Immunity to the Arab Spring? Fear, Fatigue and Fragmentation in Algeria

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ABSTRACT *Rather than asking why the Arab Spring has not spread to Algeria, a question that necessitates a comparative approach, this paper will argue that the localised protests that have become a familiar feature of Algerian life for over half a decade respond to Algerian dynamics and have continued to do so in the wake of the Arab Spring. As part of an on-going research project, this paper will use social memory to explore the contradictory nature of Algeria's past-present relationship, by looking at experiences which at once define what Algerians expect from the state and demobilise energies for collective change. The paper will argue that the fragmented nature of narratives about the past, as well as related generational divides, are factors that have inhibited the growth of cohesive movements demanding political change. In addition, the paper will look critically at assumptions that fears of a return to the violent 1990s are defining reticence toward revolution in Algeria, and will suggest that the riots of October 1988 provide a more useful reference point for understanding the clear lack of enthusiasm for a home-grown Arab Spring.*

[Editor's Note: This paper won the *New Middle Eastern Studies* Best Paper Competition at the 2012 BRISMES Graduate Section Conference.]

Introduction: Algerian Protests and the Arab Spring Contagion Paradigm

The localised street-based protests and riots in Algeria that make the headlines of national newspapers began at least half a decade before the onset of the Arab Spring and have continued unabated both during the zenith of the Spring and throughout its aftermath. Official figures show 112,878 interventions by riot police in 2010 and 18 interventions per day in the first half of 2011.[1] Indeed, long before the actions of Mohammed Bouazizi that sparked the Arab Spring, Algeria's first case of self-immolation occurred in May 2004, when a 40-year old man from Djelfa in the High Plateaux of central Algeria set fire to himself after the seizure of his assets by the courts. In October 2009, a father doused himself and his entire family with petrol and set them alight in front of the council offices in the north western city of Chlef after their home, deemed by authorities to be an illegal construction, was demolished.[2] Yet despite these and other similarities, this paper will argue that Algeria's recent protests have come primarily in response to Algerian dynamics and that their analysis within the same framework as the mass protests seen in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010-11 is at best problematic. The paper thus seeks to underscore the specificities of the Algerian context, rather than analysing the country in a regional-comparative framework.

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[1] Quoted in Liberté, 05/12/10 and El Watan, 09/06/11.
[2] For both these cases, see "Voyage dans l'Algérie des immolés", in El Watan, 29/01/12.

Rather than asking why the Arab Spring has not spread to Algeria,[3] this paper posits that a more relevant question may now be 'why should we expect the Arab Spring to spread?' A commonly expressed view in the media at the time of the Arab revolutions was that any country in the region could be next, and regimes were almost expected to fall in a sort of domino effect.[4] The assumption that the revolutions are contagious stems partly from the perceived existence of a common cultural space with similar socio-economic indicators and similarly authoritarian political systems across the region. While shared culture has been recognised in media reports as being insufficient in itself to encourage the spread of revolution across borders, an insistence on empirical socio-economic data such as unemployment figures[5] also seems lacking, since statistics often reduce soft context-based realities to hard statistical categories[6], ignoring, for example, the extent to which informal economies provide regime stability. Authoritarianism is conceptually too broad to support expectations of region-wide contagion given, for example, that political power is not as personalised, nor is wealth as concentrated, in Algeria as it was in Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's Tunisia or Hosni Mubarak's Egypt. This one of the reasons Algerians generally do not hold President Abdelaziz Bouteflika personally responsible for the situation in Algeria. Perhaps most importantly, though, the idea that the Arab Spring *should* spread is problematic in that it appears to rest on the premise that all Arab societies want the same thing, a discourse that shifts the onus for explanation onto what are now perceived to be countries that 'deviate' from the expected progression of the Spring.[7] This has led to media descriptions of Algeria as the "odd-man-out".[8] Such assumptions are also partly underpinned by the link made outside the Arab World between the revolutions and modernist notions of progress, accompanied by a sense of relief among liberal-minded westerners that the Arab World is interested in 'our type' of democracy after all.[9] That the initial Arab revolutions have been conflated with a desire for secular liberal democracy is further evident in perplexed reactions in the media to Islamist electoral victories, which seemed to confirm the fears of conservative Western narratives on the Spring.[10]

The Algerian protests are qualitatively different in two respects from the mass demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, which led to the downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak. Firstly, they are geographically fragmented. These localised protests are not limited to Algeria's largest cities, and have left few corners of the country untouched. These protests are also organized differently from those seen in Tunisia or Egypt during the Arab Spring, since they occur not in main squares and emblematic public spaces, but in front of council offices and at makeshift roadblocks, highlighting their specificity in both intent and audience. Secondly, the protests articulate specific issues affecting limited groups of people. The immediate causes of these protests fall into several main categories: insufficient availability of housing and disputes over who should be on recipient lists for new social housing; insufficient infrastructure, including the poor state of roads or other means of transport (especially after accidents) and, to a lesser extent, the reliability of water and electricity

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[3] See "Why has the Arab Spring not Spread to Algeria?", in The Huffington Post, 04/03/11.

[4] See "Why narrowly cast the push for democracy as the 'Arab' Spring?", in The Guardian, 22/02/12; "González vaticina que la 'primavera árabe' desbordará el mundo islámico", in El País, 14/03/12; US senator John McCain has said that the Spring should spread to Iran, China and Russia (BBC News, 10/16/11).

[5] Kadri, "The Arab Spring and the 'Unemployment Trap'", Global Research, 15 December, 2011 (http://www.globalresearch.ca).

[6] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, 1992).

[7] In addition to the article below on Algeria, see also "Why Sudan is yet to see an Arab Spring?", The Guardian 07/12/11.

[8] See "Why has the Arab Spring not Spread to Algeria?", in The Huffington Post, 04/03/11.

[9] See "Why narrowly cast the push for democracy as the 'Arab' Spring?" (The Guardian, 22/02/12), which not only equates the Spring to the French Revolution, but also hopes that a more "compliant" Islam might emerge from it.

[10] See "El aprendizaje de la decepción", in El País, 29/02/12; "Libyan leader's embrace of Sharia raises eyebrows", 26/11/11, at www.cnn.com; "Muslim Brotherhood top winner in Egyptian election", in USA Today, 12/04/11.

supplies; environmental protests over waste dumping; student protests over changes to the higher education system and campus facilities; and labour related disputes, including those relating to job security, salary and sectorial strikes by teachers, doctors and other workers.[11]

The immediate concerns motivating Algerian protests thus point exclusively to socio-economic motivations that express local or sector-specific issues. Protesters do not appear to be demanding a change of government – much less democracy. Rather than articulating explicit demands for political change at national level, the protests in Algeria represent the normal channel used by communities or groups to articulate their demands to the state. This points to the existence of a radical, demand-based popular political culture that employs direct action to communicate with the state.[12] In this sense, Algerian historian Daho Djerbal has rightly described Algeria as being "in a phase of political activism without political expression".[13] Now well over five years old, this cycle of localised protests and piecemeal palliative measures has become part of the structural relationship between state and society, in which both sides have learned to absorb high levels of localised protests and rioting. As a result, the riots that broke out in Algiers in December 2010 on the eve of the Arab Spring did not have the same impact on public opinion as the disturbances in Tunisia and Egypt. Algerian society was simply not shocked, while Algerian police are well-trained in dealing with protests and riots.

Algeria's cycle of protests, riots and strikes would therefore seem to respond to unique internal dynamics, rather than regional ones, in their motivation, expression, and in the social meanings attached to them. To understand some of these internal dynamics, this paper will begin by examining social memory in order to explore issues that help to explain the level of social unrest, specifically looking at how socially held views of the past contribute to defining what Algerians expect from their political system. Secondly, the paper will investigate why this unrest remains at local level, by looking at how the ways in which the past is remembered in Algeria constitute barriers to contemporary political change. The intention here is not to use memory as a catch-all explanation to the exclusion of other factors, but rather to suggest that memory can be a useful tool to identify some of the dynamics underpinning Algerians' relationship to contemporary politics, and to political change in particular. Because this paper is concerned with how the remembrance, experience, and enactment of the past affects present political subjectivities, the paper's organization will not be chronological, but instead will alternate between describing various narratives on the recent Algerian past, and exploring their effect on contemporary political attitudes. To begin with, this paper defines and describes some useful conceptual aspects of social memory, before analysing the fragmented nature of social memory in Algeria by looking at the officially-sponsored historical narrative and its relationship with popularly held narratives of the past. These, coupled with generational cleavages, provide keys to understanding the social fragmentation that acts as the major factor inhibiting a possible coalescence of many localised acts of protest into a larger movement demanding political change. Secondly, this paper will look critically at the concept of fears of a return to the violence of the 1990s, a factor often cited in arguments seeking to explain the absence of revolutionary change in Algeria,[14] by recontextualising the effects of the 1990s through the truncated hopes that

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[11] This list is a compilation of personal observations and the unpublished work of Sarah Covington; an attempt at providing a diary of the protests and their causes can be found at http://berthoalain.com/documents/emeutes-en-algerie/.

[12] Jabi (2012) "The Impasse of Political Transition in Algeria: Three Generations and Two Scenarios", Case Analysis Series, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, p. 27.

[13] See article "Knowledge and Power in Algeria: an Interview with Daho Djerbal on the Twentieth Anniversary of Naqd", by Miriam Haleh Davis, 31/01/12 at www.jadaliyya.com.

[14] See "Argelia, ¿la tercera revolución?", in El País, 14/02/11; the radio programme, "Avoir vingt ans à Alger", France Culture, 16/03/12; "Algerians go to polls in nation left behind by Arab Spring", in The Guardian, 09/05/12.

emerged from the riots of October 1988. This provides a more helpful starting point in understanding Algeria's current lack of appetite for the Arab Spring.

Social Memory

Collective or group memory is sometimes represented as transcending the individual, and such representations risk slipping into a metaphysics of group thought that gives rise, for example, to notions of 'the Arab mind',[15] or more frequent depictions of a homogenous Arab 'outlook'.[16] While it is crucial to understand that only the individual remembers, individuals do inhabit a social world that shapes what is remembered. Social groups can have memories just as they can have identities, ideas, styles and discourses, all of which are more than the sum of individual subjectivities.[17] However, inappropriate individualisation and psychologisation of social memory leads to discussion of entire social groups remembering, forgetting, repressing and experiencing amnesia – or in the case of Algeria, trauma. In addition to being problematic for the absence of any methodological adjustment between the individual and the group, such language draws on outdated Freudian imagery that would make most contemporary psychologists blush.[18] For the purposes of this research, the term social memory, defined by Geoffrey Cubitt as a "process by which knowledge and awareness of the social past are generated and maintained in human societies",[19] is preferred over collective memory, since it locates the mechanisms that transmit memory firmly within the praxis of social relationships,[20] recognising that memory is filtered through processes of interpretation grounded in social contexts.[21] As opposed to systematically encoded and institutionalised historical narratives as authoritative sources of knowledge, social memory does not attempt to provide an objective map of the past, but establishes narratives of socially located experience embodied and performed by individuals.

Any current social view of the past is the end product of political struggles over meaning in the social world. The importance of social memory lies in the fact that representations of the past articulate a sense of continuity and commonality in social existence – telling *us* about *our* present community or nation – and therefore often "hinge on backward projections of current perceptions of identity".[22] The contested nature of Algeria's political historiography amply demonstrates the use of history as a tool to legitimise or challenge present power relationships, implying that social memory is both the result of previous struggles over social meaning and a lens through which contemporary politics is perceived. When looking at social memory, the relationship between the past and the present is dialectical: our assessments of the present influence the way the past is viewed, while social memories of the past influence our relationship with present events. These two different kinds of past-present relationship must be viewed as interlinked: our perceptions of the past are historically conditioned, but the development and articulation of a sense of the past makes a profound contribution to the unfolding of historical process[23]. As Barry

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[15] Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York, 2002).

[16] Nydell, *Understanding Arabs* (Boston, 2006).

[17] Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

[18] Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in History: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", *History and Theory* 41, 2 (2002), p. 179-97.

[19] Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 26.

[20] McDougall, "Social Memories 'in the Flesh': War and Exile in Algerian Self-Writing", *Alif Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30 (2010), 34-56.

[21] Zerubavel , "Social Memories: steps towards a sociology of the past", *Qualitative Sociology* 19, (1996), 283-299; Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method", *American Historical Review* (1997) 102(5):1386-1403.

[22] Cubitt, *History and Memory*, p. 200.

[23] *Ibid.*

Schwartz describes, the past is "matched to the present both as a model *of* society – since memory reflects past events in terms of the interests, fears and aspirations of the present – and as a model *for* society, because memory embodies both a template that organises behaviour and a frame in which people locate and find meaning for present experience".[24]

The Algerian Past Fragmented

Much of the literature on memory is concerned with power relations. Maintaining that the past is remade in the present for present purposes necessitates a focus on the ways political elites use state institutions such as education systems to foster a sense of national belonging and recount the past as a narrative that increases legitimacy. [25] In this sense, "people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been".[26]

Since independence in 1962, postcolonial nationalism in Algeria has formulated an official historiography that has explicitly set out to decolonise history.[27] The creation of an official narrative on the past was crucial in bolstering the legitimacy of a populist revolutionary political system that was backed up "neither by longstanding tradition nor by universal suffrage".[28] Standing at the centre of this historiography is the idea of 130 years of continual anti-imperialist struggle based on a binary opposition between a united nation and its colonial enemy.[29] This opposition was ultimately rooted both in the *salafi* discourse of Arab-Berber unity and the political culture of the Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA).[30] The Algerian *salafiyya* movement had been of crucial importance in articulating an ancestral resistance against 'Occidental' invaders as the total meaning of history, thus portraying armed resistance to French colonial rule as inevitable.[31] The historiography of the postcolonial state has also created a pantheon of martyrs of the liberation struggle whose sanctification as national heroes has reduced individual experiences and local memories of the war to a single unified narrative of recognisable events and trajectories in the name of a faceless populism.[32] The colonial period is depicted as a parenthesis, albeit a long and painful one, after which the pre-existing Algerian nation was once again able to recover control of its own destiny and reassume its ancestral Arab-Islamic identity.

This narrative masks alternative historical possibilities, as well as ignoring the extent to which many Algerians learned to work the colonial system to their own advantage or even collaborated actively with it. Crucially, it also denies that nationalist categories of thought and practice have their roots in the colonial period, when Muslim Algerians were excluded from French *valeurs républicains* on religious grounds, causing the Muslim signifier to become the space within which nationalist identity condensed. Colonialism thus made it possible to imagine the nation.[33] During the war of independence, the Front de Libération

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[24] *Idem*, p. 245-6.

[25] Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1-14; Megill, "History, Memory, Identity", in *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*, (Chicago, 2007) p. 41-62.

[26] Foucault (1974), "Film in Popular Memory", in Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds.), *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford, 2011), p. 253.

[27] Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société* (Paris, 1965).

[28] McDougall, "Martyrdom and Destiny", p. 51.

[29] Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société*, p. 203-281.

[30] (Parti du Peuple Algérien). The PPA's predecessor, the Étoile Nord-Africaine, was the first to invoke the main themes of revolutionary nationalism: anti-capitalism, rural issues and independence. See Ruedy, *Modern Algeria. Origins and Development of a Nation* (Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 137.

[31] McDougall, "Martyrdom and Destiny".

[32] Scheele, *Village Matters: Knowledge, Politics and Community in Kabylia, Algeria* (Woodbridge, 2009).

[33] McDougall, 'The Fetishism of Identity: Empire, Nation and the Politics of Subjectivity in Algeria" in Chalcraft and Noorani (eds.), *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony* (Basingstoke, 2007).

Nationale (FLN) set about reducing the political diversity of inter-war Algerian nationalism by monopolising the legitimacy of armed struggle[34] and subsequently editing out all contributions made by rival nationalist figures and movements from official history. As a result, in Algeria political history is at once "paradoxically present and absent, mobilised in immediate consciousness and severed from its genesis".[35]

However, officially-sanctioned historical narratives do not have a monopoly on representations of the past and the formation of social memory. In Algeria, the official use of the past as an instrument of power incites a generalized popular mistrust of history and a particular focus on the vested interests of those who lay claim to historical knowledge. Judith Scheele has pointed to a widespread conception among Algerians that 'true' history has been hijacked, held under lock and key and manipulated by specific social groups or the political elite.[36] The absence of historical 'truth' is therefore often used to explain the moral defects of the political system and the inequalities it produces. It follows then that, for many Algerians, future political change is predicated upon recognition of historical 'truth' and that conceptions of stolen history are necessarily accompanied by popular notions of what constitutes the 'real story'.[37]

Official historiography in Algeria is criss-crossed by a series of alternative set narratives on the past. These narratives are articulated around the official historiography, borrowing some parts of it and rejecting others, in a relationship that is perhaps best understood as a series of parallel narratives that converge, overlap, diverge and intersect both in content and over time, rather than as a series of mutually exclusive, frontally opposed versions of the past. The common denominator is that most narratives lay claim to revolutionary legitimacy, reproducing the official narrative by placing the war of independence at the centre of constructions of political and historical meaning. Indeed, this interdependent relationship goes some way to explaining the staying power of the official narrative. Despite the seemingly organic nature of this relationship, it should not be forgotten that while these narratives are based on past events and used to explain the present, they are also used to legitimise versions of the present or visions of the future, and are therefore integral parts of urgent social contests over power relations in the present. My task will now be to examine the content of these narratives and to explore their effects on the ways in which Algerians relate to contemporary politics. The first set of narratives emerged directly after independence in summer 1962, from the power struggle that took place between different Algerian groups, but the narratives have their roots in wartime rivalries and suspicions. The second set of narratives relates to the socialist nation-building period under President Houari Boumediene (1965-1978). The third set of narratives on the past emerges from the economic crisis and social turbulence of the 1980s, articulating religious and ethnic paradigms of mobilisation.

The summer 1962 narratives have their origins in the two neat distinctions made during the war by nationalist leader Ramdane Abane at the Soummam Congress. At this secret meeting held in 1956 at Ouzellaguen in Kabylia, Abane and other leaders attempted to establish clear roles among the different forces involved in the struggle for Algerian independence.[38] The first of these distinctions was between internal military forces, or the maquis fighting inside Algeria, and the *armée des frontières*, which was stationed in Morocco and Tunisia for the duration of the war. The fighting between Algerian groups after the war has given rise to a narrative according to which the external military forces took control of

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[34] Harbi, *Le FLN, Mirage et réalité* (Paris, 1980), p. 131-140; Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, p. 138-148.

[35] Carlier, "Mémoire, mythe et doxa de l'État en Algérie. L'Étoile Nord-Africaine et la religion du Watan", in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue de l'Histoire*, 30 (1991)", p. 82.

[36] For one example of this translated into contemporary Algerian hip hop, see the song *Il était une fois l'Algérie* (Once upon a time there was an Algeria) by the group Intik, from their 2001 album, *La Victoire*.

[37] Scheele, *Village Matters. Knowledge, Power and Community in Kabylia, Algeria* (Woodbridge, 2009).

[38] See Ruedy, *Modern Algeria. The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington, 2005).

the state at the expense of the internal maquis, which the narrative casts as the true essence of the anti-colonial struggle and the rightful heirs to the levers of state power. The second distinction made at the Soummam Congress was between the political and military branches of the nationalist movement, a split manifested in the internal struggle toward the end of the war between the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) and the Gouvernement Provisioire de la République Algérienne (GPRA). This split has led to another narrative that sees the fighting of summer 1962 as having resulted in the army marginalizing the political authority that had negotiated independence with France, signalling the beginning of an uninterrupted military domination over the Algerian state.[39]

Both of these narratives rest on the idea of 'confiscated independence',[40] in which the revolution is stolen from its 'rightful' heirs. As such, these narratives reflect a strong feeling of ownership over a decolonisation struggle which is clearly recorded in social memory as a collective struggle, but not as a corresponding feeling of collective ownership over the postcolonial order. These narratives thus use the war as a starting point to explain what they see as a hidden group of shadowy figures that has controlled the state since independence. The theme of confiscation is also visible in two other narratives also related to the immediate post-war order. The first of these is a feminist narrative, in which independence was confiscated from women who had fought and participated in the war in large numbers but were subsequently marginalised from public office and sent back to the home.[41] The second narrative casts the revolution as having been confiscated by Colonel Houari Boumediene after his coup against President Ahmed Ben Bella in June 1965, putting an end to what is portrayed as an era of 'left socialism' reflected in syndicalism and self-management and replacing it with an authoritarian brand of state-centric 'right socialism'. This narrative gained more traction among the French left that had supported the FLN during the war, and never gained broad adherence in Algeria itself.[42]

Narratives also exist that relate the Algerian past explicitly to the Boumediene era, especially the period following the nationalisation of hydrocarbon resources and land redistribution in 1971 and the extension of free healthcare in 1973. The Boumediene period can be characterised by authoritarian state-led development based on the use of hydrocarbon rents to industrialise the Algerian economy, as well as by broad claims of social justice and redistribution of wealth. Fuelled by a clear project of nation-building and a regime with the political will and popular legitimacy to carry it out, this period was not only about creating strong institutions, but about producing Algerians, fusing a heterogeneous population into a single unified national body.[43]

Nostalgia for the Boumediene era is well attested in the literature focusing on the 1980s and 1990s,[44] and is reflected in popular narratives of the period as a golden age of social justice and national pride.[45] Under Boumediene, Algerians enjoyed rising living standards

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[39] For a look at these narratives from the perspectives of their originators, those who lost out in the power struggles following independence, see Aït Ahmed, *La guerre et l'après guerre* (Paris, 1964); Harbi, *Le FLN. Mirage et réalité* (Paris, 1980); Abbas, *Autopsie d'une guerre* (Paris, 1980).

[40] The term is borrowed from Maschino and M'rabet, *L'Algérie des illusions, la révolution confisquée* (Paris, 1972).

[41] Taleb Ibrahimi, "Les Algériennes et la guerre de libération nationale. L'émergence des femmes dans l'espace public et politique au cours de la guerre", in Harbi and Stora (eds.) *La Guerre d'Algérie 1954-2004, la fin de l'amnésie* (Paris, 2004).

[42] Maschino and M'rabet, *L'Algérie des illusions.*

[43] Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria* (London, 2003).

[44] Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000. A Short History* (Cornell, 2001); Roberts, *The Battlefield*; Evans and Phillips, *Algeria. Anger of the Dispossessed* (New Haven, 2007).

[45] A good example of nostalgia for the period can be seen in the article "Revisiter la mémoire de Houari Boumediène", in El Watan, published 13/12/11. For a glimpse how opposing narratives on the period interact, see the animated debate on Boumediène's legacy in the readers' comments section of the same article.

and employment opportunities, resulting in relative prosperity and above all, stability[46] – a key factor in later perceptions of the period. Many Algerians looked back through the harsh realities of the economic collapse and liberalisation of the 1980s and the violence of the 1990s to "*les temps quand l'Algérie pensait par elle même*" (the time when Algeria thought for herself),[47] when enthusiasm for the future was coupled with pride in Algeria's place in the world as a leader of the Non-Aligned movement, its willingness to stand face-to-face with the former colonial power, and the attempt to single-mindedly chart a new course between Soviet socialism and Western capitalism, giving a strong sense that being Algerian counted for something. In stark contrast to subsequent Algerian presidents, there are no jokes about Boumediene, who is respected for his *redjla* (masculine toughness).[48] However, this nostalgia is far from all-encompassing. An alternative narrative on the 1970s, and especially of the figure of Boumediene himself, couches the period as an authoritarian project that never delivered on its promises of modernisation, and even blames the populism of the 1970s for the dissident attitude to the state during the 1980s and 1990s.[49] Significantly, the Boumediene period is also the longest period of stability experienced by Algeria since independence. As such, this often ignored period[50] is arguably as important as previous or subsequent periods of instability and violence in understanding not only what it means to be Algerian, but also how Algerians construct narratives of the past and how these influence what people expect from the state.

Contemporary manifestations of popular discontent in Algeria articulate a generalised feeling of *hogra*, a term that is omnipresent in popular political discourse in Algeria and which Roberts has translated as "contempt, disdain or violating a person's right to consideration".[51] But *hogra* represents more than a general sense of injustice. It expresses a bitter disappointment and outrage that the state has not lived up to its promises and reflects a sense of having been cheated by history. As such, *hogra* expresses a deep split in state-society relations. Popular notions of what constitute positive state-society relations remain largely defined by the past desire to overcome the humiliations of colonialism through the self-proclaimed objectives of the independent state: equality, redistribution of wealth, dignity and often a sense of personal involvement in making the country a better place. That today's endless cycle of strikes, sit-ins and riots resonates with these principles indicates that Algerians continue to identify strongly with the emancipatory promises made by postcolonial nationalism. Indeed, according to the World Values Survey, Algerians prize justice, equality and the protection of the most needy above all else.[52]

Other socially held views of the past in Algeria include the two major narratives that emerged from the liberalisation and identity politics of the 1980s: the ethnic/secular and religious/authoritarian paradigms advanced respectively by Berberism and Islamism. The emergence of such non-nationalist identity paradigms articulated social discontent over falling living standards during the 1980s, and by the 1990s advocates of these paradigms were engaged in a headlong struggle to monopolize the symbolic capital of political community that ended in an armed conflict regularly quoted as having cost an estimated 200,000 lives.[53] The Islamist narrative emerged during the early-1970s and maintained that

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[46] Al-Kenz, "The End of Populism", in *Algerian Reflections on Arab Crises* (Austin, 1991), p. 37; Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria*, p. 252-262.

[47] Cited in Roberts, *The Battlefield*, p. 356.

[48] Evans and Phillips, *Algeria. Anger of the Dispossessed* (New Haven, 2007).

[49] Harbi, *Le FLN, Mirage et réalité*, p. 378-385; Addi, *L'Algérie et la démocratie* (Paris, 1994), p. 200.

[50] Rahal, "Comment faire l'histoire de l'Algérie indépendante?", *La Vie des idées*, 13/03/12.

[51] Definition from Roberts, *The Battlefield*, xxii.

[52] *World Values Survey 2000 Official Data File v.20090914 World Values Survey Association* www.worldvaluessurvey.org Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid.

[53] McDougall, "The Fetishism of Identity: Empire, Nation and the Politics of Subjectivity in Algeria", in Chalcraft, J. and Noorani, Y., (eds.), *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony.* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 49-71.

the war of independence had been a jihad against the French, a religious struggle that was subsequently hijacked by a secularising postcolonial order that reeked of atheism and socialism.[54] Berberism has created a linguistic opposition between French and Standard Arabic as colonial imports, and Tamazight (Berber) and dialectal Arabic as Algeria's true languages. This division is based on a view of Arabs as just another wave of invaders that Berbers (as the 'true' Algerians) have fought against. As such, Berberism borrows from the official narrative's insistence on resistance to outside invaders. Essentially a product of Kabylia, which was an important stronghold of the maquis during the war of independence, Berberism also frequently reproduces the summer 1962 narratives.[55] Islamist and Berberist narratives therefore both lay claim to and reproduce nationalist historiography, leading Azzedine Layachi to conclude that both Berberists and Islamists have used the same oppositional paradigm, the only difference being the identity marker employed.[56] In addition, nationalist discourse has included both Islamic and Berber elements, despite their subordinate positions within the nationalist framework.

Ethnic and religious paradigms articulated the burgeoning social discontent of the 1980s, but have masked the socio-political concerns that generated them in the first place, leading to an excessive – and largely unhelpful – focus in the literature (and in Algerian politics) on the issue of cultural identity. As such, debates over national identity have therefore been misconstrued as "the site of the problem and of politics".[57] As sterile debates between voluntaristic conceptions of Algeria's personality have raged on, paradoxically, the identity paradigms produced during contests over political legitimacy have acquired lives of their own, and now constitute real issues in themselves that cannot be ignored. However, since the mid-2000s, identity paradigms have been showing clear signs of exhaustion as vehicles for channelling political and social discontent and are now almost totally absent from contemporary protests in Algeria.

The existence of multiple narratives demonstrates the fragmented nature of socially held memories of the past in Algeria. The previously made point that perceptions of the past and present reinforce each other in a dialectic relationship is useful here. On one hand, memory is made in the present and "hinges on backwards projections of current perceptions of identity",[58] meaning that a contested past is the result of a contested present. In this view Algeria's fragmented social memories simply point to a lack of consensus both in assessments of the present and in visions for the future. On the other hand, memory simultaneously provides a template on which perceptions of the present are based, that guides behaviour and provides a program through which present conduct can be formulated and enacted, meaning that a contested past also results in a contested present. In this view, the fragmentation of social memory plays a key role in inhibiting the development of large scale movements demanding political change.

The fragmentation between different groups articulating different versions of the past is even spatially visible in journalist Ghania Mouffok's description of one of the protests held by the Arab Spring-inspired Coordination Nationale pour le Changement et la Démocratie (CNCD) on 12 February 2011 in Algiers. Massively outnumbered by riot police, the

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[54] Labat, *Les islamistes algériens* (Paris, 1995); Willis, *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria* (Reading, 1996); Roberts, *The Battlefield*; Al-Ahnaf, Botiveau and Frégosi, *L'Algérie par ses islamistes* (Paris, 1991); Denaud, *FIS: sa direction parle* (Paris, 1997).

[55] Chaker, *Berbères aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1998); Aït Kaki, *De la question berbère au dilemme kabyle à l'aube du XXIème siècle* (Paris, 2004); Yacine, "La revendication des Kabyles: culture ou identité", in *Les Kabyles. Éléments pour la compréhension de l'identité berbère en Algérie* (Paris, 1992); Yefsah, "L'Arabo-islamisme face à la question Berbère", in *Les Kabyles.*

[56] Layachi, "The Berbers in Algeria: Politicized Ethnicity and Ethnicized Politics", in Shatzmiller (ed.) *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies* (Montreal, 2005).

[57] McDougall, "The Fetishism of Identity", p. 63.

[58] Cubitt, *History and Memory*, p. 200.

relatively small group of protesters were divided over the presence of former FIS leader Ali Belhadj and by a small but vocal counter-demonstration of young people instantly labelled as "yobs" by many protesters. Mouffok describes the formation of "one circle of police to contain the Islamists who, after negotiations, accepted to be present as individuals rather than as a party; another circle to surround the democrats, and yet another to encircle the 'yobs'. Algeria shattered, divided, gaping wounds and cordial hatreds".[59]

Generational divides also run parallel to Algeria's fragmentation in terms of social memory. Although intuitively appealing, the idea that shared experiences of socio-economic and political conditions lead to the formation of cohesive generational cohorts, which then respond in similar ways to subsequent conjunctures, seems to have a questionable basis. Deciding where to draw lines between generational units can be arbitrary, and other transversal factors such as ethnicity, gender, class or region may be just as important in defining how individuals react. Indeed, while many young people may ignore or be unaware of politics, research does suggest that high visibility events discussed frequently during formative years do have an effect on later attitudes.[60] As a much under-researched area in studies of North Africa, generational differences may provide insights into how socially held perceptions of the past are transmitted within social relationships, helping to ground studies of memory.

Abdel Nasser Jabi has identified three broad generations in Algeria, and has analysed the relations between them in relation to potential political change. The independence generation has rural and popular origins and received its political formation in the pre-war radical nationalist movements and during the War of Independence. Imbued with revolutionary legitimacy, this generation has been responsible for nation-building and has been at the helm of the Algerian state since independence. The second generation came of age after independence, is predominantly urban and educated, and carried out the function of economic and social management under the oversight of the first generation. As bureaucrats, technocrats and (semi) skilled professionals brought up in the one-party state, this generation has little experience of independent political activism. For Jabi, this reflects a broad split in Algerian political culture between the party-political and the bureaucratic-managerial. Despite familiarity through daily contact, the first generation has not handed over power to the second generation, which has never considered a rupture with its elders. Forming the bulk of Algeria's middle classes, the second generation is significantly fragmented by cultural and linguistic divisions between *arabisants* and *françisants*,[61] and by the loss of social and economic status experienced as a result of the reduction of the public sector during the 1980s and 1990s, which caused an increase in union and party affiliations that often took on a nationalist, Berberist or Islamist flavour. The third generation came of age during the 1980s, amid economic crisis and austerity, urban problems such as lack of housing and water shortages, and can be defined by escapism from the humiliations and frustrations of daily life through raï music, football, and migration; cynicism regarding politics and a dim view of the possibility of collective change; and individualism and consumer desire. This generation has railed particularly against the first generation as being responsible for building a state that is at once omnipresent and impotent. The apolitical nature of the third generation, which now constitutes the majority of Algeria's population, prevents collaboration with the second generation, which in itself is so fragmented culturally and politically that it has been unable to provide middle-class backing or any kind of political framework to the street protests – unlike

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[59] See article "La révolution de onze heures à midi", by Ghania Mouffok, 12/02/12 at www.socialgerie.net.

[60] Tessler et al (2004) "Political Generations in Developing Countries: Evidence and Insights from Algeria", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 184-216.

[61] Those educated in and using at home, respectively, Arabic and French.

in Egypt and Tunisia – sticking instead to corporatist demands within union or party structures that can be manipulated or bribed by the state. [62]

The only middle-class led initiative for political change in the wake of the Arab Spring was the CNCD, a heterogeneous mixture of opposition parties, public sector unions, human rights groups and youth organisations. This group collapsed into infighting over the presence of political parties and disappeared within a few short weeks. That the CNCD marches did not draw significant support from the youth and popular classes is indicative of continuing class and generational divides. Such divides were evident in the attitudes of many protesters to some of the much younger working-class counter-demonstrators, who were accused not only of being "yobs", but of being "paid by the authorities". One 22-year old counter-demonstrator, speaking to a journalist, summed up the attitudes of young working class Algerians:

> "We're just sick of it, they should go and fight their battles somewhere else, this is our neighbourhood, our country. When we demonstrate, they call us yobs and scum. Of course I feel bad about this whole situation, I'm human too. So what's the difference? Just because they're intellectuals, it's a superiority complex. So why do they want us to join in their protest? At least when we demonstrate for two days, we manage to bring down the price of oil and sugar! What do they want with us? Those parties are just using us to make it big and get into power."[63]

Interestingly, the journalist sarcastically mentions that the march never even got started, because "like good civil servants", all the leaders of the coordinating body sloped off for lunch at midday, leaving protesters milling about aimlessly, before the young counter-demonstrators took the square and began to demonstrate in their place, suddenly reversing their soundtrack to slogans in support of the Arab Spring. The young "yobs" clearly had no problem demonstrating against the government; they just refused to do so with people they clearly saw as not representing them.

Mark Tessler's work on political generations in Algeria is based on well-structured fieldwork looking at the effect of generational groupings on attitudes to political systems, economic outlook and cultural values. Tessler defines five generations according to the period in which participants came of age: Colonialism (pre-1954), War (1954-62), Boumediene (1965-1978), Bendjedid (1978-1988), and Contestation and Violence (1988-1995), but finds little correlation between generational cohorts and present attitudes. Interestingly, the only generation exhibiting coherent views is the Boumediene generation, a finding which underscores the previously made point about the importance of this period in defining socio-political expectations. However, generational vocabulary does remain in use in Algeria as a way of periodising the past, as can be seen in Abdelaziz Bouteflika's speech at Sétif just before the May 2012 elections. He repeated three times the phrase, "My generation has had its day", and told Algeria's youth that, "those who liberated this country are telling you that we do not have the strength to continue. The country is in your hands. Take care of it."[64] By using nationalist rhetoric and announcing the opening of the succession battle for the post-Bouteflika era, this dramatic and seemingly heartfelt speech was clearly intended to

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[62] Jabi (2012) "The Impasse of Political Transition in Algeria: Three Generations and Two Scenarios", Case Analysis Series, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. For Jabi, the current situation in Algeria is analogous to that existing just before the war of independence, with a popular culture of radical, egalitarian direct action and a middle class devoid of initiative. In the 1950s, the middle class, unable to resolve the national question, was overtaken by popular classes that intervened to enact radical change, setting Algeria apart from Tunisia and Morocco, where the bourgeoisie retained control over the national movements and the resulting post-independence political systems.

[63] "La révolution de onze heures à midi", 12/02/12 at www.socialgerie.net.

[64] "Bouteflika à Sétif 'Ma génération a fait son temps'", in El Watan, 09/05/12. Indeed, the recent deaths of important Algerian political figures such as Abdelhamid Mehri, Ahmed Ben Bella, Pierre Chaulet and Chadli Bendjedid confirm the passing into history of an entire generation.

bolster turnout figures ahead of legislative elections and to obtain a resounding vote of confidence in the political system as a whole.[65]

Memory of the 1990s and the Post-Arab Spring Environment: Fear or Fatigue?

Much recent media analysis of Algeria uses the concept of fear when seeking to explain the absence of nationwide movements of protest, specifically the fear of rocking the boat and risking a return to the violence of the 1990s.[66] Some in Algeria have echoed these concerns in various ways. For example, left-leaning Islamist politician Abdallah Djaballah sums up the lack of appetite for fast-paced change in his assertion that, "Algeria is still licking the wounds of its past".[67] While initially attractive, this idea is problematic in that young Algerians in their twenties, the same demographic group that led protests in Egypt and Tunisia, did not live through the 1990s and therefore would not remember it directly. Algerians older than 30 will remember the events of the 1990s all too clearly, so the fear and fatigue argument fits more neatly here. However, the silence enforced on discussions of the period by the fact that questioning the version of events established in the 2005 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation is punishable by prison sentences have prevented the formation of cohesive social memory of the 1990s; as a result, references to this period in the public domain are fragmentary at best. An unwillingness to exchange the hard-won stability of the 2000s for a landscape of revolutionary uncertainty undoubtedly frames the attitudes of many toward the possibility of an Algerian Spring, and there is an undeniable sense of relief that scenes of violence can now be watched at a safe distance via satellite instead of being outside in the street. However, this picture of a nation wishing simply to finally get on with life is very different from that of a traumatised nation cowering in fear of a return to violence.

The focus on fear of a return to the 1990s is perhaps illustrative of the fact that much scholarship and media attention has focused on turbulent episodes of Algerian history, somewhat fetishizing violence in the process and making it into the defining feature of much analysis on Algerian society and politics.[68] More than fear of violence, it is perhaps a combination of fatigue, disappointment and cynicism that are defining Algeria's relationship to political change in the wake of the Arab Spring. To understand this, it is necessary to look at memories of October 1988 and re-examine the role played by the 1990s in light of this.

Widely perceived in Algeria as a turning point, and much talked-about and analysed in the media—allowing clearly-defined public perceptions of the events—the nationwide riots of October 1988 represented the largest-scale civil disturbances since the end of the war of independence. These riots represented an overtly political and cathartic expression of pent-up frustrations and *hogra* by the 1980s generation. In a total rupture with accepted notions of authority, young people in the working-class Algiers neighbourhood of Bab el-Oued sacked the local police station, forcing the police chief to strip to his underwear before parading him through the streets and encouraging people to slap him.[69] The harsh repression of young rioters by the army also represented a turning point for many in their parents' generation,[70] whose belief in the postcolonial system was shattered by the hitherto unimaginable scenes of

[65] Turnout reached 42.4%, and was higher than the 35% recorded in 2007. If broken down by wilaya, turnout was higher than the national average in 37 of the 48 wilayas, the average being brought down by Kabylia and Algerians abroad, see http://www.interieur.gov.dz/PublishingFiles/Participation_Cloture.pdf.

[66] See "Argelia, ¿la tercera revolución?", in El País, 14/02/11; "Avoir vingt ans à Alger", France Culture, 16/03/12; "Algerians go to polls in nation left behind by Arab Spring", in The Guardian, 09/05/12.

[67] See article "Pourqoui les algériens restent en marge du printemps arabe", France 24, 08/12/11.

[68] Entelis, *Islam, Democracy and the State in North Africa* (Bloomington, 1997)

[69] Evans and Phillips, p. 103.

[70] Massoudi, *Unbowed* (Philadelphia, 1989), p. 89.

the National Popular Army turning its guns on the 'People' it had proudly led to freedom from colonial rule. The wave of revulsion and outrage that followed immeasurably deepened the already growing rift between state and society.[71] Finding himself backed into a corner, President Chadli Bendjedid announced a constitutional amendment allowing the formation of political parties, and Algeria witnessed the growth of a burgeoning civil society and a flourishing free press. However, in January 1992, the second round of legislative elections, which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win, were cancelled by the military and Bendjedid was forced to hand over power to a military-dominated High Committee of State, signalling the descent into civil conflict.

October 1988 was the moment when the appetite for change was at its apogee, a moment that temporarily bridged the generational divide. In contrast, the 1990s were responsible for utterly exhausting the social energies released in 1988 and rechanneling them into mere survival[72] during a decade of painful economic restructuring, international isolation, and horrific violence, as an entire nation's future plans for life were simultaneously put on hold. If the 1990s are responsible for anything, it is not for instilling a sort of perennial fear of change, but for demobilising what was the most politically assertive society in the Arab World.

However, it is not just the harsh realities of the 1990s that have been responsible for depoliticising Algerian society. October 1988 remains of key significance in relation to Algerians' perceptions of current political change because, as far as many are concerned, little tangible change has followed. Ali Yahia Abdennour, President of the Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH), has said that "October 5 was a tidal wave, but once the water receded, all that remained were pebbles".[73] Algeria has gone from the classic authoritarian politics of a one-party state to an authoritarian pluralism in which there is a "periodic distribution of shares among majority stakeholders"[74] and an underlying consensus among non-opposition political parties, despite various different self-branding strategies as nationalist, Islamist or secularist. In popular Algerian parlance, this complex state of affairs even has a name that eloquently expresses the high levels of both political savviness and cynicism palpable in Algeria: *la démocrature*.[75]

Disappointment that the release of political energies in 1988 has not brought about real change mirrors and reproduces the theme of confiscation of the revolution at independence found in so many Algerian social narratives of the past. This points to the existence of a widely-held view that attempts at revolution have not borne out popular aspirations of greater freedom and social justice. This is not to say that Algerians no longer believe in these ideals – quite the opposite – but that because the still dearly-held zeitgeists of both November 1954 and October 1988 are both widely believed to have been confiscated by nebulous powers-that-be, the idea of change itself has become suspect.[76] The cynical attitude toward political change is partly fed by the fact that the amorphous, acephalous and diffused nature of political power in Algeria, or whatever concepts are called to stand in for it – the deep state, le *pouvoir*, the generals – means that it is unclear exactly whom a revolution would topple. Even if President Bouteflika were to be overthrown, it is widely believed that he would simply be replaced by another leader without change occurring in the underlying power structure. In addition, it should be mentioned that Bouteflika's absence from public

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[71] For more on the origins of this rift, and an in-depth analysis of 1980s Algeria, see al-Kenz, *Algeria: The Challenge of Modernity* (London, 1991).

[72] McDougall (2007), "After the War: Algeria's Transition to Uncertainty", in *Middle East Report*, 245, pp. 34-41.

[73] See article "Contre-révolution en Algérie, enseignements pour l'Egypte", at www.jadaliyya.com, 16/01/12.

[74] McDougall, "After the War", p. 40.

[75] The term mixes the French words *démocratie* and *dictature*. For an example of this term in use, see the song "Liberté", by Algerian hip-hop group *Intik*.

[76] "Contre-révolution en Algérie".

view in recent years has helped transfer much popular disapproval onto Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia and Interior Minister Daho Ould Kabila.

Compounded by the persistence of basic daily problems at the local level, Algeria has been experiencing massive alienation from politics[77] and cynicism regarding the possibility of bringing about meaningful political change through collective means. Today's localised demand-based protests in Algeria are perhaps best seen as the remnants of October 1988, the frustrated desire for collective change turned in on itself. In this sense, while they gave overwhelming support to Tunisians and Egyptians after the overthrow of their respective presidents, many Algerians now feel the failure of October 1988 to bring about meaningful change may hold lessons for post-Arab Spring realities, since what is being depicted as Algeria's very own 'spring' is often perceived as having led to instability, violence and massively reinforced military power.

The strange post-Arab Spring environment seems to have given rise to something strikingly unfamiliar in Algeria: a coalescence of views that has resulted in an undeclared, but broad-based, consensus among unlikely bedfellows around the lack of support for an Algerian Spring. This consensus is refracted through social memories of October 1988 and its aftermath. For anti-Islamist nationalists, especially older people and the Boumediene generation, October 1988 is seen as having opened the door to radical Islamism, which is also perceived as having been the result of contemporary revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Similarly, both Islamist leaning and secular-democratic constituencies have seen the immediate aftermath of October 1988 as being responsible for the military takeover in 1992, an event echoed by the strengthening of military power in post-revolutionary Egypt. Contemporary events in countries that have experienced the Spring thus activate a series of concerns within different Algerian constituencies over Islamism and the role of the military, concerns that the emergence of narratives of a "stolen revolution" in Egypt have done nothing to quell.[78]

The Algerian government has been skilful in reflecting these multiple anxieties about political change back into the public sphere. One of these concerns is the spectre of foreign military intervention in relation to the NATO bombing campaign in Libya. Ahmed Ouyahia has characterised the Arab Spring as a "plague" that has led to "the colonisation of Iraq, the destruction of Libya, the partition of Sudan and the weakening of Egypt", alleging that the revolutions "are not accidental but are the work of Zionism and NATO", whose member states have "granted visas to young people according to their objectives, to train in new technologies to create unrest".[79] In addition, the government has presented itself as the bulwark against the triple threats of an Islamist takeover, foreign intervention and general chaos.[80] Algeria's regime became adept at presenting the strategy of *après nous le déluge* to European audiences during the 1990s, to international audiences post 9/11, and now, for the first time, for domestic audiences in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. After two decades of minimising the events of October 1988 as "childish rowdiness", the Algerian government is now reinvoking the memory of the startling political changes that followed, allowing the regime to claim that Algeria has not only already had its spring, but was in fact a trailblazer for the whole region, and consequently has no reason to revolt.[81] There is thus still a significant disconnect between these new regime representations of 1988 and the view of many in Algeria that 1988 was usurped and confiscated by shadowy military figures. Again,

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[77] According to the Arab Barometer (2012), 94% of Algerians have no political party, 80% find the system corrupt, and only 15.5% are interested in politics. See article, "Démocratie, gouvernement, partis, religion, économie, citoyenneté… Ce que pensent les algériens", in El Watan 17/01/12.

[78] "Egypt candidate to seek election suspension", 27/05/12, at www.aljazeera.com.

[79] "Algerians go to polls in nation left behind by Arab Spring", in The Guardian, 10/05/12.

[80] "Algeria's 10 May 2012 elections: Preliminary Analysis", 14/05/12, at www.jadaliyya.com.

[81] "Les émeutes de 1988 ont changé la face de l'Algérie", in Liberté, 05/10/11.

despite their different interpretations of the event, both these narratives on October 1988 converge in their assessments of an Algerian spring as being of dubious desirability, albeit for different reasons. Government insistence on a kind of 'Algerian exception' echoes popular depictions of a lucky escape from a Spring that has been playing out in ways all too familiar to many Algerians, a sentiment expressed in journalist Kamel Daoud's bitter and, of course, cynical, remark: "Where were our famous Arab brothers when we were getting out throats slit? It's their turn now."[82]

Conclusion

The daily round of protests in Algeria do not mirror those of the Arab Spring, but instead respond to internal Algerian socio-political dynamics that have their roots in the decolonisation struggle and the emancipatory promises of the post-independence populist politics, which have deeply instilled expectations of social justice and equality within Algerian society. The experience of the Arab World's most profound revolution[83] and the fact that Algerians can look back to a period during the 1970s when the state seemed to be delivering on its promises of greater social justice – however they may characterise the politics of the day – are at the core of defining what Algerians expect from their state and are at the root of the willingness to voice unequivocal opposition to injustice that is a central feature of Algerian identity.

However, this willingness to stand up against injustice can, of course, take different forms over time: to fight against the French, to join a collectivised farm or volunteer to plant trees to stop the advance of the Sahara, to battle – peacefully or otherwise – for a more Islamic social and political order, to fight for the officialisation of Tamazight or for changes to the Family Code, to demonstrate in front of council offices because decent housing should be available to all, to block a main road to protest about the worsening potholes that cause accidents, to burn tyres and smash windows out of frustration at a life that seems blocked at every turn or to strike because one's pay as a civil servant means one cannot afford meat more than once a week. The point here is that while the motivation for standing up for what is perceived to be right comes from similar roots, its expression varies over time and is currently taking solely localised or individual forms.

The reason that fear does not explain Algerians' lack of willingness to follow the Arab Spring is that Algerians are patently far from afraid of standing up for what they believe to be right and making a noise about it. However, we must beware of essentialist portrayals of Algerians both as a people imbued with unshakable revolutionary spirit that will bring unjust regimes crashing down, a view that only echoes officially-sponsored historiography, *and* a traumatised people cowering in fear of a return to the violence of 1990s. The real contradiction lies in the coexistence of the desire for social justice as a major motivational force behind localised protests, and a knowing cynicism in the ability of revolts and rebellions to bring about lasting political change. Indeed, groups of young men have recently been chanting "The people want free hashish" at football matches, sarcastically echoing the popular Arabic slogan of the Arab Spring, 'The people want the fall of the regime'.[84] With the rapid waning of enthusiasm for the Spring since what was widely perceived to be a French-dominated bombing campaign in Libya, and the timely distribution of hydrocarbon revenues in the form of public sector pay increases, easy credit, and assistance for young people wishing to set up small businesses, support for revolutionary change seems to be at an

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[82] "Le Printemps Arabe, et si l'Algérie avait raison?", 20/03/12, at www.jadaliyya.com.
[83] Roberts, *The Battlefield*.
[84] "Algerians go to poll in nation left behind by Arab Spring", in The Guardian, 09/05/12.

all-time low and is accompanied by the realisation that things may not be so bad after all. Refreshingly for Algeria, support for getting on with life and once again trying to make the best of things seems to be at an all-time high.

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