

**ALGERIA:**  
**UNREST AND IMPASSE IN KABYLIA**

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## ALGERIA:

### UNREST AND IMPASSE IN KABYLIA

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In late April 2001, lethal provocations by elements of Algeria's National Gendarmerie triggered protracted and deadly rioting in Kabylia. That the unrest from Kabylia's Black Spring continues to this day reflects the political system's nation-wide failure to adopt reforms that address its deficit of democratic representation. Neither the regime, nor the Kabyle political parties nor the so-called "Coordinations" that lead the protest movement in the region has to date proposed a serious formula for ending the impasse. The recent invitation by the new head of the government, Ahmed Ouyahia, to the protest movement to engage in dialogue over its platform is a welcome, if belated, development. But more will be needed to enable the Algerian polity to resolve what is much more a national problem than the local or ethnic disturbance it is often mistakenly portrayed as.

The unrest has been significant in at least three respects: as a local conflict with considerable human and material cost; as both an issue in and an arena for manoeuvring by regime and opposition forces in anticipation of the presidential elections to be held by 15 April 2004; and especially as the reflection of broader national issues.

The conflict carries dangers for Algeria as a whole, aggravating instability within the regime and putting in question Kabylia's relationship to the nation. More generally, it is a manifestation of the fundamental problem that has plagued Algeria since independence, the absence of adequate political institutions for the orderly representation of interests and expression of grievances.

Since President Abdelaziz Bouteflika took office in April 1999, the government has partially succeeded

in reducing the Islamist rebellion and restoring Algeria's international standing and state finances. However, other issues have come to the fore, the most important of which has been the syndrome Algerians refer to as *la hogra* (literally "contempt"), by which they mean the arbitrary nature of official decisions, the abuse of authority at every level, and the fact that state personnel are not accountable and can violate the law and the rights of citizens with impunity. Resentment over this issue has been articulated with unparalleled force in the Kabylia region.

In response to the rioting of late April 2001, a new movement arose, consisting of self-styled "Coordinations" in each of the six *wilayât* (governorates) of the Kabylia region. In seeking to channel the anger of Kabyle youth into non-violent political protest, it initially demonstrated a remarkable capacity for mobilisation and eclipsed the region's political parties. It has since dominated political life in Kabylia and has been the object of intense controversy.

For some, the principal cause of the unrest is the conflict between Algerian Berberists and Algerian Arabists over the issue of Kabylia's – and Algeria's – cultural identity. Others argue that the movement is based on "tribal" structures (*'aarsh*) and represents a regression to archaic sentiments and forms of political action. The reality is more complex. Identity has been only one of the issues addressed by the movement. Its other – essentially democratic – demands have been more important to it. At the same time, while the "tribalism" accusation is largely groundless, the movement has been based on Kabylia's local traditions, and this

has severely hampered its efforts to articulate the modernist aspirations of its population.

The movement's own weaknesses are partly responsible for its failure to expand beyond Kabylia or to achieve its principal goals: the punishment of those responsible for the Gendarmerie's excessive repression of protestors during the Black Spring, the withdrawal of the Gendarmerie from the region and the granting of official status to the Berber language, Tamazighth, not to mention more radical demands for Algeria's rapid democratisation.

Outflanked by the Coordinations, Kabyle political parties reacted by projecting their own political rivalry onto the movement. The regime, crippled by internal divisions and resistance to change, failed to respond effectively to legitimate demands, thereby contributing to the movement's degeneration into unrealistic, intolerant radicalism that alienated public support.

The result is that the unrest has produced no significant gains for democracy and rule of law while *la hogra* remains an unresolved problem rooted in the absence of effective political representation. Ordinary Algerians have scarcely any influence over or defence against the ruling coalition of military and technocratic elites and are citizens in little more than name. This is disadvantageous to the state itself because it both guarantees popular resentment and disaffection, expressed in propensity to riot, and precludes effective government. In the case of Kabylia, moreover, given the identity issue, it has put great strain on national unity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the movement of the Coordinations in Kabylia:

1. Foreswear the use of violence in order to recover the moral high ground and public support and set an example by:
  - (a) conducting all campaigns peacefully and within the law; and
  - (b) abandoning the aim of preventing elections, seeking instead to influence voters' electors' choices peacefully by putting political parties under public pressure to support the movement's objectives.

2. Focus on realistic, attainable goals by:
  - (a) concentrating on securing redress of legitimate grievances arising out of the events of the Black Spring and their aftermath;
  - (b) dropping the demand for withdrawal of the Gendarmerie as a whole from Kabylia;
  - (c) recognising that the aim of a democratic transformation of the state (El Kseur Platform articles 9 and 11) cannot be achieved quickly and requires a long-term campaign of peaceful political education across the country; and
  - (d) abandoning blanket insistence that all demands are non-negotiable.
3. Reaffirm that the movement is independent of all political parties.
4. Reach out to other associations and movements of civil society, especially women's groups, professional associations and trade unions.
5. Establish rules guaranteeing debate within the movement, abandon practice of ostracism and vilification of dissidents, and invite dissidents to return to the movement.

### To the government of Algeria:

6. Acknowledge publicly that the movement of the Coordinations in Kabylia has raised valid concerns and undertake to ensure that the government and parliament consider these and respond appropriately.
7. Confirm its recent invitation to the movement to enter into a dialogue by formally inviting the Inter-Wilaya Coordination (CIADC) to send a delegation to discuss the government's proposed response; should the CIADC reject this invitation, proceed independently to implement a series of measures, which should include:
  - (a) releasing all activists of the protest movement and dropping all judicial proceedings, except with respect to those charged with serious crimes against persons or property;
  - (b) providing without further delay proper compensation to victims of the Black

- Spring repression and their families and full coverage of medical costs;
- (c) properly punishing gendarmes and other members of the security forces guilty of violating their rules of engagement or otherwise exceeding their authority in the course of the Black Spring and thereafter;
  - (d) reviewing the functions and rules of engagement of the Gendarmerie Nationale;
  - (e) providing full state funding for the core elements of the newly established Centre for the Linguistic Development of Tamazighth, and inviting the organisations of civil society and the Algerian community abroad to support it; and
  - (f) establishing a parliamentary commission of enquiry into the economic crisis of the Kabylia region, to consider evidence from the political parties (including those without current parliamentary representation, notably the FFS and the RCD), economic actors and voluntary associations present in the wilayât of Kabylia, as well as other independent experts, with a view to formulating recommendations for action to the government.
8. Strengthen the various elected assemblies, notably by:
- (a) increasing the power of the National Popular Assembly, including the oversight powers of its Commission on National Defence, if need be through a constitutional revision;
  - (b) introducing a new Communal Code, granting the elected executive of municipal councils (APCs) legal authority over the administrative services of the commune and abolishing the power of the wali (Prefect) to dismiss or suspend APC presidents or other elected members;
  - (c) introducing a new Wilaya Code reinforcing the authority of the elected Wilaya Popular Assembly (APW) in relation both to the wali and to the officers commanding the security services (Army, Gendarmerie Nationale, Sûreté Nationale) at wilaya level;

- (d) reviewing the status of the daïra (district) as an intermediate level of administration at which there is no elective political representation and reinforcing the element of political accountability operative at this level.

#### **To all political parties in Kabylia:**

9. Acknowledge that with the establishment of a properly funded, staffed and equipped Centre for the Linguistic Development of Tamazighth and constitutional recognition of Tamazighth's national status, the government will in principle have substantially discharged its present obligations on the language issue.
10. Prepare, publish and canvass proposals for the enhancement of the powers of the elective assemblies at every level.
11. Call for a parliamentary commission of enquiry on the economic crisis of the Kabylia region and prepare to make submissions.

#### **To the European Union:**

12. Support efforts to enhance the role and powers of Algeria's elective, legislative and representative institutions.
13. In consultation with the Algerian authorities and in the framework of the Association Agreement, explore what further assistance can be provided, notably through the European Investment Bank, to the financing of infrastructural and other development projects which may help stimulate economic activity in Kabylia and promote its economic integration with the rest of the national economy.

**Cairo/Brussels, 10 June 2003**



## ALGERIA:

### UNREST AND IMPASSE IN KABYLIA

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Since the last week of April 2001, the Kabylia region of Algeria<sup>1</sup> has experienced constant and unprecedented unrest. The disorders took the form of recurrent riots until mid-June 2001, directed primarily at the Gendarmerie, and punctuated by massive demonstrations across the region and in Algiers. Following the crystallisation of the protest movement into a number of linked Coordinations, the unrest focused on other targets and assumed other forms, including region-wide road blocks as well as continuing demonstrations and localised rioting. This reached fresh peaks with the largely successful, and at times violent, attempts to prevent voting across the region in the legislative elections of 30 May 2002 and the local elections of 10 October 2002.

Despite government concessions on several of the issues raised by the protesters and growing public alienation from their cause, the Coordinations have maintained their protests. It is possible they will attempt to disrupt by-elections that are in principle to be held in the region in the coming months.<sup>2</sup> The Coordinations' stated rationale for this intransigence is the government's failure to give "full and complete satisfaction" to the fifteen demands embodied in the June 2001 "El Kseur Platform", demands they insist are "sealed and non-negotiable".

Understanding the situation in Kabylia requires dispelling the myths that surround it. Contrary to view expressed in the international media, the conflict is not "ethnic" in nature, pitting "ethnic Berbers" against the Algerian state. Though the unrest is focused on Kabylia, it did not emerge from identity demands, but has stemmed from problems that are largely national in character.

Likewise, the nature of the protest movement headed by the various "Coordinations" has been inadequately represented by the Algerian media. An appellation commonly used, "the *'aarch*", a throwback to pre-modern structures, misrepresents the movement, which has articulated predominantly modern demands relating to the democratisation of the state. At the same time, media coverage depicting an entirely modern "Citizens movement" (*le Mouvement Citoyen*) has overlooked the fact that it has been rooted primarily in the villages rather than the towns of the Kabylia region and constrained by the traditions of village society in a way which has compromised both its democratic credentials and its effectiveness.

This report analyses the motivations of the actors and the meaning of their actions. It focuses on why the political problem that has arisen has so far proved intractable and why both the protesters and the regime have tended to resort to coercive methods and physical violence. Finally, it suggests steps to help Algeria find a way out of the impasse and resolve the problems which gave rise to it.

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<sup>1</sup> The heartland of Kabylia consists of the wilayât of Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia, but the region includes districts of the wilayât of Boumerdès, Bouïra, Bordj Bou Arreridj and Setif (see map in Appendix A).

<sup>2</sup> These by-elections concern 60 communes (56 in Kabylia) where voting for assemblies was wholly prevented in October 2002. No definite date has been set for these.

## II. DISTINCTIONS

The portrayal of the events that began in April 2001 as a conflict between Algerian Berbers (or even "ethnic Berbers") and the Algerian state is very wide of the mark.

First, although Algeria has several Berber populations, the really serious unrest has been largely confined to the Kabylia region, and the only Berbers mobilised by it have been the Kabyles. The disorders that developed elsewhere, primarily in eastern Algeria, from mid-June 2001 onwards, consisted of a rash of local riots expressing local grievances. While they began in the primarily Berber-speaking districts of the Sud-Constantinois, they quickly spread to the Arabophone regions of the Nord-Constantinois and south-western Algeria. In other words, rather than expressing specifically Berber grievances, they reflected grievances over local government failings and socio-economic issues common to most parts of the country. Moreover, these local protests were generally short-lived and occasioned little loss of life or personal injury. That this wider but also shallower and more ephemeral unrest was politically distinct from the unrest in Kabylia is clear from the fact that the elaborately structured protest movement – that of the "Coordinations" – that developed in Kabylia has had no counterpart elsewhere.

Second, the initial conflict, which pitted Kabyle youths against the gendarmes, was not primarily motivated by specifically Berber issues – that is, issues of identity, culture and language – and much of the subsequent conflict, instead of pitting Kabyle Berbers against the state – let alone against Algerian Arabs – has actually pitted Kabyles against each other.

Far from being a clear ethnic conflict, the unrest in Kabylia is both complex and distinctive. To reduce it to the status of a mere instance of a wider "Berber question" is to misconceive it badly.

## A. THE BERBER QUESTION IN NORTH AFRICA

The Berbers – or, as their intellectuals now prefer to call them, *Imazighen*<sup>3</sup> – were the autochthonous inhabitants of North Africa present long before the arrival of Arabs in the seventh century C.E., let alone the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth century. The number of Arabs who migrated west from Egypt in two main waves in the seventh and eleventh centuries was fairly small, not exceeding 100,000. The Arab identity of the countries of North Africa was established primarily through the Arabisation, over many centuries, of the indigenous, predominantly Amazigh, populations. But elements of these populations managed to preserve their ancestral language in those regions where geography or topography inhibited the penetration of Arabic, namely many (although not all) parts of the Atlas mountain system and certain parts of the Sahara. Dialects of Berber (*Thamazighth*<sup>4</sup>) are spoken from the Siwa oasis in north-western Egypt to the Atlantic coast of Morocco. While Berber-speakers constitute tiny minorities in Egypt and Tunisia, and a small minority in Libya, they amount to some 40 per cent (roughly twelve million) of Morocco's population (and were probably the majority in the nineteenth century or even later) and between 20 and 25 per cent (between six and seven million) of Algeria's.<sup>5</sup>

Because the anti-colonial nationalism that established the independent states of North Africa developed in the heyday of Arab nationalism and drew part of its inspiration from earlier movements of cultural revivalism and Islamic reform, the cultural identity of these new nation-states generally was defined by nationalist orthodoxy as "Arabo-Muslim". This definition ignored Berber-speaking minorities and the *Amazigh* ancestry of the majority. As the spread of education since independence has fostered the development of intelligentsias drawn from the Berber-speaking

<sup>3</sup> This is the plural of *Amazigh*, conventionally translated as "free man".

<sup>4</sup> Usually written *Tamazight*, after the French fashion, but the Berber prefix and suffix 't' is pronounced 'th' in Algeria and the spelling in this report will reflect this fact.

<sup>5</sup> A significant element of the Sahrawi population of Western Sahara is (or used to be) Berber-speaking. Substantial Berberophone populations also exist in Mali (the Tuareg of the Adrar n'Iforas Mountains) and Niger (the Tuareg of the Air Mountains). Tuareg are likewise found in the north of Burkina Faso.

populations, consciousness of the *Amazigh* identity and resentment over the withholding of recognition from Tamazighth have grown.

This development of a new "Berberist" or Amazigh consciousness was pioneered in Kabylia but has since spread across North Africa. Considerable impetus has been given to the development of this outlook by the North African diaspora in Europe and North America, aided in recent years by the growth of the internet. There is now a pan-Berber "Amazigh" movement, organised in the World Amazigh Congress, as well as specific movements among Algerian, Libyan and Moroccan Berbers, among others. The wider movement does not limit itself to promoting cultural and language rights for Imazighen and Tamazighth-speakers in each of the North African states. It also challenges the "Arab" character of North Africa with an explicitly Berber conception of the region, which it calls *Tamazgha*.

Contemporary Amazigh activists, whether or not of Algerian and Kabyle origin, have been inclined to explain the events in Kabylia as an instance of the broader, North Africa-wide, Amazigh struggle. This interpretation is not borne out by the evidence. In reality, the recent developments testify, among other things, to the extent to which the various shades of political opinion in Kabylia have been moving away from a preoccupation with the *Amazigh* identity as such. Having pioneered the pan-Berberist idea in the 1980s and 1990s, the Kabyles have begun to lose interest in it.

## B. THE BERBER QUESTION IN ALGERIA

While the existence of the World Amazigh Congress and the spread of the idea of *Tamazgha* is evidence of a developing "Berber question" at the level of North Africa as a whole, one should not speak of a single Berber question as such in Algeria.

When the Berberist movement that developed in Kabylia in the 1970s established an organisation in the wake of the "Berber spring" of 1980,<sup>6</sup> the resulting "Berber Cultural Movement" (*Mouvement Culturel Berbère*, MCB) was overwhelmingly a

Kabyle affair. It evoked scant support from Algeria's other Berber populations, the Shawiyya<sup>7</sup> of the Sud-Constantinois, the Mzabis<sup>8</sup> of the northern Sahara, let alone the Tuareg of the far south of the Sahara. With the advent of formal political pluralism in 1989, parties explicitly championing the cause of the Berber identity and language – namely Hocine Aït Ahmed's Socialist Forces Front (*Front des Forces Socialistes*, FFS) and Dr Saïd Sadi's Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, RCD) – garnered only marginal backing outside Kabylia, the other Berber populations displaying little or no interest in Berber identity politics. In so far as such an interest has developed among Shawi intellectuals in recent years, it has not led them to rally to the MCB, but instead to set up their own independent body, the MCA (*Mouvement Culturel Amazigh*), while continuing in the main to shun the FFS and the RCD, widely perceived as essentially Kabyle parties.

The absence of both a Berber party with appeal to all Algeria's Berbers and an Algeria-wide Berber Cultural Movement reflects the fact that each of the country's Berber populations has had its own distinctive history and its own particular relationship to the central power and the rest of the Algerian national ensemble. The fact that, in contrast to Morocco, Algeria's Berber populations are widely separated from one another and inhabit ecologically diverse environments has undoubtedly contributed to this state of affairs. But the main point is that the principal factors that have accounted for the growth of a Berberist outlook in Kabylia simply have not obtained elsewhere.

## C. THE SPECIFICITY OF KABYLIA

Kabylia is North Africa's most densely populated rural region apart from the Nile Delta. Unlike the Nile Delta, however, this population density is not linked to an abundance of fertile soil. Kabylia is mountainous, and cultivable land is scarce. It has been able to sustain its population only because of its tradition of labour and commercial migration. This tradition predates the colonial era but underwent a massive change from 1914 onwards, when Algerian workers were recruited in large

<sup>6</sup> That is, the movement of protest and demonstrations in Kabylia in March-April 1980.

<sup>7</sup> In French, *Chaouïa*.

<sup>8</sup> In French, *Mozabites*.



numbers to the factories of metropolitan France to replace French workers mobilised to fight the First World War. As a result, the Kabyles became the vanguard of the broader movement of Algerian labour migrants to Europe and, by the 1950s if not earlier, had established an informally elite position within the Algerian community in France. Kabyles ran most of its cafes, hotels and restaurants and provided most of its doctors, accountants, lawyers, skilled workers and trade union representatives, while unskilled migrants from other regions toiled on building sites or swept the platforms of the Paris Metro.

At the same time, because only adult males migrated, the links with the villages of origin were preserved, and the coming-and-going across the Mediterranean led to the spread of the French language across all strata of the male population of Kabylia in a way that distinguished it from all other regions of the country. This development was also promoted by the schools that the colonial administration established in the region from the 1870s onwards. In effect, French displaced Arabic as the Kabyles' second language, the language of legal and commercial transactions and of their dealings with the colonial and metropolitan administrations, while a Kabyle intelligentsia emerged on the basis of French schooling. As a result, many Kabyles viewed the prospect of Arabisation in independent Algeria as threatening, a fear not shared by Algeria's other Berber populations who had not experienced mass migration to France nor lost their familiarity with Arabic as the language of public life, law and commerce as well as religious observance.

Resentment of Arabisation among Kabyles is connected to the fact that, since independence, they have participated extensively in the apparatuses of the Algerian state and the management of the public sector (in addition to their strong presence in the private sector), thanks to their command of French. For the Kabyle question is not that of a marginal population,<sup>9</sup> un- or under- represented in national public life as a consequence of its cultural or linguistic distinctiveness.

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<sup>9</sup> Tizi Ouzou, the capital of Greater Kabylia, is a mere 60 miles from Algiers. A large percentage of the Algiers population is of Kabyle origin, and intercourse between Kabylia and Algiers is intense.

Kabyles played a major role in the development of the Algerian nationalist movement from the 1920s onwards and in the political and military leadership of the war of national liberation between 1954 and 1962.<sup>10</sup> To this day, awareness of Kabylia's contribution to the revolution is widespread in the region and both reinforces regional pride and fuels resentment. Kabyles in the wartime FLN leadership lost out in the power struggles both before and after independence<sup>11</sup> and their defeat is widely perceived to be linked to the triumph within the FLN of the strictly "Arabo-Muslim" conception of the Algerian nation which refused to recognise the *Amazigh* aspect of Algerian society and culture. As a consequence, there has been a powerful tendency in Kabylia since independence to dismiss the representation it has enjoyed in the state as politically worthless or even illegitimate and to deride Kabyles in high public positions as "*les Kabyles de service*".<sup>12</sup>

But this representation should not be overlooked. Far from being a monopoly of Arabophone Algerians, the state has displayed a high rate of Berber participation since Independence.<sup>13</sup> While

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<sup>10</sup> Kabyle labour migrants in France were massively drawn to the radical separatist project when it was launched with the founding of the *Étoile Nord-Africaine* in Paris in 1926. Although the ENA's leader, Messali Hadj, was an Arabic-speaker from western Algeria, many of lieutenants in the ENA were Kabyles, and Kabyles continued to be prominent in the ENA's successor organisations, the *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (PPA) from 1937 onwards, its legal front, the *Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques* (MTLD) from 1946 onwards, and its clandestine para-military arm, the *Organisation Spéciale* (OS) from 1947 to 1950. Kabyles also played a major role in the leadership of the wartime FLN and its military wing, the National Liberation Army (*Armée de Libération Nationale*, ALN), and Kabylia formed a single politico-military region (wilaya III) of the FLN-ALN's command structure. The FLN's first congress was held in the Soummam Valley in Kabylia in August 1956 and was largely dominated by the perspectives of the Kabyle leaders, notably Abane Ramdane and Krim Belkacem.

<sup>11</sup> Abane Ramdane (b. 1920) lost his commanding position in the FLN in August 1957 and was killed on orders of his rivals in Morocco on 27 December 1957. Belkacem Krim (b. 1922), the first commander of wilaya III in 1954 and a leading member of the FLN's Provisional Government between 1958 and 1962, went into opposition after 1962 and was assassinated in Frankfurt in October 1970.

<sup>12</sup> An idiomatic translation of this term would be "Kabyles for hire" or "Kabyle Uncle Toms".

<sup>13</sup> As was noted long ago by William Quandt in his article "The Berbers in the Algerian political elite", in Gellner, E.A. and Micaud, C, *Arabs and Berbers; from tribe to*

Shawiyya Berbers have tended until recently to be prominent above all in the army, Kabyles have been especially visible in civilian political roles, notably as ministers responsible at different times for a wide range of portfolios. Five of Algeria's twelve prime ministers since 1979 have been Kabyles<sup>14</sup>, while two others have been Shawiyya.<sup>15</sup> Kabyles have also been prominent in key military and security positions.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the two main pro-government parties, the FLN and the Democratic National Rally (*Rassemblement National Démocratique*, RND), are both currently led by Berbers, a Shawi (Ali Benflis) and a Kabyle (Ahmed Ouyahia) respectively. Kabyles hold leadership positions in a number of other influential parties; the current Speaker of the Popular National Assembly (*Assemblée Populaire Nationale*, APN), chosen from among the FLN deputies, is a Kabyle, Karim Younes, while between 1997 and 2001 the first President of the upper house of Algeria's parliament, the Council for the Nation, also was a Kabyle, Bachir Boumaza.<sup>17</sup>

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*nation in North Africa* (London, 1972), pp. 285-303. See also Hugh Roberts, "The unforeseen development of the Kabyle question in contemporary Algeria", *Government and Opposition*, XVII, 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 312-334.

<sup>14</sup> Kasdi Merbah (1988-1989), Belaïd Abdesselam (1992-1993), Redha Malek (born in Batna but of Kabyle extraction, 1993-1994), Ahmed Ouyahia (twice: 1996-1998 and since 6 May 2003); Smaïl Hamdani (1998-1999).

<sup>15</sup> Mokdad Sifi, from Tebessa, 1994-1996, and Ali Benflis, from Batna, 2000-2003; the Shawiyya have also produced a President of the Republic, Liamine Zeroual, from Batna, 1994-1999.

<sup>16</sup> The intelligence services (then called Military Security) were directed by a Kabyle, Colonel Kasdi Merbah, from 1962 to 1979, and the Political Commissariat of the Army was directed by another Kabyle, Colonel El Hachemi Hadjerès, until 1974. Today, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> military regions (out of six) – Blida, Oran, Ouargla and Constantine – are commanded by Kabyle officers, and the intelligence services have been commanded since 1990 by two Kabyles, Major General Mohamed Mediène and Major General Smaïl Lamari.

<sup>17</sup> A secularist party with some influence set up by former Prime Minister Redha Malek, the Republican National Alliance (*Alliance Nationale Républicaine*, ANR) is also led by Kabyles, notably Ali Haroun and Mohamed Saïd Mazouzi, in addition to Malek himself, while the smaller radical-secularist Democratic and Social Movement (*Mouvement Démocratique et Social*, MDS), is likewise led by a Kabyle, El Hachemi Cherif. Kabyles are also to be

Finally, Kabyles are prominent in the liberal professions, sport, the arts, and business, both the service sector and manufacturing (one of Algeria's most celebrated tycoons is Issad Rabrab, from Greater Kabylia). Kabyles have been prominent in the human rights movement since 1985, notably Maître Abdennour Ali Yahia and Maître Hocine Zehouane of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (*Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*, LADDH), while the principal trade union, the General Union of Algerian Workers (*Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens*, UGTA), was founded by a Kabyle, Aïssat Idir, in 1956 and has again been led by a Kabyle, Abdelmadjid Sidi Saïd, since 1997.

In short, Kabyles are a conspicuous and influential element of the Algerian national elite. To be a Kabyle is not to incur, as such, an appreciable (let alone automatic) disadvantage in public life. While the identity issue has become an important element of the contemporary Kabyle question, it should not be misconceived. The Kabyles are not generally discriminated against in public life on the basis of their identity, and their preoccupation with the issue has had other causes. Sections of Kabyle opinion have been angry with the Algerian state since 1962 not because their identity has harmed their status, but rather because their identity has been overlooked. But, while the state has been mending its ways in this respect since 1990, two other factors have been reinforcing the specificity of Kabylia and the resentment many Kabyles feel.

The first is economic. Kabylia has long depended on financial transfers from outside. Until the 1980s, the remittances from migrants in Europe were very important, while the state, buoyed by its hydrocarbons revenues, invested large sums in the economic development of the region. Over the last two decades, these sources of financial support have dried up. Kabyles have increasingly tended to emigrate with their wives and children, and have largely stopped sending money back to relatives. The money still coming from France is mainly the pensions of migrants who have retired to their native villages; this generation is dying out and the financial flows with them. As for the state, since the oil-price crash of 1985-1986, it has largely ceased to fund major investment in the region. The

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found in the Islamist parties and the Trotskyist Workers' Party (*Parti des Travailleurs*, PT).

state industries established in the 1960s and 1970s have been limping or folding altogether, and private enterprise has not been sufficiently encouraged to fill the gap. The result is unemployment and acute economic depression, in painful contrast to the optimism of the boom years of the 1970s.

The second is political, but equally recent. An important way in which Kabylia has come to differ from all other regions of Algeria is that its political life has been structured since 1989-1990 by the rivalry between two political parties essentially based in the region itself, the FFS and the RCD. Everywhere else the party-political rivalries that have mattered have been between the FLN and the FIS, in 1990 and 1991, and between the FLN and the RND and between the various legal Islamist parties in 1997 and 2002. The way in which Kabylia has diverged politically from the rest of the country has reinforced its particularism, but also its frustration. The two Kabyle parties have been almost completely confined to opposition roles, and in seeking alliances outside Kabylia they have systematically neutralised each other. Consequently, they have failed to provide effective political representation to the population of the region. The impressive participation of individual Kabyles in the apparatuses of the state, while proof of the absence of significant discrimination, has been an arithmetical, rather than political, representation of the population. The latter's interests have gone largely unrepresented, while its particularist sentiments and material distress have been aggravated by recent trends.

### III. THE KABYLE QUESTION SINCE 1980

The identity agitation in Kabylia since the "Berber spring" in 1980 has been contesting the orthodox nationalist conception of the Algerian nation as "Arabo-Muslim" and its implications that all Algerians are Arabs and Berber is merely a dialect of Arabic. Opposition to this official discourse has expressed itself in the assertion of the irreducibly Berber/Amazigh identity of the Kabyles and the demand that Berber enjoy equal status with Arabic. But the assertion of the Berber identity and the demand for recognition of *Thamazighth* were not purely ends in themselves.

#### A. IDENTITY AND BEYOND

For many Kabyle Berberists, the challenge to the "Arabo-Muslim" orthodoxy was also a demand for pluralism and democracy, and the assertion of cultural and linguistic rights was a strategy for transforming the Algerian state. It was mainly for this reason that the Berberist movement in Kabylia rigorously eschewed "Kabyle-regionalist" appeals, asserting the broader Amazigh identity rather than the narrower Kabyle identity, and demanding recognition for the Berber language, *Thamazighth*, rather than the dialect, *Thaqbailith*, which Kabyles actually speak.

This insistence on framing their agitation in terms which denied its specifically Kabyle roots and constituency testified to the continuing hold of the Algerian national idea over Kabyle activists. The collective memory of Kabylia's contribution to the nationalist movement has furnished grounds for grievance over what the resulting Algerian state had become and arguments with which to legitimise the Berberist cause and de-legitimise the regime in Algerian-nationalist terms. The tendency of Kabyle Berberists to invoke the memory of Abane Ramdane, the Kabyle leader of the FLN in 1956-1957, the Soummam Congress he organised in August 1956, and the Platform it produced (which distanced the Algerian Revolution from pan-Arabism and played down its Islamic content) indicates that they have aspired to change the nature of the Algerian state as a whole.

When the constitution of February 1989 allowed political parties to be formed, both Kabyle-based

parties that emerged, the FFS<sup>18</sup> and the RCD, while articulating the identity and language issues, gave priority to wider questions. The RCD became the champion of a secularist vision of the state, not only opposing the Islamist movement but going much further in calling for a constitutional change to abolish Islam's status as the official religion. The FFS, while more conciliatory towards the Islamists, has consistently targeted the "police-state" aspect of the regime and the political role of the army.

Prioritising wider national issues, however, has not enabled the parties to secure a substantial audience outside Kabylia and districts with large Kabyle communities (Algiers, Tipasa and the émigré community in France). While the FFS has had more success in this respect, both parties have continued to rely heavily on their Kabyle electoral bases and are perceived as essentially "Kabyle" parties. At the same time, because they have taken opposed positions on wider political issues, the Kabyle political presence nationally has not amounted to a source of concerted pressure either for democratisation or for satisfactory concessions on the identity and language issues.

## B. INCREMENTAL ACCOMMODATION: THE STATE'S RESPONSE AND THE MYTH OF 'LEDÉNIDENTITAIRE'

As long ago as 1983, it was officially acknowledged that the Algerian nation is not exclusively Arab in culture and origin.<sup>19</sup> Since the advent of formal pluralism in 1989, substantial practical concessions have also been made:

- in 1990 an Institute for Amazigh Studies was established at Tizi Ouzou University;
- since 1991, a nightly news bulletin in Tamazighth has been broadcast nation-wide on state television;
- in 1995, after months of agitation in Kabylia over the demand that Tamazighth be taught

in schools, President Zeroual set up a High Commission for Amazigh Affairs (*Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité*), presided over by a Kabyle, Mohamed Idir Aït Amrane,<sup>20</sup> that has organised conferences and workshops on Tamazighth and Amazigh culture and publishes a review, *Timmuzgha*;

- the constitutional revision approved by referendum on 28 November 1996 explicitly recognised *l'Amazighité* alongside *l'Arabité* and *l'Islamité* as one of the three constitutive elements of the Algerian national identity;
- the publication and distribution of literature in Tamazighth, banned in the 1960s and 1970s, are now entirely legal, and one can buy such material in most bookshops in Algiers as well as in Kabylia itself;<sup>21</sup>
- since 1995, Tamazighth has been taught to certain classes in schools in fourteen wilayât across the country (that is, in all the Berberophone regions);
- Berber names have been restored to many road signs and are used in official documents as well as press coverage in place of the Arabic names previously favoured by the authorities, and many political parties use Tamazighth as well as Arabic and French in Kabylia;<sup>22</sup>
- in 2000, Kabylia's sole airport, at Bejaia, was renamed after Abane Ramdane, and Hassi Messaoud Airport in the Sahara was renamed after Krim Belkacem;<sup>23</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> Originally founded by Hocine Aït Ahmed in 1963 as the political front for an armed rebellion against the Ben Bella regime, the FFS was legalised as a political party in late 1989, by which time Aït Ahmed had broken with the former maquisards who had been his main supporters in the 1960s.

<sup>19</sup> This was when President Chadli spoke publicly of the "Imazighen" as the ancestors of most Algerians in his speech to the FLN party Congress in December 1983.

<sup>20</sup> In 1945, Aït Amrane composed the celebrated song (in Tamazighth) '*Kker a mmis u Mazigh*' ("Stand up, son of Amazigh!"), which functioned as an unofficial national anthem for Kabyle activists in the Algerian nationalist movement prior to the composition of the official national anthem, in Arabic, "*Kassamen*", by the Mzabi poet Moufdi Zakaria, in 1956.

<sup>21</sup> The work of Kabyle and other Berber musicians and singers, on records, cassettes and now compact discs, has been circulating freely in Algeria for much longer, since the early 1970s at least.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the RND, whose election posters in October 2002 were headed 'AGRAW AGELNAW AMAGDA?', the Tamazighth form of the party's name, (observed in Bejaia, 25-26 January 2003).

<sup>23</sup> An important thoroughfare in Algiers, the Boulevard Telemly, was renamed Boulevard Colonel Krim Belkacem in the 1980s; streets in Algeria's main towns have been named after Kabyle, as well as Shawi, war heroes (notably Abane Ramdane) since the early days of independence.

- in October 2001, President Bouteflika agreed that Tamazighth should be recognised as a "national language" in the constitution, which was so revised in April 2002, and in April 2003 the government announced its intention to establish a Centre for the Linguistic Development of Tamazighth.

Resentment still exists over the government's refusal to accord "official" as well as "national" status to Tamazighth (that is, to make it a language of public administration), and many Kabyles dismiss the concession of "national" status as a purely token gesture. But even if withholding official status from Tamazighth were to be regarded as discriminatory and unjustifiable,<sup>24</sup> it does not mean that the state has been persisting in its earlier denial, but that it is recognising the Berber/Amazigh identity in ways that do not yet satisfy everyone.

## IV. THE BLACK SPRING AND AFTER

### A. THE KILLING SEASON

On 18 April 2001, an eighteen year-old student, Massinissa Guermah, was shot by a gendarme when in custody in the Gendarmerie at Beni Douala in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou.<sup>25</sup> On 21 April, the day he died, the Gendarmerie issued a communiqué which, far from apologising, accused Guermah of being a thief.<sup>26</sup> The next day, gendarmes at Amizour 80 miles away in Lesser Kabylia abruptly entered a classroom and arrested three high-school students, claiming they had insulted the gendarmes during a demonstration two days earlier. These events triggered Kabylia's "Black Spring".

During the last week of April 2001 and continuing into early July, Kabylia witnessed the most protracted rioting in Algerian history. The brutality with which the security forces, and primarily the Gendarmerie Nationale, responded, repeatedly firing live ammunition at unarmed youths in what was clearly a shoot-to-kill policy, had no precedent in the region since Independence and provoked an enormous trauma in Kabyle public opinion. By mid-June, 55 people had been killed, 38 of them in a dreadful spasm of violence between 25 and 28 April. The death toll has since reached 123, with many times that number injured, some maimed for life.

There are several puzzling features of these events and their protracted aftermath. The most obvious enigma concerns the behaviour of the Gendarmerie. There is virtually universal agreement that it not only provoked the rioting but also, remarkably, reignited the disorders in numerous places throughout May and early June 2001 after calm had provisionally returned. Why it behaved in this way has been the subject of a detailed investigation.

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<sup>24</sup> This is highly debatable; unlike Arabic, Tamazighth does not yet exist in a modern standard form, but in a number of dialects, which remain essentially oral and unwritten for the vast majority of the people who speak them. Some Amazigh activists now recognise that the practical obstacles to making Tamazighth a language of administration in the near future are immense.

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<sup>25</sup> Beni Douala is both the name of a commune (*baladiyya*) and of an administrative district (*daïra* - the Algerian counterpart of the French *sous-préfecture*) comprising several communes: Beni Douala, Aït Mahmoud and Beni Aïssi.

<sup>26</sup> The declaration by the interior minister, Nouredine Zerhouni, that Guermah was not a student but 26 years old and "a delinquent" added to Kabyle fury; Zerhouni later retracted it, explaining that he had been misinformed, but, as several people interviewed by ICG in Kabylia remarked, "Even if Guermah was a delinquent, they didn't have the right to kill him".

## B. THE ISSAD REPORT

On 30 April 2001, President Bouteflika announced the creation of an independent commission of enquiry; two days later, he appointed a well-known Kabyle lawyer, Professor Mohand Issad, as its chairman. The first and more important of its two reports was published on 7 July 2001. While it was criticised by some for not going far enough, its findings were widely regarded as refreshingly honest and have not been disputed. The principal findings were:

- that the violence in Kabylia was provoked and kept going by the gendarmes, who repeatedly exceeded their authority and broke their own rules of engagement in firing live rounds at rioters when this could not be justified as “legitimate self-defence”; and
- that the gendarmes’ behaviour could not be explained away as individual “excesses”, and that, either the Commander of the Gendarmerie had lost control of his troops, or their behaviour was the product of interference with the Gendarmerie Nationale’s internal chain of command, and thus evidence that sections of the Gendarmerie had been manipulated by an external force.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Issad report did not say so explicitly, this was widely taken to mean that the authority of the Commander of the Gendarmerie, General Ahmed Bousteila,<sup>28</sup> had been usurped by more powerful regime figures in a factional conflict at the highest levels. In providing support for this hypothesis, the Issad commission was advancing onto very dangerous ground, and it surprised few observers that its report abstained from naming individuals among the senior power-holders or offering an explanation for their possible motives. That there was pressure in high places to limit public debate of this affair is suggested by the fact that a second commission of enquiry was set up by the lower house of the parliament, the Popular National Assembly. This commission eventually put forward the contrary thesis that the behaviour of the gendarmes had merely been an affair of

“excesses”— that is, individuals exceeding their authority on their own initiative,<sup>29</sup> a thesis that few observers took seriously.

Opinion as to the value of the Issad report is varied in Kabyle circles. For Ikhlef Bouäichi, of the FFS National Secretariat, “the Commission pursued a horizontal, not a vertical investigation”, covering aspects of what happened across the region, but not exploring the chain of cause and effect upwards into the power structure, and so ended up “telling Algerians what they knew already”.<sup>30</sup> Others appreciated that, for once, not only had a commission set up by the regime actually published its report, but the report was serious and credible. As one man without party allegiances told ICG, “The Issad Report is a very proper report. It is accurate, an honest piece of work, a very, very honest piece of work.”<sup>31</sup>

The report’s suggestion that the provocative actions and lethal reactions of the Gendarmerie in April-June 2001 were deliberately instigated by a faction of the regime accords with popular perceptions and is endorsed by other authoritative observers. Another well-known Kabyle lawyer, Maître Mokrane Aït Larbi,<sup>32</sup> told ICG:

The thesis [that the gendarmes acted] in legitimate defence does not work. Not a single youth was shot down inside a Gendarmerie brigade station; the majority were shot in the back,

in other words, when running away from the gendarmes, not attacking them. Maître Aït Larbi pointed out that the shootings occurred simultaneously in numerous localities in three *wilayât* (Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia and Bouïra) belonging

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<sup>29</sup> See *El Watan*, 8 September 2001, *Le Matin* 9 January 2002 and *Liberté*, 3 February 2002.

<sup>30</sup> ICG interview in Algiers, 15 January 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Slimane Mokrani (not his real name), 40s, from Aïn El Hammam, now resident in Tizi Ouzou where interviewed by ICG, 16 January 2003; this interviewee was one of several who asked for their anonymity to be preserved; since he will be cited several times, we have employed an alias.

<sup>32</sup> Me Aït Larbi was a founding member of the RCD and a candidate on its list in Algiers in December 1991, although he left the party around this time. He was appointed a member of the Council of the Nation by President Zeroual in December 1997 but resigned in protest over the regime’s handling of the events in Kabylia in May 2001.

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<sup>27</sup> *Rapport préliminaire de la Commission nationale d’enquête sur les événements de Kabylie*, July 2001; made available on Algeria-Interface, 30 July 2001.

<sup>28</sup> General Bousteila was appointed Commander of the Gendarmerie in February 2000 and thus had only fourteen months in which to establish his authority over the corps.

to two military regions,<sup>33</sup> yet there was a striking uniformity about the gendarmes' behaviour: "Someone gave instructions, there is someone who gave the order at the national level, it is simple arithmetic!"<sup>34</sup>

### C. FROM DESPAIR TO RECKLESSNESS: THE IMPATIENCE OF KABYLIA'S YOUNGER GENERATION

Several other aspects of the Black Spring call for explanation. The conduct of the rioters was remarkable in two respects:

- they repeatedly attacked not only the Gendarmerie brigades across the region, but also both state buildings (local government offices, tax offices, state company buildings) and offices of political parties, including Kabylia's own, the FFS and the RCD; and
- despite the gendarmes' lethal responses and the mounting death toll, many rioters displayed an astonishing indifference to the mortal risks they were running.

The almost suicidal determination of many rioters, who were uniformly young (twelve to 30) and male, was summed up by the now celebrated cry of a protester, "you cannot kill us, we are already dead".<sup>35</sup> The depth of despair among Kabyle youth, which is reflected in the region's high suicide rate,<sup>36</sup> is also widely recognised by their elders:

Our young people, they have lost hope. They have no prospects. There is unemployment, poverty. There are Algerians who go hungry now.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the absence of economic opportunity, cultural amenities which the region used to possess have disappeared, leaving young people without distractions and with nowhere to go. As a leading activist in Akfadou (wilaya of Bejaia) told ICG:

There have not been any municipal libraries, except at Bejaia itself and Sidi Aïch, for the last ten years and more. There are no longer any cinemas or theatres; the circus has not existed in Algeria for over twenty years...<sup>38</sup>

As the economic and social marginalisation of young people has deepened, a crucial development has been their tendency to act defiantly on their own initiative. The tradition of deference to one's elders – notably to *l-'aqqal*, the men of experience and wisdom – is practically defunct: "The sages are no longer listened to; in the villages they are in a minority, the young people have no understanding for them".<sup>39</sup>

But it was not only the traditional village elders, men in their 60s and 70s, who had lost influence over the youth of the region. The same had begun to be true of men in the 40-55 age range, veterans of the 1980 Berber Spring and the Berber Cultural Movement (MCB), previously much respected for their own militant activism. As one MCB veteran told ICG:

On 16 April 2001,<sup>40</sup> I was giving a talk at Draa El Mizan with two friends. We discussed things in the car coming back. We had the feeling that there was a new generation which was saying to us: "You have had your time, with your slogans about 'democracy' and 'rights', you have got nowhere with all that, it is now up to us to settle the problem. Allow us to fight it out with them. We thank you, but we know what we have to do."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The wilayât of Algiers, Boumerdès, Bouïra and Tizi Ouzou come within the 1<sup>st</sup> Military Region, which covers north-central Algeria from its HQ at Blida; the other wilayât of the Kabylia region (Bejaia, Bordj Bou Arreridj and Setif) are in the 5<sup>th</sup> Military Region, whose HQ is in Constantine.

<sup>34</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Reported in *Libération*, 26 April 2001.

<sup>36</sup> There has been an epidemic of suicides across Algeria over the last two years; see the dossier "Pourquoi les Algériens se suicident?" in *Liberté*, 18 July 2002, notably the section on Kabylia, "Une phénomène alarmante".

<sup>37</sup> Slimane Mokrani, ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

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<sup>38</sup> Farès Oudjedi, member of the *Coordination Inter-Villages d'Akfadou*, interviewed by ICG in Ferhoun village, commune of Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Retired teacher, c. 70 years old, from central Kabylia, ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

<sup>40</sup> That is, two days before the Guermah shooting.

<sup>41</sup> Saïd Boukhari, from Maatka (wilaya of Tizi Ouzou), ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

#### **D. FROM ACTION TO REACTION: THE DISENCHANTMENT WITH POLITICS AND THE PREOCCUPATION WITH SELF- RESPECT**

By April 2001, the younger generation was not only alienated from Kabylia's political parties, but also disenchanted with the outlook that had guided the Berberist movement over the previous twenty years. The attempt by the RCD and other interested forces to explain the revolt of Kabyle youth merely as an expression of the longstanding identity issue<sup>42</sup> encouraged observers to overlook what was novel and dangerous about the outlook that actually lay behind it.

The older generation of Berberist activists had either pushed the Amazigh/Thamazighth cause out of a preoccupation with the identity/language question for its own sake, or as a strategy aiming at the democratisation of the Algerian state as a whole based on the premise that "the identity claim constitutes the foundation of the democratic claim".<sup>43</sup> In either case, the outlook envisaged a long haul and encouraged militants to invest in forms of political activity based on modern (mainly European and especially French) models – political parties, mass movements, petitions, marches and demonstrations – and which were essentially if not entirely peaceful. The younger generation apparently has no faith in these models and no notion of strategy at all.

Disaffection from political action was noticeable as early as June 1997, when legislative elections were held for the first time since 1991. Although a wide choice was on offer in Kabylia, turn-out was just over 50 per cent,<sup>44</sup> in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, the

FFS and the RCD won all the seats, seven each, but mobilised only 39 per cent of the electorate between them. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the language issue now means far less to ordinary young people than to the political activists who have been raising it. As Dr Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimy of Algiers University told ICG: "The young people don't give a damn about the teaching of Tamazighth, they are turned off it because there is no social dividend from it".<sup>45</sup>

But it is equally likely that the discourse of the Berberist movement and the Kabyle parties, with its insistence on the eternal "denial of identity", has encouraged alienation from political action. The notion that nothing has been gained since 1980 is a profoundly discouraging one. Recognition that there has indeed been a significant evolution over the last 23 years, that the Berberist agitation, of the MCB since 1980 and of the RCD and FFS since 1989, has something to show for its efforts, and that political action works at least up to a point, is absent from the discourse of all actors in the Kabyle drama. In this respect, the generation of 1980 and the Kabyle political parties bear some responsibility for the younger generation's alienation from politics in general and from the Kabyle parties in particular, as the burning of their offices attests.

The result is that the younger generation lacks political bearings and is animated above all by its own despair and anger. It is accordingly inclined to act exclusively by reflex, that is to react, and its reactions are essentially responses to provocations, to challenges to its self-respect and violations of its dignity. A vivid illustration was provided following the mysterious assassination of the singer Matoub Lounes. Matoub - nicknamed "the Rebel" – was unquestionably the great favourite of the younger generation in the region. Unlike other distinguished Kabyle singer-poets,<sup>46</sup> his output was highly political, often sarcastic and polemical<sup>47</sup> and

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<sup>42</sup> This thesis was challenged by certain Algerian journalists covering the riots and also by some Kabyle personalities; see Hugh Roberts, "Co-opting identity: the manipulation of Berberism, the frustration of democratisation and the generation of violence in Algeria", London School of Economics, Development Research Centre, Crisis States Programme Working Paper (1<sup>st</sup> series) No. 7, December 2001, 46 pp.

<sup>43</sup> Fariza Slimani, member of the RCD National Executive and President of the *Collectif des Femmes Démocratiques de Kabylie*; ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Turnout was 65.60 per cent nationwide, but only 51.62 per cent in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, where eleven party lists were on offer, and 49.79 per cent in the wilaya of Bejaia, where there were 13 party lists.

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<sup>45</sup> ICG interview, in Algiers, 15 January 2003. Dr Ibrahimy is author of *Les Algériens et leur(s) langue(s): éléments pour une approche sociolinguistique de la société algérienne* (Algiers, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Notably Idir, whose output has tended to be apolitical, and Lounis Aït Menguellat, whose songs, while often political in content, are extremely reflective in tone and allusive in style, in the Kabyle poetic tradition; alongside these, Matoub was something of a ranter, a hot-head.

<sup>47</sup> Notably *Aghuru* ("Betrayal"), a bitter parody of the national anthem, recorded just before his death.



regularly stirred up feelings of intense anger and militancy. His murder on 25 June 1998 provoked massive demonstrations throughout the region in an elemental upsurge which was a foretaste of the 2001 events. A former leading FFS activist told ICG, “what happened in 1998 was an alarm bell which the parties took no notice of; the population was escaping their control”.<sup>48</sup>

## E. THE KABYLE QUESTION AND THE ALGERIAN QUESTION

The principal complaint of the rioters in 2001 was *la hogra*<sup>49</sup> – literally ‘contempt’, that is, the humiliation they suffer at the hands of regime power-holders at every level who abuse their authority with impunity. For the rioters, the shooting of Guermah and the subsequent behaviour of the gendarmes were simply the latest and most outrageous expressions of the regime’s longstanding attitude to them. The main slogan of the riots and subsequent demonstrations was *ulac smah, ulac*, literally: ‘No forgiveness, none!’ – meaning that abuses of authority, those of the gendarmes in particular, must be punished. The rioters’ fundamental demand was for a polity in which the authorities are accountable and people are treated with respect. Exactly the same outlook was discernible in the thousands of young men who rioted in Algiers and other cities across Algeria more than a decade earlier, in October 1988.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the Kabyle question has become almost indistinguishable from the Algerian question.

Consciousness of this is widespread in Kabyle political circles. As Arab Aknine told ICG, “the crisis in Kabylia is the national crisis in miniature”,<sup>51</sup> a view echoed by Maître Aït Larbi.<sup>52</sup>

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48 ICG interview with Saïd Khelil, former First Secretary of the FFS, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

49 The Algerian colloquial Arabic form of *al-haqara*; the Tamazighth word is *thamheqranith*, from *ehqer*, ‘to despise’, which is a Berberised form of the Arabic.

50 For an analysis of the outlook of the 1988 rioters, see Hugh Roberts, “Moral economy or moral polity? The political anthropology of Algerian riots”, London School of Economics, Development Research Centre, Crisis States Programme Working Paper (1<sup>st</sup> series) No 17, October 2002, 25pp.

51 Lawyer, member of the Maison des Droits de l’Homme at Tizi Ouzou; interviewed by ICG 17 January 2003.

52 ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

Ahmed Djeddaï of the FFS argued that the Kabyles “have more or less the same demands as everywhere else.”<sup>53</sup> His colleague, Ikhlef Bouaïchi, went further: “I refuse the idea of a crisis in Kabylia; there is a crisis in Algeria, which is manifesting itself in Kabylia”.<sup>54</sup> A variant of this view is held by RCD leader Dr Saïd Sadi, who told ICG: “Kabylia expresses the problems of the nation. Rather than a purely local-regional agitation, what is happening is a harbinger of a national crisis”.<sup>55</sup>

Some Kabyles take this a step further and argue that Kabylia is the spearhead of progressive change in Algeria and that the Kabyles are, politically speaking, ahead of their fellow-Algerians. As the RCD’s Saïd Azamoum put it, “Kabylia has the same problems as elsewhere in Algeria, but it is in the vanguard”,<sup>56</sup> an idea shared by many Kabyle activists and frequently linked to the Kabyles’ role during the war of liberation.<sup>57</sup> This flattering self-image is not always endorsed by Algerians from other regions. As Dr Khaoula Taleb Ibrahim told ICG, many Algerians “have the impression that the Kabyles want to give lectures to everyone” and even Amazigh activists from elsewhere often resent Kabyle hegemony.<sup>58</sup> But the way in which the riots in Kabylia in the spring of 2001 were followed by a wave of protests in other regions gives some support to this idea, which was endorsed by a French official’s remark that, in 2001, “the Kabyle crisis was the psychological trigger for the whole of Algeria”.<sup>59</sup>

That said, the organised movement that developed out of Kabylia’s Black Spring and raised issues of national, as opposed to merely regional, importance, clearly failed to expand beyond the region and acquire a truly national standing. Understanding why requires an appreciation of the singular character of this movement, its genesis and its roots, but also the reactions to it of other forces in its political environment.

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53 ICG interview, Algiers, 30 January 2003.

54 ICG interview, Algiers, 30 January 2003.

55 ICG interview, Algiers, 30 January 2003.

56 ICG interview, Algiers, 3 November 2002.

57 As Rachid Chebati, the FFS mayor of Bejaia, put it, “Kabylia is the political trade union [*syndicat politique*] of Algeria. It is the region which really took charge of things during the Revolution”; ICG interview, Bejaia, 25 January 2003.

58 ICG interview, Algiers, 15 January 2003.

59 ICG interview, Paris, 24 September 2002.

## V. THE PECULIARITY OF THE COORDINATIONS

In stressing “the importance of the youth factor on the political scene”, Maître Hocine Zehouane drew “a parallel between the situation in Kabylia and the rise of the Islamist movement in the 1980-1990 period in the rest of the country”.<sup>60</sup> The urban youth who rioted in most places except Kabylia<sup>61</sup> in 1988 subsequently became the mass social base of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS). A key question that arose in the immediate aftermath of the Black Spring was what political force would succeed in harnessing and channelling the energies and impulses of this new generation in Kabylia. Both the FFS and the RCD did their best to offer themselves as conduits of the revolt by organising marches in Kabylia and Algiers. But when 500,000 people marched through Tizi Ouzou on 21 May 2001 and over a million in Algiers on 14 June 2001, the organisation behind these extraordinary events was something entirely new. It has been the central actor in the region ever since.

Two questions have been the focus of the intense public debate over the nature and role of the protest movement in Kabylia over the last two years. First, is the movement progressive, modernist and democratic or a regression toward traditionalism or even tribalism through a resurgence of “archaic” sentiments, political structures and forms of action? Second, why did a movement that appeared to mobilise almost universal public support in Kabylia for its protests against the regime in May 2001 end up trying to prevent legislative and local elections there in May and October 2002, vehemently targeting other points of view in Kabylia in the process?

This debate has been less useful than it might have been because it has been polarised by two equally simplistic views of the protest movement. Both views – that it is essentially modernist and democratic or essentially regressive – have involved emphasising one aspect of the movement and discounting the others. In reality, the

movement has been a complex hybrid, and this has been the key to its behaviour. Its program has been predominantly modern and in principle democratic, but its behaviour has not been determined purely by its objectives for its social basis has exercised an enormous influence. The central sociological fact about the movement is that it has been primarily based on the villages of Kabylia and has been profoundly marked in its structures and conduct by the political traditions of these villages. The influence of these traditions has not been the result of any regression, since they have been alive throughout the post-independence period. They have been able to affect the behaviour of the movement because the Coordinations were created from the bottom up and sought to be truly representative, with the village as the basic unit. The ability to harness village-level solidarity provided the movement with much of its initial mobilising power but the weight of local political traditions has also been a major constraint, the source of the movement’s principal weaknesses and its tendency to depart from its original non-violent principles.

### A. WHAT’S IN A NAME? THE ENIGMA OF THE ‘AARSH’

The organisation behind the impressive demonstration on 21 May 2001, the largest in Kabylia’s history, called itself the *Coordination des ‘aarch, daïras et communes* (CADC) of the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou. This unfamiliar mouthful of a name was partially echoed by similar bodies in the other wilayât of Kabylia – the *Coordination Inter-Communale de Bejaia* (CICB) and the *Coordination des Comités Citoyens de la Wilaya de Bouïra* (CCCWB). These three bodies, together with their counterparts from the peripheral wilayât of Bordj Bou Arreridj, Boumerdès and Setif, subsequently established an umbrella body called the *Coordination Inter-wilayas des ‘aarch, daïras et communes* (CIADC). It was this latter body that drew up the movement’s platform at El Kseur in the wilaya of Bejaia on 11 June 2001 and then organised the march on Algiers on 14 June 2001, when protesters from all parts of Kabylia converged on the capital in the biggest demonstration in Algeria’s history.

The unwieldy names and the proliferation of acronyms encouraged journalists and political actors themselves to adopt a kind of short-hand.

<sup>60</sup> ICG interview, Algiers, 16 January 2003.

<sup>61</sup> The general absence of serious disturbances in Kabylia (apart from the town of Bejaia) in October 1988 was very striking, given the region’s proximity to Algiers and its refractory traditions; for a discussion of this point, see Roberts, “Co-opting identity”, op. cit.

The entire protest movement was dubbed either “the Citizens movement”<sup>62</sup> or “the ‘*arush*’”. The first term attributed to the movement an essentially modern, democratic character and purpose, but the second conveyed an entirely different meaning. It is a striking feature of the entire debate over Kabylia since May 2001 that these very different terms have been used indiscriminately and interchangeably, thereby sowing confusion at home and abroad.

The suggestion that the nature of the movement reflects a regression to pre-modern bases of political solidarity and action consists of three separate propositions:

- that the movement is mainly if not wholly based on ‘*arush* (whatever these are);
- that the ‘*arush* in question are ancient, indeed archaic, forms of organisation; and
- that the (recently revived) idea of the ‘*arush* expresses what some have called “communitarian” sentiments and solidarities.

Only the last of these contains any truth.

‘*Arsh* (plural ‘*arush*) is an Arabic word. In the Middle East it means ‘throne’. In Algeria and Tunisia, it has a different meaning, which the standard dictionary translates as “tribe”.<sup>63</sup> The term has been absorbed into Tamazighit, where its plural form is ‘*aarsh*. The population of Kabylia has historically been divided into scores of different ‘*aarsh*, each consisting of a number of villages sharing a common political identity. The villages of an ‘*arsh* are invariably neighbours and possess a common territory within which no village belonging to a different ‘*arsh* is found.

The historic Kabyle ‘*arsh* is a survival from the pre-colonial period when Algeria was ruled by the Ottoman Regency, which, however, can be said to have governed only the towns and their low-lying hinterlands. In the rest of the country, and especially the Atlas mountains, society was self-governing. The ‘*arsh* was the highest level or largest unit of self-government. In Kabylia, the

main functions of self-government were performed at village level by the village council or assembly (*jema‘a* or, in Berber, *anejm‘a* or *thajma‘ath*), in which each lineage was represented.<sup>64</sup> Decision-making at the ‘*arsh* level mainly concerned three related matters: the defence of its territory, the protection and management of its market,<sup>65</sup> and relations with neighbouring ‘*aarsh* (war or peace). In Greater Kabylia (i.e. the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou today), but not elsewhere, many ‘*aarsh* were traditionally linked to their immediate neighbours in a higher level unit, the *thaqbilth* (conventionally translated as ‘confederation’), which was a military alliance predicated on the need to take a common attitude to the Ottoman authorities.

The claim that the contemporary movement has revived these ancient political groupings and that they can be regarded as survivals from a distant past and so “archaic” is mistaken. In reality, few of the groupings designated as ‘*aarsh* in the protest movement in Kabylia today correspond to the historic ‘*aarsh* of the pre-colonial period.<sup>66</sup> In virtually all other cases where the activists of the protest movement have appeared to be acting on the basis of the old ‘*arsh*, this was only because the modern communes have corresponded to them and borne their names. This correspondence<sup>67</sup> is recent, dating from the redrawing of the national administrative map by the government in 1984. In other words, it is the state itself that has established the local, territorial and sociological, basis of recent political mobilisation in Kabylia.

<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that Algerian journalists did not invent this term, since it was used in the founding document of the CADC; see *Rapport de synthèse de la rencontre d’Illoula Oumalou* in Appendix B.

<sup>63</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J. Milton Cowan, Wiesbaden and London, 1971, page 602.

<sup>64</sup> Every household (*akham*) in a Kabyle village belongs to a group of related families which can trace their descent from a common ancestor over at least four generations; this larger kinship unit is usually called *kharruba* or *thakharrubth* in Greater Kabylia, terms conventionally translated as “lineage”; it is the lineage and not the household which is represented in the village *jema‘a*.

<sup>65</sup> Weekly markets in pre-colonial Kabylia were usually linked to particular ‘*aarsh*, e.g. *Suq al-Arbaa n’Ath Ouacif* (the Wednesday market of the Ath Ouacif). Many boast such names to this day, as is true of other regions of Algeria.

<sup>66</sup> The most prominent groupings within the CADC which style themselves as ‘*aarsh* – the Ath Jennad, Ath Irathen and Ath Ouaguenoun – are revivals of the old confederation, *thaqbilth*, not the historic ‘*aarsh*, which have been eclipsed if not entirely forgotten.

<sup>67</sup> This correspondence occurs in about half the 67 communes of the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, but in far fewer communes in the other wilayât of the region.

Finally, it should be noted that the term '*arsh*' does not appear in the name of the Coordinations at any level in either Bejaia, Bouïra, Bordj Bou Arreridj, or Setif.<sup>68</sup> The widespread reference to the protest movement as a whole as "the '*aarsh*'" arguably is a huge mystification.

## B. CITIZENS MOVEMENT?

For much of the Algerian press, the protest movement headed by the Coordinations has been "*le Mouvement Citoyen*", a term that suggests it is modern or modernist in character, democratic in spirit and progressive in tendency. This judgement is naturally endorsed by the Coordinations' activists themselves. In support of this positive self-image, they point to the modern and democratic nature of the movement's demands, as embodied in the platform drawn up at El Kseur in the wilaya of Bejaia on 11 June 2001.<sup>69</sup>

Many of the movement's activists claim that it has also been democratic in form and practice. Farès Oudjedi told ICG, "the movement is transparent, democratic and profoundly peaceful", in contrast to the regime, which he characterised as "opaque and violent".<sup>70</sup> The evidence at least partly supports these claims. Meetings, known as "conclaves", of the Coordinations at wilaya and inter-wilaya level have regularly published their decisions. The system of representation has, in principle, been democratic, with villages choosing their own delegates to coordinations at commune level, the latter choosing their delegates to coordinations at daïra (or, in few cases, '*arsh*') level, the latter choosing their delegates to wilaya-level coordinations and the latter also choosing their delegates to the inter-wilaya conclaves. Moreover, the principle that the movement should be

"resolutely peaceful" was agreed and clearly affirmed at the outset.

Nonetheless, the credentials of the movement as a citizens movement have come under increasing attack within the region, and important elements of Kabyle opinion have turned against it. Popular disaffection is linked to its resort to violence. In seeking to enforce its call for "rejection" of the legislative elections of 30 May 2002 and the local elections of 10 October 2002, the movement actively prevented people from getting to the polling stations and even, in some cases, prevented polling stations from functioning. In the summer and autumn of 2002, the Coordinations established road-blocks, called repeatedly for general strikes, sabotaged certain infrastructures (for example, street lights in the town of Tizi Ouzou) and frequently resorted to intimidation. Some Kabyle personalities have gone as far as to say the movement displays fascist tendencies. According to the well-known human rights lawyer Hocine Zehouane, for example:

It is an error to present this movement as a vanguard, democratic, citizen's movement... In connotation, it is fascistic. In behaviour it is fascistic... Aggressiveness, violence, intolerance, terrorising people, making people do what it tells them through fear, by threats... The gross manipulation is to call all that "the citizens movement" when in fact it is the negation of the idea of citizenship.<sup>71</sup>

Part of the explanation for the movement's behaviour can be found in the developments during 2002, when it found itself the target of a series of challenges. But its response had its roots in the movement's own origins and in the particular way in which it was constituted.

## C. THE SUBORDINATION OF TOWN TO COUNTRYSIDE

The decision to establish the CADC in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou was taken by local activists concerned to stop the bloodshed by giving the furious young men of the region a good reason to

<sup>68</sup> This not because the historic '*arsh*' have not survived in these regions but because they have no contemporary political salience, since they rarely correspond to today's communes and daïras. The activists who established the Coordinations in these wilayât could have chosen the historic '*aarsh*' of the region as the first unit of representation above the village; they preferred the commune, apparently without hesitation. But this is actually what most activists in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou also decided. The rule they followed was to take the commune as the first unit of representation above the village, whether or not it corresponded to an '*arsh*'.

<sup>69</sup> For the full text (in French) of the El Kseur Platform, see Appendix C.

<sup>70</sup> ICG interview, Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>71</sup> ICG interview, Algiers, 16 January 2003.

stop rioting and getting themselves killed.<sup>72</sup> One might have expected the wilaya capital, the town of Tizi Ouzou, to be the hub of such an attempt to coordinate their efforts. Indeed, the activists' initial meeting was at the University of Tizi Ouzou on the edge of the town in the first week of May 2001. This proved indecisive, however, and Dr Amar Fali, a leading activist from Beni Douala, persuaded those present to reconvene at Beni Douala, where the first effective conclave was held on 10 May, attended by 22 delegations from across the wilaya.<sup>73</sup> This established the perspectives of the CADC, which were then developed into a provisional ten-point platform at the second conclave, in the remote commune of Illoula, on 17 May. It was there that CADC was proclaimed and plans laid for the great march in Tizi Ouzou four days later.

The way in which the wilaya capital was marginalised in these developments contrasted sharply with the "Berber Spring" in 1980, when the town of Tizi Ouzou was the storm centre and political capital of the protest movement from start to finish.

Matters developed differently in the wilaya of Bejaia, but the result was the same. At the outset, a body called the Popular Committee of the Wilaya of Bejaia (*Comité Populaire de la Wilaya de Bejaia*, CPWB), succeeded in coordinating activism across the wilaya. The CPWB was based in the town of Bejaia. Its nucleus already existed before the riots of late April 2001,<sup>74</sup> and was mostly drawn from local intelligentsia, notably at the university, and from recently formed trade unions outside the state-controlled General Union of Algerian Workers (*Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens*, UGTA). A leftwing group of Trotskyist pedigree, the Socialist Workers' Party (*Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs*, PST) played a role in

developing the CPWB,<sup>75</sup> but the Committee appears to have succeeded in reaching out beyond leftwing political circles and to have coordinated a range of independent bodies and associations. In expanding to accommodate the local coordinations which sprang up in the hinterland of Bejaia – the Soummam valley and Guergour districts in particular – it asserted the – leadership of urban forces over the region's political life and gave a modern and democratic orientation to the protest movement.

This did not last. At a CPWB meeting on 19 July 2001, a number of communal coordinations from the Soummam valley and the other rural districts seceded and established a new body. At issue was the principle of representation within the movement. The secessionists argued that "there should not be any associations, corporations or trade unions etc. in the movement. There should be a popular structure: you come into it as a citizen, not as a doctor, trade unionist, etc".<sup>76</sup>

Those who split called themselves the *Coordination Inter-Communale de la wilaya de Bejaia* (CICB). The urban rump of the CPWB remained in existence but lost its influence on events. Following the decision of the inter-wilaya conclave at Boghni on 30 July 2001 that each wilaya should be represented by only one coordination,<sup>77</sup> the CPWB was excluded from the region-wide movement, and the CICB was recognised as the latter's sole representative in the wilaya of Bejaia. The CICB's founders rejected the leadership or even participation of social forces organised on the basis of profession or occupation. Rather, the movement was to be organised according to the principle of representation by place of residence – village (or neighbourhood in the towns), commune, daïra and wilaya – alone.

The main element of the social base of the CICB was the society of the villages of the Soummam valley and the Guergour massif, a society

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<sup>72</sup> According to Arezki Yahoui, former delegate from Bouzeguen and CADC founder-member, interviewed by ICG in Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003, and Mohand Iguetoulène, delegate of 'arsh Ath Jennad and member of the rotating presidency of the CADC, interviewed by ICG at Larbaa Nath Irathen, wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, 19 January 2003.

<sup>73</sup> ICG interview with Dr Amar Fali, former delegate of Beni Aïssi commune and Beni Douala daïra and founder-member of the CADC, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>74</sup> ICG interview with Dr Sadek Akrouf, lecturer at Bejaia University and leading activist in the CPWB, Bejaia, 26 January 2003.

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<sup>75</sup> See the interview with PST spokesman Chawki Salhi on *Algeria-Interface*, 14 September 2001.

<sup>76</sup> ICG interview with CICB activists of the Coordination Inter-Villages d'Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>77</sup> *La Tribune*, 31 July 2001. The decision was confirmed by the subsequent inter-wilaya conclave at Ath Jennad on 27-28 September 2001; see "Coordination Inter Wilayale des 'archs, daïras et communes: Principes Directeurs du Mouvement Citoyen", Ath Jennad, 27-28 September 2001, article 18.

essentially identical to that of the mountain districts of the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou from which the founders of the CADC had mostly come. The political traditions of these villages have governed the behaviour of the movement across the region ever since.

#### D. STRUCTURE AND SPIRIT: THE PROJECTION OF THE JEMA‘A

As it crystallised between early May and the autumn of 2001, the movement of the Coordinations exhibited several remarkable features:

- a vertical structure characterised by the combination of three principles: delegation and mandating from below; representation at every level of the state’s administrative structure – village, commune, daïra (except where, very occasionally, so-called *‘aarsh* have been privileged instead) and wilaya; and disqualification imposed from above of certain categories of participants;
- a rotating presidency;
- a peripatetic headquarters;
- a high frequency of deliberative meetings (“conclaves”);
- an insistence on consensual decision-making;
- the complete absence of women;
- a code of honour; and
- the resort to ostracism as a disciplinary sanction.

A particular feature has been what the activists call “the principle of horizontality” embodied in a rotating presidency of the wilaya level Coordinations and the constant movement of the movement’s headquarters. Each conclave is presided over by the leading delegate of the local host coordination and decides the venue of the next conclave but one. As a result, at any time the rotating presidency of the wilaya coordination consists of three people: the delegate who presided over the previous conclave, the delegate presiding over the present or most recent conclave and the

delegate who will preside the next,<sup>78</sup> a system resembling the troikas of the European Union. Although each wilaya-level coordination has a secretariat of sorts and a number of commissions, its headquarters is regularly shifting from the venue of one conclave to the next.

Activists explain this feature by the desire to ensure that the leadership does not become a bone of contention.<sup>79</sup> But this refusal to allow the leading instances of the coordinations to become a locus of power also reflects the political tradition of Kabylia’s villages, whose system of self-government by the *jema‘a* exhibits the same principle. The *jema‘a* is presided over by a relatively powerless (albeit respected) elder, acceptable to all parties, who ensures that its deliberations are orderly but has no power to impose his views.<sup>80</sup> In fact, however, by preventing the Coordinations from having a clear leadership, chosen and legitimated – but also held accountable – by normal electoral procedures, the “principle of horizontality” merely ensures that the movement’s de facto leaders emerge informally, in part at least as a result of media attention. The two most conspicuous cases are those of Belaïd Abrika in the CADC<sup>81</sup> and Ali Gherbi in the CICB,<sup>82</sup> who have

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<sup>78</sup> ICG interviews with Mohand Iguetoulène and Hocine Mammeri of the Présidence Tournante (rotating presidency) of the CADC, Larbaa Nath Irathen, 19 January 2003.

<sup>79</sup> ICG interview with Chabane Aït El Hadj, former delegate from Yatafen and Arezki Yahoui, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>80</sup> For an explanation of the *jema‘a* and its importance in Algeria’s political traditions, see Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988-2002. Studies in a broken polity* (London, 2003), chapter 2, “The FLN: French conceptions, Algerian realities”.

<sup>81</sup> Belaïd Abrika (born 1969) emerged as the leading delegate of the Neighbourhood Committee of Tizi Ouzou Town (*Comité des Quartiers de la Ville de Tizi Ouzou*, CQVTO) within, first, the *Coordination Communale de Tizi Ouzou* and, second, the CADC; a striking figure, with (most unusually) shoulder-length hair as well as a full beard, he has been the object of continuous attention from the Algerian media, which has tended to promote his influence; he has been in custody since 13 October 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Born 1956, the leading light of the *Comité de la Société Civile d’El Kseur* and the moving spirit in the split from the CPWB by what became the CICB, Ali Gherbi came to prominence in connection with the march of 14 June 2001 on Algiers, when it was reported that the interior minister, Noureddine Zerhouni, had contacted him in an attempt to secure a change of the marchers’ route. Like Abrika, he has benefited from media attention ever since.

exercised an unequalled degree of informal leadership in Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia respectively. And because this leadership has been informal, it has also been unaccountable.

The other remarkable features of the coordinations are also derived from the traditions of village society and the *jema'a*. This clearly applies to the adoption of a "Code of Honour" binding on all members<sup>83</sup> and to the de facto absence of women,<sup>84</sup> the *jema'a* being traditionally an all-male affair. The principle that participants in coordinations at every level must be delegates instructed by mandates also reflects the tradition that members of the *jema'a* are not representatives in the Western sense, expected to use their own judgement and chart their own political course, but spokesmen for the village's constituent lineages,<sup>85</sup> able to answer for those they represent only in so far as an issue has already been discussed.

Delegates to the coordinations are accordingly able to perform their functions only to the extent that they are mandated. For every new issue, fresh mandating is necessary. As a result, the movement has been characterised by an extraordinary frequency of internal meetings. Conclaves at wilaya level have succeeded one another with sometimes astonishing rapidity, and before each such conclave can deliberate, prior meetings to mandate delegates are needed.

Likewise, the tradition of the *jema'a* underlies the principle that decisions at every level be taken by consensus, not simple majority vote. This has tended to ensure that conclaves are drawn-out affairs, especially when controversy arises over the validity of participants' mandates. Such controversy has arisen in part because of the movement's determination to be independent vis-à-vis not only the state and its institutions but also

political parties.<sup>86</sup> The principle that delegates may not hold any political position within regime institutions nor be candidates in elections for any political party has been interpreted as authorising upper-level instances of the movement to challenge and even disqualify delegates. Attempts to enforce these rules have led to angry and sometimes protracted debates,<sup>87</sup> which have tarnished the movement's image, outside the region at any rate.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, the movement's repertoire of sanctions also derives from the traditions of village society. Conceiving of itself as "resolutely peaceful", it has, at least in theory, denied itself resort to physical coercion. Instead, it has relied on the traditional practice of ostracism – "*la mise en quarantaine*" ("sending to Coventry"). This is an ancient village custom: when a family transgresses the moral or political code of the community, the *jema'a* decrees that all other members of the community break off relations with the offenders, a measure that can amount to social death for the family in question.

At the outset, the CADC decreed the ostracism of the gendarmes in the region.<sup>89</sup> But, as divisions emerged in the autumn of 2001, the Coordinations increasingly resorted to ostracism to maintain internal discipline at the expense of minority views.<sup>90</sup> In the process, the movement appeared incapable of handling or even tolerating vigorous political debate. In enforcing ostracism in some cases, the distinction between "resolutely peaceful" and intimidatory or frankly coercive behaviour tended to be lost from sight.

From its inception, the movement of the Coordinations explicitly situated itself outside the framework of the regime and its institutions, the formal political sphere structured by party-political competition and the "voluntary sector" of legally

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<sup>83</sup> This Code and the movement's "Guiding Principles" were adopted by the CIADC at the conclave at Ath Jennad on 27-28 September 2001. For the code of honour in Kabyle society, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The sense of honour", in Bourdieu, P., *Algeria 1960* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 95-132.

<sup>84</sup> See "Les archs misogynes", *El Watan*, 7 March 2002; declarations by the Coordinations formally deploring the absence of women or agreeing that they should be involved have remained dead letters.

<sup>85</sup> For the meaning of "lineages" in this context, see footnote 64 above.

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<sup>86</sup> As was made clear in the document produced after the Illoula meeting in May 2001; see *Rapport de synthèse de la rencontre d'illoula Oumalou*, 17 May 2001, in Appendix 2.

<sup>87</sup> For example, when the presence of the President of the APC of Aghrib, a leading RCD activist, within the Ath Jennad delegation was vigorously contested by other delegates.

<sup>88</sup> As Dr Taleb Ibrahim put it, "Can you take seriously a conclave where they can spend hours on end discussing whether or not to exclude a member?", ICG interview, Algiers, 15 January 2003.

<sup>89</sup> CADC, "Rapport de synthèse de la rencontre d'illoula Oumalou", 17 May 2001, in Appendix 2.

<sup>90</sup> See the article "Mise en quarantaine" in *El Watan*, 24 October 2001.

authorised associations. It was, therefore, inevitably located within the informal sector of the Algerian polity, which has been governed since 1954 by the traditions of the countryside and of village society in particular.<sup>91</sup>

These traditions were appropriate for village self-government because the issues to be addressed were familiar and their management a matter of routine. However, the Coordinations have not been a village trying to govern itself, but rather a movement trying to get somewhere and take people with it. The way in which the traditions of the village *jema'a* have determined and simultaneously circumscribed their political options and capacities has severely limited the movement's ability to pursue its aims or deal effectively with the problems it has confronted.

## VI. THE CAREER OF THE COORDINATIONS

### A. THE TRAJECTORY

The story of the protest movement in Kabylia is one of rapid rise and fall. It was only five weeks between the first conclave at Beni Douala and the 14 June 2001 march in Algiers that attracted one million protestors from all parts of Kabylia, the largest demonstration in Algerian history. The movement's decline has been protracted and has been marked by the interplay of three tendencies:

- ❑ for it to radicalise further its positions, as when it decided on 30-31 August 2001 that the El Kseur Platform was "non-negotiable" and when it subsequently decided to "reject" the legislative elections of 30 May and the local elections of 10 October;
- ❑ for it to splinter and contract, as successive waves of moderates either withdrew or were forced out, notably the "dissidents" of the "Group of Nine" and those delegates involved in talks with representatives of the regime; and
- ❑ for it to place itself at odds with a growing proportion of public opinion in the region as its representative credentials as well as its tactics, notably the resort to strong-arm methods, came in question.

The profile of the movement in its decline has stood in marked contrast to the orderly, peaceful and dignified demonstration it mounted in Tizi Ouzou on 21 May 2001. The disappointment at this evolution felt by many in Kabylia was eloquently expressed by Brahim Salhi:

The founding moment – 21 April to 31 May 2001 – opened up very hopeful prospects. It really was a "citizens movement". People lit candles everywhere, there was an entirely peaceful protest – very, very dense emotionally speaking, very strong – which offered no pretext for repression. There was a lot of imagination...good natured demonstrations, peaceful, school kids, girls and boys together, there was nothing aggressive about it...On the 'black march' of 21 May the atmosphere was not confrontational at all; feelings and ideas were welling up all over the place, discussions

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<sup>91</sup> This applies to the towns as well as the countryside. The urban population of Algeria is largely composed of first or second-generation rural migrants; urban neighbourhoods have no formal status within the administrative structures of the state; such informal political organisation as occurs at neighbourhood level involves the improvised reproduction of the model of the *jema'a*, except in those cases where Islamist influence ensures that the mosque is the focus of grass-roots organisation. The Coordinations' decision to refuse the participation of professional associations and unions ensured that the organisation would be dominated by the traditions of the village in urban as well as rural districts.



were going on everywhere, there was an immense hope...Now, there is no more discussion, things have got very heavy, people watch what they say.<sup>92</sup>

But it is important to appreciate that the decline began shortly after the march on Algiers in June 2001. The first split, which saw the CICB established by secession from the CPWB, occurred on 19 July, but divisions had already surfaced at the inter-wilaya conclave at Azeffoun on 6 July. These reflected a sharpening of pre-existing disagreements over the wisdom of the march on Algiers and especially the appropriateness of targeting the Presidency of the Republic.

The march on Algiers is widely seen as the high point of the protest movement. But while it attracted considerable international attention, it can be seen in retrospect as the beginning of the end. The descent of “*les ‘arouch*” (widely understood in Algeria to mean “the tribes”) on the capital was presented as aggressive and threatening by the state-controlled media, and the authorities were able to mobilise sections of the Algiers population against the demonstrators. Elements of the regime were particularly concerned that the organisers were determined to march on the Presidency of the Republic, notionally in order to deliver a copy of the El Kseur Platform. This decision was disputed within the movement’s leadership, some of whom considered that it amounted to an attempted coup d’état against Bouteflika and that the protest was being hijacked by putschist forces with agendas of their own.<sup>93</sup>

Whatever the organisers’ motives, the decisions to march on Algiers<sup>94</sup> have been the only substantial initiatives that the movement has taken outside Kabylia. It appears that targeting the capital has been a surrogate for expanding the movement

peacefully to other regions. Instead of gaining support elsewhere, these tactics have made it easier for the authorities to represent the movement as a peculiarly Kabyle affair as well as to exploit internal divisions that these controversial decisions have aggravated. For Brahim Salhi, among other observers, “the march of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June was the fatal error”.<sup>95</sup> Error or not, it at least partly followed from the earlier decision to radicalise the movement’s agenda.

## B. THE EL KSEUR PLATFORM AND THE RADICALISATION OF THE MOVEMENT

Between the conclaves at Illoula on 17 May 2001 and El Kseur on 11 June, the protest movement significantly radicalised its objectives.<sup>96</sup> The El Kseur platform upped the ante on every politically sensitive demand tabled at Illoula. Moreover, it committed the movement to two additional objectives:

- for a state guaranteeing all socio-economic rights and all democratic liberties (art. 9); and
- that all the executive functions of the state as well as its security forces be placed under the effective authority of democratically elected instances (art. 11).

The more radical agenda adopted at El Kseur made it harder for the government to concede and easier for it to resist the movement’s demands. The addition of the objectives in articles 9 and 11 in particular implicitly converted the Coordinations from a protest movement making demands on the government to a revolutionary movement seeking the fundamental transformation of the regime.

A key term in the vocabulary of the movement has been the French word “*revendication*”, “demand” or “claim”. The El Kseur Platform is formally entitled “The Platform of Demands of El Kseur” (“*La Plate-forme de Revendications d’El Kseur*”). According to Ali Gherbi of the CICB, the movement “is a movement of demands”.<sup>97</sup> To make demands or claims on a state is very different from trying to change its form of government. That these two distinct ambitions should have been combined

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<sup>92</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003; Brahim Salhi is one of Algeria’s leading sociologists and social historians; he lectures at the Mouloud Mammeri University in Tizi Ouzou.

<sup>93</sup> ICG interview with Saïd Boukhari, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>94</sup> On 24 June 2001, the CIADC decided to organise a second march on Algiers on 5 July (Independence Day); this was banned and marchers were prevented from reaching the capital; on 30 July 2001, the CIADC called a further march on Algiers for 8 August, which met the same fate; on 29 August 2001, the CIADC called for yet another march on Algiers for 5 October; this too was banned.

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<sup>95</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>96</sup> See the table in Appendix B for a partial illustration.

<sup>97</sup> ICG interview, El Kseur, 26 January 2003.

in the same program reflected the tensions between different perspectives within the movement, the ambivalence of its attitude towards the central authorities and the lack of coherence in its overall position.

There is evidence that many delegates in the Coordinations did not appreciate the implications of this radicalisation. In the wake of the march on Algiers on 14 June 2001, it was decided, under pressure from the rank and file, that the El Kseur Platform should be “explained” in detail to the movement’s activists as well as the general public.<sup>98</sup> But it is by no means certain that this process brought home to many the significance of what had happened. As delegates from Akfadou told ICG, “we are not asking for heaven on earth, we are only asking for the minimum of democracy”.<sup>99</sup> But the implications were understood by some, at least, of those actively involved in the leadership. Mohand Iguetoulène of the CADC’s “rotating presidency” told ICG:

The regime will never accept and will never apply article 11 of the Platform. If you take its security forces away from it, bingo! [“ça y est!”] – the regime itself is finished! 100

The movement’s attitude continued in this radical direction over the months following the march on Algiers. At an inter-wilaya conclave at M’Chedallah in the wilaya of Bouïra on 30-31 August 2001, it was decided that all the demands in the El Kseur platform were “sealed and non-negotiable.” A set of “Guiding Principles” was adopted, together with a “Code of Honour” at an inter-wilaya conclave at Ath Jennad on 27-28 September 2001, and both were subsequently invoked against those in the movement who rejected the maximalist posture that was being assumed. In early 2002 the movement decided to oppose the holding of the legislative, municipal and departmental elections until “full and complete satisfaction” had been given to the demands of the El Kseur Platform. The initial decision to “reject” these elections subsequently developed into a determination to prevent polling from taking place.

This evolution precipitated fresh divisions, as successive waves of delegates began to question or dissociate themselves from the ever more intransigent line, but also led the movement to clash with important elements of public opinion in the region, at the expense of the massive support it had originally mobilised as well as its commitment to a “resolutely peaceful” *modus operandi*.

The constant agitation, the recurrent riots with their panoply of burning tyres, stone-throwing, damage to property, tear-gas grenades, arrests, injuries and even deaths, the repeated calls by the Coordinations for general strikes across the region, the threats to force shop-keepers and other traders to heed the strike calls, the road blocks and other measures taken to prevent people from exercising their right to vote on 30 May and 10 October 2002, the irony that a movement calling for a democratic transformation of Algeria should act in this way: all this could not help but provoke revulsion among people originally incensed at the state’s behaviour and initially inclined to give the protest movement wholehearted support. A Tizi Ouzou resident told ICG:

We have suffered. We have been suffering now for thirteen years. We have lived under the dictatorship of terrorism, now we are living under the dictatorship of the ‘aarsh.... This month, they [the CADC] called for a strike; it lasted three days, then they added a fourth day. There are 21 working days in a month. Four out of 21, that’s a lot; people have children to feed, everybody loses their wages for each day of the strike, whereas they [the CADC activists], they are unemployed, they have nothing to lose. For the shopkeepers to have to close for three or four days a month, that’s a lot, they are losing a lot of their income, and they are threatened: “obey the strike call, close your shop or we burn it down”. Sometimes, all the roads in the wilaya are blocked. The road to Tizi Ouzou hospital was blocked; people visiting their relatives in hospital were pelted with stones. Why? What is the objective? It’s a nightmare, it’s a nightmare. It is really a pity.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> ICG interview with Saïd Boukhari, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>99</sup> ICG interview with members of Coordination Inter-Villages d’Akkfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>100</sup> ICG interview, Larbaa Nath Irathen, 19 January 2003.

<sup>101</sup> ICG interview with Slimane Mokrani, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

This disconcerting evolution is linked by many to the evaporation of the movement's democratic and representative character. As a retired schoolmaster put it:

In the beginning, people really supported the movement. Delegates were properly elected by the *jema'at* and then at the meetings in the communes to choose the delegates for the conclaves. This is what happened in my district. Now many delegates are self-proclaimed.<sup>102</sup>

According to one source, popular exasperation in one district expressed itself physically: "at Ain El Hammam there are no more *'arush*, the *'arush* were given a thrashing".<sup>103</sup> Why matters turned out in this way is widely debated in Kabylia. A prominent former leader of the FFS, Saïd Khelil, offered this explanation:

This movement emerged because of the failure of the political class. But it has not had the time or the experience or the qualities needed to replace the old political leadership that has become exhausted.<sup>104</sup>

These shortcomings arguably explain a central aspect of the movement already noted, the confusion at the heart of its agenda. This has been particularly pronounced in respect of its position on the issue at the origin of the unrest, the Gendarmerie.

### C. THE BONE OF CONTENTION: THE DEMAND FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE GENDARMERIE

The El Kseur Platform contains three demands regarding the Gendarmerie. Article 2 calls for the judgement of all those responsible for the "crimes" of the "Black Spring": the gendarmes who broke their rules of engagement by shooting to kill and the unidentified senior figures who allegedly gave the orders. Article 4 is far broader, calling for the immediate departure of the Gendarmerie brigades en bloc and of the riot police units sent to reinforce them. Finally, article 11 calls for all security forces as well as civilian apparatuses of the executive branch of the state to be answerable to democratically elected bodies. The combination of these demands has arguably been a major factor in the impasse.

Article 2 was a straightforward demand for justice. It appears to have enjoyed widespread support in the region and very probably beyond it. However difficult it may have been for the authorities to satisfy, it did not require a change in the constitution, merely that the state uphold its own laws and punish those of its agents who had violated them. It was not unreasonable for the movement to consider this demand as non-negotiable.

Article 11 was an equally straightforward – if very ambitious – demand for democratic transformation of the state. Its implications were revolutionary, given the pre-eminence of the armed forces in the political system and the weakness of the elected assemblies at every level. This was clearly not a demand the regime could concede in the short term, nor one which there was any point in negotiating about. It could realistically be considered to be a statement of democratic principle for which the movement could hope to canvass public support but only as a long term objective.

Article 4 was not straightforward at all. First, its meaning was unclear. Did it mean that all Gendarmerie brigades should be withdrawn everywhere, or only from Kabylia? According to some activists, it was intended to apply

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<sup>102</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

<sup>103</sup> ICG interview with Slimane Mokrani, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

<sup>104</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003. Khelil is a former First Secretary of the FFS and was elected on the first ballot at Tizi Ouzou in December 1991; he left the FFS some time ago.

nationwide,<sup>105</sup> but it has generally been understood as limited to Kabylia.<sup>106</sup> As such, it was open to the charge of being “Kabyle-regionalist” and inconsistent with the movement’s national pretensions. Second, the demand tended to eclipse the demand for punishment of those gendarmes who had misbehaved. Third, the demand, at least in its regionalist interpretation, was impossible for the authorities to concede, given the unitary constitution of the Algerian state and the national mission of the Gendarmerie, as some leading activists should have known.

An attempt to justify the withdrawal demand was made when the Inter-Wilaya Coordination eventually engaged in “clarification” of the El Kseur Platform. The document it subsequently published put forward the following rationale:

The Gendarmerie brigades, through their conduct outside of the law, which is the origin of all the evils such as corruption, drug trafficking, racketeering, intimidations and humiliations, conduct which has been denounced in vain, have ended up being guilty of deliberate murders of innocent young people, thus provoking a veritable, generalised and legitimate revolt of the population. For this reason, the presence of this corps has become unbearable, to the point that it is perceived as an intolerable aggression in the eyes of the citizens.<sup>107</sup>

This view of the Gendarmerie is by no means universally endorsed in Kabylia.

The Gendarmerie performs two sets of functions in addition to its general role as a kind of Highway Patrol. As a para-military security force it has been very actively involved in the anti-terrorism campaign across Algeria. It also performs the function of an investigative police force in the countryside. Criminal activities investigated by the *Surêté Nationale* in the towns are investigated by the Gendarmerie in rural districts. It is in carrying

out the second set of duties that the gendarmes have aroused resentment in Kabylia. But there have been two kinds of resentment and two kinds of demand in response to the problem.

That some, possibly many, gendarmes have exploited their police function to secure pay-offs from local traders through what amount to protection rackets is widely alleged and very probable. There is, however, no firm evidence that this is worse in Kabylia than in other regions. Indeed, according to Hocine Zehouane, “the gendarmes are more restrained in Kabylia than elsewhere”.<sup>108</sup> Local reactions to this aspect of the gendarmes’ behaviour, and to other ways in which they have tended to outrage local people (e.g. harassment of young women) initially took the form of demands that fell far short of their withdrawal. At Beni Douala, for example, immediately following the killing of Guermah, the population agreed that unmarried gendarmes should be replaced by “responsible” (married) ones; and that the *daira* of Beni Douala should have its own *Surêté Nationale* brigade and station, and local gendarmes should thereafter cease to perform police functions.<sup>109</sup>

Interest in the second demand has become fairly widespread, and reflects the fact that, in many districts of Kabylia officially regarded as “rural”, population density is approaching or has already reached “urban” levels. Significantly, this attitude accepts that the policing function hitherto performed by the Gendarmerie is necessary. Recognition of this is wholly absent from the El Kseur Platform.

It is public knowledge in Kabylia that a lot of illicit economic activity takes place. The dark side of the deregulation of the Algerian economy – the proliferation of *trabendo* (contraband) networks and “mafias” of various kinds – has affected Kabylia as elsewhere. The activities of what is known locally as “the sand mafia” – organised gangs who illegally extract and sell vast quantities of sand from river beds and beaches, notably the Sebaou River in Greater Kabylia and the coastline east of Bejaia – are especially notorious.<sup>110</sup> The state’s main

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<sup>105</sup> ICG interview with Farès Oudjedi, Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>106</sup> According to Mourad Bounoua, member of the Coordination Communale de Tizi Ouzou interviewed by ICG 19 January 2003; this interpretation of the demand had already been stated very clearly by Belaïd Abrika in an interview with *Algeria Interface* on 20 December 2001.

<sup>107</sup> CIADC, “Explication de la Plate-forme d’El Kseur”, Larbaa Nath Irathen, 31 October 2001, chapter II.

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<sup>108</sup> ICG interview, Algiers, 16 January 2003.

<sup>109</sup> ICG interview with Dr Amar Fali, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>110</sup> See “La mafia du sable sévit à Sidi Naamane”, *Liberté*, 29 August 2002, and “Voyage dans les plaines du GSPC”, *Algeria-Interface*, 18 December 2002.

instrument to repress this is the Gendarmerie.<sup>111</sup> For the protest movement to call for its immediate and unconditional withdrawal, without explicitly acknowledging that its police functions are legitimate and must be carried out somehow, exposed the movement to the charge that it was either rejecting the state as such or being manipulated by dubious interests.

It is also public knowledge in Kabylia, as elsewhere in Algeria, that control of the principal security forces is a major stake in the power game at the highest levels of the regime. Demanding the withdrawal of the Gendarmerie, therefore, implicated the protest movement in the factional conflict in Algiers. According to Professor Lahouari Addi, an Algerian political sociologist, the Commander of the Gendarmerie Nationale, General Bousteila, is a close supporter of President Bouteflika.<sup>112</sup> If the suggestion in the Issad report, that the provocations in April-June 2001 were ordered by forces external to the Gendarmerie, is correct, it follows that the events of the Black Spring involved an attempt to undermine General Bousteila and, through him, President Bouteflika. On this reasoning, the subsequent demand for the withdrawal of the Gendarmerie may represent a manipulation of the protest movement by forces external to it in what amounts to a continuation of the same factional manoeuvring against the president and one of his principal military supporters.

The idea that the events in Kabylia in general, and the protest movement in particular, have been manipulated is widespread within the region. That the intelligence services have been involved is often suggested, especially by FFS members,<sup>113</sup> although evidence (as opposed to hearsay) is scarce. But it is not only the FFS that has taken this view, and the scope of the “manipulation” thesis is not limited to the intelligence services, since other possible manipulators (e.g. local “mafia” circles)

are also invoked by some. And there is reasonably widespread support for the view that, as Hocine Zehouane put it, “the concentration of attention exclusively on the Gendarmerie is organised”.<sup>114</sup>

But, whether or not one accepts, as an FFS activist put it, that the events in Kabylia have represented “the squabble of the factions mediated by the population”,<sup>115</sup> and whether or not Professor Addi’s and Professor Issad’s more specific suggestions are correct, whichever faction enjoys the allegiance of the current Commander of the Gendarmerie cannot realistically be expected to agree that any region of the country should be evacuated by this apparatus. To make fulfilment of this demand a condition of any meaningful dialogue with the authorities has, therefore, been to ensure that the situation in Kabylia remains blocked indefinitely.<sup>116</sup>

#### **D. THE JOKER IN THE PACK: FERHAT MEHENNI AND THE MAK**

In June 2001 a familiar figure in Kabyle political circles, Ferhat Mehenni, began what would develop into sustained agitation for Kabylia’s autonomy. Known in the region and the Kabyle community elsewhere (especially in France) by his first name alone, Ferhat came to prominence as a singer in the early 1980s and subsequently became politically active, initially in the RCD and its wing of the Berber Cultural Movement (MCB) and later in an attempt to establish a version of the MCB – *le MCB-Rassemblement National* – independent of the region’s political parties.<sup>117</sup> When this faltered, he seemed to be politically finished, but he made a spectacular come-back as the apostle of the autonomist vision.

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<sup>111</sup> See “Des engins de pilleurs de sable saisis par la Gendarmerie nationale”, *Le Matin*, 18 November 2002, and “Bejaia: Un voleur de sable écroué”, *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 29 April, 2003.

<sup>112</sup> Lahouari Addi, “Enquête sur les dissensions au sein de la hiérarchie militaire algérienne sur fond d’émeute”, *Algeria-Watch*, June 2001.

<sup>113</sup> ICG interview with Mourad Kacer, head of the FFS *Bureau Fédéral* in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, and Ahcène Adnane, member of the *Bureau Fédéral*, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

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<sup>114</sup> ICG interview, Algiers, 15 January 2003.

<sup>115</sup> ICG interview with Mourad Kacer, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Certain Kabyle personalities noted and criticised the regionalist character of this demand, for instance the widely respected veteran of the Revolution, Ali Zaamoum, who has repeatedly tried to exercise a moderating influence on the protest movement in Kabylia while expressing his solidarity with the outlook and grievances of Kabyle youth in general.

<sup>117</sup> From 1993 onwards the MCB had been split into the (pro-RCD) *MCB-Coordination Nationale* and the (pro-FFS) *MCB-Commissions Nationales*; Ferhat set up his *MCB-RN* in the spring of 1995.

Neither the Berberist movement in Kabylia nor the Kabyle parties operating since 1989 have ever expressed any interest in autonomy; indeed, they have consistently opposed it and have been anxious to rebut the accusation of “regionalism”. The Berberist movement invoked the Amazigh identity of Algeria as a whole and the cause of Thamazighth in general while the political parties framed their agendas in explicitly national terms.

For Ferhat and other supporters of Kabyle autonomy, pan-Amazigh perspective had proved an illusion and the Kabyle parties had got nowhere with Algerians from other regions. In advocating autonomy, Ferhat and his followers were dropping *l'Amazighité* in favour of *la Kabylité* and Thamazighth in favour of *Thaqbailith* (the Kabyle language), and suggesting that Kabyle political parties should represent Kabyle interests instead of subordinating them to the transformation of the Algerian state as the precondition of resolving Kabylia's problems.

Ferhat formally launched his Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia (*Mouvement pour l'Autonomie de la Kabylie*, MAK), on 25 August 2001. It had already secured the valuable legitimating support of a leading light of the Kabyle Berberist movement, Professor Salem Chaker, and rapidly gained a strong following in the Kabyle diaspora in Europe and North America. It also received a remarkably positive welcome from the francophone Algerian press.<sup>118</sup> But it went down badly in Kabylia, where Ferhat's initial declarations were denounced by the FFS<sup>119</sup> but also by elements of the protest movement. Sadek Akrouf, a CPWB leader in Bejaia, said:

We will not construct a house inside another house. Ferhat Mehenni is speaking for himself alone. We have always underlined, in our meetings, the national character of our movement....We are neither a movement for

independence nor a movement for autonomy. We are a national popular movement...<sup>120</sup>

When ICG was able to investigate public opinion in Kabylia in January 2003, interest in autonomy and the MAK was conspicuously absent. Of over 70 people interviewed in Tizi Ouzou, Larbaa Nath Irathen, Bejaia, Akfadou and El Kseur (as well as Algiers), scarcely any mentioned it at all.<sup>121</sup> Despite its lack of support, the MAK has, nonetheless, played a significant role in preventing the Coordinations from spreading to the rest of the country.

One of Ferhat's central themes has been that the agenda of the Coordinations really conveyed “a demand for autonomy that does not speak its name”.<sup>122</sup> The Gendarmerie issue has been grist to his mill, enabling him to argue that the withdrawal demand represented “the first phase of a break with the central state”.<sup>123</sup> His claim that the Coordinations are autonomist in tendency has received intense press coverage and has discouraged Algerians elsewhere from supporting the movement. As a senior technical instructor who runs courses in Tizi Ouzou for trainees from all parts of Algeria told ICG:

Ferhat, the MAK, his secessionist movement, all this is a nuisance for the state. If it is given media coverage, that is for the other regions, so that the Movement of the Coordinations does not spread. I am quite sure of this, because I receive Algerians from all over the country here. The objective is attained.<sup>124</sup>

In other words, the regime knew how to turn Ferhat and the MAK to its advantage. That this has given cause for concern to the protest movement is clear from its attempts to dissociate itself from the MAK.

<sup>118</sup> See *La Tribune*, *Le Jeune Indépendant* and *Le Soir* of 27 August 2001 and especially the editorial in *El Watan*, 28 August 2001; for critical analyses, see articles by K. Selim and B. Mounir in *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 8 September 2001.

<sup>119</sup> See “La déclaration sur l'autonomie porte des germes de la guerre civile”: interview by Algeria Interface of the First Secretary of the FFS, Ali Kerboua, quoted in *Le Jeune Indépendant*, 10 June 2001.

<sup>120</sup> *Le Jeune Indépendant*, 10 June 2001: “En réaction à la déclaration de Ferhat Mehenni: Désapprobation générale à Bejaia”.

<sup>121</sup> One of the few who did comment questioned the feasibility of autonomy: “Not a single postal order goes out of the region. Kabylia's situation is one of total financial dependence. This is something which everyone here knows very well”. ICG interview with Slimane Mokrani, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

<sup>122</sup> See *El Watan*, 10 September 2001, “Polémique autour de l'autonomie de la Kabylie”.

<sup>123</sup> See article by B. Mounir, “La formule MAK Mehenni” in *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 8 September 2001.

<sup>124</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 20 January 2003.

The official position of the Coordinations was explained by Ali Gherbi:

The Citizens movement belongs to the nationalist current. The Algerian people is one and indivisible. We defend body and soul the unity of the nation. The autonomy plan goes back to 1958, when France tried to promote this. It is regrettable that some people with a footing in this country should be putting this idea forward; we have a legitimate right to have doubts and suspicions, although we accuse no one. Autonomy is categorically rejected.<sup>125</sup>

But this formal rejection has not been accompanied by any reconsideration of regionalist aspects of the movement's agenda (e.g. article 4 of the El Kseur Platform) that it shares with the MAK.

## E. THE KABYLE PARTIES AND THE COORDINATIONS

From the outset, the movement of the Coordinations affirmed "its independence and its autonomy vis-à-vis the political parties" and its refusal "of all forms of allegiance to or substitution for political formations".<sup>126</sup> But it is impossible to understand the evolution of the movement unless one examines its complex relationship with the party-political sphere.

The provocations and riots of April-May 2001 took the FFS and the RCD by surprise. Their initial reaction was to represent what was at issue in a way that was consistent with their respective doctrines and priorities, while attempting to channel popular anger into peaceful demonstrations. These objectives were at cross purposes. The RCD's attempt to gloss the protests as motivated essentially by the identity issue crippled its efforts to channel the revolt. Similarly, the FFS's attempt to use the events to support its demand for a constituent assembly made no more impression on regional public opinion than it did on the "decision-makers" in the power structure to whom it was primarily addressed.<sup>127</sup> As Khaled

Zahem, Tizi Ouzou bureau chief of *La Dépêche de Kabylie*, told ICG, "the FFS and RCD have had no influence on public opinion or on the course of events, because they have had no capacity to channel anything".<sup>128</sup>

This judgement is shared by CADC founders, who insisted on "the lounge-lizard [*salonnard*] character of our parties".<sup>129</sup> Locked in sterile rivalry since 1990, the parties were unable to represent the masses of unemployed and desperate young men when these were at last mobilised by the Gendarmerie provocations. Much of the significance of the huge demonstration in Tizi Ouzou on 21 May 2001 that dwarfed earlier FFS and RCD marches was to show both parties the mortal danger they faced.

### 1. The FFS

For the FFS, it was essential to forestall the formation of a new party based on the mass movement that would usurp its position as the champion of a democratic vision for Algeria. FFS activists insist on their party's paternity of all the movement's positive themes and demands:

All the vocabulary of the movement comes from the FFS – "*ulac lvo!*" (coined by the FFS when it called for a boycott of the elections in 1990), "*ulac smah ulac*" and "*pouvoir assassin*" – all these slogans come from the FFS. The current movement has been a manoeuvre to dispossess the FFS of its discourse and its region.<sup>130</sup>

At the same time, an FFS leader told ICG, party activists joined the movement "in order to give it an orientation and prevent it being manipulated. This movement of the *'aarsh* was meant to become a political party; it is the FFS militants who prevented that".<sup>131</sup>

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President Bouteflika, the Chief of the General Staff of the army, Lt. General Mohamed Iamari, and the head of the intelligence services, Major-General Mohamed Mediène.

<sup>128</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 20 January 2003.

<sup>129</sup> ICG interview with Arezki Yahoui and Chabane Aït El Hadj, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>130</sup> ICG interview with FFS activists and sympathisers Aziz Baloul, Idir Ouennoughen and Mohamed Lamriben, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>131</sup> Mourad Kacer, interviewed by ICG in Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

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<sup>125</sup> ICG interview at a meeting of the "rotating presidency" of the CICB, El-Kseur, 26 January 2003.

<sup>126</sup> "Rapport de synthèse de la rencontre d'Iloula Oumalou", 17 May 2001, Preamble; see Appendix 2.

<sup>127</sup> On 12 May 2001, Hocine Aït Ahmed addressed a memorandum, "Pour une transition démocratique", to

The FFS was largely unsuccessful in determining the movement's agenda, however. Its activists tried to get the Coordinations to adopt two of the party's demands: for an end to the state of emergency (in force since February 1992) and for the opening up of the Algerian media, notably television and radio. These figured in a draft platform drawn up by the first meeting of the Inter-Wilaya Coordination in Bejaia, on 7 June 2001,<sup>132</sup> but were dropped from the revised platform agreed four days later at El Kseur. According to FFS sources, it was to forestall any further attempt by their militants to influence the Coordinations' positions that the Inter-Wilaya meeting at M'Chedallah on 30-31 August 2001 decided that the El Kseur Platform was "sealed" as well as "non-negotiable".<sup>133</sup>

Thereafter the FFS appears to have decided to go with the flow. It maintained this posture throughout the first half of 2002, agreeing with and even championing the decision to "reject" the legislative elections in the region on 30 May 2002. It was only in August 2002 that the FFS broke with the movement by announcing its participation in the local (communal and wilaya) elections of 10 October 2002. In pitting itself against the Coordinations in this way, the party took a big risk; its militants were denounced as traitors<sup>134</sup> and targeted by the Coordination's strong-arm tactics (e.g. stone-throwing) in many places.<sup>135</sup> The movement's remaining activists are scathing about its behaviour, and argue that FFS members elected on 10 October on the basis of a handful of votes have no legitimacy. Others see the matter differently. Slimane Mokrani had this to say:

The FFS's great mistake was to support the boycott on 30 May. How can a party which wants to be considered democratic actively prevent elections? But it was quite right to participate in the elections in October. If it had

not done so, Kabylia would have collapsed into anarchy.<sup>136</sup>

Arguably, however, the most important effect of the FFS's decision, whatever its motives, was to break the spell of an increasingly forced unanimity that the Coordinations had cast over the political life of the region.<sup>137</sup>

## 2. The RCD

At the time the crisis broke in late April 2001, the RCD belonged to the multi-party coalition supporting the government, in which it held the health and transport portfolios. It withdrew from this on 1 May and tried to re-position itself to co-opt the protest. However, its attempt to prioritise the identity issue was at odds with the rioters' real outlook, and it subsequently modified its approach by investing in the Coordinations. Unlike the FFS, it has remained supportive of the Coordinations throughout, endorsing the "rejection" of the local elections in October 2002 as well as the earlier legislative elections. As a result, the party has lost all of its seats in elective assemblies. As Khaled Zahem observed:

The RCD has lost an enormous amount of ground. It is absent from the Parliament and absent from the APCs. It is like a wounded animal, which explains its furious determination. It is manipulating the protest movement to make it work in its favour, which is fair enough.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to combating FFS attempts to influence the protest movement's agenda, the RCD's strategy has been to:

- Re-orient Kabyle aspirations towards a distinctly regionalist project;
- promote the idea of the '*arsh*;

<sup>132</sup> La Coordination Inter-Wilaya, "Plateforme commune de revendications", Bejaia, 7 June 2001, section II: "Revendications démocratiques", article 6.

<sup>133</sup> ICG interview with Mourad Kacer, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Graffiti observed by ICG, at Tizi Rached: "FFS-traitres: on vous connaît", 19 January 2003, and at Bejaia: "Les traitres candidates au vote" and "FFS=DRS", 24 January 2003; DRS stands for *Direction des Renseignements et de la Sécurité*, the military intelligence services.

<sup>135</sup> ICG interview with Chafika-Kahina Bouagache, FFS member of Tizi Ouzou APC, 20 January 2003.

<sup>136</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 16 January 2003.

<sup>137</sup> While the notion of '*aarsh*' has been largely a mystification as we have seen, the sentiment of collective mobilisation that has been linked to this notion and that some observers have interpreted as expressing what they call "communitarian" sentiments has clearly been inimical to free political debate in the region. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Brahim Salhi, "Local en contestation, citoyenneté en construction: le cas de la Kabylie", in *Insaniyat, Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales*, 16, January-April 2002, pp. 55-98.

<sup>138</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 20 January 2003.



- ❑ channel the Coordinations' protest against the behaviour of the régime into precise and persistent targeting of President Bouteflika personally; and
- ❑ promote an alliance between the Coordinations and a multi-party grouping at the national level.

Having made the secularist ideal along French lines – *la laïcité d'état* – its main objective from its formation in 1989 until the late 1990s, the RCD in recent years has made a programmatic U-turn, advancing a new constitutional project. It calls this “national refounding” and its centrepiece is the proposal to restructure the Algerian state, giving far more power to the regions.<sup>139</sup> In effect, the RCD seems to have abandoned its original ambition and to have retreated to a form of Kabyle-regionalist politics, while insisting that its proposals for “flexible regionalisation” are meant to be applied across the country. Its members admit the idea would have to be implemented in Kabylia first, but argue that it will catch on elsewhere.<sup>140</sup> In this way, the turn to Kabyle regionalism is verbally reconciled with the idea of Kabylia as the spearhead for change across Algeria as a whole.

The difference between this concept and the frankly autonomist project canvassed by Ferhat Mehenni is slender, and the RCD's militant support for the Coordinations and especially for their demand for the withdrawal of the Gendarmerie from Kabylia can be understood in this light. In the RCD's new view, the Gendarmerie is an arm of the centralised nation-state that has failed in Algeria.<sup>141</sup> As one of its militants told ICG, “The nation-state has had its day, it's finished now. With the RCD's proposal for flexible regionalisation, we take the Catalan model as our reference”.<sup>142</sup>

The RCD has also been active in promoting the notion of the *'arsh* as a central feature of the protest movement. Precisely why is not wholly clear, although it claims this is consistent with its new,

regionalist, perspectives. But it is striking that the communes in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou that constituted themselves into so-called *'aarsh* to coordinate their representation at the level between commune and wilaya (i.e. instead of taking the *daira* as this level) were mostly under RCD control up until October 2002<sup>143</sup> and included the commune from which the RCD's most prominent leaders have come.<sup>144</sup>

At the same time, the RCD has encouraged the protest movement to hold what it calls “the Bouteflika-Zerhouni tandem”<sup>145</sup> primarily responsible for the situation in Kabylia. This discourse is echoed by the more radical delegates of the CADC, who demand that the regime offer “moral atonement” for its actions and for “Zerhouni's misdeeds” in particular, and insist that “the president must declare publicly and officially that he accepts the legitimacy of the demands” contained in the El Kseur Platform,<sup>146</sup> thus placing Bouteflika personally, rather than the regime in general, on the spot.

The targeting of Bouteflika has dovetailed with the RCD's attempt to knit the protest movement into the alliance it has sustained for some years at the national level, the other elements of which have been Redha Malek's National Republican Alliance (*Alliance Nationale Républicaine*, ANR), El-Hachemi Cherif's Democratic and Social Movement (*Mouvement Démocratique et Social*, MDS), and Abdelhaq Brerhi's Citizens' Committee for the Defence of the Republic (*Comité des Citoyens pour la Défense de la République*, CCDR).<sup>147</sup> What these have in common is longstanding support for the hard-line “eradicationist” tendency in the army command and opposition to Bouteflika's policy of selective co-

<sup>139</sup> See RCD, “Pacte pour la Refondation Nationale” (n.d. but circa mid-2002).

<sup>140</sup> ICG interviews with Saïd Azamoum, Algiers, 3 November 2002, and Mme Fariza Slimani, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>141</sup> ICG interview with Mme Fariza Slimani of the RCD, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>142</sup> ICG interview with Mohamed Ikarbane, RCD activist, member of the APW of Tizi Ouzou 1997-2002, in Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>143</sup> Notably the communes of Aghrib, Freha, Timizart (of *'arsh* Ath Jennad) but also Ifigha (*'arsh* Ath Ghoubri) and Larbaa Nath Irathen (*'arsh* Ath Irathen).

<sup>144</sup> The RCD's national leader, Dr Saïd Sadi, is from Aghrib, the leading commune of the Ath Jennad, as is the party's leader in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, Ahmed Aggoun.

<sup>145</sup> ICG interview with Dr Saïd Sadi, Algiers, 30 January 2003.

<sup>146</sup> In the words of Moumouh Abrika, delegate of the Comité des Quartiers de la Ville de Tizi Ouzou, interviewed by ICG at the Cité des Genêts, Tizi Ouzou, 19 January 2003.

<sup>147</sup> Redha Malek, El-Hachemi Cherif, Abdelhaq Brerhi and Dr Saïd Sadi shared a platform at a meeting held in the Salle Afrique in Algiers on 15 January 2003, as ICG observed.

optation of elements of the Algerian Islamist movement and especially his proposals to extend the amnesty offered to the armed rebellion in the “Civil Concord” law of 1999 into a broader proposal for “National Concord”. They are backed by other elements linked to the Legitimate Defence Groups (*Groupes de Légitime Défense*, GLD) fostered by the army as auxiliaries to the regular security forces in the fight against the Islamic rebellion, who fear that they will pay the price of Bouteflika’s strategy.<sup>148</sup> The immediate aim of this alliance is to stop President Bouteflika from securing a second term.

## F. THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT BETWEEN DIALOGUE, REPRESSION AND IMPOTENCE

On 31 May 2003, the Algerian government announced its intention to invite “the movement of the *‘arush*”, as it called it, to engage in dialogue over its demands.<sup>149</sup> While this was a welcome step, it highlighted the remarkable fact that no such invitation had been issued at any stage over the previous two years. The failure of the authorities to deal directly, until now, with the protest movement spawned by the 2001 Black Spring has been a major factor in the impasse and is symptomatic of the shortcomings of the Algerian political system that have been the main cause of Kabyle disaffection for much longer. For until now the authorities have done anything but grasp the Kabyle nettle.

In a televised address on 30 April 2001, President Bouteflika acknowledged the problems that Kabylia shares with other regions but then dwelt on “the identity crisis”, insisting on the progress already made and noting “a constitutional dimension which could only be addressed in the

context of a revision to the constitution”. Having thus emphasised the identity/language question, President Bouteflika waited five more months before announcing on 3 October 2001 that the status of Tamazighth would be addressed in the next revision of the constitution, and it was not until mid-April 2002 that this revision was actually effected and Tamazighth accorded the status of a national language. These delays ensured that the formal concession barely affected the situation in the region, while appearing to justify the perspectives of the most radical delegates and their fellow-travellers in the RCD.<sup>150</sup>

In a speech on 12 March 2002 announcing the constitutional revision, President Bouteflika also promised that certain Gendarmerie brigades would be redeployed and that a special status would be accorded to the victims of the Black Spring. The regime’s refusal to satisfy the El Kseur platform fully on this latter point, by giving victims the status of “martyrs”, could be justified on two counts. First, this status has historically been reserved for those who died in the independence struggle. Second, to recognise the victims of the Black Spring as martyrs would be to invite the families of many, if not all, the other victims of the terrible violence that has ravaged the country since the riots of October 1988 to demand the same status for their dead. But, however reasonable the government’s position may have been, its failure to act promptly to compensate the victims or their families and to cover medical care has occasioned enormous bitterness, reinforcing anger at *la hogra* and fuelling the movement’s intransigence.<sup>151</sup>

The regime’s handling of the Gendarmerie question has also been unsatisfactory. By January 2003, fourteen brigades had been withdrawn from their localities, and in a number of *dairas* new police (*Sûreté*) stations had been opened instead. But these moves, while a sensible concession to public opinion, got under way only in early 2002, and the regime failed to explain clearly why the demand for the wholesale withdrawal could not be accepted. Above all, the demand that those responsible for the killings of April-May 2001 be punished has

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<sup>148</sup> The Salle Afrique meeting was chaired by Commandant Azzeddine, a hero of the national liberation war who has been associated with the GLD since the mid-1990s; a number of prominent delegates of the Coordinations in Kabylia are leading figures in their local GLD, notably Mouloud Ameer of Aghrib, ICG interview with Mohand Iguetoulène, 19 January 2003.

<sup>149</sup> This was done in a speech presenting the government’s programme to the Popular National Assembly by Ahmed Ouyahia, the new head of the government appointed to replace Ali Benflis on 6 May. At the time of this writing, it remained uncertain whether the invitation would be accepted, but the signs were promising.

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<sup>150</sup> ICG interviews with delegates of the Comité des Quartiers de la Ville de Tizi Ouzou, 19 January 2003, and with Ahmed Aggoun and Mohamed Ikarbane of the RCD, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>151</sup> ICG interviews with Dr Madjid Abrous, Tizi Ouzou, 19 January 2003 and with members of the Coordination Inter-Villages d’ Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

received a derisory response. The gendarme responsible for the death of Massinissa Guermah was not brought to trial until November 2002, when a military tribunal sentenced him to a mere two years in jail. Having already spent over eighteen months in confinement, he was due for release five and a half months after sentencing.

The negative impact of the regime's failure to provide serious satisfaction for the protesters' central demand – *ulac smah*/no impunity – has been aggravated by its resort to repression. On 25 March 2002, thirteen days after President Bouteflika's conciliatory speech but before its promises could be fulfilled, the authorities clamped down on the Coordinations, arresting numerous delegates, especially from the radical wing. This virtually guaranteed that the constitutionalisation of Tamazighth three weeks later would have little impact in the short term and that the movement would stick to its decision to "reject" the May legislative elections.

The contrast between the government's failure to provide legal redress for the victims of the Black Spring and its resort a year later to judicial procedures as part of its armoury of repression is the subject of bitter commentary in Kabylia. As Maître Hakim Saheb told ICG:

Between May 2001 and March 2002, the law did not budge. In March 2002, it went into action, adopted a different profile; the machine started up in a logic of expeditious repression; it was necessary [for the regime] to instrumentalise it. Since 1989, the judiciary has become, nominally, a power independent of the executive, constitutionally speaking. These events have taught us that it is merely an apparatus in the service of certain interests.<sup>152</sup>

Many regime initiatives, far from resolving matters, have tended to encourage intransigence and perpetuate the impasse, particularly the successive attempts to lure elements of the protest movement – but not the movement as a whole – into a dialogue. Whatever the intentions, the effect was to weaken the pro-dialogue wing of the protest movement,<sup>153</sup>

radicalise the movement's tactics<sup>154</sup> and induce the political parties to invest in it still further<sup>155</sup> while precipitating renewed disorder. While it is entirely possible that the then head of government, Ali Benflis, was simply doing his best in difficult circumstances,<sup>156</sup> and that his personal commitment to dialogue was genuine, from the point of view of many delegates in the Coordinations, the regime was simply manoeuvring.

Delegates at Akfadou insisted to ICG that "it is the régime which refuses dialogue. We are for dialogue on condition that it is sincere. We do not want any ambushes".<sup>157</sup> This judgement is supported by informed observers outside the movement. Maître Mokrane Aït Larbi told ICG that "our regime, it wanted to choose and manufacture its own interlocutors....The conclusion? The regime does not really want to dialogue".<sup>158</sup>

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and ostracised; following Benflis's invitation of 7 November 2001 to "a duly mandated delegation" consisting of various "citizens" outside the movement as well as authorised representatives of the CIADC, an invitation rejected by all the Coordinations, numerous pro-dialogue delegates in the movement had their local mandates cancelled and were replaced; on 30 November 2001, the "Group of Nine", consisting of moderate delegates representing seven communes in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou withdrew from the CADC.

<sup>154</sup> On 6 December 2001, Benflis met with a group of "dialoguists" from Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, Bouïra, Boumerdes and Algiers, headed by Salim Allilouche from El Kseur. These delegates had no mandate from the Coordinations and were immediately denounced as the "opportunist and unscrupulous usurpers" and as "pre-fabricated delegates" – "*les délégués taiwan*" [as in "Made in Taiwan"] by the Coordinations, which called a general strike on 6 December in protest and decided the following day to "reject" the legislative elections scheduled for 30 May 2002. On 21 December the Coordinations posted the names of the "pre-fabricated delegates" all over Kabylia, denouncing them as "traitors" and exposing them to recriminations. A personality from Bejaia who had acted as go-between with the Allilouche group had his house burned down.

<sup>155</sup> On 22 December 2001, the FFS leader Ahmed Djeddaï denounced the regime for its "manoeuvres" and announced the FFS's intention to "accompany" the protest movement.

<sup>156</sup> ICG interviews with several informed sources in Algiers, 13-16, 20-24 and 26-31 January 2003; ICG was unable to secure interviews with government spokespersons, despite formal requests addressed to both the head of the government and the minister of the interior.

<sup>157</sup> ICG interview with members of the Coordination Inter-Villages d' Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

<sup>158</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

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<sup>152</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 20 January 2003; Me Saheb is a member of the Collectif des Avocats des Detenus du Mouvement Citoyen.

<sup>153</sup> Delegates received by the head of the government, Ali Benflis, on 3 October 2001 were subsequently denounced

Facing a movement that had publicly stated that its demands were non-negotiable and that was accordingly refusing to negotiate, one might argue that the government had no choice but to seek interlocutors wherever it could. But the Algerian authorities have enormous experience (since 1980 at least) in dealing with protest movements and should have known that their oblique and partial approaches would provoke intransigent reactions.

The Coordinations' refusal to distinguish between immediate and long-term objectives, their treatment of the El Kseur Platform as Scripture and above all their insistence that the regime commit itself to accepting its fifteen points in their entirety as a precondition furnished a massive alibi for the regime's failure to engage in a serious dialogue. Arguably, though, since the regime has the responsibility of governing, it was above all its responsibility to resolve the impasse. If effective dialogue was indeed out of the question, what it should have done in these circumstances was to decide for itself what demands it was prepared to accept and act energetically to satisfy them without delay, while explaining clearly to the Coordinations and public opinion in the region why the remaining demands could not be met. Largely insulated from public opinion, paralysed by its internal divisions, and with its civilian figures lacking necessary power, the regime was incapable of acting in this way.

That the impasse in Kabylia is an issue in the constant factional struggle within the Algerian power structure is a staple theme of Algerian press commentary accepted by many political actors in Kabylia. According to this view, the main regime actors have not really sought to resolve the problem so much as neutralise whatever threat it has presented to their political interests. At the same time, many observers consider that a faction within the regime has actively wanted the impasse and its attendant disorders to continue. A well-informed source in Paris told ICG that, for an element of the regime, "the crisis in Kabylia has been a way to make trouble for Bouteflika",<sup>159</sup> a thesis at least partly corroborated by Maître Aït Larbi, who argued that "there is a group in the power structure which is manipulating Kabylia. We cannot say

categorically that all the top people are agreed over this".<sup>160</sup>

The result is that what many Algerians call *le pourrissent* – letting the situation deteriorate while giving the Coordinations rope to hang themselves with – has appeared to be the régime's default option. Instead of resolving what is at stake, it has settled for playing cat-and-mouse with the movement and precipitating dissension within it, so that it loses more and more public support as representative delegates have been forced out and the remainder have opted for increasingly controversial tactics.

If this indeed has been the régime's strategy, it has worked up to a point. Public weariness in Kabylia with the situation has weakened the protest movement and neutered whatever challenge it originally posed to the political status quo. But it is not at all self-evident that the Algerian state – as opposed to the current régime – will emerge undamaged or that this strategy will not eventually back-fire. For this reason it is worth reflecting on the way in which the régime itself seems to have contributed, early on, to pushing the protest movement into its arguably self-defeating posture of refusing to negotiate.

On 26 May 2001, before the El Kseur Platform, let alone the subsequent hardening on all sides, Ali Benflis received a delegation from the fledgling CADC which sought to press a number of demands. The government accepted the first demand, for students taking their baccalaureate exams to be allowed a second sitting in the autumn, a concession that applied across the country. The second demand concerned the Gendarmerie, the principal object of popular anger. According to CADC sources, Benflis admitted very frankly that it was a problem he could not deal with, telling the delegates: "this is beyond me". The talks were interrupted at that point.<sup>161</sup> As Fares Oudjedi told ICG, it was at that juncture that the activists of the protest movement really decided not to talk to the government any more.<sup>162</sup>

If Ahmed Ouyahia now follows through on his 31 May announcement by addressing an invitation to

<sup>159</sup> ICG interview, Paris, 24 September 2002.

<sup>160</sup> ICG interview, Tizi Ouzou, 18 January 2003.

<sup>161</sup> ICG interview with Arezki Yahoui and Chabane Aït El Hadj, Tizi Ouzou, 17 January 2003.

<sup>162</sup> ICG interview with Fares Oudjedi, Akfadou, 25 January 2003.

the movement of the Coordinations as a whole to enter into dialogue through a delegation of its own choosing, this may be enough to persuade it to agree to negotiate. Some kind of compromise permitting an end to the current unrest might then become possible. But it is not clear that Ouyahia possesses significantly greater authority on the issue of the Gendarmerie than his predecessor, and the prospective dialogue may offer the protest movement little more than an occasion for a climb-down on its main demands. Talks, if agreed to, will therefore test the political intentions and capacities of both sides. Dialogue may offer both the regime and the Coordinations the chance for a new departure. But whether a decisive resolution of the political problems at the root of Kabylia's drama can be achieved is another matter entirely.

## VII. CONCLUSION

As a campaign for a major change in the character and form of government of the Algerian state, the movement of the Coordinations has, so far, failed. Unable to reconcile its purpose of making demands on the state with its aspiration to transform it, incapable of handling its internal differences effectively or reaching out to other regions, vulnerable to manipulation on all sides, it has ended up in a cul-de-sac of angry radicalism disconnected from any viable strategy. That the movement may belatedly realise this and rethink its strategy cannot be ruled out. But if its failure to date proves conclusive, it will represent a tragic waste of the energies and good intentions it originally mobilised.

A major premise of the project conceived by the founders of the Coordinations in Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia and the other wilayât of the Kabylia region was that the political parties were entirely incapable of offering the furious young men of the region a convincing reason to stop rioting. This analysis was unquestionably correct.

The weakness of the parties meant that, despite having deputies in the National Assembly and controlling between them the region's assemblies, they were unable to provide effective political representation. It is because the population of Kabylia has been without effective political – as distinct from arithmetical – representation that it has been unable to ensure that its economic and social as well as cultural interests have been properly addressed by the Algerian government. Lacking effective representation, the population of Kabylia has lacked much of the substance of citizenship and has been constantly vulnerable to abuses of authority. The difference in this regard between Kabylia and other regions of Algeria is essentially one of degree.

In general terms, the problems of *la hogra*, abuse of authority, arbitrary rule, and impunity are experienced across Algeria. But the lack of political representation, which is their most important premise, is especially acute in Kabylia. Elsewhere, the fact that political representation of a kind is, at least formally, available through the government-sponsored parties, the FLN and the RND, means that some accommodation of local interests and protection of rights can be provided through the

clientelist system. Because only opposition parties<sup>163</sup> are effectively present in Kabylia means that the population has been excluded from the routines of party-political clientelism that operate elsewhere. While the articulation of the diversity in Kabyle opinion has benefited from the advent of pluralism since 1989, the effective representation of material interests has arguably suffered.

The same state of affairs that has worked to disfranchise Kabylia has simultaneously worked to disable the central government. The fact that the government – dominated in its party composition by the RND between 1997 and 2002 and since 30 May 2002 by the FLN – has had no party-political relays to speak of in Kabylia has severely limited its capacity to respond constructively to the population's needs and grievances.<sup>164</sup> It has, additionally, meant that the administrative apparatus in the region has been politically unaccountable and has tended to be gangrened by interests rooted in the informal or "black" sector of the economy. And it has also meant that the security forces in Kabylia, policing a region without effective representation in Algiers, have been particularly inclined to treat this population with contempt.

The absence of effective political representation is the heart of the matter. The identity/language issue has been of secondary importance and, with the recognition of Tamazighit as a national language, its constitutional aspect has been addressed as far as is possible at this juncture. The demand that the language be given official status cannot be meaningfully conceded by any government in Algiers until either a modern standard version of Tamazighit has been developed at the expense of the diversity of its dialects, or the dialects other than Thaqbailith (Kabyle) have been developed into

effective written languages. Since this will take years, no further change at the level of the Algerian constitution is practical for the time being. This demand should not be allowed to distract attention from the issue of political representation, which is the problem that most urgently needs to be addressed, and at every level.

The stunted powers of the National Assembly and its consequent inability to hold the executive – including the security forces – to account, or, by curbing the executive, to help guarantee the independence of the judiciary, are a major part of the problem.<sup>165</sup> It was, in part, because the National Assembly meant little to the FFS and the RCD and almost nothing to the population of Kabylia that "rejection" of the legislative elections on 30 May 2002 was so widely supported.

It also is necessary to address the problem at the local and regional level. If the political parties are to acquire the ability to offer effective representation, they must be able to do so in the APCs and APWs as well as nationally. For this to happen, the powers of those assemblies must be increased. The assemblies currently have little or no power in relation to the administration. Party activists elected to APCs and APWs thus have little chance to provide good government at local and regional levels, and a tendency to cynicism and even corruption has been apparent. The government should thoroughly revise the laws regulating these bodies with a view to enhancing their prerogatives and so enabling the political parties to perform their representative functions properly.

One immediate way in which the government could demonstrate proper concern for the Kabyle region and begin to regain public confidence would be to commit itself to a sustained effort to address its economic plight. It should encourage investment in projects that will stimulate economic activity, generate employment and promote integration with the national economy. Among initial steps, it should establish a parliamentary commission of enquiry into the region's economic crisis. The commission should consider testimony from political parties (including those without parliamentary representation, notably the FFS and the RCD), economic actors and voluntary associations present in the *wilayât* of Kabylia, as

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<sup>163</sup> The RCD was in government from 24 December 1999 to 1 May 2001; apart from these sixteen months, it has been in opposition throughout its fourteen years of existence.

<sup>164</sup> As Dr. Abderrazak Dahdouh, chef de cabinet of the General Secretary of the FLN, acknowledged, the FLN was open to the criticism of having "abandoned" Kabylia since around 1990, but now aspired "to return to the region and offer a choice to the Kabyles", ICG interview, Algiers, 29 January 2003. The FLN won many Kabyle seats (nine of fourteen at Tizi Ouzou, seven of thirteen at Bejaia) in the legislative elections on 30 May 2002 for the first time since 1987 and took control of certain APCs in October 2002, but it did so very much by default, on the basis of tiny turn-outs that deprived it of legitimacy in Kabyle opinion.

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<sup>165</sup> See ICG Middle East Briefing, *Diminishing Returns: Algeria's 2002 Legislative Elections*, 24 June 2002.

well as other independent experts, and thereby contribute to establishing the relevance of state institutions.

But it is not only the government that needs to act. The Kabyle political parties have failed to address the problems from which they suffer. As long as they content themselves with slogans and gestures and fail to work out and campaign for serious proposals for reform, they will be conniving at their own inability to represent their constituents effectively and thus contributing, in the longer term, to their own demise.

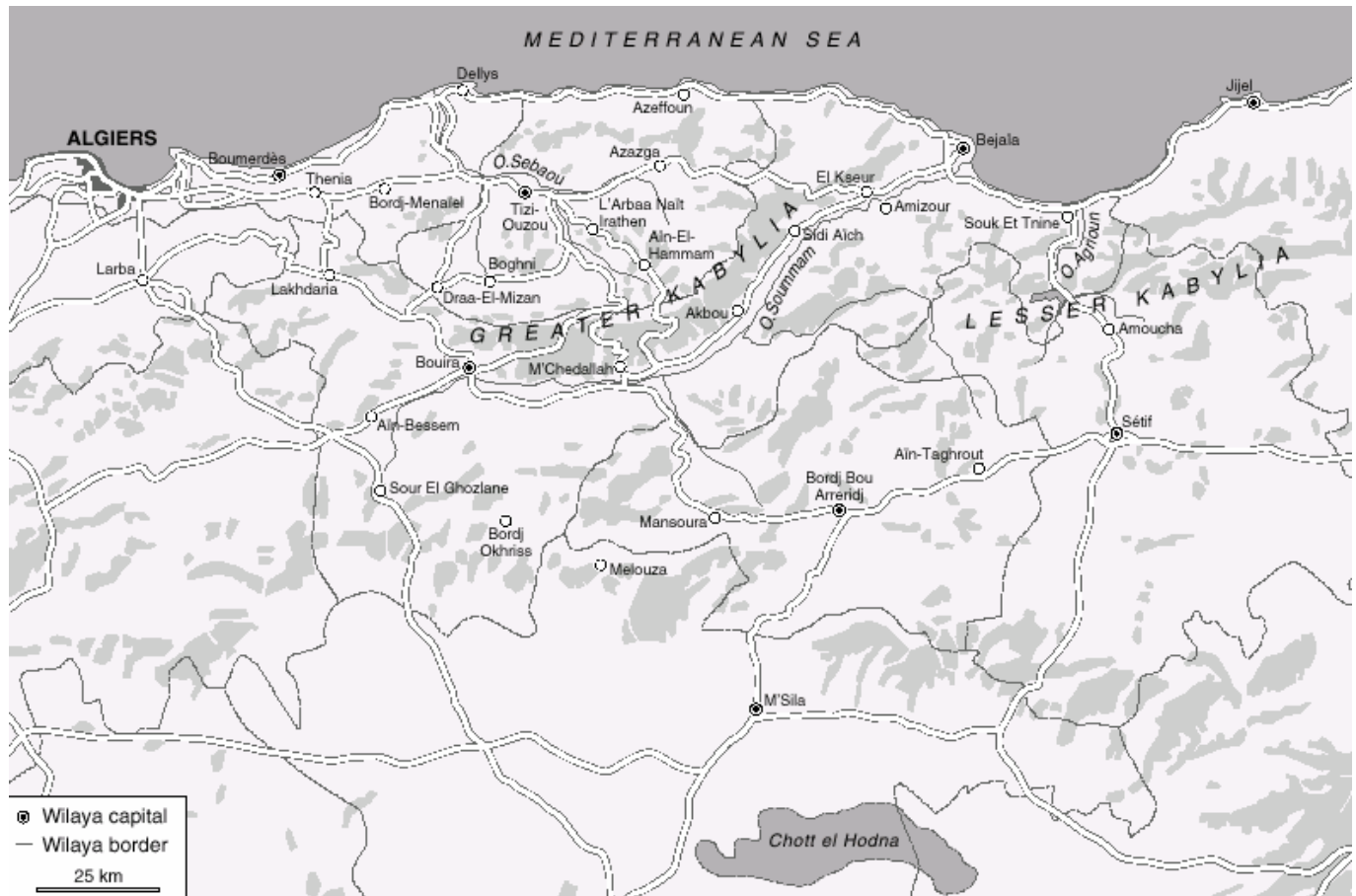
The Coordinations can contribute to the needed development only if they recognise their mistakes and take a new direction. This requires them to stop treating the El Kseur Platform as Holy Writ, to abandon the demand for the withdrawal of the Gendarmerie (article 4), and to distinguish clearly, as the Platform signally fails to do, between immediate demands that might legitimately be made (notably articles 1-3, 5-6, 12 and 15) and longer-term, more ambitious demands (notably

articles 8-11 and 13) that it is unrealistic to expect the authorities to concede in the short term but are legitimate objectives of a long-term campaign of peaceful agitation.

In pursuing both sets of objectives, moreover, they need to place less emphasis on mobilising purely physical energies in ways that have tended to transgress the movement's own non-violent principles and alienate public opinion, and invest in more imaginative activities that stimulate public debate instead of inhibiting it. They also need to break explicitly with Kabyle-regionalist and communitarian sentiments, agendas and forms of activism as a precondition of an effective strategy of alliances with other democratic forces, regionally and nationally. Should it be impossible for the movement as a whole to reinvent itself, those elements that recognise the need will have to undertake a new departure outside the present restrictive framework.

**Cairo/Brussels, 10 June 2003**

**APPENDIX A:**  
**MAP OF KABYLIA**





## APPENDIX B:

### SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MEETING AT ILLOULA OUMALOU

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Civil society, obliged to respond to the grave events in our region, marked by the regime's bloody and indiscriminate repression, gathered on this day at Illoula Ou Malou – thanks to a younger generation passionately attached to justice and freedom and appalled by exclusion, marginalisation and *hogra* [contempt] – asserts its independence and autonomy in relation to political parties and state institutions, and refuses all form of allegiance or substitution to political groups.

This citizens movement, now being organised, essentially peaceful and resolutely democratic, is committed to a long term struggle to achieve the following aims:

- Prosecution of the perpetrators of killings, brutalities and other excesses.
- An immediate end to police questioning and intimidation and dropping of criminal charges against demonstrators.
- Immediate and unconditional departure of all gendarmerie brigades.
- Definitive settlement of the claim of denial of identity, culture and language, the source of all frustration, through the constitutionalisation of Tamazight as the national and official language.
- Protection for witnesses of crimes.
- Acceptance of responsibility for care of the victims.
- The granting of the special status of martyr to victims of democracy.
- Postponement of examinations.
- Urgent socio-economic program for the region.
- Dissolution of all commissions of inquiry set up by the regime.

Actions envisaged in the short term :

- One minute's silence each Saturday morning and Thursdays after school until the end of the school year.
- Light candles in memory of the victims until all demands are met.
- Sit-in on Saturday 19 May 2001 at 10 a.m., in front of the department of education at Tizi Ouzou to demand the postponement of end-of-year exams so our children will not be penalised.
- Black march on Monday 21 May, 2001 at 10 a.m., followed by a general strike and a march to Algiers.
- Boycott of the ISSAD and parliamentary commissions.
- Boycott of all national sporting, cultural or other events.
- Boycott of international festival of youth and students.
- Ostracising of gendarmerie until their definitive departure.
- Erection of commemorative statues to the martyrs of April 2001.

- ❑ Support and aid for the victims' families.
- ❑ 1 June, 2001 to be date of collective commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> day of our martyrs.
- ❑ Creation of an Internet site.
- ❑ Freedom of each Daira to act autonomously.

In addition, we completely reject the reform to the criminal code imposed by the regime placing greater limits on freedom of expression.

We express our total solidarity with the press.

Coordination of committees of the AARCHS, daïras and communes.

17 May 2001

## APPENDIX C:

### PLATFORM OF DEMANDS FOLLOWING THE INTERWILAYA MEETING OF 11 JUNE 2001 IN EL-KSEUR (BGAYET<sup>166</sup>)

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We, the representatives of the wilayas of Sétif, Bordj Bou-Arredj, Bouira, Boumerdès, Bgayet, TiziOuzou and Algiers, together with the Combined Committee of the universities of Algiers, meeting this day, Monday, 11 June 2001 at the Mouloud Feraoun Youth Club of El-Kseur (Bgayet), have adopted the following common platform of demands:

- ❑ For the state to provide urgent care to all injured victims and the families of the martyrs of repression killed during the events.
- ❑ For the civil courts to prosecute all the authors, organisers and secret sponsors of crimes and for them to be expelled from the security services and public office.
- ❑ For the status of martyr to be granted to every victim of dignity during the events, and protection given to all witnesses of the crimes.
- ❑ For the immediate departure of gendarmerie brigades and reinforcements of the U.R.S.<sup>167</sup>
- ❑ For legal proceedings against all demonstrators to be dropped, and for the acquittal of those already tried during the events.
- ❑ For the immediate end to punitive raids, intimidation and provocation of the population.
- ❑ Dissolution of the commissions of inquiry set up by the regime.
- ❑ Satisfaction of the Amazigh claim in all its (identity, civilisational, linguistic and cultural), dimensions, without a referendum or any conditions, and the consecration of Tamazight as the official national language.
- ❑ For a state that guarantees all socio-economic rights and democratic freedoms.
- ❑ Against the policies of under-development, pauperisation and reduction to vagrancy of the Algerian people.
- ❑ The placing of all executive functions of the state and the security corps under the authority of democratically-elected bodies.
- ❑ For an emergency socio-economic programme for the entire Kabylie region.
- ❑ Against tamheqranit (*hogra*) and all forms of injustice and exclusion.
- ❑ For a case-by-case re-scheduling of regional exams for pupils unable to sit them.
- ❑ Introduction of unemployment benefit of 50 per cent the value of the SNMG.<sup>168</sup>

We demand an immediate and public official response to this platform of demands.

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<sup>166</sup> Bgayet is the Berber form of Bejaia.

<sup>167</sup> *Unités républicaines de sécurité*, Republican Security Units.

<sup>168</sup> SNMG = Salaire Nationale Minimum Garantie, the guaranteed national minimum wage.

## APPENDIX D:

### RADICALISATION OF POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PROTEST MOVEMENT

<i>Illoula Platform</i>	<i>El Kseur Platform</i>
Prosecution of the perpetrators of killings, atrocities and excesses (art. 1)	Judgement by civil courts of all the authors, organisers and secret sponsors of the crimes and their expulsion from the security forces and public office (art. 2)
Immediate and unconditional departure of all Gendarmerie brigades (art. 3)	Immediate departure of the Gendarmerie brigades and of the URS (Republican Security Units – i.e. riot police) (art. 4)
That the claim over the denial of linguistic and cultural identity be definitively settled through the constitutionalisation of Tamazighth as a national and official language (art. 4)	Satisfaction of the Amazigh claim in all its (identity, civilisational, linguistic and cultural) dimensions, without a referendum or any other conditions, and the consecration of Tamazighth as a national and official language (art. 8)
Rejection of all commissions of enquiry set up by the regime (art. 10)	Dissolution of the commissions of inquiry set up by the regime (art. 7)

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**APPENDIX E:**  
**ABBREVIATIONS**

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ALN	National Liberation Army
APC	Communal People's Assembly
APN	National People's Assembly
APW	Wilaya People's Assembly
CADC	Coordination of 'aarcs, Daïras and Communes
CCCWB	Coordination of Citizens' Committees of the Wilaya of Bouïra
CCDR	Citizens' Committee for the Defence of the Republic
CIADC	Inter-Wilaya Coordination of 'aarsh, Dairas and Communes
CICB	Inter-Communal Coordination of Bejaia
CPWB	Popular Committee of the Wilaya de Bejaia
FFS	Socialist Forces Front
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FLN	National Liberation Front
MAK	Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia
MCA	Amazigh Cultural Movement
MCB	Berber Cultural Movement
MDS	Democratic and Social Movement
PPA	Party of the Algerian People
PT	Workers' Party
RCD	Rally for Culture and Democracy
RND	National Democratic Rally
UGTA	General Union of Algerian Workers
URS	Republican Security Units