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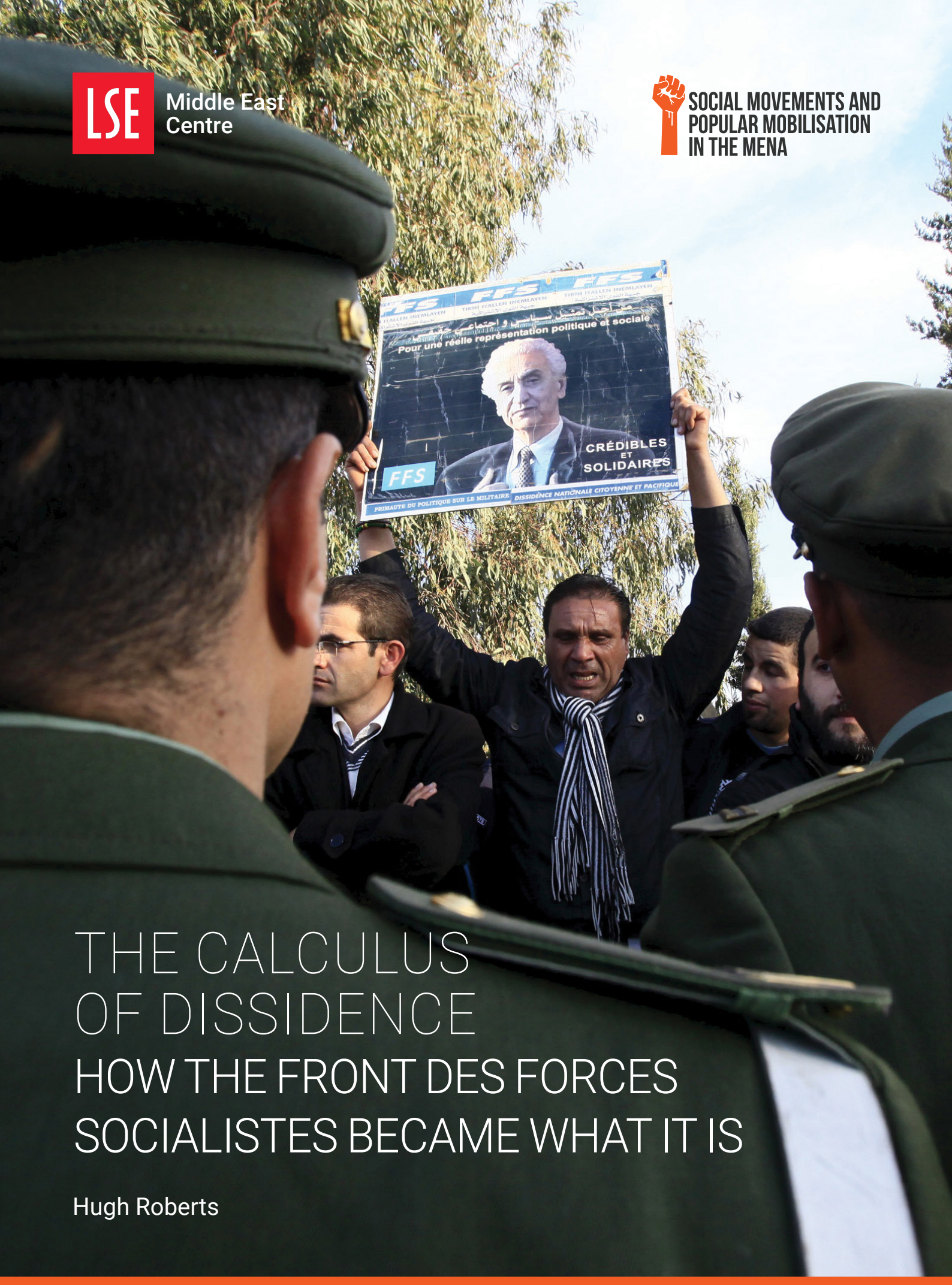

THE CALCULUS OF DISSIDENCE

HOW THE FRONT DES FORCES SOCIALISTES BECAME WHAT IT IS

Hugh Roberts

LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series | 26 | October 2018

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The Calculus of Dissidence: How the Front des Forces Socialistes Became What It Is

Hugh Roberts

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About the Author

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Abstract

While Algeria's rulers bear much of the responsibility for the lack of democratic reform after the advent of formal party-political pluralism in 1989, the political forces notionally engaged in constitutional opposition have their share. This judgment applies in particular to the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS). Finally legalised in 1989, the FFS from its foundation in 1963 has provided the main template of 'opposition' in Algeria but it has not been engaged in genuine opposition, merely dissidence. Media commentary and academic analysis have attributed democratic credentials and reforming ambitions to the FFS on the strength of its discourse, while ignoring the way the party has actually behaved. This flawed approach has also built upon earlier errors in the analysis of the FFS by the French sociologist Jeanne Favret, who misconceived the 1963 rebellion as representing the 'ultra-modernism' of the Kabyle middle class and misunderstood the role of tradition in this affair. This paper examines the party's behaviour since 1989 and the logics of the rebellion of 1963–5, and explains how and why the FFS has always fallen short of opposing the government with a serious democratic project.

A Funeral in Kabylia

On 2 January 2016, tens of thousands of Algerians[1] stood witness to a historic event, the funeral of Hocine Aït Ahmed, the founder of the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS)[2] in 1963 and its leader until 2013, who had died, aged 89, at his home in Lausanne. Ten days later he was buried next to his mother[3] in the hamlet that bears the family name, Ath Ahmed,[4] a short distance from the large village of Taqa in the *'arsh* Ath Yahia,[5] near Aïn el-Hammam in the mountains of Greater Kabylia.

Kabylia is the home of Algeria's largest Berber-speaking population. Approximately 25 percent of Algeria's population (around 40 million in 2016) are Berber-speakers and Kabyles account for about 7 of those 10 million.[6] As the most densely inhabited region in North Africa outside the towns, with the possible exception of Egypt's Nile Delta, Kabylia has long had a tradition of commercial and labour out-migration and Kabyles have been disproportionately represented in the population of Algiers since the Ottoman era, in the Algerian diaspora in France and Belgium since the early 1900s and, in recent decades, in other parts of Europe and in North America.

Kabyle activists were prominent in the nationalist movement which developed amongst the migrant workers in France from the 1920s onwards and in Algeria from 1937, and played a major role in the war of independence of 1954–62. The first congress of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) was held in the Soummam valley in Kabylia in August 1956 and at that point Kabyles dominated the FLN leadership. It was a Kabyle, Abane Ramdane, who emerged as the FLN's principal political brain in 1955–6 and another Kabyle, Belkacem Krim, not only created the guerrilla networks of the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) in Kabylia (*wilaya*[7] III of the ALN) and hosted the Soummam Congress but also sent his lieutenants Amar Ouamrane and Ali Mellah to establish the ALN in *wilaya* IV (Algérois) and *wilaya* VI (southern Algeria) respectively. From late 1955 onwards, the Abane–Krim

[1] The Algerian press spoke of numbers as high as 1–200,000; *El Watan*, 2 January 2016.
[2] In Arabic: Jebhat al-Quwā al-Ishtirakiyya; in Thamazighth (Berber): Tirni Iyallen Inemlayen.
[3] Mustapha Benfodil, 'Aït Ahmed en sa terre éternelle', *El Watan*, 31 December 2015.
[4] 'Aït Ahmed' is how his name was recorded in the colonial era *État Civil* and how all sources refer to him but 'Aït' is a French deformation of the Berber word, meaning 'the sons of', which is actually pronounced *Ath* in Kabylia, as some authors, local authorities and the press are finally acknowledging.
[5] An *'arsh* is a group of villages forming a stable political community; in the pre-colonial period such communities were sovereign. For a discussion, see Hugh Roberts, *Berber Government: The Kabyle Polity in Pre-Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014; p/b 2017), pp. 43–9.
[6] The second largest Berber population are the Chaouia of eastern Algeria, who also played an important part in the War of Independence. The other Berber populations are the Mzabis, inhabitants of the five cities of the Wad Mzab in the northern Sahara and two other cities outside the valley; the Ichenwiyen of the Chenoua massif west of Algiers, and the Tuareg of the far south. Much smaller Berber populations exist in the Wad Righ and the Gourara regions in the Sahara and in parts of north-western Algeria. All Algeria's Berbers are Sunni Muslims of the Maliki *madhhab* except the Mzabis, who are Ibadis.
[7] *Wilaya* can mean responsibility, charge, command, and/or the territorial extent of such an authority (for example, a province). The FLN divided Algeria into six *wilayat*, that is military commands. Since independence the term is used to mean 'governorate', of which there are currently 48.

leadership, hegemonic inside Algeria, was in conflict with the external delegation, headed by Ahmed Ben Bella, in Cairo, but following the capture of Ben Bella and his colleagues, including Aït Ahmed, in October 1956 (when French fighter aircraft forced down their plane at Algiers) and the flight of Abane, Krim and other members of the internal leadership from Algiers to various safe havens in February 1957, a new line of cleavage appeared, with Krim joining Abane's critics and approving his eventual liquidation. Krim was initially the Number 1 of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (GPRA) formed in 1958, but he and the Kabyles as a group lost control over the ALN in 1958–9, a development consolidated by the rise of Houari Boumediène as Chief of the General Staff in 1960.

With the crisis of the GPRA in the summer of 1962, the Ben Bella–Boumediène alliance was sealed and it was primarily with troops of Boumediène's 'army of the frontiers' based in Morocco and Tunisia that Ben Bella came to power, the forces of *wilaya* III and *wilaya* IV being hostile to this development and providing most of the FFS rebellion's troops the following year. After the failure of the rebellion, the dissident wing of the Kabyle intelligentsia would eventually invest heavily in the Amazigh (Berber) identity issue. In 1990–1 Kabylia was the main region resisting the appeal of Islamist parties, and since then it has harboured a variety of political outlooks expressing disaffection vis-à-vis the government in Algiers.

In choosing his native village as his final resting place, Aït Ahmed was refusing the government's offer of an alternative which would have accorded him recognition as a major national figure. As one of the so-called 'nine historic chiefs' credited with founding the FLN,[8] he unquestionably had a claim to a prominent place in El-Alia cemetery in Algiers, the traditional burial place of Algeria's national heroes. In rejecting the government's overtures, Aït Ahmed was understood to be giving priority to the role he had played in Algerian political life since independence, as the founder and leader of the FFS.

The Front des Forces Socialistes

'Le FFS' is the name of an organisation licensed by the Algerian government as an 'association of a political character' under Article 40 of the 1989 constitution and, like other organisations so licensed, is widely referred to as a political party. Whether it deserves to be called a political party is open to question. It has never campaigned for socialist demands or policies but has nonetheless been a member of the Socialist International since 1996.[9] The Algerian press routinely refers to it as 'Algeria's oldest opposition party'.

[8] The 'nine historic chiefs' were: Mohammed Khider (1912–67), Ahmed Ben Bella (1916–2011), Mostefa Ben Boulaïd (1917–56), Mohammed Boudiaf (1919–92), Mourad Didouche (1922–55), Belkacem Krim (1922–70), Larbi Ben M'Hidi (1923–57), Rabah Bitat (1925–2000) and Hocine Aït Ahmed (1926–2015). Three of these (Didouche, Krim and Aït Ahmed), were Kabyles. Captured with Ben Bella, Boudiaf and Khider in October 1956, Aït Ahmed spent the rest of the war in French custody.

[9] It had previously become a candidate member in 1992.

That this opposition was grounded in a commitment to democratic principles was widely affirmed in the tributes paid to Aït Ahmed at his death. The national daily *El Watan* described him as a 'pioneer of the opposition to the regime'[10] and as 'a fierce and untiring fighter for democracy',[11] judgments echoed by numerous prominent personalities.[12] But, if Aït Ahmed's credentials as a fighter for democracy were unanimously endorsed, it was also recognised that his combat had fallen short of its objective. As *El Watan* put it, 'the immense political leader that he was departs without having seen the realisation of the ideal of a state bound by law and the respect for liberty to which he dedicated nearly 70 years of his life.'[13]

A question that no one raised in public in late December 2015 or early January 2016 is whether there had been a relationship of cause and effect between the political activity of Aït Ahmed and the FFS on the one hand and the continued absence of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights in Algeria on the other. This is not because Aït Ahmed and the FFS have not had their critics. Critical commentaries on both have surfaced at intervals over the years. In 2002, the website *Kabyle.com* published a polemic by a former FFS activist under the title 'Aït Ahmed décortiqué' [Aït Ahmed dissected].[14] In 2014, the Kabyle journalist Lounis Aggoun published an equally vigorous attack.[15] More than 20 years earlier, a whole book, published in Algeria, was devoted to dissecting Aït Ahmed's discourse and interrogating his political strategy, without encountering any attempt at refutation.[16] Other critiques could be cited.

It is understandable that such discordant voices were not audible during the national communion of loss following Aït Ahmed's death. Even if President Bouteflika had not decreed eight days of national mourning,[17] it was to be expected that the death of the last of the 'nine historic chiefs' would be the occasion for a full display of Algerian *unanimisme* and that personalities, including former first secretaries of the FFS, who were known to have had serious disagreements with Aït Ahmed and in some cases to have quit

[10] Saïd Rabia, 'Après le combat contre le colonialisme, Aït Ahmed, pionnier de l'opposition au pouvoir', *El Watan*, 24 December 2015.
[11] Samir Ghezlaoui, '70 ans au service de l'idéal national', *El Watan*, 24 December 2015.
[12] These included Abdennour Ali Yahia, founder and first president of the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH), former prime ministers Mouloud Hamrouche and Ali Benflis, former Secretary General of the Party of the FLN Abdelaziz Belkhadem, the leader of the Parti des Travailleurs Louisa Hanoune, the prominent journalist Abed Charef and the eminent sociologist Lahouari Addi; see articles in *El Watan*, 24 December 2015; *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 31 December 2015 and the website *Algeria-Watch*, 6 January 2016.
[13] Ghezlaoui, '70 ans au service de l'idéal national', *El Watan*.
[14] Hakim Adjissa, 'Aït Ahmed décortiqué', *Kabyle.com*, 2 October 2002. Available at http://www.kabyle.com/forum/salon-discussions-générales/4893-ait-ahmed-decortique-article-extrement-interessant.html.
[15] Lounis Aggoun, 'Hocine Aït-Ahmed, l'albatros déplumé', *Études Coloniales-revue en ligne*, 3 March 2013. Available at http://etudescoloniales.canalblog.com/archives/2013/03/03/26575854.html.
[16] Mohamed Boudjema, *FFS: Fatalité ou Faiblesse, Aït Ahmed Se Confesse* (Batna, Algeria: Mohammed At Ivrahim Éditeur, 1992).
[17] *Algérie Presse Service*, 24 December 2015.

his party *à grand fracas*,[18] would leave those issues to one side while paying their respects. But to suggest that the Algerian state's failure to amount to a democracy in which the rule of law guarantees respect for human rights is entirely the fault of the government is to imply that Algeria's opposition parties have been blameless, their democratic credentials unimpeachable and their strategies immaculate. These notions are unrealistic; Algeria's opposition parties are not above criticism and what holds good in general holds good for the FFS in particular, given precisely its status as 'Algeria's oldest opposition party' and thus an example for those that came after it.

The FFS bears a substantial responsibility for the absence of democracy in Algeria. This is because it has postured as a party of democratic reform without actually being one; it has not really been in the business of opposition, merely that of dissidence. Moreover, its dissidence has been founded not on doctrine, that is, on a set of beliefs (as in the Dissenting tradition within British Protestantism), but on a sense of frustrated entitlement. The FFS has been preoccupied not with the question of how Algeria and the Algerian people should be governed – an inquiry that could have led it to advocate and campaign for democratic proposals – but the very different question, that of legitimacy: who has the right to rule?

It would be a mistake to suppose that the party's preoccupation with the issue of legitimacy has been a consequence of its own evolution from what McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly call 'transgressive contention' to what they call 'contained contention'.[19] The FFS that has existed within the law since 1989 has certainly been engaged in a kind of contained contention that has fallen short of genuine democratic agitation. But to call the FFS 'Algeria's oldest opposition party' is to date its existence from September 1963, when Hocine Aït Ahmed and his associates proclaimed the existence of the FFS in public meetings held, in Kabylia and the Algérois, to denounce and challenge the regime of Algeria's first president, Ahmed Ben Bella.

The FFS was, at its inception, engaged in transgressive contention, since the act of publicly proclaiming its existence transgressed the new rule imposed by the regime that there could be only one party in Algeria, the 'Party of the FLN' (PFLN),[20] and no organisations might exist outside its purview and authoritative supervision. It can be said to have sustained this 'transgressive' position not only during its revolt in Algeria (September 1963 to June 1965) but also during the years when it was active primarily in exile (1966–89), and thus for 26 years in total, for as long as the regime maintained its own profile as a 'one-party state'. But, when the regime of President Chadli Bendjedid introduced the formally pluralist constitution in February 1989, with its famous Article 40, it transformed the rules of the game and the context in which the FFS had its being.

[18] Notably Saïd Khelil, Mustapha Bouhadef and Karim Tabbou, who all paid unalloyed tribute to their former chief; see 'Réactions', *El Watan*, 24 December 2015.
[19] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 7–9.
[20] I use the acronym PFLN to distinguish the 'party' created by regime fiat after independence from the revolutionary movement (FLN) which secured this independence.

The end of the PFLN's monopoly of party-political activity created a major opportunity for the FFS but it also complicated matters for it. In particular, it obliged it to contend with rival parties, including one based in Kabylia, the Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (RCD), founded in February 1989 by a defector from the FFS, Dr Saïd Sadi, and legalised in September of that year. Nonetheless, the ability at last to operate openly within the law should have facilitated the activity of the FFS as a party advocating democratic reform. The question is why this did not happen.

Contained Contention: The Legal FFS, 1989–2013

Three features of the FFS from its legalisation in late 1989 onwards are especially striking. The first is the abandonment of its roots in the Kabyle *maquis*;[21] the second, the position of Aït Ahmed as its permanent, uncontested and unaccountable leader; and, third, its failure to call for democratic reforms. These features are connected.

The main elements of the FFS organisation in 1963 had been a number of units of the guerrilla forces in what had been *wilaya* III (Kabylia) and *wilaya* IV (Algérois) of the ALN during the war of independence. One of the principal leaders of the FFS from the outset and its military commander from early 1964 onwards was Abdelhafidh Yaha (1933–2016), widely known as 'Si L'Hafidh', a celebrated veteran of the ALN in *wilaya* III. It was Si L'Hafidh who led the FFS delegation which negotiated the eventual cease-fire with the regime in June 1965. Thereafter he went into exile in France and acted as the deputy leader and principal organiser of the FFS there. In May 1989 he returned to Algeria to organise the FFS on the ground, rallying veterans and sympathisers from yesteryear, recruiting new supporters and preparing the FFS networks for their emergence as a legal party. Unknown to him, Aït Ahmed had appointed a certain Hachemi Naït Djoudi, a younger man (born 1946) with no *maquisard* past, to act on his behalf. On 24 September 1989, Naït Djoudi submitted, in the FFS's name, an application for legal recognition, which the Algerian authorities approved on 20 November, dismissing a formal challenge to this application from Si L'Hafidh.[22] In this way, Aït Ahmed sloughed off the *maquisard* element of the FFS and obtained approval for a substantially new party in which his authority, no longer qualified by the presence of distinguished ex-*maquisards*, would be unchallenged.

In December 1989 Aït Ahmed returned to Algeria after 23 years in exile in Lausanne, Switzerland. He remained in Algeria during 1990–1 but, following the army's coup and the onset of violence in 1992, he left the country. Thereafter he directed the FFS from Lausanne, returning briefly in 1999 when he was a candidate in the presidential election. Throughout the period from 1992 to 2013, when he finally retired from the presidency of the party, Aït Ahmed relied on activists inside Algeria to conduct the party on the ground. The party had a national secretariat, composed of senior militants, each of whom had a defined area of responsibility, but these were themselves coordinated and led by a 'first

[21] The guerrilla forces of the ALN.

[22] 'Algérie: Le parti de M. Aït Ahmed a été agréé.', *Le Monde*, 22 November 1989.

secretary'. The most striking feature of this arrangement was that, while party congresses elected a National Council which then appointed the members of the secretariat, Aït Ahmed himself chose the first secretary, who was appointed for a limited term and rarely allowed to serve two consecutive terms.[23]

Table 1. First Secretaries of the FFS, 1989–2016[24]

Term of Office	Name	Wilaya of Origin
1989–90	Hachemi Naït Djoudi	Tizi Ouzou
1990–1	Saïd Khelil	Tizi Ouzou
1991–4	Ali Kerboua	Bouïra
1994–6	Ahmed Djeddaï	Algiers/Jijel
1996–7	Mustapha Bouhadef	Tizi Ouzou
1997–9	Seddik Debaïli	Algiers
1999–2000	Mustapha Bouhadef	Tizi Ouzou
2000–2	Ali Kerboua	Bouïra
2003–4	Djoudï Mammeri	Bejaia
2004	Mustapha Bouhadef	Tizi Ouzou
2004–7	Ali Laskri	Boumerdès
2007–11	Karim Tabbou	Tizi Ouzou
2011–13	Ali Laskri	Boumerdès
2013–14	Ahmed Betatache	Bouïra
2014–16	Mohamed Nebbou	Algiers
2016–	Abdelmalek Bouchafa	Constantine

This regular rotation of the most senior figures of the FFS leadership in Algeria illustrated Aït Ahmed's personal control over his party, in contrast to the situation that had developed during his exile from 1966 to 1989. As numerous observers noted, Aït Ahmed had accordingly come to resemble the traditional conception of the *za'īm* – an absolute and immovable leader – and this patently qualified the party's democratic character. It also entailed a terrible wastage of political talent, as successive first secretaries subsequently left the party (see Table 1). In this way Aït Ahmed enlisted the energies of able members of the younger generation of political activists only to cast them aside once their brief mission at the apex of the party in Algeria was over. This tendency for senior FFS officials to quit the

[23] The main exception to this rule was Karim Tabbou; see Table 1.

[24] Sources: Malika Hamraoui, *Algerian Press Review*, 15 January 1996; *Liberté*, 26 June 2004; FFS, 28 August 2000 and 20 May 2001; *El Watan*, 23 September 2001; *La Tribune*, 23 March 2003; *Le Soir d'Algérie*, 8 May 2012; *El Watan*, 2 October 2004; *El Watan*, 7 April 2007; FFS official website, 18 November 2011, available at http://www.ffs-dz.net/?p=378; ibid., 1 June 2013; *El Watan*, 9 August 2015.

party was also connected to the party's political positions, which were invariably decided by Aït Ahmed, at different junctures in the unfolding crisis of the Algerian state.

Two distinct aspects of these positions should be considered: the party's stance regarding participation in the elections which the regime has held at intervals since 1989 and its position on the principal matters in dispute at different moments in the crisis since 1990–1.

The FFS and Elections

In every election a key question has been whether the FFS would take part in and thereby legitimate the proceedings, or boycott and so de-legitimate them. Table 2 presents the party's record in this regard.[25]

Table 2. FFS Attitudes to, and Fortunes in, Elections, 1990–2017

Date	Nature of Election	FFS Position
1990	APW and APC elections	Boycotts, claims elections will be rigged, calls for abstention
1991	APN (legislative) elections	Participates, wins 25 seats in first round (second round cancelled)
1995	Presidential election	Has no candidate, calls for abstention
1997	APN elections	Participates, wins 19 seats
1997	APW and APC elections	Participates, wins 55 APW seats and 645 APC seats
1999	Presidential election	Aït Ahmed candidate; withdraws just before poll, calls for abstention
2002	APN election	Boycotts, calls for abstention
2002	APW and APC elections	Participates, wins some APW seats, 684 APC seats
2004	Presidential election	Has no candidate, calls for abstention
2007	APN election	Boycotts, calls for abstention
2007	APW and APC elections	Participates; wins 54 APW seats, 566 APC seats
2009	Presidential election	Has no candidate, calls for abstention
2012	APN election	Participates, wins 28 seats
2012	APW and APC elections	Participates; has 20 APW seats, 954 APC seats, majority in 11 APCs
2014	Presidential election	Has no candidate, calls for abstention
2017	APN election	Participates, wins 14 seats

The FFS has regularly participated in local and regional elections, with one exception. In 1990, the FFS boycotted the first ever pluralist elections in independent Algeria, claiming

[25] The Assemblées Populaires Communales (APC) are Algeria's municipal councils, the Assemblées Populaires de Wilaya (APW) are the provincial-level councils and the Assemblée Populaire Nationale (APN) is the lower house of the Algerian Parliament.

that they would be rigged. The spectacular success of the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, or FIS) in these elections, winning control of a majority in Algeria's APC and APW, appeared to demolish this claim, but it may well have been merely a pretext for refusing to enter the lists for another reason. It is likely that Aït Ahmed, having only recently returned to Algeria after 23 years in exile and facing a rival party in Kabylia, Dr Saïd Sadi's RCD, whose leaders had been present in the region throughout, wanted to 'count the RCD's guns' by giving it a clear run while simultaneously testing his own party's influence by calling for abstentions. In the event, the RCD swept Kabylia on a very low turn-out,[26] enabling Aït Ahmed to regard his abstention call as a success and to identify his rival's distribution of support without placing his own party in electoral jeopardy.

The FFS has participated in the elections for the lower house of parliament, the Assemblée Populaire Nationale (APN), except on two occasions. In 2002, party politics in Kabylia was overshadowed by the grassroots protest movement, the 'Mouvement Citoyen', which had arisen in response to the carnage of the 'Black Spring' of 2001, when gendarmes confronting rioting youths shot dead 126 people and wounded many more. The FFS had initially been suspicious of, if not hostile to, the movement but subsequently sought influence within it and it was in these circumstances that it went along with the movement's call to boycott the APN elections in May 2002, before breaking with it to contest the local and regional elections in the autumn of the same year.[27] There was no comparable grassroots pressure on the FFS to boycott the 2007 legislative elections and it is unclear why it did so.

Since 2004, the FFS has consistently boycotted presidential elections by refusing to put forward a candidate and calling on Algerians to abstain. Its position during the nightmarish decade of the 1990s was another matter. It boycotted the election in 1995, but Aït Ahmed was a candidate in 1999 and returned to Algeria to campaign before withdrawing on the eve of polling day, together with the five other 'opposition' candidates standing against 'the candidate of consensus', Abdelaziz Bouteflika, on the grounds that the election was rigged, a turn of events that infuriated Bouteflika, who was seen as '*mal élu*' in consequence.

Whatever may have been the particular calculations which informed the FFS's behaviour in these various elections, its record has clearly been an erratic one. To the question of whether these elections have been valid democratic procedures, the FFS has signally failed to give a consistent answer.

[26] Voter participation in the APC elections in Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia (the core *wilayat* of Kabylia) was 22.82 percent and 27.08 percent respectively; in the APW elections it was 22.46 percent and 26.79 percent respectively.

[27] For a full discussion, see International Crisis Group, 'Algeria: Unrest and Impasse in Kabylia', *Middle East/North Africa Report* 15, 10 June 2003.

The FFS and Debates over Policy

An equally striking aspect of its attitude to these elections is that it has never put forward suggestions or demands that address the question of their validity, that is, proposals to reduce the possibility of rigging or eliminate it altogether. An issue that arose in the legislative elections of 1997 was the way the regime made it difficult for parties to have their representatives present to observe the conduct of the polls in many places and especially during the so-called 'special vote' of members of the armed forces, police, fire brigades and customs officers, who voted in their barracks and stations before polling day. It was not the FFS but an Islamist party, Abdallah Djaballah's Mouvement de la Nahda (MN, previously Mouvement de la Nahda Islamique, or MNI), which put forward proposals to guarantee access for party representatives to such places in future contests, proposals that were accepted by the government and enshrined in a revised electoral law.

This was not an isolated case. The FFS has never advanced serious proposals for realisable reform. Its policy positions from 1989–2013 served a different purpose. While there is no space here to recount these positions in detail, their main features can be sketched. These positions can be summarised as the 'negative alternative'; the 'empty chair', and 'unnatural alliances'.

The Negative Alternative

The first elections that the FFS contested were the legislative elections of December 1991. The principal contenders were the FIS on the one hand, offering a brand of Islamic populism, and the PFLN on the other, seen as the party of the status quo. The FFS campaigned on the slogan '*Ni la République intégriste, ni l'État policier*' [Neither the fundamentalist republic nor the police state], condemning the FIS and the PFLN alike while offering no positive alternative vision.

The Empty Chair

A feature of the FFS's behaviour during the drama that unfolded from 1989–90 onwards has been its refusal at critical junctures to ally with other parties or to participate in consultations to advance democratic positions when invited to do so.[28] At least four instances of this conduct can be noted:

- In April 1991, eight parties joined forces to denounce the undemocratic electoral law introduced by Mouloud Hamrouche's government; the FFS refused to join or endorse this alliance, despite the fact that it knew the electoral law was indefensible, as it eventually acknowledged.[29]
- In July 1991, following Hamrouche's fall and the postponing of the legislative elections, veteran FLN politician Sid Ahmed Ghozali, heading a non-party caretaker government, invited Algeria's parties to a meeting to try to frame a new electoral law so that the delayed elections could go ahead with agreed ground rules. The FFS initially accepted only to announce at the last moment that it would not take part after

[28] Algerian journalists call this repeated refusal to take part in the political debate of the moment *la politique de la chaise vide*.
[29] See Aït Ahmed's interview in the French daily *Le Figaro*, 7 June 1991.

all. The meeting ended with no agreement and the PFLN-dominated national assembly approved a revised electoral law that had calamitous consequences, namely the forbidding prospect of the FIS securing 75 percent of seats in the assembly with less than 48 percent of the vote and the support of barely 25 percent of the electorate.

- By mid-1994, the violence had reached horrific proportions and the new head of state, Liamine Zeroual, was struggling to arbitrate the policy division between those who favoured a strategy of brutal suppression of the Islamist movement (*les éradicateurs*) and those who advocated negotiations with the banned FIS (*les conciliateurs*). Inclined to favour the latter, he invited eight parties to talks in order to secure their support for his proposal to hold talks with the imprisoned FIS leaders. Only two of these parties (Ettahaddi and the RCD) towed the *éradicateur* line; the other six – the PFLN, Ahmed Ben Bella's Mouvement pour la Démocratie en Algérie (MDA), Abdallah Djaballah's MNI,[30] Mahfoud Nahnah's HAMAS,[31] Noureddine Boukrouh's Parti du Renouveau Algérien (PRA)[32] and the FFS – all favoured the *conciliateur* policy. The first five of these accepted Zeroual's invitation. The two *éradicateur* parties predictably declined the invitation but so did the FFS, and the most promising initiative to end the violence faltered, then failed, and the slaughter went on. It is not certain that Zeroual's initiative would have succeeded had the FFS supported it but it is indisputable that the FFS, at a critical juncture, refused to follow through on its championing of the *conciliateur* policy when invited by Algeria's head of state to do just that.

- The fourth instance was a matter of boycotting an important debate. On 11 May 1996, President Zeroual circulated a memorandum containing a draft revision of the constitution which he invited Algeria's political parties and various associations to consider,[33] making it clear that he would take their views into account. The draft proposed official recognition of *l'Amazighité* (the Berber dimension of the Algerian nation), an important concession to Kabyle opinion; in deference to secularist opinion it required Algeria's Islamist parties to drop all explicit reference to Islam in their names; it also proposed to limit the presidency to two terms. But the centrepiece was the proposal to establish a 'Council of the Nation' that, as the upper house of the Algerian Parliament, would be able to act as an institutional curb on the excesses of a party (such as a re-legalised FIS) possessing a majority in the National Assembly. Instead of accepting this idea as facilitating the relegalisation of the FIS, Aït Ahmed and the FFS caricatured and condemned Zeroual's proposal as anti-democratic and took no further part in the discussion. As a result there was no input from the 'democratic' wing of the Algerian political class and the most conservative elements of the regime were able to determine the fine print in the eventual revision.[34]

[30] The MNI (which became the MN after 1996) located itself in both the Algerian nationalist tradition and that of the political Islamism pioneered by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood while refusing affiliation to the latter out of nationalist scruples.

[31] That is, *Haraka li-Mujtama' Islami*, 'Movement for an Islamic Society', recognised by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as its Algerian sister party.

[32] Boukrouh located himself and his party in the intellectual tradition of the Algerian Islamic thinker, Malek Bennabi.

[33] An English language summary of this memorandum and the entire French text were published in the *Journal of Algerian Studies* 1 (1996), pp. 117–31.

[34] The FFS followed its rejection of Zeroual's draft by calling for a 'No' vote in the referendum held to

Unnatural Alliances

Although the FFS has repeatedly played the lone ranger, it has not invariably done so. Following the army's deposing of President Chadli on 11 January 1992, talks were held by the three parties that had won seats in the first round of the legislative elections on 24 December, that is the FIS, the PFLN and the FFS. The FIS and PFLN leaders met on 15 January and the FFS joined them the next day. The irony in the FFS consorting with the parties representing its two *bêtes noires* was not lost on observers,[35] but it shared their interest in the continuation of the electoral process and could plausibly elevate this into a position of principle. Aït Ahmed subsequently declared there was no question of the FFS entering into an alliance with the FIS, but it is likely that the army commanders considered that an alliance of the three 'Fronts', if not yet sealed, was a serious prospect and would represent a major challenge to the legitimacy of their actions and to their authority.[36] This prospect was decisively nipped in the bud when they had the FIS's caretaker leader, Abdelkader Hachani, arrested on 22 January, an action that committed them to suppressing the FIS altogether, with all that this would entail.

Whatever Aït Ahmed may have envisaged in January 1992, an alliance of the three 'Fronts' is precisely what he orchestrated three years later. Following the failure – for which the FFS bears some responsibility – of President Zeroual's initiative in August–September 1994 and the success of *les éradicateurs* in the army leadership in preventing a negotiated end to the violence at that juncture, the FFS, together with the PFLN, the FIS, HAMAS, Ben Bella's MDA, Djaballah's MNI, Boukrouh's PRA, Louisa Hanoune's Workers' Party and Abdennour Ali Yahia's Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH), met in Rome on 21–2 November 1994 to agree a common position. A second meeting,[37] held in Rome on 13 January 1995, published a joint 'Platform for a Peaceful Resolution of Algeria's Crisis'.[38] While attracting much favourable publicity outside Algeria, this was rejected by the Algerian government and had no discernible influence on government policy or the course of events. It also caused unease within the FFS itself and provoked the departure from the party of one of its leading figures in Greater Kabylia, Saïd Khelil.[39]

The disposition to engage in what some Algerian observers have called 'unnatural alliances' was already evident during the later years of the FFS in exile, when Aït Ahmed

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ratify the final version of the revision on 28 November 1996.

[35] This development was publicly denounced by Hachemi Naït Djoudi, who broke with the FFS at this juncture.

[36] On 19 January 1992 the FIS published an appeal calling for 'a return to constitutional legality' (*Le Monde*, ibid.), implicitly targeting the unconstitutional character of the army's moves; on this point both the PFLN and the FFS could be expected to endorse its position.

[37] Having refused to sign the joint communiqué at the end of the first meeting, neither HAMAS nor the PRA were invited to the second meeting. At both meetings the FIS was represented by Rabah Kebir, the president of its External Executive Committee based in Germany.

[38] See Hugh Roberts, 'Algeria's ruinous impasse and the honourable way out', *International Affairs* 71/2 (April 1995), pp. 247–67, republished in Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002, Studies in a Broken Polity* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), ch. 9.

[39] Interview with Saïd Khelil, Tizi Ouzou, January 2003. Khelil had been elected to the National Assembly for the constituency of Tizi Ouzou in the first round of the legislative elections on 26 December 1991 and following Naït Djoudi's departure had served as First Secretary of the party.

formed an alliance with his old enemy, Ahmed Ben Bella, the pair of them announcing this at a press conference in London on 16 December 1985. This alliance did not lead anywhere or last long. Moreover, while the two leaders published a joint platform, their conceptions of how a democratic revolution might put an end to the dictatorial regime in Algiers were wide apart, Ben Bella looking to the recent revolution in Sudan while Aït Ahmed invoked the example of Poland's Solidarnosc.[40] This event was very much a deal between leaders, rather than the product of a real rapprochement between two parties as a result of a convergence of perspectives in the course of a public debate. Criticised as such by Algerian scholar Ramdane Redjala,[41] it was bitterly opposed by Abdelhafidh Yaha at the time and was the beginning of the parting of the ways between him and Aït Ahmed.

However, to suggest that such alliances have been unnatural is to presuppose that a democratic ideology has been the main constitutive element of the FFS's nature and to overlook the fact that these incidents have provided a major clue to the FFS's real nature. Aït Ahmed has engaged in alliances when it has suited him to do so. The point is that it has suited him to do so only when the alliance in question is formed at his initiative and never when the alliance or, more broadly, the procedure of public concertation is instigated by the government, even when the purpose of such a procedure is shared, in principle, by the FFS, as was the case with Zeroual's attempt to rally support for his *conciliateur* initiative in August 1994.

What this means is that actually achieving the adoption of the *conciliateur* policy was not the FFS's priority in August 1994, any more than ensuring an agreed and valid electoral law was a priority in 1991. The FFS's priority has clearly been to avoid being in any way implicated in or compromised by a political agreement with the Algerian authorities of the moment, whoever they are, even if they are disposed to adopt a policy the FFS approves and has advocated. Its fundamental and unwavering priority has been to sustain a permanent challenge to the regime's legitimacy.

Most if not all things have their end in their beginning. The FFS of 1989–2013 appeared a very different animal from the FFS of 1963. But the contemporary FFS existed in germ in the FFS of yesteryear; its overriding preoccupation with the question of legitimacy was in its DNA from the outset.

[40] As I was personally able to observe at the press conference.

[41] Ramdane Redjala, *L'Opposition en Algérie depuis 1962: tome 1: Le PRS-CNDR; Le FFS* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988), p. 176.

Favret's Gloss

Academic understandings of the FFS rebellion of 1963 have been heavily influenced by Jeanne Favret's article, 'Traditionalism through Ultra-Modernism'.[42] Widely cited in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it has been largely spared substantive criticism[43] and has been explicitly endorsed by two prominent specialist writers on Kabylia, Alain Mahé and the late Mohamed Brahim Salhi.[44] But at least two elements of Favret's argument have been very misleading.

The first is her suggestion that the revolt expressed the 'political discontent of the urban middle class' of Kabyles in Kabylia and other towns,[45] that this discontent had primarily socio-economic motivations, and that a key objective of the insurgents was to influence the new state's economic policy.[46] On the contrary, not only were middle class Kabyles in Algiers and the other main towns heavily dependent on state favour and inclined to keep their heads down[47] but, above all, the politics of the FFS was not in any sense 'representative'.

In none of its rhetoric did it articulate the interests, grievances and aspirations of sections of the Kabyle or broader Algerian population at large, and its leader, Aït Ahmed, did not even articulate the outlook of his own troops, refusing to raise the question of Kabyle (or broader Berber) identity or express the opposition to single-party rule that animated many of them.

The second lies in her characterisation of the rebellion as 'ultra-modernist' in substance and 'traditionalist' only in form. This argument presupposed the absolute dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies that was fundamental to the French colonialist project. Favret was accordingly unable to recognise not only that all societies – including 'modern' ones – have traditions, but also that the principal tradition which the rebellion was remobilising was not that of pre-colonial Kabylia.

Instead, it invoked the era dating from 1 November 1954 and the revolutionary tradition of the FLN, a movement that had developed its own characteristic and novel ways of doing things while simultaneously mobilising several of Algeria's older traditions in pursuit of the modernist objective of constituting Algeria into a sovereign nation-state.

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[42] Jeanne Favret, 'Traditionalism through Ultra-Modernism', in Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud (eds), Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa (London: Duckworth, 1972), pp. 307–24; originally published as 'La tradition par excès de modernité', Archives européennes de sociologie VIII (1967), pp. 71–93.

[43] Not one of the Algerian authors who have written about the FFS has engaged with Favret's argument. I included a critique of this in my doctoral thesis, *Political Development in Algeria: The Region of Greater Kabylia* (Oxford University, D.Phil, 1980), published as *Algerian Socialism and the Kabyle Question* (Norwich: University of East Anglia Monographs in Development Studies 8, 1981), pp. 247–75.

[44] Alain Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie, XIXe-XXe siècles: anthropologie historique du lien social dans les communautés villageoises* (Paris: Éditions Bouchène, 2001), p. 436; Mohamed Brahim Salhi, *Algérie, Citoyenneté et Identité* (Algiers: Éditions Achab, 2010), p. 154, note 4.

[45] Favret, 'Traditionalism through Ultra-Modernism', p. 319.

[46] Ibid., p. 308.

[47] Jean Morizot, *Les Kabyles: propos d'un témoin* (Paris: Publications du CHEAM, 1985), p. 221.

These two errors led her into a third, the suggestion that, in so far as the rebellion's troops were oriented, at least in part, by a backward-looking traditionalism, this was compensated for by the modernism of the movement's directing elite, a modernism she illustrated with the observation that 'the "historic leader" doesn't make use of his kinship with a prestigious maraboutic lineage'.[48]

The Autumn of the *Maquisard*

The FFS originated as a splinter from the historic FLN which Aït Ahmed had helped to found. The FLN was primarily based on the society of the mountains and its internal politics were informed by the traditions of this society, as I have explained elsewhere.[49] Yet, unlike the FLN, the FFS of 1963–5 exhibited a decidedly protean aspect. In his discussion of movements contesting the new Turkish state in the Kemalist period, Gavin Brockett distinguishes between

> three distinct groups: collective public protests in which participants did not resort to force; [...] violent insurrections against the state; and, active participation in Muslim *tarikats* and brotherhoods.[50]

Not least of the remarkable features of the FFS in its early days was the way it migrated into each of these three categories of collective action in turn.

Founded as the outcome of a series of discreet meetings held from early August to early September 1963 in Aïn el-Hammam,[51] the FFS began as a semi-clandestine network distributing tracts that called on people to boycott the constitutional referendum of 8 September and the presidential election of 15 September 1963.[52] It then emerged as a collective public protest, proclaiming its existence as a political party and denouncing the Ben Bella regime in large open-air meetings in Tizi Ouzou and Medea on 29 September and subsequently in other towns of the Kabylia region.

When the regime responded by sending in the Armée Nationale Populaire (ANP)[53] to occupy these two towns, and subsequently all the urban centres in Kabylia and the main roads that linked them, the FFS stopped behaving like a political party almost as soon as it had started and mutated into a *maquis*, its units withdrawing to the hills after several

[48] Favret, 'Traditionalism through Ultra-Modernism', p. 319.
[49] Roberts, *The Battlefield*, ch. 2.
[50] Gavin D. Brockett, 'Collective Action and the Turkish Revolution: Towards a framework for the social history of the Atatürk era, 1923–38', *Middle Eastern Studies* 34/4 (1988), pp. 44–66: 48.
[51] Abdelhafidh Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature: de la résistance armée à l'opposition politique* (Algiers: Koukou Éditions, 2014), pp. 56–60.
[52] The available statistics on turn-out in these two electoral consultations are unreliable but all observers agree that the FFS's boycott call significantly reduced turn-out in Kabylia by as much as 50 percent.
[53] So-called to distinguish it from the wartime ALN; the ANP which, as Minister of Defence, Boumediène was busy constructing, was built around the ALN of the frontiers which he had controlled since 1960, and incorporated some but not all of the old guerrilla units of the ALN of the interior.

tense stand-offs with the ANP, notably at Ouadhia and Aïn el-Hammam itself.[54] They did this for the most part without exchanging fire with government troops[55] and at this point no blood was spilt.

The onset of '*la guerre des sables*' with Morocco on 14 October, with the armed clashes between ANP units and Morocco's Forces Armées Royales (FAR) over the disputed border region around Tindouf in the Algerian Sahara, prompted the FFS both to announce a truce with the regime on 24 October[56] and to send some of its own troops to support the ANP units confronting the FAR. The truce remained in force until 23 February 1964, when the FFS announced it was resuming hostilities;[57] fighting at last took place and blood was shed. FFS units engaged in a number of clashes with ANP patrols across Kabylia and also conducted a campaign of assassinations, targeting mainly PFLN cadres but including an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate President Ben Bella. In response, the ANP abandoned its initially soft tactics,[58] descending in heavy-handed fashion on mountain villages and carrying out hundreds of arrests,[59] while the Police Judiciaire and the Police des Renseignement Généraux,[60] not to mention the 'popular militias', also played their part, which included the resort to torture,[61] in suppressing the rebellion.

On 17 October 1964, Aït Ahmed was taken prisoner at the village of Ath Zellal in '*arsh* Ath Bouchaïb, a short distance from his native village of Ath Ahmed, and from then on the FFS was effectively led by Si L'Hafidh. But the rebellion had become a desultory and increasingly demoralised affair, and it was Si L'Hafidh who led what was left of the FFS into negotiations, held in Paris, with a PFLN delegation on the terms of a definitive end to the revolt, which was announced in the Algerian daily *El-Sha'b* on 16 June 1965. Ben Bella had neglected to secure Boumediène's agreement to this and was deposed three days later. But the new Council of the Revolution chaired by Boumediène honoured the terms of the PFLN–FFS agreement and Aït Ahmed, who had been condemned to death on 9 April 1965 but had subsequently had this sentence commuted by Ben Bella to imprisonment, was allowed to escape into exile in May 1966.

The way in which the FFS migrated from the category of armed insurrection into Brockett's third category of 'Muslim *tarikats*', that is, what Algerians would call *turuq* (plural of

[54] Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature*, pp. 66–9; Redjala, *L'Opposition en Algérie depuis 1962*, p. 149.
[55] FFS and ANP units exchanged fire (without occasioning any casualties) at Larbaa n'Ath Irathen (Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature*, p. 66) but apparently nowhere else.
[56] David Ottaway and Maria Ottaway, *Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 98.
[57] Redjala, *L'Opposition en Algérie depuis 1962*, p. 153.
[58] That the ANP units acted carefully and even tactfully at first is attested by several FFS veterans; see Mohand Arab Bessaoud, *Le FFS: Espoir et Trahison* (Paris: Imprimerie Cary, 1966), p. 88 and Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature*, p. 64.
[59] Several thousand people were arrested in all; 3,000 imprisoned FFS militants and suspects were released by the Boumediène regime shortly after it took power in June 1965.
[60] The counterparts, respectively, of the CID and Special Branch in the United Kingdom.
[61] Saïd Smaïl, *Mémoires Torturées: Un journaliste et écrivain algérien raconte* (Paris and Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1997), t. 1, pp. 37–67.

tarīqa, or Sufi order) will become clear only once other aspects of the movement have been delineated. The first particularly striking feature of the FFS's trajectory between August 1963 and June 1965 is the way it evolved from collective leadership to what Algerians sardonically call '*un one-man show*', with Aït Ahmed acquiring the status of *za'im*.

The meetings in August–September 1963 to found the movement were attended by a panoply of major figures, by no means all of them Kabyle. In addition to Aït Ahmed and Si L'Hafidh, these included three ALN colonels (Mohand ou 'l-Hadj, Amar Ouamrane and Slimane Dehilès) and three commandants (Lakhdar Bouregaa, Mohamed Slimani and Amar Bouakkache); several prominent civilian veterans of the revolution (Abdennour Ali Yahia, Belaïd Aït Medri, Maître Mourad Oussedik and Aboubakr Belkaïd) and the mayor of Aïn el-Hammam, Kaci Naït Belaïd.

By the time Aït Ahmed was in custody, nearly all these had fallen by the wayside. Three of them – Bouakkache, Naït Belaïd and Aït Medri – were killed in the course of the revolt, but most of the others simply quit. Two of them dropped out early on: Ouamrane and Slimani attended the first meetings but decided against further participation and withdrew. The others – Mohand ou'l-Hadj, Lakhdar Bouregaa, Slimane Dehilès – were initially enthusiastic and put themselves on the line, at least for a while. Veteran guerrillas who had proved their courage time after time, they quit, not because they could not handle the pressure, but because they had ceased to believe in the project. The same could be said of the civilian figures who rallied to the FFS only to distance themselves from it subsequently, notably Ali Yahia. So what was the FFS's purpose at its inception?

The Rhetoric and the Calculus

At 10am on 29 September 1963, Mourad Oussedik read the Proclamation of the FFS to a large crowd assembled in front of the town hall in Tizi Ouzou. The text of this proclamation is edifying in several ways.[62] The regime was denounced as not only 'personal' and 'dictatorial' but even 'neo-fascist' and as such counter-revolutionary. The FFS presented itself as the guardian of 'the Revolution', credited itself with a developed organisation (and, in particular, a 'Central Committee') and assumed the authority to pronounce the regime 'illegal'. The constitution that had recently been massively approved in a referendum everywhere except Kabylia was dismissed as a 'pseudo-constitution'. 'The People' (despite their regrettable ratification of the pseudo-constitution) were invoked as the repository of revolutionary virtue but assigned no role other than that of witness to the impending duel between the resurgent Revolution (the FFS) and the Counter-Revolution.

So much for what the Proclamation contained. What was absent from it matters as much if not more. For a start, there was no reference either to Kabylia or to the Berber identity; this followed, entirely coherently, from Aït Ahmed's concern to avoid the charges of 'regionalism' and 'Berberism' in order to present the movement as the heir to the rev-

[62] For the text of this see Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature*, pp. 62–3.

olutionary FLN of 1954–62 and accordingly national in character. But to emphasise the absence of references to regional and identity concerns misses the key point, which is that the Proclamation made no demands of any kind whatsoever.

There was no lack of both social and political grievances in Kabylia in 1963. The region – a major bastion of the ALN throughout the war – had been hammered by the French army, especially during the 'Jumelles' operation conducted by General Challe in 1959–60. Hundreds of villages had been destroyed, many thousands of people killed, many more thousands of women widowed and children orphaned, and scores of thousands of people displaced. The social and economic dislocation and human distress in the region were intense and a major concern of Colonel Mohand ou 'l-Hadj, as he and his officers found themselves powerless to alleviate the plight of the endless stream of destitute war widows besieging them in the headquarters of the 7th military region.[63]

These concerns, while unusually intense, were not unique to Kabylia and could have furnished the basis for a platform of demands that would have elicited understanding and support throughout Algeria. The advent of an authoritarian single-party regime was also intensely resented by many of the guerrilla veterans of the old *wilaya* III; there is evidence that it was the fundamental political concern of some of them, notably Si L'Hafidh.[64] Here again, a demand which targeted this issue could have won support beyond Kabylia and those parts of the Algérois where the FFS had a presence. Nowhere in the proclamation does the FFS mention the single-party system.

The FFS was not in the business of representative politics. At no point was it interested in articulating the concerns of the population in order to secure the redress of grievances. Its politics were of a different kind.

The refusal to contest the principle of the single party was not an oversight. The argument implicit in the proclamation was that the root of the problem was the 'oriental despotism', 'dictatorial power' and 'personal regime' of Ahmed Ben Bella and the detestable police methods and 'constitutional coups' employed to establish, secure and legitimate this. It was in virtue of these considerations that the regime was damned as 'neo-fascist'; the principle of the single party as such was not in question. This is because Aït Ahmed at this juncture was not opposed to this principle. Whatever the revolutionary rhetoric may have suggested, his purpose was to secure a redistribution of power and responsibility within the single-party regime rather than overthrow it by force. The central demand to this end was for a proper party congress to be held. As he stated in the summer of 1963,

> Only a congress will be able to bring about the regrouping of these vanguards, the condition sine qua non of the resumption of the revolution. You will ask me ten questions, I will give you a single reply: the congress.[65]

[63] Ibid., p. 52.

[64] Author's interviews with Si L'Hafidh (Abdelhafidh Yaha), Tizi Ouzou, April 1999 and Paris, August 2000.

[65] My translation; the text of the interview is reprinted in Hocine Aït Ahmed, *La Guerre et l'Après-Guerre* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964), p. 177.

This statement gives us the essence of Aït Ahmed's purpose and objective. Intensely resentful at the way he, a 'historic chief', had been marginalised by the evolution of the Ben Bella regime, he looked to a party congress to rectify matters and to a carefully calibrated rebellion to pressure Ben Bella into calling this. The way in which the National Constituent Assembly (in which he sat) was pre-empted in August 1963 by a meeting of the party in drawing up the Constitution led him to radicalise his rhetoric, but not to attack the principle of the single party. Within hours of the Proclamation of the FFS, Aït Ahmed declared at a press conference in Aïn el-Hammam that 'in principle, we are not opposed to a dialogue with our adversaries.'[66]

This second statement enables us to assess the charge of 'neo-fascism' at its true value. The ploy was to denounce the regime as illegitimate in the most vehement terms in order to put it under pressure to make the concession its critics required if they were to come round to acknowledging its legitimacy. The reason the revolt continued and, from late February 1964, turned violent, was that Ben Bella would not offer Aït Ahmed the deal he sought.

There are accordingly grounds for considering the FFS rebellion a failure, if not a fiasco. It obliged, to no clear purpose let alone profit, the population of Kabylia, barely recovered from the repression it suffered during the war of liberation, to endure a reprise of this trauma all over again, with the ANP pursuing the *imjuhad* much as the French army had pursued the *imjuhad* not long before.[67] But to register only the rebellion's failure and count only its costs is to miss several of its effects.

Despite Failure, a Transformation

However novel a 'contentious social movement' may appear, it may also be – at any rate in its inception – a fresh move in a longstanding game. The FFS rebellion polarised the political field in Kabylia in a novel way but in doing so reconfigured elements that pre-dated it. The dynamic of this process was an intense if largely covert struggle for the leadership of refractory Kabyle opinion.[68]

In the summer of 1962, the division in Kabylia was between the supporters of the 'Tlemcen group', as the Ben Bella–Boumediène alliance was called before it took possession of Algiers, and the partisans of its main opponents, Belkacem Krim and Mohamed Boudiaf, known as the 'Tizi Ouzou group'. The success of the 'Tlemcen group' in seizing power and consolidating its position spelt the end of the Krim–Boudiaf alliance, and Boudiaf went his own way, founding the Parti de la Révolution Socialiste (PRS), with most of its support outside Kabylia.

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[66] *Le Monde*, 1 October 1963.

[67] The Arabic word *mujahid* – roughly, 'fighter' – (plural: *mujahidūn*, *-īn*) becomes *amjahed* (plural *imjuhad*) in the Kabyle dialect (Thaqbaylith) of Thamazighth (the Berber language).

[68] In developing this analysis I am very much in agreement with John Chalcraft's argument about the importance of leadership; see John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 39–46.

The inability of the Ben Bella regime to immediately bring order out of chaos, let alone give appreciable relief to the widespread economic and social distress, combined with its resort to high-handed treatment of its critics, ensured that one year on, in June–July 1963, Kabylia was still fertile ground for opposition currents. The new alliance that began to take shape was that of Krim and Mohand ou 'l-Hadj, who was the only *wilaya* commander to have retained his position, the renaming of the ALN's *wilaya* III as the ANP's 7th military region being little more than a change in nomenclature at this point. This alliance began to plan an initiative that would challenge Ben Bella's regime; they had the support of Si L'Hafidh and most of the 7th military region's troops but wanted to know whether Aït Ahmed, who had refused to take sides the previous year, would now rally to the cause.

What happened next is still rather obscure, but it is clear that Aït Ahmed was unwilling to enlist in the Krim–Mohand ou 'l-Hadj project. According to his own account, he refused to join or back them because they were planning a violent action of some kind while he was committed to a non-violent strategy as a matter of principle.[69] This version is contradicted by Si L'Hafidh[70] and in any case runs into the objection that Aït Ahmed's FFS itself resorted to force before long. It is virtually certain that Aït Ahmed's objection to the Krim–Mohand ou 'l-Hadj project was that it was led by Krim and that he could not bring himself to serve under him. The upshot was that the FFS was formed, with Aït Ahmed as its 'Secretary General', as an alternative to the earlier plan and was launched at Krim's expense, and had the effect of definitively marginalising him and driving many of his followers into political retirement or support for the government.

The evolution of the FFS revolt had a similar effect on many other personalities. Mohand ou 'l-Hadj, who had always doubted Aït Ahmed,[71] seized on the crisis with Morocco to rally to the regime, securing the promise, which was honoured, of a party congress (originally Aït Ahmed's central demand) and the release of political prisoners; he would subsequently figure in Boumediène's Council of the Revolution before definitively retiring from politics. Colonel Slimane Dehilès eventually followed Amar Ouamrane into political retirement; Abdennour Ali Yahia would serve as a minister in the Boumediène regime before subsequently concentrating on his law practice until circumstances in the mid-1980s prompted him to launch the Algerian human rights movement; another activist, Mohand Arab Bessaoud, went into exile in France, where he founded the Académie Berbère in Paris in 1966.

By the end of the FFS revolt, despite its failure, Aït Ahmed had succeeded in establishing his personal position as the paramount leader of the Kabyle challenge to the regime. Furthermore, a major premise of the way his subsequent leadership of the FFS would resemble that of a *zaʿīm* was in place. The only other tendency present in Kabylia from late 1965 onwards was the loyalist tendency headed by leading figures who accepted the legitimacy of the regime and sought to work within it.[72] For the FFS, the loyalist tendency

[69] Hocine Aït Ahmed, *L'Affaire Mecili* (Algiers: Bouchene, c. 1991), pp. 111–13.
[70] Si L'Hafidh claims that the project was to launch a new opposition party, not mount a coup (Yaha, *FFS Contre Dictature*, pp. 45–9).
[71] Ibid., pp. 49–522.
[72] This tendency included major figures from the Kabyle *maquis* who had never been tempted to join

were *les Kabyles de service* (KDS), whom it denounced *en bloc* as 'Kabyle Uncle Toms', a judgment that ignored their often entirely respectable motivations as patriots serving the Algerian nation-state.

This polarisation of the political field in Kabylia survived until 1980 if not longer. In the mid-1970s, dissident opinion in Kabylia was very much inclined to view Aït Ahmed in his Swiss exile as the defeated Scottish Jacobites had viewed Bonnie Prince Charlie, 'the King over the water'.[73] The rise of the Berberist movement within the younger generation with the explosion of the 'Berber Spring' in 1980 complicated the situation, but did not immediately transform it. Dissidents were still inclined to damn any Kabyle serving the Algerian state as simply one of the KDS and Si L'Hafidh was a very positive reference for young Berberists in his home district of Iferhounène when I was doing fieldwork there in 1983.

Tarīqa

Maître Mourad Oussedik, the man who read the FFS Proclamation to the expectant crowd in Tizi Ouzou on 29 September 1963, was the scion of a notable family of Aïn el-Hammam. The Oussedik family are not merely notables; they are *imrabden*, a saintly lineage, what the French call *marabouts*. The Ath Ahmed are *imrabden* also. Not simply the *imrabden* of Taqa, the leading village of '*arsh* Ath Yahia, they are also a branch of the most influential saintly lineage in the whole of the Jurjura region, the Ath Sidi Ahmed.[74] It was this lineage, by then affiliated to the Rahmaniyya *tarīqa*, who provided, in Lalla Fadhma n'Soumeur and her brother Sidi Tahar, the leaders of the resistance to the French conquest of Greater Kabylia in 1857. When the sheikh of the Rahmaniyya proclaimed jihad against French rule in 1871, it was the leading saint of the Ath Ahmed of Taqa, Sidi Mohand ou 'l-Hocine, who, foreseeing the revolt's failure, advised against it.

The founder of the FFS is conventionally identified as Hocine Aït Ahmed. In fact, his given name, as registered in the *État Civil* and as entered in the electoral lists in 1962 and 1991, was Mohand ou 'l-Hocine; after his great uncle (his grandfather's brother), the saint.

The 'maraboutic' aspect of the FFS has been an occasional theme of the discourse of the RCD, its Kabyle rival since 1989, but this has mainly been expressed in rancorous mutterings on websites. As far as I am aware, it has never been the object of extended analysis and has been entirely missed by academic as well as journalistic observers. At present, I know of two main reasons for taking this aspect seriously.

A curious detail of Aït Ahmed's career is the fact that, when he was elected to the National Assembly in 1962, it was not in the *wilaya* of Tizi Ouzou, where he came from, but in the *wilaya* of Setif. When he was elected to the National Assembly in 1991, it was again in

the FFS and other prominent Kabyle personalities who had served the Revolution in civilian capacities.

[73] Interviews with young Kabyles in Jurjura villages in 1975 and 1976.

[74] I discuss the role of the *imrabden* of the Jurjura region and the Ath Sidi Ahmed in particular in Roberts, *Berber Government*, pp. 228–46.

Setif. On this occasion, however, unlike 1962, the *wilaya* as a whole was not the constituency; far smaller districts performed this function. The constituency where Aït Ahmed stood for election was Beni Ourtilane (or Beni Warthīlān), a reclusive '*arsh* in the Guergour mountains. Two distinguished men of religion are associated with it: Sheikh Hussein al-Warthīlāni (1710–79),[75] and, more recently, an interesting member of the Association of the '*ulama*', Sheikh Fodhil al-Warthīlāni (1906–59).

There is evidence that the people of Beni Warthīlān had a longstanding relationship with Hocine Aït Ahmed and that this was a premise of his candidacy in 1962 as in 1991. His death was an occasion for particularly emphatic mourning in this community.[76] But the basis of Aït Ahmed's relationship with the '*arsh* as a whole was his prior relationship with a particular village in the area: Anou, birthplace of Fodhil al-Warthīlāni. Anou is an entirely saintly settlement, a village of *imrabden*; it was here that Aït Ahmed established his campaign headquarters in the legislative elections of 1991.[77]

The second piece of evidence is provided by the Proclamation of the FFS in 1963. The claim to be the resurgence of the Revolution was predicated on the characterisation of the Ben Bella regime as neo-fascist and, accordingly, counter-revolutionary. This characterisation was a piece of rhetorical exaggeration, as was the FIS's later denunciation of the Algerian state as 'impious' (*kufr*). The function of both denunciations was to license the remobilisation of the revolutionary tradition against the state. In the case of the FIS, this rhetoric was an instance of the radical Islamist ploy of *takfir*, the denunciation of a supposedly Muslim state as impious in order to justify rebellion against it, so that the rebellion can be considered jihad (defence of the *umma*) and accordingly licit in terms of classical Sunni doctrine, rather than *fitna* (division of the *umma*) and so illicit. What of the earlier instance, that of the FFS in 1963?

Saintly lineages in the Maghreb are distinct from the lay population. In Kabylia, a sharp distinction has traditionally been drawn between the latter, *leqbayel*, and the *imrabden*, who are credited with Arab and often Sherifian[78] ancestry and so not regarded, strictly speaking, as Kabyles. As Ernest Gellner demonstrated in his classic study of the Ihansalen in the High Atlas of Morocco,[79] the saints are outside the rivalries of the lay tribesmen, do not bear arms and are obligatorily pacific. They are accordingly available to mediate in disputes between clans and tribes, being recognised by all as impartial. The only context in which saints may engage in fighting is the *jihad* and in doing so they may and often do assume leadership roles.

In his version of the events of June–July 1963, Aït Ahmed claims that he refused to join the projected Krim–Mohand ou 'l-Hadj initiative because they were planning a *coup de force*, while he insisted on an entirely peaceful strategy. In his various public criticisms of the Ben Bella regime before that moment, Aït Ahmed had refrained from describing it as 'neo-fas-

[75] For Sheikh Hussein al-Warthīlāni's outlook, see Roberts, *Berber Government*, pp. 211–21, 228, 248, 284–5.
[76] Kamel Ouhnia, 'Beni Ourtilane pleure sons fils adoptif', *Liberté*, 26 December 2015.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Descending from Hasan ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet Mohammed.
[79] Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).

cist', while playing the *amrabed*'s classic role of mediator of disputes – exhorting all sides to respect and talk to one another – with his insistent call for a party congress. He ups the rhetorical ante only on 29 September 1963. That he did so suggests that he anticipated the regime's counter-moves and that these would put paid to the FFS's prospect of functioning as a political party, forcing it to revert to the *maquis*. By denouncing the regime as 'neo-fascist' when he did, he justified in advance his movement's eventual resort to force. The regime, as the product of the revolutionary war of liberation – popularly conceived and experienced as jihad – had an obligation to remain true to the Revolution. Aït Ahmed, as a founder-member of the revolutionary FLN, assumed the authority to remobilise this tradition against Ben Bella and thus to call, implicitly, for a resumption of jihad. The denunciation of the regime as 'neo-fascist' represented the secularisation of the Islamic procedure of *takfir*.

I have described Aït Ahmed's leadership of the FFS from 1989 onwards as approximating to that of a *zaʿīm*. But I say 'approximating' because I consider that it was actually closer in form and spirit to the role of a leader of a Sufi order, a *tariqa*. A *tariqa* has a clear hierarchy, with the paramount charismatic sheikh at the apex, his numerous lieutenants – *al-muqaddemīn* – acting in the sheikh's name and on his behalf at the middle levels of the organisation, and the rank and file adepts – *al-ikhwān* – at the base. This is a fundamental element of the logic that underlay the organisation and functioning of the FFS and a big part of the reason why Aït Ahmed insisted on being buried among his ancestors, in the exclusively maraboutic village where he had been born.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term	Definition
ʿarsh	A group of villages forming a stable political community
ALN	Armée de Libération Nationale, armed wing of the FLN, which successfully fought the War of Independence against French colonial rule
ANP	Armée Nationale Populaire, the Algerian armed forces, successor to the ALN
APC	Assemblées Populaires Communales
APN	Assemblée Populaire Nationale
APW	Assemblées Populaires de Wilaya
FFS	Front des Forces Socialistes, led by Hocine Aït Ahmed
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front)
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale, Algeria's principal nationalist movement during the War of Independence (1954–62)
GPRA	Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne, the FLN's government-in-exile during the latter part of the War of Independence
HAMAS	Haraka li-Mujtama' Islami, (Movement for an Islamic Society), the Algerian sister party of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood
imjuhad	The Kabyle Thamazighth translation of the Arabic mujahidīn, 'those who engage in jihad'
imrabden	The Thamazighth form of the Arabic murabitun (in French 'marabouts'; sing. murabit): members of a saintly lineage, often affiliated to a Sufi order.
KDS	'Les Kabyles de service', a derogatory term (used by the FFS) for Kabyles loyal to the PFLN regime
LADDH	Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme, a human rights movement led by Abdennour Ali Yahia
maquis	The guerrilla forces of the ALN
MDA	Mouvement pour la Démocratie en Algérie, led by Ahmed Ben Bella
MNI / MN	Mouvement de la Nahda Islamique (which after 1996 became simply the 'Mouvement de la Nahda'), led by Abdallah Djaballah
PFLN	Party of the FLN, the FLN's post-Independence political movement and the country's sole legal political party until 1989
PRA	Parti du Renouveau Algérien, led by Noureddine Boukrouh
PRS	Parti de la Révolution Socialiste, led by Mohamed Boudiaf
PT	Parti des Travailleurs (Workers' Party), led by Louisa Hanoune
RCD	Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie, led by Dr Saïd Sadi
tarīqa	Literally 'path', the term refers to a Sufi order
umma	The wider Islamic community
zaʿīm	Literally 'boss' or 'chief', an absolute and immovable leader

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Cover Image
A member of the FFS holds up a picture of Hocine Ait Ahmed after the plane his coffin was on arrived at Houari Boumediene airport in Algiers, 31 December 2015.

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