

ALGERIA'S MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CRISIS: THE STORY OF A FAILED STATE-BUILDING PROCESS

L'Algérie et son destin – croyants et citoyens by MOHAMMED HARBI
Paris, Arcantère éditions, 1993. Pp. 247. FF120.00 paperback.

Le Sabre et le Turban – l'avenir du Maghreb by RÉMY LEVEAU
Paris, François Bourin, 1993. Pp. 274. FF119.00 paperback.

Histoire de l'Algérie indépendante by BENJAMIN STORA
Paris, Repères, 1994. Pp. 122. FF60.00 paperback.

Algérie: la démocratie interdite by JEAN-JACQUES LAVENUE
Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993. Pp. 280. FF140.00 paperback.

Following the tragic events that shook the country in October 1988 and forced the authoritarian régime to initiate a seeming democratisation process, a great deal has been written about Algeria. Several observers have used the developments there to advance their own academic or journalistic careers without, however, enriching our knowledge about a very complex, and today extremely tragic, situation. The four books under review are in many respects the best accounts that have been published since the suspension of the electoral process by the military in January 1992. As is now well-known, this would have allowed the candidates of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the main contender to the single ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), to control the National Popular Assembly that it had hitherto dominated.

Although the Islamist violence antedated the cancellation of the second round of legislative elections their revocation precipitated a wave of violence and terror – not seen since the end of Algeria's anti-colonial struggle against France in 1962 – which by September 1994 had resulted in over 10,000 deaths and \$2,000 million in damages. The war against France cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Algerians. The FLN-produced élites were left with the task of building a state and creating the conditions for social and economic development which would satisfy the aspirations of the Algerian masses that had sacrificed lives, properties, education, and youth to help the country to achieve its independence. The four authors – two historians, a political scientist, and a constitutionalist – provide convincing interpretations of the different phases which have had an impact on today's events. These studies can be read as a sequential chronicle because each supplements the other.

Undoubtedly, in order to understand the current situation, one must turn to a serious study of Algeria's history, especially the nature of the nationalist movement which shaped the men and women who eventually held the destiny of the country in their hands. Mohammed Harbi, perhaps one of the greatest, if not the best, historians of the nationalist movement – besides Mahfoud Kadache, whom he curiously never cites – is the only scholar who has studied in depth the relationship between Algeria's nationalist past and the present socio-economic and political crisis. In *L'Algérie et son destin – croyants et citoyens*, which is a condensed version, with a re-interpretation of certain points, of his two commanding studies written in the 1970s – *Aux Origines du F.L.N.: le*

populisme révolutionnaire en Algérie (Paris, Bourgois, 1975) and *Le F.L.N.: mirage et réalité* (Paris, Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1980) – Harbi provides, for the first time, a guarded account of his own rôle in the movement. Until his imprisonment in 1965 for his opposition to Houari Boumédiène's *coup d'état*, and his subsequent exile to France, Harbi, though a maverick, was an influential actor in the FLN revolutionary élite.

Harbi reminds us that one of the major tasks faced by any analyst of Algeria is to unveil the sociological nature of the myths born during the anti-colonial struggle, which constitute the hardest hurdle to the emergence of a state that is founded upon society. The erection of a strong state and of a nation suffered from the absence of both before French colonisation in 1830. The nationalist movement's populist vision, which assimilated state and *Pouvoir central fort*, rested on the conception of the organic solidarity of the community rather than the more modern notion of a state in which society is built upon external norms and on a contract which, taken together, constitute the basis of the state. The fact that Algeria's history has been characterised by the absence of a social pact helps to explain the necessity felt by the new leaders to achieve social cohesion through authoritarian means, as well as the emergence of religion as a substitute for citizenship (*nationalité*). Neither is it surprising that the *Ulemas* (religious scholars) played a central rôle in 'nationalising' Algerians after independence, but not without transforming the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic character of Algerian identity into a schizophrenic one. In view of this analysis, one can only agree with Harbi's powerful assertion that

[Algerian] nationalism served as a vehicle for a communitarian, not a social, project. The contact with colonisation was favourable to the emergence of a civil society. But its development has been equally thwarted by everlasting traditional solidarities and by a political culture founded on the pre-eminence of the community (p. 36, my translation).

In this context, any hope that the urban élites might be able to build a modern society was made even more complicated by the demographic explosion and by the rural exodus. Because of the military and peasant nature of the revolution, the FLN, which had since its inception ostracised autonomous social groups, adopted a policy which consisted of using the new classes (intelligentsia, bourgeoisie, and proletariat) for its own ends, and forced them to play subordinate rôles only. In such a system, all segments of society are viewed as mere appendages to the state, one in which personal loyalties and patron–client relations are substituted for political and ideological commitments, and in which the economy itself is subordinated to political rule.

The power of this analysis derives from tracing the origin of the formation of a nascent bureaucracy within the nationalist movement well before independence. The peculiarities of Algerian society were reflected in the dominant bureaucracy. The FLN and its *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN) favoured the integration not only of the nationalist élites and the urban and rural *déclassés*, who according to Harbi were 'predisposed by their social psychology to a merciless struggle for power and for material advantages' (p. 38), but also the enemies of nationalism itself – i.e. the magistrates, policemen, officers who had participated with the French, until two or three years before independence, in their repression against Algerians.

The wealth of information provided by Harbi helps us to understand the connection between the nature of the nationalist movement and the projection of its most negative features into the political system established after the country's independence. And the following are still the main impediments to the erection of a truly modern political system: the 'privatisation' of the nascent state and its militarisation by rural and bureaucratic forces; factionalism, clientelism, and regionalism; extreme governmental secrecy and suspicion vis-à-vis the masses and the intellectuals; idealisation of violence, political assassinations, and force as the basis of power; religion as the source of integration (due to the divorce between state and nation); the negation of political and cultural pluralism; and sheer authoritarianism. In fact, contrary to the credit which has been attributed to the FLN state, especially that headed by President Boumédiène, Harbi argues that 'the absence of a state has been a constant of Algerian political life since 1962. Instead, what exists is a political machinery' (p. 199). In other words, although *étatistes*, the FLN leaders were incapable of building a national state.

The main focus of *Le Sabre et le turban: l'avenir du Maghreb* by Rémy Leveau, a political scientist, is the evolution of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia since their independence and the growing challenges to the state, especially of the Islamist type, which have arisen in the last few years. Despite important differences between the three, 'colonisation served as a catalyst to nationalism and as a mould to the bureaucratic systems which emanated from it' (p. 27). All of them demonstrate their aversion, in the name of national unity, to particularisms and to any genuine opposition. Thus authoritarianism plays a prominent rôle in the institutionalisation of the state. The erection of huge bureaucratic systems has had the double effect of providing for the needs of many sectors thanks to family solidarity, while at the same time facilitating the widespread corruption that has helped discredit the state.

The colonial inheritance in the Maghreb led the national élites to legitimate their rule through development and modernisation, and also to foster an aggressive nationalism vis-à-vis their neighbours. However, the rôle of the military has not been limited to defence against external aggressors, since the armed forces have also been used to preserve the internal stability of the state against all sorts of opposition, although in Algeria this function has been more important due to the nature of the struggle for national liberation. The post-independence state in the Maghreb appropriated competence in countless areas, although the challenges which it faced were formidable in light of the incredible demographic explosion, rural exodus, mass education, economic development, etcetera. In spite of its recent de-legitimation and many failures, the state in the Maghreb has accomplished a number of important tasks.

But, the marginalisation, particularly among the youth, of sizeable segments of the population, that resulted from the failure of the development process, has undervalued various positive achievements. The middle classes could no longer consent to the authoritarianism of a state that has failed to fulfil its promises. This is particularly true in the case of Algeria, even if the current stability in Tunisia, due to some real progress in the economic sphere, has not totally removed the threat of a serious clash between Islamists and the régime.

Morocco, owing to the ability of its absolutist ruler, King Hassan II, has fared somewhat better, at least in appearance, according to Leveau. Yet, one wonders how long this illusive stability may last, and whether the Islamists there do not already constitute the major opposition to his rule.

Any study of the current situation in Algeria must also deal with the previous three decades which have led to the collapse of the FLN state. In a real *tour de force* Benjamin Stora succeeds in providing in a succinct yet analytical style the major landmarks of the country's history since independence, when the challenges faced by the state were colossal. As *Histoire de l'Algérie indépendante* explains, the inherited socio-economic problems were gigantic. Yet, it was precisely within this catastrophic context that the new ruling élite was forced to elaborate a development strategy. Unfortunately, the power struggle between the various clans that emerged during the anti-colonial period paralysed such efforts. All the negative forms created during the war – notably, clientelism, regionalism, and factionalism – were reflected in the new structures. The ruling élite was quite heterogeneous, and now also comprised those civil servants hurriedly trained by France, as well as those more urban, better educated, wealthier groups who joined the FLN at the last minute. New unholy alliances were formed with more traditional, religious, groupings called in to participate in the construction of the new state. Irrespective of the antithetical ideological predispositions of these groups, Algeria opted for a socialist development strategy, which Harbi defines as an extension of Algerian nationalism.

The legitimacy of the FLN rested on the war of liberation. But, the single-ruling party suffered from a lack of democratic legitimacy, which undoubtedly characterised successive régimes, and critical forces continued to challenge those in authority. For instance, the conservatives opposed state socialism and any genuine attempt to erect a secular state; the liberals, Marxists, and national-populists each had their vision, which more often than not clashed within the various spheres of power. In order to keep this opposition at bay, the Algerian state established a powerful *sécurité militaire*, which, especially following Boumédiène's military coup against Ahmed Ben Bella in June 1965, penetrated every sector. Its job was to thwart any serious opposition, to co-opt new state élites, and to establish surveillance over state officials.

In order to strengthen his military-authoritarian régime, Boumédiène sought to legitimise his rule through a redistribution of the hydrocarbon revenues, which also served to finance the new development strategy. A widely acclaimed model of 'industrialising industries' was started; its main rationale consisted of getting Algeria out of its underdevelopment as fast as possible, but it was also meant as a 'means of affirmation (legitimation) of the state and the nation' (Stora, p. 36). If the achievements were appreciable, the system in general was not viable due to the corruption, clientelism, and absence of democratic values which pervaded it. In fact, under Chadli Bendjedid, Boumédiène's successor, 'corruption reached unequalled proportions', according to Stora (p. 67).

The fundamental question as to why opposition to the state comes in the form of protests inspired by religious values is raised by Leveau, who argues that the 'upsurge of Islamic movements has its origin largely in the deficiencies

of development, in the widening gap in inequalities which accompany policies of the socialist type or market economy' (Leveau, p. 38). Basically, the Islamists have adopted a similar rôle to that played by the communist parties in the 1930s: 'They offer to those disillusioned with modernisation and rationalism an "elsewhere" that allows them to dream while accepting compromises in the present time' (p. 39). Yet, whatever the appeal of such a vision, it does not fully explain either the intensity of the movement and its psychology, or the extreme violence to which scores of its members have resorted. Once again, it is necessary to examine the nationalist movement to apprehend the question of Islam in Algeria, not least because the idealisation of violence is the product of a populist nationalism that has generated a political culture which contains a heavy dose of religion. Further, the FLN state has since independence established a monopoly over religious matters. Undoubtedly, French colonialism helped to destroy Algerian personality, language, and culture, and this inevitably created a counter-reaction on the part of those who sought to return to a more traditional past from which they had been deprived for more than a century.

But, some élites, for obvious ideological and political reasons, vowed not only to accelerate the re-Arabisation of Algeria, but also to lead a struggle against French culture and language, as emphasised by Stora. At the same time, however, these ideologues used the opportunity to falsify Algerian history, especially the origins of the nationalist struggle. The post-independence FLN put the study of Algerian history under strict surveillance because of fears that certain disclosures would threaten the revolutionary legitimacy claimed by many of its members. The disciples of the *Ulemas*, especially Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi when he was Minister of Education, took advantage of the decision to re-write history to, unashamedly, attribute to the religious figures the paternity of the Algerian revolution. They denied the pluralism which characterised the nationalist movement, and totally negated the rôle played by the genuine founders/or leaders of the movement, such as Messali Hadj, Ferhat Abbas, Mohamed Boudiaf, and many others. This reinterpretation of history gave the upper-hand over religion, education, and culture to those close to the *Ulemas*.

The strategy pursued by the Algerian state was undoubtedly the major factor that facilitated the rise of Islamism, whereas the disastrous socio-economic policies and the absence of democratic channels provided the grounds for its radicalism. In fact, the state itself associated Islam with the socialism it advocated despite the rejection of state socialism by the early Islamists in the 1960s and 1970s. As the ordained religion of the state, Islam is protected by the Algerian régime which also promotes a 'religious public order' within the framework of Algerian socialism. The state has nationalised, or one should say monopolised Islam, by building thousands of mosques, and by appointing hundreds of *Imams*, albeit not enough to prevent Islamist preachers from controlling the majority of the mosques. Yet, as shown by Stora, political Islamism emerged in opposition to the submission of Islam to the state.

The socio-economic problems aggravated the socio-linguistic cleavages, thus giving the opposition arabophones versus francophones a religious

dimension which resulted in bloody clashes between 'laics' (secularists) and Islamists at the universities. By the mid-1980s, the Islamist movement made its presence felt at several levels. Its mobilisation revolved around the re-Islamisation and moralisation of Algerian society which the Islamists describe as infidel. The state offered the Islamists the necessary ammunition by passing in 1984 the *Shari'a*-inspired 'Family Law', which violated many of the articles proclaiming equality before the law embodied in the 1976 constitution. According to Stora, they then used this opportunity to further their demand for the application of Islamic law in its totality. In fact, the growth of Islamism was tolerated by the régime which encouraged Islamist groups to overwhelm leftist organisations in the universities. During 1988–9, a faction in power exploited Islamism to destroy the forces opposed to economic reform. But, by calling religion to their rescue to defeat their adversaries, the liberals did in fact make religion the basis of all kinds of expectations.

The demographic explosion, the chaotic urbanisation of the society, the failure of the authorities to respond to the growing societal demands in all areas, coupled with the drop in hydrocarbons revenues in the mid-1980s, shook irreparably the foundations of the rentier state. The régime was aware of the necessity to introduce urgent reforms even before any structural adjustments were imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to alleviate the huge debt burden. There was consensus on the need for privatisation, albeit no concomitant agreement on the urgency of introducing pluralism in order to end the single-party monopoly and establish democratic legitimacy. Clearly, although cracks were visible within the ruling bloc, the tragic riots of October 1988, orchestrated by rival clans inside the régime, marked the end of the FLN's hegemony over Algerian political life.

The riots precipitated some amazing developments, notably the introduction of a multi-party system. As explained by Jean-Jacques Lavenue, the new constitution voted in February 1989, followed by the mushrooming of political parties, seemed to inaugurate a process of genuine democratisation. However, this proved too optimistic a forecast, as documented in *Algérie: la démocratie interdite*. The contradictions were too numerous (e.g. the legalisation of the FIS) and the ploys too risky, especially the June 1990 municipal and *départemental* elections, which were won by the FIS as the outcome of 'a process, conceived, prepared, and implemented by the President':

The question is... whether President Bendjedid did not take too big a risk by attempting to use the Islamists against the FLN, by trying to organise to his own benefit a new fools' day which would allow him to define a new presidential majority whose aim would be precisely to bar altogether the extremist factions of the FLN and the FIS from power (p. 55).

This was indeed the strategy devised by the President to accomplish the two objectives mentioned above, as well as to 'limit the rôle of the military institution from which he rose' (p. 135), and to thwart an alliance between the FLN and the military against him. Worse still, in order to remain in power and to proceed with the reforms that he had initiated, Bendjedid sought a 'cohabitation' with the FIS to the detriment of the military, a stratagem which led eventually to the cancellation in January 1992 of the second round of legislative elections after the FIS had won the first in December 1991. Such

an outcome played into the hands of the armed groups within the Islamist movement whose increased level of violence has plunged the country into a quasi civil war, where terrorism and repression go hand-in-hand.

The four authors have described and analysed these events in a remarkable fashion. They have elucidated many of the most intricate developments that have been taking place in the Algerian state and society, and offer a number of convincing interpretations. Although a short review article can hardly do justice to the rich contents of their books, one important element must be emphasised. We cannot understand the present situation without referring to the colonial past and to the evolution of the nationalist movement, because as stated by Stora:

the history of modern Algeria does not begin in 1962. The FIS [and Islamism for that matter] has not arisen from nothingness, but finds the roots of its dynamic in a complex past which continues to operate in the present. To understand this history allows one to get rid of simplistic images (p. 91).

This will also help us to comprehend not only the patriarchal character of Algerian society, its resistance to change, and the difficulties in making the transition from a clientelist, neo-patrimonial system to a modern, democratic state and society, but also the interplay of religion and politics, the weakness of the democratic forces, and the potential scenarios for the future. Whatever one's criticisms, few students of Algeria can afford not to have these four studies on their shelves.

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