crisis states programme

development research centre

LSE

Working Paper no.19

FROM SEGMENTARITY TO OPACITY:
ON GELLNER AND BOURDIEU,
OR WHY ALGERIAN POLITICS HAVE
ELUDED THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND
VICE VERSA

Hugh Roberts
Development Studies Institute
LSE

December 2002

Crisis States Programme
Working papers series no.1

Development
DESTIN
Studies Institute

Crisis States Programme

**From segmentarity to opacity:
On Gellner and Bourdieu, or why Algerian politics
have eluded theoretical analysis and vice versa**

Hugh Roberts[*]
Development Studies Institute
London School of Economics and Political Science

While there were many differences between Ernest Gellner and Pierre Bourdieu, they also had much in common. Both carried out anthropological research in the Maghrib on the Berber societies of the highlands and did so at the start of their university careers and at the same historical moment, that of the end of French colonial rule and the beginnings of Moroccan and Algerian independence. They both subsequently gained international reputations through their contributions to contemporary sociological theory, developed in both cases through a series of books which were remarkable for the novelty of their arguments and the striking manner in which these were elaborated and defended. And, in both cases, while eschewing further research in Berber territory, they continued to draw on their original fieldwork in the central High Atlas and Kabylia for the empirical material to support a wide variety of theories.

One has only to look at recent social science research by specialists on the Maghrib, and by Maghribi scholars themselves, to realise how influential these two thinkers have been over the last forty years[1]. And, after forty years, an overall appraisal of their respective contributions to our knowledge of the Maghreb is no doubt due. But this is not exactly what I intend to do in this paper. My reason for doing something else is only partly because I consider that many of their contributions lie in the field of sociological theory, and that others are better placed than I am to give an account of work in this field. For it seems to me that, if their writings have made such an impact on their contemporaries and on subsequent generations of scholars, it is in part because of the audacity of their hypotheses and thus of the extent to which their writings constituted a series of challenges to those who were, or still are, inclined to view the social and political realities of North Africa in a different way. And if I think that it is time to take up one or two of these challenges, this is in part because the negative aspect of the influence of these two great sociologists is now being felt in the area which closely concerns me, the political history of contemporary Algeria.

From opacity to segmentarity
For some years now, and in particular since the horrible massacres of July-September 1997, it has been commonplace to hear foreign observers of Algeria complain of the 'opacity' of Algerian politics. At the same time, we have heard calls for greater 'transparency'. It was in

---

the name of this demand for transparency that human rights NGOs and the European Union, for example, have invited the Algerian government to admit Special Observers from the UN, an invitation which, so far, has invariably been declined.

Given that the opacity of the Algerian political system is a problem, the absence of attempts at a serious analysis of this problem is very striking. Neither the foreign and international circles who feel or claim to be concerned about events in Algeria, nor the Algerian political actors who we may suppose to be inconvenienced by this opacity – opposition political parties or human rights groups within the country, for example – have attempted to explain this allegedly permanent obstacle to any lucid reading of the political situation in Algeria.

We therefore are faced with two questions:
- Why this opacity? and
- Why this inability to account for it?

While one can speak of the opacity of the Algerian political system since independence, there can be no doubt that this opacity has increased since 1978, and especially since 1992. As I have argued elsewhere[2], from January 1992 the Algerian state was reduced to its executive branch, given the dissolution of the National People's Assembly (*Assemblée Populaire Nationale*, APN), and the Communal and Wilaya People's Assemblies (APC and APW), and the increased dependence of the judiciary on the executive as a result of the introduction of the state of emergency and the passing of other emergency legislation. Now, the executive of any state is normally veiled by official secrecy. The 'transparency' of any state or political system is a function of the activity of its legislative and judicial branches of the state to the extent that they possess real autonomy allowing them to hold those in charge of the executive to account for their management of public affairs. There is, therefore, since 1992, a set of conjunctural factors which account for some of this opacity.

But these conjunctural factors explain only the aggravation of the opacity of Algerian politics.

Before seeking what we might call the objective factors contributing to this opacity, it is important to consider the subjective factors that have also been at work. Has the perspective of social scientists working on Algerian politics been the right one? Should we not reconsider the theoretical perspectives which have been orienting efforts at political analysis? I have already answered this second question in the affirmative, by arguing that at the origin of this problem lies what we might call a change of direction in the history of the political anthropology[3] of the Maghrib, a shift which has had a high cost in the long run in so far as

---

[2] Hugh Roberts, 'Under Western Eyes: violence and the struggle for political accountability in Algeria', *Middle East Report,* 206, vol.28, no.1 (Spring 1998), pp.39-42.

[3] I would emphasise that we are concerned here with *political* anthropology and not anthropology in general: the anthropology of religion is in much better shape, as is evidenced by Fanny Colonna's fine book, *Les Versets de* l'Invincibilité , Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995; but also Mohammed Brahim Salhi's thesis on the Rahmaniyya (*Etude d'une confrérie religieuse algérienne: la Rahmania à la fin du XIXe siècle et pendant la première moitié du Xxe siècle*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Paris: EHESS, 1979), and the value of the use of religious anthropology approaches to the analysis of violence in Algeria has been demonstrated by several authors, notably Abderrahmane Moussaoui: 'De la violence au djihad', *Annales, HSS*, No.6 (Nov-Dec 1994), pp.1315-1333; 'La violence en Algérie: des crimes et des châtiments', *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 150-152, XXXVIII, 2-4 (1998), pp.245-269; 'Du danger et du terrain en Algérie', *Ethnologie française,* XXXI, 1 (2001), pp.51-59. We should also mention the contribution of the anthropological approach

the advent of structuralist thought - and, in the first place, of segmentarity theory – in anthropology has had the long-term consequence of obscuring that history and distorting the view taken by contemporary scholars of the analyses developed by the first European researchers to study Maghribi political systems, the 19th and early 20th century French ethnologists working on Berber political systems in Algeria (Hanoteau and Letourneux, Masqueray) and in Morocco (Montagne).[4]

It remains for me to develop this hypothesis by reviewing some of Gellner's and Bourdieu's theses about Berber, and particularly Kabyle, political organization. Since I shall be criticizing their approaches and analyses on certain key points, I want straightaway to emphasise the value of some of their other writings for the analysis of the political situation in contemporary Algeria. I shall return to these questions in due course.

Some observations
Before turning to the arguments of Gellner and Bourdieu themselves, I want first to highlight what I consider to be a key, symptomatic aspect of the 'scholarly' literature on Algerian politics the absence of any in-depth reflection on Algerian political traditions and the rarity of serious attempts to take these traditions into account in the interpretations and analyses of Algerian politics since independence. These shortcomings result in approaches marked by one or more of the following expedients:
- the recourse to economic determinist arguments;
- the recourse to arguments by analogy (with Egypt, the USSR/Russia, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Turkey, even Latin America);
- the recourse to cultural determinism;
- the recourse to Ibn Khaldun (and especially to the concept of solidarity based on blood ties, *'asabiyya*)

At the same time, the almost monopolistic influence of segmentarity theory over contemporary Algerian anthropologists is very striking. We see its influence in the representations of Kabyle socio-political organization offered by Ramon Basagana and Ali Sayad in respect of the Aït Yenni of the central Jurjura[5] and by Mohand Khellil for the Aït Fliq of maritime Kabylia,[6] and Aissa Ouitis' sketch of the political sociology of the old village (*thaddarth*) of Mansourah in the Biban[7] accords perfectly with this theory,[8] while Tassadit Yacine's portrait of the maraboutic community of At Sidi Braham of the Biban explicitly claims to be inspired by it.[9] Beyond the Berber-speaking areas of Kabylia (Greater

to the richness of the work of Omar Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad: histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens,* Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995.
[4] Hugh Roberts, 'Perspectives on Berber politics', *Morocco* (Bulletin of the Society for Moroccan Studies, London), 3 (1993), pp.1-19; see also the more developed version of this article, 'Perspectives on Berber politics: on Gellner and Masqueray, or Durkheim's mistake', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (new series), 8:1 (March 2002), pp.107-126.
[5] Ramon Basagana & Ali Sayad, *Habitat traditionnel et structures familiales en Kabylie*, Algiers: Centre de Recherches Anthropologiques, Préhistoriques et Ethnographiques, Mémoire XXIII, 1974.
[6] Mohand Khellil, *L'exil kabyle,* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979; *La Kabylie, ou l'ancêtre sacrifié*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1984.
[7] The Biban mountains are located to the south-east of Greater Kabylia and the south-west of Lesser Kabylia, and form a natural barrier between central Algeria (the Algérois) and eastern Algeria (the Constantinois), breached by a narrow defile known as 'the Gates' (in Arabic: *al-bîbân*), whence their name.
[8] Aissa Ouitis, *Les contradictions sociales et leur expression symbolique dans le Sétifois*, Algiers: Centre de Recherches Anthropologiques, Préhistoriques et Ethnographiques, Document No. III, SNED, 1977.
[9] Tassadit Yacine, *Poésie berbére et identité: Qasi Udifella, hérault des At Sidi Braham*, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987, pp.31ff.

and Lesser), Mahfoud Bennoune's study of the village of El Akbia of the Beni Kaid in the El Milia region – one of the numerous communities of *Arabic*-speaking hillsmen which the anthropology of Algeria has unjustifiably ignored – also locates itself openly within the framework of segmentarity theory.[10]

There are, of course, exceptions: we should cite above all the work of Fanny Colonna, her insistence on a non-segmentarist reading of Emile Masqueray, and her very thorough questioning of Gellner's theses on rural Islam.[11] No doubt there are others. But these exceptions have not been able to amount to another, clear and explicit, hypothesis about the *political* anthropology of Algeria that might stand as an alternative to the segmentarist thesis, which they have tended to skirt around rather than refute, a fact which may explain or even justify the assurance with which Mahfoud Bennoune has argued, as one of the fundamental premises of the current political drama, for the segmentary nature of the traditional social structures of Algeria *in general*, and not only of this or that particular tribal population.[12]

Third, we should note the influence of the idea not only that traditional political organization among rural (or at least highland) populations in Algeria, and among the Berbers in particular, is 'archaic', i.e. superceded if not condemned by history, but that it is based on blood or kinship ties, and that its 'archaic' character is a function of this fact. This influence has been clearly demonstrated in Algerian press commentaries on the phenomenon of the 'Coordination of *'aarch*, dairas and communes' in Kabylia since May 2001, commentaries which have only compounded the relentless confusion between the register of kinship (blood ties, given and immutable) and that of politics (balance of forces, relations of rivalry and alliance that are constructed, contingent and conditional) encouraged by analyses of Algerian politics which speak of the struggle of the *clan*s inside the power structure of the state, when it has always been a matter of *factional* conflicts, like everywhere else in the executive apparatuses of contemporary states.

Fourth, we should note the difference between the fields of Algerian and Moroccan studies in this respect. In Moroccan studies, segmentarity theory has long been either:
- disputed and rivaled by other, French[13] and American,[14] approaches; or
- applied with important modifications, reservations or qualifications;[15] or
- subjected to detailed empirical criticism.[16]

---

[10] Mahfoud Bennoune, *El Akbia: un siècle d'histoire algérienne (1957-1975)*, Algiers: OPU-ENAL, 1986, pp.22-23.

[11] Fanny Colonna, Introduction to the new edition of Emile Masqueray, *Formation des cités chez les populations sédentaires de l'Algérie*, Aix en Provence: Centre de Recherches et d'Études sur les Societés Méditerranéenes, Edisud, 1983, pp.xv-xvi; Colonna (1995), pp.35-69.

[12] Mahfoud Bennoune, *Esquisse d'une anthropologie de l'Algérie politique*, Algiers: Éditions Marinoor, 1998, pp.10-11 & 13-16; the validity of the segmentarist model also seems be one of the premises of the argument of Abderrahmane Moussaoui's interesting article, Moussaoui (1994), p.1331.

[13] See Jacques Berque, *Structures sociales du Haut Atlas*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978, pp.480ff.

[14] Clifford Geertz, 'In search of North Africa', *New York Review of Books*, 22 April 1971; Dale Eickelmann, *Moroccan Islam*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977; Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz and Lawrence Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

[15] Raymond Jamous, *Honneur et baraka: les structures sociales traditionnelles dans le Rif*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981; J.D. Seddon, *Moroccan peasants: a century of change in the eastern Rif, 1870-1970*, Folkestone: Dawson, 1981; Wolfgang Kraus, 'Contestable identities: tribal structures in the Moroccan High Atlas', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (new series), 4 (1998), pp.1-22.

[16] Abdallah Hammoudi, 'Segmentarité, stratification sociale, pouvoir politique et sainteté', *Hesperis Tamuda*, 16 (1974); Henry Munson, 'On the irrelevance of the segmentary lineage model in the Moroccan Rif', *American*

In contrast, in the field of Algerian studies, which has produced not one monograph of socio-political anthropology to compare with the classic studies of Gellner on the Ihansalen,[17] David Hart on the Aïth Waryaghar and the Aït 'Atta,[18] or Jamous on the Iqariyyen, etc., segmentarity theory has never been seriously criticised, disputed or rivalled. All of which indicates the extent to which the hegemony of the Gellnerian variant of segmentarity theory over the anthropology of Algeria has benefited from the absence of debate over political anthropology in this field. It is high time that this hegemony was challenged.

Segmentarity: from modest role to overwhelming ambition
When researchers working on Algeria turn to segmentarity theory, they often overlook the specific factors that at least partially conditioned its particular application by Gellner to the peoples of the Central High Atlas region of Morocco. This indifference to the specificities of the terrain studied by Gellner should not be attributed exclusively to the excessive taste for fashionable models so widespread in contemporary social science, for Gellner's own line of argument encourages it.

Let us first enumerate these specificities. Gellner suggests that the case he is studying, that of Ahansal-land, is an exception to a rule, the rule in question being that established by Montagne. The region is interesting for a number of reasons: there is a strong religious influence on politics, and, moreover, a *stable* one, while the factions ('moieties') that are supposed to be characteristic of Berber political life are not to be found.[19]

Gellner develops the first point through two propositions:

- the role played by the *igurramen* ('saints') of the Ihansalen lineage and the political influence they exercised were so important that the political order in this region might legitimately be called a *hagiarchy* (government by saints);[20]
- not only should this political order be distinguished from those existing in the Western High Atlas, Anti-Atlas and Rif regions studied by Montagne – both that of the small republic governed by the *jema'a* (assembly) of the *taqbilt* (canton), and that of the great *qa'id* (El Glawi, El Gondafi, El Mtuggi, etc.), but also the oscillation between these republican and tyrannical forms, which was a key element of Montagne's thesis, is totally absent from Ahansal-land; the hagiarchy in question, which is neither 'republican' nor 'tyrannical', is in addition very stable.[21]

As for the second point, Gellner argues that, even though the word *leff* (plur. *ilfuf*), which he suggests meant 'moiety' in Montagne's analysis, was known in Ahansal-land and was used to signify a political alliance, the *ilfuf* found there were parochial, informal and ephemeral and so bore little or no resemblance to the *ilfuf* referred to by Montagne - large, formal and enduring alliances, extending in a system of binary oppositions, resembling a chess-board,

Anthropologist, 91 (1989), pp.386-400; 'Re-thinking Gellner's segmentary analysis of Morocco's Aït 'Atta', *Man* (new series), 28 (1993), pp.267-80.

[17] Gellner (1969).

[18] David Hart, *The Aïth Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: an ethnography and history*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976; *Dadda 'Atta and his forty grandsons: the socio-political organisation of the Aït 'Atta of southern Morocco*, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: MENAS Press, 1981; *The Aït Atta of southern Morocco: daily life and recent history*, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: MENAS Press, 1984.

[19] Gellner (1969), p.35.

[20] Gellner (1969), p.35.

[21] Gellner (1969), p.65.

over entire regions such as the Western High Atlas, the Anti-Atlas or the Rif. The *ilfuf* in this sense did not exist at all in Ahansal-land.[22]

To the foregoing we can add at least two further aspects of the specificity of the region. First, we should note that one of the factors cited by Gellner as premises of the existence and importance of Zawiya Ahansal was what he called 'the politics of transhumancy'[23] arising from the fact that each spring, when the snows melted, the Central High Atlas region was invaded by the shepherds of the Aït 'Atta to the south at the very moment that the permanent residents of the region had to regulate the access of their own flocks to the high pastures. The political ecology of the region, therefore, was an essential element of Gellner's analysis. In these respects – the primacy of stock-raising over agriculture and of a mobile population over a sedentary one – the region was, again, very different from those studied by Montagne.

In addition, while Gellner stressed the importance of kinship for individual and group identity, he was obliged to recognize that, in the case of the Aït Bu Gmez, who, owning very rich land, were the most sedentary tribe of the region, the names of the most important groups were borrowed from the topography and the conceptualization of groups in genealogical terms obtained only at the lower levels,[24] and that this, while locally exceptional, was the rule elsewhere, notably in the Western High Atlas.

These very important features of the society of the Central High Atlas which, while linking it to the similar - predominantly pastoral - society of the Middle Atlas, distinguish it very clearly from the other mountain societies in Morocco, should have encouraged readers of *Saints of the Atlas* to assume that its thesis could not be easily elevated into a 'model' to be subsequently 'applied' to other regions and populations without restriction. They might also have led Gellner himself to be prudent about the ambitions he entertained for his analysis. But Gellner does not invoke these peculiarities of the region in order to justify his segmentarist thesis, while admitting that other theses might be better able to account for the political life of other populations. Rather, he cites these peculiarities in support of another thesis altogether, namely his explanation of hagiarchy.

The segmentarist thesis in its sophisticated form developed out of the study of societies of nomadic pastoralists, notably the Nuer of the British Sudan and the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. One might reasonable expect it to be capable also of explaining the transhumant pastoralists of Ahansal-land, especially given that (i) earlier studies of Berber political organization had never looked seriously at this region, and (ii) certain key features of Montagne's analysis of the Shleuh and the Rifians were absent from it. But this is not at all what Gellner argues in his book. If we take the trouble to reconstruct his argument, we shall see that he proceeds as follows:

- segmentarity theory is applicable not only to the Berbers of the Central High Atlas, but to all Moroccan tribes, indeed to all tribal populations of the Maghrib as a whole;[25]
- not only does Montagne's thesis about the importance of the action of the *ilfuf* not apply to Ahansal-land, but it does not apply *anywhere* as an explanation of the maintenance of order in general;[26]

---

[22] Gellner (1969), p.66.
[23] Gellner (1969), pp.169-172, see also pp.206-210.
[24] Gellner (1969), pp.40 & 60.
[25] Gellner (1969), pp.28, 35 & 41.
[26] Gellner (1969), pp.66-67.

- given that all Berber - indeed all Maghribi - tribal society is segmentary in nature, it in all cases needs the 'saints' for the interplay between segments to ensure the maintenance of order;
- the peculiarities of the case studied explain only the unusual extent and duration of the influence of local saints – the fact that the Ihansalen, unlike most other marabout lineages, succeeded in constituting themselves into a hagiarchy over a fairly extensive territory and in maintaining themselves over a long period.

It is to be noted that at no time does Gellner actually take the trouble to establish his first proposition, which is an essential requirement of the second. It is purely and simply an assertion, which is supported by no empirical demonstration or theoretical reasoning outside of the particular local case studied. His approach, therefore, is an affair of very audacious leaps of logic sprinkled as necessary with essentially circular arguments:

- since Montagne's analysis does not seem to account for the political life of the region, Evans-Pritchard's interpretative framework suits it better;[27]
- the segmentary nature of the social structures of the region having thus been established, there is no further need to prove the applicability of segmentarity theory everywhere else;
- given that all Moroccan and indeed all Maghribi tribes are segmentary societies, which means, among other things, that no one level of the social structure is more important than any other, Montagne's thesis on the role of the *ilfuf* in maintaining order among the Shleuh falls to the ground, since it applies (according to Gellner) to one level alone.

We are therefore well and truly faced with a line of argument which aims, not only to explain the particular case of Ahansal-land, but to appropriate the whole of the political and social anthropology of the tribal populations of the Maghrib for the benefit of one theoretical model, without any serious demonstration of the model's applicability to other cases.

Now, this ambition to conquer everything and have it all seems profoundly at odds with a remark made by Gellner himself when he writes, of the interplay of the segments and hence of the preservation of the cohesion of each segmentary group (or sub-group) by external threats, that *'what defines a segmentary society is not that this does occur, but that this is very nearly all that occurs'*.[28] It should follow that the fact that one can, if one really wants to, say of such and such a tribe that it subdivides into 'segments' by no means signifies that one is in the presence of a segmentary society in the sense given this term by Gellner above, that is, a society in which order is maintained by the interplay of the segments and by - very nearly - nothing else. This being the case, what entitled Gellner to claim that all Maghribi tribal populations are segmentary societies? Very nearly…nothing.

The peculiarities of the society of Ahansal-land which we have already mentioned might very reasonably be invoked in support of the hypothesis that the explanation of the maintenance of order by the interplay of the segments, supported by the influence of the saints, is in fact correct in this particular case, while allowing us to suppose that other analyses may better explain the political organization and political life of other Maghribi

---

[27] Gellner himself admits that this is how he came to adopt the segmentarity approach; see his 'Reply to critics' in J. A. Hall & J. A. Harvie (eds.) *The social philosophy of Ernest Gellner,* Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, 48, Amsterdam: Rodophi, 1996, p.645.

[28] Gellner (1969), p.42; see also his reply to Munson in Hall & Jarvie (1996), p.649.

tribal populations, including highland and Berber populations, formed by different histories and obtaining their living from other ecological frameworks. It was with this relaxed attitude towards my field of study that I approached the analysis of the particular case of Kabylia almost thirty years ago. If most of those studying the political anthropology of rural Algeria have preferred, implicitly or explicitly, to apply the Gellnerian model, this does not mean that their analyses have really conformed to this model.

Some analyses which one might take to be segmentarist when in fact they are not
I will limit myself to three well-known cases, those of Pierre Bourdieu, Mahfoud Bennoune and Tassadit Yacine.

In the portrait he paints of Kabyle socio-political structure in his first book, *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, Bourdieu insists that kinship and genealogy are the sole factors constitutive of the group and guarantors of its cohesion, and that this is true at all levels,[29] and offers an account of Kabyle political organisation that resembles in nearly all respects the segmentarity model, although he never explicitly identifies his argument with this. His account differs from the Gellnerian model on only two important points. First, rather than arguing, like Gellner, following the logic of the segmentary system, that no one level of the social pyramid is more important than the others, Bourdieu quite clearly privileges one particular level, that of the "simple or complex clan (*thakharrubth* or *adhrum*)", which he describes as "the most vital unit".[30] Second, while sharply downgrading the importance given to the village assembly, *jema'a*, by Hanoteau and Letourneux,[31] in which respect his thinking completely coincides with that of Gellner, who had no time for the *jema'at*,[32] Bourdieu recognizes the importance of the *sfuf* and tries, not without difficulty, to integrate their activities into his analysis,[33] whereas Gellner allowed himself to ignore the role of the *ilfuf* in Ahansal-land altogether.

As we have already seen, Bennoune, unlike Bourdieu, openly espoused segmentarity theory, which he, like Gellner, believed was valid for the whole of Algerian rural society. Yet his very interesting historical/anthropological study of the village of El Akbia, of the Beni Kaïd tribe of the mountainous hinterland of Jijel in the Arab-speaking North Constantinois region, also differs from Gellner's segmentary model of political organisation. For political institutions properly so-called, the *jema'ât* and the factions, have a very important role in Bennoune's analysis of local politics, while the mediating role of the 'saints' (*mrabtin*) does not seem at all important.[34] Not only does Bennoune recognize the role, in every village in

---

[29] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, Paris: Que Sais-Je?, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958, 3rd edition, p.21; the fact that many, if not the majority, of the villages (*thiddar* and *tuwafeq*) and 'tribes' (*'aarsh*) in Kabylia have non-genealogical names is not taken into account by Bourdieu.

[30] Bourdieu (1958), p.18. In the more developed version of this chapter presented in the English edition, Bourdieu goes further, arguing that, at least in the particular case of the village of Aït Hichem, "(t)he real political unit is the clan, *adroum*' and that '(t)he clan…constitutes the fundamental political unit." (Bourdieu, 1962, pp.18 & 20).

[31] Bourdieu (1958), p.23; Bourdieu (1962), p.22; Adolphe Hanoteau & Aristide Letourneux, *La Kabylie et les coutumes kabyles*, 3 vols., Paris: Challamel, 1893 (1st edition 1872-3) vol.2, pp.7-10.

[32] Gellner (1969), pp.89-90.

[33] Bourdieu (1958), p.20; (1962), pp.13-6; see also 'La maison ou le monde renversé', in P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédée par trois études d'ethnologie kabyle,* Geneva and Paris: Librairie Droz, 1972, pp.68-69, fn 76, and 'La parenté comme représentation et comme volonté', in Bourdieu (1972), p.139, fn 23.

[34] It should also be noted that at no point did the Beni Kaïd practice the collective oath that was so important to Gellner's analysis of the relationship between the *baraka* of the saints and the *asabiyya* of the lay segments in Ahansal-land.

the pre-colonial period, of the "assembly or council of elders, or *Djemaa*",[35] but he also claims that the latter "directed the affairs of each community" and was "responsible for all the affairs of the whole *dachra*",[36] and all this seems so self-evident to Bennoune that he does not hesitate to state, a little later on in his argument, that "the core of rural political organization in pre-colonial Algeria was the djemaa"[37] before going on to give an account of post-colonial political life in terms of 'factionalism', while at the same time presenting an interesting sketch of the behaviour of the El Akbia *jema'a* and of its relationship to the administration of the independent state up to the mid-1970's.[38]

Finally, the case of the maraboutic community of At Sidi Braham in the Biban mountains, on the edge of Lesser Kabylia, which Tassadit Yacine has brought to our attention in a fascinating discussion, seems to me important for several reasons. First, Yacine openly indicates her adoption of the segmentarist approach by calling the At Sidi Braham a "segmentary grouping" and by highlighting those aspects of the community's situation and surrounding context that recall Zawiya Ahansal:

- the At Sidi Braham, like the Ihansalen, live in several villages and hamlets whose populations are exclusively maraboutic and "form an independent and homogeneous ensemble";[39]
- the region is characterised by a degree of aridity and a very low population density which make it resemble the Central High Atlas while differentiating it from the rest of Kabylia;
- the main village is situated near a narrow gorge in the Biban mountains, which resembles that of Acif Ahansal, in that it has been a necessary passage on the route between Algiers and eastern Algeria for generations.

However, when describing the internal politics of the At Sidi Braham, Yacine shows how complex they are. We find among these Kabyle marabouts three distinct elements:

- "the segmentary structure of the Kabyle society to which they belong";[40]
- "… an organisation into a hierarchy of strata which have unequal access to *baraka*";[41]
- a division into two *sfuf* that had their origin in the segmentary division between the At Abdelhelim and the At M'Hand ou Saïd, but which developed into an opposition between supporters of two contrasting points of view and schools of behaviour: the *imserrhen* ('liberals') and the *ouzmiken* ('rigorists').[42]

Now, the combination of segmentary divisions and a hierarchy of strata is not a problem in itself, since we also find it at Zawiya Ahansal, which, for the most part, resembles in its daily life all other villages in the region.[43] It is because this is a village of *igurramen* that the segmentarity which exists as a backdrop there cannot explain the maintenance of order, which relies instead on the hierarchical principle, the 'unequal access to *baraka*', exactly as Yacine herself puts it. On the other hand, there is no division into *ilfuf* at Zawiya Ahansal and

---

[35] Bennoune (1986), pp.27.
[36] Bennoune (1986), pp.27 & 51; *dachra* means village.
[37] Bennoune (1986), p.123.
[38] Bennoune (1986), pp.363-87, and especially 368-77 and 378-81.
[39] Yacine (1987), pp.32-3.
[40] Yacine (1987), p.32.
[41] Yacine (1987), p.48.
[42] Yacine (1987), pp.34-5, 39-43.
[43] Gellner (1969), pp.209, 212-3.

it is therefore the presence and importance of the *sfuf* among the At Sidi Braham that should intrigue us.

How can this aspect of the organization of the At Sidi Braham be reconciled with Gellner's theory? There are reasons to believe that it is impossible. If we assimilate the binary division into *sfuf* to the ordinary principal of segmentary opposition, as Yacine seems tempted to do, then this amounts to admitting that the interplay of the segments determines the maintenance of order among these Kabyle marabouts as it does among their 'lay' neighbors - whereas it is precisely the contrast between obligatorily peaceful *igurramen* and warlike 'lay' tribes on this point that is at the heart of Gellner's argument – and that the At Sidi Braham, far from resembling the Ihansalen, differ profoundly from them in their internal organization; thus we are already outside the Gellnerian model. If, on the other hand, one considers that the division into *sfuf* - even if it may to some extent coincide with segmentary membership - cannot be explained by the division between segments, but expresses another principle, we are, once again, outside the model.

Yacine herself gives us reason to suppose that the opposition between *sfuf* in this case is not at all a specific example of the general principle of order maintenance through the interplay of segments.[44]

First of all, the two segments in question, the At Abdelhelim and the At M'Hand ou Said, are unequal; only the former can claim a genealogy which goes back to the founding ancestor, and they are also apparently much more numerous than the latter. If the interplay of the *sfuf* merely expresses an opposition between these two segments, it does not conform to the segmentary principle of 'balance and opposition', for it is very hard to see how there can be any balance.

But this does not entitle us to suppose that the opposition between *sfuf* expresses nothing other that the hierarchical principle, because the division into *sfuf* seems, at least in part, to have escaped from its original moorings in the opposition between segments. As Yacine explains, some At Abdelhelim ended up rallying to the point of view of the *ouzmiken*, while some At M'Hand ou Said rallied to the *imserrhen*.[45] It follows not only that the functioning of the division into *sfuf* tended to subvert the hierarchical principle, but also that, if this evolution in the political orientations of all and sundry resulted in some sort of balance,[46] this was precisely to the extent that the interplay of the *sfuf* had broken with the opposition of the segments properly so-called and membership of a *saff* had emancipated itself from kinship ties.

I do not claim to know better than Tassadit Yacine what explains the maintenance of order among the At Sidi Braham. But I think it is clear that we are not dealing here with a society characterized only by the interplay of segments, but with a population whose political life is rather complicated and where many different things happen.

But this is equally true for the other cases we have briefly reviewed. Since Gellner's segmentarity theory aims to explain the maintenance of order among the tribal populations to

---

[44] What Gellner called "a kink and variant in the segmentary structure" (Gellner, 1969, p.67).

[45] Yacine (1987), pp.42-3.

[46] I stress the 'if...' since this is not at all clear; Yacine's presentation does not explain how order is maintained among the At Sidi Braham, as this is not one of her concerns, which is understandable given that her book, as its title indicates, is mainly about Berber poetry and identity.

which it is applied, it follows that the analyses offered by Bennoune, Bourdieu and Yacine are not Gellnerian and that the societies which these three authors discuss are not segmentary in the strong sense which Gellner gives to this term. The moment one breaks with the mechanical aspects of segmentarity theory – that is, abandons the attempt to explain the maintenance of political order by the interplay of the segments – the segmentary approach tends to be reduced to a purely descriptive approach[47] which can only account for social structure and which can make no more than a modest contribution to the explanation of political organization.

Now, even if we admit that segmentarity is a prominent feature of the social structures of the Algerian countryside, we have had to take account of the role of the *jema'a* in Bennoune's analysis of El Akbia, and of the action of the *sfuf* in Bourdieu's and Yacine's analyses of Kabyle political organisation. In all three cases, then, we are dealing with political institutions, that is, with the very things which Gellner's thesis absolutely refuses to entertain, because the radical absence of political institutions is one of the fundamental premisses of his model.[48]

From segmentarity to opacity
Can a society without political institutions give rise to political traditions? Evidently not.

The opacity of the state, the political system and political life in post-independence Algeria is in part due to the fact that its most experienced and well-informed observers lack the frame of reference for interpreting the political context and the political action which might enable them to grasp effectively the underlying logics of events.[49] My hypothesis is that this is primarily because, in almost all of the literature on Algerian politics, with only a few exceptions, there is never any mention of Algeria's political traditions. Now, how can one hope to explain politics in France, Britain, the US, Russia, China, etc. – but also in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, etc. – without considering the political traditions of those countries? The idea is difficult to defend. But this is essentially what countless observers, commentators and analysts have attempted to do in the case of Algeria, and it is hardly surprising that they should have generally failed. Instead of trying to conceive what has happened in Algerian politics in terms of its own political traditions, there has been a tendency to import ready-made theories and explanatory models and to apply them to problematics that are often, themselves, also imported. From the problematic of 'feudal lords' and 'fiefdoms' borrowed from the traditions of French revolutionary democracy by some of the authors of the 'Tripoli Programme'[50] via that of the new ruling class - the 'state bourgeoisie'[51] -borrowed from

---

[47] Which would justify the critique of the segmentarist approach made by Rene Gallissot & Gilbert Badia, *Marxisme el Algérie*, Paris: Union Générale d'Edition, 1976, p.238, on condition that we note that this precisely does not apply to Gellner himself.

[48] Gellner (1969), pp.41-2; see also his article on Masqueray, 'The Roots of Cohesion', *Man*, 20:1 (1985), pp.143 & 146, and his reply to Munson in Hall & Jarvie (1996), pp.649-51.

[49] These logics are to be distinguished from what we might, provisionally and approximatively, call the institutional and programmatic logic of, for example, the Boumedienne regime, which was grasped in a remarkable way by several analysts, including Jean Leca & Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique: institutions et régime*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1975; 'Le système politique algérien', in Jean Leca, Jean-Claude Vatin, et al., *Développement politiques au Maghreb: aménagements institutionnels et processus électoraux,* Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1979; and Bruno Etienne, *L'Algérie, cultures et révolution*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977; we would also mention the study by I.W. Zartmann, 'L'élite algérienne sous la présidence de Chadli Bendjedid', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 106 (Oct-Dec 1984), pp.37-53, which grasped much of what was at stake in the early stages of the Chadli regime.

[50] Mohammed Harbi, *Le FLN, mirage et réalité,* Paris: Éditions J.A., 1980, pp.331-334.

[51] Marc Raffinot & Pierre Jacquemot, *Le capitalisme d'état algérien*, Paris: François Maspero, 1977.

Djilas on Yugoslavia and Bettelheim on the USSR[52] to the recently canvassed problematics borrowing scenarios from Russia (Gorbachev-style perestroika), Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Chile and so on and so forth, the history of critical thought and discourse on Algerian politics is in large part the history of a series of approaches which, based on either ignorance of or contempt for Algerian traditions - or the refusal, out of embarrassment, to discuss them - have all turned out to be dead-ends. It is as if we are confronted with a taboo which is so powerful and well-established that it has itself become a national tradition: thinking about and explaining Algerian politics in Algerian terms – *la yadjouz!*[53]

The influence of segmentarity theory, whose apogée in Maghreb studies almost exactly coincided with the first forty years of Algerian independence, has had a lot to do with this. Its influence has had a much greater impact on theoretical approaches to Algerian politics than to Moroccan politics. In a very interesting book, the American political scientist John Waterbury has tried to conceive the political system of post-independence Morocco in terms of segmentarity.[54] If few others have followed him down this road, this is, I believe, largely because the particular traditions of the Moroccan *bled es-siba* played only a secondary role in establishing the political system of the independent state. The political forces of the towns and cities – the bourgeois nationalism (combined with *salafi* reformism) of the Istiqlal, and the monarchy itself – were able to keep the political initiative (even if they were later to dispute the leadership0, whereas the forces of the countryside and especially the mountains, organized mainly in the Liberation Army and, later, the Popular Movement, only played an auxiliary role. In Algeria, it was the other way round.

But let us look at two recent attempts to free the political analysis of Algeria from the impasse to which this taboo has led.

In a very penetrating article, Lahouari Addi offers a reading of Algerian politics in terms of the logic of the regime, a logic that derives primarily from the role of the army as the legitimizing power. Because it is the army that mandates civilians to run the administration and the economy, and any ambitious civilian accordingly depends on his privileged relationship with a member of the military hierarchy,

> (t)he state…exists in two dimensions: in one, it is visible, official, obedient to rules; in the other, it is obscure, hidden from public view, guided by a changing balance of forces that only initiates can discern.[55]

Here we are right in the middle of the problematic of opacity. Moreover, because the Algerian army has inherited its role as legitimating power from its predecessor, the National Liberation Army, it is also a question, Addi argues, of "the traditions inherited from the anti-colonial struggle".[56] But, instead of invoking the particular traditions of the 1954-1962 revolutionary war to explain how the authoritarian aspect of the state depends on its *arbitrary* aspect, itself a consequence of the lack of institutionalization that Addi mentions, but also a characteristic of any opaque regime, Addi emphasizes, rather, how these traditions explain the refusal of the army to install an openly military regime and suggests that it is the populist

---

[52] Milovan Djilas, *The new class*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1957; Charles Bettelheim, *La lutte des classes en URSS*, Paris: Le Seuil-Maspero, 1974.

[53] In Algerian colloquial Arabic: 'not allowed', a slogan employed notably by the Algerian Islamists.

[54] John Waterbury, *The commander of the faithful: the Moroccan political elite – a study of segmented politics*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970; it should be noted that Gellner (in Hall & Jarvie, 1996, pp.654-5) is careful not to identify this borrowing with his own model.

[55] Lahouari Addi, 'Algeria's tragic contradictions', *Journal of Democracy*, 7:3 (1996), p.96.

[56] Addi (1996), p.96.

ideology (which, we should note, dates from 1926 and not 1954) rather than its military origins that explains the authoritarianism of the state. That populist ideology possesses authoritarian traits we can immediately agree. But it seems to me that the originality of the Algerian case resides in the fact that the populist tradition not only was the source the independence project, but also achieved hegemony in Algerian politics only via the revolutionary maquis, a stage in its itinerary which marked it profoundly by aggravating its tendencies towards Manichean intolerance (all opposition is treason, or even apostasy) but also by grafting onto it the form of behaviour that Mao called 'commandism', the arrogant and arbitrary elitism fostered by every militarized revolution.

These considerations are at the heart of an important debate which cannot be pursued in any great depth here. But let us pursue the problem raised by Addi concerning the traditions inherited by the post-independence Algerian state. This question has also been touched on by Bennoune, who argues that:

> the [political] system and the political behaviour of the social forces underpinning the political life of independent Algeria are rooted in three traditions: a tradition dating from pre-1830 Algeria, a French tradition and a revolutionary tradition. Coexistence between the bearers of these three traditions is marked by competition as well as cooperation.

> Nevertheless, the lack of synthesis between these three sources of the political culture of independent Algeria has led to both latent and overt conflicts that have ended up destabilizing present-day Algerian society.[57]

I agree with Bennoune that we should try to think about the problem of political behaviour as well as that of the political system. Nevertheless, it seems to me that some of his propositions need to be nuanced. In particular:

- the coexistence of diverse traditions in post-independence Algeria has been a matter not only of the relationship of different agents representing distinct traditions, but also, and perhaps most importantly, of a process taking place in the subjective experience of individual Algerians who, in their innermost being, if to varying degrees, are worked on by all these traditions and the values they carry. The political problem, therefore, does not arise from an absence of synthesis, but rather from the fact that the simultaneous or successive attempts at synthesis by a variety of social and political actors have given birth to different conceptions of the necessary synthesis which are in competition with one another while, at the same time, both the criteria and the institutional framework needed if this competition is to be arbitrated other than by force have been lacking;

- Bennoune's schema of three traditions needs to be corrected, in that we should recognise: (i) the contribution of traditions originating in the Middle East; (ii) that distinctions should be made, within each of these broader traditions, between their diverse and often contradictory elements; (iii) that the revolutionary tradition holds a particular and privileged place, precisely in that it is the fruit of a synthesis of the other three.

---

[57] Bennoune (1998), pp.11-2.

Now, in his discussion of the tradition (in the broadest sense) of pre-1830 Algeria, Bennoune seems to want to privilege the particular tradition of the Regency, as the only *political* tradition worthy of the name, in opposition to the exclusively social traditions borne by the segmentary structures of the Arab-Berber population.[58] In this he is faithful to his choice of theoretical framework, but takes no account of the importance he himself accorded to the tradition of the village *jema'a* in his earlier book; what is more, in the passage where he discusses the organizational aspects of the revolutionary tradition during the war of liberation, we find among these precisely the fact that "the rural populations were organized at the local level through popular assemblies or *jema'as*".[59] It is possible that several factors have combined to inhibit Bennoune from drawing out all the theoretical implications of his own observations, but the influence of segmentarity theory is clearly one of them.

To suppose that the highland societies of Algeria have no political traditions makes it impossible to understand the way of doing things and the internal history of the revolutionary movement known as the FLN, and the political system of the Algerian state which the FLN constitued.[60] To suppose that the highland societies of Algeria had no political institutions is to make their political traditions impossible to grasp.

What, then, is a *jema'a*?

The denial of institutions

Gellner acknowledges the existence of *jema'at* among the tribes of Ahansal-land, but denies them the status of political institutions on the pretext that

> Berber jema'as have no sense of corporate identity distinct from that of the group
> of which they are the jema'a; they have no continuity other than that of that group;
> they have, of course, no kind of secretariat or records.[61]

Let us accept that this may at least appear to be true of nomadic populations which are constantly on the move in accordance with the imperatives of transhumance.[62] But the facility with which Gellner allows himself to generalize from the case of these nomadic pastoralists is striking, as is the fact that he never examines the political organization of the large sedentary tribe of the region, the Aït Bu Gmez. Now, among the sedentary populations of the Jurjura district of Kabylia, the village *jema'a* not only possesses its own permanent space and thus its own *hurma* (honour) and *'anaya* (the protection it offers by virtue of the consideration it is owed), and thus its own identity, but also its own officers, including a secretary (who is also often the treasurer), a town crier and a president, to say nothing of its own clear prerogatives, its calendar and internal regulations – procedures, rules of proper conduct, etc. In many cases, it also has its own building. If this is not an institution, what does 'institution' mean?

---

[58] Bennoune (1998), pp.16-17.

[59] Bennoune (1998), p.54.

[60] I have explained how the political traditions of Algeria's mountain populations influenced the political organization and approach of the FLN in my article, 'The FLN: French conceptions, Algerian realities', in George Joffé, ed., *North Africa: nation, state and region*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp.111-141.

[61] Gellner (1969), p.90.

[62] However, it is hard to conceive how any political institution may have any continuity independently of the group to which it belongs – that the French National Assembly might have existed before the French nation was constituted and might outlast it, for example.

In saying all this about the Kabyle *jema'a,* I am for the most part simply repeating the information given to us by Hanoteau and Letourneux[63] and by Masqueray, having taken the trouble to verify it on the ground.[64] Masqueray is cited by Gellner in his bibliography, and Bourdieu cites Hanoteau and Letourneux as well as Masqueray in the bibliographies of *Sociologie de l'Algérie* and of *The Algerians.* But at no time do either Gellner or Bourdieu try to show, by serious reasoning backed up by evidence, that the analyses of their predecessors were wrong. There are therefore grounds to believe that we are dealing here with a prejudice, or rather two prejudices which it is appropriate to distinguish.

The first is theoretical: this is the prejudice, intrinsic to structuralist sociology, in favour of determinist and reductionist strategies of explaining everything that occurs in the political field, in which respect structuralist sociology is the brother as well as rival of historical materialism (Gellner's social thought being a kind of highly elaborated anti-Marxism). Within this framework, it is normal to see anything which belongs to the political field as of only superficial importance, as ephiphenomenal, since the key to theoretical explanation is always to be found in the social structure or the economic 'base'. But this theoretical perspective - which, like any other set of assumptions, we can take or leave - cannot on its own explain what has been going on in the two cases which concern us. For structuralist thought does not generally lead its proponents to deny the very existence of the political field or its institutions; on the contrary, they recognize them, if in a condescending fashion, the better to establish their rights over them. Yet Gellner does not want simply to explain the political order by the social structure, he reduces the political to the social. He puts his cards on the table very early on, during his discussion of Montagne, when he argues that:

> Berber society oscillates between two rival and opposed social forms, between on the one hand democratic or oligarchic tribal republics ruled by assemblies or hierarchies of assemblies, and on the other hand ephemeral tribal tyrannies, exemplified in modern times by the 'great caïds' of the South.[65]

Here we see Gellner speaking of *social* forms when clearly it is a case of regimes, and therefore of *political* forms. The society being insufficiently evolved for the distinction to be made between the social and the political, the latter is suppressed in favor of the former. Gellner's attempt to persuade us that segmentarity theory finds an essential part of its origins in the work of Masqueray[66] completely ignores the fact that, in Masqueray's own analysis, the political takes precedence over the social and incorporates it, which is why he compares the variety of Berber polity ('cité') to the city of classical antiquity.

Why does Gellner choose to suppress the political by submerging it in the social, rather than the reverse? This is where the second, social, prejudice seems to come in, that of the urban intellectual,[67] who, like Marx, cannot help having a condescending attitude towards rural populations. Just as Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, exclaimed, of the French peasantry: "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented",[68] Gellner - contrary to the

---

[63] Hanoteaux and Letourneux (1893), vol.2, pp.1-10, 21-23, 25-36.
[64] In the course of fieldwork on both the northern and southern sides of the Jurjura in 1973-1974, 1975, 1976 and 1983.
[65] Gellner (1969), p.26.
[66] Gellner (1985), pp.142-55.
[67] Gellner himself described his family background as "deeply urban"; see John Davis, 'An interview with Ernest Gellner', *Current Anthropology*, 32,1 (February 1991), p.63.
[68] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1970.

whole of this other tradition constituted by the work of Hanoteau and Letourneux, Masqueray and Montagne – says, in effect, of the Berbers: "they cannot govern themselves, that is to say, manage their own conflicts; they need to have these conflicts dealt with by the mechanism of their social structure, lubricated as necessary by religious specialists."

Indeed, it is not only when considering Berber organization that Gellner exhibits this outlook. He does essentially the same thing when writing of the contribution of the Salafiyya movement or *islah* to the Algerian national revolution, and of the place of reformist Islam in the independent state.[69] In his representation of what happened in Algeria between the 1920's and the 1970's, there is not the least mention of political movements or actors. There is no reference to Ferhat Abbas, nor to Messali Hadj and the ENA-PPA-MTLD-OS tradition out of which the FLN emerged, nor to the FLN itself (let alone Ben Boulaïd, Boudiaf, Krim, Abane, Ben Bella, Boumediène, etc.) His account refers only to the activities of Ibn Badis and his allies, and, in the context of the independent state, of the technocratic elite, the "mamluks of the modern world",[70] who are at a disadvantage, in terms of legitimacy, to the devout petty bourgeoisie and the Islahist *'ulama* who allegedly represent them. In Gellner's account of the history of contemporary Algeria, political nationalism is cut out of the picture altogether, that is, the nationalism of the populist tradition and the *maquis*, which have no claim to consideration in his eyes.[71]

Are we entitled to attribute to Gellner the same theoretical *a priori* that is often found among orientalist scholars of Islam? This is not certain. His fundamental prejudice seems to be in favour of the man of letters rather than the man of religion as such.[72] This, at least, is what emerges from two of his occasional writings on independent Morocco that have attracted much less attention, although they are of great interest for an analysis of Algerian politics.

In 'Patterns of rural rebellion in Morocco', Gellner offers an analysis which seeks to explain the logic behind the curious revolts which broke out in the traditional *bled es-siba*, the Rif and the High Atlas, just after independence, insisting that it was not in the least a matter of traditional *siba*, nor of the activation of atavistic sentiments of identity, but rather of calculated manoeuvres in the new national political game.[73] At a stroke, the highland Berbers are recognized by Gellner as having a political life and political behaviour properly so-called

---

[69] Ernest Gellner, 'The unknown Apollo of Biskra: the social base of Algerian puritanism', *Government and Opposition*, 9 (1974), pp.277-310, republished in E. Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.149-173.

[70] Gellner (1981), p.168.

[71] In this brilliant article, in which all Gellner's erudition as well as his peremptory, indeed Procrustean, reductionism are deployed with panache, we can recognise an astonishing anticipation of what the Algerian state has now become – on condition that we also recognise that, in order for the polity to be reduced to this condition, it was necessary not only for a new Islamic radicalism to replace the exhausted Badisiyyan tradition, but also for the country to burn and bleed for more than ten years, for more than a hundred thousand Algerians to be killed, and *last but not least*, for the tradition of political nationalism to be destroyed together with its leading representatives.

[72] This prejudice is itself dependent on a distinction which plays a key role in his social theory overall, that between Great and Little Traditions, or between High and Low Culture, between what corresponds more or less to urban cultural traditions based on scripturalist learning and teaching on the one hand, and the popular or, indeed, peasant cultural traditions, rooted in oral culture, on the other hand; see Gellner (1981), pp.80-81, but also E. Gellner, 'Culture, constraint and community: semantic and coercive compensa-tions of the genetic under-determination of *Homo sapiens sapiens*', in Paul Mellars and Chris Stringer, *The Human Revolution*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989, pp.514-525, republished in E. Gellner, *Anthropology and politics: revolutions in the sacred grove*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp.45-61, 60-61.

[73] E. Gellner, 'Patterns of rural rebellion in Morocco during the early years of Independence', *European Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1962), pp.297-311; republished in Gellner (1981), pp.194-206.

and, in contrast to Waterbury's approach, Gellner's analysis of their political behaviour owes little to his own segmentarity theory. There is an irony in this change in perspective, but no real U-turn. For what explains Gellner's willingness to take seriously the political game in which his Berbers are involved is the fact that they have been integrated into this via clientelist networks, including political parties, which radiate out from the capital and are largely the work of educated, urban elites. The irony lies in the fact that it is only when Gellner abandons his anthropological hat and reverts to the persona of the sociologist in order to look at contemporary Morocco that he frees himself from the reductionist tendencies of structuralist sociology and allows himself to describe what is happening in the political field in its own terms.

In 'The struggle for Morocco's past', Gellner reviews two books by Moroccan authors who offer a striking contrast in terms of their respective polemical strategies and nationalist attitudes.[74] The first, *Les grands courants de la civilisation du Maghrib* by Ben Abdallah,[75] seems to reflect the point of view of the traditional bourgeoisie and their *'ulama*, containing as it does a preface by Allal al-Fassi. The second, *Le gouvernment marocain à l'aube du XXème siècle*, by Lahbabi,[76] is endorsed by a preface from Mehdi Ben Barka, and therefore seems to represent a more radical nationalist, or even left-wing, point of view. Yet, far from preferring the first, Gellner furnishes a critique of it which, while courteously phrased, is nonetheless scathing, whereas he sings the praises of the second. What is interesting here is the criterion on which Gellner bases his judgement. Ben Abdallah's book is not really a coherent argument; it is really more of a collage of retorts to wounding colonialist theses, retorts which, for every French criticism of the defects of Muslim civilization in North Africa, takes the form of the argument *tu quoque*. Because this attempt to pay the advocates of the colonialist theses back in their own coin cannot seriously hope to convince them, the book is a polemic that is more of an internal monologue than a debate with the Other and thus an effort, fundamentally conservative in spirit, to nurse a wounded self-respect in order to recover a self-confidence that has been lost. In contrast, Lahbabi's book displays a coherent and ambitious argument which, while challenging certain French theses on Morocco, and in particular those that attributed an absolute character to the monarchy (a thesis which suited the Protectorate), does this not out of amour-propre in order to settle a score with the colonialists, but for a far more serious and interesting reason. For its purpose was to develop an overall historical vision of Morocco and its political traditions precisely in order to establish the premises of a particular political position in the context of the independent state, premises which, we should note, are both based on a sophisticated theoretical argument and anchored in an imaginative but never romantic reading of national history.

In recognizing the intellectual seriousness of Lahbabi's book, and its superiority to Ben Abdallah's, Gellner seems to me to demonstrate both his interest in the role of ideas and arguments in political life, *and* a certain impartiality between different tendencies among the men of letters. It is because he sees only the Islahist *'ulama* as actors in the field of ideas in Algeria that he privileges their role. His blind spot is, therefore, the traditions of thought and expression of not only the illiterate, but also the non-lettered, and particularly those of rural society. If, in his article on the *islah* and the Algerian revolution, he uses Fanon as foil to Ibn Badis, it is because he does not know the thought of the Algerian revolutionaries, thought which was never confided to a public readership because it was never distilled into theoretical

[74] E. Gellner, 'The struggle for Morocco's past', *The Middle East Journal*, XV, (Winter 1961), pp.79-90.

[75] Ben Abdallah, *Les grands courants de la civilisation du Maghrib*, Casablanca: Imprimérie du Midi, 1958.

[76] Mohamed Lahbabi, *Le gouvernment marocain · l'aube du XXe siècle,* Rabat: Éditions Techniques Nord-Africaines, 1958, Preface by Mehdi Ben Barka, President of the Consultative Assembly.

texts, thought which was hidden because originating in and belonging to the *maquis*, and it never occurs to Gellner that those who do not live by books, but rather by political action, could develop original and innovative thinking capable of influencing events. Thus it was that the achievement of the Algerian revolutionaries, rooted in the political traditions of the *bled el-baroud*[77] – the remarkable synthesis of these traditions with the demands of all these other, Algero-Ottoman, French, Arab and Islamic traditions – became inconceivable to social scientists. The same thing has occurred in respect of the contemporary academic vision of those other unlettered country people who founded a modern state, the Irish revolutionaries.

Evidently, the very different origins of Pierre Bourdieu do not lend themselves in this way to explaining his view of Kabyle political organization. One might suppose that his relationship to the society of the Béarn peasantry would have allowed and inclined him to get much closer than was possible for Gellner to the highland Berbers he was studying. This is at any rate the impression given by some of his other writings on Kabyle society, and especially his superb article on 'The sense of honour', which seems to me to be a great contribution to the understanding of Algerian (and not only Kabyle) society and should be a basic reference for any serious work on, *inter alia*, a central aspect of state-society relations in Algeria today, *la hogra*.

Why, then, did Bourdieu reach conclusions similar to Gellner's about what for Bennoune was "the core of rural political organization", namely the *jema'a*? Undoubtedly that same theoretical prejudice in favor of structuralist sociology had a lot to do with it. But we should also remember that Bourdieu did his fieldwork during the war. At that time, the *jema'a* in every Kabyle village was either suspended or subordinated to the diktat of the French army, or operating under the hegemony of the ALN in a totally clandestine fashion. This was, therefore, the worst possible moment to observe Kabyle political life or to try to grasp its logic. This, at any rate, is my hypothesis and explains, I believe, why the interplay of the *sfuf*, which continued to characterise the political life of the Jurjura in the 1960s and 1970s,[78] was never theorised by Bourdieu in relation to the logic of the *jema'a*, and consequently seemed to him to be an affair of "strange processes of weighing",[79] in short, something frankly mysterious, opaque.

---

[77] The Algerian equivalent of the Moroccan *bled es-siba;* literally, 'the land of (gun)powder', i.e. the land of fighting, where the central power is resisted.

[78] Hugh Roberts, *Political development in Algeria: the region of Greater Kabylia*, doctoral thesis (unpublished), Oxford University, 1980, pp.241-244, 281-284, 307-332; see also my article, 'The conversion of the mrabtin in Kabylia', in Ernest Gellner, Jean-Claude Vatin *et.al.* (eds.) *Islam et Politique au Maghreb*, CRESM, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1981, pp.101-125.

[79] Bourdieu (1962), p.16.

Bibliography

Abdallah, Ben, *Les grands courants de la civilisation du Maghrib*, Casablanca: Imprimérie du Midi, 1958

Addi, L., 'Algeria's tragic contradictions', *Journal of Democracy*, 7:3 (1996), pp.94-107

Basagana, R., and Sayad, A., *Habitat traditionnel et structures familiales en Kabylie*, Algiers: Centre de Recherche Anthropolgiques, Préhistoriques, Mémoire No.XXIII, 1974

Bennoune, M., *El Akbia: un siècle d'histoire algérienne (1857-1975)*, Alger: OPU-ENAL, 1986

Bennoune, M., *Esquisse d'une anthropologie de l'Algérie politique*, Alger: Editions Marinoor, 1998

Berque, J., *Structures socials du Haut-Atlas*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955

Berque, Jacques, *French North Africa: the Maghrib between two world wars*, London: Faber, 1967

Bettelheim, C., *La lutte des classes en URSS*, Paris: Le Seuil-Maspero, 1974

Bourdieu, P., *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, Paris: 'Que Sais-Je?', Presses Universitaires de France, 1958

Bourdieu, P., *The Algerians*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1962

Bourdieu, P., *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, precede de trois etudes d'ethnologie kabyle*, Geneva & Paris: Librairie Droz, 1972

Bourdieu, P., *Algeria 1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979

Carlier, O., *Entre nation et jihad: histoire sociale des radicalisme algérienes,* Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995

Colonna, F., 'Introduction', in E. Masqueray, *Formation des cités chez les populations sedentaires de l'Algérie*, (CRESM, Archives Maghrébines), Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1983, pp.i-xxv

Colonna, F., *Les versets de l'invincibilité: permanence et changement religieux dans l'Algérie contemporaine*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995

Davis, J., 'An interview with Ernest Gellner', *Current Anthropology*, 32:1 (February 1991), pp.63-72

Djilas, M., *The new class*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1957

Eickelmann, D., *Moroccan Islam*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976

Etienne, B., *L'Algérie, cultures et révolution*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977

Gallissot, R., & Badia, G., *Marxisme el Algérie*, Paris: Union Générale d'Edition, 1976

Geertz, C., 'In search of North Africa', *New York Review of Books*, 22 April 1971

Geertz, C., Geertz, H., & Rosen, L, *Meaning and order in Moroccan society,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979

Gellner, E. A., *Saints of the Atlas*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969

Gellner, E. A., 'The struggle for Morocco's past', *The Middle East Journal*, XV, (Winter 1961), pp.79-90

Gellner, E. A., 'The unknown Apollo of Biskra: the social base of Algerian puritanism', *Government and Opposition*, 9 (1974), pp.277-310

Gellner, E. A., 'Patterns of rural rebellion in Morocco during the early years of independence', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol.3, pp.297-311, reprinted in Gellner (1981), pp.194-206

Gellner, E. A., *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981

Gellner, E. A., 'The Roots of Cohesion', *Man*, 20:1 (1985), pp.142-155

Gellner, E. A., 'Culture, constraint and community: semantic and coercive compensations of the genetic under-determination of *Homo sapiens sapiens*', in Paul Mellars & Chris Stringer (eds), *The human revolution*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989, pp.514-525, reprinted in E. Gellner, *Anthropology and politics: revolutions in the sacred grove*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp.45-61

Gellner, E. A., 'Reply to critics', in Hall & Jarvie (1996), pp.639-56

Hall, J. A. and Jarvie, I. (eds.), *The social philosophy of Ernest Gellner* (Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, 48), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996

Hammoudi, A., 'Segmentarité, stratification sociale, pouvoir politique et sainteté', *Hesperis Tamuda*, 16 (1974)

Hanoteau, A. and Letourneux, A., *La Kabylie et les coutumes kabyles*, 3 vols, Paris: Challamel, 1893

Harbi, M., *Le FLN, mirage et réalité*, Paris: Editions J. A., 1980

Hart, D. M., *The Aïth Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: an ethnography and history*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976

Hart, D. M., *Dadda 'Atta and his forty grandsons: the social and political organisation of the Aït 'Atta of southern Morocco*, Wisbech, Cambs: MENAS, 1981

Hart, D. M., *The Aït 'Atta of southern Morocco: daily life and recent history*, Wisbech, Cambs: MENAS, 1984

Jamous, R., *Honneur et baraka: les structures sociales traditionelles dans le Rif*, Paris & Cambridge: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme & Cambridge University Press, 1981

Khellil, M., *L'éxil kabyle*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979

Khellil, M., *La Kabylie, ou l'ancêtre sacrifié*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984

Kraus, H., 'Contestable identities: tribal structures in the Moroccan High Atlas', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4 (1998), pp.1-22

Lahbabi, Mohamed, *Le gouvernment marocain · l'aube du XXe siècle,* Rabat: Éditions Techniques Nord-Africaines, 1958

Leca, J. & Vatin, J-C., *L'Algérie politique: institutions et régime*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1975

Leca, J. & Vatin, J-C., 'Le système politique algérien', in Jean Leca, Jean-Claude Vatin, et al., *Développement politiques au Maghreb: aménagements institutionnels et processus électoraux,* Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1979

Marx, K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1970 [1852]

Masqueray, E., *Formation des cités chez le populations sedentaires de l'Algérie* (CRESM, Archives Maghrébines), Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1983 [1886]

Moussaoui, A., 'De la violence au djihad', *Annales, HSS*, No.6 (Nov-Dec 1994), pp.1315-1333

Moussaoui, A., 'La violence en Algérie: des crimes et des châtiments', *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 150-152, XXXVIII, 2-4 (1998), pp.245-269

Moussaoui, A., 'Du danger et du terrain en Algérie', *Ethnologie française,* XXXI, 1 (2001), pp.51-59

Munson, H., 'On the irrelevance of the segmentary lineage model in the Moroccan Rif', *American Anthropologist*, 91 (1989), pp.386-400

Munson, H., 'Rethinking Gellner's segmentary analysis of Morocco's Aït 'Atta', *Man,* 28 (1993), pp.267-80

Ouitis, A., *Les contradictions sociales et leur expression symbolique dans le Sétifois*, Alger: Centre de Recherche Anthropologiques, Préhistoriques et Ethnographiques, Document No.III, SNED, 1977

Raffinot, M., & Jacquemot, P., *Le capitalisme d'état algérien*, Paris: Françoise Maspero, 1977

Roberts, H., *Political development in Algeria: the region of the Greater Kabylia*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1980

Roberts, H., 'The conversion of the mrabtin in Kabylia', in Ernest Gellner, Jean-Claude Vatin et al., *Islam et Politique au Maghreb*, CRESM, Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1981, pp.111-141

Roberts, H., 'The FLN: French conceptions, Algerian realities', in G. Joffé (ed), *North Africa: nation, state and region*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993a, pp.111-141

Roberts, H., 'Perspectives on Berber Politics', *Morocco,* 3 (1993b), pp.1-19

Roberts, H., 'Under Western Eyes: violence and the struggle for political accountability in Algeria', *Middle East Report*, 206 (Spring 1998), pp.39-42

Roberts, H., 'Perspectives on Berber politics: on Gellner on Masqueray, or Durkheim's mistake', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, March 2002

Salhi, M. B., *Etude d'une confrérie religieuse algérienne: la Rahmania à la fin du XIXe siècle et pendant la première moitié du Xxe siècle*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Paris: EHESS, 1979

Seddon, J. D., *Moroccan peasants: a century of change in the eastern Rif, 1870-1970,* Folkestone, Kent: Dawson, 1981

Waterbury, J., *The commander of the faithful: the Moroccan political elite – a study of segmented politics*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970

Yacine, T., *Poésie berbère et identité: Qasi Udifella, Héraut des At Sidi Braham*, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987

Zartmann, I. W., 'L'élite algérienne sous la présidence de Chadli Bendjedid', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 106 (Oct-Dec 1984), pp.37-53

Working Papers in Series (up to August 2003)

WP1   Crisis States Programme, 'Concept and Research Agenda' (April 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP2   Crisis States Programme, 'Research Activities' (April 2001)

WP3   Crisis States Programme, 'States of Crisis in South Asia' (April 2001)

WP4   Crisis States Programme, 'Research in Latin America' (April 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP5   Crisis States Programme, 'South Africa in Southern Africa' (April 2001)

WP6   Dennis Rodgers, 'Making Danger a Calling: Anthropology, violence, and the dilemmas of participant observation' (September 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP7   Hugh Roberts, 'Co-opting Identity: The manipulation of Berberism, the frustration of democratisation and the generation of violence in Algeria' (December 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP8   Shaibal Gupta, 'Subaltern Resurgence: A reconnaissance of Panchayat election in Bihar' (January 2002)

WP9   Benedict Latto, 'Governance and Conflict Management: Implications for donor intervention' (February 2002) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP10   Jo Beall, 'The People Behind the Walls: Insecurity, identity and gated communities in Johannesburg' (February 2002) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP11   Jo Beall, Owen Crankshaw & Susan Parnell, 'Social Differentiation and Urban Governance in Greater Soweto: A case study of post-Apartheid reconstruction' (February 2002) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP12   E. A. Brett, 'Liberal Theory, Uneven Development and Institutional Reform: Responding to the crisis in weak states' (July 2002)

WP13   John Harriss, 'The States, Tradition and Conflict in North Eastern States of India' (August 2002)

WP14   David Keen, 'Since I am a Dog, Beware my Fangs: Beyond a 'rational violence' framework in the Sierra Leonean war' (August 2002)

WP15   Joseph Hanlon, 'Are Donors to Mozambique Promoting Corruption?' (August 2002)

WP16   Suzette Heald, 'Domesticating Leviathan: Sungusungu groups in Tanzania' (September 2002)

WP17   Hugh Roberts, 'Moral Economy or Moral Polity? The political anthropology of Algerian riots' (October 2002)

WP18   James Putzel, 'Politics, the State and the Impulse for Social Protection: The implications of Karl Polanyi's ideas for understanding development and crisis' (October 2002)

WP19   Hugh Roberts, 'From Segmentarity to Opacity: on Gellner and Bourdieu, or why Algerian politics have eluded theoretical analysis and vice versa' (December 2002) – *Also available in French*

WP20   Jonathan DiJohn, 'Mineral-Resource Abundance and Violent Political Conflict: A critical assessment of the rentier state model' (December 2002)

WP21   Victoria Brittain, 'Women in War and Crisis Zones: One key to Africa's wars of under-development' (December 2002)

WP22   Apurba Baruah, 'Tribal Traditions and Crises of Governance in North East India, with special reference to Meghalaya' (March 2003)

WP23   Giovanni M. Carbone, 'Emerging Pluralist Politics in Mozambique: the Frelimo-Renamo Party System' (March 2003)

WP24   Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Fragmentación electoral y política tradicional en Colombia – piezas para un rompecabezas en muchas dimensiones' (March 2003) – *English version forthcoming*

WP25   Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Los tiempos de las involuciones democráticas' (March 2003) – *English version forthcoming*

WP26   Manoj Srivastava, 'The Dyamics of achieving 'Power' and 'Reform' as a Positive-Sum Game: A report on the preliminary ethnographic explorations of the politics-governance nexus in Madhya Pradesh, India' (March 2003)

WP27   Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Criminal Rebels? A discussion of war and criminality from the Colombian experience' (April 2003)

WP28   Luis Eduardo Fajardo, 'From the Alliance for Progress to the Plan Colombia: A retrospective look at US aid to Colombia' (April 2003)

WP29   Jean-Paul Faguet, 'Decentralisation and local government in Bolivia' (May 2003) – *Also available in Spanish*

WP30   Maria Emma Wills & Maria Teresa Pinto, 'Peru's failed search for political stability (June 2003)

WP31   Robert Hunter Wade, 'What strategies are viable for developing countries today? The World Trade Organisation and the shrinking of 'development space' (June 2003)

WP32   Carlos Medina & Hermes Martínez, 'Violence and drug prohibition in Colombia' (August 2003)

www.crisisstates.com

The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

Crisis States Programme collaborators

In India:
Asia Development Research Institute (Patna, Bihar)
NEIDS, North-East Hill University (Shillong)

In South Africa:
Wits Institute of Social & Economic Research (WISER)
Sociology of Work Workshop (SWOP)
Department of Sociology
(University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)

In Colombia:
IEPRI, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Universidad de los Andes
Universidad del Rosario

Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.

- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.

- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.

- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.

Director: Dr James Putzel
Administrator: Wendy Foulds
Editorial Assistant: Jonathan Curry-Machado

Development Research Centre,
Development Studies Institute (DESTIN),
LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE
Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631   Fax: +44 (0)20 7955 6844
e-mail: csp@lse.ac.uk

LSE