

## 7 The Fragile and Resilient Country, 1992–2012

---

In his darkly poetic and posthumous novella *The Last Summer of Reason*, Tahar Djaout portrayed the rise of a fascistic theocracy as seen through the eyes of an Algiers bookseller, a man whose youthful hopes of ‘a humanity liberated from the fear of death and of eternal punishment’ have been drowned by the rise of an ultra-militant Islamism, its ‘dream of the purification of society’ in ‘blood and all-consuming flood.’<sup>1</sup> Born in 1954 in Oulkhou, a village perched in sight of the sea on the Kabyle coastline just east of Azzefoun, Djaout was ten months old when the war of independence began. After university he became a journalist for *Algérie Actualité* and by the late 1980s was one of Algeria’s foremost literary talents. In January 1993, he helped launch an independent newspaper, *Ruptures*, which was as critical of the state since Boumediene’s coup as it was of the Islamists. On the morning of 26 May 1993, he was shot in a parking lot as he left his home in the west Algiers suburb of Baïnem. After seven days in a coma, he was pronounced dead on 2 June.

### **Who? Whom? – And for What?**

Officially attributed to an Islamist terror group, Djaout’s killing was never transparently investigated. It became one of the first, and perhaps the best known, of many murders, of journalists, intellectuals and artists but also of many thousands more Algerian women, children and men, to become caught in a controversy over the attribution of culpability, whether to some faction of the Islamist insurgency, to some fraction of the state’s security services or to some combination of the former manipulated and instrumentalised by the latter. Other murders added to a mounting death toll that became incalculable, and to a horror that seemed incomprehensible: 21-year-old Karima Belhadj, a secretary in a police station, was killed on her way home from work in April 1993, leading sociologist Mohammed Boukhobza, at his home in Algiers in June 1993, beloved *rai* singer Cheb Hasni, outside his parents’ apartment in Oran in September 1994, and acerbic journalist Saïd Mekbel, in an Algiers

pizzeria in December 1994; the left-wing, feminist architect Nabila Djahnine, in a Tizi Ouzou street in February 1995, the Bishop of Oran Pierre Claverie who, born in Bab el Oued in 1938, had returned to Algeria in 1967 and remained there, in a doorway in Oran in August 1996, and the militant, secularist musician Matoub Lounès, on a road in Kabylia in June 1998; entire families and neighbourhoods in the Algiers suburbs and villages in the Mitidja in 1997–98, and in the districts of Blida, Medéa, Aïn Defla, Chlef, Relizane, from 1994 onwards . . .<sup>2</sup> By 2002, a decade of bewildering, horrifying war was said to have taken anything between 100,000 and 200,000 lives, the routine imprecision of the estimated death toll expressing both the enormity and the unaccountability of the violence.

From the mid-1990s onwards, gnawing doubt and bitter dispute about *qui tue qui?* (who is killing whom?) troubled the Western media, the online public sphere and the political quadrilles danced around the Algerian crisis by the international community. It exasperated and infuriated many of those in Algeria who themselves were living with constant threats of death and saw their friends and colleagues murdered around them. The West's seeming indulgence of Islamists, as some saw it, during the 1990s, and criticism in European liberal opinion of Algerian opposition to Islamism as indistinguishable from the military regime's 'dirty war', angered those who saw a violent, intolerant and incipiently totalitarian Islamism on their doorsteps as the real threat to their lives, their families and their country. Some of Djaout's former colleagues would be scathing that the same French leftists and liberals who mobilised against fascism in France, when the Front National's Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round of presidential elections in 2002, had entertained the prospect of an FIS victory in Algeria ten years earlier. To them, Le Pen was 'a choirboy by comparison' with the Islamists. They were indignant that 'terrorists' were given asylum in France, Britain, Germany and the USA, while 'those who were threatened with terror' were left to face it alone because it was not the government that threatened them. They saw withering irony in the international about-face after al-Qa'ida's attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, the recasting of Algeria as an early victim of armed Islamism and *avant la lettre* line of defence in a 'global war on terror', which the regime spun skilfully in its favour, along with the mounting Western racism and Islamophobia that they and their compatriots now faced, irrespective of their own experiences.<sup>3</sup> Others, perhaps equally opposed to Islamism but more inclined to credit the state with a monopoly of violence, decried the naïvely simplistic misrepresentation of the Algerian conflict as a struggle between Islamists and 'republicans', seeing the many irregularities, opacities and unexplained circumstances

around the proliferating violence as signs of a deliberate, orchestrated campaign of deception and misinformation as well as assassination and state-sponsored terror by *le pouvoir*.

Within Algeria, and in the intertwined public spheres of media and migration that connected Algeria and France, each side in the argument viewed the other with impatience and incredulity. Some, fleeing for their lives from secret police threats into exile in Europe or North America, alongside European democracy and human rights activists, some of whose engagements with Algeria dated back to the war of independence, saw themselves as unmasking the lies and conspiracies deliberately built up by a regime that had resorted to terrorising its own people on a massive scale. Others, pointing out that they were still in Algeria and perhaps knew more than exiles and outsiders about what was happening to them, pointed to their unenviable choice between ‘plague or cholera’ and accused the promoters of ‘the deleterious question of *qui tue qui*’ not only of ‘sowing confusion’ but, implicitly, of being complicit bystanders in the violence engulfing them.<sup>4</sup> In the global media that multiplied over these years through internet and satellite, Algeria – increasingly isolated as foreigners fled, consulates closed and exit visas became the most sought-after of commodities – became a horrific spectacle, a cautionary tale, a vicarious trauma, anything but ‘a country with people in it’.<sup>5</sup>

In these circumstances, and since the 2006 law on ‘National Reconciliation’ which criminalised in Algeria ‘declarations, writings or any other act’ bearing on ‘the National Tragedy’ of the 1990s that might ‘cause injury to the institutions [of the state] ... the honour of its agents ... or impugn the image of Algeria on the international stage’,<sup>6</sup> the possibility of writing a satisfactory history of what happened in Algeria in the mid-1990s remains slim twenty years later, not because sources are unavailable – testimonies of various kinds as well as intense contemporary media coverage abound – but because, in the context of a fundamentally unresolved conflict, the tools necessary to the indispensable criticism of the sources are lacking. The competing narratives spun out of the crisis and war, each situated within the crisis itself, became aspects of the war, means of seeking understanding and self-location in relation to the violence, more than analyses of it. Recounting the war became indistinguishable from taking a position within it, uncovering ‘secret histories’ or refuting their accusations, disputes over which tended to become a grotesque rhetorical double, in the ether of the global media, of the war itself, and which became structured by their own narrative economy of political expediency, consumer demand, ‘acceptable’ opinion and a market for the sensational, the ‘secret’ and the obscene. Conspiracy theories abounded, seeking to identify a single, hidden rationality behind

apparently irrational events that were otherwise beyond comprehension.<sup>7</sup> Individual ‘testimonies’ or ‘revelations’ were valued for their supposed ability to uncover ‘confiscated truths’ more than for their own truth to be confronted with others: in place of the unanimist narratives that fell apart along with much else after 1989, Algeria in the early 2000s had a proliferation of publishing and an immense public interest in its recent past, but Algerians were given ‘*témoignages*’ instead of history.<sup>8</sup>

Narratives of the 1990s within Algeria and outside remain deeply divided and, needless to say, the evidence of the archive or of those, within the apparatus of the state, most centrally implicated is unlikely ever to become available. In addition, the broader frames of reference that structured social-scientific accounts of the crisis as it unfolded have arguably proved actively unhelpful to understanding it. The mounting crisis from 1986 onwards that culminated with the army’s intervention and ejection of Chadli in January 1992, and then the war that escalated through the end of the decade and was winding down, unresolved and unaccountable, just as the ‘global war on terror’ began, coincided with dramatic changes on the world stage: the democratic revolutions in eastern Europe and the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War after 1989 and the apparent ascendancy of a unipolar, neoliberal and American-led world order, then, in 2001, the challenge to that order by a utopian and sectarian, millenarian Islamism and, after 2003, its testing to overstretch by its own spectacularly delusional ambition. Then came the global crash of 2008, and the rise of a new global instability and anxiety, combined with both renewed democratic aspiration and a new wave of war across the Arab world.

The academic industries of political and economic ‘transition’ studies and those of ‘conflict management’ for ‘new wars’ that emerged in the briefly triumphal moment after 1989, and then those of ‘terrorism and security studies’ that succeeded them a decade later, were mostly interested in ‘lessons from Algeria’ that, often misunderstood, could be (mis) applied to validate highly questionable general models; they themselves proved quite inadequate to understanding Algeria.<sup>9</sup> Between the promised ‘new world order’ that was supposed to follow the Cold War and the new wave of global fear, proxy war, neo-imperialism, terrorism and unaccountable state violence that spiralled into the twenty-first century, Algeria’s murderous decade from 1992 was framed, as it unfolded and as Algerians and others attempted to understand it, by competing narratives and interpretations – of human rights and humanitarianism, democratisation and international law, terror and counter-insurgency, religion and politics, freedom of speech and cultural difference – whose only common

feature was their greater propensity to become stakes in the conflict than means of accounting for it, let alone contributing to any resolution of it.

Algeria's history in the 1990s, then, must be seen as one of contradictory stories, of the divergent ways in which Algerians themselves sought to make sense of what was happening to them and to their country. It is perhaps the most terrible chapter of the country's history, but – like not dissimilar stories from Rwanda or Congo, Lebanon or Iraq – it cannot be understood if it is seen simply as a spectacle of carnage. If the logics of violence themselves remain all but impossible to penetrate, and can only be accounted for hypothetically or in multiple ways, the subsequent developments in Algerian state and society, after the turn of the millennium, nonetheless illustrate important underlying dynamics. The fragility of political order, the rapidity with which it came apart and the ruthless brutality with which it was reconstituted to the benefit, once again, of a few and to the effective exclusion of the majority, demonstrated the resilience of the state's core of coercive force despite, or because of, its disconnection from and increasingly predatory relationship to the population supposedly constituted of its citizens. The latter, for their part, would increasingly view their ruling class and its apparent 'contempt' (*hogra*) for them with irony and disgust, deriding the incompetence of *hukumat Mickey* ('Mickey Mouse government') and the self-serving privileges of *tchi-tchi* (chic, cosseted) apparatchiks' families and *mujahidin Taiwan* (fake, 'made-in-Taiwan' claimants to ALN veterans' rights). They would lament the rising rate of teenage suicide and the increase in *harraga*, the clandestine migration to Europe of which, each summer, dozens of young people would become victims by drowning at sea, at the same time as they, just as often, held to a sense of political community marked by a self-image of insubordination, dignity and combative national pride.

And at the same time, while the near-collapse of Algerian society in a maelstrom of blood and terror might be most apparent – the unravelling of social solidarities as neighbours were murdered in their stairwells or sitting rooms by others they'd known as children, the pervasive fear induced by car bombs in city streets and *faux barrages* ('false', insurgent-mounted control points) on country roads – at least as important, in the longer term, would be the underestimated and often unobserved endurance of society relative to both the absence and the ferocity of the 'forces of order', its capacity to sustain and rebuild itself amidst the destruction of insurgency and repression as it had under the ravages of colonialism and in the throes of revolution. And while both state and society thus proved more resilient than might perhaps at first appear, the relations between them too, however torn, were capable of reconstitution.

While the early 1990s saw the disintegration of social bonds as well as of the formal political sphere, and the apparent dislocation both of the state from society, and of society from itself, a formal political sphere was recomposed, from 1997, over the resilient, 'informal' but real core of the state. This, and its uneasy, fragile but tenacious, endurance through the regional upheavals of the 'Arab Spring' that began in Algeria and Tunisia in the winter of 2010, was possible not only because of the unfettered violence so ruthlessly unleashed to win the war – and not, in particular, because of any deep and abiding fear of that violence among the population at large – but rather because of the rebuilt, informal connections between the state's centres of decision, access and patronage and local networks of support, distribution and negotiation. Algeria put itself back together, after the 'dark decade' (*la décennie noire*),<sup>10</sup> through long-established practices of informal politics and even older institutions – *jama'a*, *ashira* and *zawiya* – as well as through a recomposed, formally pluralistic party-political machinery that often doubled, or was linked to, such institutions at local and regional level. And after the devastations of utopian jihad and cynical *Realpolitik*, Algerians tentatively rebuilt their social space on the basis of a broad consensus of values, within which social and political divisions could be played out without recourse to arms. By 2012, Algeria was neither at peace, nor was it a pathological, traumatised society endemically at war with itself, but one engaged in a slow, episodically overt struggle over its shape and that of its polity, and over the meanings of the values – nation, religion, personal morality and social justice, the inheritance of the past and the means of moving beyond it – that its people generally held in common.

### The Descent into War

The drama of 1989–92 had not, despite appearances and especially despite comparisons with what was happening at the same time in Eastern Europe, been a promising transition to democracy that was suddenly reversed by the army. It was, rather, a case of manipulative crisis management gone awry. The opening of public space to associational life – for everything from clubs for former students of particular schools to proselytising Islamic associations like shaykh Mahfoud Nahnah's *jami'yat al-irshad wa'l-islam* (the Guidance and Reform Society) – a proliferating and remarkably free media, and a massive social mobilisation, especially through near-continuous strike action across all sectors of the economy and the professions, certainly liberated and encouraged an immense outpouring of social energy and enthusiasm as well as anger and dissent, especially among younger Algerians. Journalist Hocine Belalloufi would

remember that Algeria ‘was fizzing . . . A wind of freedom had begun to blow across the country.’<sup>11</sup> But the conditions for the translation of Algerians’ diverse and assertive visions of themselves and their possible futures into a rule-bound, stable and mutually tolerating, substantively democratic politics were by no means in place: in fact, quite the reverse.

What quickly became the largest Islamist movement, embodied after two constitutive meetings at the al-Sunna mosque in Bab el Oued on 18 February 1989, and the Ibn Badis mosque in another Algiers neighbourhood, Kouba, on 10 March, in the FIS, was impatient and utopian, undecided about its tactical position on electoral democracy (but opposed to democracy in principle as unable to distinguish between ‘impiety and faith’<sup>12</sup>) and inclined to see its opponents, at best, as deviants who were ignorant of Islam and in need of correction and, at worst, as unbelievers or apostates who had no place in the national community. Its project was one of social moralisation rather than of governance and its militant fringes, while pushing their opponents into the arms of the army, were not above espousing violence themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The FIS drew its inspirations and its slogans from an eclectic range of influences. It claimed a filiation with Ben Badis’ pre-war reformism that was quite unjustified in terms of intellectual content or social program but very effective as a claim to the continuity of incorruptible, religiously based opposition to oppression, and more strongly asserted a claim to be the true inheritor of the wartime FLN and its revolution that corrupt apostates had stolen from the people: the FIS was thus allegedly the *fil*, the legitimate son, of the historic FLN. Its adherents had been influenced by the broader movement of *al-sahwa al-islamiyya*, the Islamic ‘awakening’ that spread in the 1980s from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt, the writings of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, ideas of a ‘caliphal state’ and of a republic based on ‘consultation’ (*shura*): the duty of each properly instructed believer to exercise his opinion as to the government of the community, guided by the interpretation of *shari‘a*, under the sovereignty of God. It brought together ambitious veteran Islamists like Abbasi with younger firebrands like Benhadj alongside Mohammedi Saïd, ‘Si Nacer’, who had worked for German intelligence during the Second World War and was famous for the German helmet he wore as well as for his rhetoric and incompetence in the maquis, where he was colonel of *wilaya* 3 in 1956. At the same time, there was undeniably ‘a real adhesion’ among broad swathes of society to the FIS, which more effectively than other, rival Islamist movements tapped into a widespread, ‘profound attachment’ to religion and captured the enthusiasm of younger people, especially, in the cities and in peripheral neighbourhoods, for a radical vision of morality, dignity and justice.<sup>14</sup> Against



them was not only the generals' intense dislike of the threat the FIS posed to the established system and to their own custodial sense of public order, but also a visceral anti-Islamism among other opponents of the regime. This was to be found especially, for example, among members of the PAGES who saw the contest as a life or death struggle against fascism, and the activists of the RCD, whose own political socialisation had been in the fledgling anti-authoritarian human rights movement of the mid-1980s when many of them had been imprisoned, but whose opposition to Islamism trumped their antipathy to the regime. Such divisions, which ramified throughout society, were likely to serve nothing better than the interests of the factions in power.<sup>15</sup>

It has been argued, partly because the FIS was legalised in September 1989 after five months of waiting, because of the FIS's own relatively liberal (though also very abstract) economic program and initial lack of criticism of Hamrouche's economic reforms, that a tacit understanding was reached by Chadli and Hamrouche with the FIS, which they hoped to instrumentalise in the service of economic liberalisation against an FLN 'old guard' still identified with étatist/socialist policies.<sup>16</sup> Other accounts, by contrast, point to the legal recognition of the FIS, as well as those of the RCD, whose creation was announced by MCB and human rights activists at Tizi Ouzou on 9 and 10 February, and the Trotskyist PT (*Parti des travailleurs*, Workers' Party) as having been decided by Hamrouche's opponents in the regime. As one insider put it, all three parties were 'born in Larbi Belkheir's office'.<sup>17</sup> The FIS's founders were themselves undecided about the form their movement should take. Having originally imagined it as an umbrella organisation for the unification of *da'wa* activities (the proselytising 'call' to what they saw as 'true' Islam), they rushed to adopt the form of a political party when the opportunity arose, under the February 1989 constitution, to translate their implicitly political stance into actual political action.<sup>18</sup> The decision to legalise the party seems to have been made not by Hamrouche's government, but by his predecessor Kasdi Merbah's Interior Minister Abubakr Belkaïd, almost certainly at the behest of Belkheir (and Chadli?), putting Hamrouche, when he took office three days later, before a fait accompli.<sup>19</sup>

In any event, Hamrouche and his government came into a political landscape in ferment, which in the months after October 1988 had already blown away their previously preferred option of a slow and managed political opening. Given the way in which the formal multi-party system was subsequently – from 1995 onwards – recomposed around the *décideurs*' rules of entry into the system, and especially the roles played in that system by the RCD (as a counterweight to the



FFS), the PT (as a notional revolutionary leftist and secularist party, the only one in the Middle East and North Africa to be led by a woman, Louisa Hanoune), and the permanent presence of two, mutually balancing, legal Islamist parties, there is every reason to think that from early on in the ‘management’ of the crisis of the system in 1989, the factions of the *pouvoir réel* had decided on the creation and instrumentalisation of a multiparty ‘shop window’ for the regime, with party machines serving as channels both to diffuse dissent and split opposition, and as networks for clientelism and patronage. As one observer put it, ‘most of the parties they legalised [in 1989–90] were non-entities (*des partis bidon*)’, which, if not vanity projects like Ben Bella’s Movement for Democracy in Algeria (MDA), which had existed since 1984 without having any constituency within Algeria, were simple vehicles for distributing influence, their strings pulled by elements of the regime.<sup>20</sup> Algeria’s reconstituted party system – put together as a remarkably rapid return to ‘constitutional legality’ in the midst of the worst of the violence between 1995 and 1997 – would be structured by an unreasonably neat choreography: two ‘Kabyle’ parties (FFS and RCD), two Islamist parties, a far-left party (the PT) to supplant the PAGES (which imploded in December 1992) and a new regime party, the National Democratic Rally (RND), created almost from nothing for elections in 1997, as well as the FLN (which would be recuperated after a stint in opposition under Mehri between 1992 and 1995), along with a large number of tiny independent parties and a few electorally insignificant groups created as personal vehicles by historic FLN figures.

This suspiciously tidy division of ‘seats at the table’ (*kursis*), which could be (and from 1997 onwards would be) periodically reshuffled almost at will, would serve the interests of the regime’s factional power brokers, not only in lieu of and more effectively than the old single-party façade of the FLN but, more importantly, in place of any more genuinely autonomous and plural political field, whether emerging from the old FLN, from the newer social forces of a younger generation or from a generational reconciliation that might have combined the two. The larger reform project that had been briefly imagined by the team around Hamrouche as the necessary basis for a longer-term, stable liberalisation and democratisation of the system had been destroyed in 1991 before the suspension of the formal electoral process; the latter, even had it been allowed to continue – which in the circumstances was exceedingly unlikely – would not have equated to a substantive democratisation of Algeria’s polity. Competitive party pluralism mobilised especially around mutually exclusive identity politics, the pressure of elections, and above all the opportunity of a utopian opposition party to benefit from a massive

popular protest vote which, however, was hardly an overwhelming mandate for an Islamic state, all militated against deeper, structural democratic change, and pressed Algeria, instead, headlong into open civil conflict.<sup>21</sup>

Presiding over this sabotage of the country to rescue their entrenched positions from the crisis of the single-party system were the *janviéristes*, the army and security hierarchs who were behind the heavy-handed intervention of June 1991 and the deposition of Chadli in January 1992, who by 1997 would succeed in returning to elections with a new multi-party regime façade more in tune with post-Cold War times, and who by 2002 had maintained themselves in power by prosecuting a vicious war against the Islamist insurgency and anyone else who might threaten them, while actively preventing any negotiated political solution to the crisis that might allow all sides of Algerian society to arbitrate their own future. Whatever else about the war remained opaque and impenetrable, one thing was abundantly clear: while almost everyone else in Algeria had lost by it, they and their associates had won.

The central group of *janviéristes* were all of the same generation and similar backgrounds. Born mostly in the late 1930s, none had been political militants before the revolution, most had been trained in the French army before joining the ALN on the frontiers and all had risen through the ranks as professional military ‘technicians’ under Boumediene before reaching command positions in the mid-1980s. Khaled Nezzar (b.1937), who had been Chadli’s adjutant at the *base de l’est* and one of the first cohort of Algerian officers trained at staff college in Moscow after independence, took overall command of ground forces in 1986, was appointed chief of the General Staff in November 1988 and in July 1990 became Minister of Defence (the first time since 1965 that this post was separated from the prerogatives of the Presidency). Abdelmalek Guenaïzia (b. 1936), who deserted his post as a warrant officer in a French unit stationed in Germany with Nezzar in April 1958, succeeded him in 1990 as Chief of the General Staff. Mohamed Lamari (b. 1939), who would succeed Guenaïzia in turn as Chief of the General Staff in July 1993, was commander-in-chief of ground forces in January 1992. Benabbès Gheziel (b.1931) had been commander-in-chief of the National Gendarmerie (the paramilitary extra-urban police, run from the Ministry of Defence) since 1987. Chadli’s long-serving right hand Larbi Belkheir (b. 1938) had become Interior Minister in October 1991, putting him directly at the head of the bureaucracy and police forces as the final act of the crisis approached. Mohamed ‘El Moukh’ (‘the Brain’) Touati (b.1936) was an advisor to the General Staff; Ismaïl ‘Smaïn’ Lamari (b. 1941), a veteran of the *sécurité*

*militaire* (SM), was head of its department of internal security and counter-espionage, and his immediate superior Mohamed ‘Tewfik’ Mediène (b.1939) had taken charge of the SM, which he renamed DRS (*Département du renseignement et de la sécurité*, Intelligence and Security Department), in 1990.<sup>22</sup>

Most of these men – Nezzar and Belkheir, in particular, but also, indirectly, ‘Tewfik’, who as a minor SM officer had been brought to Algiers from Oran under Belkheir’s wing – owed their ascension to their long-term patronage by Chadli. But some of them, most notably Tewfik, were also allegedly notable within the system for their ascension in opposition to an attempt in the mid-1980s by Chadli and two principal army figures, chief of staff Mustafa Belloucif and SM director Medjoub Lakhall-Ayat, to professionalise and modernise the army and intelligence services and to reduce the influence within them of the old ex-ALN and MALG factions whose networks within and outside the armed forces, entrenched since independence, stood in the way of establishing a more efficient, meritocratic officer corps and intelligence service (and, no doubt, new networks of influence independent of those already in place). An ex-maquisard and career soldier, Belloucif was appointed Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence (effectively the head of the armed forces, answerable only to the President) in July 1980. He was one of the first cohort promoted to the new rank of Major General in October 1984, and the following month became the first man to hold the office of Chief of the General Staff since it was abolished by Boumediene after Zbiri’s attempted coup in 1967. He became a proponent, in particular, of diversifying Algeria’s military procurement away from dependence on the USSR. Lakhall-Ayat, also a career officer, became director of the SM in 1981 and head of the new General Delegation for Prevention and Security (DGPS) within the SM, which Chadli split from the Central Directorate of Military Security (DCSA) in a reorganisation of the security services in 1987.<sup>23</sup>

Both Belloucif and Lakhall-Ayat encouraged the recruitment of a new intake of university graduates into the army and the SM, but at least some of those who joined came to observe the persistence of parallel structures of solidarity and patronage, organised both by factional loyalty and by region, in particular the importance of officers from the east of the country, the so-called BTS triangle of the region between Batna, Tebessa and Souk Ahras. Less qualified but more pliable recruits with the right connections were seen to benefit from accelerated training and promotion. Tewfik, who ‘didn’t count for much’ on his arrival, is said to have been recruited into the MALG in 1961 in Tunis from the French navy, and to have owed his subsequent career entirely to Belkheir.<sup>24</sup>

In 1986, he was made head of the Department of Defence and Security Affairs, one of Belkheir's apanages in the Presidency, and when DCSA chief Mohamed Betchine, an ex-ALN maquisard who was also an army moderniser, was promoted to succeed Lakhhal-Ayat as head of the DGPS after the bloodshed of October 1988, Tewfik took over from Betchine as head of military security. When Betchine subsequently resigned, in 1990, it was Tewfik who took over command of both departments of the SM, reorganising and greatly expanding the service under the new title of DRS. When January came, it was he who presided over the extensive powers of the secret services; and he owed his position to manoeuvres that already indicated a dangerous degree of factionalism even within them.

While undoubtedly serving their own interests and those of the system as they saw it, it is important not to assume, as many in and outside Algeria would come to believe, that the *janviéristes* were either a single, closely united interest group, or that this group was simply the instrument of a diabolical, neo-colonial plot. Some of them, particularly those close to the influential power broker Belkheir, could certainly be identified with a *hizb fransa* in terms of their own personal, political and commercial connections with elements of the French political establishment, business elite and security services. But they were not a unified bloc, and if they acted in the service of their own lucrative connections to foreign interests, they did so, too, in concert with a vision of the Algerian state, and in particular of the role of the army, that they shared with others of quite different backgrounds. Nezzar would insist on the custodial role of the ANP, established since 1962, as 'safeguarding independence and national sovereignty'. While duly removing its officers from the FLN's central committee after the 1989 constitutional changes, the army, he declared, could not remain 'neutral' in the face of what its commanders saw as threats to 'the destiny of the nation'.<sup>25</sup> He was joined on the HCE by Ali Kafi, whose nationalist background could not be more impeccable – he had been in the PPA before joining *wilaya 2*, where he was Zighout's adjutant, participating in the August 1955 offensive and the Soummam Congress, and from 1957 to 1959 was Zighout's successor – and Ali Haroun, the lawyer and wartime FFFLN veteran, who had worked with Abbane on *El Moudjahid* in 1957 before retiring from politics after participating in the first Constituent Assembly in 1963 and re-emerging in the human rights movement in the mid-1980s.

Others agreed with them as to what was to be done in January 1992. Ali Kafi held the presidency of the National Organisation of Mujahidin (ONM), a powerful mechanism for distributing and leveraging influence through networks of ALN veterans (or those claiming to be such). In 1993, a new movement, the National Organisation of the Children of

Mujahidin (ONEM), was set up to transmit the same system to a new generation, modelled on the existing National Organisation of the Children of Martyrs (ONEC). In the years after independence, a tiny pension was all the state had accorded to the widows and orphans of the revolution – and sons and daughters of *shuhada* ('martyrs' to independence) experienced their status as such as a personal, familial matter, as a private grief as well as the sense of dignity that loved ones had 'done their duty'. 'He was dead; it was done with': some at least, probably many, were revolted by the notion that it should be a source of lifetime rent.<sup>26</sup> Now, such inheritances of the revolution were politically mobilised through the ONM, ONEC and ONEM, which would be called the 'revolutionary family', to rally anti-Islamist social forces and bolster the regime.

Another veteran revolutionary, Redha Malek, the Évian negotiator and contributor to the Tripoli program, became the president of the HCE's rubber-stamp 'parliament', the National Consultative Council (CNC), and later joined the HCE itself. Malek saw Islamism as an anti-modern 'regression', an undoing of the revolution that threatened the life's work of his generation, and considered that political figures like himself who backed the military intervention had 'done [their] duty': 'we assumed our responsibilities.'<sup>27</sup> Mostefa Lacheraf, the more liberal intellectual and pre-war PPA veteran who had been Malek's colleague on the Tripoli program, agreed.<sup>28</sup> In April 1995 these two would be the principal founders, with Ali Haroun, of a 'modernist' political party, the National Republican Alliance (ANR), which would have no electoral significance but was nonetheless several times awarded a ministerial portfolio.<sup>29</sup> As Prime Minister in March 1994, Malek famously declared at the funeral of the murdered playwright Abdelkader Alloula in Oran that 'It's time fear changed sides' (*La peur doit changer de camp*). Fifteen years later, he was unrepentant at the phrase, which, he said, was intended 'to give courage to the population' that was 'wavering', and to counter 'defeatists, accomplices, and opportunists' whose 'misinformation' and 'conspiracy-obsession' (*complotite*) expressed the anti-Algerian *Schadenfreude* of a 'colonial *revanche*'.<sup>30</sup> At the time, his declaration announced an escalation and generalisation of hostilities.

The *janviéristes*' coup was thus supported by a broad coalition of actively mobilised interests, as well as by more diffuse anti-Islamist opinion, while being rejected by others, especially the FFS and FLN, which for a short period became an opposition party. Questions of the coup's 'constitutionality' – which Nezzar and others defended, referring to their 'Novembrist' action in defence of the integrity of the revolution, while others decried its blatant illegality – were largely beside the point, since

the one consistent feature of Algeria's politics had long been its lack of law-bound government. This formal problem, however, was underlain by a more serious, deeper one, revealed in the widespread adoption both by establishment figures outside the army's core elite and among the opposition, including 'democrats' on the left, of the view that the crisis was a security matter that should be 'managed' by the army, not a political problem requiring resolution through a political process, debate and compromise.<sup>31</sup> Once again, the military took, and was largely granted, precedence over the political.

The HCE, presiding over a dramatic political crisis, was nonetheless opposed by the three parties (FIS, FFS and FLN) that had garnered most votes in December 1991, and although it had some real support within Algeria – from the PAGES and the RCD, the powerful UGTA, intellectuals and cultural figures mobilised to 'safeguard Algeria' – and the backing of the French establishment, it lacked any broader international legitimacy. Redha Malek, who had served as an intermediary during the US embassy hostage crisis in Tehran in 1980, flew to Washington where he pressed for support of the regime against potential Islamist takeovers across the region.<sup>32</sup> But the HCE, having resurrected the old principle of collegial leadership and assumed the powers of the Presidency, nonetheless needed a credible face. After some hesitation, they agreed to invite Mohamed Boudiaf out of exile in Morocco to become president of the Council. The 73-year-old veteran revolutionary, untouched by compromise or corruption since 1962, would represent 'honesty'. For those who thought like Redha Malek, the austere Boudiaf, in 'suit and tie, clean-shaven', would incarnate 'modernity' in contrast to the Islamists' gowns, beards and 'regression'.<sup>33</sup>

A few months earlier, Boudiaf had been interviewed by an Algerian journalist who had found him at his very modest brickworks at Kenitra, on the Moroccan coast north of Rabat, preparing clay for moulding himself, with his sleeves and trousers rolled up.<sup>34</sup> Suddenly called back to politics after thirty years in opposition and exile, he took a similarly direct approach to the task at hand in Algeria: he certainly was not content to be a front for the *décideurs*. He arrived in Algiers on January 16. While pursuing the repression of armed Islamism, he also had thousands of detained FIS sympathisers who, he said, were no more than 'stone-throwers', released.<sup>35</sup> Above all, he ordered major investigations into corruption, and reached out directly to younger Algerians, to whom he promised a re-foundation of the state. Completely unknown to the younger generation when he arrived, he took the initiative of addressing them directly, in particular by speaking Algerian dialect in speeches and interviews: as one, 14 years old in 1992, would remember, 'he spoke the



Figure 7.1 Mohamed Boudiaf, photographed on his return to Algeria from exile, 16 January 1992 (AP).

language of the people. You felt the Algerian in him . . . You felt you could trust this man – he was like us.’<sup>36</sup> There was a feeling, among many who had opposed both the FIS and the generals’ coup, that Algeria might yet be saved from plunging into the abyss. Then, on 29 June 1992, Boudiaf was shot dead by one of his bodyguards while addressing a televised meeting in Annaba.

### **The Terror**

The escalation of violence, already begun, now proceeded headlong. The FIS had been banned in March; in April the municipal and regional councils (APCs and APWs) that since June 1990 had been run by FIS-majority administrations were dissolved and replaced by appointed ‘Executive Municipal Delegations’ (DECs). On 15 July, the principal



FIS leaders Abassi and Benhadj were sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment by a military court at Blida. In the six months of Boudiaf's Presidency, thousands of FIS militants had already been interned in detention camps in the Sahara. Others, radicalising the violence already practised by the movement in the 1980s, took to the maquis and launched an armed insurgency.

Islamists had occasionally physically attacked their political opponents before the elections. Tiny splinter groups calling themselves 'Algerian Hizballah' or *Takfir wa'l-hijra*, borrowing the name invented by the Egyptian government for the *gama'a islamiyya* of the 1980s, already existed on the margins of the movement, and an armed attack at Guemmar, north of El Oued near the Tunisian border in November 1991, involved militants associated with the FIS-affiliated Islamist trade union, the SIT. In early 1992 armed militants engaged in sporadic clashes with soldiers and the police.<sup>37</sup> In late 1990, veterans of Mustafa Bouyali's mid-1980s insurgency, led by an ex-soldier, 'General' Abdelkader Chebouti, constituted guerilla groups in the Atlas south of Blida and resurrected the MIA. While, by agreement with the FIS, abstaining from obstructing the electoral process which they opposed in principle, Chebouti's militia gained considerable prestige among FIS sympathisers for their more uncompromising posture. After the coup they emerged as the principal armed Islamist opposition movement, thought to number 2,000 fighters already in 1992, and engaged in low-level attacks on regime targets and security forces. An alternative strategy was followed by another group, FIS founder member and Afghanistan veteran Saïd Mekhloufi's MEI (*Mouvement pour l'état islamique*). Mekhloufi had been head of security for the FIS before being removed from the party's leadership 'consultative council' (*majlis al-shura*) at its emergency conference in Batna in July 1991. Declaring that 'injustice arises and endures mainly because of the docility and silence of the majority', he called for civil disobedience and hoped to create a 'popular Islamist army' – failing which, the MEI began to turn its violence on 'recalcitrants' among the people, hoping to provoke the radicalisation and inspire the loyalty that the ALN had achieved during the war of independence.<sup>38</sup>

These groups inherited a stock of ideas and images, a diffuse political imagination, from the war of independence, and a sense of continuity with the radicalism of earlier Islamist activism that had espoused violence as both justified and efficacious in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>39</sup> Among peri-urban populations that had moved from the countryside during the war or since independence, they also tapped into the long-standing mythology of the social bandit, the avenging

outcast of the mountains, that had persisted through the colonial period and was still celebrated in popular culture – by the mid-1980s, among other media, on TV and in cartoon strip books that retold stories like that of Mas‘ud Ben Zelmát for a new generation, as well as in oral storytelling. Many FIS activists previously committed, whether on principle or by calculation, to constitutional politics, but who were now faced with the ‘theft’ of their electoral victory, undoubtedly gravitated towards armed struggle. At the same time, some of those who in previous decades had been student radicals, involved in violence against ‘apostate’ professors or ‘immodest’ women and committed to a radical vision of an Islamic state, had stood aside from the FIS, and now opted to pursue social and political regeneration without recourse to arms. Abdallah Djaballah, who had been a militant law student at the University of Constantine in the mid-1970s and by 1992 had become one of the most followed preachers in the Constantinois, in 1990 created a *Harakat al-nahda ‘l-islamiyya* (Islamic Renaissance Movement, MNI) which preached ‘reconciliation’ instead of armed struggle and opted to work within the scope allowed by the system.<sup>40</sup>

These groups were not motivated by any unified, atavistic ‘imaginary’ (let alone the libidinal ‘violent pulsions’ that, recycling colonial-era psychology, some commentary on the war would evoke<sup>41</sup>). Rather, international circumstances and experiences or inspiration from elsewhere – most notably, the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan – as well as the domestic situation and the internal diversity of the Islamist movement itself directed different individuals and groups into different avenues of action. The regime’s careful opening of managed, oppositional political space for some groups and co-optation of others, combined with ruthless repression and covert ‘management by violence’ of both the jihadist fringe and the broader social base that had propelled the FIS towards power, did the rest. Djaballah’s Nahda and Mahfoud Nahnah’s HAMAS, a political party created on the basis of his *irshad wa ‘l-islah* society, were less populist, more cautious than the FIS, although sharing most of its views and its aspiration to create a ‘truly Islamic’ society and state. Electorally marginalised in the FIS’s brief high tide, they survived the subsequent crash and became part of the re-institutionalised political landscape.

While largely retaining the same rhetoric, HAMAS (which tellingly amended its name in 1997, without needing to change its acronym, from ‘Movement for an Islamic Society’ to ‘Movement of Society for Peace’) would opt for an entryist strategy, working in coalition with the recuperated FLN and regime party the RND in the late 1990s, while Djaballah’s various parties would maintain a more oppositional stance.

The more intellectually inclined, non-violent Islamic reformism of the PRA (Party for Algerian Renewal), founded by disciples of Bennabi, sought to revive and apply his ideas. Rejecting the salafist notion that society must be 're-Islamised', and drawing on Max Weber as well as Bennabi, they saw the challenge instead as being to revive Islamic 'authenticity' as a total social ethic that would become socially and economically 'efficacious'. The party, under its founder Noureddine Boukrouh, faded into obscurity and compromise with the system, but some of its original adherents – who, while referring to communists, for example, as 'those who had gone out of the community', nonetheless rejected the label 'Islamist' and were sometimes themselves vigorously opposed to the FIS – continued to re-publish Bennabi's works and to work quietly to disseminate their views.<sup>42</sup>

While these more quietist trends took different paths, the militant edge of the Islamist movement escalated its jihad against *taghut*, the 'tyrannical' regime, and those who supported it – and the regime escalated its violence too. On the night of 9–10 February 1992, as the state of emergency came into force, six young policemen (all were between 26 and 31 years old), most of whom were fathers of young children, were gunned down on the rue Bouzrina in the Casbah, signalling the beginning of terrorist action.<sup>43</sup> The first major attack on civilians, a bomb blast at Algiers airport on 26 August 1992, killed nine people and injured 128. Condemned by an FIS publication, it was then attributed to a group of FIS militants, who for their part claimed that their confessions had been forced from them under torture.<sup>44</sup> Attacks on infrastructure, security forces and state targets like members of the DEC, but also on journalists, academics and intellectuals, foreigners (including Algerians' foreign spouses), working women and 'immodest' girls in public places, multiplied in 1993 and especially from the beginning of 1994. During the worst period of assassinations against writers and cultural figures, one Algiers journalist did not leave his apartment for three months; his wife had to 'take care of everything' and his children were told to tell everyone that they had not seen their father, and did not know where he had gone. Another journalist told his spouse and children never to show any sign that they recognised him if they saw him out of doors.<sup>45</sup> In 1994, while attempting to reintroduce some degree of a 'culture of dialogue' into Algerian life and remind people what Algerian culture was capable of – notably by bringing the celebrated singer Warda al-Jaza'iriyya from Egypt to perform in the country that claimed her – as Minister of Culture Slimane Chikh, the son of national poet Mufdi Zakarya, 'spent [his] time accompanying friends to the cemetery.'<sup>46</sup> The wave of murders of prominent writers and artists forced many of Algeria's cultural producers

into exile in France, Europe or North America; ironically, while at home Algerians felt cut off and left to their fate by the rest of the world, these same years saw the beginning of a new global recognition of Algerian culture, especially in music and literature.

But international attention was focused mostly on the increasingly dark drama of the war. In the summer of 1992, a nebulous organisation calling itself the *Jama'a al-Islamiyya 'l-musallaha* (Islamic Armed Group, GIA), allegedly an umbrella organisation of Islamist guerilla units, emerged. 'The' GIA was not one group, but many. Pretending to hegemony over the insurgency and ostensibly espousing a more radical line on both the overthrow of the state – rather than simply re-instituting the FIS as a legal political force, which seemed to have become the ostensible short-term war aim of the MIA – and on the forcible Islamisation of society as a whole, the GIA was also a supple and decentralised organisation. Its label, look ('Afghan' style, with beards, shaved heads, turbans and loose-fitting clothing instead of the MIA and MEI's stolen army uniforms) and style of unbridled, extreme and demonstrative violence could be 'franchised' by any local leader with a following. Paradoxically, the avowedly uncompromising aims announced by the GIA facilitated the adoption of its name and style by a plethora of new 'military entrepreneurs' who had much more limited and local objectives.<sup>47</sup> Without any identifiable, concrete political agenda or real overall command structure to follow, pursuit of 'total' war against the local embodiment of *taghut* – policemen and their families, local authorities, existing networks of influence and property – became means of seizing control over local revenue and commerce and of establishing social precedence in particular districts that became the fiefs of (often short-lived) 'emirs'. Ambitious local actors could reinvent both their 'moral' profile and their material fortune in the vacuum left by the removal of the FIS's local government and the withdrawal of the state.

In the economically ravaged and roiling housing estates of the Algiers suburbs, especially, unemployed young men whose occupation, with wry Algerian humour, was said to be that of *hittistes*, 'the men who hold up the walls' (by leaning against them all day long for lack of anything else to do), often saw either the ostensible higher cause or, perhaps more often, the economic opportunities combined with the dark glamour of the GIA maquisards as irresistibly appealing.<sup>48</sup> Local gangsters like Amar Yacine, known as 'Napoli' (supposedly from his desire to make enough money to go live there), in the upper Casbah, Beaufrasier, Eucalyptus, Baraki and other districts of Algiers, ran autonomous armed groups in which 'jihad' against the police was indistinguishable from a racketeering spree. In many places, local logics and interests, and a 'privatisation' as

well as a generalisation of violence, were undoubtedly more immediately relevant causal factors of the spread and entrenchment of the war than either Islamist utopia or regime repression alone. If jihadi Islamism and anti-Islamist 'patriotism' often provided languages for expressing such interests, the regime also facilitated this degeneration into violence. In many districts where the FIS had enjoyed strong popular support in 1990–91, an apparent strategy of deliberate neglect of law and order enforcement by the authorities tacitly encouraged generalised insecurity. 'There are thieves everywhere', said an unemployed young graduate of his Algiers suburb in 1993, '... it's *normal* now, there are no more police officers, you have to fend for yourself, the thieves are getting rich ... The government, they did this on purpose, I promise you.'<sup>49</sup> This picture of life in Algeria after 1992 – thieves getting rich everywhere, generalised insecurity, a state the population cannot trust and which acts 'on purpose' against them, the need for everyone to fend for themselves – would come to be very widely shared, and would persist over the following decade. In Algerian vernacular, the very word *normal* (used in French whatever language is being spoken) came to designate, with unsurprised, cynical irony, the perfect banality of life in a permanent state of crisis and collapse.

The fluidity and multiplicity of the GIA made the group especially hard to pin down and suppress, as did the frequent succession of its commanding 'emirs': Mohammed Allal ('Moh Léveillé'), the leader of the rue Bouzrina attack who was killed in August 1992; Abdelhak Layada, arrested in Morocco in June 1993 and released from prison in 2006; Djaafar 'el-Afghani', killed in February 1994; Chérif Gousmi, killed in September 1994; Djamel 'Zitouni', killed in July 1996; Antar Zouabri, killed in February 2002; and Hassan Hattab, who left the organisation in 1996 to found a splinter group, the GSPC, and disappeared, having apparently surrendered to the authorities, after 2007. But conversely, the same characteristics also suggested its malleability and liability to manipulation. The GIA was very soon suspected by some of being, if not a network of 'pseudo-gangs' or counter-guerillas directly organised by the DRS, at least heavily infiltrated and manipulated by them to split the insurgency and sow confusion in its ranks, taking the counter-insurgency into the maquis to provoke war between Islamist factions – which by the summer of 1994 the GIA had largely done – and more generally discredit the cause of other 'true *mujahidîn*' and terrorise the population by spectacular atrocities against civilians. Thus began the vexing question of *qui tue?*

The emergence of the GIA, its escalation of violence and high media profile and its rapid eclipse of the earlier movements, MEI and MIA, were

countered to some degree by the appearance in July 1994 of an Islamic Salvation Army (*Armée islamique du salut*, AIS), which under a ‘national emir’, Madani Mezrag, declared its loyalty to the imprisoned FIS leadership. Political figures claiming continuity with the FIS had already radicalised their own tone so as not to be outflanked. A 19 March 1993 FIS communiqué signed by Abderrezak Redjam, the FIS’s underground communications chief inside Algeria, affirmed that ‘what is occurring is not terrorism, but a blessed jihad whose legitimacy arises from the obligation to create an Islamic state, and [in response to] the coup d’état against the choice of the people . . . The criminal junta must stand down so that Algeria can devote itself to rebuilding what they have destroyed by theft, despotism and Westernisation.’<sup>50</sup> Anwar Haddam, a nuclear engineer elected to parliament for the FIS from Tlemcen in December 1991 and now in asylum in the United States, where he styled himself the head of a FIS ‘Parliamentary Delegation’ in Europe and the USA, described the assassination of psychiatry professor Mahfoudh Boucebci, outside his hospital in June 1993, as ‘not a crime but a sentence carried out by the mujahidin.’<sup>51</sup> When a massive car bomb claimed by the GIA exploded on 30 January 1995 near the central police station on the boulevard Amirouche in downtown Algiers, as a packed bus was passing, killing 42 people and injuring 286, Haddam justified the attack, describing the death toll as an ‘unfortunate’ accident of timing.<sup>52</sup>

Rivalries, personal or political or both, between the factions spread, and Islamist leaders and others involved in attempts at brokering negotiations with them were assassinated – Kasdi Merbah in August 1993, Abdelkader Hachani in November 1999. Accusations that assassinations and atrocities officially imputed to the GIA were in fact carried out by disguised army units, or directed by security operatives in the maquis, multiplied in the media, particularly in France and the wider Algerian diaspora, and circulated widely on the internet. Within Algeria, such uncertainty, and a generalised climate of suspicion and insecurity, only added to the fear stoked by ‘false roadblocks’ set up by guerillas in military uniform, where travellers were racketed or murdered, indiscriminate attacks on trains and buses, car bombs and attacks on individual civilians in towns, and the abduction and rape of young women in the countryside. Uncertainty about who ‘the terrorists’ really were was expressed in divergent ways: among young conscripts within the army, it was apparently said (repeating a long-standing trope of Islamic martyrology) that the corpses of *mujahidin* found in the mountains did not decay and smelled of musk.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, more prosaically, the word *tango* came to be a widespread derogatory term for Islamists, apparently referring to

the radio moniker in use in the police ('T' for *terroristes*): later, the term acquired a delicious irony appreciated by drinkers when *Tango*, manufactured in Rouiba, near Algiers, by the millionaire businessman Djilali Mehri, became Algeria's leading brand of beer.

If martyrology and cynical humour both helped Algerians to put the horror escalating around them into more manageable terms, both the extent of the horror and the stakes involved in accounting for it reached a peak between 1996 and 1998. On the night of 26–27 March 1996, seven Cistercian monks, all French nationals, were abducted from the monastery of Notre Dame de l'Atlas at Tibhirine, high in the mountains just outside Médéa. The monks' long-standing medical mission to the local population was combined with a deep personal and institutional commitment to remaining in Algeria, a commitment they shared with many other clergymen and – women of the Catholic church who had come since independence both to minister to the small remaining European population and to sustain a dialogue of prayer and spiritual exchange with Muslim interlocutors. They had repeatedly refused to leave.<sup>54</sup> On 30 May, their heads were found, without their bodies, near Médéa. The brothers' kidnapping had been claimed in a GIA communiqué on 26 April, and another, dated 23 May, announced that they had been killed, their throats slit, two days earlier. But doubts emerged almost at once: the authorities ineptly attempted to conceal the absence of the monks' bodies, which were never found, and it appeared that the victims had been decapitated post-mortem, disguising the cause of death. Claims abounded that the 'GIA' operation attributed to Djamel Zitouni was in fact a deliberate manipulation by the DRS to implicate the Islamists in an act of 'barbarity', remove the monks (whose determined presence in a highly insecure zone and, worse, their readiness to provide medical care to all comers, including guerillas, was irritating) and shock French opinion into firmer support for the regime. An alternative scenario, published in the Italian daily *La Stampa* in 2008, later suggested that the monks had been inadvertently killed by machine-gun fire from army helicopters attacking the Islamist camp where they were being held.<sup>55</sup> The truth remained inaccessible after twenty years of speculation and occasional pressure on the Algerian authorities: the only clear outcome was the horror of the act, the only indubitable fact the unaccountability of those behind it.

Both the most spectacular and the most bitterly disputed acts of violence were yet to come. In the early hours of 29 August 1997, a massacre of civilians at Raïs, a neighbourhood on the eastern edge of Sidi Moussa in the Mitidja twenty kilometres southeast of Algiers, killed at least 98, and perhaps as many as 300 people: men, women



and children were all killed, often with knives and axes, or burned to death. In a carnage that (no doubt deliberately) both recalled and exceeded the worst terror of the war of independence, bodies were mutilated, eviscerated and displayed in the street, heads left on doorsteps. Several young women were abducted by the attackers. The Raï's murders were followed by a spate of mass killings in the Beni Messoud district on the outskirts of Algiers to the north, and in the Mitidja again, at Bentalha, near Baraki, a few kilometres north of Sidi Moussa, on 23 September, in which perhaps 250 people were killed. Subsequent massacres, especially in the west of the country in villages around Tiaret and Relizane between December 1997 and April 1998, were thought to have taken up to 400 or 500 lives in single episodes. At the end of 1997, in the first two weeks of Ramadan alone, over 1,000 people were killed in Algeria.<sup>56</sup>

The several hours' duration of these massacres, the non-intervention of nearby army and police forces – or even their alleged complicity in sealing off areas under attack – and the apparently 'false beards' of the attackers, cast doubts on official claims that the atrocities were perpetrated solely by Islamist militia attempting to destabilise the state. Combined with the geography and timing of the violence, which struck especially at former FIS strongholds that had provided material aid to guerillas, and occurred as legislative, local and senatorial elections were being held (in June, October and December 1997), such doubts suggested that, whether committed by 'real' GIA militia that had been infiltrated and instrumentalised by the DRS or by covert army death squads only masquerading as Islamists, the massacres were outward effects of factional conflict within the regime.<sup>57</sup> Others insisted that the bloodbaths were more simply the desperate acts of Islamist extremists whose expected victory over the regime had not materialised, and who found themselves increasingly under pressure from the army, without a realisable war aim, losing support among the population and vengeful against those who, having formerly aided them, had recently stopped supporting their struggle. Whatever the truth, whether intended by elements of the regime to demonstrate that Islamism was beyond the pale and had to be 'eradicated', or by Islamists to demonstrate the lengths to which they would go if pushed, or both, the latter turned to its own purposes by the former, the massacres were clearly intended as an obscenely exemplary spectacle, a theatre of cruelty that horrified ordinary Algerians and played to all the worst imaginings of international opinion and the global media.

The butchery à *l'arme blanche*, especially the murders and mutilations of mothers and children, recalled and exorbitantly magnified, in entirely incomparable circumstances, the ritualistic peasant violence of anti-

colonial insurrection. The open perpetration of atrocity and the elements of display – bodies, or heads, exhibited in the street or on doorsteps – recalled the colonial practice of leaving the bodies of ALN *junud* or suspected sympathisers in village squares and roadways. The particular, grisly details narrated after the fact – such as the claim that attackers at Bentalha had made bets among themselves on the gender of unborn babies before disembowelling pregnant women – directly echoed tropes of the ‘increasingly explicit violence’ that had characterised commemorative narratives of the war of liberation since the early 1980s, in contrast to the relative circumspection of earlier publicly aired accounts of the war.<sup>58</sup> Such acts were less evidence of an unconscious ‘return of the repressed’ in a traumatised ‘national psyche’ than calculated *mises en scène*, a surely deliberate and targeted staging of well-known scripts that had been fed into society and socialisation over the previous fifteen years. As optimism about the revolution’s prospects faded, such narratives had increasingly shaped a culture of national memory that emphasised both the glorification of armed struggle and the dehumanising extremes of victimhood.<sup>59</sup>

Commentators, especially in France, where in the mid-1990s debates about the war of independence were resurfacing in both academic and political life, began to refer to the violence as a ‘second Algerian war’, sometimes with the implication that this new violence had arisen from the ‘unhealed wounds’ of the older struggle. Within Algeria, language and imagery drawing on the war of 1954–62 was indeed used by all sides to claim credentials and to deny legitimacy to others, and in some areas the conflict must have been structured around local social and generational tensions, as it had been during the war of independence. Citizen militia officially called ‘self-defence groups’ (*groupes de légitime défense*, GLDs) were thus universally known as *patriotes* and, in many rural areas, were first constituted by the older generation of ALN veterans, supported by the National Organisation of Mujahidin (ONM). At the same time, the Islamist guerrillas claimed the mantle of ‘true’ *mujahidin* for themselves, and while they denounced their enemies as *hizb fransa*, they were themselves accused of being ‘the sons of *harkis*’.<sup>60</sup> Whether or not some insurgents were in fact the offspring of formerly caïdal or *harki* families, seeking to regain the property or redeem the social status lost since independence, was in this respect beside the point, since it was the moral charge, not the material accusation, that really mattered, although in some cases the latter might also have been true. Again, rather than simply, compulsively re-enacting the revolution, these narratives were both a means of conflict, staking claims in a ‘moral economy’ that was effective because shared throughout society, and a means of rationalising and recounting what was otherwise fast becoming, not – by any means –

something ‘innate’ to all Algerians, but on the contrary horribly foreign and incomprehensible to the vast majority of them.

Whoever was responsible for the wave of massacres that engulfed Algeria in 1997–98 before subsiding into smaller and less frequent, though still persistent, incidents of violence in the following years, there could be no doubt at all that elsewhere, state terror was in full swing. In the escalating struggle to suppress the insurgency and terrorise, in turn, its civilian supporters, from 1992 onwards thousands of suspects ‘disappeared’ into undocumented detention, where torture by the security services was once again both routine and extreme. Many people – the number, inevitably, being impossible to calculate – never re-emerged. Ever since the war of independence, the torture of suspects had been part of the secret services’ regular functions: used against actual or suspected opponents under Ben Bella and Boumediene, and against detainees in October 1988, it was now once more employed on a massive scale – with beatings, electricity, water, electric irons, drills, and soldering tools, blowtorches, rape – in police stations and DRS holding centres across the country.<sup>61</sup> In early 1992, Mohamed Lamari took charge of a combined, multi-service counter-terrorist operation involving the army, gendarmerie and police. His counterpart, the other (unrelated) Lamari, General ‘Smaïn’ of the DRS, from his office in the Directorate of Counter-Intelligence and Internal Security, took charge of more covert aspects of the counter-guerrilla. Among the regular arms of the security services, many police officers saw themselves simply as combating a terrorist threat to their country. Regular policemen accustomed to walking the beat or doing traffic duty volunteered for the new, special anti-terrorist police, the BMPJ; dressed in black, armed with Kalashnikovs and wearing balaclavas during operations, they resembled the army’s special intervention units, and like them became known as ‘ninjas’. Some, appalled by what they were told to do and later seeking asylum in Europe, would tell horrific stories of torture and of DRS collusion in assassinations and massacres. Others, either uninvolved in the violence of interrogation and intimidation or judging it justified in the struggle against the terrorism that was killing their comrades and relatives, drew satisfaction from their role in winning the war.<sup>62</sup>

As the violence escalated, it also became diffused, dividing families, urban districts and villages across the country. Relatively inaccessible rural areas, vulnerable country roads and settlements, became virtual no-go zones where the state ceased to have any regular presence: police and soldiers sheltered in heavily fortified barracks, and insurgent bands operated with apparent impunity. In the absence of any more formal rule of law, some of the ‘self-defence groups’ (GLDs) that the government began to arm in 1994 as counter-insurgent militia would also, like the insurgent

armed groups, be accused by human rights observers of carrying out extrajudicial killings, acts of terror and involvement in local vendettas. The privatisation of violence and its multiple local logics became divorced from the ostensible conflict of Islamists *versus* government, and fed on local 'war economies', through which local, private or sectional interests and the local networks of the state, whether in competition or in collusion, came to have greater stakes in the perpetuation of the conflict than in its resolution.

In 1992–93, belief was strong among young Islamist sympathisers in the imminent collapse of the regime and the victory of Chebouti, 'the lion of the mountain' and his avenging army: in the words of a newspaper-seller in the Algiers suburbs, 'It won't last, Chebouti, he'll come down from the mountain with his *mujahidin* and I promise you, he'll kill the lot of them'.<sup>63</sup> But it did last. Boudiaf's murder itself, committed by a lone gunman, Lembarek Boumaarafi – a sub-lieutenant in a police special intervention unit who was known to have Islamist sympathies and who had unaccountably been placed, against protocol, in Boudiaf's bodyguard on the day he was killed – was at once widely, and soon almost universally, seen as having been ordered by the hard men of the *pouvoir* who had quickly regretted their choice of president and had no intention of allowing him to undermine or bypass them.<sup>64</sup> On the surface a shocking sign of the fragility of the state even at its highest level, from this perspective the assassination of Boudiaf already displayed the resilience of the system at the centre of the state, its determination to defend itself and the complete absence of any 'red lines' it might hesitate to cross. In 1992–95, the HCE's regime slowly regained ground against the insurgency, averted what its supporters saw as a threatened 'collapse of the state' after Boudiaf's death and could claim to have 'saved Algeria from the *débâcle*' that faced it in 1992.<sup>65</sup> The HCE's supporters would also point out that, as rarely occurs in such circumstances, it respected the anticipated end of its mandate, dissolving itself at the end of 1994 and appointing General Liamine Zeroual, a 53-year-old ex-maquisard from Batna who in July 1993 had succeeded Nezzar as defence minister, as State President for a three-year 'transitional period'.

While the state may have been close to collapse in the immediate crisis of 1992–94, the regime's hard core had now regained the initiative. The men who removed Chadli were sufficiently determined to fight an all-out, and atrocious, war against the Islamist insurgents, and entrenched enough either to co-opt or to sideline their opponents in the political class. An attempt at a negotiated political solution among the opposition parties, put together during talks brokered by the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio near Rome in November 1994 and announced

in a platform ‘for a peaceful resolution’ to the crisis in January 1995, was rejected outright by the regime. Most of the platform’s proponents were ignored: the external leadership of the FIS, whose political re-entry was anathema to the *décideurs*, Ben Bella’s MDA and the FFS and al-Nahda, which remained opposition movements. The PT was persuaded back into line. Honest opponents of the Rome initiative judged it ‘inopportune’, since as they (and many in Algeria, long allergic to ‘intrusions’ into national sovereignty) saw it, any initiative to reach out to the Islamists and resolve the crisis needed to come from within Algeria, not from outside.<sup>66</sup> For others, the reopening of political dialogue simply had to be sabotaged. Abd al-Hamid Mehri, who signed the Sant’Egidio platform for the FLN, was soon taking calls from his central committee colleagues who, they told him, could no longer support the initiative, having been ‘put before difficult, and sometimes extreme, choices’.<sup>67</sup>

It was therefore somewhat surprising when, in February 1995, Zeroual renewed the regime’s own attempts to engage a ‘national dialogue’ that, he said, was the only solution to the crisis and must include ‘the participation of the national political and social forces without exception.’<sup>68</sup> Presidential elections in November 1995 confirmed Zeroual in office, and a constitutional revision a year later strengthened the Presidency’s powers, particularly by establishing an upper chamber, the Council of the Nation (informally known as the ‘senate’), one-third of whose members would be designated by the President, and allowing the President to legislate by decree whenever parliament was not in session. At the same time, an important progressive counterweight was introduced in the limitation of a President’s mandates to a maximum of two five-year terms, suggesting both the strengthening of the Presidency and the potential for it to become a more fully ‘constitutional’ office.<sup>69</sup> New legislative, regional and local elections in June and October 1997 were won overall by Zeroual’s newly created party, the RND. Accusations of fraud and ballot-rigging were widespread, but the undoubtedly calculated distribution of *kursis* had the effect of parcelling out representation tolerably across the political spectrum. The ‘moderate’ Islamist parties, Hamas and al-Nahda, now sat in the national assembly alongside the FLN and representatives of other shades of opinion prepared to accept entry into the system under the regime’s rules.<sup>70</sup> A wider political dialogue also seemed possible. As Minister of Defence in Redha Malek’s government, Zeroual had already pressed for negotiations with Abbasi and Benhadj: Malek had dismissed the idea as ‘a waste of time’.<sup>71</sup> Now, feelers were put out to the imprisoned FIS leaders.

But Zeroual’s ‘national dialogue’, while no doubt intended, among other aims, to marginalise Sant’Egidio, was nonetheless opposed by the

'eradicators' in the regime. His loyal lieutenant and ally, the former DGDS chief General Mohamed Betchine, was systematically undermined and discredited by a vitriolic press campaign that revealed the extent of his suspiciously accumulated private wealth. The ANP moderniser Mustafa Belloucif, who had seemingly made the same wrong enemies some years earlier, had already been thrown to the media as a scapegoat for corruption in April 1992. As under Chadli in the early 1980s, such selective and suspiciously timed corruption investigations served particular political interests much more than public justice and accountability. And just as it seemed that the earlier stage of the insurgency was being brought under control – in January 1996, eleven founder members of the FIS called for a ceasefire, the curfew in urban areas that had confined families to their overcrowded apartments every evening for three years was lifted in February, and government spokesmen began to speak of 'residual' terrorism – the violence suddenly multiplied and intensified. The abduction at Tibhirine came just as Zeroual prepared to meet the signatories to the Sant'Egidio statement; after Abdelkader Hachani and Abbasi Madani were conditionally released from prison in July 1997, the wave of massacres of civilians began in earnest.<sup>72</sup> Where some saw GIA extremists resorting to ever more brutal tactics to stop the return to elections and eliminate the possibility of dialogue with the regime by their rivals of the ex-FIS, others saw a clear campaign by the 'eradicators', through Tewfik and Lamari in the DRS and their agents in the GIA, to undermine Zeroual and force him out. He held on for another year, until 11 September 1998, when in a surprise TV address to the nation barely two years into his term of office, the President announced his intention to cut it short. New presidential elections were to be held in April 1999.

### **After the War**

Although it would flare sporadically for several years still, the violence began to abate. Without any real political or social resolution of the conflict, after seven years of war the Islamist insurgency was effectively exhausted, and society politically demobilised and desperate for a return to normality. The basic elements of the regime – the army and security services, the factional interests and patronage networks of their bosses, and the institutions of the state around them – were firmly restored to power. Observers abroad debated the nature of the violence and the utility of calling it a 'civil war', often, once again, in ways that mostly annoyed Algerians while adding little to anyone else's understanding of what had been happening to them.



The generalisation of violence, the arming of society between Islamists, GLDs, police and the military, with familial survival strategies often – anecdotally, but no doubt on a large scale – involving one son joining the police and another the *'mujahidin'*, the neighbourhood denunciations and the intimacy of violence in the worst-affected areas, the extent of both popular alienation from the security forces and, elsewhere, of popular resistance to the armed Islamists, certainly made the struggle a civil war in the sense that the armed conflict was not simply between clearly demarcated camps of insurgents and government, but turned society in on and against itself.

At the same time, the 'classic' developments often thought characteristic of civil wars did not materialise: the state's institutions, especially the army and police, did not collapse or split, large areas of national territory were never effectively occupied and fought over for any length of time by rival protagonists, and above all, the general population was not mobilised politically in support of one or another clearly distinguished armed force carrying rival political projects.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 7.2 Children and young men look at the photographer between the guns of a citizens' militia (GLD, self-defence group) at Remika, near Relizane, 5 January 1998. The region was in the throes of some of the 'dark decade's' worst violence (AP).



In fact the reverse was mostly true. The insurgency, while it could only survive by retaining at least some support, relatively quickly lost most of its popular support and its political goal, to the extent that there was one at all, was never more than the superficial rhetoric of a utopian 'Islamic State': its material content, capitalising on opposition to *le pouvoir*, was entirely negative. Territorial contests with regime forces were limited to micro-scale, localised urban guerillas and the maintenance of a state of insecurity in rural areas; while this had been enough for the ALN in the late 1950s, the Islamists had absolutely no political equivalent of the FLN's counter-state or the growing popular support that it came to represent. To prevail, the insurgents needed a decisive military victory that was always illusory, or a political collapse of the regime that, when it was possible in 1992–94, would have been the effect of the financial crisis, not a reflection of Islamist strength. And in fact, in military terms the ferocity of the regime's counter-guerilla proved, if anything, to be capable of inflicting more terror than its opponents' terrorism, while its political strength was visible in its ability to suppress the possibility of any agreement unsanctioned by it, as demonstrated by the fate of the 1995 Rome platform.

And instead of mobilising society into competing political camps, out of which either victory for one side or a negotiated peace might have emerged, the violence instead reduced 'politics' to a display of horror, demobilising the social energies that had been so effusively liberated in 1989, destroying the social movement that had carried Islamism to the edge of power, exacerbating the rift between the people and the political class, and directing social strategies and aspirations away from national-level politics and notions of dramatic change towards more limited, local and sectional means of engagement and bargaining with the state. These, in turn, worked through older, and still resilient, networks and practices that, rather than fading away before 'rational' bureaucracy and impersonal, transparently competitive institutions, became newly relevant. The success of the recomposed political party system from 1997 onwards was, in all likelihood, attributable more to its effective meshing with such informal systems than to anything political science would recognise as institutionalised party politics.<sup>74</sup>

Three circumstances, in addition to its ruthlessness, saved the regime. First, debt rescheduling and financing deals with the IMF and with the foreign creditors represented in the Paris Club in April and June 1994, respectively, staved off the financial crisis and released cash for arms and equipment to fight the war. The economists of Hamrouche's group had resisted earlier pressure, especially from France, to reschedule the country's foreign debt repayments: the constraints for structural adjustment

that such a move would bring meant a loss of sovereignty, amounted to ‘selling the family silver’ and would ‘put the country on its knees when it already risked collapse’.<sup>75</sup> They also, perhaps above all, wanted to avoid a new flood of credit into an economy without the capacity productively to absorb it, a transfusion that would simply reanimate corrupt rentierism. They had sought instead to re-profile the debt over the longer term, a strategy that had the support of the Japanese, who held much of Algeria’s debt portfolio, but which was opposed in particular by the French. The reformers’ lack of support from international financial partners, in fact, combined with their fragility within the regime had proved their undoing. While at home they were attacked for reforms that appeared ‘American’, for neoliberals abroad their project had insufficient deregulation and private sector-led orthodoxy, insufficient rapidity in the devaluation of the currency. Paris, where their opponents in the regime were well connected, did not know or trust them and was especially hostile; and where there was some support for the reforms, turf wars within the French establishment, including between older and newer French businesses and within the French security services (between the internal intelligence service, the DST, thought to be closely connected to its homologues in the DRS, and its external equivalent the DGSE), made matters worse.<sup>76</sup>

But by 1993, the earlier reformers were all out of the picture. After a brief and disastrous flirtation with a return to a planned ‘war economy’ under the veteran étatist Belaïd Abdesselam in 1992–93, the regime switched to a liberalisation that could be made to work more in its favour. Ahmed Benbitour, an honest technocrat with a Canadian MBA who had already argued that rescheduling was inevitable when he was an advisor to Khellef and Brahimi in 1986, was brought into Redha Malek’s government as Minister of Energy to negotiate with IMF. Once the IMF and Paris Club agreements were in place, the Malek government’s job was done: the Prime Minister was dismissed the following day, and while Benbitour remained as Finance Minister in the two successor cabinets, his other proposed reforms, notably in the banking sector, were ignored.<sup>77</sup> IMF support came at a high cost. The policy presided over by the governments of Ahmed Ouyahia, a discreet diplomat and unbending ‘eradicator’ who came to sudden prominence in January 1996 when he was named Prime Minister, and who subsequently became head of the RND, threw the country into rapid and merciless structural adjustment. There were swingeing cuts in government expenditure on health, education and infrastructure; salary reductions for public servants; shutdowns and closures in industry; and rapidly mounting unemployment. Algerians experienced dramatic reductions in living standards, and the country’s

industrial capacity, instead of being revitalised, as had been planned at the end of the 1980s, was cut to ribbons instead.

Second, once the war was effectively won on the ground, the return to political business as usual was miraculously facilitated by the world market. High oil prices between 2002 and 2015 flooded the system with new money, returning the political class to the illusions of easy unearned income and unassailable foreign currency reserves. The recovery of foreign exchange revenues created a surplus of 32.5 billion US dollars by 2006. Gross domestic product grew at around 5 per cent, the economic recovery program in place since 2001 reinjected investment into the public sector after its previous throttling by structural adjustment and the public debt was finally paid off in 2006.<sup>78</sup> The liberalisation of foreign commerce and the massive consumer demand of the young population stimulated private sector imports and the local franchises of foreign firms, now uncontrolled by any need for domestic reinvestment and freed of any potential competition from a domestic industrial base. Spending and patronage on a grand scale could begin again. A new generation entering the political elite in 1997–99, whose members might otherwise have been obliged to recognise the need for systemic change, could instead simply graft themselves into the reconstituted system of their elders (and patrons), and reproduce their patterns of behaviour.<sup>79</sup>

Third, the attacks by al-Qa'ida on the United States on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent 'global war on terror' at last ended the regime's international isolation. While the resurgence of 'global jihad', the sense of playing a role in a worldwide struggle for Islam against impiety that stretched from New York to Kabul, was undoubtedly a boost to the morale of Algeria's own embattled and partly demobilised jihadists, the George W. Bush administration's response brought even greater benefits to Algeria's army and security hierarchs. The regime was now seen as offering valuable 'lessons' in combating Islamist terror, and became an 'ally' in a global war that, Algeria's leaders would lose no time in pointing out, they had already fought and won. In the mid-1990s, Algeria's war spilled over into France, with the hijacking in Algiers of an Air France Airbus in December 1994, the murder of three passengers and the dramatic liberation of the other hostages by French gendarmerie commandos at Marseille's Marignane airport; the 11 July 1995 murder in Paris of Abdelbaki Sahraoui, a co-founder of the FIS; and, two weeks later, the bombing of the St-Michel underground (RER) station in Paris that killed eight and injured 117. By 2001, these events were widely seen within the *qui tue* dispute, as alleged 'black operations' to provoke French opinion against the Islamists and strengthen material support for the regime. After September 11, they

could be seen as premonitory warnings of the reach of globalised jihad. At the same time, as the war within Algeria wound down and most Algerians talked of a return to ‘normality’, in January 2007 a successor group to the GIA, the so-called Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), declared its adherence to the cause of Osama Bin Laden and re-branded itself as ‘al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghrib’. A wave of attacks claimed by the GSPC or AQIM between October 2006 and December 2007 marked an uptick of ‘residual’ terrorism: co-ordinated bomb blasts on 11 April 2007 struck the *qasr al-hukuma*, the former government general building in central Algiers, and the police headquarters in the suburb of Bab Ezzouar; a suicide bombing killed twenty and injured 107 at Batna on 6 September; car bombs targeted the Constitutional Court and destroyed the United Nations Development Program offices in Algiers on 11 December.

In April 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika had been brought to the Presidency in succession to Zeroual, as the *décideurs*’ ‘consensus candidate’, promising peace. The presence of Larbi Belkheir as director of the president’s office was a strong indicator of where real power still lay; the six other candidates who had put themselves forward to run for the Presidency withdrew on the eve of the election, in a gesture of protest at the imminent fraud that went ahead anyway. As a reminder of the ‘good old days’ of Boumediene and unalloyed by involvement in the past decade, Bouteflika enjoyed a measure of real popularity. His diplomatic profile and good connections both in the Gulf and elsewhere made him the logical choice to put Algeria back on the international map, and his first term was largely spent in energetic travelling. Buoyed by the rising oil price, long-abandoned *grands projets* were recommenced and joined by new ones: Algiers’ underground rail system and international airport terminal, an east–west highway, a million new housing units. Some long-overdue progressive measures were also passed, especially, in 2005, a family law reform that limited the role of a woman’s *wali* (guardian) at marriage to a representative rather than a tutor, improved parental rights for divorced women and removed the necessity for the husband or father’s authorisation for women and children to leave the country.<sup>80</sup> Bouteflika was re-elected in 2004 with a – perhaps not excessively overinflated – 85 per cent of the vote. But as would soon be apparent, the system’s long-established blend of authoritarianism, patrimonialism, rentierism and corruption was reaching a new peak.

The showpieces of Bouteflika’s first term were two measures intended to ‘turn the page’ on the war. The ‘civil concord’, submitted to a September 1999 referendum, was generally supported as an effort to end the violence and induce insurgents to lay down their arms, which

some had already done under a ‘clemency’ (*rahma*) initiative by Zeroual in 1995, and which more did now. Having announced a ceasefire in September 1997, the AIS ended its insurgency in January 2000. Approved with much reduced popular support in a second referendum in September 2005 and enacted in February 2006, the expanded law on ‘national reconciliation’ consolidated the ‘peace’ without resolving the conflict. Much contested by civil society groups, especially the families of the ‘disappeared’ and families of victims of terrorism, as well as by ‘eradicators’ who criticised Bouteflika’s position as encouraging recidivism among diehard Islamists, the 2006 law legislated sweeping amnesties (supposedly excluding those guilty of murder or rape, but in effect extending to all parties) and made juridical attribution of responsibility for the events of the war – ‘the national tragedy’, as it was now officially termed – impossible.<sup>81</sup>

The only certainty was that the truth about the thousands of people killed, kidnapped by insurgents or ‘disappeared’ by the security services, would not be known, justice for them or those who survived them not done and public debate on the whole ‘national tragedy’ silenced. ‘For me,



Figure 7.3 *Familles des disparus*: Women holding placards at a demonstration demanding truth and justice for the ‘disappeared’ in Algiers, 10 August 1999 (AP).

my problem wasn't the state, it was the terrorist, the Islamist who was my neighbour, to whom I never did any harm and who did harm to me,' said Ali Merabet, spokesman for the Somoud ('Steadfast') group that represented the families of victims of terrorism, and whose two brothers were kidnapped and killed by a local armed group in 1995: 'But we realised that [with the law on national reconciliation] they'd got together; they'd done a deal between themselves . . . If the person responsible for murdering my brothers is protected by the state, who is the real aggressor?'<sup>82</sup> Protests like this from Algeria's combative civil society, however, added up to so many voices in the wilderness.

By 2007, with an estimated quarter of the population living below the poverty line, and unemployment officially at around 12 per cent but possibly 40 per cent and anecdotally higher among young people under 30 (who accounted for over half of the total population), the reopening of Algeria to the neoliberal global economy had sharpened an already highly unequal distribution of benefits. The school-age (5- to 14-year-old) population was 25.3 per cent of the total, and after the ravages of the war and budgetary austerity, the school system struggled to equip the rising generation for success in a brave new competitive world. Prospects for most of the country's youth, who had grown up amidst violent upheaval and looked anxiously for something better in the near future, remained very limited. Family connections and patronage were surer recommendations than education and training, and private employers, according to some young job seekers and those advising them, could be even less meritocratic than the public sector. While ostentatious villas mushroomed in some districts, so did the precarious shantytowns on their unclaimed edges, and the entrepreneurial energy of the long-standing urban poor, the recently unemployed and the war's million or more internal refugees from the countryside had to find outlets wherever it could, especially in the informal import and retail world of *trabendo* (from French *contrebande*, 'smuggling') and highly insecure, occasional employment.

At the other end of the spectrum, the vision of possibilities unleashed by unrestrained private enterprise ran to surreal extremes. The tale of Rafic 'Moumen' Khalifa, the young man from Algiers who reportedly began with 1,500 euros and a modest family pharmacy and ten years later owned a bank, a TV station and an airline in a business empire clearing 200 million euros in annual profit, was 'obviously too beautiful to be true.'<sup>83</sup> Khalifa, the son of senior MALG officer Laroussi Khalifa, incarnated the impossible excesses now open to the *tchi-tchi* elite. The Khalifa group collapsed in 2003 with 45 million dollars missing from its flagship private bank. While Khalifa himself had long since fled to London, fifteen

of his executives and others implicated in the bank's collapse were sentenced to prison terms in March 2007. While the primary victims of Khalifa's spectacular corporate fraud and personal incompetence were the group's employees and small private investors – ordinary Algerians drawn in by the hope that 'finally, we can have the good life, too'<sup>84</sup> – some public servants who ended up in prison had invested public money in the group's enterprises, apparently on untraceable instructions from above.<sup>85</sup>

At the same time as the Khalifa collapse exposed the country's most spectacular private business empire as a flimsy and inept artifice, international observers and experts shook their heads at the lack of progress actually made in opening up more sectors to foreign investment and privatising the country's state-owned enterprises. The avenues open to private investment in fact remained limited, while the remaining public industries, running constant deficits that were once again being bailed out by the soaring hydrocarbon surplus, could be neither efficiently retained nor advantageously sold, and the regime appeared indifferent to their fate. Foreign direct investment in Algeria in 2002–06 remained at only 2.6 per cent of GDP.<sup>86</sup> An estimated 25–35 per cent of money in the economy circulated outside official banking circuits, and the informal economy accounted for a commercial sector at least as large.

Against this background, deep-running grievances and the alienation of great swathes of society from the reconstituted political system found new outlets. When the outspoken, rebellious singer Matoub Lounès was assassinated in 1998, crowds in Kabylia had chanted *pouvoir assassin* ('murdering *pouvoir*'), a slogan that later became the refrain of a song and Tizi Ouzou football anthem by another militant Kabyle musician, Oulahlou, which openly denounced the SM and compared Boumediene to Pinochet. Public opinion in Kabylia largely espoused a well-worn image of Kabyle resistance to the regime, and saw the past decade in the light of the region's history of patriotic martyrdom and betrayal. While there had certainly been Kabyle Islamists too, the regime itself was widely credited with having deliberately implanted the Islamist maquisards, whose insurgency was now largely confined to a few mountainous areas including parts of Kabylia, to keep the region insecure. On 18 April 2001, an 18-year-old high school student, Massinissa Guermah, was shot and killed while in custody in a gendarmerie post at Beni Douala, in the central Djurdjura just south of Tizi Ouzou. Several months of angry confrontations between Kabyle youths and the security forces, especially the gendarmerie, followed. In what became known as the 'Black Spring' (*printemps noir*) at least several dozen protestors were killed. Mass demonstrations, culminating in a massive march on Algiers on 14 June in which hundreds of thousands took part and which degenerated into violence



when protestors tried to reach the presidential palace, expressed a groundswell of dissent against the regime's violence and unaccountability, summed up in the sense that citizens were subject to nothing but *hogra*, the 'contempt' of those who ruled them. For over a year, the confrontations continued: in spring 2002, FFS and RCD party offices as well as symbols of the state were attacked, and unrest rumbled on and flared sporadically across the region for the next several years.

With the region's main political parties incapable of channelling the protests – the RCD's Saïd Sadi was in government, Hocine Aït Ahmed was still in his Swiss exile – in May 2001 a grassroots organisation, the 'Coordination of *aaruch*, daïras and communes' (CADC), emerged to lead what became known interchangeably – and instructively – both as the *mouvement des aaruch*, that is, of the 'tribes' (*la'arash*), and as the *mouvement citoyen*: a movement that expressed the desire for meaningful citizenship, mobilised through the ancient structures of adult, male village assemblies that became the organising bodies of the revolt. On 11 June 2001, the CADC put together a platform of fifteen demands at El Kseur, in the Soummam valley west of Bejaïa. These combined the immediate and particular (cessation of 'punitive expeditions against the population', withdrawal of criminal charges against protestors, withdrawal of the gendarmerie and police reinforcements) with the general and far-reaching: for 'a state guaranteeing all socio-economic rights and democratic liberties', against 'the policies of under-development, pauperisation and impoverishment of the Algerian people'; that 'all the executive functions of the state and its security forces shall be placed under the effective authority of democratically elected bodies', and more simply 'against *hogra*.'<sup>87</sup>

As these demands suggested, combined with those that claimed the 'status of martyr' for victims of the repression and immediate state welfare measures for their families, the movement's demand was for more effective inclusion in a more responsible and accountable state, according to perceptions widely held throughout Algeria as to what that state should be, rather than any rejection of the state. Only two articles of the El Kseur platform made regionally particular stipulations: the demand that Tamazight should be declared a 'national and official' language, and that there should be 'an emergency socio-economic plan' for Kabylia. But the regime's portrayal of the protests as specifically Kabyle and 'Berberist' was largely successful, containing the revolt as an expression of 'identity politics' and regionalism which the rest of the country could (and, largely, did) ignore. At the fringes of the Berberist movement, calls for Kabyle autonomy within a federal Algeria were developing, led by the singer Ferhat Mehenni's Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia

(MAK), founded at the height of the Black Spring in June 2001, but support for the MAK came mainly from the Kabyle diaspora and such sentiments were vanishingly rare in Kabylia itself.<sup>88</sup> Ahmed Ouyahia, once again Prime Minister, opened negotiations with representatives of the *aaruch* on the more limited terms of the platform. The 1996 constitution had included recognition of the Amazigh as well as the Arab and Islamic aspects of the ‘personality’ of Algeria but offered nothing concrete on the language question; a 2002 amendment addressed this on the symbolic level, recognising Tamazight as a ‘national’ language. It would at last be made an official language, its use permitted in official documents, in a further constitutional revision in January 2016.

The ‘citizens’ movement’ was thus effectively circumscribed as a cultural one; the country’s other principal idiom of identity politics, militarily defeated, was now dispersed and re-integrated into the system in different ways. Abassi and Benhaj were released at last in July 2003. Some attention was paid to them, and especially to their endorsement of Bouteflika’s ‘reconciliation’ platform, but they had become all but irrelevant. Their constituency had been destroyed, either physically eliminated or – with the regime’s refusal to sanction the creation of the Wafa’ (Fidelity) party by Taleb Ibrahimi, which was seen as a potential revival of the FIS – reabsorbed either into the parties of Nahnah and Djaballah, or, increasingly, into the Islamist-inclined wing of the FLN led by Abdelaziz Belkhadem, who rose under Bouteflika’s patronage to be Foreign Minister in 2000, FLN Secretary General in 2005 and Prime Minister in 2006.

Outside the formal political field, a specifically Algerian Islam was cultivated by a newfound state interest in the *tariqas* and their *zawiyas*, seen as both a useful counterweight to an ‘imported’ Islamism and, above all, as a reservoir of political mobilisation. Attacked by the reformists since the 1920s and largely delegitimised since the revolution, the brotherhoods had nonetheless never gone away. They even experienced a modest revival in the 1980s, at the same time as the broader ‘Islamic revival’ was taking a more reductive turn to orthopraxy and social moralisation, partly thanks to Chadli’s family connections (through his second marriage into a Mostaghanem family), but also through the resilience of the *zawaya* networks themselves, which still commanded followings of thousands. The old Rahmaniyya *zawiya* of Tolga, on the edge of the Sahara west of Biskra, was demolished after independence, but only so that new buildings could be erected, beginning in the mid-1960s, to house its well-maintained library and its students. Magnificent new *zawiya* complexes, ostentatiously patronised by local politicians, like that of Sidi Muhammed Belkaid near Oran, were built in the early

2000s.<sup>89</sup> A National Association of Zawaya was created in the early 1990s, and the brotherhoods proved instrumental as part of Bouteflika's coalition in successive presidential elections up to 2009. The revival of the *zawiyas* and of the religious education dispensed there, however, was not merely a political expedient. For some, including disenchanted former FIS sympathisers and militants, the brotherhoods' spirituality and inner discipline was becoming an important alternative avenue in their search for 'serenity', for personal as well as social peace, in religion, at a time when public piety was widespread but seemed more superficial than ever. As one put it, the result of the war had been that 'mosques have never been so full, nor hearts so empty'.<sup>90</sup>

### Autumn in Springtime

As Algeria celebrated fifty 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>91</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, which prepared to take up the office of Prime Minister and form a government, 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 roadblocks and stopped the traffic for several hours, demanding that the state take action to rehouse them. In Boumerdès, university students went on unlimited 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 under-served 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.<sup>92</sup> In the context of the 'Arab Spring', a decade after Kabylia's 'Black' one, 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.

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, though he had been in power for a much shorter time than Ben Ali in Tunisia, let alone Libya's Gaddafi or Egypt's Mubarak, 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 illness that visibly (when he was, occasionally, visible) verged on incapacitation, Bouteflika's long and tenacious decline was also that of the revolutionary generation as a whole. He had been hospitalised in November 2005, apparently for a gastric ulcer, but rumours of stomach cancer abounded as he was repeatedly absent, sometimes for extended periods, for treatment in France; in April 2013 he suffered a minor stroke. 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 organise its departure', but seemed incapable of doing so.<sup>93</sup>

Bouteflika's entrenchment in the Presidency was the most obvious sign of this incapacity to chart a course to a managed transition: a constitutional amendment in November 2008 had allowed him a third

mandate, reversing the provision of the 1996 constitution that had fixed a two-term limit to the office. The two subsequent electoral campaigns, in 2009 and 2014, were notable only for the political class's failure to use them as opportunities to address the country's systemic malaise.<sup>94</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. This had been the case at least since 2004, when former Prime Minister Ali Benflis, Bouteflika's 1999 campaign manager and the FLN's secretary general since 2001, ran for President against his former patron with support from Mohamed Lamari and others. The campaign was especially acrimonious, and led to a hard-fought split in the FLN, which by 2009 was brought back into the fold and to support for Bouteflika under the gradually imposed leadership of a 'corrective' faction (the so-called *mouvement de redressement*) led by the Islamist-leaning Belkhadem. Other notable incidents indicated serious squabbles within the regime. On 25 February 2010, Ali Tounsi, the country's chief police officer, was shot dead at his office in the Algiers police headquarters (DGSN) by one of his colleagues, Chouaib Oultache. Oultache would be jailed in November 2011 in a corruption case along with several other DGSN cadres, having not yet faced trial for the murder. In May 2010, the long-serving and powerful SM veteran Noureddine 'Yezid' Zerhouni was removed from the post of Interior Minister that he had occupied since 1999. Four months earlier, a spectacular corruption scandal had broken at SONATRACH; the investigation would eventually bring down Chekib Khelil, the former World Bank petroleum expert who had been SONATRACH president from 2001 to 2003 and Energy Minister from 1999 to 2010.

If by 2010 *le pouvoir* had become a fragmented, polycentric system, this was, in part, because of an at least limited generational shift. The broader political elite – in parliament, in the bureaucracy and especially in the private sector, into which the children of generals and apparatchiks had flocked on returning from higher education – had been very largely replaced since the mid-1990s.<sup>95</sup> Even the core of the regime was no longer under the sway of the *janviéristes*, who, with the exception, as yet, of 'Tewfik' Mediène, were now all out of power, or relatively tamed and on their way out. Khaled Nezzar had already opted for retirement in 1994

and, although regularly consulted through the later 1990s, was now principally notable for occasional defensive sorties in the media. Mohamed Lamari was pushed out in July 2004 and died in February 2012. Benabbès Gheziel, who officially retired in 1997 but remained active on 'counter-terrorism' policy from an office in the Ministry of Defence, died in July 2014. Larbi Belkheir himself was sent into ambassadorial exile in Morocco in August 2005, and died in January 2010. The especially opaque 'Smaïn' Lamari died in August 2007. In 2011, aside from Tewfik, only two strongmen *décideurs* remained, both by negotiation with the President: Abdelmalek Guenaïzia, who had gone 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 once more by the President), which he occupied until 2013. Mohamed 'El-Mokh' Touati had first retired in August 2005, and returned in 2011 as presidential advisor for security affairs, but would finally be removed in July 2014. Bouteflika, it seemed, had done away with all the men who had brought him to power at the end of the war.<sup>96</sup> But their war, and the re-composition through it of a formalised party-political system as the expression of their own, and the broader political class's, factional interests, had put nothing new in place to replace them; and nor, apparently, had Bouteflika any viable notion of how to replace himself.

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 800 injured; 1,000 arrests were made.<sup>97</sup> In late January, the *Coordination nationale pour le changement et la démocratie* (CNCD), a coalition of political parties and some civil society groups, emerged to organise opposition to the regime, hoping to capitalise on this wave of protest, and demonstrations were held in Algiers in February and April. But after the first weeks of January, in contrast to events elsewhere in the Arab world, Algeria's protests did not coalesce into a mass movement for regime change. In part, this was due to effective management by the regime, which quickly 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 publicised meetings with prominent personalities in May and June. But 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.<sup>98</sup>

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*, 'spraying' money from the state's deep foreign currency reserves to buy acquiescence. At least while hydro-carbon prices remained high, the regime could afford to revert, 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 thereby implying any more genuine inclusion of participatory politics in the government of the country. In 2011, as in 2001, Algerians were engaging not in frontal opposition to the state but in the demand *for* a state, and for the public goods the state was supposed to deliver; in the short term, such demands could be met. In 2005, a development plan for the south amounting to some 3.4 billion US dollars 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 and 100 per cent.<sup>99</sup> The price rises in the costs of basic commodities – oil and sugar – were reversed. These responses effectively stifled the immediate dynamics of protest which, in other countries, were at the same time gaining momentum.

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, 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 manoeuvres*), the fiercely secularist Saïd Sadi, head of the RCD, found himself awkwardly in company with the former FIS firebrand Ali Benhaj. While supporters of the latter chanted *Ya Ali, ya Abbas, al-jabha rahi la bas!* ('Ali [Benhaj], Abbasi [Madani], the Front's still going strong'), other demonstrators shouted *Boulahya barra!* ('"Beardies" [Islamists] out!').<sup>100</sup> 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 sacrificed 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.

Unlike Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, Algeria's Presidency had perhaps become an office for life, but not a family business.<sup>101</sup> Bouteflika, for all his longevity, was not seen by most Algerians as the 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 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 of social and political energy: the political parties and the proliferation of privately owned newspapers, in French and Arabic, expressing every shade of opinion, provided no end of avenues for the dissipation and cooling and 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 CNCND and especially the RCD suffer from a lack of credibility. The organisation of protest by professional groups, unions and neighbourhoods meant that each could be repressed or bought off as the particular situation demanded, or as local political interests dictated.<sup>102</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, and 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 informal mechanisms of influence and arbitration still, in some places, embodied in very old forms of local consultation: councils of *la‘arash* in Kabylia, sometimes remodelled as ‘patrimonial associations’ but preserving the function of the ancient male, adult consultative assembly; meetings of ‘tribal’ heads of families in Tebessa or Timimoun; the *halqas* of scholars and community leaders in the Mزاب who had mediated episodic conflict there since 2008. 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.<sup>103</sup>

This was how the political economy of riot had operated throughout the country throughout the past decade. There was no connection between protests across national political space because each riot, sit-in or demonstration, whatever it shared with others, 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, not because Algerians were collectively ‘traumatised’ by the experiences of the 1990s (and many of the young people protesting could themselves have little or no conscious memory of the war<sup>104</sup>), but because fears of a return to violence, however severe, were outweighed by generalised popular political demobilisation. Rather than being afraid to speak out – which in fact they did, vocally, 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 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 the social protests of January 2011 – what in the popular quarters of Algiers, Bab el Oued and Belouizdad (Belcourt) became known as *zzit wa sukkar* – and the attempted mobilisation for ‘change’ in February. The organised political rallies were largely boycotted by those who had been involved in the spontaneous popular protests only weeks earlier. As the apparently ‘pro-Bouteflika’ youths, who briefly formed a counter-demonstration at *chamaneuf* on 12 February, but who were anything but ‘pro-regime’ protestors, explained:

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 (*racaille . . . 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.<sup>105</sup>

As one taxi-driver in Oran put it, again drawing a clear line between attempted political mobilisation 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, ’cos that lot, they did nothing for us in the riots.’<sup>106</sup>

Endemic social protest thus combined with what Algerians called *dégoûtage* for all things *bulitig*. The war had not only crushed but also effectively delegitimised utopian Islamism as a revolutionary solution capable of ‘re-enacting’ the revolutionary dynamic of the war of independence, as some FIS and MIA militants in 1989–93 had understood themselves to be doing. It had fragmented the Islamist constituency, isolating, manipulating and undermining its most radical factions while co-opting and taming others. Ferociously re-establishing its position, and the status quo ante, against the threats both of Islamism and of a more genuine democratisation through the 1990s, the regime had by 2015 left itself fragile, hollow and with little idea of what to do next save accelerate its rapaciousness. As FLN veteran Abd al-Hamid Mehri put it in 2007, ‘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>107</sup>

‘The people’, the revolutionary FLN’s ‘sole hero’, 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. But the system that governed them had retained of its distributive function only the capacity to buy short-term acquiescence, of its guarantees of law and order only the ability to repress, and of the revolutionary counter-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. The promise of 1 November, of the establishment of a democratic state 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>108</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 sixty years later. The generational shift that had produced Algeria's population of 2012 and their aspirations for change thus confronted the maintenance of a status quo untenable in the longer term but capable of reproducing itself apparently indefinitely for the time being. Algeria, which as ever had its share of dramatic events in and after 2011–12, was less in the shade of its neighbours' springtime than in the autumnal shadow of its own revolutions. It was from their shadows that Algeria's contemporary history was, and ordinary Algerians were, still struggling to emerge.