

THE CHALLENGES TO THE DEMOCRATIC SHIFT IN ALGERIA: BEFORE AND AFTER BOUTEFLIKA

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Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer una visión interna del cambio democrático argelino, antes y después del gobierno de Bouteflika, tanto a nivel político como social. El artículo refleja la realidad del ciudadano argelino bajo un sistema que durante mucho tiempo no ha logrado satisfacer las aspiraciones populares de justicia social, igualdad y democracia. Proyectando luz sobre algunos elementos clave que plantean un reto para el establecimiento de un verdadero cambio democrático, el artículo se centra en examinar la vida cotidiana de las personas –y sus impedimentos– en un país que se identifica a sí mismo como una democracia en el discurso oficial y en los medios de comunicación estatales. También muestra cómo el despertar popular ha instado a los pasados regímenes a ir evolucionando gradualmente, y a veces de mala gana, hacia un cambio democrático.

Palabras clave: Cambio democrático, resistencia pacífica, corrupción, reformas, Argelia.

Abstract: This article aims to give an insider view of the Algerian democratic shift, before and after the Bouteflika rule, at both the political and social levels. The article reflects the reality of the Algerian citizen under a system that has long failed to meet the people's aspirations for social justice, equality and democracy. By shedding light on some key elements challenging the establishment of a real democratic change, the article focuses on examining people's daily life –and obstacles– in a country that self-identifies as a democracy in the official discourse and the state media outlets. It also shows how popular awakening urged the past regimes to shift gradually and sometimes unwillingly towards democratic change.

Key words: Democratic shift, peaceful resistance, corruption, reform, Algeria.

ملخص: يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم نظرة داخلية لعملية التحول الديمقراطي الجزائري قبل عهد حكومة بوتفليقة وبعدها، على المستويين السياسى والاجتماعى. يصف المقال واقع المواطن الجزائري في ظل نظام فشل لفترة طويلة في تلبية التطلعات الشعبية للعدالة الاجتماعية والمساواة والديمقراطية. ومن خلال تسليط الضوء على بعض العناصر الأساسية التي تشكل تحدياً أمام إنشاء تحول ديمقراطى حقيقى، يركز المقال على فحص الحياة اليومية للناس والعوائق التي يواجهونها في بلد يعرّف نفسه في كل من الخطاب الرسمى ووسائل الإعلام الحكومية على أنه دولة ديمقراطية. كما يُظهر المقال كيف تمكنت الصحوة الشعبية من دفع لأنظمة السابقة نحو التحول الديمقراطي بشكل تدريجي وأحياناً غصباً عنها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحول الديمقراطي، المقاومة السلمية، الفساد، الإصلاحات، الجزائر.

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Introduction:

Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has gone through some difficult challenges to establish a democratic state. Since independence, there was no sign of political will to shift to a democratic system; especially on the part of the elite who fought for the country's independence and used the revolutionary legitimacy to rule the country.

The turning point in Algerian post-independence politics was in 1988, when riots broke out as a result of the socio-economic crisis that hit the country following the oil markets glut. It allowed the emergence of a multiparty system and paved the way for democratic elections to take place for the first time in the country's history. However, the subsequent events that hit Algeria after the cancellation of the legislative election's results in 1991 led to a ten-year-war. This resulted in the death of more than two hundred thousand people, many shattered families, orphaned children and a devastated economy.(Desorgues, 2018)

The country sank into a complex crisis because of the terrorist attacks. Foreign investment out of the hydrocarbon sector shrank dramatically and the economy reached alarming levels. The depreciation of the dinar, the weakening purchasing power and the sharp housing crisis contributed to the chronic violence and corruption in the country, because poverty was the major pool of terrorist recruitment (ICG, 2001, pp. 6–8).

When Bouteflika became president in 1999, Algeria met another challenge whose impact was more serious than the civil war. His twenty-year presidency sank the country into a complex corrupt system, exhausted Algeria's economy, and destroyed its social values. It was only when the country got hit again by another oil market crisis in 2014 that it shifted to another level of democratic change. How did such change take place? How well did Algeria manage to build the foundations of an authentic democracy? Is it possible to consider the Algerian democratic shift a successful one?

1. The Rentier State and the Democratic Shift in Algeria

The Rentier State studies focus on the relationship between state and society in systems whose incomes are mainly generated from rents. It is largely manifested in oil-producing/exporting nations, where those incomes are not only used to run the country's economy but also to make its politics. The dependency on these resources makes both economy and politics volatile as there is neither a real productive economy nor a real sane politics. If the energy markets collapse, the complete system will follow.

The 1973 oil embargo gave the Arab oil exporting states overconfidence about the power of fossil energy in building their societies and defining their image to the world. One of those states was Algeria. The newly independent country enjoyed high revenues from the booming oil prices and never expected those days to end in a near future. That feeling of confidence grew with the second oil boom in 1978-79 that came as a result of the Iranian revolution and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 (Gray, 2016, p. 3). The engendered capitals were used to maintain the continuity of the regime with its single party. No real investments and production systems were developed as it was easier to extract and sell oil and gas then spend their revenues to make the policy of the state look successful.

A number of scholars such as Hussein Mahdavy, Hazem Beblawi, Giacomo Luciani and Lisa Anderson tried to study the Rentier State Theory (RST) mainly to understand the reason behind the inability of the oil producing countries to achieve development. Despite all the externally generated rent from oil revenues, very little is reflected on the economic, social and political realities of those states.

Michael Herb argued that between 1972 and 1999 that an average of 53% of the Algerian rent came from oil(Herb, 2009, p. 299), while Luciani claimed that 40% was enough to consider a state rentier (Luciani, 1990, p. 72). In such countries the socio-political issue lies in the way the rent is distributed, as it directly affects the stability of society and maintains the link between the government and the governed, but for how long? That relation depends greatly on the

continuity of the rent, which is not sure since it also depends on the world's markets and geopolitics. Algeria experienced in the 1980s serious change because of the volatility of oil markets.

2. Algeria before the Bouteflika Regime

Algerian politics has long been narrated internationally by external observers who either get sourced from some local media outlets, or from biased opponents to the Algerian system, or even from the perspective of political asylum-seekers. Relying too much on such sources would not allow a clear vision of the whole picture. Many accusations were brought about without evidence or clear testimonies against some figures of the system and at times even institutions. The opacity of the Algerian policies makes truth seeking about the Algerian political functioning difficult and complex. The truth about the political and the societal problems is, however, clear to specialists and laymen equally: They are just expressed differently. With a number of crises that hit the country since its independence and the unfruitful policies it implemented, Algeria needs more than ever to learn from its mistakes and adopt serious reforms where the law is supreme. Politically too, patterns of loyalty should not be the individual or the party but the nation.

The Impact of colonisation on Independent Algeria:

The most serious challenges that Algeria has been facing since its independence, is political and economic stability due to the weakness of the laws in front of the power of the individuals, as there are clear laws but also clear double standards. Following its independence in 1962, after a seven-year war that ended 132 years of French occupation, contention emerged inside the newly established government over the legitimacy of ruling the country. At the beginning of the sixties, the ruling elite used what it called revolutionary legitimacy, which meant that the leadership of the country was held by those who took part in the war of liberation. The country also adopted a single-party system embodied in the Front de Libération National (FLN), which was the political wing of the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN). It was impossible for anyone outside the ruling elite circles, to reach any leading position in any public institution without affiliation with the party. The road map of independent Algeria was seen as the achievement of the platform of the Algerian revolutionary principles through a socialist democracy with an Arab-Muslim identity. The population did not question or object to the decisions made by the state for the sake of unity and prosperity. Half of the population was directly affected by the war as many were in prisons⁽¹⁾; similar numbers sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and three hundred thousand people were war veterans. Furthermore, 95 percent of the population was illiterate. The state had to reanimate the crippled administration, the industrial and mining sectors, and compensate the war veterans and the families of the soldiers killed in action. More importantly, it had to spread literacy and run the country's different sectors with Algerian hands.

Recovering after more than a century-long occupation was not a simple process. The violent decolonization of the country engendered a rather rigid political system that tried to make its own way in an independent country. Yet, as claimed by Edward Said in his work, *Orientalism*, the horrors of occupation do not cease with the end of colonialism but continue through corruption, civil wars, military coups and other faces of chaos. He goes on stating that the continuity of occupation is maintained by the remnant loyalists of colonization, or what is commonly known in Algeria as the Francophone current (Said, 1979, p. 2).

(1) Four hundred thousand people were in colonial prisons, half million were refugees and three hundred thousand were orphaned.

Algeria tried to avoid that chaos that Said mentioned by working towards a more reliable economy. However, it was not easy with an overwhelmingly illiterate and inexperienced population. Production had dramatically dropped by 55 percent in the first year following independence and coincided with a sharp increase in spending, especially in unproductive sectors. The number of the waged workers also grew after independence, increasing the burden on the national economy and the political leadership. Subsequently, Algeria was compelled to resort to foreign debt from its former coloniser, France (Stora, 1994, p. 32). Even the freedom of the movement of the Algerian and the French citizens that was guaranteed by the Evian Treaty was revised as the immigration flow increased from Algeria towards France.

The ruling party, the FLN, in a 1964 convention admitted the main reason behind the mass migration toward France was the lack of development in Algeria (Stora, 1994, p. 33). The leaders knew that in order to stop immigration they needed to develop the country. Still, the French labour market helped Algeria to contain popular discontent for some time as the government machinery was not as effective as it had to be. President Ben Bella was growing unpopular because of the regional rivalry for power between the eastern and the western poles of the country. That rivalry existed even before independence and was decisive in defining the power of political units and displaying a clear example of Samuel Huntington's idea on the state's loss of power to some substate entities (Huntington, 1996, p. 35). This polarity of eastern vs western regions is still a pattern of the Algerian socio-political change, and that was a major cause of the first military coup in the country.

In 1965, following a military coup, Colonel Boumedien became the new Algerian president and Ben Bella was sent to prison where he would remain for 15 years. President Boumedien explained to the public that the reasons behind the coup were mainly due to the country being on the brinks of failure—a result of the mismanagement and conspiracies of the previous regime. He prepared for the elaboration of a new constitution and nationalised the country's energy and mining sectors that constituted the backbone of its economy, including other sectors and launched what he called the agrarian, industrial and cultural revolutions.

A great deal of state policing characterised Boumedien's rule. He relied on the army and the secret service to eliminate his opponents and any conspiring entities. Some historians, such as Benjamin Stora noted that he used oil revenues to assert his regime's legitimacy and earn popular support (Stora, 1994, p. 49). He nationalised the oil and gas sector and other French-owned companies in Algeria to put the country's economy on the track (Parra, 2004, p. 51). Miriam R. Lowi underlines how his regime prevented the emergence of social movements by means of the country's rent and a limitation of the degree of expression (Lowi, 2009, p. 99). Boumedien also managed to reflect a strong image of his country at the level of foreign affairs, but his national reform plan could not be assessed as the economy continued to focus mainly on the oil industry. He maintained his rule till his death in office in 1978 and then Algeria started a new era with his successor, another colonel in the army, Chadli Ben Jdid.

The military institution continued to rule the country with Colonel Chadli who was then the Secretary of Defence. He had a softer policy compared to his predecessor, but he could not maintain an economic plan in view of the collapsing oil markets after 1980. The oil glut marked a turning point in the history of independent Algeria. It completely reshaped the social and political structure of the country.

The collapse of oil markets crippled the oil-dependent economy of the country and affected the purchasing power of the working class. The public discontent that resulted from the bad conditions was an opportunity that some groups needed to come to light as political counterparts of the ruling single party, especially the Islamists. Algeria was obliged to resort to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan that would hypothetically save the country's economy. However, the conditionalities of the monetary institution with its structural adjustment plan put the country ablaze. It required the privatisation of the state's economy and

the liberalisation of the market. It also recommended high interest rates on bank loans and restricted any form of salary increase to workers or job creation to maximize revenues and decrease spending. subsequently, many workers were victims of massive layoffs as privatization continued to expand.

3. The 1988 Riots and the Crisis of the Rentier State

On 5 October 1988, riots broke out as a result of the country's socio-economic crisis that resulted from the oil glut and the collapse of the rentier state. The increasing population with the stumbling economy affected the quality of life of people and led to widespread public discontent. Young people went out to the streets, destroyed public properties, which led to the death of many civilians after direct clashes with the security forces. According to some sources the death toll exceeded 300 people, mostly young (Stora, 2010). They were not politically motivated but that was an outcry caused by the inability of the state to maintain a sustainable economy that could maintain an economic security in the country. However, the riots paved the way for revolutionary political changes. John Ruedy points out the overnight change in freedom of expression and the shift to unprecedented political change that paved the way for the emergence of different opposition currents to the old ruling regime (Ruedy, 2005, p. 231).

In 1989 the Algerian constitution was changed following a referendum to introduce a multiparty system, start democratic reforms, guarantee freedom of expression and remove references to socialism. Most importantly, Islam was stated as the religion of the nation, and therefore, Islamists gained more political and social ground in the country. In September of the same year, the first Islamic party was founded in Algeria: The *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS). Many people saw in it a chance to find the long-awaited social justice they fought for in October 1988. The party gained popular support as Islam had long been associated with the salvation of the nation, and people wanted to believe that the FIS would continue what the freedom fighters had started since El Amir Abdelkader's revolution. Ruedy sees that the new Algerian constitution offered new democratic guarantees never seen before in the Arab world, such freedom of the written press (Ruedy, 2005, pp. 250–51).

In a relatively short time, many Algerians adhered to the FIS, and its leaders increased their propaganda about their political platform and the perception of a just Islamic state. The use of over 9000 mosques across the country helped the Islamist party to quickly mobilize considerable numbers of partisans and sympathisers (Ruedy, 2005, p. 253). The party was well organised in its structures but the statements of its two leading figures, Abbassi Madani and Ali Belhadj, had frequently conveyed diverging views. Belhadj—the “angry” man—wanted an extreme change based on his perception of an Islamic rule, which sounded frightening to some people. For example, he believed that democracy was not Islamic despite it being the pattern that paved the way for his party to have a say in politics. He also thought that the constitution was not Islamic and had to be substituted by Sharia law.

In June 1990, the FIS won the local elections by 54.2 percent, almost twice the votes the FLN had. Encouraged by the results, the party intensified its work for the next step to the legislative elections (Ruedy, 2005). Convinced by the importance of winning the population, the FIS used its financial resources to help parts of the poor population to win more support. Its leaders also talked about the party's plans in public spaces such as mosques, universities and through the different media outlets to restore social justice. It was unprecedented scene in the life of the Algerians, to see people openly criticising the state for failing to manage the country's wealth for the wellbeing of the population. The state's failure was merely the best aspect that helped the FIS in its campaign.

Having realised their strong position, the FIS leaders urged the state to organise early presidential elections as they considered President Ben Jedid a major obstacle to the progress of their political ambitions. Mr Abbassi, the head of the party, openly threatened during a TV

debate with the FLN secretary-general Abdelhamid Mahri, to resort to the use of force if the state did not accept to organise early elections. Parts of the population started to feel that the fast-growing Islamic party started to threaten their fundamental individual liberties. Many of its members wanted to play the police in streets and public spaces without having any official prerogatives. The party called for a general strike to exert pressure on the state in May 1991 and in June that year, Abbassi with Belhadj were arrested and the state of emergency was declared. The spread of the military forces with their arms and tanks in many cities, especially around mosques, led to some bloody confrontations with the Islamists.

Despite those tensions, the political process continued and freedom of expression leaped long steps forward compared to almost all countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Qirat, 2003, p. 107). For the first time since independence, the Algerians could watch programmes on the unique national television channel with political content where opposition parties strongly criticised the system. Meanwhile, state counterpropaganda tried to expose the hidden image of the Islamist party by showing the terrorist attacks perpetrated by their armed wing on security forces. Despite those images, the FIS remained popular among the poor working class, the unemployed youth and many others (Martinez, 2000, p. 2).

4. The Outbreak of the Civil War between the Islamists and the Military Regime

In December 1991, the legislative elections were organised, and the FIS won with an important margin but the Army cancelled the process. The generals behind the cancellation justified their act to be for the protection of democracy and the constitution as the Islamist party leaders expressed their intentions to change it. The state's reforms to establish democracy paved the way for Islamists to reach power for the first time in the MENA region's modern history. However, the shift to democracy went so fast in a country where a new politically inexperienced class of politicians tried to make up decades of lateness within months. Joseph Schumpeter argues that when advocating democracy as the will of the citizens, it should be more than just unclear *impulses* and some *mistaken impressions*. Thus, knowledge of the citizens and clarity of their ideas about the facts enable them to independently shape their opinions (Schumpeter, 1994, pp. 253–54). War broke out after the annulment of the elections between the Islamist rebels and the government dragging the country into chaos that lasted for over a decade.

The Islamist party won the popular support because it advocated religious justice that holds an important place in the Algerian society. The Algerians believed it to be an unchallenged source of legislation that the country needed, but did not realise that wrong interpretations could be costly. While continuing their propaganda, the Islamists were collecting money, medicines and supplies that could be of help in their war. They had among them people with considerable guerrilla warfare experience, as many of them were former fighters in the Soviet-Afghan war (Willis, 2014, p. 173). They launched attacks on security forces and all the symbols of the state to spread fear among their opponents. Furthermore, they had many sympathisers and enjoyed considerable support by part of the population. Finding recruits was not difficult as there were many desperate poor people, even among educated university graduates. There were also people who believed that the FIS was undertaking a religious mission they had to take part in. Some others wanted revenge from the system that neglected them and prevented them from getting their elementary rights.

In view of the great popular support the FIS had, and the growing violence and terror that its armed wing spread, the state needed to find a strategy to weaken them. The military option was not of great use in countering a latent enemy. The insurgents could not be found easily or identified. The best option was to get popular help for intelligence, logistic support and even armed resistance. However, it was difficult to regain the trust of the nation after years of failure and mismanagement (Blin, 2007, pp. 300–02).

Some influential generals in the army considered President Ben Jedid as a major cause of the crisis because he allowed a multiparty system to be established, and therefore wanted to replace him by someone from their trusted men or at least someone who could be influenced. Because people did not trust the military to manage politics anymore after three decades in power, a neutral figure was selected. An exiled opponent of the rule of president Boumedien and a historical figure, Mr Mohamed Boudiaf became the chair of the High Council of the State (HCS). He was one of the six well-known figures who played a major role in the liberation of the country and displayed a sharp character, sense of honour and integrity. His speeches reflected a great deal of good will to bring up reforms, end military domination of politics and fight against corruption.

He took a pledge to fight corruption, injustice and stop terrorism and extremism. The state of emergency decree was signed giving broad prerogatives to the security institutions and limiting individual liberties. Many FIS partisans were arrested in thousands and sent to detention camps in the deep Sahara desert without any charges, to investigate any possible involvement in violent acts. However, Boudiaf could not achieve his plans as he served only six months in office before being assassinated in mysterious circumstances while delivering a public speech. Many believed that his killers were powerful people inside the government, but no one could reach clear evidence to confirm the allegations(RANDAL, 1992).

Urged by the escalating situation, the military authority found another man to replace Boudiaf. They appointed a retired colonel and statesman, Ali Kafi for two years without major effect, prior to the arrival of Liamine Zeroual, a retired general and statesman, who later was elected president in 1995. His presidency was a turning point in the Algerian war on terror as he introduced new policies to contain the terrorist threat.

Because of the population support to the insurgents the state was unable to counter the terrorist threat. The state resorted to the use of media to wage propaganda war, influence the public opinion and isolate the armed groups. The unique and public-owned TV channel showed horrific scenes of crimes and mass killings to the public for the first time since independence and this affected the FIS popularity and reduced the number of its sympathisers. More importantly, the state used the media to mobilise the citizens to inform the security forces about any suspicious person or behaviour. The state of emergency gave unlimited powers to the security institutions to use all means possible to crush the insurgents. Military forces were deployed with heavy artillery, tanks, helicopters and all the equipment used in conventional wars. Checkpoints were installed on the roads linking cities, towns and villages through the country and no warrants were required to fetch or arrest anyone suspected of terror links. Luckily, that strategy gave its fruit leading to the elimination or the arrest of terrorists and also reduced the number of attacks in the crowded urban areas(Ruedy, 2005, pp. 254–59).

To challenge the state and demonstrate their strength, the terrorists tried to seize every opportunity to perpetrate appalling acts that could hold the world's attention and because of such acts Algeria was quarantined by many countries. Because of assumptions and allegations about possible state-arranged massacres against civilians, Algeria failed to get military equipment for its war on terror, especially after refusing investigation by some international organizations.

While intelligence work, military and paramilitary operations continued, the state was trying to find peaceful solutions to the conflict by negotiating with the FIS leadership. However, the Islamist party had no more authority over the armed groups, for there were many groups that split from the party's armed wing and got new allegiances and new agendas. Even the second powerful man in the FIS, Ali Belhadj, admitted that president Zeroual demonstrated good and strong will to reach a peaceful solution but powerful entities within the state were blocking the process. Ruedy maintains that despite Zeroual's civilian cabinet, the most

influential actors were from the military institution to go forward with certain concessions for the Islamists (Ruedy, 2005, p. 265).

In 1999, President Zeroual organised anticipated elections for unclear reasons. It paved the way for the independent candidate, Abdelaziz Bouteflika to become president with 74 percent of the votes. He came at the end of a bloody decade and was backed by the military, according to many accounts. Suspicious about the transparency of the elections, the other running candidates withdrew from the race for the presidency.

5. Algeria under Bouteflika's Presidency

Under Bouteflika, the FLN took over again as the state's party, although he ran for the presidency as an independent candidate (Beaugé, 2005). Many of the party's partisans were appointed at the head of key institutions in the country. Unless loyal to the party and the president people had little chance to hold high positions. The FLN was crowned the historical "party of the president". Its members almost never talked about a party platform or party programme. Instead, it was very commonplace to hear about the president's programme without any reference to its specific content. Every eventual decision, reform or act was justified to be among the president's programme, and thus unquestionable.

Parliament, which was supposed to be the voice of the nation and the counterbalance of the executive, was powerless with a majority from the FLN and another proxy party called *Rassemblement Nationale Democratique* (RND), which stands for the National Democratic Rally. Any bill presented by the government was endorsed and the little opposition could have no influence to stop it. Bouteflika deactivated the state's institutions by making loyalty to him or to the FLN the only options to reach superior positions. Those institutions lost their legal spirit to become instruments that expressed his unchallenged will (Ruedy, 2005, p. 285).

His policy paved the way for a great deal of corruption, because the country was run by a sort of mafia and therefore, there was no liability or accountability. The country with all its great economic potential remained backward at many levels, with bad public service and hard living conditions due to corruption and a crippling bureaucracy (ICG, 2001, p. 6).

Despite the booming oil markets that characterised Bouteflika's years in power and the accumulation of over \$200 billion, it was not reflected on the economic development of the country. The rentier state took an extreme course as it did not rely on the rent to rule the country but it dispossessed the people of its right to take its share.

6. The Paradoxical Effects of Bouteflika's Policy of National Reconciliation

President Bouteflika took a great leap forward with the pacification in Algeria following the war with the Islamic terrorist groups during the 1990s by drawing his national reconciliation plan. It was a corner stone in his presidency. However, the plan that attempted to stop the military conflict via a general amnesty to the insurgent Islamic groups not involved in killing or rape was the beginning of a political and economic derailing (Ruedy, 2005, p. 258; Werenfels, 2007, p. 48).

The positive side of the reconciliation that was endorsed via a national referendum was the fact that it contained the Islamist terrorist threat significantly, as thousands of insurgents put down arms to then reintegrate normal life and even help in the counterterrorist campaigns. The country became safer and escaped an extended bloody civil war.

The national reconciliation started to derail when the terrorist threats became an instrument to make policies and pass laws. Bouteflika was glorified as a hero and saviour of the nation by his followers, who were mostly from the FLN party, and turned into an unchallenged authority. He managed to domesticate all the opposition parties by either bribing them with high positions in the state or by bribing their best activists to weaken them. Consequently, almost every party

sided by the state and praised Bouteflika. Even media outlets did not complete freehand in criticising his regime (Werenfels, 2007, p. 59).

The parties were not the only ones to be used by the regime to remain in power. Even the major trade union known as Union Generale des Travailleurs Algeriens (UGTA) and the student unions played a key role in promoting Bouteflika's image. Whoever showed loyalty to the regime had protection and advantages, which encouraged acting above the law and spread a culture of hypocrisy, opportunism and person glorification among many ambitious people.

What is worth noting too is the fact that Bouteflika appointed his brother Said, a university lecturer, as an advisor to the presidency, who later turned into a strong man in the management of the country. Many high officials in Bouteflika's regime were from the same locality he came from, which caused resentment among an important portion of the population that felt neglected in other parts of the country. Regionalism was already a problem that existed in Algeria since the colonial period and continued after independence. The regime of Bouteflika deepened the schism in society because of his localised nominations.

Any high officials expressing opposing opinions to certain policies were warned that it was the president's program to deter them. If they continued resisting the system, they could simply be dropped out of their positions and denied any future nominations or could be appointed at some weaker positions where they could make no change.

According to a survey conducted in 2011, out of 1600 Algerians interviewed, 85 percent believed that high officials were protected against corruption charges, 52 percent expressed their fear to be involved in the trials, while 43 percent expressed their resentment regarding whistleblowing in the absence of evidence (Bsikri, 2011). The interviewee added with 85 percent that the sentences handed down were not enough. People charged with embezzlement are sentenced in the Algerian law to serve 10 years in prison but for good conduct can serve only 5 years. Another source also suggested that 88 percent of Algerians were afraid of directly denouncing corruption cases to the authorities because they did not feel protected (Amirouche, 2011). Instead, 31 percent resorted to the different media outlets and 30 percent chose to do it via anonymous letters (Bsikri, 2011). However, the latter were taken with some scepticism as their numbers increased and in some instances conveyed fallacious statements that caused damage to innocent people. For that reason, the ministry of justice decided to consider only letters with detailed information. These unfortunate incidents would later pave the way to some suspicious laws (Aoudia, 2010).

7. The Collapse of Bouteflika's Regime

Bouteflika disarmed the state's institutions from the legal instruments that could prevent him from having absolute power and did not envisage transition. The turning point in his regime was in 2013 when he suffered from a stroke. It caused him damage that kept him on a wheelchair unable to move or even speak. His health problems raised some questions about his ability to keep managing the country. There were serious questions about his ability to remain in office while he could not even address the nation.

Bouteflika was sent to a French military hospital, who kept his health condition secret. Therefore, no one knew the exact truth of his health apart from the medical team treating him, his family, very close persons in the Algerian state and of course the French president administration (Diallo, 2013). Despite the apparent effect of the stroke on him, the Algerian official sources maintained that Bouteflika's health was stable and that he was recovering. They did not want him to fall under the article 102 of the Algerian constitution, which states that the president can be deposed in case of a chronic deteriorated health (Algerian Constitution, 2010, p. 14). Nationally and internationally, doubts started looming about his ability to continue in office when all official statements and decisions were made by powerful people in his surrounding without a single statement from him to the public (Gal, 2015).

The period following the president's stroke was characterised by the empowerment of the Algerian wealthy class in such a way that allowed them to use the state's national reserves for their unproductive projects. They justified the draining of the country's financial resources starting by massive imports that served to expatriate the hard currency out of the country through false statements to the customs. Those false statements were either via declaring commodities other than the ones imported or via the inflation of invoices of the imported commodities to resell the transferred hard currency into the Algerian market with substantial margins. Thus, the black market infiltrated the state's financial institutions and jeopardised its stability for personal enrichment.

The high officials who facilitated the suspicious business affairs started establishing their own businesses through their relatives. In order to protect themselves and their associates they tailored certain laws in a way that facilitated corruption at multiple levels. For example, on July 22nd, 2015 the council of ministers adopted a law that was known as the decriminalization of acts of management. Under the pretext of the previously-mentioned victimisation of some top managers of public institutions—following some anonymous letters accusing them of corrupt practices—this law was introduced to protect people in managing positions. The law simply made it difficult to denounce acts of corruption, because it coincided with the collapse of oil prices. Before that collapse, when oil reached \$140/barrel the financial bubble hid the weak economy and the ill management of the country's revenues. Signs of collapsing oil prices started to appear by 2009 and then by 2014 they dropped dramatically. Consequently, the repercussions started to materialise in people's lives.

In 2017, the Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia and the members of his cabinet made shocking declarations about empty state treasury. His strategy to counter the crisis consisted of increasing taxes on certain products, increasing fuel prices, the gradual termination of state subsidising and the establishment of a system of austerity. Because of this striking statement, the feeling of despair increased among Algerians. The increasing numbers of people taking the perilous sails from Algerian shores across the Mediterranean to reach Europe, visibly expressed such despair, despite the 2008 Algerian law criminalising illegal immigration (Algeria Watch, 2009). Young Algerians illegally immigrated in thousands towards Europe and some of them never arrived or returned home. The news of the dead ones did not deter others to follow them, which unveiled how desperate those youngsters were and how corrupt the system was (Hamouchene, 2015).

The deadly mistake the system made was the product of the policy of a former minister of Industry and Mines, Abdesslam Bouchouareb, whose decision to stop importing cars and establishing an automotive assembly industry exacerbated the problems. He annulled most of the dealership authorisations and passed them over to his favourites. The cars assembly factories were under the Algerian law exempted from paying customs duties, Value Added Tax (VAT) and other duties. Despite those fiscal exemptions, automobile prices went up in an unprecedented scale and the speculation made it worse. People expected that local car assembly would make it cheaper especially that factories were exempted from all duties. However, the opposite happened with 100 percent price increase and at times more. Unexpectedly, the car issue was the point at which Algerians launched the first and largest boycott campaign since independence under the slogan "Khalliha Tssadi" which literally stands for "leave it rust" (Nadine, 2018).

The state tried to break the boycott by purchasing most of the produced cars, and thus keeping prices high. This resulted in the publics' perception that the ruling class was by no means serving them but rather served the wealthy, who were mainly nouveau riche who appeared following Bouteflika's rise to power. The boycott of the local automotive industry was thus more than a simple act of protest against the unfair prices. It was an attempt to assert the will of the people against the corrupt totalitarian regime.

Car prices did not return to normal but people's awareness increased about the on-going corruption. The experiences of the past two decades taught people lessons about civil peaceful resistance. They have seen how in the 1990s violence led to the state of emergency that paved the way for a military rule. Hence, waiting for the elections was seen as the key to a better transition in view of the president's health condition. Although Bouteflika ran for another term after the 2013 stroke, but people did not expect him to run for another. The mismanagement of the country and the increasing signs of corruption and embezzlement made people long for a fresh start by 2019 with a different president. The favourites of the president's brother, Said could have business privileges that left many law specialists and economists confused as to how those projects would serve the national interests.

After the state's measures of stopping imports to preserve what remained of the national reserve of hard currency, the state announced the encouragement of local production to diversify the country's revenues. It turned out that importing did not stop, but was monopolised by a number of businesspersons who were described by the media as the capitalist mafia. It was also manifested through the assembly of semi-finished products which was in fact just a disguised form of import worse than the previous one as those factories paid neither import duties nor VAT, such as the mobile phones and some electronic equipment.

Unexpectedly, the spokespersons of Bouteflika declared that he was running for a fifth term despite his age and health conditions. According to some newspapers this was ironic, with several reporting that the younger generation, would be ruled by a president whose voice would never be heard. The day that many Algerians waited for with the hope to see change, was to be delayed for another term. In a press conference held by the former Prime Minister, Abdelmalek Sellal, he announced that the president would remain in power (Europe 1, no date).

The striking announcement triggered a popular backlash just a week after. The peaceful protest, known to Algerians as *Hirak*, counted huge numbers of protesters across the country who marched against a fifth term for the absent president. In view of the numbers rejecting the continuity of the regime, the Chief of Staff of the armed forces urged Bouteflika to retract his candidacy under article 102 of the Algerian constitution. Bouteflika left office with apologies presented to the Algerian people through a letter that was released to the media (BBC News, 2019).

Bouteflika's withdrawal from the rally for the presidency was a victory that encouraged the Algerians to keep protesting every Friday against the mafia that ruled the country claiming their departure. The elections that were supposed to take place on April 18th were postponed and the head of the upper house of the Algerian legislative assumed the interim of the presidency as stated by the constitution. He, in turn, was rejected by the *Hirak* because he belonged to Bouteflika's regime. People claimed articles 7 and 8 of the constitution, which state that the legitimacy of the state comes from the will of the people.

There was some sensitiveness as to the role of the army in the transition. Bouteflika's brother wanted to take the army to the streets against the peaceful protests, but the chief of staff of the armed forces made an official statement to explain that the army's role was to protect the country against external hazards and not to suppress its people. He also asserted the role of the army in protecting the constitution and accompanying the peaceful change without bloodshed till the election of a new president. The situation was complicated from a legal perspective because the protesters wanted the president to leave the office under article 102, which is a constitutionally legitimate claim. Then, they wanted everyone in his regime to leave including the interim president, Mr Bensaleh, which could create a constitutional vacuum. That's why the chief of staff, Gaid Salah insisted on maintaining the constitutionality of the transition via elections. Albeit necessary for the transition, the elections that were supposed to take place on July 4th were postponed a second time on June 1st.

The chief of staff was perceived by part of the population as a dictator hijacking the popular protests. The 80-year-old officer was in a dilemma, as he could not remove all the faces of the regime because it would be a military coup and a violation of the constitution. An important portion of the population was exerting pressure on him to support their claims, but he insisted on acting within constitutional limits through elections because the country had long been said to be ran by a military regime.

The protests continued during months before the provisional authority set another date for the presidential elections for December 12th. The civilian and military authorities insisted that the elections were not going to be postponed for a third time (France 24, 2019). The announcement triggered resentment among a large number of protesters as it opposed the will of the *Hirak* that called to remove all of the faces of the former regime. For example, the Prime Minister, Mr Noureddine Bedoui was not trusted because he was the minister of interior under the regime of Bouteflika when election results were falsified at multiple occasions.

The chief head of staff of the army could not make the changes claimed by the *Hirak* because it was constitutionally impossible. He could not remove the interim president. The interim president could not change the Prime Minister or the members of his cabinet, by law. The only proposed guarantee was the creation of a national independent authority to organise the presidential elections. This authority counted people from different backgrounds and ages, including some of the loyal followers of the former regime, which again triggered some backlash among the *Hirak*.

In all that turmoil, the different social media networks, especially Facebook, played an important part in both informing and misinforming: a duality that highlighted the importance of having an educated and informed audience to relay information. With all the spread fake news, photoshopped pictures and edited videos, the protests started derailing from their main objective of regime change for the common good. Ethnic flags, liberal placards and feminist slogans started waving in the protests. Some public personalities also tried representing the *Hirak*'s voice, but they were rejected by an important part of the protesters because of some controversial statements they made in the past about certain religious values, such as inheritance or the hijab. Normally, people are free to express their opinions freely about religion, identity or individual freedom, within limits of decency, but in a conservative society this can be costly at the political level. The ethnic flags in particular contributed considerably to dividing opinions about elections, because on different media outlets the amazigh flag outnumbered the national one. It was interpreted by many people as an attempt to divide the country.

Most of the pictures where the ethnic flags were displayed, were from the capital Algiers and some predominantly amazigh cities. However, it triggered some reactions among an important part of the non-amazigh population. This was obvious through the social media posts and comments in particular, where voting shifted from being a national act for positive change, to a reaction against ethnic activism. Although it seemed like many people were opposing elections at the beginning of the protests, the tendency started to change when the third vote deadline was close.

Some of the protesters waving the amazigh flags were arrested after previous warnings by the chief of staff of the army. He delivered regular speeches in which he insisted on the necessity to preserve the unity of the nation by carrying only the national flag. By the same period, some controversial videos and pictures appeared on social media about certain opponents to the system, journalists and bloggers to have links to the financial and political mafia and even to certain foreign entities. Those allegations coincided with some statements made by the European parliament calling on the Algerian authorities to stop repression of peaceful protests and allow democratic change (Saidoun, 2019). Such statements engendered wide outrage among the protestors against foreign intervention in the internal affairs of the country. It also

spread a feeling of need for urgent elections to allow more stability in the country and to prevent further foreign attempts to intervene in the country's internal affairs.

The economic situation of the country was one of the contributing factors that urged a considerable number of the protesters to accept going to the ballot box, despite their opposition to organising elections under what they called the four Bs⁽²⁾. All the latter served under the Regime of Bouteflika. Four out of the five candidates running for the presidency were faces from the former regime and two of them were former prime ministers who were ejected out of the system for being non-conformists. For example, being dropped by the former regime increased the chances of Ali Benflis, and Abdelmadjid Tebboune in the elections.

8. The Election of a New President

In the weeks that preceded the elections, the state intensified propaganda campaigns. Despite the amounting support on social media for an end of the months-long protests and the stagnant economy, the intensive peaceful protests on the streets continued claiming radical change and the removal of the faces of the former regime. Constitutionally, that was impossible and this is why the military authority showed determination to carry out the elections on 12 December.

The elections took place under high security measures without violence from the protesters except in the majority amazigh cities. In those cities reports confirmed that protesters broke into voting centres and burnt the ballot boxes. Abstention rates were the highest in the country's voting history but it remained peaceful without violent incidents. As expected by many, the winner was the former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune, because of his image as an opponent and victim of Bouteflika's regime. Of the total voters only 39.88 percent went to the polling stations to vote, out of which the elected president got 58.13 percent. That means that out of 24.464.161 registered voters Mr Tebboune got only 4.947.523 votes, which is the lowest in Algeria's history (APS, 2019).

Although a little number of people voted but many wanted to believe that change would take place for real. That could be seen in the shrinking number of protesters following the poll results. Tebboune made the oath of office on 19 December and four days later the chief of staff of the army, Gaid Salah, was declared dead because of a heart attack. His death was depicted as a heroic one since he honoured his promise of preventing bloodshed and protecting the constitution until an elected president would assume power. According to certain analysts, regardless of any imperfection in the whole process, he managed to keep a balance that helped the country avoid instability.

After his investiture, President Tebboune made an inaugural speech in which he talked about the road map of his presidency and the reforms he intended to make. He gave promises to people and assured that he would do his best to help the country recover economically and politically after all the damage caused by the previous regime.

The new cabinet counted 39 members, out of which there were 7 deputy ministers and 4 secretaries of state. The staff also counted five ladies. Four previous members of the cabinet of the jailed Prime Ministers, Ouyahia remained in the new one with Mr Abdelaziz Djerrad.

The president and his new cabinet have important socioeconomic and strategic challenges that need to be dealt with in the short and the long run. Urgent measures need to be taken to satisfy the public, as protests continued in some major cities such as Algiers and Oran after his election and stopped only because of the CoVid-19 pandemic. The conflict in Libya also poses

(2) The four Bs were Former Interior minister Nouredine Bedoui, Abdelkader Bensaleh for chair of the upper house of the parliament, Tayeb Belaez the chair of the constitutional council and Mouaadh Bouchareb who was the chair of the lower house of parliament.

a considerable threat to the stability of the country and urges the new government to take measures to resolve the crisis peacefully before the military involvement of foreign players.

Although it would be too early to judge the future role of Algeria in the region, the security test that the country underwent quite successfully during the Hirak, made it eligible as a strategic partner in North Africa. Some people believe that if President Tebboune and his team manage to put his programme on the right track that it will help the country to reach political stability internally and externally in the neighbouring countries. Europe as a Mediterranean neighbour too can contribute to that strategic stability in Algeria by allowing more knowledge transfer, fair commercial exchange and cooperation. A good and fair partnership would help reduce illegal immigration towards Europe, drain the recruitment pool of terror groups and pave the way for more access to the African markets. The increasing threats resulting from the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, coupled with troubled U.S.-Iran and US-Turkish relations can trigger a complex regional conflict that would lead to a world crisis. Russia too has already shown its determination to protect its interests and key allies, and this can resuscitate the old east-west rivalry. Therefore, a reliable, moderate and politically-stable partner in North Africa can help stabilise the region.

The economy of the country was counted upon to enhance the image of the state, recover people's trust and improve their life. However, the CoVid-19 pandemic slowed down Algeria's economy. The increase in prices of certain staples and necessary commodities fuelled public discontent. This coincided with a poor participation in the constitution's amendment referendum which earned only 67% approval out of 23% of the whole electoral pool.

The state institutions have been facing fierce resistance from the corrupt bureaucrats in the different administrations since the establishment of the new cabinet. Even the private economic sector resisted state attempts to regulate prices in the absence of alternative options that would render the market more competitive. For example, the minister of commerce, Kamal Rezig, promised the public after his installation to reduce the prices of some staples to a reasonable and affordable levels but prices went up instead (Amzal, 2020). His attempts aimed at demonstrating positive progress to recover the lost trust between the state and the people. He kept giving press releases protesting against the increase in prices of vital goods. Many people criticised him on the different social media platforms for his inability to assert the will of the people and that of the state.

Since the pandemic is affecting the entire world at all levels, especially economically, the Algerian government's failure to mend its socio-economic situation cannot be assessed fairly. Thus, it may allow some more time to the state to try finding solutions. At the present stage the major problem where the state has shown failure is anti-corruption efforts by empowering state institutions and enforcing laws. That is what one may consider as the crisis of democratic progress in Algeria and this is what the Algerian people has been trying to change since 1988.

Conclusion

The democratic shift in Algeria has been in an ebb and flow since independence with a growing popular awareness about the fabric of democratic life. It was difficult to think about building a proper democracy in Algeria after independence, as people were still savouring the taste of liberation and never considered challenging the ruling revolutionaries. However, the obvious successive failures of the governing elite in erecting a democratic edifice that would safeguard liberties of individuals and better their socioeconomic quality of life urged the emergence of some form of opposition. It was not political activism that fuelled the democratic change in the country at the beginning than was a growing need for a decent life. People did not study democracy in schools or in political parties but spontaneously realised the importance of taking part in the making of national politics to not just suffer the consequences of an ill management of the country and its resources by a totalitarian elite.

It is undeniable that the process of democratisation of the country was very slow and still is incomplete, but the unexpected achievements that resulted from people's awareness may be considered as a success. It is so because the growing democratic spirit was not the result of high knowledge or political awareness resulting from some political schools or parties. The democratic shift in Algeria was a chain reaction to successive undemocratic policies that were exposed at each crisis of the rentier state. Those crises showed the link between democratic progress and the economic systems, and they explain why some undemocratic systems can survive for longer time than others. The illusion created by the rent to people was able to delay the democratic shift but offered the ruling elite very fragile stability and unless the rentier state tries to genuinely change its policies it will end up facing people's backlash.

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