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MORAL ECONOMY OR MORAL POLITY? THE POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF ALGERIAN RIOTS

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Moral Economy or Moral Polity? The political anthropology of Algerian riots

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No one has a key to fit all locks.
(Maxime Rodinson)¹

Argument

The appalling political breakdown which has occurred in Algeria is almost universally identified with the descent into violence since 1992, itself widely attributed, directly or indirectly, to the rise of the Islamist movement since 1989. In explicit opposition to this view, this paper argues that the breakdown of the Algerian polity occurred well before 1989 and consisted essentially in the rupture between the state and the people which took place in the 1980s and was first made manifest in the dramatic riots of October 1988. The central feature of this rupture as popularly experienced has been the problem of what Algerians call 'la hogra' (al-hagra), the systematic and contemptuous violation of their rights through constant abuse of power and arbitrary rule. Popular support for the Islamist movement after 1989 was a conjunctural mode of expression of a pre-existing social demand for good government which was not itself premised on adherence to contemporary Islamist doctrines, but on values rooted in Algeria's long-standing political traditions. The persistent refusal of the Algerian authorities since the 1980s to respect these traditions or to recognise and accommodate this demand has ensured that the strategy which the regime has followed in resisting the Islamist movement since 1992 has precluded a proper reconstruction of the Algerian polity.

Introduction

The fact that, fourteen years after the event, there is not one serious scholarly study of the October riots is itself symptomatic of the difficulty which the Western social sciences have had in making sense of Algerian political history. There is, however, an interesting variation within the social sciences in this respect, one which may be observed in the specific case of the 1988 riots as in other cases. This is that, while the specialist students of Algeria have evinced great reluctance to hazard a fully developed analysis of this event, the authors of more general surveys have demonstrated no comparable reluctance to integrate the Algerian case into their theoretical generalisations and analytical schemes.

For example, John Walton and David Seddon have not hesitated to include the Algerian case in their general category of 'austerity protests' which they regard as the characteristic form of collective social unrest in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, as of the other regions of the ex-colonial world, in the era of structural adjustment and the onset of globalisation. Such protests in general, they argue,

¹ Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (translated by Brian Pearce), London: Allen Lane, 1974, viii.

are to be explained largely as a reaction, by those sections of society which feel themselves to be adversely and unreasonably affected, to the domestic political and economic changes consequent upon the implementation of specific government policies in response to economic crisis.²

Moreover, they “have been largely ‘spontaneous’”³ and “may be seen as the vivid manifestation of deeper currents of dissent and social unrest which ‘break out’ at a particular conjuncture or when a precipitating event occurs.”⁴ As for the nature of the latter, “in virtually all cases, significant increases in the cost of basic goods and services (or the threat of these) have preceded and effectively precipitated the outbursts of popular unrest.”⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that

in many such cases...governments felt obliged to revoke publicly the price increases that, despite official denials, so often appear to have been the trigger for protest.⁶

At no point do Walton and Seddon suggest that the Algerian case may have been an exception to the rule in any of these respects (and they explicitly cite it as an illustration of the last point). In those passages where they discuss the 1988 riots in relative depth, the only unusual aspects of them which they note are “the use of firearms on both sides”⁷ and the brutality of the repression, which they consider extraordinary.⁸

When it comes to analysing the behaviour of the protestors in the various ‘austerity riots’ under review, Walton and Seddon invoke the work of the American historian Edmund Burke III. Central to Burke’s approach is his insistence on the need to distinguish between “Islamic movements” and “social movements in Islamic societies”⁹ if the analyst is not to fall into the classic Orientalist mistake of ascribing all such movements to timeless cultural or ideological factors. As an alternative to such explanatory strategies, which tend to lock the social and political history of countries such as Algeria and Egypt within the mystificatory framework of Middle Eastern or Islamic exceptionalism, Burke invokes the work of various historians on social movements - and especially urban mass protests - in European history, and suggests that the concept of ‘moral economy’ which has informed some of this work can, if handled carefully, be employed in explaining social movements in the context of Muslim societies.¹⁰

I am in general agreement with the approach of Walton and Seddon to the phenomenon of social protest in the era of structural adjustment and with Burke’s approach to the study of social movements in Islamic societies. But it cannot be said that these approaches, however generally valid, have actually elucidated the political history of Algeria over the critical period from October 1988 to June 1990, let alone beyond the latter date.

² John Walton & David Seddon, *Free Markets and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment*, Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994, p.175.

³ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.173.

⁴ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.173.

⁵ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.171.

⁶ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.205.

⁷ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.204.

⁸ Walton & Seddon (1994), p.191.

⁹ Edmund Burke III, ‘Islam and social movements: methodological reflections’, in Edmund Burke III and Ira M. Lapidus (eds.), *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1988, pp.18ff.

¹⁰ Burke (1988), pp.22 & 34 fn 12.

This is partly connected to the fact that this history is, in large degree, the history of a very complex mutation. This was a mutation of the polity as a whole, but also a set of other mutations which followed from this. The most spectacular was the mutation of a social movement in a Muslim country - the mass, popular, but distinctly unideological, protests which began on October 4, 1988 - into an explicitly Islamic movement with the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (Al-Jebha al-Islamiyya li 'l-Inqâdh; Front Islamique du Salut, FIS) in 1989 and its success in establishing itself as the political representative of the urban poor in 1990 and 1991. To vary our metaphors, we can say that the phenomenon of popular protest in Algeria migrated from one of Burke's two categories to the other in a manner which, very understandably, he appears not to have anticipated and which therefore remains to be explained in theoretical terms.

But it is also connected to the fact that, pace Walton and Seddon, the October riots occurred without the benefit of a precipitating event such as an abrupt and provocative increase in the cost of basic goods and services; as William Quandt has remarked,

it is still hard to pinpoint the spark that led to the protests. There was nothing quite so dramatic as the bread price increases that had provoked rioting in Cairo in January 1977 and in numerous other Middle East capitals in later years.¹¹

Moreover, the riots ended without any explicit concession by the authorities in respect of whatever material grievances the rioters may be supposed to have been expressing.¹² Far from exemplifying the standard form of austerity protest discussed by Walton and Seddon, the Algerian case actually differed very sharply from it. And this in turn is connected with the fact that the outlook of the urban poor, who rioted in 1988 and voted FIS in 1990 and 1991, was not something which can be illuminated by the concept of a moral economy.

Thompson and the English crowd

The idea of 'moral economy' is borrowed from the work of E.P. Thompson on the social history of 18th century England.¹³ In Thompson's work it refers to the system of values which underlay popular protest, and especially the intermittent collective action of 'the crowd', in opposition to the unbridled operation of market forces characteristic of the emerging political economy of laissez-faire capitalism.

In order to assess the usefulness of this concept for the consideration of Islamic social movements - and social movements in Islamic societies - in general, and of such movements in Algeria in particular, it is necessary to bear in mind that the hypothesis of a moral economy was put forward by Thompson in answer to a particular question, which was in turn derived from his findings in respect of a prior question.

Thompson developed his argument in explicit opposition to what he called "the spasmodic view of popular history"¹⁴ which views social events such as 'riots' as "compulsive rather

¹¹ William B. Quandt, *Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998

¹² This point is discussed in some detail in another paper of mine, currently in preparation.

¹³ E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 1971, reprinted in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, London: Merlin Press, 1991, pp.185-258; all references here will be to the latter edition.

¹⁴ Thompson (1991), p.185.

than self-conscious or self-activating” and as “simple responses to economic stimuli”.¹⁵ Dismissing, with fine contempt, the “crass economic reductionism” of those historians disinclined to take seriously “the complexities of motive, behaviour and function”,¹⁶ he insisted on considering the question economic historians ignore, namely, how people respond to stimuli: “being hungry..., what do people do? How is their behaviour modified by custom, culture and reason?”¹⁷ And he found that the English labouring poor responded to hunger or the threat of hunger in a very remarkable way.

The behaviour he documented was essentially a series of collective attempts to subject local markets in foodstuffs, at least temporarily, to popular political control. Typically, the crowd forced farmers withholding grain and other crops, in order to profit from anticipated price rises in times of dearth, to bring their goods to market without delay; it prevented farmers from exporting their crops to other regions or countries in order to benefit from higher prices elsewhere; it set ‘fair’ prices and imposed these prices on traders; and it intimidated millers or bakers suspected of adulterating flour or bread, and so forth. These actions, although prompted by the stimulus of hunger or dearth, were clearly focussed, purposeful and for the most part impressively orderly. The collective force of the crowd was mobilised, but remarkably little violence was actually employed; for example, goods when seized were sold at the ‘fair’ price and their original owners reimbursed; outright theft of goods was rare. Thompson rightly considers this behaviour to have been remarkable and rightly asks what accounted for it.

The hypothesis of a ‘moral economy of the crowd’ is his answer to this second question. He suggests that this coherent and purposeful collective behaviour was informed by a coherent and generally shared vision or idea which both legitimised the resort to coercive direct action and defined the limits of legitimacy of this action. This idea was the idea of a moral economy, that is, the idea that the operation of the market should be subject to a higher, non-economic, law or set of norms based on long-established notions of the common weal on the one hand and of the traditional rights of the people on the other hand. In its refusal to accept that the autonomous movements of supply and demand, the laws of the market left to their own devices, should be the supreme arbiter of either the provision or the price of goods, this ‘moral economy’ was clearly opposed to the ‘political economy’ of the emerging laissez-faire capitalism, which recognised no non-economic constraint on the development of the economic. The moral economy of the English crowd in the 18th century was thus anti-capitalist in content but this anti-capitalism was founded on a pre-capitalist vision of society, and especially a pre-capitalist conception of the community and its laws as opposed to the economy and its laws.

What relevance does Thompson’s argument have for the analysis of contemporary Islamic social movements?

Islamic social movements

To the extent that contemporary Islamist movements are animated by a concern for the cohesion of the community of the faithful - the umma - and that they consider this to be profoundly menaced by the materialism of contemporary capitalism, and especially the tendency of capitalism to reduce everything to a commodity, one might say that there is

¹⁵ Thompson (1991), p.185.

¹⁶ Thompson (1991), p.187.

¹⁷ Thompson (1991), p.187.

implicit in the social vision of these movements a kind of moral economy. Central to the preoccupations of contemporary Islamist movements has been the notion that the Muslim world has been lapsing into a new jahiliyya (the condition of pre-Islamic ignorance or barbarism), and that the undermining of traditional moral values by Western materialism has been a major cause of this decline.

There is, however, a general problem with this way of looking at things, and this is that the Islamists do not, as a rule, oppose a pre-capitalist vision to the capitalist vision in the economic sphere (other than in respect to the problem of usury, concerning which notions of 'Islamic economics' are not to be taken very seriously), but, if they do so at all, in the cultural and political sphere. They do not complain that capitalism is ruining artisans and honest traders, but rather that the materialism associated with capitalism is undermining and defiling Islamic values. Moreover, their objections to capitalism are rather muted and ambivalent in comparison with their previous objections to socialism and communism. While it is certainly the case that there have been numerous riots in the Arabo-Muslim world over the last twenty years over such issues as food prices ('bread riots'), and that the rioters have tended to require more of the state in the way of interference with the operation of market forces rather than less, these riots have not had emphatically Islamist orientations, and the Islamist social movements in the countries in question have tended in the opposite direction, opposing state intervention and regulation and nationalisation and generally siding with the laws of the market against the paternalistic and redistributive impulses of the state.¹⁸

In the Algerian case, in so far as the Islamist movement has vehicled a critique of and protest against the operation of the Algerian economy, it has not denounced this for being a capitalist economy, but - in effect - for not being a capitalist economy. It is precisely because the Algerian economy has been embedded in particular political and moral structures that the bourgeois constituency of the Islamist movement has been exasperated with it, and has demanded its disembedding.¹⁹ The principal target of Algerian Islamism has not been the uncontrolled behaviour of producers and traders taking advantage of market forces in an economic sphere conceived as entirely autonomous - that is, governed by its own laws, the laws of the unbridled market, but the uncontrolled behaviour of the state. It is not capitalism

¹⁸ Exceptions to this generalisation can of course be found; Joel Beinin has argued persuasively that the notion of moral economy can be said to apply, at least in some degree, to the outlook of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the mid-1940s, notably when it addressed the issue of unemployment and argued that the Egyptian state had a responsibility to find work for the unemployed; see his article 'Islam, Marxism and the Shubra al-Khayma textile workers: Muslim Brothers and Communists in the Egyptian trade union movement', in Burke & Lapidus (1988), pp.219ff. The significance of this episode is qualified, however, by the fact that the unemployed in question had been induced by the government to abandon their original forms of employment in order to work in the war industries, from which they were subsequently laid off; thus the government could be said to have had a special obligation to these particular workers, as the Brothers argued; the fact that the Brothers were also in competition with the Communists for a working class audience is unlikely to have been absent from the considerations underlying their formal position in this matter. There are grounds accordingly for considering that this was a special case, rather than evidence of a constant element of the Brothers' outlook.

¹⁹ Notably in its opposition to state monopolies and, indeed, monopolies of all kinds and the obstacles to free competition which these constitute, and its opposition to nepotistic and parasitic practices and the occult solidarities which these serve; see the extracts from the 'Programme Économique du FIS' published in M. Al-Ahnaf, Bernard Botiveau & Franck Frégosi, *L'Algérie par ses Islamistes* Paris: Karthala, 1991, pp.179-187, and especially p.183; see also the article by Ali Ibn al-Shukri published in *El Munqid* no. 28 and reprinted in Al-Ahnaf *et al.* (1991), pp.175-178. It should be understood that many of the practices conventionally defined as 'corrupt' by Western observers actually involve the informal honouring by Algerian employees and functionaries of sets of obligations - whether to patrons or clients, or to dependents, friends and relations - which have *moral* force in their minds.

in Algeria, but the nature and behaviour of the state (and of individual power-holders within the state apparatus), which have been the object of Islamist condemnation. Thus, in respect of its middle class constituency, from which it draws the greater part of its political leadership (its military leadership is perhaps another matter), Algerian Islamism has not conformed to the Thompsonian model, but has been in emphatic contrast to it.

If we wish to say that Algerian Islamism has operated with a moral economy in mind, the substance of this moral economy is significantly different from what Thompson has described. While it has proposed to subject the operation of the market in respect of the supply and price of basic consumption goods to a degree of political control, in so far as this operation is perverted and falsified by corrupt practices (hoarding and the artificial creation of shortages etc.) and the presence of the black economy, all of which it proposes to eliminate, it is important not to overstate the significance of this. This proposal has had only a secondary status in its project, and has appeared as a sop to the urban poor rather than symptomatic of a more radical objection to capitalism as such. The main proposal of Algerian Islamism has been rather to maintain and enlarge the sphere of operation of *laissez-faire* capitalism within a framework of law (the *Shari'a*), while acting in the non-economic sphere - cultural and political life - to suppress those cultural and political by-products of capitalist political economy that are considered haram, illicit - that is, inimical to or inconsistent with Islamic values. This is a very different matter.

This is partly because the elements of the Algerian middle classes which have formed the core constituency of the Islamist movement have long been wholly won over - or broken in - to the economic norms of Western capitalism. In so far as the Algerian Islamist movement, in its critique of Western materialism and decadence, expresses the puritan values of an important section of the middle class, it does not express a pre-capitalist let alone an anti-capitalist outlook, it expresses, *mutatis mutandis*, substantially the same values as were universally held in the bourgeoisies of 19th and early 20th century England and America, in the era of the triumph of capitalist political economy, before Anglo-Saxon puritanism involuted itself into the merely egoistic hedonism of the late 20th and early 21st century permissive society in which anything goes if there is a market for it. Thus we may say that Algerian Islamism expresses a social vision similar to that of western bourgeois puritanism at an early stage in its learning curve, before the onset of unbelief and ennui had forced the individualistic impulses of the middle classes of the West to find outlets in patterns of ostentatious and hedonistic consumption and consumption-related activities which would have astonished as well as outraged previous generations of exemplary English and American bourgeois whose puritanism connoted - in addition to the fear of God - self-respect, sobriety, thrift and...modesty.

What has this bourgeois Islamic puritanism, with its essentially positive acceptance of *laissez-faire* capitalist political economy and its hostility to the traditional religious beliefs and practices (the cult of saints, the ecstatic practices of the *turuq*), cultural preferences (*sha'abi* music, *rai* music, theatre, not to mention western cultural imports - pop music, etc.) and economic priorities of the mass of the people, got to do with the character and behaviour of social movements in Algeria and, in the first instance, with the outlook of the Algerian crowd?

The crowd's point of view

Simple food-riots do not exhaust the activities and ideas of the 'mob'.
(Eric Hobsbawm)²⁰

The study of the Algerian crowd is in its infancy because the Algerian crowd - like the Algerian nation to which it belongs - is in its infancy. There is no comparison with the English crowd in the 18th century in this respect. There is no long-established tradition of repetitive and comparatively coherent crowd behaviour stretching back over 150 years for the social historian to contemplate and decipher in the Algerian case. But what little is known from such instances of riotous crowd behaviour in independent Algeria does not support the notion that the Algerian crowd has been primarily animated by an implicit moral economy of some kind.

In saying this I am conscious that I am, once again, opposing the consensus of western media opinion in respect of the massive riots of October 1988, which were almost universally described as 'food riots' or 'bread riots'.²¹ Leaving aside the question of whether there was significant political manipulation from above on this occasion, the evidence does not suggest that the rioters were seeking to assert a moral economy in opposition to a political economy experienced as intolerable to them.

I shall come to this evidence in a moment. Before I do so, however, let me note that the 1988 riots seems to me to have been different in this respect from the very serious riots which occurred in Constantine in November 1986. The latter certainly appear, at least at first glance, to have been a response to an economic stimulus of a kind, and to have asserted, at least by implication, a right or set of rights that, in the two and half decades since independence, had acquired a patina of tradition.

The Constantine protests began in the lycées, where pupils were up in arms about new regulations concerning the baccalauréat exams, which introduced new obligatory subjects and more generally both shifted the goalposts and raised the cross-bar²² in what was clearly

²⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The City Mob', in *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, revised edition, 1971, p.111.

²¹ It would be tedious to document this virtually unanimous media preference for an economic-determinist explanation of the riots, the only significant exceptions to which have been elements of the French press, notably *Libération* and *Le Monde*. The rest of the Western media (both print and broadcast) have relentlessly relayed a view of the riots as 'food riots' which appears regrettably to have influenced much of the scholarly discussion of these events. In addition to Walton & Seddon (1994), authors who have endorsed or accepted this view include Daniel Brumberg, 'Authoritarian legacies and reform strategies in the Arab world', in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 1: Theoretical Perspectives*, Boulder, Colorado, & London: Lynne Rienner, 1995, p.244; John L. Esposito & John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.150 & 154; Giacomo Luciani, 'Rente pétrolière, crise fiscale de l'état' in Ghassan Salamé (ed.), *Démocraties Sans Démocrates: politiques d'ouverture dans le monde arabe et islamique*, Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1994, p.219; Lucille Provost, *La Seconde Guerre d'Algérie*, Paris: Flammarion, 1996, p.74. A number of Algerian journalists and scholars have clearly recognised that the riots were not food riots; see for example Abed Charef, *Dossier Octobre*, Algiers: Laphomic, 1989, pp.105-106; Hocine Benkheira, 'Un désir d'absolu: les émeutes d'Octobre en Algérie', *Peuples Méditerranéens* 52-53 (July-December 1990), p.15; more recently, the eminent former diplomat, M'Hammed Yazid, who was the director of the government think-tank, the Institut National d'Études de Stratégie Globale (INESG), in October 1988, has explicitly denied that the riots were food riots; see his interview in *El Watan*, 'Les émeutes n'étaient pas celles de la faim', 5 October 2000.

²² My metaphor is drawn from Rugby, not Association, football; the new subjects which it was rumoured would be introduced, with a definite implication that ideological correctness - in other words, political conformism - was to become a precondition of success in the baccalauréat exam, were Islamic Studies and Political Studies;

perceived as a deliberate move by the government to make the exam far harder to pass, and thus a big step towards a more élitist educational system.²³ The lycée pupils were joined by university students protesting about conditions at the university, the inadequate accommodation in the student hostels, the especially inadequate transport for students between hostels and the main campus, the inadequate food provided in the canteens, and even the inadequate teaching provided by some of the academic staff.²⁴ Before long, however, the relatively orderly and peaceful demonstrations of these two elements were complicated and overtaken by the arrival on the scene of unemployed youths from the shanty-towns taking advantage of the situation to make their own point²⁵ and, with the decision of the authorities to react with repression,²⁶ the affair quickly degenerated into a major riot which lasted several days and ended with several dead and many injured, as well as hundreds of arrests,²⁷ and which quickly prompted a similar riot in Setif.²⁸

One can certainly say that the rioters were protesting against the new direction of government economic policy in various respects, and asserting a tacit conception of their rights founded on their memory of what the state had undertaken to provide them with - egalitarian access to education, proper educational provision and facilities, employment - in a previous period (the 1960s and 1970s). Thus there is a formal parallel with the English case in Thompson's analysis, in that the moral economy of the English crowd was founded on a tradition which was itself based on the behaviour and outlook of the state in an earlier period, the paternalist outlook inherited from Tudor times and partly codified in the Book of Orders of 1630.²⁹ There can be no doubt that a memory of the 'paternalist' policies of the Boumediène era in particular (based on a social vision that was itself eventually affirmed, if not exactly codified, in the National Charter of 1976) underlay in part the outlook of Algerian crowds in the 1980s.³⁰

But, in so far as the 1986 rioters were animated by a moral economy of some kind, they were acting quite independently (and in implicit opposition to the economic outlook) of the Islamist movement. And in so far as the urban crowd, after 1988, was harnessed by and adhered to the perspectives of the Islamist movement as articulated by the FIS, this was at the expense of whatever notions of 'paternalist' moral economy had previously mobilised it, since, whatever changes the FIS was calling for, a return to the 'dirigiste' and 'paternalist' economic policy of the Boumediène era was not among them and, as we have seen, it explicitly supported the policy of radical liberal 'reform' in the direction of unbridled capitalist economy.

What, then, constituted the basis on which an Islamic movement which was not vehicling a moral economy in Thompson's sense was eventually able to win the massive support of the

see *The Guardian*, 12 November 1986; *Maghreb Arabe Press*, 14 November 14 1986; *Le Monde*, 15, 16 & 17 November 1986; *Associated Press*, 17 November 1986.

²³ *Le Monde*, 11 November 1986; *The Guardian*, 12 & 18 November 1986.

²⁴ *Reuters*, 14 November 1986; *Maghreb Arabe Presse*, 13-15 November 1986.

²⁵ *Le Monde*, 13-17 November 1986.

²⁶ *Le Monde*, 16-17 November 1986.

²⁷ *Le Monde*, 15-17 November 1986.

²⁸ *Le Monde*, 14-15 November 1986; see also El-Hadi Chalabi, *L'Algérie, l'État et le Droit*, Paris: Arcantère, 1989, pp.162-164.

²⁹ Thompson (1991), pp.225-226, 228, 241 & 253.

³⁰ Section 4 of Chapter 1 of the National Charter was entitled: 'Satisfaction prioritaire des besoins fondamentaux des masses populaires', in which it is said, notably, "L'État doit créer toutes les conditions pour que chaque Algérien puisse satisfaire ses besoins essentiels dans la dignité." Front de Libération Nationale, *Projet de Charte Nationale*, Algiers, June 1976, page 6.

urban crowd which had, at least occasionally, shown signs of being animated by such a moral economy? We are addressing an enigma here, and admitting this is the first precondition of solving it.

The solution I wish to propose is the hypothesis that the Algerian crowd is not primarily animated or informed by a notion of a moral economy so much as by something else. This other thing is properly called an idea of a moral polity, and it is what enabled the conjunctural combination of Algerian Islamism and Algerian populism to occur in the party-political sphere, on certain, extremely limiting and correspondingly significant, conditions.

The moral polity of the Algerian crowd in late 20th century

In the article in question, Thompson briefly and unaccountably employed the term ‘moral polity’ at one point, where he observed, of the theories of Adam Smith et al., that “In the new economic theory questions as to the moral polity of marketing do not enter...”³¹ Nowhere in the rest of the article did he explain what he had in mind when using this term.

In suggesting that the Algerian crowd is above all animated by a notion of moral polity, I am accepting Thompson’s argument in so far as it affirms that what Algerian rioters have been trying to defend and assert is a set of “traditional rights or customs”,³² “a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations”³³ and “definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal...”³⁴ I am denying, however, that these norms, obligations and notions are economic in content; I am suggesting that they are political in content.

The riots of October 1988 are the first riots in the history of independent Algeria for which we possess some documentation of the rioters’ subjective outlook. According to the French press, the main slogans shouted on the first full day of the riots, October 5, were “Levez-vous, la jeunesse” (“Rise up, Youth”) and “Chadli assassin!”,³⁵ while some banners proclaimed, in ungrammatical French, “On demande nos droits totales”³⁶ and, in Arabic, “We are men”.³⁷ There is nothing about the price of bread or couscous here; in so far as the content of these slogans can be discerned, it was clearly political rather than economic. This is borne out by other evidence. In a fascinating, if tantalisingly brief, article, Naget Khadda and Monique Gadant report certain other slogans used by the rioters which took the form of rhyming couplets in Algerian colloquial Arabic, and which also expressed unmistakably political preoccupations:

ma bghina la zebda wa la felfel
lakin bghina zaïm fhel

We don’t want butter or pepper
We want a leader we can respect

Boumedièn, ardja’ lina
Hlima wellet tehkoum fina

Boumediène, come back to us
Halima has come to dominate us

³¹ Thompson (1991), p.202.

³² Thompson (1991), p.188.

³³ Thompson (1991), p.188.

³⁴ Thompson (1991), p.188.

³⁵ *Libération*, 6 & 8-9 October 1988.

³⁶ *Libération*, 8-9 October 1988.

³⁷ *Libération*, 8-9 October 1988. It is unclear whether the slogan on the banner in question was in modern standard Arabic, in which case it would have read *nahnu rejal*, or colloquial Algerian Arabic, which would be *ehnaya rejal*; colloquial Arabic is unwritten as a rule.

Chadli, barkana min el vis
Qoul li weldek ired el devis

Chadli, that's enough vice
Tell your son to return the money³⁸

Khadda and Gadant also provide snapshots of the rioters' behaviour, which are supplemented by Hocine Benkheira in a companion article.³⁹ In the popular neighbourhood of Belcourt, the police chief was made to strip to his underwear and sit on a chair in the street while passers-by were invited to slap him;⁴⁰ in the eastern suburb of Bachdjarrah, the police station was set on fire;⁴¹ in Bab El Oued, policemen were forced to parade while declaiming *ana tahan, ana beye* ('I am a braggart, I am a betrayer').⁴² The rioters also staged a kind of impromptu street theatre in which police procedures, notably interrogations, were parodied, and the Algerian justice system was satirised in mock trials in which the 'defendants', accused of corruption or other abuses of power, were all acquitted.⁴³ As for the attacks on property, not only were these confined to public property⁴⁴ but, where state shops were the target, the rioters were as inclined to express contempt for the consumption goods which they had at their mercy as to help themselves to them.⁴⁵

The cliché of the Western media, that these riots were about food prices, receives no support from these actions or the slogans which accompanied them, quite the contrary. But there was nothing overtly Islamic about them either.

The riots occurred at a very precise moment, that known in Algeria as 'la rentrée politique' - the start of a new political term (in the school or university sense of 'term') after the summer break, and at the beginning of the run-up to the Party Congress at which the Party of the FLN was to decide whom to nominate as the Party's candidate (the only candidate allowed) for the Presidency for the next five years. Chadli had already served two five-year terms without distinction, and there was considerable opposition in high places to him having a third, and support for alternative candidacies. It was at this juncture that the people rioted, and in doing so expressed a massive popular hostility to Chadli. Clearly, in the circumstances, the hypothesis of a manipulation from on high cannot be ruled out; indeed, I am quite certain that such a manipulation was undertaken. But, whether the riots occurred through spontaneous combustion, or fires were started at a number strategic points at the same time by secret men who knew exactly what they were doing, the point is that the material was there, there was

³⁸ Najet Khadda & Monique Gadant, 'Mots et choses de la révolte', *Peuples Méditerranéens* 52-53 (July-December 1990), p.20; *'fhel'* in the second line of the first couplet is normally written *fahl* in the standard transliteration of the Arabic; the reference in the second couplet to Halima is to Chadli's wife, Halima Bourokba, who - in a manner which closely recalled Wassila Bouguiba of Tunisia but which stood in massive contrast to Anissa Boumediène - had played a major role in the politics of the presidency or 'le serail' (the seraglio), as the French press had come to call it by the mid-1980s, actively promoting her favourites and intriguing against others.

³⁹ Benkheira (1990), pp.7-18.

⁴⁰ Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.22.

⁴¹ Benkheira (1990), p.10.

⁴² Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.22; *tahan* (which the authors translate into French as *vantard*) is presumably the Algerian colloquial Arabic version of *taihân* (proud); *beye* is presumably the colloquial form of *bayyâ*, which literally means 'salesman', 'dealer'; Khadda and Gadant translate this as *donneur* which in French slang means the person who betrays, informs on; they remark that *beye* also has a homosexual connotation.

⁴³ Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.22.

⁴⁴ Benkheira notes that on the important shopping street Rue Didouche Mourad in downtown Algiers, where state shops and agencies were worked over very thoroughly, not one of the numerous private jewelry shops was attacked (Benkheira, 1990, p.10)

⁴⁵ Thus round cheeses were used as footballs, butter trampled into the ground etc.; see Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.24.

plenty of dry tinder lying around, and the question of what was in the heads of the rioters remains to be addressed.

That there was a substantial degree of nostalgia for the Boumediène era is clear,⁴⁶ and that the Chadli régime - and Chadli's performance as president in particular - were being measured against the yardstick of that era and found wanting, is also clear.⁴⁷ In order to appreciate the full significance of this, however, it is worth comparing the nostalgia of the rioters, that is, the particular past or status quo ante they invoked in condemning the present status quo, with those explicitly or implicitly favoured by the Islamist movement prior to 1988.

In so far as the Islamist agitation which got under way in the early 1980s had leaders at the national level, it was primarily led by two veterans of the earlier Islamic Reform movement of the 1930s and 1940s, Shaikh Abdellatif Soltani and Shaikh Ahmed Sahnoun, both of whom had been active in Shaikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis's Association of the Algerian Muslim 'ulama (Association des 'ulama musulmans algériens, AUMA), whose surviving members after independence had been mostly co-opted by the state as the salaried functionaries of official Islam. The dissident 'ulama leaders, Soltani and Sahnoun, were bitterly opposed to this co-optation and wanted to reassert the 'ulama's autonomy; this demand threatened a radical change to the character of the state, the disabling of Algerian nationalism's ambition to subordinate the religious sphere to its state and to nationalist *raison d'état*. In taking this position, Soltani and Sahnoun were reiterating the point of view previously expressed in the 1963-1970 period by the small grouping called *Al Qiyam* ('The Values'), in which they had both been active, seeking autonomy for the 'ulama from the supervision of the FLN-state.

If we take it to its logical extreme, this demand implied the dismantling of the FLN-state. The only way in which it could avoid this awkward implication was if it implied, instead, a qualitative development of the FLN-state in the direction of political institutionalisation through the creation of deliberative institutions within which the 'ulama would have representation as of right, and by means of which representation they could regain a collective and relatively autonomous voice while abiding within the (modified) framework of the FLN-state. But at no point in the 1960s did *Al Qiyam* propose this alternative, nor did Soltani and Sahnoun do so in the 1980s. They had no clear practical political vision at all and, in the circumstances which actually obtained, their agitation, by tending to subvert the FLN-state by implication, could only facilitate the scenario of a restoration of French power.

The middle class, private sector traders and small entrepreneurs who have formed a core constituency of the Islamist movement have also, tacitly, expressed nostalgia for an important aspect of the colonial status quo ante, in that their principal grievance against the status quo has been their exasperation with state interference and obstruction via endless red tape, corrupt officials, arbitrary abuse of power at the expense of their property rights, etc. (This tacit nostalgia for the supposed virtues of the colonial régime has not been confined to the Islamic-inclined middle class; it has also been characteristic of the francophile wing of the middle class, especially - although not only - in Kabylia,⁴⁸ but expressed since 1989 in anti-

⁴⁶ Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.19.

⁴⁷ Khadda & Gadant (1990), p.19-20.

⁴⁸ As I discovered for myself during the year I spent in Bouïra in 1973-1974 and during my fieldwork in the region 1975 and 1976; Farouk Benatia has suggested that this same nostalgia has characterised the outlook of the old Muslim élite of Algiers; see his important study, *Alger: Agrégat ou Cité? L'intégration citadine de 1919 à 1979*, Algiers: Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion, 1980, p.161.

Islamic, not Islamic, terms.) The urban poor, by contrast, and especially the hittistes (unemployed youth), have not shared this nostalgia for the colonial era at all, for the excellent reason that they have absolutely no memory of it.

It is essential to bear in mind that the vast majority, between 70 and 90 per cent, of the population of Algiers, Oran and the other major cities - and of the urban poor above all - at the end of the 1980s were first or at most second generation immigrants from the countryside.⁴⁹ In the case of Algiers, the majority of rural migrants came from the mountain districts of the Tell Atlas, and especially from the areas which had been devastated by the war, where scores of villages and hundreds of smaller settlements (hamlets and isolated homesteads) were destroyed by the French army, the areas in question declared to be zones interdites ('forbidden zones' - that is, what the American army in Vietnam called 'free-fire zones') whose populations were forcibly evacuated and provisionally resettled in what were euphemistically called 'regroupment centres' in the lowlands or near the main roads where they could be kept under permanent surveillance and from which they were forbidden to return to their homes and fields on pain of being shot on sight.⁵⁰

The urban poor had no positive memory of the colonial régime. They had a memory of the wartime FLN, which was a romantic memory, and a memory of the Boumediène régime, which was a wistful memory. In 1988, the slogans of the adolescent rioters expressed this nostalgia for the time when Algeria counted for something in the world and when injustice and corruption were held in check by a strong and just ruler, *zaïm fahl*, Houari Boumediène. At no point have the Islamist movements before or since 1988 given expression to the nostalgia of their mass social base for the Boumediène period. With the FIS, however, the Islamist movement gave elaborate and emphatic expression to their nostalgia for the wartime FLN, in radical contrast to the behaviour of Sahnoun and Soltani in the early 1980s.

The nostalgia for Boumediène was not merely nostalgia, since it was linked to a demand for the future: if you cannot give us Boumediène back, give us another *zaïm fahl*. It was on the basis of this outlook that many Algerians who voted for the FIS in 1990 and 1991 began to warm to Mohammed Boudiaf in 1992 and may ultimately have voted for Liamine Zeroual in 1995. But the demand for *zaïm fahl*, while not necessarily merely nostalgic, nevertheless translated an unarticulated demand for the return to a status quo ante in a broader sense. This status quo ante was something which the urban poor had experienced in the self-governing village and tribal communities from which they had come, that is, a moral polity.

The popular demand for a return to a moral polity was not the same yearning as that of ideological Islamism for a recreation of the *dawla islamiyya* which had supposedly existed under the Rashidin in 7th century Mecca, it was something else altogether.

Central to this idea of the moral polity were three linked notions. The first of these was the demand for the man in charge to be above reproach, honest, impartial, firm, a man of integrity respected by all; in this sense, *zaïm fahl* was a counterpart or sequel to the man who

⁴⁹ M'Hammed Boukhobza, *Octobre '88: Évolution ou Rupture?* Algiers: Éditions Bouchène, 1991, pp.56-57; see also Marc Côte, *L'Algérie ou l'Espace Retourné*, Paris: Flammarion, 1988, pp.257ff, and especially Benatia (1980).

⁵⁰ Mohamed Teguia, *L'Algérie en Guerre*, Algiers: Office des Publications Universitaires, 1988, pp.257-264; Pierre Bourdieu & Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le Déracinement: la Crise de l'Agriculture Traditionnelle en Algérie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964, pp.47ff.

presides the village or tribal council, al-amin (literally: 'the person in whom trust is placed'). The second was the demand for the laws decided on by the deliberative institutions - not to mention the leaders - of the community to be observed by the authorities themselves as well as enforced by them on the people: Chadli, barkana min el vis! Qouli weldek ired e-devis!⁵¹ The third was the demand for the people to be answered for in the political process by which they were governed - Boumedien, ardja' Ina! - for it is an essential characteristic of the strong, just, ruler that he does not despise his people but, on the contrary, takes them into consideration.

It was the last demand that was least clearly articulated. No slogans that I know of bear witness to it directly in its positive content at least. Its negative content, however, the constantly and bitterly reiterated protest against al-hagra⁵² - the contempt with which the regime treated ordinary people, those without piston ('pull'), without al-maarifa ('contacts'), in short, without representation, and the humiliation which it heaped on them - could not have been more explicitly and emphatically expressed.

Thus the subsequent rallying of the people to the FIS expressed an enthusiastic popular acceptance of the new party as its interlocutor vis-à-vis 'le Pouvoir'. The exceptions to this proved the unwritten rule in question.

The most obvious exception occurred in Kabylia, where most people preferred their own, home-grown, interlocutors, whether those proposed by Saïd Sadi's Berberist-secularist Rally for Culture and Democracy (Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie, RCD) or those proposed by Hocine Aït Ahmed's Socialist Forces Front (Front des Forces Socialistes, FFS). A more discreet exception occurred in the wilaya of Ghardaia, the capital of the Mزاب region of the northern Sahara, where the distinctive (Berber but also Ibadi) population of the seven cities of the Mzabis voted for their own, independent, favourite son candidates. In all cases, popular support for these parties and candidates expressed a negative attitude towards the FLN based on the experience of not being answered for by the FLN. And the same logic actually explained the resilience of popular support for the FLN in eastern and especially south-eastern Algeria, that is, in those regions which had provided a massively disproportionate number of the regime's senior personnel during the 1980s and whose populations had accordingly continued to feel, with reason, that they at least were answered for by the FLN and taken into consideration by the state.

Thus underlying the demand for a moral polity was, among other things, the demand for an egalitarian tradition of political representation to be honoured by the state in its relations with the people. This tradition was not an urban tradition, it was a rural tradition, and it is still alive and well in much of the Algerian countryside.

The rural origins of urban protest in Algeria

⁵¹ This alluded to the fact that one of Chadli's sons was widely rumoured to be implicated in an operation to defraud the Banque Extérieure d'Algérie of AD170 million (\$30 million) worth of foreign currency; see the article by Frédéric Fritscher in *Le Monde*, October 15, 1988; for details, see Charef (1989), pp.60-61.

⁵² This is usually written *hogra* in French newspapers and secondary sources; it is not clear that there is any warrant for this deformation of the word.

A striking feature of the October riots was the ‘vandalism’ which accompanied it, the almost systematic destruction of state property in which the rioters engaged.⁵³ In investigating the poorer public housing estates in Algiers towards the end of the war of liberation, Pierre Bourdieu noted that, on those estates whose Muslim residents had succeeded in securing an economic niche for themselves, very little vandalism occurred; it was only on estates whose residents had apparently despaired of making it in the city that vandalism was frequent, and, significantly, the adolescents who engaged in this incurred little or no disapproval from their elders.⁵⁴ The same investigation led Bourdieu to a second observation: rural migrants who were succeeding in their new environment tended to conform to the family model appropriate to it, that of the nuclear family of two or at most three generations (parents, children, grandparents), whereas the families which had got nowhere evinced a strong tendency to encourage their relatives who had stayed in the country to join them in the city. The logic of this was that, having failed to make the transition to the economic and social roles characteristic of a modern city, these people tended, as a second-best solution, to reproduce in their new environment the social organisation and the concomitant solidarities of the environment they had left.⁵⁵ This ‘ruralisation’ of the poorer quarters of the city went a long way.

The new arrivals seek to make work for themselves on the perimeter of the estate, setting up small mobile businesses or spreading out their wretched, miscellaneous wares on the ground. At the same time, the European-style shops are abandoned. Meeting-places spring up spontaneously around the estate. Groups of old men are again to be seen leaning against the walls of the building, talking all day, as they did in the shanty-town or in their village in Kabylia. But those who turn a modest estate into a shanty town are not obeying a backward-looking traditionalism. Prevented from adapting, as they wished, to an environment which requires a transformation of all their attitudes, deprived of the material conditions for such a transformation, they are simply re-creating the previous living conditions which they thought they were leaving behind them when they arrived in a modern estate.⁵⁶

The social change which had occurred between 1960 and 1988 was a quantitative but not a qualitative one. Such run-down housing estates cum shanty-towns had proliferated and become the norm, and it was no longer the old men alone who propped up the walls, but virtually all males aged 15 (or even 12) and over. This ruralisation of the poorer quarters had political implications.

The society of the Algerian countryside, throughout most of Algeria’s history, has for the most part been a society of self-governing tribes and villages, in which the vast majority of the population has enjoyed political enfranchisement through representation in the village or tribal assembly, the jema’a.⁵⁷ Only a small minority of families, notably the practitioners of despised occupations (butchers, grain-measurers) and the descendants of slaves (abid or

⁵³ Charef (1989), pp.84-126; see also *Le Monde*, 6-10 October 1988; *Libération*, 7-10 October 1988; *Le Figaro*, 6 October 1988; *International Herald Tribune*, 7 October 1988; *Financial Times*, 8 & 10 October 1988; *Guardian*, 8 October 1988.

⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The disenchantment of the world’, in Pierre Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.87, fn 13.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu (1979), pp.86-87.

⁵⁶ Bourdieu (1979), p.87.

⁵⁷ For a fuller discussion of the jema’a in Algeria’s political traditions, see my article, ‘The FLN: French conceptions, Algerian realities’, in George Joffé (ed.), *North Africa: Nation, State and Region*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp.111-141 republished with corrections as chapter 2 of my book *The Battlefield, Algeria 1988-2002: studies in a broken polity*, London: Verso, 2003.

aklan), were denied this representation; another minority, the religious aristocracy constituted by maraboutic and sherifian lineages, was also unrepresented in the jema'a, but this is because they were, so to speak, above it. Everyone else enjoyed equal political status in the sense of possessing the same formal political rights; political influence was not evenly distributed, of course, and this inequality was liable to perpetuate itself, but in principle a weak family's political fortunes could improve, as those of a powerful family could decline.

An important aspect of this society has been the demanding ideology embodied in the code of honour, which Bourdieu has also admirably described.⁵⁸ This ideology is demanding because it requires everyone (abid or aklan apart) to exhibit a panoply of virtues - dignity, courage, truthfulness, courtesy, generosity and wisdom - usually associated with aristocracies alone in most other societies, while simultaneously generating and reproducing powerful egalitarian impulses. The notion of deference as a general disposition informing social relations has little application except in respect of one's elders and the members of saintly lineages, whereas the crucially distinct notion of consideration (al-'anâya) applies all the time. A man (rajul or, in Berber, argaz) is a man of honour and entitled to consideration (as his womenfolk are), and the consideration owed to the men of honour is indissociably linked to the fact that their words count because they are represented in the jema'a, that is to say, enfranchised.

In Kabylia, and no doubt elsewhere in Algeria, the word 'anâya has the derived meaning of protection.⁵⁹ The consideration which people enjoy protects them from affronts to their self-respect, from outrage, insult and shame. The same applies to places: for men to outrage the place of assembly, the place of reasonableness and decorum par excellence, by coming to blows there is to violate its 'anâya, the consideration which is its due and by which its dignity is normally assured. A stranger to a village will be allowed to enter it only if he is under the protection of a villager, whose personal 'anâya is first and foremost a guarantee to the community that his guest will respect its honour. In this way the term has acquired a third meaning, that of the given word, the commitment;⁶⁰ the host commits himself to answer to his fellow villagers for the behaviour of his guest, who is thereby sheltered from whatever recriminations from other villagers his conduct may provoke.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that these values had become a thing of the past by the time Algeria acceded to independence after 132 years of colonialism. I encountered them all on a daily basis in the course of my fieldwork in Kabylia in the 1970s. Their survival was something of which the state was well aware and which it knew how to turn to its advantage. When President Boumediène in 1968 made his first visit as head of state to Kabylia, where his role in suppressing the recent FFS rebellion had left bitter memories, he was publicly approached on his arrival at Tizi Ouzou by an ancien moudjahid (former maquisard) who placed a burnous on the President's shoulders, saying, solemnly and clearly so that all could hear, "aqalak dhi l-'anâya ou varnous leqvail": "you are under the protection of the burnous of the Kabyles".⁶¹ In this way the collective honour of the people of Kabylia was publicly engaged to ensure that the President's visit passed off safely and without unpleasant incident, as it did.

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The sense of honour' in Bourdieu (1979), pp.95-132.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that 'anâya is an Arabic word.

⁶⁰ Bourdieu (1979), p.103.

⁶¹ I owe this to local informants in Greater Kabylia.

The same values and logic underlay a subsequent but very different incident, when the wali (governor) of Greater Kabylia decided to visit the remote village of Tizit in the Illilten tribe of the high Jurjura, apparently in order to demonstrate that his writ ran everywhere in his wilaya. The men of Tizit took a different view, and not one of them was disposed to extend his 'anâya to the unfortunate wali, who unwisely entered the village without local protection. He was immediately seized and bodily expelled from the village by several of Tizit's citizens, who told him: "Toi, tu n'as rien à foutre ici; tu n'as qu'à rentrer chez toi" ("you have no business here; you had better just go home").⁶²

The survival of these values in the mountains of Algeria, and the capacity of village society to tell the state where it gets off, is illustrated by another, more recent, incident I heard of in the course of my fieldwork in 1983.⁶³ Tazerbouzt is a large village which dominates the Aït Kani tribe⁶⁴ settled on the southern slopes of the Jurjura overlooking the valley of the Oued Sahel. After independence it was included in the commune of Chorfa, which takes its name from an important maraboutic village at the foot of the mountains, and Tazerbouzt supplied the President of the Popular Communal Assembly (Assemblée Populaire Communale, APC) – that is, the mayor – of Chorfa from 1967 to 1975.⁶⁵ But the people of Tazerbouzt would also frequent the larger township of Tazmalt, the centre of the commune of the same name immediately to the east of Chorfa. By the early 1980s the men of Tazerbouzt had a score to settle with the gendarmes of Tazmalt, who for some reason had formed the habit of arresting young men from Tazerbouzt on their visits to the Tazmalt market and roughing them up. Eventually the gendarmes went too far, and the matter was debated in the jema'a of Tazerbouzt and a decision reached. The men of Tazerbouzt got onto their lorries, drove down the mountain to Tazmalt, took the gendarmerie by storm and, taking their time about it, systematically beat up every gendarme they could get their hands on (taking care, however, not to kill anyone or inflict permanent injury). Having 'administered a correction' and 'washed their honour clean', they got back onto their lorries and drove home. According to my informants, the local senior army officer, having investigated les tenants et les aboutissants (the ins and outs) of the affair, decided that the gendarmes had asked for it and no action was taken. Thereafter, young men from Tazerbouzt visiting Tazmalt were treated with consideration by all and sundry.

That the value of consideration is intimately connected with those of honour and respect, and thus the polar opposite of what Algerians mean when complaining of al-hagra, should be clear. But it is simultaneously linked to the notion of political representation and enfranchisement. To extend one's 'anâya is to commit oneself to answering for someone else; it is to give one's word concerning the behaviour of another. It is thus central to the function performed by the person who ensures the representation of others in the political organisation of a self-governing village or tribe.

⁶² My informants were from the Aït Boudrar tribe but had close connections with Tizit. In a second, somewhat fuller, version of this story, I was told that the wali had gone to Tizit to arbitrate a dispute between Tizit and a neighbouring village over access to water; the men of Tizit had not solicited his intervention and, suspecting that he would favour their adversaries, refused to accept his arbitration, which is why they sent him packing so unceremoniously.

⁶³ Once again, my informants were from the Aït Boudrar but had connections with several villages on the southern side of the Jurjura, including those of the Aït Kani.

⁶⁴ This tribe was renamed the 'douar Aghbalou' by the French administration.

⁶⁵ *El Moudjahid*, 27 January & 10 February 1967; 16 February 1971.

In the villages of Kabylia, every lineage is represented in the village jema'a by one of its own, known as the tamen (plural: temman), which is a Berber form of the Arabic word dhâmin and literally means the person who vouches for, answers for, guarantees.⁶⁶ The temman are chosen by the man who presides the jema'a, l'amin, and thus are liable to be replaced when the amin is replaced. Their role is to answer for their lineages: when the jema'a decides to raise a levy to pay for repairs to the mosque, the tamen vouches for his lineage's willingness to pay its share; when the jema'a decides to reinforce the nocturnal guard on the village's gardens against the depredations of wild boars, the tamen guarantees that men from his lineage will take their turn; when a member of a lineage is fined for transgressing a village by-law, it is his tamen who answers for the offender to the jema'a and pays the fine to the village chest. The conception of representation here is quite different from that which informs modern Western democracies, since the tamen is appointed (after consultation) by the amin rather than elected by his 'constituents', but it has the same effects of legitimating the decisions of the jema'a and enfranchising the population in general. The lineage accepts a decision, even if it dislikes it, because its point of view has been heard and its honour both satisfied and engaged; and a member of the lineage, in virtue of the fact that his lineage has a tamen in the jema'a and is accordingly answered for whenever any decision is taken, has political status as an enfranchised member of the community and is entitled to consideration accordingly.

This tradition of political organisation and representation is not a purely Kabyle or Berber affair. The jema'a as the principal institution of village and tribal self-government used to be found across the Algerian countryside⁶⁷ and is still to be found in many regions to this day. Whatever variations of detail may obtain, the basic logic of the jema'a is undoubtedly the same everywhere. Among the Arabic speaking hillsmen of north-eastern Algeria, the word tamen (or dhamin) is not used; the man who answers for his lineage is called wajh en-nas ('the face of the people'),⁶⁸ but his functions and what they presuppose and imply are the same.

What qualifies a man for the role of tamen or wajh en-nas? The overriding principle is that he must be able to answer for those he is supposed to represent, that his word is good. This in turn presupposes that he is honest, that he possesses good judgement and is able as well as disposed to represent the point of view of his lineage accurately, that he is respected in his lineage and enjoys its confidence. Only if these conditions are met can he effectively vouch for it and guarantee its consent to and acquiescence in the assembly's decision, so that the commitments he enters into in its name will indeed be honoured by it. It follows that the amin's choice of temman is a delicate matter, and that a mistaken choice will provoke a

⁶⁶ The argument here draws on my earlier article in Joffé (1993) and a full length study of the political history of Kabylia which is currently in preparation.

⁶⁷ The tradition of the jema'a is briefly noted by Bernard Cubertafond, *La République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979, p.188; for an interesting discussion of both officially sponsored and unofficial, 'occult', jema'at during the colonial period, see Jean-Paul Charnay, *La vie musulmane en Algérie d'après la jurisprudence de la première moitié du XXe siècle*, 2nd edition, Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1991, pp.226-231; Bourdieu mentions the traditional salience of the jema'a in the Nord-Constantinois in Bourdieu & Sayad (1964), pp.131ff; Alain Romey discusses the role of the jema'a among an important tribe of long-distance transhumants in southern Algeria in his fine study, *Les Saïd Atha de N'Goussa: histoire & état actuel de leur nomadisme*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983, pp.73ff; see also Thierry Michalon, *Les Collectivités Locales Algériennes d'Hier à Aujourd'hui*, doctoral thesis, Université d'Aix-Marseille III, 1976, t.1, p.40; t.2, pp.548ff, and Khelifa Bouzebra, *Culture and Political Mobilization in Algeria*, PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1982.

⁶⁸ I am grateful to Mohammed Harbi for this information (private communication).

reaction from the lineage concerned, which is liable to put in question the amin's judgement and his own fitness for his office.

The qualities required for a *tamen* or *wajh en-nas* are those of a man of honour. But the communities which have traditionally governed themselves through their *jema'ât* have all been communities of Muslims. To be a member of the community of believers was always and remains today the precondition of membership of the political community of the Algerian village or tribe. And there has therefore always been an important element of interaction, interpenetration and identification between the ethics embodied in the traditional code of honour and the ethical teachings of Islam, founded on the opposition of Good and Evil and the corresponding importance of the distinction between the good man and the bad man, *insan al-kheir* and *insan al-shar*.

A man of honour, in the fullest and most complete sense, is a good man, a man of good not evil, *rajul al-kheir*, *argaz l'aali*. The close relationship between the notion of honourability and that of goodness is routinely affirmed in the sayings associated with the *jema'a*. "Sortez sur la place, hommes d'honneur; puissiez-vous connaître le bien," calls Smaïl, the village crier summoning the men of Tala to a meeting of the *jema'a* in Mammeri's fine novel.⁶⁹ And in speaking in the assembly, on a matter of litigation between families for example, a man may give point to his words and put moral pressure on his hearers by addressing them by the phrase: "Peace be upon you, O assembly of good", *Salaamu alaikum, ya jema'at al-kheir*.

We have already seen in the incidents recounted above how, in various ways, the Algerian state since independence has been partly disposed and partly obliged to recognise the continuing salience of the traditional code of honour, has made use of it, has acknowledged its force and, when necessary, accepted its claims. Nowhere has this been of more significance than in its approach to the business of political representation.

From 1967 onwards, the state organised elections at regular intervals, to the municipal councils known as 'popular communal assemblies' (APCs), regional councils, the 'popular wilaya assemblies' (*assemblées populaires de wilaya*, APWs) and, from 1977 onwards, the Popular National Assembly (*Assemblée Populaire Nationale*, APN). Although conducted within the constraints of the one-party state, these elections offered electors a degree of choice: for the APCs and APWs there were invariably twice as many candidates on the party list as there were seats to be filled, and the ratio was three to one for the APN elections. Since neither ideology nor programme differentiated the candidates from one another, what criteria were to inform the electors' choice? The answer supplied by the authorities themselves was: 'l'engagement, le compétence et l'intégrité' (commitment, competence and integrity).⁷⁰ In this way, the state incorporated, reproduced and confirmed the traditional values.

The arrangements made to provide an acceptable element of political representation to the Algerian people during the 1960s and 1970s worked reasonably well, at any rate in the countryside. By offering a choice of candidates, the Party list ensured that most villages would normally have at least one candidate in the running in APC elections, which

⁶⁹ Mouloud Mammeri, *L'Opium et le Baton*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1965, pp.90-91.

⁷⁰ Michalon (1976), t. 2, p.347; this injunction remained in force in the 1980s; see the text of the 'enriched' (i.e. revised and, if anything, diluted) version of *La Charte Nationale*, Algiers: République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire, Parti du FLN, 1986, pp.102-103.

accordingly appeared legitimate to the electorate concerned.⁷¹ By the same device, the state guaranteed that there would be an element of competition, expressed in the informal constitution of rival 'slates' or 'tickets', which made the elections interesting, because specific pledges could be extracted from the candidates.⁷² The great exception to this rule was the big cities and Algiers above all.

In every election and referendum held in Algeria between 1967 and 1987, the lowest turn-out was invariably recorded in Algiers.⁷³ The mass of the population took no interest in the elections at the local level (APC), and did not bother to vote at this level or any other (APW, APN). This had everything to do with their inchoate social condition. In a commune in the mountains, it was easy for the electors to decide whom to vote for. They would know some of the candidates on the Party list already, and a few conversations with fellow villagers and at the local market would be enough to complete this information regarding the remainder. They would thus be able to make reasonably informed judgements concerning the personal qualities of the candidates. In addition, the voting decisions of the electors would be guided by considerations of the general interest of the community to which they belonged: a village as a whole would often be persuaded by its leading figures to back one of the informal slates rather than the other, because undertakings had been quietly given (if you vote for us and we get elected, your village will get a new road, electricity, etc.) and realistic calculations made.⁷⁴

Little or none of this could apply in the poorer quarters of Algiers; the size of the population of each municipality, the transient element within it, the low levels of social integration, the make-shift character and limited scope of such traditional kinship solidarities as had been recreated - all this meant that it was extremely difficult if not impossible for the electors to make any kind of informed judgement on the candidates proposed to them, let alone a judgement guided by a strong sense of the collective interest, such as might obtain in a mountain village and which, by facilitating 'block voting', made possible the kind of quid pro quo that is an essential part of the relationship between electors and elected in representative politics. And whereas rural electors could expect to be able to put pressure on the successful APC candidates to deliver on their promises after polling day, the urban poor could not realistically expect to exercise any such pressure at all.

And so the urban masses were unable to secure effective intermediaries with the state. They did not vote and, being predominantly unemployed or active only in the informal sector of the economy, they were also outside the 'mass organisations' (workers' union, traders' union, peasants' union etc.) supervised by the party which offered some representation to occupational categories. And so, lacking effective representation within the state, they were accordingly inclined to place all their hopes and trust in the man who alone represented the state to them, the President, according to his actions and his personal qualities an importance that the rural electorate was never disposed to accord.

⁷¹ Michalon (1976), t. 2, pp.346ff.; see also Hugh Roberts, *Political Development in Algeria: the region of Greater Kabylia*, D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1980, pp.307ff., and Slimane Bedrani, *Les élections communales dans la daïra d'Aflou*, University of Algiers, Mémoire pour le D.E.S. en Sciences Politiques, 1973.

⁷² Roberts (1980), pp.307ff.; Michalon (1976), t. 2, p.353.

⁷³ Benatia (1980), p.186, fn 75, notes the high abstention rate in the bidonvilles of Algiers but offers no explanation for it.

⁷⁴ Roberts (1980), pp.307ff.; Michalon (1976), t. 2, p.353.

The demand for *zāim fahl* had never been a demand of the population of the countryside. The term *zāim* has no place in the traditional political vocabulary of Kabylia, for example, and an obsessive insistence on 'collective leadership' and a corresponding hostility to 'zāimism' was a major feature of the politics of the wartime FLN.⁷⁵ 'Zāim fahl' was the entirely novel demand of those elements of the rural population who had migrated to the cities and lost in the process their capacity to make their words count in the political process, and who had come to depend to an extreme and unique degree, for their sense of membership of the political community and thus for their self-respect, on the 'anāya of the ra'îs, the consideration he expressed for them, the appropriateness and reliability of the commitments he made on their behalf or at least in their name, and the extent to which he answered for them in the highest councils of the state. The urban mass could feel represented and legitimately governed only in so far as the ra'îs performed the functions of *tamen* or *wajh ennas*, as well as those of *l-amin*, the man in whom you can have confidence. When Boumediène died, the urban poor lost their *tamen*, and by 1988 they were acutely aware of the fact.

In the traditional political organisation of the Algerian countryside, a lineage which has no *tamen* in the *jema'a* does not exist. The fortunes of lineages vary over time, and an index of their fortunes is their numerical size. A lineage that has dwindled in size will not be able to sustain its claim to independent representation indefinitely. Sooner or later it will be forced to accept that it is answered for by the *tamen* of another lineage, which means that, politically speaking, it has ceased to exist; in time, it will be assimilated into the larger lineage on which it has come to depend in the political sphere. The processes which have these outcomes are ones over which the interested parties have little control; members of an old lineage reduced to dependent status will be unable to take pride in their situation, but the process which has led to this is not cause for disgrace, and cannot easily be resisted. It is another matter entirely when a substantial lineage with no cause to relinquish its claims to consideration and representation in the political sphere is denied these.

The logic of the functioning of the *jema'a* is that each decision reflects the consensus of opinion of those present, but that a decision is valid only if all relevant groups are answered for by their respective *temman* at the meeting in question. All groups must thereafter accept and abide by the decision if their point of view has been heard and taken into account. But, by the same logic, a group which has not been answered for, because its *tamen* was not present at the meeting, will not feel bound by the decision at all (unless the *tamen's* absence was simply a matter of an individual's dereliction of duty). And a group whose *tamen* has not been invited to the meeting will feel obliged by the logic of its situation to reject and contest the decisions taken, irrespective of the content of these decisions, because to abide by them would be to acknowledge the authority of a body which denies to the group in question the right to have a say in the decisions it takes; it would therefore be to accept its own disfranchisement and its reduction to a dependent status in relation to one or another of the groups properly represented within the *jema'a*. And that would never do: no group possessing a respectable number of adult males could honourably resign itself to such a demotion in the political system. In other words, respect for the *jema'a* and its decisions is conditional; and if the *jema'a* does not fulfil its share of the necessary conditions by recognising a given lineage, the latter is honour bound to defy the *jema'a* and treat it with a reciprocal contempt.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Roberts (1993).

⁷⁶ Roberts (1993).

In a state which relentlessly invoked a war fought mainly in the mountains by men and women enrolled in a movement whose inner life was thoroughly informed by the political traditions of the mountains, but which was unable to integrate the urban poor - composed overwhelmingly of migrants or the children of migrants from those same mountains - into the modern economy or accommodate them in the system of representation, and which was no longer presided over by a strong man capable of imposing order on the powerful factions within the regime and seeing to it that the mass of the people were not forgotten but were guaranteed a necessary minimum of social justice, what were the urban poor, whose fathers had been men of honour, to do if not either take everything done to them lying down, or riot? And what could they do when they rioted except trash - that is, express contempt for, refuse to recognise - the institutions and property of the 'state' which, possessed by others, refused to recognise them?

The behaviour of the crowd in 18th century England was orderly because its objects were economic, not political. The "traditional rights and customs" it was asserting, the "traditional view of social norms and obligations" which oriented it, and the "definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal" which it endeavoured to enforce, were all economic in content. In the successive feudal and post-feudal forms of the partly aristocratic and partly monarchical constitution of the English state, the crowd had never been enfranchised, and in the 18th century it was still disinclined to make an issue of its political status; the people had no quarrel with their King or his government and no reason to rebel against the state or attack its local representatives or institutions.⁷⁷ Their quarrel was with the local embodiments of the new 'political economy', and in order to subject the latter to their own point of view, their moral economy, they needed to impose their own order on them in the commercial sphere, which they could do only by using their collective force in an orderly manner.

The Algerian crowd's quarrel was with the state, and the substance of the rioters' grievance was not that they wanted an entirely different political order, but that the existing political order no longer included or recognised them, no longer respected them nor deserved their respect. The crowd had no alternative order to impose in the political sphere or the economic sphere, and therefore no practical objective which it required the constructive and therefore orderly use of its collective force to attain. It had only its nuisance value with which to make its point, and it could only force the authorities to recognise this by acting in a disorderly manner.

"Nahnu rejali!" "Nous sommes des hommes!" In the incidents of rural protest recounted above, the actors were exclusively men. The same was conspicuously true of the riots of October 1988, in which only males - young men and boys - were involved.⁷⁸ The exclusively

⁷⁷ Because the moral economy of the crowd involved the selective invocation of the 'paternalist' model established by the British monarchy itself under Elizabeth I and codified under Charles I, the crowd tended to be explicitly royalist, if anything, in its wider political outlook (see Thompson, 1991, p.228), but it was generally apolitical. Thompson notes the emergence of a more political rhetoric, including anti-monarchical slogans, in the second half of the 18th century but suggests that this was mainly just rhetoric, intended to put the wind up the local establishment, rather than indicative of a genuine political purpose; the intensification of this trend from around 1800, when the new political economy has explicitly triumphed over the old paternalism at the level of national government policy, is clearly another matter, but should be understood, he argues, as evidence that "we are coming to the end of one tradition, and the new tradition has scarcely emerged" (Thompson, 1991, p.249).

⁷⁸ None of the newspaper reports at the time (see footnote 41 above) mention the involvement of any women in the riots; the "portrait-robot" ('identikit-picture') of a rioter sketched by Abed Charef was that of a young man aged between 15 and 20 (Charef, 1989, pp.95-96); recently M'Hammed Yazid remarked that, while watching the riots, he had the impression of a repeat of the great demonstrations of December 1961 (*sic*; he presumably meant to say 1960), "avec les femmes en moins" ("with the women left out"); see *El Watan*, 5 October 2000.

masculine character of these incidents is consistent with the thesis that they expressed the moral polity of the crowd rather than the moral economy of the crowd. The operation of market forces was not at issue. The sharp or inhuman practices of farmers or traders - such as housewives might be better able than their husbands to detect⁷⁹ - were neither here nor there. It was le Pouvoir, as-Sulta - the composition, character and behaviour of the government, the contempt it displayed for the People and the humiliation it inflicted on the People - which was at issue. These affrays were all about politics, and the public conduct of politics in Algeria has traditionally been an exclusively male concern. "La djemaa est aux hommes."⁸⁰

Conclusion

In their dealings with the Algerian people, the Algerian authorities are no longer guided by this tradition. This departure has a positive aspect, in so far as women have begun to be allowed, at least formally, to play a role in political life, as the composition of the government appointed last June demonstrates. But the state is yet to repeal or amend the notorious 1984 Family Code which made adult women legally dependent upon and junior to their male relatives, and it long ago ceased to regard ordinary Algerian adult males as men. The concept of rujla – manliness, the quality and status of rejal – and the code of male honour continues to inform the outlook of the officer corps of the army, but the latter behaves as if it has a national monopoly of rujla, and treats the civilian population as consisting of anything but men – as women, children, even animals.⁸¹

Contempt, al-hagra, is thus a fundamental premise of the way in which the state-society relationship is now managed, or rather mismanaged, by the authorities in contemporary Algeria, of the corresponding popular disposition to engage in violent contestation of le Pouvoir, and of the degraded condition to which the state has accordingly been reduced. It follows that a proper restoration of order to Algerian political life requires the state tacitly to take the rioters' point and work to put an end to the intolerable disorder it has precipitated and allowed to endure. It can do so only by replacing this disorder with something which embodies the principles of an intelligible and legitimate political order – honest and responsible government, the rule of law and effective representation - and so corresponds in essential respects to the moral polity which the rioters have been canvassing.

⁷⁹ As Thompson notes of the English crowd in fascinating detail (Thompson, 1991, pp.233ff.)

⁸⁰ Mouloud Feraoun, 'La djemaa des Aït Flane' in *Jours de Kabylie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1954, p.21.

⁸¹ 'Quel cheptel!' – 'what a herd!' – was the contemptuous reflection on the civilian wing of the political class by Algeria's former defence minister, retired Major General Khaled Nezzar in a conversation with the Member of the European Parliament, Hélène Flautre, according to the French journalist Florence Aubenas, *Libération*, 3 July 2002.

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- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



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