minister Kasdi Merbah and a number of intellectuals and journalists, as well as foreign nationals.

Since the annulment of the legislative elections, Islamist 'political' leaders have been overtaken by uncontrollable underground groups including the MIA, the GIA, the Mouvement pour l'Etat Islamique (MEI), and lastly the Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS), which appeared at the end of 1993, claiming to be the armed branch of the FIS. Today, it is the autonomous GIA which seems to take the more radical stand and which refuses any compromise or concession. The latter, often led by virtual illiterates, is a gathering of small groups led by local Emirs (princes) exhausting their authority in violence. Thus, while the MIA has led selected attacks against the 'forces of repression' with the hope of compelling the state to liberate jailed Islamist leaders and recognise their election victory, the GIA is 'determined' to take on all those who support the 'military junta' in power, whether military or civilian, Algerians or foreigners.

A number of GIA leaders are known as the 'Afghans', for they fought beside the Afghan *Mujahideen* against the Soviet army. It appears that these Afghans joined Afghanistan thanks to funds distributed by Islamic organisations, often Saudi, which operate under the cover of humanitarian organisations. Several channels permit Algerian 'Afghans' to reach Afghanistan via France, Turkey or Saudi Arabia. It is said that the International Islamic Relief Organisation, sponsored essentially by the Saudis, receives Arab mercenaries in Peshawar, trains them and supplies them with arms. It also finances the FIS and other Islamist movements around the world.<sup>24</sup>

The present situation gives the impression that the Algerian authorities are in the process of abandoning the ground to the Islamists, indicating the beginning of the Islamisation of society, imposed by fear. Islamic armed groups, who are gradually gaining more ground, seem to exercise real control over some regions of the country. In most cases it is the GIA, the most radical Islamist group, which appears at the origin of the hardening of the position. Known to have been infiltrated by the SM, this organisation has gained notoriety. It recruits among the illiterate and unemployed, whose hopelessness and desire for social revenge are more powerful than any concern about whether or not they are manipulated. The apparent indifference of the authorities may serve as an indication of a frightening conclusion, anticipating a future political agreement with the Islamists. The terms will be that the authorities abandon society to them in exchange for preservation of their own interests. How can the Islamists doubt their strength while they are making their own law in and around Blida, a military region housing the biggest and most important military barracks in Algeria?

Today, political Islam seems set on the invasion of both the political and social fields. But this time it seeks the myth of a lost paradise in a disorderly contemporary world. Heaven is to be sought in 'returning to original Islam'. As

for the Algerian people, they have become prey to both the military junta and the Islamist galaxy.

### Mass media and intellectuals

With few exceptions, and despite a period of opening towards democratisation and freedom of expression, there has been no real intellectual or mass media revolution in Algeria. The majority of Algerian intellectuals have been unable to comprehend the problems of the society in which they live. And the journalists have remained almost entirely incapable of freeing themselves from the discourse of bygone regimes.

Like the army, political parties and other organisations, the Algerian mass media are heavily infiltrated by the SM, whose main objective is to sow confusion and dismantle all the forces that struggle for the installation of genuine democracy.

In fact, certain elements in the press continue to excel in the art of flattering the holders of authority. But as soon as these latter lose their power of decision making, the press drags them in the mud. The example of Abdelaziz Bouteflika is revealing. A member of the Oujda Group which usurped power in 1962 and which is at the origin of the present Algerian tragedy, Bouteflika is also one of the *barons* of Boumedienne's dictatorial regime. He served as Algeria's Foreign Minister for 16 years (1963–1979). As soon as there were rumours, at the national conference of January 1994, of his candidacy for the post of president, the press hastily portrayed him as a 'reformer' and a 'democrat' who had been in 'favour of democracy' even under the dictatorship of Boumedienne! He was being described as a man of progress and modernisation who symbolised rupture with the 'Chadli regime'.<sup>25</sup>

Some journalists abusively sign editorials in government papers to denounce democrats, while overlooking the suffering of the Algerians at the hands of the regime. Despite the international outcry against the violation of human rights in Algeria,<sup>26</sup> torture in the country does not appear to be either a national or a political issue. It has given rise to no thought, provoked no debate in the mass media, which remain silent and complacent. The mass media conform to Edmund Burke's formula: 'morality depends on geography'. A journalist can tolerate bad behaviour in his country while condemning it elsewhere.

Most of the 'intellectuals' who are supposedly 'murdered' by the Islamists did not merely welcome the military junta but also participated in its activities. A considerable number of them served as members of the CCN and the *Conseil National de Transition* (CNT), puppet parliaments set up by the regime after the interruption of the electoral process and the January 1994 National Conference for Consensus respectively while those who had been 'chosen' by the people were thrown into the Sahara camps. Accordingly, it is legitimate to argue that the murdered 'intellectuals' were not assassinated as poets and intellectuals but as politicians.

Supporting journalists and 'intellectuals' who are threatened by extremists is a moral duty, but not at the price of silence towards massive violations of human rights, a term which has yet to find its way into the Algerian press. To denounce

torture, humiliation and contempt in no way means playing into the hands of the extremists. There are also 'intellectuals' in the camp of the Islamists. In the Sahara camps there are hundreds of people who are not terrorists, but merely the product of 30 years of dictatorship, nepotism and corruption. They are victims of the ideology of those who still lead Algeria today.

### **France and the current Algerian crisis**

French foreign policy with regard to Algeria seems determined by an obsession with its own security. The official attitude towards the Algerian crisis is almost entirely monopolised by the Interior Minister, Charles Pasqua, eclipsing the French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, in this domain.

Relying on right-wing hype, Charles Pasqua raises the spectre of an eventual exodus towards France if an Islamic regime were to be established in Algeria. To exacerbate this fear, Pasqua declared on 4 August 1994, that an eventual flow of refugees from the southern shores of the Mediterranean should not simply be the concern of France but of all the countries of the Mediterranean Basin. Now French diplomacy with regard to Algeria appears to be divided between those who initially condemned the interruption of the electoral process and called for a political solution based on dialogue between the regime and opposition political parties, and those who applauded the interruption of the electoral process and persist in their support for the military regime. Charles Pasqua belongs to the latter camp. He insists that Western diplomacy should follow the French lead with regard to the Algerian crisis. Accordingly, he has sharply criticised the USA, the UK and Germany for their 'leniency' and 'complacency' with regard to the Algerian Islamists.

The official French attitude seems particularly anxious about an eventual overspill of the Algerian disease not only into neighbouring countries but also into France itself. In fact French inner cities as well as the suburbs are seething with thousands of sons of immigrant workers who live on the margin of society because of unemployment and poverty. They represent a failure to integrate them into French society. These youths present a fertile ground for Islamist propaganda. Indeed, there exist powerful Islamic organisations in France which carry out proselytism among these youths. The Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF), financed by the petrodollars of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, assembles some 207 declared associations, and controls more than 150 mosques.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The political turning point in recent Algerian history was marked by the October 1988 riots. The repression that followed opened the path to a new constitution which 'abandoned' the single party system in favour of multipartyism. The hidden intention of such reform, however, was to pass from a single-party regime to a system of a dominant party; that which would effectively prevent

power rotation from occurring. The caste in power has resisted genuine reform, hoping to maintain the situation in its favour.

The principal aspiration of the people, however, was a real demise of the FLN's monocratism and a change of leadership through free choice of new representatives able to transform the conditions of their daily lives.

The opposition, composed of the FIS in the Islamic camp and the FFS in the democratic camp, developed a theme of the moralisation of public life, and demanded that new elites, formerly excluded from political responsibility, should be given access. These contesting movements succeeded in training a new generation which the regime had been unable to integrate. In the face of this dynamic, the state found itself deprived of a social base. Therefore, the state army chose force as its sole language, and imposed on everyone a brutal alternative! Either support a corrupt 'mafia' system, or line up behind an Islamism which, in principle, repudiates democracy.

The present tragedy in Algeria pinpoints the isolation and therefore the weakness of the actors who do hold democratic values. Algeria's political tradition has continuously been bathed in totalitarianism. This constitutes an essential component of the country's recent history, including the contemporary history of its struggle for independence, which witnessed a party claiming to be sole owner of the state and society, monopolising the word and establishing its legitimacy on a mythologisation of the past.

The period from 1992 to 1994 is full of dates that register restrictions, oppression and all signs of instability. Since the annulment of the legislative elections, Algeria has become a theatre for assassinations and clan fighting. There have been at least two contradictory projects for society. The regime has endeavoured to strengthen both projects with the objective of prolonging the instability and confusion that are its *raison d'être*. Now the country is moving from one transition to another, an interlude of several years without stable or credible state institutions.

The recrudescence of terrorist acts and the cycle of violence and repression have favoured political schism and accentuated the division between followers of a global political solution and adherents of continued domestic repression and confrontation. As in 1992, Algeria is still divided between '*Reconciliateurs*' and '*Eradicateurs*', '*Dialoguistes*' and '*Anti-Dialoguistes*'. On the one hand the new Head of State, General Liamine Zeroual, initially seemed to be opting for the 'realist line' by calling for a negotiated global political solution. On the other hand the forces that provided the ideological substructure for the interruption of the electoral process, and the drive belt of the regime that followed, are mobilising themselves and hoping to give the impression that they have completed their divorce from the regime.

Algeria today presents symptoms of a long illness whose contagion could reach neighbouring countries and beyond. There is no apparent solution. On the one hand, Algeria is a state characterised by illegitimacy and divided between 'hawks' and 'doves'. On the other hand, Islamists with a goal of total hegemony—and who are themselves torn between 'radicals' and 'moderates'—are fighting to replace the existing regime. The real losers in this 'complicated' game are certainly the Algerian democrats.

## Notes

- I am very grateful to Dr Peter Burnell, University of Warwick, for his valuable comments.
- <sup>1</sup> Mohand Salah Tahı, 'The arduous democratisation process in Algeria' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30 (3), September 1992, pp 397-419.
  - <sup>2</sup> In 1964, the FLN Congress confirmed the 'Arabo-Islamic tradition of the Algerian people', established in its sovereignty after 132 years of colonial domination. The measure was clumsy and for a start, negated the existence of Berbers with their own culture and identity. Today, the linguistic question is included in the process of the struggle for democracy.
  - <sup>3</sup> Mohamed Harbi, *Le FLN, Mirage et Réalité*, Paris: Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1980; Harbi, *Aux Origines du FLN: Le Populisme Révolutionnaire*, Paris: Éditions Bourgeois, 1975; and Harbi, *L'Algérie et Son Destin: Croyants Ou Citoyens*, Paris: Éditions Arcantere, 1992, esp p 48.
  - <sup>4</sup> *El Watan* (Algiers), 12 January 1994.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Le Matin* (Algiers), 29 June 1993.
  - <sup>6</sup> *El Watan*, 12 January 1994.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Le Monde*, 27 January 1994.
  - <sup>8</sup> *El Watan*, 23 January 1994.
  - <sup>9</sup> *Liberlé* (Algiers), 8 February 1994.
  - <sup>10</sup> *La Nation* (Algiers), 64, 23-29 March 1994.
  - <sup>11</sup> See his interview in *Le Figaro*, 30 March 1994.
  - <sup>12</sup> The February 1989 Constitution forbade the creation of parties based on religious, linguistic or regional characteristics. The RCD, like the FIS and other formations of the Islamic movement, are all anti-constitutional parties.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Liberlé*, 1 January 1994.
  - <sup>14</sup> See Hocine Ait Ahmed, *L'Affaire Mecili*, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1989; Patrick Gérard, 'Ait Ahmed: flagrant délit du Berbérisme', in *Grands Procès de l'Afrique Contemporaine*, Paris: JAPRESS, 1990, pp 139-151; Pierre Monbeig, 'Une opposition politique dans l'impasse: le FFS de Hocine Ait Ahmed', *La Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 65, 1993, pp 125-140.
  - <sup>15</sup> *Le Monde*, 12 January 1994.
  - <sup>16</sup> *El Watan* 11 January 1994.
  - <sup>17</sup> *Guardian*, 26 January 1994.
  - <sup>18</sup> There is an excellent work on the Algerian army by Abdelkader Yefsah, *La Question du Pouvoir en Algérie*, Algiers: ENAP, 1990; Abdelkader Yefsah, 'L'armée et le pouvoir en Algérie 1962-1992', *La Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 65, 1993, pp 77-94; Lahouari Addi, *L'Algérie et la Démocratie*, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1994.
  - <sup>19</sup> *Le Point*, 1116, 5 February 1994, p 45.
  - <sup>20</sup> *Liberlé*, 24 November 1994.
  - <sup>21</sup> *Le Monde*, 13 April 1994.
  - <sup>22</sup> Ahmed Rouadjia, *Les Frères et la Mosquée*, Paris: Karthala, 1990; Franck Frégosi, 'Islam et Etat en Algérie, du Gallicanisme au fondamentalisme', *La Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 65, 1993, pp 61-76; and Hugh Roberts, 'Radical Islamism and the dilemma of Algerian nationalism: the embattled Arians of Algiers', *Third World Quarterly*, 10 (2), 1988, pp 556-589.
  - <sup>23</sup> The *Djaza'ara* favours a gradual assumption of power through 'democratic' elections.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Le point*, 1116, 5 February 1994, p 47.
  - <sup>25</sup> *Le Matin*, 24 January 1994.
  - <sup>26</sup> On 4 January 1994, a US human rights organisation, Middle East Watch, published a 67-page report on the violation of human rights in Algeria.
  - <sup>27</sup> See *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1565, 3-9 November 1994, pp 40-42.