

## Integration of the Islamist Movement The case of Algeria

*Daho Djerbal\**

Re-legitimizing the state through voting or discrediting it through widespread insecurity were the political issues that took Algeria during the 1990s into a downward spiral of violence not seen since the colonial period. After the attempts at “civil concord” and the edict of amnesty decreed by President Zeroual at the end of the 1990s, President Bouteflika inaugurated a policy of integration and assimilation of the Islamist opposition movements into the government sphere.

Benefiting from an increase in return on investments, the informal economy, held for the most part by the Islamists, has been organized into networks and monopolies compensating for the dysfunction of the administered economy. Thanks to its rapid development, it took over part of the state apparatus and also part of parliamentary and political forms of representation. It developed ties with political parties, the parliament, the courts, the army, the police force, etc... In other words, the informal economy has integrated itself into the system. In so doing, it has formalized its modes of functioning and its presence inside the system and the society. The Islamization of the state during these last two decades is nothing other than the political form of the alliance between a rentier economy from oil production and an informal speculative economy.

\* Assistant Professor, Head of *Naqd* Magazine – Algeria

### **The Socio-Economic Bases of the Political System's Crisis**

During the 1970s and part of the 1980s, the salaried worker made up the center of gravity and the principle form of regulation of social harmony in Algeria. This was a time of investments and of economic growth, a time when an important section of the population was integrated into the sphere of production. However, the 1980s and increasingly the 1990s were marked with a sort of deindustrialization, of disinvestment, and of a crisis for the salaried worker, with new social classes taking over. Those excluded from the economic and educational system revolted in the streets against the very values that permitted their elders to be mobilized. The society was no longer structured by the relationship between social issues and the workforce, and the cultural identity of the worker was no longer a major vehicle of social identity.

As a result of deindustrialization, denationalization, the decline of the salaried worker, and the erosion of purchasing power, the endangered workers, the new impoverished, the unemployed, and the excluded became more numerous than the integrated workers. They constituted the mass base of assembled throngs in the outlying neighborhoods and marginalized sections of the cities, but also the electoral base of protest movements contesting the social and political order as well as the ideology of the nationalist and conservative state. Globally, the F.I.S.<sup>1</sup> would become both the political expression of the vacillating masses and their electoral party.

Because of the decrease in workers' wages compared to other revenues, the classic forms of organization and representation – unions and associations – controlled by the state or by the one-party system entered into crisis. They had

long since been infiltrated or replaced by the models of the nascent Islamist movement, in which the places of organization were no longer the factories or the workplace but the mosques, the streets, and the stadiums.

During the 1980s and even more so during the 1990s, the Islamist movement became a sort of alternative recourse to the disappearance of possible upward social mobility or integration into the official political apparatus. And at the same time as the first armed Islamist groups launched their assault against the political powers, the government decided to carry out a more tolerant policy towards the associative movements. Since then, the total number of associations has soared, from several thousand in 1989 to 36,000 in 1994, and to an estimated 57,000 today.

Islamist charitable organizations took over from non-religious types of associations. They responded in reality to a number of local needs, ranging from aid for the impoverished, the needy, and the handicapped to training courses for women, and even supplying medication to the most destitute. They responded to local needs and to the non-solvent social demand. They were well organized on the local and national level and were expert in collecting the necessary funds. Unofficial commerce, which had taken considerable proportions, furnished an important part of financial support. These Islamist associations had very good relations with the political sphere and were able to attract young volunteers and competent employees, some working for minimum wage. In Algeria, they were without doubt the most efficient and active associations; the government, however, remained somewhat suspicious of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Islamic Salvation Front.

### **The Interference between Religion, Politics and Business**

With the development of the market economy and neo-liberalism, the different forms of organization shifted from the production sphere to the trading sphere, be it market trade or symbolic trade (dress code, linguistic code, religious rituals, etc...) The ideological, cultural, religious, and symbolic forms of expression came to the fore, as did the forms of organization that stemmed from them. Identity, religious, and ideological problems arose in full power throughout the country as the preceding modalities of organization and of expression by social agents (workers' unions and Berber cultural associations in particular) entered into crisis or were broken by state repression during the events of October 1988.

It must be remembered that the one-party system crisis gave birth to a multiparty system, which emerged at a time when the entire society – not just the political system – entered into crisis. The opposition parties, which included Islamist parties, channeled the protest within the logic of power-taking. While the seizure of power over the state apparatus comprised the political stakes for some, others were interested in taking power over the society. The failure of this double attempt to renegotiate the relations between the society and the state and between the religious authorities and the society opened the door to new modes of negotiating, of protesting, and of contesting. These modes can be classified into two types:

- Those concerned with integration into the system by taking part in official political actions and by joining the government.
- Those of across-the-board protest expressed outside of the political, union, or religious spheres, meaning riots.

As pointed out above, the 1980s and 1990s were years when salaried work was called into question. By virtue of rent seeking, the sphere of trade had overtaken in importance the sphere of production. In the former, the informal economy was organized into networks and monopolies compensating for the dysfunction of the administered economy. Thanks to its rapid development, it took over part of the state apparatus and also part of the parliamentary and political forms of representation. It developed ties with political parties, parliament, the courts, the army, the police force, etc... In other words, the informal economy shifted from the sidelines (the outskirts) towards the center and has been integrated into the system. In so doing, it formalized (by negotiation) its modes of functioning and its presence inside the system – both the state system and the society. The informal economy therefore withdrew from unofficial activity segments, which had absorbed part of the relative overpopulation. It also withdrew from the extremist branches, namely the proponents of armed power seizure.

For 20 years now, this system of informal economy has been integrated into the economic system more or less controlled by the state and has thus come to be more or less recognized by the state. Moreover, a series of regulations and laws voted by parliament has permitted it to clear its name. This includes in particular the laws on the liberalization of import trade. Because of this, the legislative, judicial, and especially economic control apparatuses – particularly fiscal control – have been taken over by those who have made a fortune in the informal economy.

### **The Politics of Compromise and of Integration for Moderate Islamist Movements**

Re-legitimizing the state through voting or discrediting it through widespread insecurity were the political issues that took Algeria

during the 1990s into a downward spiral of violence not seen since the colonial period. The legislative elections of June 1997 came about, within the logic of power, as a way to put the finishing touches on the “national recovery” initiated by the January 17, 1992 coup<sup>2</sup>. The participation of all parties (with the exception of the F.I.S. and several small political groups that refused to conform to the party law) and of the electorate in the vote had the effect of politically sanctioning the option chosen. When the Islamist groups resorted to using arms, it appeared to be an isolated series of actions not representing the general will, freely expressed, of the population.

However, the real political representation of the F.I.S. and of its military wing, the A.I.S.<sup>3</sup>, was not taken into account. The task of President Liamine Zeroual and of his team was first of all to find a negotiated solution with the Islamist party’s military wing. In fact, the results of the secret agreements with the A.I.S. were composed of several points. The military aspect was to have been a “peace of the brave” where parts of the Islamist forces were to be integrated into the ranks of the regular army. The judiciary aspect was to have guaranteed the cessation of legal proceedings against those who had committed crimes and misdemeanors and the release of all political prisoners. Besides the liberation of the Islamist movement detainees, the political aspect was to include the reintegration of F.I.S. members into the free play of parties under the cover of a new political formation. The failure of President Zeroual to convince the different authorities in power, particularly the army, to get to the heart of the dilemma of a political or a military solution brought about his downfall. It was

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<sup>2</sup> The date when the elections, during the second legislative round, threatened to bring absolute power to the F.I.S. They were interrupted by a military coup bringing about the resignation of President Chadly Bendjeddid.

<sup>3</sup> Islamic Salvation Army.

therefore incumbent on the newly “elected” president to forge ahead with the strategy decided by those actually holding power.

The politics of “civil concord” were in fact the true outcome of the separate negotiations with the A.I.S. Several points in these secret agreements began to be implemented under the cover of an edict according amnesty<sup>4</sup> to all those who had not committed murder. A preliminary commission was even set up to study the case of those who had serious presumptions hanging over them.

Concerning the F.I.S., President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s policies gave results. Indeed, a large number of the former political activists (town councilors of *wilayas* [departments] and political leaders), were recycled into more or less official and more or less legal activities. One can find them in most public administrations, services (private transport in particular), as well as in the flourishing wholesale and retail business. Many have come to swell the ranks of those who, like the ex-Hamas<sup>5</sup>, have found ways to legalize and to politically launder money accumulated in unofficial business dealings. Their troops, “relegated to the infamy of ill-gotten gains,” were awaiting political representation that would permit them to be integrated into the “administered” society, itself evolving towards a market economy even more ultra-liberal. This same political system, however, did not bear fruits for the G.I.A. and the G.S.P.C. because their doctrinal, social, and political bases did not seem able to accept the compromise that the other armed or unarmed groups concluded.

This policy of integrating and assimilating Islamist opposition movements brought about

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<sup>4</sup> A decision completely absurd from the point of view of judicial procedure and constitutional rights.

<sup>5</sup> It has become an officially recognized party under the name M.S.P. (Movement of the Society for Peace).

the arrival, in the governmental sphere, of so-called moderate Islamist political parties such as the M.S.P. Since 2000, its deputies vote every year on the budget and other laws, each more unpopular than the last, but its ministers apply them zealously. Certain ministers control billions of dollars while others ministers negotiate the adhesion of Algeria to the WTO. The responsibility of this movement is also evident in the regime's brutal policies, as well as in the bloody repression of demonstrators during the "Black Spring" in Kabylia (2001 – 2002), and in the social and union protests with which Algeria is wrestling.

The access of dozens of M.S.P. leaders to ministerial posts and to deputy seats has created within it a militant aristocracy, benefiting from privileges it doesn't want to lose by being critical of the system. The movement's writings recognize this fact. On the M.S.P.'s website, an article titled "Assessment of the Participation in Algeria's Government" admitted that this has caused the cooling off of political activism for some leaders, who consider themselves part of the established government.

#### *The Revolt of the Young and the Rejected*

Thus, abandoned by the commercial and integrationist wing of the Islamist movement, the country's youth have not found methods of integrating into either production or trade, which has become an oligarchic monopoly. Under these conditions, they were condemned to being low-wage earners, to remain marginal, or to serve as assistants to those holding the monopoly. Their protests transformed into an overall contesting of the system. They do not take aim at the state alone, but also at the monopoly of integration into the system of redistribution of national revenues, be they religious or not. Yet having said this, these youth are not aware of the global character of their protests. They are bearers of a true social,

economic, and political demand, but the form of expression they use is "immediate," contemporary with itself.

The Islamists integrated into the state apparatus have subordinated the fiscal system to their self-interest, which the younger generation arriving on the business scene can see clearly and immediately. They attack the state's symbols because the apparatus is for them subordinated to private interests. Many interests – state or private – push the protest movement towards depoliticization and to its dilution into an "apolitical," violent form of expression.

#### *Exploitation of the Revolt and the Muzzling of the System of Representation*

The new trends appearing in the society (new social agents and dynamics taking form) incite violence because they do not find channels (cultural, ideological, political, or juridical) through which they can be expressed. These channels are feeble or blocked by monopolistic, authoritarian, or despotic decisions. This phenomenon does not concern Algeria alone. One can very well use the case of India as a parallel example. In both cases, the period from 1990-2000 was marked by the progressive replacement of the former nationalist non-religious movements by new ethnic identity and cultural movements. The "movement" structure progressively took over the space previously occupied by the "party" structure.

These movements may not express themselves through voting and thus parliamentary representation. Large sections of society representing these parties, the most dynamic and the newest, may be unrepresented in can be unrepresented in governmental and civic bodies. The appearance of these movements is irreducible to the vertical hierarchic structure of the party and to any centralized organization. These phenomena can consist of movements

tied to the given situation. But they can also, on the social scale, develop into important movements and even into mass movements. Nonetheless, they rarely have consequences on the nature of the regime in place.

Data from the field shows that measures have been taken to intensify the muzzling of activities of associative movements, in the universities as well as in other realms of authority such as the courts. The state (and its new moderate or non-religious Islamist servants) knows that there is a subversive menace, that its very foundations are put into

question by the revolt of the younger generation. It is called into question both as a force for regulating the system and as a Nation-State. Convinced that it is within its rights, by virtue of power of its force, it has increasingly a tendency to respond to the subversive movement by repression. This is, moreover, a sign of its failure to find peaceful means of permitting a part of Algerian society to have its place in the present and in the future.