

The Future of Algerian Islamist Parties

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What remains of Algerian Islamist parties and movements after the almost 20 years of violence and terrorism that have passed since the banning of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, or FIS) in 1992?

This paper attempts to comprehend how Islamist actors have evolved and considers their political future in Algeria. The transformation of Algerian political Islam is based on three major dynamics: 1) the state's cooption of "moderate" Islamist parties such as Hamas, An-Nahda and Islah, whose revolutionary ideology and mode of operation have become professionalized and institutionalized; 2) the neutralization of these "moderate" parties in relation to political competition, with the dissolution of their protest capacity as a result, while the reintegration of former activists and leaders of the FIS remains pending; 3) the increasing lack of interest in party politics on the part of the Islamist base, and the rising appeal of the *da'wa salafiyya* inspired by Saudi Wahhabism.¹ This movement is revealing a shift from the party as an organizational framework towards anti-political social networks in post-conflict Algeria, where people interested in using Islam to initiate social change are seeking forms of socialization and political channels that are less costly and easier to access than the ones used by historical Islamist parties such as the FIS.

Since the electoral victory of the FIS in the legislative elections of 1991, Islamist parties have never left the Algerian political scene. United by the same motivation of giving a militant dimension to Islam, they are still far from constituting a homogenous movement. We can nonetheless identify three political groups that typify today's Algerian Islamist parties. The first is An-Nahda, whose secretary-general is Fateh Rabiaï. It was created by Abdallah Jaballah before he launched Islah, the Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP or *Hamas/Harakat al Mujtama'a al-silm*), which is currently under the chairmanship of Aboujerra Soltani. The third group is the Movement of National Reform (MNR or *Islah al Harakat al Islah al-Watany*), which was until recently under the chairmanship of its founder Abdallah Jaballah, and is now headed by Djahid Younsi. While some groups within Islamist opposition, such as the banned FIS, opted for anti-state strategies, others like Hamas, an-Nahda and Islah decided to cooperate with the regime in place. These

¹ For more, see Amel Boubekeur, "Salafism and radical politics in Post-conflict Algeria," *Carnegie Papers*, number 11, September 2008.

parties have been allowed to participate in elections since 1995. In the presidential elections of 1995, the leader of Hamas, the late Mahfoud Nahnah, reaped close to 25 percent of the vote. The legislative elections of 1997 confirmed the anchoring of the Islamist vote within the Algerian electorate, with 69 seats won by Hamas and 34 by An-Nahda, led by Abdallah Jaballah.

Despite the weakening of the Islamist vote during the presidential elections of 1999, Islah was able to obtain 43 seats and Hamas 38 in the legislative elections of 2002. This made Hamas the second political force in the country. The 2007 legislative elections marked a sharp decline of elected Islamists in the Algerian Parliament—52 seats for Hamas and only three for Islah. These numbers indicate a decline—which can be explained by significant voting abstention and irregularities in the polls, among other reasons—but still confirm that Algerian Islamism has become part of the Algerian political structure. Heirs of the nationalist struggle and the Islamic revival of the 1970s, the Islamist parties have in 30 years shifted from radical opposition to participatory politics, from political violence to delivering discourses on democracy. How did these dramatic changes come about? This can be understood by considering Islamism as an evolving political process where actors adapt themselves to constraints and opportunities, rather than as a fixed and timeless political ideology.

The popular support credited to these parties must also be reconsidered. After almost 20 years of continuous or uninterrupted violence, a majority of Algerians became disinterested in politics, and is less convinced that Islam can play a role in reforming the political system. Thus, legalized Islamist parties such as Hamas, An-Nahda and Islah are facing great difficulties in ensuring the survival of their activist apparatus. These have been exacerbated by their inability to influence the presidential elections of 2009, which resulted in the re-election of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. In this context, even the attempts of former FIS leaders to revive their party have not succeeded in mobilizing Algerians. Disillusioned by the political monopoly exercised by the National Liberation Front (*Front de Liberation National*, or FLN), the party in power since 1962, many young Algerians have decided to invest in the *da'wa salafiyya*. This allows them to reject both the FIS confrontational position towards the government and the political irrelevance of co-opted Islamist parties, while adopting an “Islamic way of life.”

This paper focuses on the ideological and structural evolutions experienced by both banned and legalized Islamist parties in Algeria, and their impact on the country's politics. It argues that the decline of their protests against the state and inability to reform it have delegitimized the validity of the political party framework as an agent of reform. This in turn has favoured meta- or anti-political forms of Islamic protests, as illustrated by the success of the growing *Salafi* movement.

1. Conflicting politics:² from religious association to party

The ideologies of various Islamist groups or organizations in Algeria have significantly evolved with regard to their methods and policy options. In the 1970s, the leaders of existing Islamist parties were at first involved in religious preaching and Islamic education through Islamic associations. They held hegemonic positions within Algerian Islam, which enabled them to control numerous mosques and compete with the state with regard to Islamic discourse. The choice of Islamic associations as organizational frameworks meant to disseminate their political views was mainly motivated by the restrictive nature of the Algerian political arena at that time, where it was impossible to create political parties. The precursor of these associations is Al Qiyam (values), created in 1962 by Islamic reformists marginalized by the FLN after Algerian independence. Al Qiyam was dissolved in 1966 after its leaders publicly denounced the execution of the influential Egyptian Islamist thinker, Sayyid Qutb. It would nevertheless serve as a historical basis for the future FIS, which would draw its doctrine and leading figures from it.

Under the influence of the reforming activism of both the Syrian and Egyptian Muslim brotherhoods, Abdalla Jaballah, the future leader of An-Nahda and Islah, became the head of the association Al Djama'a al Islamiya in the 1970s. Mahfoud Nahnah, the future head of Hamas, was himself in the 1980s responsible for a federation of religious associations named *Al irshad wal islah*. In an attempt to unify the Islamist movement, the leaders of the newly created Islamist party, the FIS, Ali Benhadj and Abassi Madani, invited these associations to join their party. The FIS was founded in 1989 after the government introduced a multiparty system, but Mahfoud Nahnah and Abdallah Jaballah refused to join it, arguing that religious associations were already performing the required functions. The transformation of some associations into parties in the early 1990s was mainly due to their fear of being overcome by the FIS and the need to limit its influence. Even as they led political parties, Nahnah and Jaballah continued to engage in Islamic religious education, preaching and charity work to secure their base. The legalization of their parties gave them recognition as partners of the government in its fight against the FIS.

Conflicting politics have come at times from using associations to maintain a popular legitimacy and the parties to be close to the ruling elite. Islamist leaders had great difficulty in converting grassroots activists into voters, because genuine political socialization through the party was restricted by strategies designed mainly to gain political notability for the leaders themselves. Some associations are still alive and operate as satellites of parties, but differ significantly in the motives of their supporters,

²The expression was coined by Myriam Aït-Aouda, "La naissance du Front islamique du salut : une politisation conflictuelle," *Critique internationale*, 30, janvier-mars 2006.

and in their relationship to the state. In some cases, such as Hamas, the organization *al-Irshad wal Islah* even claims that it is completely independent from the current leadership of the party. Association activities include campaigns to reduce the costs of weddings and circumcisions, distribution of goods, caring for orphans, raising awareness about the importance of female literacy, the creation of Islamic kindergartens and various other social activities. Even student unions such as the General Union of Algerian Students (UGEL, close to the MSP) and the Rabitat Al Wataniya (close to Nahda), which were previously used as privileged channels of recruitment, are disconnecting themselves from the Islamist parties intended to represent them politically.

In order to transform themselves from Islamic associations into political parties, Islamist parties also had to change the nature of their discourses. The aim of establishing an Islamic state, which constituted the pillar of Algerian Islamist ideology before 1990, was abandoned, and Islam was no longer presented as the solution to all problems. Political pragmatism prevailed and was characterized by a set of general moral values and democratic principles that could evolve depending on circumstances.

2. Finding a space between cooptation and opposition

The Algerian government's cooptation of and invitation to enter the political arena to some Islamist groups led to the "parliamentarization" of Islamist contestation.³ It consists in routinizing Islamist demands by giving these groups access to the Parliament as MPs, while knowing that the Parliament has a negligible impact on decision-making. This cooptation was considered an obstacle by the Islamists themselves.⁴ Since official recognition by the government has at least preserved them from the kind of repression the FIS has experienced, however, they also see it as a *moucharaka* (partnership) that allows them to "learn about politics" and create their own political space. But Hamas and Islah, if they both choose to participate in elections, have two different strategies toward the government.

Hamas is involved in what it calls "critical support" to the government. It always supports long-term institutional reforms advocated by the President, while criticizing the government on short-term and controversial issues where Islamic values are involved, such as the prohibition of alcohol. This criticism is not accompanied by serious attempts to break from the coalition, and is generally voiced during election campaign speeches.

³ Jean-Noël Ferrié, "La parlementarisation de l'islam politique : la dynamique des modérés," Rapport Euromesco, septembre 2005.

⁴ Noura Hamladji, "Cooptation, Repression and Authoritarianism Regime's Survival. The Case of the Islamist MSP-Hamas in Algeria," SPS Working Papers, European University Institute, 2005.

This low-cost oppositional discourse allows them to secure their popular base by appearing as defenders of Islamic values, but also as non-disruptive elements of the President's program for national reconciliation, which aims at pardoning former Islamic armed groups and security forces involved in blood crimes during the 1990s civil war.

Hamas' conciliatory strategy has been fully applied with the decision to join the government coalition, called the Presidential Alliance, composed of two parties emanating from the traditional ruling elite, the FLN and the RND (Democratic National Rally). But even as Hamas' influence on government decision-making remains marginal, its experience represents an important milestone in the country's political life in terms of the trivialization of Islamist parties' political participation.

The former leader and founder of An-Nahda and Islah, Abdallah Jaballah, has also agreed to participate in the elections while adopting an "oppositional strategy" in relation to the policies of the FLN and RND parties. The refusal of the members of his An-Nahda party to join the Presidential Alliance led to an internal crisis that forced him to launch a new party, Islah. Jaballah regularly denounces the concentration of powers in the Algerian Presidency. In the Parliament, he often introduces amendments to laws proposed by the Presidential Alliance. This strategy has conferred on him more credibility than Hamas as an Islamist oppositional party among members of the Islamist base, but it has not allowed him to make any difference at the policy level. His denunciations remain well within the political consensus (issues of poverty, corruption, inequalities, etc.), and are not complemented with proposals for genuine political alternatives. His criticisms of the government are essentially denunciations of the elites and the authoritarian regime.

A regime that refuses to coopt Jaballah as unequivocally as the leaders of Hamas, while allowing his organization to subsist, gives an impression of pluralism. But Interior Minister Yazid Zerhouni did not allow Abdallah Jaballah to run as the head of Islah in the parliamentary elections of May 2007, and instead promoted his contender within the party as the new head of the party. Another complication that Al-Islah faces is a very volatile electoral base.

Beyond these differences, the main objective of legalized Islamist parties such as Hamas, An-Nahda and Islah is to form a stabilizing and non-disruptive political force, while retaining their ability to criticize when it comes to issues related to Islamic or nationalistic principles. With regard to the economy, Hamas is defined as nationalistic, although in favor of free markets. Al-Islah has repeatedly opposed the privatization of oil on the grounds that it represents a strategic sector for economic independence and the political influence of Algeria in the region.

Another characteristic of Algerian Islamists, with the exception of the FIS, is that they are legalistic. Moreover, in order to win votes beyond their original base, they have been developing alliances with political entities that have required them to moderate their discourse and gradually adapt some of their values. As an example, Islah has even forged election alliances with the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), the mainly Berber

party of Said Saadi characterized by its fierce opposition to Islamism. Whereas until the 1990s, Islamist leaders criticized any attempt to formulate a Berber identity, they now recognize “Amazighism” (alongside Arabism and Islam) as one of the foundations of Algerian identity. By engaging in electoral party politics, they have developed a culture of political compromise and negotiated a peaceful entry to the Algerian political scene.

3. The collapse of the party framework and the crisis of the 2009 presidential elections

Political participation and the *moucharaka* strategy are the Islamist parties’ greatest achievements on the national level. The objective was to take power by infiltrating political institutions. But the constitutional amendment of November 2008 authorizing incumbent President Bouteflika to run for a third presidential mandate threw the coopted and oppositional Islamist movements into a state of paralysis. The 2009 presidential elections that resulted in a third term for the President have revealed the limits of the “accommodating strategies” adopted by the Islamists of the former FIS, as well as the extent of the fragmentation of the opposition.

The *moucharaka* strategy seems to have strengthened the historic FLN regime and related decision-making circles much more than Islamist partisan structures. In 20 years of institutionalized politics, the Islamists were unable to transform the social mobilization and anti-government sentiments of Algerian citizens into genuine political mobilization. It is becoming harder for them to convince the people of the benefits of political participation in a context where civil society is weak and state institutions are unable to make political pluralism a reality.

In the post-civil-war context, Islamists have gradually replaced their promises of revolutionary changes with the ambition of helping the President consolidate the country’s political unity, thus excluding themselves de facto from political competition with the regime. The challenging question for Algerian Islamists today is whether to continue to participate in a political system that weakens and neutralizes them, or to withdraw from it in order to reinvent themselves and take on new challenging roles.

In an atmosphere of disinterest in politics on the part of many Algerians, the 2009 presidential elections saw the participation of two Islamist candidates. Candidate Djahid Younsi, representative of the Islah Party, promised to liberalize broadcast media, allow new political parties, put an end to the state of emergency in effect since 1992, develop strategies to deal with the post-oil era, and insure the promotion of young entrepreneurs. He also proposed to pursue national reconciliation through total amnesty, including for current members of Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Djahid Younsi, however, was unable to impact the presidential campaign or effectively replace Ahmad Djaballah as the real leader of the party, who refused to compete following unsuccessful negotiations with the government.

Candidate Mohamed Said, one of the “rabbit candidates” (“*candidats-lièvres*,” a nickname given by the Algerian public to all candidates during the campaign, except for the President, to signify that they had no chance of success and that they were called upon just to keep up appearances), was persuaded to run for elections without a genuine popular base. His party was created two months before the elections and was still not officially approved on voting day. Mohamed Said and his partner, Ahmed Taleb al-Ibrahimi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and founder of the not-yet-approved Wafa Islamist party, were hoping to be allowed to return formally to the political scene after the elections. Their hopes were disappointed. As a result, Younsi and Said have vehemently denounced the elections results, and have even called for the dissolution of the assembly two months after their participation.

The positions of former members of the FIS during the elections were also inconsistent. While former activists such as Anwar Haddam or Rabbah Kebir called for participation in the elections in order to make their voices heard concerning the reintegration of repentant Islamists, the lifting of the State of emergency or the creation of a new party out of the ashes of the FIS,⁵ others, such as Ali Benhadj,⁶ Abassi Madani and AQIM members, called for boycotting them.

The weak Islamist participation in the 2009 presidential elections as well as in public debates can also be explained by the way the government had used Islamic actors, and to a certain extent Islamic values, in support of the President’s third term. The Minister of Religious Affairs even declared that abstention is against Islamic values, since voting is a religious duty. The Bouteflika campaign’s main argument involved the pursuit of national reconciliation and the social reintegration of repentant militants through a generous plan backed by 9.5 billion dinars.

The most remarkable reconfigurations of Islamist participatory strategies during the elections were unquestionably those observed in the Hamas party. Aboujerra Soltani decided not to participate in the elections and to support President Bouteflika’s candidacy because of Hamas’s participation in the Presidential Alliance. This position led many Hamas activists to question the role of their party on the political scene; and exacerbated the leadership war between Soltani and Menasra, the second most important figure of the party, who, three months prior to the elections had decided to create the MPC (Movement for Preaching and Change), splitting from the original party. Confirming the split to the press, Menasra noted that “the Movement for Preaching and Change, created in April 2009, was not a religious institution, but a political party in accordance with the requirements set forth in the constitution, and with an Islamic orientation.”⁷ Adding to a

⁵ Rabah Kebir launched his new “Mouvement de la liberté et de la justice sociale” in January 2007.

⁶ See Ali Benhadj, “Why the boycott?”, a document circulated on pro-FIS websites in March 2009 (in Arabic).

⁷ Ramdane Koubabi, “Abdelmadjid Menasra l’a réitéré hier: le MPC plaide pour un Etat islamique” [Abdelmadjid Menasra reiterated it yesterday: MPC pleads for an Islamic State], *El Watan*, May 16, 2009.

strategy of differentiation from and competition with the participatory strategies of Hamas leaders, one objective of Menasra was to reintegrate the FIS repentant militants and former members as well as the new *salafi* generation in the newly created party.

Shortly before the elections, numerous activists, including 564 women, resigned from Hamas to protest the party's participatory line, and joined the MPC now led by Mustafa Belmahdi. Soltani resigned from his ministerial cabinet position in order to deal with the crisis, thus attempting to regenerate his base.

4. Terrorism, repentance and political reinstatement of the ex-FIS

The FIS has undoubtedly been weakened by the 16 years of violence that followed its dissolution in March 1992. Its ambiguous acceptance of violence in order to maintain itself as a central political actor⁸ led a large number of its long-time followers to reject it, and to the conversion of many of them to *salafism*. The FIS' inability to channel violence dissuaded the government from pursuing negotiations with the Islamist party.⁹ A response to this marginalization has been the emergence of a post-revolutionary Islamism among former FIS leaders since the end of the 1990s.

Accepting the national reconciliation project and rejecting the strategy of violent revolution allowed members of the FIS to create a space for themselves in the politico-military system of post-conflict Algeria. With their support of Bouteflika and following their negotiated social reintegration, they are asking today for political reintegration. But how to consider the issue of FIS rehabilitation in a context of party competition blockage, ever since the national reconciliation agreement was enacted?

Former FIS leaders are not as important as they once were in Algerian national political life. Benhadj, Madani and other FIS historical leaders were either put under house arrest or forced into exile after having been imprisoned. The position of former FIS leaders is ambivalent, and a real competition exists among them over who will inherit the symbolic capital of the party. They now condemn violence as they strive to cope with the paradox of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, which prohibits their return to political life, but, at the same time, gives them hope that they will be reintegrated in the political sphere. The terms of the Charter neutralize them politically because they are still considered repentant terrorists, but at the same time allow them to be the President's partners in his efforts to stabilize the country. They reject AQIM violence and call for peace in order not to be marginalized and to present themselves as mediators.

⁸ On the FIS's relationship to violence, see Kamil Tawil, *Al haraka al islamiyya al musallaha fil djazair. Min al inqad ila eldjama'a*, Beyrouth, Dar an-Nahar, 1998.

⁹ Frédéric Volpi, "Algeria's pseudo-democratic politics: Lessons for democratization in the Middle East," *Democratization*, 13:3, pp. 442-455, 2006.

After having called them apostates,¹⁰ Madani and Benhadj are trying to build an alliance with members of the marginalized Algerian democratic opposition, such as Aït Ahmed (leader of the Socialist Forces Front, FFS), Taleb Ibrahimi (President of the not-yet-legalized Wafa Islamist party), Mouloud Hamrouche (ex-Prime Minister and reformist), Abdelhamid Mehri (former Secretary General of the Liberation National Front, FLN), or even Ali Yahia Abdenour (a lawyer and former president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights¹¹). Many former members of the FIS ran for office under various political labels during the legislative elections of May 2007. Other leaders such as Rabah Kebir, Anouar Haddam and Madani Mezrag from the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) have declared that they want to create their own party and intend to form alliances with legalized Islamist parties, such as Hamas and Islah, with both of them welcoming the idea.

The government seems undecided on whether to allow these Islamic activists to form new parties, oscillating between giving them false hopes and categorical refusal, according to internal Algerian political circumstances, and to the category of repentant militants and political opponents. The future of old FIS members will not diverge much in the near future because the government is unwilling to give them an opportunity to resurrect themselves after having reached a consensus on reconciliation. The end of the FIS and its violent past have even consolidated the Algerian state, which through the war against terrorism managed to mitigate international pressure regarding the torture of FIS activists and their partisan followers, and has managed to impose certain restrictive measures on political activity while still benefiting from international support. Even if the FIS is neutralized through its condemnation of terrorism, the vacuum that it has left on the ground in terms of Islamist mobilization seems to be increasingly filled by the exponential development of the *da'wa salafiyya*.

5. Ad-da'wa salafiyya: an alternative to Islamist parties?

This trend is to a great extent inspired by the Saudi Wahhabi school of thought.¹² Its origins can be traced to the 1980s, when many young Algerians studying Islamic sciences in Saudi Arabia returned to teach in Algeria. One of the main representatives of the *da'wa salafiyya* in Algeria is Abdelmalek Ramdani, an Algerian who has become an imam in Saudi Arabia. He left Algeria after receiving death threats due to his anti-violence and pro-government stances. Others such as Ali Ferqous,¹³ Sheikh Yassin, Najib Lazhar,

¹⁰ Speeches can be found in Zohra Benarros, Amokrane Ait Idir and Fella Midjek, *L'islamisme politique : la tragédie algérienne*, Beyrouth, Dar Al Farabi, 2002.

¹¹ Interview of Ali Benhadj by Florence Beaugé in *Le Monde*, 9 February 2008.

¹² Zoubir Arous, "Les courants salafistes, de la profondeur du processus historique à la réalité de l'expérience contemporaine," *Naqd*, Automne/Hiver, 24, 2007. ["Salafi tendencies, from the depth of the historic process to the reality of contemporary experience", *Naqd*, Fall/Winter, 24, 2007.]

¹³ See <http://www.ferkous.com/rep/A.php>.

Sheik Abdu-ighani Awisat and Abdu-Imadjid Djoumah are the main leaders of this movement and keep extremely strong links with Saudi religious institutions. They regularly moderate *dourous*, religious instruction, in Algerian mosques under Saudi influence. Their popularity is spread by the *ijaza* (authorization to teach dogma), which is delivered to them by Wahhabi Saudi scholars. They are accessible and respected; many young Algerians contact them on their phones to ask them for *fatwas* on a wide variety of daily issues.

This trend exploded a decade ago, firstly because it welcomed former supporters of political *salafism*, left without affiliation after the prohibition of the FIS in 1992. Many supporters of *djihadi salafism*, former or repentant members of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) have traded arms for the prospects of trade networks that the *da'wa salafiyya* provides, notably with the Gulf region. Since the promulgation of the Law on Civil Concord in 2000, signaling the final death of the “revolutionary” strategies of Islamist parties in Algeria, this movement has been especially strengthened by the generation of young Algerians between the ages of 15 and 35, many of whom have been disappointed by the political Islamist experiences of their elders.

Compared to Islamist parties, the *da'wa salafiyya* is a movement that allows relatively easy access. There is no need to have an Islamic education or espouse lofty political demands. Islamist parties that are legalized by the government largely reject the membership of younger people, considering them too flagrant with their *niqab* (a veil that covers the whole face) and their *qamiss* (long white shirt that men wear). In *salafi* mosques and on their websites, members enjoy a like-minded community and find solidarity if they want to find housing, open a business or get married. There is no need to follow long ideological sermons or attend political meetings. Many websites offer already-set *fatwas*, advising on behaviors and policies to adopt. In a country where national broadcast channels are controlled by the state, religious channels from the Gulf States have helped a whole generation familiarize themselves with the doctrine of *salafism*. Religious literature that can be found in Algeria is mainly *salafi*, and cheap.

The advantages of *salafism* are available simply by going to the same mosque and meeting the same friends who wear the same outfits. For this “terrorist generation,” as they call themselves, the *da'wa salafiyya* is a way of gracefully rejecting Western values and current empty Algerian politics without direct conflict. They are not ready to pay the price of past violence, and at the same time reject parties’ use of Islam for social change, as according to them this has been a failure. The *salafi* networks provide a way to overcome the deficiencies of public institutions and the lack of political representativeness, and to organize around the model of the ideal Islamic community.

By offering an alternative to the party framework in a post-conflict Algerian political landscape where oppositional Islam cannot find space, the *da'wa salafiyya* movement has

become an important step towards re-Islamization, bypassing Islamic parties that are considered too elitist and have changing and risky strategies. At the same time, a feeling of being able to organize their own society within the whole society without being worried by the police is a pervasive issue in discussions with Algeria's *salafis*. They explicitly refuse to get involved in politics, while proclaiming that they only want to "practice their religion in peace."

Indeed the *salafiyya* movement excludes all political activity. Members consider the electoral system and the party framework as nonsense imported from Western traditions. They refer to those who engage in a political party as *hizbi* (from *hizb*, party supporters but with a strongly negative connotation in the sense of division). They claim the precedence of *salafi* scholars' knowledge over any political ideology. These scholars are widely used by the government within Algerian Islamic universities or mosques as they offer a consensus on neutrality vis-à-vis the State.

Salafi criticism is accentuated by the bloody experience of Islam's politicization in the 1990s. In an Algeria where the government has not approved new parties since 1999, *salafism* reactivates the old pattern of movements standing in for parties, which had prevailed in times of single party control. Faced with the state's manipulation of official Islamist parties, which were coopted and neutralized mainly through the "reconciliation" narratives, non-oppositional and popular *salafism* represents for many an alternative to the crisis of representation in current Algerian politics.

Conclusion

Analyzing Algerian Islamism through a dynamic perspective helps us avoid two pitfalls. The first would be to consider political Islam as a permanent revolutionary strategy that Islamist leaders are destined to maintain, using the framework of the party, where the only aim is to gain power. Long focused on establishing an Islamic state, Algerian Islamist parties have reformulated their strategies not only because of the failure of the FIS and attempts at armed uprisings (AIS, GIA, GSPC, etc.), but also because of cooptation opportunities offered to them by the state to get involved in the political process by participating in elections. Today, Algerian Islamists do not aspire to any Islamic revolution, either through elections or violent means. Not taking into account the evolving nature of political Islam in Algeria presents the risk of freezing Algerian Islamists in positions that are no longer necessarily theirs. Algerian Islamism is the result of the opening or closing of the political sphere, and the relevance of the party as an organization must be understood in an evolving fashion and in relation to the status given by the state to Islamist opposition.

The second pitfall would be to consider Algerian Islamic formations as religious parties. Although Islam remains central to their ideology, these groups should no longer be considered as religious parties that will make religious consideration a priority over political issues. Religious positions have a lesser impact when political, economic and diplomatic interests are involved. Algerian Islamists have evolved from dogmatism to

pragmatism and consensus-seeking. They have integrated the ideological apparatus of ordinary political parties in their mode of operation and their discourse, even becoming, like Hamas, a party that according to its leader Aboujerra Soltani hoped to reach the presidency while being in favor of a third term for President Bouteflika.

The popularity of Islamist parties among the Algerian people has declined as these parties pay the price of being coopted by the state. Consequently, it may be pertinent to ask if there is a space left for Islamist movements in an Algerian political system devoid of competition. Among the supporters of the *da'wa salafiyya*, the fear of *fitna* (divisions among believers), and the disinterest for political opposition considered ineffectual, leave them with the only choice of submission to the state while being critical of the FIS and rejecting jihadist violence. Leaving this movement to grow, the state has found wide support for its policy of reconciliation and has occasionally halted the political radicalization of ultraorthodox Islam. Supporters of religious radicalism, mainly *salafists*, who discard mainstream social values and reject any prospect of living together with the rest of the population could be problematic in the future, however, especially if living conditions for youth do not improve rapidly.

For the FIS the notion that political power resides primarily with the state remains essential. The FIS has understood that if it wants to return to politics, it must abandon its obsolete references to an Islamic state and establish a working alliance with the governing elites. This has been achieved through the FIS' acceptance of the reconciliation policies promoted by the government, in the hopes of being reinstated on the political scene, which was observable in the last parliamentary and presidential elections. It is important to remember that long-time members and activists of the FIS, and the Islamic base of the *da'wa salafiyya*, both wish to play an important role in future elections. The situation of Islamist parties and movements in Algeria in the future will be characterized by the questioning of the relevance of the old frontiers drawn between Islamist and secular parties, and between legalized Islamist parties and prohibited Islamist parties, as well as the link made between the party framework (*hizb*) and the movement (*haraka*).