

The Multi-Party System in Algeria

After having lived under a single-party system for close to three decades, Algeria opened itself up to a multi-party system, which was to assure a large participation of the population in the institutions of the state. But since the reform that legalized the parties, the country has been confronted with a political violence that continues to this day. In order to understand the causes of this instability, one must analyze the particulars of the multi-party system in Algeria in relation to the features of the political system. According to the most current definition, a political system is constituted by all the forces, formal or informal, institutionalized or not, that help to either sustain the central power or call it into question. From this point of view, the army, the police, or the administration are part of the political system, as well as the lobby groups and the sporadic riots that shake up a city or a region. The distinct feature of the Algerian political system is the role that the army plays as a source of power: it is an eminent political actor because the country liberated itself from colonial domination through violence, which gave the army a historical legitimacy authorizing it to co-opt civil elites charged with handling the governmental administration. For this reason, it exercises sovereignty in place and in stead of the electorate. However, this sovereign power is not institutional—it is not inscribed in the Constitution. The army intervenes in the political field by means of its political police, the DRS, whose mission is to monitor all the potential actors of political life: trade unions, associations, newspapers, universities, and so on. Sometimes, it does not hesitate to infiltrate protest movements in order to manipulate them or discredit them.

This outline corresponded to the one-party system that Algeria had known since independence and that formally ended in 1989. When the multi-party system was introduced thanks to the constitutional reform of February 1989, the army was to cease exercising its political role. Yet that has not been the case—hence the incoherences of the political system that led to the violent crisis that the country has known since January 1992. The multi-party system was introduced by reformers led by the head of the government, Mouloud Hamrouche, under the presidency of Chadli Bendjedid; they hoped to lead a transition like that which had taken place in the Eastern European countries. But the enormous electoral victories of an islamist party (FIS) in June 1990 (municipal elections) and in December 1991 (legislative elections) frightened the hardliners, who

deprived the Islamists of their electoral victory. Since then, the multi-party system does not assure the participation of the population in the institutions of the state but serves only as a democratic façade for a regime that refuses electoral alternation.

The Algerian political system resembles an iceberg whose visible portion is made up of the state and the parties that accept the informal domination of the army; the others are declared illegal (FIS) or marginalized (FFS). The elections that have taken place after 1992 have not filled in the deficit of the regime's legitimacy, and the question at hand is to know why the peaceful transition from the single-party to multi-party system failed. This article will attempt to respond to this question in showing that the regime, while accepting a multi-party system, considers the political parties to be apparatuses at its service and the electorate to be its exclusive property. Before developing this double hypothesis, we begin by drawing up a typology of the political parties in Algeria.

A. The political parties in Algeria

On the eve of the municipal elections of June 1990, some sixty parties were declared. In order to break up the opposition, the administration encouraged them, and the press opened its columns for them generously. But at the end of the free polls of June 1990 and December 1991, only FIS, FLN, FFS, and RCD obtained seats. The other groups were ignored by the electorate whose favors they solicited. We will consider here only the principal parties, those that had an electoral legitimacy, even if it were negligible, or that, for various reasons, occupy a place in the political/media-related field. We will classify the political groups in three categories: the parties of the administration, those claiming to represent Islam, and, finally, those whose discourse is secularized.

1. The parties of the administration: FLN and RND

The governmental administration has two organizations (FLN and RND) obedient to it, beyond the conflicts of clans of persons who shake them up regularly. Their mission is to defend the governmental policy and to prepare lists of candidacy for the different elections, in return for nominations to political or administrative posts. Obeying a logic of prebends, the militants of FLN and of RND are susceptible to the symbolic and material gratifications offered by the

regime to the elected representatives; they arouse appetites and ambitions that often appeal to vote-catching affairs and to the distribution mechanisms of the resources of the state for securing the loyalty of local support and for mobilizing the notables in order to have an influence on the polls [1]. But this manufacture of docile political elites is not capable of conveying and expressing the social demands of the mass of voters. FLN and RND, preoccupied with the search for wealth and social ascension for their members, are not inclined to make the voice of the voters heard in the assemblies [2].

The FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale)

Created in 1954 in order to fight the colonial power and to gain independence from France, the FLN lost some of its dynamism as soon as its objective was achieved [3]. The governmental administration, since 1964 with the Algeria Charter, entrusted to the party the mission of defending the options of the regime (industrialization, agrarian revolution, etc.). After 1965, it was able to draw its authority from the charisma of Boumédiène, but it lost all credibility after the death of the latter. During the riots of October 1988, its premises were ravaged first—an indication of its unpopularity. After the constitutional reform of February 1989, the leaders hoped that FLN, subjected to competition, would become a hegemonic party around which would gravitate small groups that it would patronize, following the example of the Mexican experience of PRI. It was incapable, however, of playing this role, even if, at the time of the polls, it managed to keep a small electoral base that remained faithful (Fontaine, 1992, 1997). At the time of the elections of December 1991, it had obtained 15 seats out of 400 with close to half. The jerrymandering that was supposed to favor it, had actually profited the FIS. Without opposing the annulment of the elections, it did not approve of it so much. In January 1995, under the leadership of Abdelhamid Mehri, secretary general from 1989 to 1996, it participated in the reunion of Saint'Egidio, which brought together FIS, FFS, MDA, En Nahda, PT, and LADDH, signing the platform of Rome, which recommended a political solution to the crisis. It was the first time that FLN took an autonomous initiative that irritated the military hierarchy. It was in this way that the idea of creating a rival to FLN appeared. The RND was born in 1997 from a particular circumstance, on an administrative injunction, in order to neutralize the FLN if need be. The wish to create a party sustaining the crackdown of the islamists was formulated by Abdelhak Benhamouda, secretary general of UGTA, a fervent supporter of the regime. After his

assassination (1996), General Mohamed Bechine, advisor of President Liamine Zérroual, salvaged the idea in the hope of giving to the president a group that would support him at the different elections. In record time, the new party disposed of premises, funds, and human means in the perspective of the June 1997 legislative elections. Meanwhile, among FLN, A. Mehri was the victim of a protest that reproached him for having turned away the party in power and the manna of the administration. He was replaced by Boualem Benhamouda, who brought FLN back toward its traditional function, namely, supporting the military. Since then, FLN and RND have competed in the defense of the regime in return for various gratifications.

The RND (Rassemblement National pour la Democratie)

From its birth, RND has attracted toward itself numerous adherents motivated more by personal interests than by political convictions. As each election approaches, the party shows an unusually feverish activity in the making of the electoral lists. This is often accompanied by crises at the local level and gives way to rows that make the front pages of newspapers. The militants attracted by RND—and to a lesser extent by FLN—are not very politicized and succumb to the temptation of diverting funds when they assume elective functions. According to the daily paper *El Watan*, 1,050 elected persons resulting from a local ballot of October 2002 had been suspended from their functions, and 500 have since been arrested and condemned to prison. Citing the short speech of the president made before the commission of surveillance of the elections, the newspaper put forward that 349 mayors (that is, a quarter of the mayors of Algeria) were prosecuted by legal action for embezzlement, giving information that informed on the personnel of the parties of the administration. The newspaper wrote in its edition of 15 May 2003,

Regarding these 349 arrested elected officials, who represent 34 wilayas [administrative subdivisions] out of 48, no less than 123 have been judged and condemned. Bouteflika was only giving, one must emphasize, the example of the presidents of APC [municipality], which does not make account of the extent of a phenomenon that was making of the institutions of the State an immense jungle where pillage and predation are the rule and not the exception. In the wilaya of Sidi Bel Abbés alone, the suspensions touched nearly sixty elected officials, according to a report established by the services of the administration. Regarding these sixty suspensions, ten concerned presidents of APC relieved of their functions and then brought before the courts.

The equation that the regime is looking to solve is how to attract elected officials representative of the population who will accept being docile in the face of the executive power? Docility has a

price: the propensity of the elected officials to use their status to enrich themselves. The regime finds itself confronted with a contradiction that is peculiar to it, namely, that of seeking out elected officials representative of the population who will accept the rules of the game. But an elected official with a real electoral legitimacy at his disposal will have a tendency to free himself of the executive power, whose directives he will refuse and which he will criticize as often as necessary. An elected official with a legitimacy will call out not only the government but also the power of the army. Hence the necessity, for the regime, of resorting to stuffing ballot boxes in order to avoid introducing opponents in the assemblies and to remind elected officials of what they owe the administration.

2. The Islamist parties: FIS, MSP, MNR

In a Muslim country today, Islamism is inevitable for cultural and historical reasons. It drives a vision of the world that proposes to resolve the social fractures introduced by modernity by mobilizing ethics and morals. It is a political current whose objective is to install the definitive Islamic state as a politico-administrative organization working for the well-being of all in respect of the word of God. Its discourse informs more on the representations of the social groups than on the Qur'anic text to which it refers in order to legitimate itself. Owing to the potential of violence and of passions they contain, numerous Muslim states have prohibited Islamist movements—prevented in this way from taking part in the institutional political life. Doing this, they compromise the civil peace in closing the political scene to an important current of opinion. For those of the Muslim countries that have opted for pluralism, the crucial question to solve is *the implementation of the electoral democracy without excluding the most popular politico-ideological current*. The solution chosen by the Algerian regime is to prohibit the radical current of Islamism—which refuses the sovereign power of the army—and to promote an Islamism domesticated and lured by the functions of ministers, deputies, or mayors. It is in this way that it resorted to MSP and MNR to attract the Islamist electorate in return for ministerial portfolios and seats in the different elected assemblies. On one side, MSP and MNR participate in the government and in the elections; on the other, FIS is pursued and discredited for the terrorist acts that it commits against civilians or for those committed in its name.

FIS (Front Islamique du Salut)

From its prohibition in March 1992, FIS [4] disappeared as a legal parti. The members of its leadership, or those who remained after the arrests and the assassinations, divided themselves publicly on the exit from the crisis after the failure of the platform of Rome, which was refused by the military hierarchy. In September 1997, AIS, an armed branch of FIS, deposited the weapons and signed a truce with the military. Some supported the truce (Rabah Kébir, settled in Germany), while others (Mourad Dhina, settled in Switzerland) expressed reserves, hoping to negotiate a global political solution. In August 2002, a conference of FIS was held in Europe, which confirmed Mourad Dhina as spokesperson of the party abroad and which proposed a political solution for getting out of the crisis. At the time of the different polls, the other Islamist parties attempted to attract its electorate without anyone knowing in what proportions it still had one. Through the release of its leaders Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj in July 2003, the authorities sought to definitively turn the page on a party that nearly created a new regime. But Ali Benhadj is still criticizing the regime and advocating electoral alternation and respect for human rights

MSP

The second Islamist party, MSP (formerly Hamas), is rather legalist. It has participated in all the polls, accepting ministerial cabinets. Utilizing the public media, its leaders frequently denounce any project or measure harming the Muslim character of the state. They defend the Arab language, marginalized according to them by the current practice of French in the administration. From this point of view, MSP attracted all those who, in society and in the administration, were sensitive to what is commonly called in Algeria “the permanent national values” (*et-thawâbitel-wataniyya*). The party essentially recruits in the urban middle classes, among the civil servants and teachers. Its checkered results, from one poll to another, indicate either that its electoral base is volatile or that it agrees to the stuffing of ballot boxes—sometimes in its favor, sometimes not. The tolerant discourse of MSP toward the regime makes it appear as the third party of the administration.

MNR

The third Islamist party is MNR, led by Abdallah Djaballah. Its ideology is not different than that of MSP, except that its founder prefers being the leader of a small party to being second-in-

command of a larger one. Although present electorally in the large cities, MNR draws its strength essentially in the east of the country, and particularly in Skikda, where its leader originally comes from [5].

3. The non-Islamist parties

The non-Islamist parties have for their social basis the urban classes, more or less francophone, having positions in the state or in agencies of the government : civil servants, executives of public enterprises, teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, journalists, and so on. The political influence of these social groups does not stem from their number but rather from their functions in the administration, the public sector, and the press, where they have a great visibility. Numerically minorities in society, they are majorities in the media, where they express their views and, above all, their hostility to Islamism, perceived as a danger for “the republican state.” Not being themselves politically homogenous, they recognize each other in different parties, some of which gather no more than several dozen persons. There is a collusion between these parties and the press without which certain groups among them would remain unknown. Indeed, ANR, MDS, or CCDR only manifest themselves by means of press releases. The only ones that fill up rooms during meetings are FFS, RCD, and PT, which, in addition, have representatives in various elected assemblies. We will mention only the groups that have had to face electoral sanction, namely, FFS, RCD, and PT.

FFS

Created in 1963 by Hocine Ait Ahmed, a historical leader of the national movement, FFS was always opposed to the regime that was illegitimate in its eyes since the forceful takeover of 1962. It recommended the establishment of the institutions on the basis of a constituent assembly that would write a new Constitution. Becoming legal in 1989, it organized marches on Algiers that attracted tens of thousands of people, which made it the principal non-Islamist opposition party. In January 1992, it called for a great march to Algiers that brought together more than a million people under the watchword, “Neither police state, nor fundamentalist state.” With the electoral victory of FIS—which it had accepted—it intended to unite all the political currents not identifying with the Islamist project in order to propose a democratic alternative. The annulment of the elections, which it condemned, prevented it from playing this role of a political

counterweight to Islamism. Three years later, it took part in the meeting of Rome, recommending a political solution to the bloody crisis. It was the only legal party that demanded the return of the army in the barracks, denouncing the influence of the military hierarchy on the institutions of the state and thus refusing what it considered to be the illegal prerogatives of “real power”. Anchored essentially in Algiers and its environs and in Kabylia, demanding the official recognition of the Berber language, FFS suffers from the image of a regional party, despite the national dimension of its leader. Its discourse seduced the urban elites of other regions (Oran, Constantine, or Annaba), but they did not provide it the electorate it needed outside Kabylia. The ideology of FFS is closer to the European social-democratic parties (it is a member of Socialist International), sharing with them the model of electoral alternation and the respect of democratic values, notably freedom of expression and of human rights. Its strength, paradoxically, constitutes also its weakness, namely, identifying with a charismatic leader and with a particular region. Its dilemma is either making Kabylia into a stronghold in order to establish itself in power as the mouthpiece of a rebellious region, or extending itself on a national scale at the risk of losing ground in Kabylia to the profit of its rivals (RCD and *‘arouch*). Hocine Aït Ahmed has sought out the middle path, renouncing neither the anchorage in a particular region nor the national dimension. This is what explains his hostility toward the protest movement known as *arouch* (nonpartisan structure), which claims to speak in the name of all the inhabitants of the region. To support this movement would, for FFS, amount to putting forward its regional identity while its discourse is the bearer of a global national vision. It has always been wary of movements or groups that appear in Kabylia, suspecting them of being the work of the intelligence services in order to thwart it in a region considered to be its natural stronghold. It is in this way that, for FFS, behind the *arouch* hides the hand of the military security, which also would have aided in the creation of RCD in 1989.

RCD

Founded by militants stemming from FFS, with which they were at odds, and from the Berber cultural movement, RCD imposed itself in the field of politics and media thanks to the dynamism of its leader, Saïd Saâdî. Its virulent anti-Islamism led it to support the most extremist fringe of the army, of which it sought in vain to be the political expression. Its discourse advocates attachment “to the republican and democratic values”, refusing, however, to open the institutions

to any group using religious discourse. Its model is that of French “laicite”, which neatly separates politics and religion. Recruiting in social groups frightened by the islamist discourse, the RCD considers itself as the party of the enlightened minority. For its militants, democracy is not reduced to elections, which can be fatal for it, and requires transformations beforehand, notably the program of teaching dominated today, according to them, by an Islamist vision of society. Saïd Saâdî does not hide from defending an authoritarian model of the modernization of the country. He has long wooed high ranking officers in order that they entrust him with to carry out his program. But the latter have judged him too audacious and have only offered his party two ministerial portfolios in exchange for his support for repression and violations of human rights. When the events of Kabylia exploded in April 2001, RCD withdrew from the government, afraid of cutting itself off definitively from what it considered to be its potential stronghold. An elitist party proclaiming itself to be democratic, RCD refuses the equation “democracy = electoral majority.” Its leader dreams of being the Mustapha Kamel Attaturk of Algeria—excepting, of course, the fact that the latter appeared in the 1920s, in historically different conditions, and above all that his legitimacy stemmed not from his lay discourse but rather from his status as a high ranking officer having won military victories on the field of battle against the Greek army.

The Workers’ Party (PT)

PT (*le Parti des Travailleurs*) is known through its spokesperson Louiza Hanoune—a young, popular female—for her generous interventions and criticisms in relation to the economic and social situation. As comfortable in Arabic as in French, Louiza Hanoune, in militant Trotskyist fashion, develops a virulent discourse against any reform tending to liberalize the economy. She recommended a reinforcement of the public sector to better take charge of the social demands in terms of employment, housing, health, schooling, and so on. A signatory of the agreements of Rome in 1995, PT was satisfied with its integration into the national assembly, where it obtained 4 seats in 1997, and 21 in 2002. For a long time allied, PT and FFS moved apart on the issue of the demand for an international commission of inquiry on the massacres and the assassinations. For Louiza Hanoune, in fact, the Algerian crisis must find its solution without the intervention of foreign NGOs or of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

In the eyes of the overall configuration of the parties, after a decade of a multi-party system, the will of the regime to subdue the political adversity to the necessity of its reproduction is evident. On the political scene, in fact, there exist two parties of the administration (FLN and RND), two Islamist parties (MSP and MNR) which are asked to adjust the Islamist demands so that neither the one nor the other stakes out a monopoly; there exist also two rival groups stemming from Kabylia, a rebellious region, which allows what the generals call “the Kabyle pressure” to be relieved. As for the other parties, which are overall insignificant, they are sometimes solicited only for reinforcing the pluralist image of the regime.

B. A multiparty-system without electoral alternation

The notion of a multi-party system supposes that the source of power is the sovereign electorate, which the parties seek to convince in order to commission them in of the elected assemblies. Yet in Algeria, the army has not renounced its sovereign power, which consists in designating the president and in distributing representative seats to the parties according to the logic of quota. In this schema, the parties are not organs assuring the political participation or some control of the government by the electorate—they are apparatuses in the service of the regime, which they seek to perpetuate while giving it a democratic appearance. The Algerian political system is in contradiction with a multi-party system because the military leaders identify with the nation. In the vision of the military leaders, if they were to abandon the sovereign power for the benefit of civil elected officials, the nation would risk disappearing. It is for this reason that the multi-party system only concerns the parties that do not question *the unwritten rule of the political system*: the army is the sole source of power.

The halt of the electoral process in January 1992 signified that the army was not ready to accept autonomous parties likely to form a government that would escape its control. The army hoped that the parties would reinforce the regime in giving it the electoral legitimacy that it lacked, but the most popular party refused to play this game and sought instead to exercise power and to bring about the rupture that the population was expecting. Hence, the violent crisis since 1992. After the constitutional reform of 1989, the political system has changed either *too much* or *too little*. On the one hand, it changed *too much* because it moved away from the logic of the one-party system that had its coherence; on the other hand, it changed *too little* because the army

does not want to renounce its historical legitimacy. The system has switched to a multi-party system only in discourse; in deed, however, it remains marked by the preeminence of the army, which has three parties (FLN, RND, MSP) instead of one, as before (FLN). Functioning with two legitimacies, the political system in Algeria is confronted by three major contradictions: the first is relative to the antagonism of two legitimacies (historic and electoral), the second is linked to the inevitable competition between the real power (the army) and the formal power (the president), and, finally, the third results from the weak representation of the elected officials owing to the stuffing of ballot boxes. In order to survive these three contradictions, which risk proving fatal to it, the regime indirectly fashioned a singular typology of parties, in corrupting their respective leadership. It is known that the managements of FLN, RND, and MSP are not autonomous and obey the instructions of the administration.

1. The results of the different polls

The analysis of the results of the polls that have taken place since the early stages of the multi-party system is in this regard significant and informs on the logics of the Algerian political field. We will focus our attention on the polls that unfolded after January 1992, in the absence of FIS, which has been banned from legal activities since that time. We will not consider the elections for the presidency because, not being open to the parties, they are not indicative. On two occasions, in November 1995 and April 1999, the candidate of the army was elected with a huge majority. There was a call for candidatures, but the results left little doubt. The presidential election has to do with the system of “great voters.” When the latter find a consensual candidate (Chadli Bendjedid in 1978, Liamine Zéroual in 1995, Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999), the system presents an appearance of unity and cohesion, which are necessary for it. Conversely, if the “great voters” do not agree on the candidate, the system goes into crisis. Pressure groups mobilize their clients in the aforementioned civil society in order to spread accusations against one another. The presidential election does not inform on the influence of the parties, but rather on the influence of such institution or of such clan in such institution.

Conversely, the municipal and legislative elections mobilize the parties and the militants in order to obtain the coveted seats. But what is interesting is the analysis of the results across several

polls to ascertain the change in the power of balance between the different clans at the head of the state.

The first national elections after January 1992 were the legislative ones of 5 June 1997. The president Liamine Zérroual (elected in November 1995) was in need of a national assembly, docile or rebellious, in order to erase the consequences of the annulment of the poll of December 1991. He had previously taken care to modify the Constitution in order to create a council of the nation (senate)—whose tier of members is designated by the president—in order to shelter himself from an inevitable, less than cooperative, national assembly [7]. The results of the elections of June 1997 show that the administration endowed L. Zérroual with the assembly he was hoping for. His party, RND, created three months earlier, obtained 155 seats (3,533,434 votes), followed by MSP (69 seats with 1,553,154 votes), FLN (64 seats, 1,487,285 votes), and the Nahda of A. Djaballah (3* seats with 915,446 votes). The other parties fared as follows: FFS obtained 19 seats with 527,848 votes; RCD, 19 seats with 442,271 votes; and PT, 4 seats. ANR and PRA did not obtain a single seat.

This structure of the results indicates a logic of quotas and not the expression of the electoral bases of the parties, in view of the scorecard of RND and of the equal number of seats between FFS and RCD. As for FLN, it was punished for having participated in the meeting of Rome; MSP and Nahda were confined to positions of backup forces in case an electoral majority was ever needed. As for FFS, RCD, and PT, they were given a legal way to express themselves and criticize the government without really jeopardizing the regime.

A new national assembly was elected on 30 May 2002, totally different than the preceding one. This election was marked by the massive boycott of Kabylia (2% participation, according to the official figures) and the highest level of abstention ever recorded: 53.01%. The results clearly indicate that the power struggles at the head of the state had changed compared with June 1997. FLN won the majority of seats (199 representatives out of 388), to the detriment of RND, which suffered a spectacular drop (48 representatives), losing the two tiers of its representation. The other loser of the poll was MSP, overtaken by the party of A. Djaballah (MNR), which passed from 38 to 43 seats. The other unexpected winner was the PT party of Louiza Hanoune, which

passed from 4 representatives to 21. FFS and RCD boycotted the elections in regard to the quasi-insurrectionary situation in Kabylia since April 2001. An unknown party—the Algerian National Front—obtained 8 seats. Three parties made their entry with a representative seat: the Movement of National Harmony, Ennahda, and PRA.

On 10 October of the same year, the voters were invited to renew the municipalities (APC) and the regional assemblies (APW). The same structure of the results of the May 2002 legislatives was reproduced: the FLN won close to half of the APC; the spectacular drop of RND; and the appreciable loss of MSP to the benefit of MNR, party that became the first legal Islamist group. The rate of participation of Kabylia was very weak, despite the participation of FFS in the poll. RCD called for a boycott, while PT chose to participate only in the APW and not in the APC.

In May 2007, legislative elections took place to renew the National Assembly elected five ago. The FLN won 136 seats out of 389, the RND got 61 and the MSP 52. These three parties formed the parliamentary majority supporting the government. Some seats went to the PT (26), the RCD (19) and Islah (3). The 2007 elections have been held in a climate of indifference. According to official figures, only 36% of the electorate voters took part to the vote.

What lessons can we take from the evolution of the results of the different polls? The first is that the regime does not consider the elections as modality of electoral alternation, but rather as a way of relegitimizing itself. The second is that it does not consider the parties as rivals but as auxiliaries that are asked to obtain an electoral representation to place at disposal of the regime. The third is that the results of the polls reflect the struggles and divergences between the different pressure groups at the top of the state. The spectacular decline of RND—which, in five years, went from 155 representatives to 48 between 1995 and 2002—and the defeat of MSP inform on the loss of influence of their respective protectors to the benefit of other pockets of power that are hard to identify.

What is at stake in the struggles is the transition from national sovereignty (which the army claims) to popular sovereignty (which is expressed by the electorate)? One could have imagined a transition or a cohabitation during a period of time.¹ Having been unable to draw up a

¹ The parties could have accepted that the army designates a president, who would play the role of the king of a parliamentary monarchy and who chooses as prime minister the head of the winning party of the elections of the

compromise with the military leaders, FIS found itself in 1992 before the choice of either accepting the annulment of the electoral results or resorting to violence. The conflict in January 1992 was between two legitimacies: the historical one, embodied by the army, which proclaimed itself the trustee of national sovereignty, and the electoral, over which FIS prevailed. What characterizes the political system today is the preeminence of the historical legitimacy over the electoral one. What the army expects from the parties is that they accept this fact by abandoning the idea that they speak in the name of the electorate, because the electorate is part of the nation that the army alone represents.

2. The electorate as property of the regime

In a world that has changed, at least since 1989 with the collapse of the one-party systems of the countries of Eastern Europe, no regime can refuse pluralist elections. All the Arab countries, with the exception of Libya and Syria, have abandoned the one-party system and have chosen the multi-party system. The idea that only elections are a source of legitimacy is largely accepted in the Arab world, and this in itself is revolutionary. The leaders accept this, but in order to shelter themselves from the consequences, they have appropriated the electorate! No regime concerned by its external image can ignore the ballot boxes and the popular will expressed through elections; however, elections are not an indication of democracy. For what the experience of authoritarian regimes with a democratic façade shows is that the majority vote is a stake of the struggles between the administration, on the one hand, and the political parties, on the other. In an authoritarian regime, the administration has the power to make the majority vote be expressed in whatever way it desires: “one” makes the electorate speak. The parties do not have the capacity to protect their potential electorate from hijack up front or down the line. Up front, in fashioning the electoral offer in such a manner as to be integrated into the logic of the regime that it does not threaten. Having made the neo-fundamentalist parties (MSP and MNR) allies, to which it offers the electorate of the ex-FIS, the administration disposes of a very large breathing space in the manipulation of the electoral results. Down the line, in stuffing ballot boxes where

national assembly. The presidential election would be closed off up front, but that of the representatives would be free and open to the parties. The latter would have an electoral legitimacy in order to exercise the legislative and executive functions under the control of a president setting red lines not to be overstepped. The schema would be as follows: a president, faithful to the army and elected by universal suffrage, designating as prime minister the leader of the electoral majority, whence the ministers would come. Such a system would combine, institutionally, two types of legitimacy: that of the army, choosing the president, and that of the electorate, controlling the government by the intermediary of the parliamentary majority.

the parties are not implanted. In the large urban centers (Algiers, Oran, Constantine, etc.) and in Kabylia, it is certainly difficult for the administration to stuff the ballot boxes, but in the rest of the country, where the parties are quasi-inexistent, the administration draws the voices that help it to balance the assemblies according to its wishes. The lesson to be drawn is that in a democracy, the parties are presumed to have resources to defend the part of the electorate that they will have won. The electorate is a stake, and it is necessary to have the strength to conquer it and protect it. It is necessary to have sufficient militants to keep watch over the voting offices that number in the thousands (only the parties of the administration and the Islamists have this capacity), and it is also necessary that the legal system be independent in order to receive complaints from parties that are victims of fraud. But this is not the case in Algeria, where the legal system is obedient to the administration. The system of parties has been fashioned in such a way that it is integrated into the regime and not the society, whose various currents it is supposed to represent. FIS, and in a smaller measure FFS, have been neutralized because they refused to play the role of the regime's intermediary in society. They did not seek to integrate themselves into the system—they sought, each in its own way, to replace it with another. And it is not a coincidence that these two parties converged under the influence of a mechanical dynamic and signed the document of Rome, while still opposing each other ideologically. But FFS did not constitute a threat for the regime as did FIS, which relied on numbers. In the confrontation between legal violence and the numbers, it is the logic of violence that imposed itself. Schematically, we are in the presence of a central power incapable of satisfying the social demands of the larger number nurtures the unrest in the periphery whose demands are expressed, in large part, in a religious discourse insisting on the necessity of raising the moral standard of public life more than on the desire for a law-abiding state or a representative democracy.

The practice of the Algerian regime is incompatible with a multi-party system because it does not expect the parties to enter into competition in order to exercise power in the name of the electorate, which is the protagonist of the system whose social demands will have to be integrated in order to satisfy them as much as possible. The parties must adjust these social demands (employment, housing, healthcare, etc.) to the capacities of the state and play the role of a trade union. The parties are not conceived of as autonomous organizations conveying particular visions of the general interest; rather, they are considered as apparatuses of the state

filling stabilizing and legitimizing functions of the administration compared to the population. In this perspective, the Algerian regime is pervaded by a major contradiction, a source of tensions of crises. On the one hand, it promulgates a law admitting to the parties their purpose in the “competition for access to power (in order) to contribute effectively in this way to the consolidation of the democracy” [18], and on the other, it refuses the philosophy of such a system resting on the sovereignty of the electoral body. This refusal is attested by the stuffing of ballot boxes favoring the parties of the administration and distorting the electoral majorities. It is not sufficient to promulgate a law on the parties in order that democracy be imposed. To this end, the parties must be rooted in society and be the expression of political currents having potential electoral bases. In democratic regimes, the strength of the political parties stems from counterweights that exist in society, whose presence and influence they express in the institutions of the state. But the Algerian political field is dominated by two forces: that of the central power that disposes of resources it utilizes in view of its support (army, police, legal system, administration, oil revenue, etc.) and that of society, politically unorganized and riotous. Further, these parties must have resources in order to defend the portion of the electorate that recognizes itself in their programs.

The modification of the Constitution of February 1989 did not improve the political participation of the population and did not democratize the regime. The reason is that the latter does not want to renounce its bipolar structure and seeks to perpetuate itself by the parties that it expects to play the role of representatives of the state among the population. In this perspective, the state seeks to be represented and not the population to be represented in the state. Hence, the representatives do not have the capacity to question the government regarding issues as sensitive as torture, disappearances, and matters of corruption in which superior military and police officers are involved. Since genuine parliamentary life does not exist, the majority of representatives concern themselves with their personal interests in profiting from the resources of the state, which discredits them in the eyes of the population, giving up hopes of improvement and finding refuge then in indifference and sporadically manifests its malcontent in localized riots. In doing this, the regime encourages indirectly the emergence of non-institutionalized forms of the polity such as Islamist violence or the protest movement in Kabylia. In 2001, this region teetered in open dissidence because the two parties of the region had been neutralized. One—RCD—had

been integrated into the system of powers, and the other—FFS—had been reduced to the role of a sterile opponent denouncing the shortcomings of the state without being heard.

Born from the struggle against colonial domination, the Algerian regime has been built on a historical legitimacy that weathered out after three decades (setbacks of economic and social politics, renewal of generations). It is perpetuated because it still manages to mobilize political resources: legal violence (army, police, judicial administration), economy (public sector, hydrocarbons, foreign aid), the support of the Western powers—notably France—alarmed by a possible brutal geopolitical change, and so forth. It is unpopular and contested by a majority of the population, which took hold of the most abundant political resource: Islam. Islamism is the expression of the struggle between the rulers and the ruled in a situation where the polity is not autonomous from the religion that continues to structure a vision of the world centered on the notion of justice.

3. The state-building in Algeria and political science

The regime remains in place despite its setbacks in terms of economic and social policies and the loss of legitimacy. All the resources are utilized for reaching a paradox that political science attempts to explain: a multi-party system without electoral alternation! The populations have the right to vote, but not the right to choose leaders other than the ones designated by the administration. What political science does not emphasize enough is that the electorate is a stake and that if the ballot boxes are not defended by the parties, the administration, as a “ventriloquist” will make the electorate “speak” in whatever way it wants. The rigging of elections signifies that the regime does not accept the fact that the electorate is not faithful to it. The administration corrects the gaps of infidelity with the rigging of the results in order to not have to resort to annulment as in January 1992. For this, the regime makes use of three resources: the administration, which fixes the results; the legal system, which is incapable of annulling falsified polls; and finally, the police, which suppresses every violent protest. These three resources, drawing their strength and their legitimacy from the army, are mobilized in order to prevent electoral alternation.

The military hierarchy exercises sovereignty, designating to the elective functions, in place and in stead of the electorate. The multi-party system is only a façade, since the opposition is asked to renounce to wield power while still participating in the elections. In this game, the Algerian model appears to the external observer as the most democratic of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region: a diversified electoral offer ranging from Islamists to Trotskyists (24 seats in the National Assembly!), an autonomous press very critical of the government (“the most free press of the Arab world”), and a repression that affects only the “fundamentalist Islamists” who kill innocent civilians. The European Union is amazed by “the secular and modern convictions” of the Algerian army, the only efficient rampart in this country against the fundamentalism south of Europe. It is what is called the “Islamist annuity,” which allows it to obtain the financial and political support of the West without equivalent.

Democracy in Algeria has consisted of submitting the government (formal power) to public protest, whence this impression that Algeria is a democratic country. This impression is also reinforced by the role of the press, which, controlled in a subtle way by the double monopoly over publicity and publishing, have the right of criticizing only the formal power. It is particularly prohibited from giving a point of view on the Islamists other than that of the regime. It is also not permitted to doubt official releases about terrorist attack or to ask the rather elementary question, “Who killed whom?” Asking this question gives rise to hysterical editorials whose hysteria hides precisely something forbidden to journalist and to the public opinion. For the rest, the press is free to criticize the inaction of the president and the incompetence of the ministers. As for requesting an explanation from those who nominated this president or these ministers, that is evidently beyond the possibilities of the journalists. What the press does not speak about is the service that depends on the army—DRS—and whose mission is to control the political field. The intelligence service infiltrates the associations, the trade unions, the press, the parties, and all other form of grassroots organizations. The system is so efficient that the population has no hold on the state, and its only option is rioting, apathy, or “harga” (illegal emigration), as the youth say. If the legal competition for power is quasi-forbidden, then what aim remains for political science in Algeria? In order to overcome this difficulty, and in order to discover the real risks of power and to formulate them as objects of research, political science must resort to political philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, and

economics. As a result of the lack of differentiation of social practices, these disciplines are likely to provide, simultaneously, the keys of interpretation and the social and political struggles in a historical and cultural context where the social practices—economy, religion, kinship, and so on—are not autonomous, that is, are not autonomous fields (to take up a concept of Bourdieu) in the sense that they do not draw in themselves their rules and conditions of reproduction. Since the political field is not crystallized and is not sufficiently institutionalized, the struggle for power is regulated by violence: that of the regime, which uses the coercive methods of the state to maintain itself, and that of society, which expresses itself with riots, terrorism, delinquency, or, again, apathy—a form of symbolic violence against oneself.

These considerations suggest that, as scholars, we should start not from theoretical models of the political science of Western societies, but we should begin with fieldwork and then note that a certain society at a certain moment of its history obeyed a dynamic. From this point of view, if one refers to the Algerian experience—which is paradigmatic in many respects—the Arab world has not gone beyond the contradictions of the privatization of power and is looking for a new way of legitimation. The more legitimate a government is, the less it resorts to coercion. This is what Michael Hudson has pointed out since 1977 for the Arab world in general. This posture is rejected by certain persons as being marred by culturalism, forgetting, however, that the polity is a cultural representation and the fruit of an ideological will. Polity is representation and will and is linked to the norm of justice reflecting a standard—nature, reason, nation, and so forth, in secularized societies; religion, God, morals, and so forth, in others. If the Islamists are popular, it is not because they are better organized and more aggressive—it is because their discourse, which is of a cultural making, corresponds to the vision of the world of the average voter in the Arab world. It is not culturalism when we come to observe that the Arab world is confronted by a culture marked by a religious ethic that is, despite appearances, on the way to secularization.

Political science has focused—with good reason for Western societies—on the electoral offer in order to analyze democratic systems, and in a comparative perspective, it tends to assess—at least on the implicit mode—the democratic deficit in non-Western societies. In the Arab world, political science should pay more attention to the “electoral demand” and solicit sociology and anthropology. Islamism, as an object of research, does not correspond to the methodology of

political science, nor to its concepts, unless concluding that Islamists are an aberration of history and, as such, they distort the rationality of the political models. If there is a discipline that must be sensitive to history, it is political science, for relationships of authority are shaped by history, which testifies to the evolution of the actors and of their ideologies. Islamism is neither an immutable culture nor a timeless essence—it is an aspiration to a greater political participation formulated in a religious discourse called inevitably to modify itself in a disenchanted world. Fundamentally, it was fed on the failure of the Arab nationalism of the 1950s and '60s.

Power is a fact of nature, but it is also a social construction founded on processes of legitimation. It defends itself against implacable adversaries. It is everywhere the stake of a merciless struggle, for it is a unique phenomenon: to command people and obtain their obedience. Physical force alone never reaches this result; hence the necessity of legitimation. As anthropological reality, it is authoritarian in essence, whatever the culture that expresses it may be. The authoritarianism of the Arab regimes reflects the natural tendencies of man, and this is what Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant taught in reference to the process of the historical formation of European civil societies. One must recall this hypothesis of anthropological pessimism in order to put an end to the prejudice of “the Arab exception” or the unending debate on the incompatibility of Islam with modernity or democracy, as if the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages had fought against the authoritarianism of the European monarchs. Historical perspective is necessary for all reflection on polity because, precisely, the polity has a history that it shapes and that shapes it. The most important concept in the matter is that of “political resources,” without which the power over people is lost to the benefit of other competitors.

The Algerian political system has practically fifty years of existence under the modern form of the nation-state. It needs a bit more time in order to rearticulate itself to the population, especially since it stems from a liberation movement in which the leaders have identified with the people and have attempted to stand in for them after independence. In a word, the political history of Algeria indicates that the leaders have not yet come to envision the transition from national sovereignty to popular sovereignty. In concerning itself with the Arab world, political science must pay more attention to this difficult transition in constructing a theoretical approach that localizes the true stakes of the struggles.

Notes

[2] It was reproached for this definition for being of a Western-centric character; wrongly, for the countries of the south that opted for a multi-party system formally authorized the parties—in spite of numerous restrictions and in spite of the frequent stuffing of ballot boxes—to take part in the elections in order to manage the institutions of the state, which corresponds to the schema of Western democracy. If there is Western-centrism, it is not in the definition cited above, but rather in the Constitution of the countries of the south.

[4] In this article, I refer to FIS such as it made itself known until January 1992. I do not consider the ulterior evolutions in the discourse of its leaders and of the texts that it published, notably at the time of the congress held in August 2002. In October 2004, the executive council of FIS abroad, presided over by Mourad Dhina, disbanded following the collective resignation of its members.

[6] We should recall that for Georges Lavau, a party fulfills three functions: that of legitimation-stabilization, that of political relief, and that of tribunician (making dissatisfied persons heard). The set of problems was criticized for its excessive functionalism, but it was of a not negligible importance for the theory of parties (Lavau, 1969).

[10] On the vote-catching game on the occasion of the poll of June 1997, cf. Hachemaoui, 2003.

[11] The struggles for places in the institutions of the state are acute because the state is an obliged passage for social ascension and personal enrichment. All the fortunes are established directly or indirectly in relation with the mechanism of distribution of the petroleum annuity. Commerce is the privileged channel of the accumulation of riches; since it is regulated and, without support in the apparatus of the state, it does not generate the hoped-for profits.

[12] On FLN during the war of liberation, cf. Harbi, 1980.

[14] The leader of MNR has increased his ambitions since the chief of general staff, Mohamed Lamouri, declared in an interview that the army will respect the choice of the electorate in the presidential election of 2004, even if an Islamist like Abdallah Djaballah is elected president.

[15] Other Islamist parties made themselves familiar to public opinion. Ennahda is originally the party created by A. Djaballah, contested by his deputy Adarm. A. Djaballah retired and created

MNR, attracting the essential of Enahda reduced to a scrawny direction. Al Oumma is a party created by Benyoucef Benkhedda, former president of GPRA; it was prohibited because it had refused to submit to the dispositions of the law on the parties. Finally, the last, Wafa, founded by Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, former minister and son of the sheik El Bachir el Ibrahimi (leader of the Oulema in the 1940s and 1960s), did not receive the approval of the minister of the interior. On the regulatory conditions imposed on the parties, cf. Khalfoune, 2000.

[17] The senate was instituted in order to block every law voted in the national assembly against the will of the regime and to spare this one from having to annul the elections. On the constitution of November 1996 and the prerogatives of the council of the nation (senate), cf. Mahiou, 1997.

[18] Cf. ordinance no. 97-09 of 6 March 1997, carrying an organic law relative to the political parties.