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**CO-OPTING IDENTITY:  
THE MANIPULATION OF BERBERISM,  
THE FRUSTRATION OF  
DEMOCRATISATION AND THE  
GENERATION OF VIOLENCE IN  
ALGERIA**

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### Co-opting Identity: The manipulation of Berberism, the frustration of democratisation, and the generation of violence in Algeria

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My debts to my Algerian friends, especially in Kabylia, cannot be detailed here. As they know well, the critical element of the analysis which follows does not imply a lack of sympathy for the language rights of Algerian Berber speakers, which I have supported since the 1970s.

\*

"*Ilah ghaleb, kulshi yeqleb.*" "Oh God, everything is turned inside out."  
(Slimane Azem)

"...the relation between idea and context is an *internal* one. The idea gets its sense from the role it plays in the system."

(Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*)

## Introduction

The purpose of this working paper is to explore one of the political premises of the current violence in Algeria, namely the character of the identity politics which has developed in the Berberophone Kabylia region of the country, which has this year been the theatre of the most sustained riots in Algeria's history, and the first riots of any significance to have occurred in Algeria since October 1988. A secondary, theoretical, purpose is to demonstrate and establish the analytical value of the concepts of *forms of politics* and *political mutation* which have been central to my work for many years but remain to be generally taken up and put to use in contemporary political studies.

It is a striking and important fact about the riots of October 1988, which heralded the subsequent dismantling of the FLN-state, that, whereas they quickly spread from Algiers to other parts of the country, they did not spread to Kabylia, despite the fact that the region's capital, Tizi Ouzou, is a mere 60 miles from Algiers and that a large percentage of the Algiers population are Kabyle. It is an equally striking feature of the recent riots that, while they have also spread to, or at least been imitated in, other parts of Algeria, especially in the east of the country, they have not (so far) spread to Algiers itself, in the sense of infecting the Algiers population, and that the only disturbances which have taken place in Algiers in connection with these riots have occurred when the Kabyle protestors have come to Algiers *en masse*, as on June 14 last, to organise demonstrations of their own in the city.

The disturbances this year, in Kabylia and elsewhere, have exhibited three remarkable contrasts to the 1988 riots.

In 1988, the régime very quickly declared a state of siege and called on the army to restore order, whereas throughout this year's disturbances the army (as distinct from the gendarmerie, which has always been present in the region as a matter of course) has not intervened at all.<sup>1</sup>

The death toll this year, while entirely deplorable - at over 100 killed as well as many injured over seven months, is of a different order from the several hundred killed in 1988 over a mere six days.<sup>2</sup>

The 1988 riots, although of exceptional intensity, were rapidly brought to an end; having begun in Algiers on the night of October 4, and having spread across the country by October 9, they nonetheless ended everywhere on the night of October 10. This year's riots, which began in Kabylia on April 23, not only continued throughout the summer but still cannot be said as of now (early December) to have been brought to a complete end.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The gendarmerie is charged with maintaining order in the Algerian countryside and - unlike the Surêté Nationale, which has this responsibility in the towns and comes under the interior ministry - it comes under the ministry of defence and its commander is a member of the army general staff

<sup>2</sup> The official death toll in 1988 was 159 (*Libération*, October 24, 1988), while unofficial estimates ranged from 400 to over 600 dead (*Le Monde*, October 25, 1988). No official casualty figures have been published for the whole of the 2001 disturbances. A provisional but detailed list established independently by Dr Salah Eddine Sidhoum gives the figure of 95 people killed in the Kabyle disturbances (including 9 killed in demonstrations organized by the Kabyles in Algiers) between late April and June, 2001; two other people were killed in separate disturbances south-eastern Algeria; see Salah Eddine Sidhoum, *Liste non-exhaustive des victimes des émeutes en Algérie, Avril-Juin 2001*, Algeria-Watch, June 2001 (<http://www.algeria-watch.org>)

<sup>3</sup> For an early analysis of the dynamics of the riots which explained why they repeatedly resumed after every lull, see my article, 'Algeria: riots without end?' in *Middle East International*, 651 (June 1, 2001), 16-18.

But the 2001 riots have had at least one major feature in common with those of 1988. In both cases, the principal object of the rioters' anger was what Algerians call *la hogra* (in standard Arabic, *el-hagra*), by which they mean the contempt with which they are treated by the authorities and the humiliations heaped upon them as their notional rights are routinely violated by official abuses of power. That this was what was at issue was immediately recognised by the coverage of the initial disturbances by the independent Algerian press, many of whose reporters are Kabyles.<sup>4</sup> And it was because the rioters in Kabylia made it clear that their principal grievance was *la hogra* that their actions struck a chord elsewhere and their revolt proved contagious beyond Kabylia.

However, notwithstanding the clearly expressed outlook of the rioters, one of the two political parties based on the Kabyle constituency, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, RCD), published a series of declarations in the early stages of the riots which proffered an entirely different view of what was at issue.<sup>5</sup> Instead of articulating the Kabyles' rejection of *la hogra*, notably their anger at the behaviour of the local gendarmerie which had precipitated the disturbances<sup>6</sup> and, more generally, their anger at the socio-economic distress – mass unemployment, inadequate housing, etc. – they suffered in consequence of the government's neglect of and indifference to their interests, grievances which tended to unite the Kabyles with their fellow-Algerians in all other parts of the country,<sup>7</sup> the RCD insisted that the main source of Kabyle frustration and anger was the identity question and specifically the government's longstanding refusal to accord national and official status to the Berber language, *Thamazighth*,<sup>8</sup> an issue which clearly distinguished, and tended to isolate, the population of Kabylia from those of other regions and thus to forfeit the sympathy and support of the rest of Algerian public opinion.

That the Algerian authorities considered they had an interest in defining the problem in terms of the identity and language issue cannot be doubted. As early as April 30, President

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<sup>4</sup> See Ahmed Kaci, 'Colère pour une dignité' in *La Tribune*, April 25, and especially his article in *La Tribune*, April 28, where he wrote: "Ce serait un...crime que de réduire le ras-le-bol actuel des jeunes, parce que s'exprimant pour l'instant en Kabylie, à la question linguistique et identitaire." See also the article 'L'amalgame' in *El Watan*, April 29, and the report by Abla Cherif in *Le Matin*, April 30, which quotes a demonstrator at Ourzellaguen in Lesser Kabylia as saying that: "Il est faux de croire que la révolte a éclaté pour revendiquer tamazight." Even the French press was initially forced to recognize the truth of the matter; see José Garçon's article in *Libération*, April 28-29 and also *Le Monde*, April 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie: Déclaration du Bureau Régional du RCD de Bejaïa*, Bejaïa, April 24; *Le Comité Exécutif met le régime devant ses responsabilités* (declaration of RCD Executive Committee) Algiers, April 25; *La situation est grave* (RCD communiqué), Algiers, April 28, 2001; source: RCD internet bulletin, April 2001 (<http://rcd-algérie.org/avril/avril.htm>).

<sup>6</sup> The immediate trigger of the riots were three provocative incidents which occurred in rapid succession: the unexplained fatal shooting of a youth, Massinissa Guermah, in the offices of the gendarmerie at Beni Douala (*wilaya* of Tizi Ouzou) on April 18; the gratuitously offensive terms of the communiqué subsequently issued by the gendarmerie, accusing Guermah of being a thief, and the brutal arrest of three pupils at a school at Oued Amizour (*wilaya* of Bejaïa) on the flimsiest of pretexts on April 22. Non-violent protest demonstrations began at Beni Douala on April 21 and spread across the region from April 23 onwards, developing quickly into riots as clashes occurred with the local gendarmerie in dozens of different places.

<sup>7</sup> Strictly circumscribed and largely non-violent protests against local misgovernment at municipal level have been occurring in most regions of Algeria for the last year or more; local discontent developed into riots in the wake of the Kabyle events in many parts of the Constantinois from June onwards; they have since spread to the Oranie (western Algeria).

<sup>8</sup> Usually written *Tamazight* in Algeria, following French practice, although the 't' is pronounced as the 'th' in English. In addition to official statements, we may note the declaration on April 26 of Djamel Ferdjallah, the RCD's Vice-President and one of the party's deputies for the *wilaya* (administrative region) of Bejaïa, that "these demonstrations are an expression of deep resentment by the Berber population over its identity and cultural claims" (Reuters).

Bouteflika implied that this was the main issue in a televised address to the nation in which, having formally acknowledged the problems which Kabylia shares with other regions, he then proceeded to dwell on “*la crise identitaire*”, insisting on the progress which the state had already made towards addressing this but also noting that the identity claim had “a constitutional dimension which could only be addressed in the context of a revision to the constitution”.<sup>9</sup> Five months later, Bouteflika announced that the awarding to *Thamazighth* of the status of a ‘national language’ previously accorded to Arabic alone would indeed be on the agenda of the constitutional revision now in prospect.<sup>10</sup> Instead of being greeted with triumphant rejoicing or even sober satisfaction in Kabylia, however, this announcement received an unenthusiastic, cynical and in some cases hostile reception in the region, and appeared to resolve nothing.<sup>11</sup>

This is the first complex of issues which this paper seeks to address. A second question concerns a distinct aspect of the recent disturbances.

In 1988, the riotous behaviour of the demonstrators, the generally destructive actions they undertook, and especially those directed against the offices of the sole legal political formation, the Party of the FLN (*Parti du Front de Libération Nationale, Hizb Jebhat el-Tahrir el-Wataniyya*), were widely explained in terms of the monolithic character of the political system and the lack of institutional outlets for popular anger given the Party’s monopoly of public life; the riots were therefore widely cited, especially in the French press, as grounds for dismantling the FLN-state and establishing political pluralism,<sup>12</sup> and were in fact followed quite rapidly by this development.

Yet the riots this year have occurred precisely in conditions of political pluralism. The population of Kabylia has been represented in the National Assembly (the lower, elective, house of the Algerian parliament) since this was re-established in June 1997, and it has, moreover, been represented by its own, home-grown, regionally-based parties, which have between them held almost every one of the region’s seats.<sup>13</sup> It has also been represented in the Council of the Nation (the upper house of the parliament) since this was established in December 1997, both among the indirectly elected members who make up two thirds of its composition and among the remaining third who owe their seats to presidential appointment.<sup>14</sup> Given the general condition of political pluralism, and given the political representation of the Kabylia region by Kabyle parties – given, that is to say, precisely those

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<sup>9</sup> *Texte intégral de la déclaration du Président de la République, 30 avril 2001*, Algeria-Watch ([http://www.algeria-watch.de/farticle/kabylie/discours\\_boutef.htm](http://www.algeria-watch.de/farticle/kabylie/discours_boutef.htm)).

<sup>10</sup> Communiqué of the Presidency of the Republic, October 3, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> See *Libération*, ‘L’annonce faites aux berbères’; and *Le Monde*, ‘Confusion en Kabylie après la reconnaissance du berbère’, both on October 5, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> See in particular the articles of Bernard Cohen in *Libération*, November 3 and November 5-6, 1988, and the text of the resolution passed by the European Parliament on November 17, 1988 (reported in *Libération*, November 18, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> In the legislative elections of June 1997, all 14 seats of the *wilaya* of Tizi Ouzou (Greater Kabylia) went to the Kabyle parties, the FFS and the RCD, and were shared equally between them; in the *wilaya* of Bejaia (Lesser Kabylia), the FFS took seven seats to the RCD’s three, and one seat was taken by the moderate Islamist party, the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP). The votes cast by the Kabyle element of the adjacent or nearby *wilayât* of Algiers, Boumerdès, Bouïra and Tipasa also translated into seats for the FFS and RCD (six a-piece); from the émigré population in France and North America, much of which is of Kabyle origin, the RCD picked up three seats.

<sup>14</sup> Each of Algeria’s 48 *wilayât* is represented in the Council of the Nation by two members, elected by the members of the *wilaya*’s popular assembly (APW) and its communal popular assemblies (APCs) from among their own number.

political conditions the absence of which was cited as explaining in large part the resort to rioting to express popular grievances in 1988, why should the recent massive riots have occurred at all? And why should some of the rioters in Kabylia have included among their targets the offices of the Kabyle political parties as well as those unequivocally associated with the régime?<sup>15</sup>

This paper does not provide a political analysis of the recent riots, which have been an exceptionally complex affair and are not yet fully over as we have seen. It offers instead a preliminary analysis of the form of identity politics which has oriented the behaviour of a crucial actor in these events, the RCD, and which has been permitted to develop within the constitutional framework of formal pluralism established since the dismantling of the FLN-state. As such it represents research in progress, which it is intended that subsequent work will develop and if necessary correct. It should be emphasized that this paper deals exclusively with Algerian Berberism, and that its analysis should not be assumed to apply to the Berberist movements which have developed elsewhere in North Africa in recent years. Beyond the Algerian context, however, a purpose of this paper is nonetheless to contribute to the debate about the character of identity politics and political pluralism in contemporary developing countries, as well as of the political premises of the popular resort to violence in formally pluralist states.

### **Enigma variations**

Sharp changes of political direction are often symptoms of a crisis of some kind, and a crisis is often a favourable context in which to appraise a form of politics, revealing as it does what is optional and what is essential to it and so enabling the analyst to distinguish between the two. Let us begin, therefore, by considering two dramatic U-turns in recent Algerian political life.

In the course of the 1999 presidential election, which brought Abdelaziz Bouteflika back to high office with the support of powerful factions of the Algerian army and administration, one political party adopted a posture which may have appeared to outflank all other forces present in respect of commitment to democratic principle and political radicalism. This party was the RCD. Instead of either rallying to the pro-Bouteflika coalition composed of four substantial parties - the regime-sponsored National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, FLN), the equally regime-sponsored Democratic National Rally (*Rassemblement National Démocratique*, RND) and the 'moderate' Islamists of the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) and *Ennahda* - or supporting any of the six other candidates in the race, or even putting forward its own candidate, the RCD called for an outright boycott of the election on the grounds that it was rigged in advance. A few months later, the RCD leaders announced the rallying of their party to the coalition of parties supporting President Bouteflika's position in the National Assembly. They did this despite not only their own emphatically expressed views concerning the undemocratic manner in which Bouteflika had been 'elected', but also despite Bouteflika's publicly declared refusal to accept their demand for national and official status for the Berber language, and despite his insistence on seeking some form of reconciliation with the RCD's *bête noire*, the Algerian Islamist movement (and thus his tacit

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<sup>15</sup> Between April 23 and June 20, at least 32 offices of political parties were sacked or set on fire by rioters in Kabylia. While these incidents might be considered self-explanatory in the case of those parties permanently associated with the régime, the FLN and the RND (14 and 4 offices attacked respectively), the attacks on the Kabyle parties, the FFS and the RCD, both of which had seven offices destroyed, remain to be explained.

rejection of the RCD's vision of a secular state). In reward for placing their principal programmatic objectives on the long finger in this manner, their party was subsequently allocated two portfolios (health and transport) in the new government announced on December 24, 1999, which, consisting entirely of men, tacitly expressed Bouteflika's additional indifference to the RCD's third major concern, female equality.

The inconsistent behaviour of the RCD in 1999 obviously calls for explanation. This first U-turn can now be considered in the light of a second one, which occurred immediately after the defining moment of the party's line and conduct since late April of this year (2001), that is during the massive riots which have occurred in the RCD's home region of Kabylia. For, having reversed its principled opposition to Bouteflika and joined his government in 1999, on May 1, 2001 the RCD reversed itself all over again and pulled out of the government *à grand fracas*.

A cynical interpretation of the RCD's *volte-face* in July 1999 would be that the RCD leaders sold their souls for the political equivalent of a mess of pottage (what Algerians would refer to as a seat near the *couscousier*), and that the RCD's own principles went comprehensively by the board in the transaction in question. In line with this view of things, one might suppose (as many observers and commentators have in fact suggested) that, when the RCD decided to leave the government in May 2001, this meant either that it had reverted to better sentiments and resumed its original, natural and proper function of representing Kabyle opinion in the more straightforward medium of explicit opposition, or that it had simply acted opportunistically once again, in jumping off the government's mired and immobilized coach onto the dynamic bandwagon of the mass movement in Kabylia while the going was good.

I want to argue that this view, in all of its variants, however plausible, is essentially mistaken. Whatever truth it contains is of superficial significance only. For the RCD leaders were not substantively departing from their previous political orientation in executing the *volte-face* of July 1999, and the second 180-degree turn they executed in May 2001 - whether one entertains a cynical or charitable interpretation of it - also did not amount to a genuine reversal of the party line or a fundamental shift in its political allegiances at all. That this is so is closely connected to the fact that the explanation for the RCD's behaviour is not primarily to be sought in the opportunism of its leaders, but in the character of the form of politics from which the party has sprung, namely Berberism, a form of ideology-laden identity politics which has been widely misconceived by most detached observers as well as many of its adepts.

### ***Berberism***

Berberism in Algeria is above all a dissident political position which has developed with respect to the Kabyle question in Algerian politics.

If the term is abstracted from its historical context, one might define it as simply the concern to affirm and promote the Berber identity, as Arabism and Islamism have been concerned to promote the Arab and Islamic identities respectively, with whatever these have been understood to imply in respect of language, culture, faith and morals. Many of those who have belonged to the Berberist movement as a movement of ideas have sought to promote the Berber language and culture, as Arabists have sought to promote Arabic language and culture, and have been seen - and have seen themselves - as acting in the cultural sphere rather than the political sphere. In this perspective, the Berberist movement can be traced back to the early years of the twentieth century. The work of a Berber intellectual, Amar ou

Saïd Boulifa, can be seen as an important moment in the gestation of the Berberist project,<sup>16</sup> and contemporary Berberists explicitly claim Boulifa as a forerunner of their own vision.<sup>17</sup> The affirmation of the Berber identity was also a central element of the work of Jean Amrouche (1906-1962) and his sister, Marguerite Taos Amrouche (1913-1976).<sup>18</sup> More recently, and especially since Algeria's independence in 1962, the development of the Berberist movement as a cultural enterprise has owed a great deal to the work of the novelist and essayist Mouloud Mammeri (1917-1989),<sup>19</sup> a degree of theorization of the movement has been provided most notably by Salem Chaker (b. 1950),<sup>20</sup> and the popularisation of Berberist themes in the wider social consciousness has owed much to the appeal of a number of singer-poets, notably Slimane Azem (1918-1983), Idir (b. 1948), Lounis Aït Menguellet (b. 1950), Ferhat Mehenni (b. 1951) and Matoub Lounes (1956-1998).

But to view the Berberist movement as an essentially apolitical movement of ideas evolving mainly if not entirely in the cultural sphere is to overlook the fact that the cultural sphere and the political sphere have not been truly distinct, let alone separate, in Algeria since the French conquest in 1830, and is to ignore the political content of much of the intellectual and artistic output of leading figures in this movement, notably Chaker but also the singers mentioned above (especially Mehenni and Matoub). And to abstract the consideration of Algerian Berberism from the historical context in which it has developed over the last half century disables the external observer from appreciating the political significance of this movement, and makes the reactions to it of other tendencies in Algerian public life incomprehensible. For the Berberist movement has been a highly political affair from early on, and its impact on Algerian politics has been immense.

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<sup>16</sup> Amar ou Saïd (sometimes written Ammar Bensaïd) Boulifa (1870-1931) was the author notably of *Recueil de poesies berbères*, Algiers : Jourdan, 1905; *Méthode de langue kabyle, cours de deuxième année*, Algiers: Jourdan, 1913; *Le Djurdjura à travers l'histoire: organisation et indépendance des Zouaoua*, Algiers : J. Bringau, 1925.

<sup>17</sup> Salem Chaker, 'Documents sur les précurseurs: A.S. Boulifa et M. A. Lechani', in S. Chaker, ed., *Berbères: une identité en construction*, special issue of *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 44 (October 1987), 97-115.

<sup>18</sup> Jean (El-Mouhoub) Amrouche was the son of Kabyle parents converted to Christianity; his mother, Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche, wrote a remarkable autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* (Paris, 1968; republished by La Découverte, 2000). A prominent figure in Franco-Algerian letters in the last three decades of the colonial era, he was the author notably of *Chants berbères de Kabylie*, Paris, 1939, republished in Paris by L'Harmattan in 1986, and of the famous essay, 'L'éternel Jugurtha: propositions sur le génie africain', *L'Arche* (Paris), 13 (1946), 58-70; his sister Marie-Louise (Marguerite Taos) Amrouche was the author of *Le grain maïque*, Paris: F. Maspero, 1966 (republished by La Découverte, 1994) and other works; a remarkable singer, she produced a celebrated album entitled *Chants berbères de Kabylie* in 1965.

<sup>19</sup> Mammeri, who tragically died in a car accident on February 25, 1989, is widely regarded as the intellectual giant of Algerian Berberism, the author of numerous novels (in French), notably *La colline oubliée*, Paris: Plon, 1952; *Le sommeil du juste*, Paris: Plon, 1955; *L'opium et le baton*, Paris: Plon, 1965; as well as the editor of important collections of Kabyle poetry, *Les isefra: poèmes de Si Mohand ou M'Hand*, Paris: Maspero, 1969 and *Poèmes kabyles anciens*, Paris: Maspero, 1980; he held the chair of Berber at the University of Algiers from 1967 until this was abolished in the early 1970s; from March 1969, he was also the director of the Centre de Recherche en Anthropologie Préhistorique et Ethnographique (CRAPE) at Algiers, in which capacity he inspired many other researchers and especially oversaw research on the various Berber dialects in Algeria and the production of dictionaries.

<sup>20</sup> Salem Chaker is professor of Berber at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) in Paris and has been the director of its Centre de Recherches Berbères since this was established in 1990. He is the author of numerous studies in Berber linguistics and other more general works, notably *Berbères aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1989 (republished by L'Harmattan, 1998) and *Une décennie d'études berbères, 1980-1990*, Algiers: Bouchène, 1992.



The term 'Berberist' first gained wide currency in 1948-1949 when it was employed by the leadership of the main Algerian nationalist party, the *Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques* (MTLD - a legal front for the banned and accordingly clandestine *Parti du Peuple Algérien*, PPA) to refer to, and stigmatise, a dissident minority, led by a certain Rachid Ali Yahia, within the leadership of the PPA-MTLD - and especially its French extension, the *Fédération de France du MTL*D, of which Ali Yahia was the secretary - which had put forward the notion of '*l'Algérie Algérienne*' in opposition to the longstanding orthodoxy of the PPA-MTLD that the Algerian nation was properly defined as '*l'Algérie arabo-musulmane*'.

The concept of 'Arabo-Muslim Algeria' withheld explicit recognition from the Berber aspects of Algerian society and culture. By proposing 'Algerian Algeria', the dissidents were not explicitly denying either the Arab or the Muslim elements of the national culture, but were contesting the definition of the nation in terms of these two elements, and were thus holding out for an entirely open conception, within which the Berber elements of Algerian society and culture might be at least tacitly acknowledged.

Although they were not advancing an exclusively Berber conception of the nation (such as might have been expressed in the slogan *l'Algérie berbère*, for example), the dissidents were denounced as 'Berberists' for their pains, and this for a combination of two reasons. First, as Kabyles, they were, in fact, Berbers. And, second, in challenging the nationalist orthodoxy of 'Arabo-Muslim Algeria', they were open to being seen, and were certainly portrayed, as dividing the nationalist movement in the face of the enemy along precisely the same fault line which French colonialism had perennially exploited in its strategy of dividing the Algerians, namely the Kabyle-Arab dichotomy.<sup>21</sup>

For Berberism in its inception was a peculiarly Kabyle affair. In addition to Ali Yahia and his associates, all the figures mentioned earlier as having played leading roles in the development of the Berberism as an intellectual and cultural movement, from Boulifa to Matoub, have been Kabyles. And, while it would be a mistake to define Algerian Berberism as an exclusively Kabyle movement, since there is in principle nothing to stop a Shawi Berber from the Aurès or an Ibadi Berber from the Mzab, etc. (to look no further) from developing a 'Berberist' outlook and several Shawi and Mzabi intellectuals have done so in recent years, it has in fact remained an overwhelmingly Kabyle affair.

I explained in detail over twenty years ago why this should be the case,<sup>22</sup> and will not repeat this explanation here beyond mentioning the most immediate element of it, the fact that the French language replaced Arabic as the second language of the Kabyles in the course of the colonial period (primarily as a consequence of the impact of mass labour migration to France from the first world war onwards), whereas this never happened in the Aurès or the Mzab. But it may be noted that developments since the early 1980s have thoroughly confirmed my

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent study of the development and exploitation of the Kabyle-Arab dichotomy in French colonial ideology and policy, see Patricia M.E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Hugh Roberts, 'Towards an understanding of the Kabyle question in contemporary Algeria', *The Maghreb Review*, V, 5-6, September-December 1980, 115-124; 'The unforeseen development of the Kabyle question in contemporary Algeria', *Government and Opposition*, XVII, 3 (Summer 1982), 312-334; 'The economics of Berberism: the material basis of the Kabyle question in contemporary Algeria', *Government and Opposition*, XVIII, 2 (Spring 1983), 218-235; see also my doctoral thesis, *Political development in Algeria: the region of Greater Kabylia*, D.Phil., Oxford University, 1980, published as *Algerian socialism and the Kabyle question*, University of East Anglia, Monographs in Development Studies, No. 8, 1981.

original assessment of Berberism in Algeria as an essentially Kabyle affair. For, when the advent of the pluralist constitution in 1989 permitted virtually all points of view in Algerian society to express themselves in the party-political sphere, it was striking that neither the Shawiyya nor the Mzabis supported the Berberist position as developed by the Kabyle-based RCD, nor did they secrete Berberist parties of their own. The Mzabis (whose particularism is as much a function of their religious specificity - their adherence to the Ibadi variant of Kharejism - as of their Berber speech) voted for independent candidates in 1990 and 1991, and the Shawiyya scorned particularist political options altogether, voting in more or less equal numbers for the establishment FLN and its main challenger, the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS), in 1990, and for the most part either abstaining or voting FIS in 1991.

In other words, neither the Shawiyya nor the Mzabis have been disposed to contest the official definition of the Algerian nation as *l'Algérie arabo-musulmane*. In voting for their own independent candidates, the Mzabis were unobtrusively expressing and defending their particular interests while abstaining from contesting the self-definition of the larger whole within which they are situated. And in voting for the FLN or the FIS, the Shawiyya were voting for alternative political expressions of broadly the same conception - or at most choosing between closely related conceptions - of the nation.<sup>23</sup> Only the Kabyles have been disposed to canvass and support a politics which vehicles a conception of their identity which is explicitly at odds with the official conception.

This conception is not only opposed to the official conception at the level of abstract ideas, it is clearly subversive of the unity of the Algerian nation-state as this was constituted at the end of the war of national liberation in 1962. Why, then, should the Kabyles have been allowed to express this subversive outlook? Why should Algeria's rulers have indulged the Berberist point of view since 1989, when the nationalist leadership acted decisively to suppress it in 1949? Part of the answer to this question is to be found in the ambiguity, if not confusion, at the heart of Kabyle Berberism.

### ***Language and identity, 1948-1980***

'Berber' is primarily a linguistic category. Ethnically, nearly all Algerians might be described as Berbers, in that the number of Arabs who came to Algeria in the 7th and 11th centuries was relatively small, and these intermarried freely with the native Berber population, such that most Algerians for many generations past have been descended from, among others, Berber ancestors, whatever language they have since come to speak.<sup>24</sup> As a result, in recent times the term 'Berber' has had a clear meaning, in opposition to 'Arab', only in respect of

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<sup>23</sup> I have distinguished elsewhere between the 'Arabo-Muslim' conception of the Algerian identity – *l'Algérie arabo-musulmane* - favoured by the nationalist movement prior to independence and by the FLN-state after 1962 from the Islamist conception – *l'Algérie islamique* – canvassed by the radical Islamist movement, notably by the FIS since 1989; see my article 'Historical and unhistorical approaches to the problem of identity in Algeria', *Bulletin of Francophone Africa*, 4 (Autumn 1993), 79-92. However, there has always been a good deal of overlap between the two. The difference is that the champions of the Arabo-Muslim conception have tended to be emphatic about the political implications of the 'Arab' aspect of this (viz. the Arabisation policy) while far vaguer about the implications of the 'Muslim' aspect; with the Islamist conception of the national identity, this distribution of certainty and vagueness is to some extent reversed in a vigorous insistence on the need for an Islamic state accompanied by a somewhat less doctrinaire attitude towards language policy, which while championing Arabic has tended to be open-minded about *Thamazighth*.

<sup>24</sup> We should not overlook the importance of specifically Arab ancestry in the case of certain elements of the Algerian population, especially the Beduin tribes of the High Plateaux and parts of the Sahara, a substantial number of which are able to claim descent from the Hilalian invaders of the 11th century with some conviction.

that element of the Algerian population which has continued to speak one or another dialect of the Berber language as its mother tongue, an element which is probably at least 20 per cent but no more than 25 per cent of the total.

If 'Berberism' was essentially a movement asserting the right to official recognition of the Berber language, one could understand it primarily as the expression of an entirely natural material interest, and one which Algeria's rulers might have found it both possible and politic to accommodate. But not only did the nationalist leadership in 1949, and the rulers of independent Algeria from 1962 to 1978, refuse any compromise with 'Berberism' along these lines, but leading advocates of the Berberist cause during the 1980s denied that their movement vehicled a material interest at all, insisting instead that it vehicled a distinctive identity, and explicitly counter-posing the question of identity to that of material interest.<sup>25</sup> This view of the matter has received sustained and voluble endorsement in French media coverage and academic commentary. It has become a commonplace of contemporary French discussion of Algeria's painful crisis to assert that this crisis is a crisis of identity, and, moreover, one which concerns all Algerians equally, and by no means the Berbers, still less the Kabyles, alone.

There is a definite logic in this view. To assert that Berberism expresses a preoccupation with identity, and to observe that the Kabyles in particular have an identity problem, is to subvert the notion of Algerian identity. It is to deny that it is possible for the Kabyles, *qua* Berbers, to be content with their identity as Algerians, and thus to put in question the Algerian identity in general.

When I became aware, in the course of my field work in Kabylia in the mid-1970s, that the Kabyle question was far from resolved, and was, on the contrary, acquiring a far broader social basis in the Kabylia region and the Kabyle population than it had possessed in 1949,<sup>26</sup> I suggested that this change was due to the cultural implications of economic and social change in the region since independence, such that the Kabyle population as a whole had acquired a substantial material interest in the status of its mother tongue. I pointed out that, while there had long existed a Kabyle bourgeoisie, this bourgeoisie had both become more integrated and unified than before as economic development had expanded and unified the Kabyle market, and had acquired a stake in the Berber language agitation as the government's socialist and Arabisation policies had simultaneously reduced the scope for private sector entrepreneurs and made them more dependent than ever on the public sector bureaucracy, in which Kabyle representation was severely threatened by the progress of Arabisation.<sup>27</sup> I accordingly argued that the new wave of 'Berberism' which began to develop as an agitational movement in Kabylia from the mid-1970s onwards vehicled, at bottom, the interest of the Kabyle bourgeoisie, but that this agitation was well able to mobilise public opinion in general by virtue of kinship links which easily transcended class distinctions, and that the government accordingly had an interest in conceding the demand for official recognition of the Berber language, in order to disarm the development of a politics which was simultaneously subversive of national unity and inimical to its socialist policies.

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<sup>25</sup> Salem Chaker, 'Critique d'un mythe: à propos des bases sociales du mouvement berbère', *Tafsut*, No. 2, 1985, pp. 39-52.

<sup>26</sup> The nationalist leadership had no difficulty in securing the services of locally influential Kabyle activists to suppress the Berberist tendency in Kabylia in 1949, whereas matters were very different in this respect in 1980.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts (1980 & 1983).

That the Algerian authorities proved incapable of adopting this position is not, in itself, proof that my analysis was mistaken. But the behaviour of the Berberists themselves since 1980 might be thought to be another matter. For while it is incontrovertible that the scale of popular support in Kabylia for the Berberist agitation in 1980 and thereafter has confirmed my assessment of the degree and character of social change in the region since 1962, the actual perspectives of the leading Berberists over the last twenty-one years have not been significantly different from their predecessors in 1949, in that the status of the Berber language has not been their real concern.

That the status of the Kabyle (or, more broadly, Berber) language was not really at issue in 1949 is clear from two facts.

First, the 'Berberist' advocates of *l'Algérie algérienne* made no practical proposal that the leadership of the PPA-MTLD might consider in respect of this status. As Omar Carlier has pointed out, they did not suggest that the nationalist conception of the Algerian nation might be modified to accommodate Kabyle concern over the language issue, by substituting the notion of *l'Algérie arabo-berbère et musulmane* for the notion of *l'Algérie arabo-musulmane*, nor did they put forward any other constructive suggestion.<sup>28</sup> Two other options which were open to them to canvass were the idea of *l'Algérie arabo-berbère* (i.e. dropping the explicit reference to Islam while keeping Arabic and Berber on an equal footing) or *l'Algérie musulmane* (affirming the nation's Muslim character while keeping the Arabic and Berber languages on an equal footing by omitting explicit references to either of them). The 'Berberists' did none of these things. They merely challenged the long-standing (and widely accepted) conception of the cultural content of Algeria nationality in the name of a conception which had no specific cultural content at all.

Second, while Carlier provides a sociological and historical explanation for the fact that some Kabyle intellectuals should, by 1949, have developed an outlook which put them at odds with the mainstream of Algerian nationalism, a point he neglects to mention is that the person who, more than any other at that time, personified a developing Kabyle interest in the Berber language, Mohand Amokrane Khelifati, was not one of the 'Berberists' in 1949, but was, on the contrary, enlisted by Kabyle opponents of the 'Berberist' grouping in an effort to induce them to abandon their agitation before it did serious damage to the unity of the nationalist party as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Khelifati accepted this commission, and traveled from Kabylia to Paris to do what he could but, in a context of factional mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, his arguments made no impression on Ali Yahia & Co. All of which suggests that the status of the Berber language was not a priority for the first wave of Berberists in 1949.

What of the second wave, the class of 1980? At first sight, it would appear that the language issue was not merely central to the latter's preoccupations, but that it was their only preoccupation. Not only did Berberist demonstrators in 1980 make clear their hostility to the government's Arabisation policy, the movement equally vigorously canvassed the claims of the Berber language, *Thamazighth*. But, as I pointed out at the time, the movement, while united in what it opposed, was far from coherent in its positive proposals.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Omar Carlier, 'Nationalisme et identité: la crise "Berbériste" de 1949', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* 1984, 347-371, reprinted in O. Carlier, *Entre Nation et Jihad: histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995, pp.240-270.

<sup>29</sup> Hocine Aït Ahmed, *Mémoires d'un combattant*, Paris: Sylvie Messenger, 1983, pp. 180-181.

<sup>30</sup> Roberts (1980), p.123.

Three distinct currents could be identified, I suggested. The first, which I called ‘cultural-pluralist’, was inclined to accept the government’s policy of Arabisation on condition that the state also accepted, and made room for, the claims of Berber as a second national language. A second current, which I called ‘Amazigh-revivalist’, took a very different view, bitterly attacking the ‘cultural-pluralists’ for implicitly dividing the Algerian nation, which it insisted was intrinsically and uniformly Berber<sup>31</sup> in origin and character, irrespective of what languages were now spoken by its members, while simultaneously opposing the Arabisation policy on the grounds that it involved the importation and imposition on all Algerians of an alien language (i.e. Middle Eastern Arabic) at the expense of both of the languages native to Algeria - colloquial Algerian Arabic and Berber. Neither current had developed any serious position in respect of the practical realisation of their demands. In particular, neither had addressed the question of how Berber was to be taught or how public administration was to function in Berber, and neither had addressed the question of how the differences between the various Berber dialects - differences which are quite substantial as well as long-established<sup>32</sup> - might be transcended in a standardised Berber language capable of being taught, learned and used across the country.

In contrast to these two tendencies, a third tendency could be identified, I suggested, which, instead of promoting the particular claims of Berber in one way or another, was demanding something else altogether, namely the democratisation or at least liberalisation of Algerian public life. An implication of this demand, however, was that the language issue should cease to be an affair of public policy. I accordingly called this position ‘*laissez-faire*’, and I suggested that it was in reality the most radical of the three, since it clearly presupposed not a change of policy on the part of the régime, but the end of its dictatorial character and the advent of a liberal-democratic constitution and form of government within which cultural matters would cease to be the object of authoritarian social engineering.

### ***Culture and democracy, 1980-1989***

While the conflicts between these various points of view can hardly be said to have been sorted out in the years after the 1980 upheaval, the third, democratic, tendency seemed to be making most headway by the mid-1980s. As government crack-downs on Berberist agitation

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<sup>31</sup> That is, ‘*Amazigh*’, the term many Berbers now use to refer to themselves; *Amazigh* (whence, for the language, *Thamazighth*) literally means ‘free man’, plural: *Imazighen*. It is only since the advent of the second wave of Berberism in the mid- to late 1970s that Berbers have begun to use the terms *Amazigh*, *Imazighen* and *Thamazighth* in this way. Previously, Algerian Berbers invariably referred to themselves merely as *Leqbail* (Kabyles), speakers of *Thaqbailith*, or *Ishawiyen* (Shawiya), speakers of *Thashawiyith*, etc., and the term *Imazighen* was used only in Morocco, where it refers to the Berbers of the Middle Atlas and the Central and Eastern High Atlas, who speak a dialect known locally as *Thamazighth*, to distinguish them from the Shleuh Berbers and the *Thashelhith* dialect of the Western High Atlas and the Sous.

<sup>32</sup> These dialects are themselves internally diverse; in Algeria the Kabyle dialect - *Thaqbailith* - is internally diversified into the dialect of Greater Kabylia, the dialect of Lesser Kabylia and the dialect of the Chenoua massif; see Abderrazak Dourari, ‘Malaises linguistiques et identitaires en Algérie’, *Anadi: Revue d’Études Amazighes*, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, No. 2 (June 1997), 17-42, page 18. As Dourari also notes, the Tuareg Berbers of the central Sahara speak at least four recognisably distinct sub-dialects - *Thahaggarth* (the dialect of the Kel Ahaggar), *Thairth*, the dialect of the Kel Air, *Thadghaq*, the dialect of the Kel Adghagh and *Thawllemet*, the dialect of the Iwllmeden; in addition there are the dialect of the Mzabi Berbers, *Thamzabith* and that of the Oued Righ, Touggourt and Ouargla - *Tharighit*. Dourari neglects to mention that there are also several distinct dialects or sub-dialects of *Thashawiyith*, the language of the Shawiya (Chaouia) Berbers of the high plains of the Sud-Constantinois and the Aurès and Nememcha mountains in south-eastern Algeria, whose Berber speech subdivides into the distinct sub-dialects of the Harakta, the Nememcha, the Aït Frah, etc. Indeed, this list probably understates the extent of the linguistic fragmentation of Algerian Berbers.

yielded successive crops of political prisoners from 1980 onwards, a vigorous human-rights agitation developed which began to put the régime and its authoritarian attitudes on the defensive, while the régime's monopoly of historical and revolutionary legitimacy was challenged by a new movement called the Association of the Children of Martyrs (*Association des Enfants de Chouhada*) - that is, the orphaned children of men and women who were killed fighting for Algeria during the war. The point about this association was that, in addition to contesting the régime's monopoly of historic legitimacy, it also breached the Party's formal monopoly of public life, and did so flagrantly, thereby setting a dangerous precedent, as the authorities certainly realised, since they acted promptly to suppress it.

But these two developments were significant from another point of view. Kabyles were prominent in the leadership of both the Association of the Children of Martyrs and the fledgling human rights movement. A leading spokesman for the former was Noureddine Aït Hamouda, son of the legendary Kabyle guerrilla commander Colonel Amirouche.<sup>33</sup> And the effective leader of the human rights movement was Abdennour Ali Yahia, a well known lawyer who also happened to be of the same family as Rachid Ali Yahia, the leader of the class of '49.<sup>34</sup> But, unlike the language and cultural agitations, the agitations conducted by these latter movements tended to link Kabyles to non-Kabyles and non-Berbers, whereas the specifically linguistic and culturalist agenda of the other movement tended to politicise and reinforce the Kabyle-Arab dichotomy and seal up their adepts in a specifically Kabyle political ghetto.

It can therefore be seen that two main tendencies were developing in Kabylia throughout the 1980s. The Berberist tendency, organised in the initially clandestine Berber Cultural Movement (*Mouvement Culturel Berbère*, MCB), was one, and the liberal-democratic tendency, organised in particular in Ali Yahia's Algerian League for Human Rights (*Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme*, LADH), was the other. Despite a degree of overlap between the two, the first tended to isolate the Kabyles and bottle them up in a preoccupation with their own identity, whereas the second tended to emancipate them from the particularist ghetto and enable them to contribute to a broader, potentially nation-wide, challenge to the régime on the basis of democratic principles. For, while the authorities cracked down on Ali Yahia's organisation, they were obliged to bow to public pressure on the human rights issue to the extent of sponsoring a tame, official, League of their own,<sup>35</sup> and, since it would have been self-evident nonsense for even this officially-sponsored League to come under the supervision of the Party, they allowed it to operate outside the Party's umbrella, thereby making the first formal breach in the Party's monopoly of public life, a development which, as many people understood at the time, was the thin end of the wedge, as was subsequently confirmed by a Law on Associations which further subverted the Party's authority in 1987.

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<sup>33</sup> Amirouche Aït Hamouda (1926-1959), from Tassaft Ouaguemoun in the central Jurjura, was the commander of the *Armée de Libération Nationale* in wilaya III (Kabylia) from July 1957 until his death in action in March 1959. He is a national hero. Numerous towns, including Algiers, have streets named after him; a lycée at Tizi Ouzou bears his name.

<sup>34</sup> The Ali Yahia family is from Taka, in the Aït Yahia tribe north of Aïn El Hammam in the Jurjura region of Greater Kabylia. The fact that Abdennour Ali Yahia is related to Rachid Ali Yahia does not necessarily have political significance. Unlike Rachid, Abdennour Ali Yahia was active in the national revolution, notably in the leadership of the nationalist trade union, the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens* (UGTA) and served in both Ben Bella's and Boumediène's governments in the 1960s before falling out with Boumediène in 1967, since when he had concentrated on his legal practice in Algiers.

<sup>35</sup> This was led by Miloud Brahimi (brother of the distinguished diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi), and adopted the same name as Ali Yahia's organization, which of course had by then been suppressed.

This is how matters stood when the balloon went up in October 1988, when riots on an unprecedented scale erupted in Algiers and spread to numerous other towns, in the wake of which President Chadli and his colleagues decided to embark on a major programme of 'reforms', chief among which, it transpired in February 1989, was the complete abolition of the Party's monopoly with the introduction of a pluralist constitution.

One might have thought that the advent of a pluralist, and potentially liberal, constitution would have vindicated the perspectives of the democratic tendency in Kabylia and signaled the eclipse - or at least the marginalisation - of the Berberist tendency. This is not what happened at all. While the independent human rights movement was able to operate in the open at last,<sup>36</sup> the main development was that of a new political party, the RCD, led by a certain Dr Saïd Sadi, which, as an offshoot primarily of the MCB, came from the Berberist rather than the democratic tendency in Kabyle politics, and which, far from enabling the Kabyles to join with their fellow-Algerians on the basis of a democratic platform of some kind, gave renewed expression to Kabyle particularism and reinforced the Kabyle-Arab dichotomy by giving this dichotomy an entirely new content.

This content was secularism. While the RCD took over from the MCB the long-standing concern with the Berber language, it added two other concerns which were new: a commitment to a modernist and egalitarian attitude to the position of women in Algerian society, and a commitment to what it called '*la laïcité*', by which it meant, as Dr Sadi repeatedly made clear, the principle of the separation of religion from politics. While it formally gave equal billing to each of these three planks in its platform (Berber language, women's rights, secularism), it unquestionably tended to give priority to the third (and to treat the second as ancillary to the third). The RCD's spokesman who announced the party's formation in February 1989 had defined its purpose as "to bar the road to theocratic ambitions" ("*barrer la route aux velléités théocratiques*"),<sup>37</sup> and it very soon became clear that the principal purpose of the RCD was to resist and oppose the Islamist movement in Algeria. The language issue had clearly been superseded by other preoccupations.

Formally, it might be argued, the RCD was not so much a continuation of the Berberist movement as its gravedigger. It combined in its name - Rally for *Culture* and *Democracy* - the central ideas of both tendencies in Kabyle politics, in both of which, moreover, its leader, Dr Sadi, had been personally prominent,<sup>38</sup> but it might be thought to have given priority to the second of these, and certainly its activity entirely marginalised the MCB from which it sprang. It might thus be considered to have been the negation of Berberism within Berberism, or at least the negation of Berberism at the point of exit from Berberism. But this view of the matter only holds good if Berberism is defined in terms of a primary preoccupation with the status of the Berber language.

There were certainly many people in the MCB who were in earnest about the language issue, and these activists were mostly opposed to the formation of the RCD, on the grounds that the language issue should be canvassed with all parties, and that supporters of Berber language rights should not alienate potential support in the various political parties by posing an

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<sup>36</sup> Although Ali Yahia was finally allowed to conduct his human rights activities within the law, he was obliged to rename his organization the *Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*, LADDH, since the original name continued to be retained by its state-sponsored rival

<sup>37</sup> 'Des berbéristes ont formé un embryon de parti légal', *Le Monde*, February 15, 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Sadi was a founder member of both the MCB and the original LADH.

electoral threat to any of them.<sup>39</sup> But the point is that this wholly cogent objection was easily brushed aside. The RCD was set up, and virtually all of its leadership and cadres came out of the MCB, and most of the element of Kabyle opinion which had previously followed the *mots d'ordre* of the MCB made the transition to following the *mots d'ordre* of the RCD without the slightest difficulty, despite the fact that the *mots d'ordre* had changed. And when the rump of the MCB, led precisely by those who had opposed the formation of the RCD, tried to keep their movement going by organizing a demonstration on the language issue in Algiers in January 1990, the RCD leadership vigorously opposed the demonstration and tried to sabotage it.<sup>40</sup> (By the time the MCB was revived in 1991, it had been taken over by the RCD and was led by RCD activists and functioned as a docile satellite of the party, in sharp contrast to its earlier robust independence of political connections.) Thus the language issue had never been the principal preoccupation of the majority of the second wave of Kabyle Berberists any more than it had been the principal preoccupation of the first wave.

One might also argue that, in making secularism its principal plank, the RCD was endeavouring to escape from the ghetto of Kabyle particularism, and was taking up an issue on which it could hope to elicit support across the country. But, if the founders of the RCD originally entertained such expectations, their illusory nature should have been brought home to them by the results of the municipal and regional elections in June 1990; for, while RCD candidates polled moderately well in Kabylia,<sup>41</sup> they failed dismally everywhere else.<sup>42</sup> These elections established what should have been known well in advance, that an explicitly secularist position could not hope to win significant popular support outside Kabylia, and that for the RCD to adopt this position was in fact to condemn itself to being just another expression of Kabyle particularism in the eyes of the greater part of Algerian public opinion. That a concern to escape from the Kabyle ghetto was not a priority for the RCD's leaders was made clear by their persistence with secularist positions after June 1990.

Thus the RCD was not a negation of Kabyle Berberism at all, merely a *mutation* of it. With the RCD, Berberism became a distinct political party operating openly and within the law, and redefined its purpose in terms, not of the language issue, but of the religious issue. In claiming to represent Kabyle opinion, and in taking its stand on the question of *la laïcité*, the RCD identified the Kabyles with secularism. And it thereby gave the Kabyle-Arab dichotomy in Algerian political history a new lease of life, and a new and virulent content.

In doing this, the RCD was arguably acting against the formal spirit of the constitution.<sup>43</sup> But, since the Chadli régime nevertheless decided to legalise the RCD when it could have chosen

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<sup>39</sup> Salem Mezhoud: 'Glasnost the Algerian way: the role of Berber nationalists in political reform', in George Joffé, ed., *North Africa: Nation, State and Region*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.162. This article, based on a conference paper given in 1989, testifies most eloquently to the democratic aspirations which motivated many Kabyle Berberists and the illusions they entertained in respect of the democratic potential of the identity-centred agitation which mobilised them.

<sup>40</sup> Alain Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie XIX-XX siècles: anthropologie historique du lien social dans les communautés villageoises*, Algiers: Éditions Bouchène, 2001, p.499.

<sup>41</sup> Notably in taking control of 31 out of the 52 municipalities in the wilaya of Bejaia and 44 of the 66 municipalities in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou; it did so, however, on the basis of a majority share of a very low turnout, and thus effectively won by default.

<sup>42</sup> While picking up a few stray municipal council (Assemblée Populaire Communale, APC) seats here and there, the RCD won control of only one APC outside the Kabylia region (Bouzina, in the Aurès).

<sup>43</sup> Article 40 of the 1989 constitution recognized the right to form "associations of a political character", which was promptly interpreted to mean political parties, but had then stipulated that "This right, nonetheless, cannot be invoked in order to undermine fundamental freedoms, national unity, the integrity of the territory, the independence of the country or the sovereignty of the people" (see *El Moudjahid*, February 5, 1989, which



not to, the RCD cannot be said to have acted against the purpose of the constitution. It was for the author of the constitution to decide what its purpose was, after all, and the author of the constitution was the Chadli régime. And in legalising the RCD, the Chadli régime was demonstrating to those with eyes to see that the democratisation of the Algerian state was not among its purposes.

### *The RCD and democracy, part I*

The existence of the RCD as a legal political party was conditional on the existence of the pluralist constitution of 1989. One might have thought that it would have recognised its interest in the preservation of this constitution, and confined its democratic ambitions to this end, supplemented perhaps by the canvassing of further specific reforms such as would tend to consolidate the great formal change that had occurred with the advent of pluralism and, by thus ensuring that this change was a matter of political substance rather than merely constitutional form, make it irreversible. Such reforms might have included enhanced powers for the legislature, the independence of the judiciary, legal guarantees of press freedom, freedom of information, the freedom to organise independent trade unions, freedoms of various other kinds in the economic sphere, institutions to protect human rights and civil liberties (e.g. an Ombudsman, specialist tribunals and courts of appeal, etc.), and so on and so forth. A party which put forward proposals of this kind and campaigned energetically for them would have lived up to its 'Democratic' name. But the RCD did not do any of this. What it did was to call for '*la laïcité d'État*', that is the abolition of Islam's status as the official religion of the state.

By doing this, and making this its central proposal and the basis of its appeal to the electorate, the RCD charted a course which tended to subvert the 1989 pluralist constitution instead of consolidating it. Instead of taking this constitution as the ground for subsequent development, it immediately made an issue of this constitution on the grounds that it was not a secular constitution. This behaviour had several profound effects.

First, it galvanised the Islamists into forming a party of their own. The RCD was not set up in reaction to the FIS, it was set up before the FIS had been founded. It was the FIS which was set up in reaction to the RCD.<sup>44</sup> While it is entirely possible that Algeria's diffuse Islamist movement would have crystallised into a unified political party anyway, it remains the case that it did so only after the RCD had announced its programme and purpose, and that it did so very soon after, and in reaction to, this event.

Second, it helped ensure that the newly established party-political sphere was ideologically polarised from the outset between the FIS and itself, that is between parties canvassing alternative, extremely doctrinaire, conceptions of the constitution, both of which (*dawla islamiyya*, '*la laïcité d'État*') were radical alternatives to, and therefore by implication subversive of, the actual constitution. It thereby helped to ensure that political debate thereafter would focus on rival constitutional proposals, and moreover proposals of a far-fetched if not utopian nature, instead of rival programmes for government, and that the

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published the full text of the draft constitutional revisions). In so far as the RCD was politicising the Kabyle - Arab dichotomy, it was certainly open to the reproach that it was undermining national unity.

<sup>44</sup> The creation of the FIS was formally announced in Algiers on March 9, 1989; the decision to found the party had been taken earlier and was informally announced on February 21, 1989 (*Le Monde*, February 23, 1989); the formation of the RCD had already been announced on February 11 (see note 37 above), having occurred the previous day.

climate in which these proposals would be discussed would be one of mounting hysteria and incipient violence.

Third, in addition to identifying the Kabyles with secularism, the RCD ensured that both the cause of democracy and, more modestly, opposition to the Islamist agenda of the FIS would be split along secularist/non-secularist lines. There is no doubt whatever that a majority of Algerians, while self-consciously Muslim and even devout, were resistant to the Islamists' appeal at first. Were the democratic priority of priorities, as the RCD defined it, "to bar the road to theocratic ambitions" (i.e. *no pasarán!*), then it followed that the thing to do was to preserve and maximise the unity of non-Islamists in Algerian politics. This could only have been done on the basis of defence of the existing constitution, including its provision that Islam was the state religion, a provision which had been in place since 1963 and had never connoted the subjection of the population to theocratic government, for the excellent reason that what it had really implied was the subordination of Algeria's religious leaders to the nation-state (as many Islamists bitterly complained), and thus the curbing of religious enthusiasm in the political sphere. To argue for the dis-establishment of religion was to split the non-Islamist majority, and to identify not only democracy but all opposition to the Islamists with secularism. And since Islam has always been an intensely public religion, to identify democracy or any kind of resistance to Islamism with secularism, namely the proposal that religious belief and observance should be reduced to a strictly private matter, that is, should be expelled from the public sphere, was to identify these things with a conception of the Islamic religion which many if not most self-respecting Muslims, and not merely radical Islamists, would be naturally disposed to consider as un-Islamic. In short, the RCD's position tended to identify both democracy and any and all resistance to the Islamists with *unbelief*, and thereby provided enormous support to the FIS's own position that democracy is *kufir* (infidel)<sup>45</sup> and that all sincere Muslims should support the Islamist agenda. And it did all this while simultaneously proposing that the state should disarm itself in the face of the Islamist challenge by abandoning its constitutional authority in the religious sphere.

Political parties accused of behaving in the face of the fascist enemy in Spain as the RCD behaved in the face of the Islamist enemy in Algeria were suppressed by the Republican government. But the Chadli régime did not suppress the RCD, it bent over backwards to facilitate it. While the draft Law on Political Associations submitted to the FLN-controlled National Assembly in July 1989 originally stipulated that parties based on an ethnic, regional or linguistic interests would not be allowed, this stipulation was promptly nullified by an amendment inserting the single word "exclusively" before these terms. As a result, the government was free to legalise the RCD, on the grounds that, although indisputably based on regional and linguistic (if not also ethnic) interests, it was not based "exclusively" on these. And having thus gone out of its way to legalise the RCD, the government saw to it that the state-controlled media thereafter gave every facility to its leaders to air their views.

### **The first manipulation**

It should now be clear what the initial manipulation of Berberism amounted to. I have already described elsewhere the way in which the Chadli régime deliberately manipulated the

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<sup>45</sup> See – as one illustration among many – the excerpt from one of the sermons of the FIS No. 2, Sheikh Ali Ben Hadj, published in *L'Express*, February 9, 1990.

Islamist movement in Algeria both in 1980-1982 and from 1989 onwards.<sup>46</sup> I have also explained what the motives of Chadli & Co. were in undertaking this audacious manoeuvre, how they sought to ensure that the FIS humiliated the FLN in June 1990 in order to be able to exploit this defeat as a pretext for purging the FLN of powerful factions opposed to the Chadli leadership, and thereafter convert the party into '*un parti présidentiel*' under firm Chadlist control, which would be discreetly helped to win the elections which really mattered, those for the National Assembly, when these were finally held in 1991. I have also explained how and why Chadli's enemies were able to turn the tables on him, and convert the FIS from an instrument of Chadli's strategy to an instrument of their own, and how this fatally disrupted Chadli's strategy and finally brought him down.<sup>47</sup>

It is in this context that we can understand why the Chadli régime deliberately connived at the formation of the RCD: it did so precisely because it counted on the RCD subsequently behaving as it did, because this was grist to the mill of its wider strategy of manipulating the Islamists.

It should already be clear in what way the activity and propaganda of the RCD was a gift to the FIS. But, while the reinforcement of the FIS, on the rebound, so to speak, was the main function of the RCD in the Chadlist strategy, the RCD performed at least two other functions. First, the RCD split the Kabyle electorate.

So far I have spoken of Berberism, and of the RCD mutation of Berberism, as if this was the only tendency within Kabyle politics. This is, of course, very far from being the case. Berberism was an affair of a small minority in Kabyle political circles in 1949, when the PPA-MTLD leaders had no difficulty in enlisting the services of Kabyle loyalists to suppress the Berberist dissidence. But Berberism was also a minority trend in Kabyle politics in the late 1980s. The FLN was present in Kabylia, for a start, and while much reduced in influence by 1989, it still managed to carry 16 APCs in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou in 1990 and 17 APCs in neighbouring Bejaia.<sup>48</sup> But more important than the FLN was a movement called the Socialist Forces Front (*Front des Forces Socialistes*, FFS).

The FFS was a far older party than the RCD, having been founded in 1963. Its leader, Hocine Aït Ahmed (born 1926), is widely recognised as having been a founder-member (one of the so-called 'nine historic chiefs') of the FLN in 1954, but he fell out with Ahmed Ben Bella at independence, and organised an armed uprising in Kabylia in September 1963 which lasted till June 1965. Aït Ahmed himself was captured in Kabylia in October 1964, sentenced to death, reprieved, sentenced to life imprisonment instead, and finally escaped into exile in 1966, where he remained until his party was legalised in 1989.

Aït Ahmed was far from being a Berberist. A leader of the younger generation of nationalist activists in Kabylia after 1945, he was elected to the PPA-MTLD Central Committee at the age of 21 in 1947 and was chosen to command the PPA's clandestine para-military

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh Roberts, 'From radical ambition to equivocal ambition: the expansion and manipulation of Algerian Islamism, 1979-1992', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *The Fundamentalism Project, Volume IV: Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences/University of Chicago Press, 1994a, pp.428-488.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts (1994a).

<sup>48</sup> For the detailed results of the 1990 APC elections, see *El Moudjahid* June 18, 19, 22-23, 24, 25, 26 and 27, 1990.

*Organisation Spéciale* (OS) in 1948.<sup>49</sup> As such, he viewed the Berberist agitation developed by Rachid Ali Yahia with horror, and it was he who asked Mohand Amokrane Khelifati to go to Paris to try to reason with Ali Yahia before things got out of hand.<sup>50</sup> He got no credit for this with the PPA leadership, however, and was one of the principal victims of the affair, since he was removed from the command of the OS in its wake, the PPA leader Messali Hadj later admitting that "*on a éliminé sans discernement des éléments gênants en les taxant de berbéristes*".<sup>51</sup>

The challenge he launched to Ben Bella in the 1963 revolt was not Berberist in character. Although the FFS found support primarily in Kabylia, it also had support amongst Arabophone Algerians in the Algérois, the Nord-Constantinois and the Sud-Oranais,<sup>52</sup> and in order to maximise the chances of securing this support, Aït Ahmed ensured that the FFS abstained from raising any demands of a Kabyle-particularist nature.<sup>53</sup> The basis of the FFS's opposition to Ben Bella was its objection to the régime's incipient authoritarianism, which had been made evident by its reduction of the National Assembly (in which Aït Ahmed sat) to a mere rubber stamp of the Party. The FFS appealed for a return to what Aït Ahmed (somewhat fancifully) portrayed as the 'democratic' traditions of the wartime FLN, and in particular called for a congress of the FLN to be held,<sup>54</sup> but took care not to engage in overt Berberist agitation of any kind.

Between 1966 and 1980, Aït Ahmed kept the FFS in being as an opposition movement based in exile, with an extensive network amongst Kabyle labour migrants in France, but with an underground network in Kabylia as well. By 1978, aware of the development of Berberist sentiments among the younger generation in Kabylia, the FFS had formally taken up the language claim as a matter of democratic principle. Although it did not start the agitation in Kabylia in 1980, it tried to provide political leadership to the movement. The key FFS representative in Kabylia in 1980 was none other than Saïd Sadi.<sup>55</sup>

It is not clear precisely when Sadi decided his own future lay outside Aït Ahmed's FFS, but he had certainly broken with the FFS long before 1989.<sup>56</sup> As a much younger man (born 1947), with an impressive record of activism behind him, a leading position in the MCB and something of a martyr's halo from a spell in jail in the 1980s, Sadi could expect to appeal to the younger generation of Kabyles for whom the FFS of yesteryear meant little or nothing.

From the point of view of the Chadli régime, however, there can be no doubt that it was Aït Ahmed who represented the real threat. As a former commander of the OS, a founder-

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<sup>49</sup> Although discovered and dismantled by the French in 1950, the OS was partially reconstituted in 1953 and was the source of all the activists who took part in the creation of the FLN in 1954. Its historic role as forerunner of the FLN is universally recognised in Algeria.

<sup>50</sup> Aït Ahmed (1983), p.180.

<sup>51</sup> Mohamed Harbi, *Aux Origines du FLN: le populisme révolutionnaire en Algérie*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1975, pp. 38-39.

<sup>52</sup> The FFS rebellion was supported by former maquisards led by Lakhdar Bouregaa in the Algérois, Moussa Hassani in the Nord-Constantinois and Mohamed Ben Ahmed (alias Si Moussa) in the Sud-Oranais.

<sup>53</sup> As some of his followers bitterly complained; see Mohamed Arab Bessaoud, *Le FFS: Espoir et Trahison*, Paris: Imprimerie Cary, 1966.

<sup>54</sup> See Hocine Ait Ahmed, *La Guerre et l'Après-Guerre*, Paris : Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1964, especially pp.165-204.

<sup>55</sup> Saïd Sadi, *Algérie, L'Heure de Vérité*, Paris : Flammarion, 1996, p.89.

<sup>56</sup> Sadi (1996), pp. 125-126, appears to situate this in 1982, but his account is less than wholly explicit or precise; in an official six-page biography of Sadi posted on the RCD's internet web-site, the parting of the ways is situated in "*début 1982*" ([www.rcd.asso.fr](http://www.rcd.asso.fr)).

member of the original FLN and a pioneer of the opposition to the régime in Algiers since independence, Aït Ahmed possessed a degree of both historic nationalist and democratic legitimacy which made him potentially a formidable proposition, someone potentially capable of galvanising and orchestrating a nation-wide democratic movement in conditions of political pluralism, given the discredit of the FLN and the scepticism with which most Algerians were initially disposed to view the Islamists. If Aït Ahmed had a free hand in his native Kabylia and were able as a result to take his Kabyle support base for granted, as a nationalist with an excellent command of the Arabic language and no Berberist tag to live down, he could hope to win significant support in other parts of the country and fatally disrupt Chadli's general strategy. To protect this strategy, it was vital to cause problems for Aït Ahmed in Kabylia, by encouraging a rival political force which, by threatening to deprive the FFS of an audience in Kabyle youth, would force Aït Ahmed to invest in Berberist themes in order to defend his home base and thereby compromise his prospects of appealing to non-Kabyles on a non-Berberist basis.

The promotion of Saïd Sadi's RCD was thus in Chadli's immediate interest in two respects: first, as a red rag to the Islamist bull and a source of secularist propaganda which played into the FIS's hands and, second, as a means of dividing the Kabyle electorate and thwarting Aït Ahmed's ambitions. That Aït Ahmed understood this is suggested by his decision not to contest the 1990 municipal and regional elections, allowing the RCD a free run in Kabylia against the FLN, and keeping his powder dry. While his decision was widely criticised on the grounds that the FFS boycott materially assisted the FIS in 1990, this criticism was entirely misguided, since the FIS was not contesting most of the Kabyle constituencies in any case, and the FFS's call for a boycott was certainly heeded in Kabylia as the turn-out in Tizi Ouzou (22.82 per cent) and Bejaia (27.0 per cent) indicated.<sup>57</sup>

The second additional function which the RCD performed was to provide rhetorical comfort for Chadli's position.

As I have explained elsewhere, a crucial aspect of Chadli's strategy was to deflect public criticism of the régime from his own performance (and that of his allies and cronies) on to the far broader and more abstract target of 'the FLN', and I have also explained how the FIS's propaganda suited Chadli's purposes admirably in this respect.<sup>58</sup> By denouncing "the thieves of the FLN" in general, and counterposing the allegedly corrupt and Godless FLN in power since 1962 to the allegedly devout and virtuous (because properly Muslim) FLN of the revolutionary war, the FIS was able both to posture as the legitimate heir of the wartime FLN and to serve Chadli's purposes by shielding him from personal criticism. The essential thing was to ensure that public opinion did not contrast the dismal and disappointing years of Chadli & Co. with the more successful and inspiring years of the Boumediène era. The FIS, which had no time for Boumediène, was happy to oblige.

What needs to be added is simply that the discourse of the RCD dovetailed perfectly with that of the FIS in this respect. "Trente ans de dérive" ("Thirty years of going off the rails") became a staple theme of Saïd Sadi's speeches, the argument being that, while the national revolution was, of course, a good thing, everything had gone wrong since Independence (just

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<sup>57</sup> Source: see note 48 above; the success of the boycott call was obviously, to a considerable extent, a measure of the FFS's potential electoral strength.

<sup>58</sup> Hugh Roberts, 'Doctrinaire economics and political opportunism in the strategy of Algerian Islamism' in John Ruedy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994b, p.139.

as the Islamists said), but for the opposite reason, namely the decision to make Islam the official religion of the state, with all that this supposedly entailed.

From Chadli's point of view, of course, it was all one: the problem with the Algerian state was systemic, it was not his fault in the least, and he and his allies and associates were not in the dock; on one count or another (for being insufficiently Islamic or excessively so) 'the FLN' was - whatever this acronym was understood to refer to exactly - and if public opinion was at sixes and sevens as to precisely why 'the FLN' was to be faulted, so much the better.

### *The RCD and democracy, part II, or the second manipulation*

By late 1991, however, the boot was on the other foot with a vengeance, and the results of the legislative elections, when these were finally held on December 26, were a comprehensive disaster for Chadli and his allies. Not only had the FIS won so handsomely on the first round that it was heading for a final tally of 75 per cent of the National Assembly seats, a result that would be used by the army as a pretext for Chadli's enforced resignation, in addition the RCD had been trounced in Kabylia.

By the time the elections were held, Aït Ahmed's FFS had had time to get its act together and overhaul the RCD, and in the election results it massively outdistanced its rival, polling some 500,000 votes to the RCD's 200,000 and winning all 25 seats decided on the first ballot in the Kabylia region,<sup>59</sup> while the FLN, despite its far larger vote nation-wide, secured only 16 seats on the first ballot. While the numerous awkward implications of the FIS's huge first-round lead were no doubt the main factor behind the army's decision to force Chadli to step down and to cancel the second round of the election scheduled for January 16, the prospect of Aït Ahmed emerging at last as the champion and chief rallying point for anti-Islamist opinion was also intolerable to it.

By cancelling the elections, the army thus killed (at least) two birds with one stone, and this development was, of course, extremely congenial to the RCD, which had nothing left to hope for from the continuation of the electoral process. The RCD accordingly threw itself behind the army, and devoted its energies to justifying the interruption of the democratic process in the name of democracy, a service which was naturally appreciated by the army commanders, while Aït Ahmed's FFS was forced into the position of denouncing the army's move as a coup, and contracting an alliance with both the FIS and the FLN, in defence of the democratic process. These alignments were to remain broadly in force for the next seven years, with the RCD providing consistent support, in the name of secularist and democratic principles, first to the cancellation of the elections, next to the dissolution of the FIS, and finally to the military campaign to 'eradicate' the Islamist rebellion which the decision to dissolve the FIS had inevitably provoked. In this way, the army was able to secure badly needed legitimation from the Berberist tendency in Kabylia, while simultaneously benefiting from the disarray in democratic ranks and the way in which the 'democratic' cause, by becoming identified with militarist repression, tended to discredit itself with all other sectors of Algerian opinion,

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<sup>59</sup> The FFS won 12 seats in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, 11 in Bejaia, one in Bouïra and one in Setif; in addition, FFS candidates were in first place on the second ballot in four constituencies (one each in the wilayât of Tizi Ouzou, Bouïra, Boumerdès and Setif) and in second place in a further 15 constituencies in seven different wilayât: Algiers (5), Bouïra (1), Boumerdès (3), Setif (1), Tindouf (1), Tipasa (1) and Tizi Ouzou (3); it had thus achieved an appreciable measure of success in eight wilayât in all. In contrast, the RCD won no seats at all, was in first place in only three constituencies, all in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, and in second place in two further constituencies, in Tizi Ouzou and Bouïra respectively; it had thus achieved a very mediocre measure of success in only two wilayât.

leaving the military régime to appear to many observers as the only convincing alternative to the armed Islamist movements, and vice versa.

The bitter irony in this turn of events should be self-evident. But, in case it isn't, consider the following. One of the three RCD candidates to get through to the second round in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou in 1991 was the singer Ferhat Mehenni, who represented the RCD in the constituency of Bouzeguen. Mehenni, popularly known simply by his first name Ferhat, is a well-known figure in contemporary Kabyle music. By 1991 he had also emerged as the new secretary of the MCB, reflecting the RCD's take-over of the movement (before this subsequently split along party lines into the *MCB-Coordination Nationale*, controlled by the RCD, and the *MCB-Commissions Nationales*, controlled by the FFS). As a singer in the early 1980s he had helped raise Berberist consciousness in numerous polemical songs. One of the most popular was called '*Berzidan*', an Algerian corruption of the French word *Président*; the song was an extremely sarcastic address to President Chadli (then busy putting Berberist activists in jail, where Ferhat himself joined them at one point in the mid-1980s). In French translation its opening lines, sung with heavy irony, are "*Le bonjour à Monsieur le Président, et au Pouvoir Militaire.*"<sup>60</sup> Less than a decade later Ferhat and his party were on the same side as '*le Pouvoir militaire*' and opposed to the continuation of the democratic process, and the extension of democratic rights to Islamists, in the name of democracy, and apparently not so disposed to ironise about things any longer.<sup>61</sup>

### ***The French connection***

Berberism as an organised political force is not primarily the expression of a will to defend and enhance the Berber element of Algerian culture or even of Kabyle culture. In the linguistic sphere, the Berber element of Algerian culture exists in a number of distinct dialects with their own linguistic forms and histories, as we have seen; it follows that the ambition to unify and standardise the Berber language in Algeria, supposing the Berberists themselves are in earnest about this, which remains to be demonstrated, would not be to the advantage of the Berber dialects which people actually speak, but at their expense. In reality, Berberist agitation on the language issue has done much more to impede the advance of Arabisation than to enhance the status of Berber, and in doing this it has, of course, worked to the advantage of the one written language that most Kabyles actually command, French.

In the political sphere, the demand for '*la laïcité d'État*' does not express a Berber tradition. All Berber political traditions have taken the public aspect and status of the Islamic faith for granted. Secularism, the radical separation of religion from politics, is not a Berber idea, it is a French idea. But it was not only when the Berberists took up secularism that they began to vehicle French political ideas, they have always done so.

The conception canvassed by Rachid Ali Yahia & Co. in 1949, *l'Algérie algérienne*, was a French conception. It is in France above all that the idea of the nation has been a political rather than a cultural idea, the idea of the democratic political community of free citizens whose status is independent of religious belief and other particular cultural stigmata, and who

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<sup>60</sup> In *Thaqbailith*, these lines are: "*Sbah l-khir i Berzidan/Win na ihekman S waaskeri*"

<sup>61</sup> At some point in 1994 or 1995, Ferhat broke with the RCD and the RCD-controlled wing of the MCB and, having tried without success to constitute a distinct version of the MCB detached from both the RCD and the FFS, appears subsequently to have lapsed into political inactivity. He has recently re-emerged as an advocate of autonomy for Kabylia, a proposition which is currently arousing some controversy but appears to enjoy very little support in Kabylia, as opposed to the Kabyle community in France, where it is making some headway (see below, note 80).

are French in virtue of their citizenship of the Republic rather than citizens in virtue of their French culture. The point about *l'Algérie algérienne* is that it was a notion entirely lacking in cultural content; it was thus an Algerian echo or imitation of the French conception of the nation.

But Algerian nationalism could not afford to base itself on French conceptions if it was to mobilise the Algerian people, let alone secure allies further afield. And the French conception it was actually confronting was not the French conception of France, but the French conception of Algeria. In the colonial context, the French conception of Algeria was an entirely cultural, if not tacitly racial, conception - *l'Algérie française* - in which the political community did not include all and sundry on the basis of the principles of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, but precisely excluded the Muslim population and penalised the Arab language. To posit 'Algerian Algeria' was to indulge in a pedantic imitation of a French conception (the French conception of *France*) while evading the real issue. And, *mutatis mutandis*, that is exactly what the second wave of Berberists, having mutated into the RCD, have done since 1989, indulging in French-inspired phrase-mongering in defiance of Algerian political realities.

It can therefore be seen that, far from the expression of Berber cultural identity, political Berberism in Algeria is primarily the expression of the French element of the Kabyle worldview and identity as these have developed through contact with French culture in the colonial context from 1830 (and essentially from 1914), and in the post-colonial context since 1962, and articulates a fixed idea that there can be no alternative to French models of political modernity (other models - including Western ones - of political modernity being systematically ignored), a fixed idea which, by vehicling and reproducing the master-pupil relationship, betrays the persistence of a colonial inferiority complex.<sup>62</sup>

It is this – its true nature – which explains why it was possible for the RCD to agree to join the coalition of parties supporting the Bouteflika presidency in July 1999. It is not only that Bouteflika was widely perceived, with reason, as enjoying the sponsorship of certain powerful generals (especially Larbi Belkheir and Khaled Nezzar), who were publicly identified with the Francophile outlook and with whom the RCD leaders had long been on intimate terms, and who may reasonably be supposed to have prompted the RCD to make this move.<sup>63</sup> It was also because it came naturally to the RCD leaders to give precedence to the modernist political element of their notional project over its particularist cultural elements. The decision to support Bouteflika was rationalised on the grounds that Bouteflika himself was committed to a number of modernising reforms (of the education and justice systems, for

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<sup>62</sup> A tendency to invoke other Western models – notably Spain and the Catalan example – has recently become perceptible in the RCD's discourse, but this is limited by the imperative of adhering to the French conception of the secular state; the refusal of Algerian Berberism to consider the experiences of Western countries where the development of democracy has not required a prior radical separation of the religious and political fields (e.g. the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic), experiences which might be thought to be more relevant to Algerian circumstances, has been total.

<sup>63</sup> The principal sponsor of Bouteflika's candidacy in 1998-1999 was retired Major General Larbi Belkheir; subsequently, retired Major General Khaled Nezzar also announced his support for Bouteflika. Between them they were able to mobilize powerful networks of influence across the country as well as abroad, especially in France. Both Belkheir and Nezzar belong to the coterie of former officers of the French army who rallied to the FLN in the second half of the war of liberation, and who maintained privileged relations with the French political and military establishments after 1962. As interior minister and defence minister respectively, Belkheir and Nezzar had been the key decision-makers in the events of January-March 1992 – the deposing of Chadli, the canceling of the second round of the legislative elections and the dissolution of the FIS – with the RCD's enthusiastic support.



instance) and deserved support as such, and that if he was nonetheless obliged to accept the support of other political parties whose discourse was inconsistent with this commitment (notably the legal Islamist parties, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's MSP and Lahbib Adami's En-Nahda), this was all the more reason for the RCD to put its shoulder to the wheel to counter their influence in government.

At the same time, the true nature of Kabyle Berberism explains why it has not only tended to repel rather than attract the sympathy of Algeria's other Berber-speakers, but also has never risen above the status of a minority trend within Kabylia itself.

### **Claim and denial**

Berberism is a form of politics which invest the energies of its activists in the business of making claims and demands and expressing grievances and resentment. Two of the key French terms in its vocabulary are *revendication* and *déni*. The Berberist movement asserts *la revendication amazighe* (the Berber claim) and expresses resentment at *le déni identitaire*, the state's denial of the Amazigh identity.

This denial is a myth. The Algerian state does not deny the Amazigh aspect of Algeria's identity, it recognizes it and is accommodating it. Nor does it deny the particular identity of the Kabyles, or practise any substantive discrimination against them or other Algerian Berbers.<sup>64</sup> In 1973, in the supposedly bad old days of the Boumediène era, one of the régime's leading ideologues in cultural matters and the intellectual champion of Arabo-Muslim orthodoxy, Dr Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi,<sup>65</sup> published in Algeria a book (in French) which acknowledged the Berber element of the Algerian people,<sup>66</sup> and since then successive régimes have gone further and further along the road of formally recognizing *le fait berbère*. As early as 1981, President Chadli spoke publicly of the *Imazighen* who were the ancestors from whom most Algerians were descended; in 1990, an Institute of Amazigh Studies was established at Tizi Ouzou university; in 1995 the Zeroual régime agreed to set up a High Berber Commissariat (*Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité*, HCA), chaired by a distinguished Kabyle intellectual, Mohand Idir Aït Amrane,<sup>67</sup> to examine the question of the development

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<sup>64</sup> To be a Kabyle has in itself been no bar to public office in Algeria since 1962, quite the contrary; Kabyles have been a massive presence in the civil service and in the management of both the state as well as private sectors of the economy; numerous government ministers have been Kabyles, five of Algeria's twelve prime ministers to date have been Kabyles, the first President of the Council of the Nation was a Kabyle, the leader of the main government-sponsored party, the RND, is a Kabyle, there are numerous Kabyle generals and major generals in the armed forces (including the current commanders of several military regions) and Kabyles have tended to dominate in particular the enormously powerful intelligence services. The ability of Algerian nationalism to accommodate a high level of Berber, and especially Kabyle, participation in Algerian government and political life was recorded a long time ago by William Quandt in his article, 'The Berbers in the Algerian political élite', in Gellner & Micaud (1972), pp.285-303.

<sup>65</sup> The son of Sheikh Bachir el-Ibrahimi, who led the Association of Algerian 'ulama from 1940 to 1965, and himself an FLN activist during the war, Taleb Ibrahimi was a permanent fixture in the Algerian government from 1965 to 1988 as minister of national education (1965-1970), information and culture (1970-1977), minister-adviser to the president (1977-1982) and minister of foreign affairs (1982-1988).

<sup>66</sup> Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, *De la Décolonisation à la Révolution culturelle*, Algiers: Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion, 1973.

<sup>67</sup> Aït Amrane is one of the Kabylia's most celebrated figures, since it was who, when a student in Algiers in 1945, composed the famous nationalist song, 'Kker a mmis u Mazigh' ('Stand up, son of Amazigh'), which provided Algerian nationalists of Berber origin with a kind of unofficial national anthem in the years leading up to the war of liberation. That the régime should have chosen Aït Amrane to head the HCA testifies to its capacity to display consideration for Kabyle (and more broadly Amazigh) sensitivities and to reconcile these with Algerian nationalist principles when it chooses.

of *Thamazighth*, and in 1996 the revised constitution ratified on November 28 explicitly consecrated *l'Amazighité* alongside *l'Islamité* and *l'Arabité* as one of the three fundamental components of Algeria's national identity.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that news bulletins in *Thamazighth* are broadcast nightly by the state television channel, and that this has been the case for the last decade. In addition, the current régime of President Bouteflika has made a point of honouring a significant number of historic Berber figures: thus the airports at Bejaia and Hassi Messaoud were renamed in 1999 after Abane Ramdane and Krim Belkacem (two leading Kabyle members of the wartime FLN), while in 2000 public buildings in Constantine and El Khroub in eastern Algeria were named after Massinissa and Lalla Fatma n'Sumer (the heroine of Kabyle resistance to the French conquest in 1857), and an Air-Algérie Boeing 737-800 was baptised Yougourta (i.e. Jugurtha).<sup>69</sup> And numerous schools, colleges, hospitals and barracks, not to mention streets and squares (etc.), in Algeria's cities and towns have been named after Kabyle and other Berber figures since the 1960s.

Whether or not such measures are sufficient is, of course, a matter of opinion. Many if not all Berberists forcefully insist they are not. But the Berberists' argument that they are wholly insufficient can be conceded in its entirety without this for one moment implying that what they are confronting amounts to a *denial* of their identity. It amounts to a recognition of their identity expressed in measures with which they are dissatisfied. That is a very different matter.

The principal focus of Berberist dissatisfaction until recently has been the fact that *Thamazighth* has not been accorded national and official status. The possibility that the state has had substantial grounds for withholding this status, and that among these is to be numbered the problem that a standard form of *Thamazighth*, transcending the particular regional dialects (*Thaqbailith*, *Thashawiyith*, etc.) which Algeria's Berbers actually speak, cannot yet be said to exist as a living language, such that there is, quite apart from other considerations, a serious practical argument for withholding official status (as a language of public administration) from it for the time being, is not admitted.<sup>70</sup> But the withholding of national and official status from a language does not amount to a denial of its existence. It is characteristic of Algerian Berberism that it equates partial recognition with total denial. And given this impressive capacity for dissatisfaction, it is not in the least surprising that President Bouteflika's recent announcement of his intention to include the question of national status for *Thamazighth* in the forthcoming constitutional revision should have gone down like a lead balloon in Berberist circles.

The Algerian state is probably guilty of many things, but in the matter of *le déni identitaire* it is innocent – or, at any rate, no longer guilty – as charged. The real denial at the centre of this story is one which has gone unnoticed and uncomplained of, for very powerful reasons, and it is the denial of which Berberism itself is guilty.

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<sup>68</sup> It did this in the preamble to the main text, the French version of which was published by the official news agency Algérie Presse Service and reproduced in full in the *Journal of Algerian Studies*, 2 (1997), 102-132.

<sup>69</sup> Algérie Presse Service, August 7, 2000.

<sup>70</sup> That is, it is not admitted in Berberist political discourse. Berberist intellectuals who have been working seriously on the language have become increasingly aware of the complexities and difficulties involved, and are now tending to acknowledge these in academic articles; see, for example, Madjid Alaoua, 'Tamazight dialects and the insertion of the Tamazight language in the educational system', article posted on the site of the World Amazigh Action Coalition (<http://www.waac.org>), and notably his admissions that "the Tamazight language does not really exist as a homogenous language in the sense of a socio-communicative reality" and that certain dialects, notably the Kabyle and Tuareg dialects, "may be said to constitute separate languages".

### Berberism as Kabyle self-denial

Berberism, while actually about other things, is formally obsessed with the question of language to the virtual exclusion of other elements of culture. In this it can be seen to be a mirror image of, and retort to, the Arabist outlook as this developed as a powerful current within the mainstream of Algerian nationalism. At the same time, it imitates the Arabist position in another way: just as the advocates of Arabisation in Algeria have wanted to establish the modern standard Arabic that is the *lingua franca* of the Middle East as the Algerian national language at the expense of the colloquial Arabic which most Algerians actually speak, so too the Berberists have wanted to establish in *Thamazighth* a 'modern standard Berber' at the expense of the Berber dialects.<sup>71</sup> In this way, Berberism, despite being in the Algerian case a predominantly Kabyle affair, has substituted the promotion of *Thamazighth* for the defence of *Thaqbailith*, and can reconcile the two only by redefining them in terms of each other. While Kabyle hegemony within Algerian Berberism makes this possible, it encounters a major difficulty in the pan-Berberist dimension of the Berberist vision, which requires the Kabyle Berberists to invest in a project which transcends Kabyle particularisms if they are to elicit support from the other Berberophone populations and rebut the charge of regionalism, which they have generally felt they must do if they are to preserve their credentials as modernists.

Thus it can be seen that Berberism is not really very interested in Kabyle culture, which is why Berberism ignores that aspect of Kabylia which was what actually fascinated and preoccupied the French during the consolidation of the colonial conquest in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the Kabyle political tradition.

The Kabyle political tradition today has at least six main elements, three which date from before the colonial conquest in 1830, two which date from the period between the two world wars and one which dates from the late 1940s. The first three closely connected traditions are those of:

- a.(i) self-government by the assembly or council (*jema'a* or *thajma'ath*) of the village (*thaddarth* or *toufiq*) or of the wider local community comprising several villages, the '*arsh*;
- a.(ii) representation within the *jema'a* by spokesmen (*temman*) chosen for each constituent lineage of the village or each constituent village of the '*arsh* by the man who presides the *jema'a*, the *amin* - that is, representation founded on the principle of co-optation;
- a.(iii) the structuring of debate and conflict within the *jema'a* by the action of rudimentary parties, the *sfuf*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> As Alaoua (2001) notes, evincing a degree of optimism about the ultimate feasibility of this project notwithstanding the realism of his earlier admissions.

<sup>72</sup> For a fuller discussion of the traditional political organization of Kabylia, and especially the nature of the *jema'a* and the role of the *temman* and *sfuf*, see my article, 'The FLN: French conceptions, Algerian realities', in George Joffé (ed.), *North Africa: nation, state and region*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp.111-141. For a discussion of the way in which Kabylia's political traditions have been misrepresented in contemporary academic anthropology, see also Hugh Roberts, 'Perspectives on Berber politics: on Gellner and Masqueray, or Durkheim's mistake', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (new series), 8 (March 2002, forthcoming), pp.107-126.

The three more recent traditions are:

- b.(i) more or less enthusiastic acceptance of the idea of Progress, whether expressed in collaborationist or integrationist ('assimilationist') attitudes to the French imperial order or in nationalist opposition to it in the name of the very ideals proclaimed by French democracy;
- b.(ii) acceptance of the nationalist vision which identified Kabylia as part of the Algerian nation, the sharing of this vision's separatist project for this nation and consequent hostility to French rule and acceptance of the implication of this, namely the need to fight for Algerian independence in the name of what all Algerians have in common, including conservative attitudes and of course Islam, if need be;
- b.(iii) the tradition of organised irregular warfare as rebellion and as strategy of conquest of political power, that is, the tradition of the *maquis*.

Berberism can properly accommodate only one of these six elements, namely b(i) and it has historically done so in both its main variants (integrationist and nationalist) and in recent decades and especially since 1989 has tended to lose sight of the distinction between the two under the pressure of French patronage. Its attempts in its discourse to accommodate and claim legitimating descent from the tradition of the *maquis* have confronted enormous difficulties in the shape of the actual, non-Berberist or frankly anti-Berberist outlook of the historical Kabyle *maquis* of 1954-1962 (quite apart from the pre-emptive claims of the FFS to be the authentic emanation of this tradition), and its attempts to exploit this tradition since 1992 have also been rivaled by those of its Islamist adversaries in the region.<sup>73</sup>

Algerian nationalism has accommodated all of these elements of Kabylia's political tradition – none of which are *unique* to Kabylia - except the collaborationist and integrationists variants of b(i), but it has been unable to give satisfactory expression to its accommodation of a(i) and a(iii).

Berberism thus is largely neglectful of Kabyle political traditions, and much less accommodating of them than the FLN's version of Algerian nationalism has been. This is connected to the fact that Berberism is also unable to accommodate Kabylia's religious traditions.

The religious traditions of Kabylia comprise several distinct elements:

- i. the general tradition that all Kabyles are Muslims, that membership of the political community, ('*arsh*, *thaddarth*, *jema'a*) is conditional upon membership of the community of believers (*umma*) and that religion is in consequence an intrinsically and fundamentally public matter;
- ii. the popular tradition of maraboutic Islam - the cult of local patron saints and the tradition of deference to the endogamous holy lineages, the *mrabtin* (in Berber, *imrabdhen*), descended from them;

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<sup>73</sup> It is not only since the breakdown of 1992 and the development of Islamic guerrilla movements that the Islamists have proved able to co-opt the *maquis* tradition, in Kabylia as elsewhere; between 1989 and 1992, the FIS in Kabylia enjoyed the vigorous endorsement of Mohammedi Saïd, the commander of the ALN in wilaya III (Kabylia) in 1956-1957.

- iii. the particular tradition of the *turuq* (religious orders) since c. 1770;<sup>74</sup>
  - iv. the particular tradition of Kabylia's participation in the orthodox Islam of the urban '*ulama* (doctors of Islamic law) from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards through both producing apt pupils of same and providing within the region itself certain places of scripturalist Islamic learning and instruction which welcomed *tolba* (students) from elsewhere;<sup>75</sup>
- the radical tradition of Islamic reform, *islah*, from the 1920s onwards and especially from 1931 onwards with the constitution of Ben Badis's *Association of Algerian 'ulama*, in which some (but not all) elements of Kabylia's religious leadership took part.<sup>76</sup>

Berberism categorically turns its back on the general tradition (i), and especially the conception of Islam as an intrinsically public religion which it vehicles, by identifying this notion, first, with the Islam of the urban '*ulama* and denying that Kabylia has ever participated in this Islam, and, second, with contemporary Islamism or fundamentalism (and thus with fanaticism and reaction, if not 'fascism'). It tacitly accommodates (ii) up to a point, as a counterweight to the Islam of the '*ulama* and the Islamists, but dissociates it from (i) in the process. It has no interest in (iii) and is either unaware of (iv) and (v) or is in denial about them.

Algerian nationalism and especially the FLN-state between 1965 and 1989 have accommodated (i), disapproved along *islahist* or Badisian lines of (ii) and (iii) but embraced (iv) and (v) and have tried quietly to accommodate certain elements of (ii) and (iii) in so far as they can be converted into a kind of latter-day version of (iv).<sup>77</sup>

The political traditions which date from before 1830 but which have survived into the post-colonial era have three very awkward implications for the Berberist ideology:

first, they owe a lot to Arab influence;<sup>78</sup>

second, they actually have informed mainstream Algerian politics and especially those of Berberism's historic enemy, the FLN, in ways which cannot be acknowledged without disabling the Berberist political critique of the FLN-state;<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kabylia is the birthplace of a *tariqa* (singular of *turuq*; literally: 'a way', that is, a religious order) known as the Rahmaniyya, after its founder, Sidi M'Hammed Ben Abderrahmane Bou Qobrain (c.1715-c.1794). The order was established c. 1770 and developed in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the largest in Algeria, dominant not only in Kabylia but also in the Constantinois. While the *mrabtîn* in Kabylia and elsewhere rallied to the order and provided most of its local leadership, the principles on which it functioned were distinct from those governing traditional popular deference to hereditary saintly families, as Mohamed Brahim Salhi has argued in his doctoral thesis, *Étude d'un confrérie religieuse algérienne: la Rahmania à la fin du XIXe siècle et dans la première moitié du XXe siècle*, Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, October 1979, especially pp.53-74.

<sup>75</sup> See Houari Touati, *Entre Dieu et les homes: letters, saints et sorciers au Maghreb (XVIIe siècle)*, Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1994 and a most interesting recent doctoral thesis by Kamel Chachoua, *Zawaya et Zwawa: L'Islam, "la question kabyle" et l'État en Algérie*, Paris: EHESS, 1999/2000.

<sup>76</sup> This is discussed in detail by Chachoua (2000).

<sup>77</sup> Thus the Algerian government's ministry of religious affairs, in developing its network of Islamic Institutes across the country, made a point of establishing these in Greater Kabylia in locations long renowned for their traditional religious role, the entirely maraboutic village of Aït Bou Yahia at Beni Douala, and the zawiya of Sidi Abderrahmane Yillouli at Illoulen Oumalou.

<sup>78</sup> As I have pointed out before (Roberts, 1993b), virtually all the terms employed in the traditional vocabulary of honour in Kabylia are of Arabic origin, as are nearly all the terms in the traditional political vocabulary of the region ('*arsh*, *jema'a*, *temman*, *sfuf*, etc.); it can also be noted that every word in the line of the song by the great Kabyle singer-poet Slimane Azem quoted at the front of this paper is in fact Arabic, reflecting the substantial element of Arabic which has been absorbed into *Thaqbâilith*.

third, these traditions have as one of their elements a conception and practice of political representation *which organises representation by co-optation*.

In this last respect, it could be argued that the Kabyle political tradition warrants a full-blooded critique on modernist democratic grounds, namely that there can be no modern democracy in Algeria without a profound questioning of the traditional system of political representation, a clear break with it and its replacement by the modern democratic concept of representation founded on election. But Berberism cannot furnish this critique. It cannot address the third point without acknowledging the truth of the first and second points, and these truths are indigestible to it. And because it therefore cannot bring itself to reflect on these matters, its actual relationship to the Kabyle political tradition is the relationship of the conscious to the unconscious or subconscious; the older part of the Kabyle political tradition, which we could call a repressed memory were it not for the fact that it is actually still alive in the mountains of Kabylia today, informs the unconscious attitudes of the Berberists and actually determines their political conduct. This is why they are so susceptible to co-optation; the habits of co-opting and seeking co-optation come naturally to them as Kabyles rather than as Berberists, but their Berberism, in its abstract pan-Berberist programmatic vision, disarms them politically as Kabyles. As a result, the imported progressive, modernist and secularist discourse, while formally a critique of the Algerian state, can be absorbed and even intermittently utilised by this state, in the continuously shifting kaleidoscope of its policy repertoire, in so far as the bearers of this discourse conform to the state's expectations of them in practice and accept co-optation when required to do so.

The pan-Berberism of Berberism indicates not only a lack of interest in *Thaqbailith*, but an indifference to the Kabyle population as the collective possessor of a community of interest. Berberism does not consider that there is a Kabyle nation and does not articulate a Kabyle national interest or idea. Until now, at any rate, Algerian Berberism has conceived of the Kabyles and the other Algerian Berbers as elements of the Algerian nation (for which alone the term nation is reserved), while being intent on redefining this nation in line with Berberist doctrine. This may change, given the emergence of an explicitly autonomist current in the Kabyle Berberist movement,<sup>80</sup> since the autonomist project implies the constitution of the population of Kabylia into a collective subject possessing the right of self-determination, but this has not happened yet. Nor is there any substantive ambition to constitute the Berbers of North Africa as a whole into a self-determining political community. What Kabyle Berberism articulates is a hostility to the Arabo-Muslim conception of the nation, a hostility to the geopolitical vision of this nation's place in the world that goes with this conception,<sup>81</sup> and a doctrinaire insistence on French political models. It is at home in the French cultural ensemble, which accommodates it much as it accommodates other expressions of the ex-

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<sup>79</sup> The way in which the traditions of the *jema'a* have informed the politics of the FLN is explained in detail in Roberts (1993a).

<sup>80</sup> One of the products of the extremely confusing events of last summer has been the birth of a new movement called the *Mouvement pour l'Autonomie de la Kabylie* (MAK), led by Ferhat Mehenni (see footnote 61 above); it has also received the support of Professor Salem Chaker. The fact that it has had a largely sceptical if not hostile reception in Kabylia itself does not mean that it will not grow, given the crisis of both the RCD and the FFS and the absence of a serious prospect of progressive reform of the Algerian state at the national level. For a scathing critique of the autonomist perspective by a Kabyle intellectual, see Ramdane Achab, 'À propos de l'autonomie de la Kabylie', *Algeria-Watch* ([www.algeria-watch.org](http://www.algeria-watch.org)), November 2001.

<sup>81</sup> The doctrinaire secularism of contemporary political Berberism has led its adepts to develop a clear affinity with the Kemalist tradition in Turkey, which has long had an unobtrusive relay in the Tunisian political class as well, and to take up the Turkish and Tunisian proclivity to claim, not merely a 'Mediterranean' identity, but even a European one, a proclivity massively reinforced by the large Kabyle community in France, many of whose members have French nationality.

colonial (African, Antillais, Indochinese) culture,<sup>82</sup> and it is hostile to the nationalist Arabo-Muslim culture because this is not considered to have accommodated it, and is presumed to be incapable of accommodating it, despite the evidence of incremental accommodation over the last three decades.

Thus we see a more complex picture now than we did at first. Because Kabyle Berberism is not really interested in Kabylia's linguistic traditions (which it proposes to sacrifice on the altar of a largely notional pan-Berber language yet to be brought into existence) or Kabylia's political traditions (except the least specifically Kabyle - *progressisme*) or its religious traditions (except maraboutism, the most backward), it displays a kind of amnesia about them all; it has no use for them and forgets them. But, whereas an emerging nationalism can forget about pre-national traditions with impunity and succeeds by doing so, this won't work in this case, because rival political forces (the FLN, the Islamists, not to mention the FFS) are there to take in hand those Kabyle traditions which the Berberists ignore. Moreover, because Kabyle Berberism has not to date been the expression of an emerging Kabyle nationalism, and its investment in pan-Berber ideas are not themselves the substance of its political project, but the importing of French political models is, the amnesia it displays towards Kabylia's tradition is not something that can take effect in the society of Kabylia as a whole unless the Algerian state takes on board the French models and imposes them on the society in general and Kabyle society in particular. The main effect of this amnesia is to encumber the Berberists themselves with illusions about Kabylia and about the Algerian state, and to inhibit them from reflecting on the traditions which their own project requires Algerians to supersede. And because these traditions are not reflected on, they continue to inform the political behaviour of the Berberists themselves, which is accordingly characterised by systematic *mauvaise foi*.

This bad faith, and the divided state of mind underlying it, were graphically illustrated in the early stages of the disturbances in Kabylia in the spring of 2001.

### **Misrepresenting Kabylia**

I have noted above that the RCD proffered a definition of the causes of the unrest in Kabylia which failed to reflect the actual outlook and grievances of the rioters. This was not done without a most interesting exercise in throat-clearing, however.

On April 24, after rioting had been in progress for 24 hours across both Greater and Lesser Kabylia, the RCD's office in Tizi Ouzou published the following communiqué:

*Déclaration du Bureau Régional du RCD de Tizi Ouzou*

Les villages de Beni Douala et Tizi Hibel viennent d'enterrer dignement un de leurs enfants, M. GUERMAH Massinissa, décédé des suites de blessures par balles reçues dans les locaux de la brigade de gendarmerie de Beni Douala, le 18 avril dernier.

Légitime, la révolte de la jeunesse de Beni Douala qui a répondu à cet évènement tragique et qui a occasionné malheureusement des dégâts sur les biens publics,

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<sup>82</sup> In this context, it can be said that we are witnessing the rapid development of what we might well call a 'South French' culture and identity, by analogy with the 'West British' culture that has now all but overwhelmed public (intellectual, artistic and political) life in the Irish Republic at the expense of Irish national traditions.

traduit un désespoir compréhensible face à la persistance d'abus et d'exclusions aussi divers qu'injustes.

Le darki auteur de la gravissime faute commise à l'encontre du regretté GUERMAH est identifié.

Le Bureau régional du RCD de Tizi-Ouzou exige une sanction exemplaire.

Par ailleurs, solidaire de la revendication des citoyens de Beni Douala concernant la mise en place d'une sûreté de daïra, les dirigeants du RCD ont déjà entamé les démarches en ce sens, interventions qui semblent rencontrer un écho favorable.

En ces circonstances difficiles et comme de coutume, les voix des pompiers pyromanes habituels s'élèvent dans une tentative de récupérer et d'infiltrer la juste indignation populaire.

Survenant, en effet, parallèlement à une bavure commise par le même corps de sécurité à Oued Amizour, dans la wilaya de Bejaïa, ce mécontentement compréhensible fait déjà l'objet de convoitises de forces connues pour leur promotion de la stratégie du pire. Chacun aura déjà constaté leurs tentatives sournoises visant à étendre et dévoyer la légitime colère populaire vers des mots d'ordre étranger à ses aspirations naturelles.

C'est le droit absolu de notre jeunesse de dénoncer et de s'opposer à toute atteinte à l'intégrité et aux droits des citoyens. Mais elle doit savoir que les édifices et infrastructures divers de la région sont d'abord les siens et doivent être épargnés.

Comme dans tout combat pour la dignité, plus que jamais, la vigilance doit être le credo de tous.

Tizi Ouzou, le 24/04/2001.

P/le RCD.

Le Président du Bureau régional de Tizi Ouzou.<sup>83</sup>

This declaration was remarkable in at least four respects. First, it represented what was at issue in Kabylia last April as being the question of the persistence of various unjust 'abuses and exclusions' and 'attacks on the integrity and rights of citizens', as well as the specific incidents in Beni Douala and Oued Amizour, and thus faithfully articulated the demonstrators' revolt against *la hogra* in terms which would be immediately intelligible to the numerous victims of *la hogra* elsewhere in Algeria. Second, the declaration articulated and supported the specific practical demand of the population of Beni Douala for a police station to be established in their district, a demand grounded in the fact that the police – *la Sûreté Nationale* – has traditionally behaved properly towards the local populations, in flagrant contrast to the widely execrated Gendarmerie. Third, while accurately representing popular feeling and proclaiming the RCD's solidarity with the 'legitimate revolt' of Kabyle youth, the declaration not only warned (very presciently) against attempts to infiltrate and pervert the movement but specifically insisted that the demonstrators should not attack public buildings, but should regard and respect them as their own collective property. Fourth, the declaration made not the slightest attempt to suggest that the identity and language questions were at issue, and made not a single reference to these concerns.

The very same day, a communiqué was also published by the regional office of the RCD in Bejaïa.<sup>84</sup> This declaration also invoked the incidents in Beni Douala and Oued Amizour, but said nothing about 'abuses and exclusions' or the 'rights of citizens' or a 'citizen's combat

<sup>83</sup> Source: RCD Internet Bulletin, April 2001 (<http://rcd-algerie.org/avril/avril.htm>); *darki* (plural: *darak*) means 'gendarme'.

<sup>84</sup> *Déclaration du Bureau Régional du RCD de Bejaïa*, Bejaïa, April 24, RCD Internet Bulletin, April 2001 (<http://rcd-algerie.org/avril/avril.htm>).



for dignity'. Instead, it noted that the incidents which triggered the protests had occurred "in regions known for their attachment to the cause of Amazigh identity" and that "this revolt of the younger generation expresses in fact the indignation of a population put off by the permanent refusal of its identity and cultural claims." This definition of the issue in the second paragraph of the declaration was repeated in the fifth, sixth and seventh paragraphs, to the complete exclusion of anything else which might have been at stake, including the local demand for a district police station. The contrast with the position taken by the RCD in Tizi Ouzou was massive.

The following day, the national leadership of the RCD published a declaration of its executive committee which arbitrated the disagreement between its two regional bureaux in favour of Bejaia.<sup>85</sup> While implicitly alluding to the problem of *hogra* in a passing mention of "contempt and abuse of authority", the executive committee insisted that "the explosion recorded once more in Kabylia is first of all the consequence of an immense feeling of frustration born of the denial which the State opposes to a peaceful and popular claim expressed and reaffirmed each year with vigour", an unmistakable reference to the identity claim which the Berberist movement habitually renews and reasserts every year in celebrating in April the anniversary of the 'Berber Spring' of 1980. The rest of the declaration continued in this vein, invoking "a younger generation ignored in its identity...", "the Amazigh claim..." and "the identity question". A subsequent communiqué published in Algiers on April 28, by which time at least 35 demonstrators had been shot dead in Kabylia, confirmed this orientation, referring to the identity issue five times and raising no other demand for the population to mobilise behind or the government to concede.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, the initial impulse of the RCD activists on the ground, in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou where the disturbances began, to reflect the outlook of the population and represent its practical concerns and demands was firmly, consciously and completely overridden. Why the Bejaia leadership should have differed from its counterpart in Tizi Ouzou is unclear, although the fact that the Vice-President of the RCD, Djamel Ferdjallah, is from Bejaia may have had a lot to do with it. But there is no doubt whatever that the national leadership in Algiers refused to endorse the view taken by its Tizi Ouzou bureau and, in choosing between representing the population and representing the Berberist agenda, gave exclusive preference to the latter.

That the RCD should have done this is not surprising in itself, that is to say, if we view it in abstraction from its context. Political parties which are founded on a particular programmatic vision are liable to cling to this vision at the expense of popular support if need be when forced to choose between the two. What is surprising is that the RCD leaders should have felt that they were faced with this choice in the actual circumstances which obtained in Kabylia in April 2001. For in rebelling against *la hogra*, the demonstrators in Kabylia were expressing opposition to the régime, not to the Berberist agenda. Why, then, should the RCD leadership have considered that it had to misrepresent popular sentiment in Kabylia, not to mention override and disavow its own militants in Tizi Ouzou, in order to defend the Berberist agenda, instead of adopting a position which articulated a synthesis (or at least combination) of the two?

This question can best be considered in conjunction with a second one.

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<sup>85</sup> *Le Comité Exécutif met le régime devant ses responsabilités*: declaration of RCD Executive Committee, Algiers, April 25, loc cit..

<sup>86</sup> *La situation est grave*, RCD communiqué, Algiers, April 28, 2001, loc. cit.

On May 1, 2001, three days after confirming its line on the situation in Kabylia, the RCD announced that it was quitting the governing coalition.<sup>87</sup> It did not do this because President Bouteflika or his prime minister, Ali Benflis, had refused to accept the RCD's conditions for remaining in the government, for the RCD had not posed any such conditions. At no point between the start of the riots on April 23 and its decision to leave the government on May 1 had the national leadership of the RCD called on the government to take specific practical measures in respect of the troubles in Kabylia as the price of its continued support. At no point did the RCD leaders use the threat of reverting to opposition as a lever with which to secure concessions for its notional constituency, that is, engage in the kind of political manoeuvre which comes naturally to representative political parties taking part in coalition governments. Is it possible that the RCD leaders, while arguably deluded about other matters, know very well what they are themselves about, and that this does not include substantive opposition of any kind, and that it was accordingly pointless to issue idle threats to engage in this?

There is every reason to think that the answer to this second question is yes, and that the answer to the two questions taken together is that the Berberist form of politics, since mutating into the RCD, has never been in the business of serious as distinct from token opposition and is intrinsically incapable of it.

### **From dissidence to co-optation, or the French connection revisited**

Berberism, the political preoccupation with the question of the contemporary Kabyle identity as an identity which has come to possess French elements and is ill at ease within the Algerian national identity, is *dissident* rather than oppositional. This is closely connected with its inability, which we have demonstrated, to function as a representative politics even in the Kabyle context.

Kabyle society is far more complex in the cultural sphere than is usually recognised. Kabyle culture includes Berber, Islamic, Arab and Ottoman elements as well as a French element. Berberism's unacknowledged preoccupation with the French element of Kabyle culture and its corresponding obsession with French political and constitutional models disable it from representing the actual material interests of Kabyle society as it is within the framework of the Algerian political system as this is. This weakness in the Berberist outlook was only latent until 1989, but was enormously aggravated by the mutation of the Berberist movement into the RCD in that year and the latter's explicit adoption of secularism as its programmatic priority.

In adopting secularism and making it the main plank of its platform, the RCD embraced a demand which had never been a popular aspiration in Kabylia or anywhere else in Algeria, but was strictly confined to the Francophile wing of elite and middle class circles inside the country. But there is an element of the broader Algerian population which has long evinced a tendency to the secularist position without this being subjectively associated with or confined to an elitist outlook. This element is the Algerian émigré community in France, in which the Kabyles have long held pride of place and where political Berberism originated.

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<sup>87</sup> *Le RCD se retire du gouvernement. Résolution de la session extraordinaire du Conseil National du RCD du 1<sup>er</sup> Mai 2001*, loc .cit.

In a predominantly Christian country, the secularist principle, the separation of Church and State, naturally works to the benefit of a Muslim minority within the population, since it tends to limit the disadvantage this minority incurs by virtue of its faith. In addition to this general factor inclining Algerian émigrés to appreciate French secularism, the participation of many émigré workers in the organisations of the French labour movement (trade unions and political parties) undoubtedly encouraged them to pick up the secularist assumptions of their French colleagues. It is these factors which help to explain the outlook expressed by Ali Yahia and his colleagues in 1948-1949. And although their dissidence was suppressed within the PPA-MTLD, and eradicated for a generation within Kabylia itself, it was not eradicated within Algerian nationalist politics in France.

When the constitution of the newly independent state was being debated by the various factions of the FLN in 1962-1963, the émigré wing of the movement, the Fédération de France du FLN, explicitly canvassed a secular constitution. It was the only organised element of the FLN as a whole to do so, and was overruled. The leader of the FFFLN from 1957 to 1962 was a Kabyle, Omar Boudaoud. Most of the other leading figures in the FFFLN during the war were Kabyles, notably Bachir Boumaza, Mourad Terbouche, Salah Louanchi, Amar Ladlani and Ali Haroun,<sup>88</sup> a fact which reflected the predominance of Kabyles within the rank and file of the nationalist struggle in the metropolis. Most of these figures played no role in the government of the FLN-state after 1962. As a result, a connection was established in the minds of this generation between secularism and dissent from the official orthodoxy of the FLN-state as this actually evolved under its first two presidents, Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965) and Houari Boumediène (1965-1978).

In the course of the 1980s, as more and more elements of the old nationalist outlook of the Boumediène era were being abandoned by the Chadli régime, certain figures linked to the old FFFLN and who adhered to its old secularist outlook began discreetly to surface in government positions. The most important of these was Aboubakr Belkaïd, who, having held a succession of portfolios in the government since 1984,<sup>89</sup> was appointed to the crucial interior ministry in November 1988, in which post he handled the business of recognizing the new political parties which blossomed after the promulgation of the pluralist constitution in February 1989. Belkaïd himself was not a Kabyle, but a native of Tlemcen in western Algeria. As such, he undoubtedly owed his position to the sponsorship of the most powerful figure from western Algeria in the Chadli régime, the secretary-general of the presidency, General Larbi Belkheir, one of the coterie of ex-officers of the French army who rallied to the FLN-ALN in the last years of the war of liberation, and widely regarded as the leader of the pro-French tendency within the Algerian political élite.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ali Haroun is also the author of a history of the FFFLN, *La Septième wilaya: la guerre du FLN en France, 1954-1962*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986.

<sup>89</sup> Belkaïd was deputy minister for urban planning in charge of construction (1984-1986), minister of vocational training and labour (1986-1987) and minister of higher education (1987-1988) before assuming the interior portfolio in November 1988.

<sup>90</sup> That is, the tendency known as *hizb frança* ('the Party of France'); the fact that this is a polemical term in Algerian politics, and liable to be applied somewhat indiscriminately, does not mean that *hizb frança* does not exist, and that Larbi Belkheir is a key, if not the key, figure at the Algerian end of the Algeria-France relationship since 1980 is widely acknowledged in both French and Algerian circles. For a frankly partisan but fascinating account, see Abdelhamid Brahimi, *Aux origines de la tragédie algérienne (1958-2000): témoignage sur hizb frança*, Geneva & London: Hoggar Books, 2000.

It was Belkheir's close ally, El-Hadi Khediri,<sup>91</sup> who as interior minister in 1987 had piloted through the Algerian national assembly the Law on Associations which subverted the monopoly previously enjoyed by the Party of the FLN over Algerian public life, and it was Khediri who contacted Saïd Sadi in October 1988 to enlist Sadi's help in ensuring that the riots engulfing Algiers and many other cities did not spread to Kabylia.<sup>92</sup> It was Khediri's successor, Belkaïd, who liaised with Sadi over the matter of the recognition of the RCD thereafter and who, as minister 'in charge of relations with Parliament and the associations' in the government of Sid Ahmed Ghazali in 1991-92, handled the government's relations with the various political parties in the critical period both before and after the legislative elections of December 1991. And it was Belkaïd's old colleague from the FFFLN, Ali Haroun, who, as minister of human rights in Ghazali's government, personally provided an element of 'democratic' legitimisation for the army's coup in January 1992 by joining the five-man High State Committee (*Haut Comité d'État*, HCE) set up by the army to fill the vacant presidency for the balance of Chadli's uncompleted term.

It is possible that the RCD's support for the army and the HCE in 1992, the convergence if not identity of the views it expressed with the position incarnated by Haroun, was secured without this depending on any deliberate consultations between Haroun and Sadi. But it is inconceivable that the RCD committed itself to secularism in 1989 against the wishes or advice of Belkaïd and Belkheir, since it depended on their approval if it was to secure legalisation as a political party within the new constitution. And it is entirely possible, if not probable, that it made this commitment at their explicit suggestion and prompting. By doing so, the RCD adopted a position which was in tune with the subjective outlook of much of the Kabyle community in France, but which severely limited its appeal in Algeria and in Kabylia itself to the new intelligentsia and middle class.

The suggestion I made twenty years ago that the Berberist movement vehiculed at bottom a bourgeois interest was grounded in an analysis of the underlying structural trends in Kabyle society and politics, and appeared to receive no confirmation from the social profile of the protests which erupted in Kabylia in the 'Berber spring' – *Tafsut Imazighen* – of March-April 1980. The region-wide scale of the movement and its trans-class character, with the workers at the SONITEX factory at Draa Ben Khedda going on strike and the populations of numerous villages mobilizing *en masse* in support of the university and high-school students who were the *fer-de-lance* of the protests, conveyed the impression that the Berberist movement articulated the outlook and interests of the population as a whole and may have appeared to refute my thesis.<sup>93</sup> But to draw this conclusion is to overlook the fact that the movement in 1980 was united only in what it opposed, and not at all united in support of a positive project or demand, for in its positive aspect the movement was split between the mutually contradictory visions of cultural pluralism, Amazigh revivalism and *laissez-faire* as we have seen. The behaviour of the workers who went on strike and the villagers who descended on Tizi Ouzou cannot be assumed to have reflected a developed political

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<sup>91</sup> El Hadi Khediri was for many years *Directeur Général de la Sûreté Nationale*, that is, the chief of the Algerian police, before taking up the interior portfolio in 1987. He was demoted to the transport portfolio in 1988 and left government office in 1989, although remaining an influential figure behind the scenes.

<sup>92</sup> As Khediri has frankly admitted; see his interview in Sid Ahmed Semiane (ed.), *Octobre: Ils Parlent*, Algiers, Éditions Le Matin, 1998, pp.101-102.

<sup>93</sup> In formally recycling Salem Chaker's disagreement (1985) with me on this point, Mahé (2001), pp.449-50, 471 fn) has – unlike Professor Chaker – gravely misrepresented the articles and theses of mine to which he refers, while omitting to justify his criticism with serious arguments or to acknowledge that important elements of his own analysis were in fact put forward in the articles and thesis in question, over a decade before he began to proffer his own, undoubtedly valuable, contribution to the study of Kabylia.

commitment to the Berberist project, which was largely inchoate at this juncture, but rather to have expressed a natural and instinctive reflex of solidarity with their own children, younger brothers and sisters and cousins the moment the latter found themselves on the receiving end of the state's repression. It was thus above all a response to a provocation. And it should not be forgotten that the initial protests of the Berberist students were themselves a response to a provocation, the gratuitous banning by the *wali* (governor) of Tizi Ouzou of a scheduled lecture at Tizi Ouzou university by Mouloud Mammeri.<sup>94</sup> And in so far as the scale of the protests reflected a generalized response to provocation, they expressed the entirely traditional values of the code of honour, the imperative defence of *nif*, self-respect, as much as if not more than a preoccupation with language and culture, or anything else for that matter.

The disposition of Kabyle society to mobilise when necessary in defence of its younger generation was an enormous source of moral support to the Berberist agitators throughout the 1980s, and enabled them to display the courage of their convictions in standing up to the state for as long as the state sustained its repressive attitude. But the mutation of the FLN-state into the formally pluralist state established in 1989 transformed the premises of political action on all sides. In inviting the Berberists to constitute themselves into a political party, the state appeared to convert itself from a brick wall into an open door, and made them an offer they could not refuse. It thereby induced the Berberist leaders to revise their own attitudes, and to orient themselves in a positive manner towards those elements of the régime who had been responsible for the opening which had occurred. It accordingly complicated their attitude towards the régime, and stimulated the development of subjective considerations in the minds of the Berberist leaders which tended to inhibit them from developing the RCD into a party of substantive opposition.

In committing the RCD to the secularist agenda, the RCD distanced itself from a large element of the potential Kabyle constituency for Berberist politics. It should not be forgotten that part of the population of Kabylia was initially attracted to the Islamists' position,<sup>95</sup> that many Islamists were not hostile to the Berberist position on the language issue, but on the contrary inclined to accept this, and that much of the Kabyle population of Algiers supported the FIS in 1989-1991.<sup>96</sup> Thus the way in which the RCD resolved the confusion which had obtained in the positive aspects of the Berberist agenda since 1980, retaining the cultural-pluralist position while subordinating it to the entirely novel element represented by the secularist demand, tended to alienate elements of the Kabyle community and to contract rather than expand the support base for the party's demands on the language issue, and so reduce its capacity to sustain an independent attitude and posture towards the régime. At the same time, in allowing other forces unencumbered by the secularist dogma (the FIS and the

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<sup>94</sup> Mammeri was intercepted on his way to Tizi Ouzou on March 10, 1980, apparently on the orders of the *wali*. Since the subject of his scheduled lecture was the uninflamatory theme of his new book on Berber poetry, and he had recently been allowed to deliver a similar lecture in Constantine, the motivations of the authorities on this occasion were far from self-evident.

<sup>95</sup> The notion that the Kabyles were unanimously hostile to the FIS owed a lot to the fact that the FIS did not actually contest most of the municipalities in the *wilayât* of Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia in 1990, for reasons that are unclear. In the neighbouring *wilayât* of Bouïra and Boumerdès, the FIS contested all seats and came first in both cases; in those few municipalities in Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia which it did contest, it polled quite well, and actually won control of the APC's of Draa el Mizan and Sidi Naamane in Tizi Ouzou and Dra el Caïd in Bejaia. In 1991, it polled strongly in the parliamentary constituency of Tizi Ouzou, coming second to the FFS candidate and forcing none other than Saïd Sadi into third place.

<sup>96</sup> The FFS's support for the relegalisation of the FIS from 1992 onwards, following the dissolution of the latter, is likely to have been informed by the FFS leaders' awareness that many Kabyles in Algiers had voted for the FIS, and that it was politic to show consideration for their outlook.

FFS) to mobilise the populist and other traditions in Kabylia, the RCD came increasingly to depend upon and reflect the interests and outlook of the Kabyle middle class in general and the bourgeoisie *stricto sensu*.

It is a striking fact about Kabyle politics since 1989 that the FFS, while able to claim majority support in the region in 1990-1991 and for much of the time since then, has never managed to establish a daily paper of its own or benefit from the regular support of a notionally independent paper, whereas the RCD has enjoyed the constant support of one of Algeria's best known French-language dailies, *Liberté*. *Liberté* is edited by Outoudert Abrous and is owned by Kabylia's most celebrated millionaire, the business tycoon, Issaad Rabrab. Abrous is from the village of Taguemount Azzouz, which is likely to be connected with the fact that Rabrab is from this village as well. Taguemount Azzouz was one of the main centres of the missionary activity of the French White Fathers during the later colonial period.<sup>97</sup> It is the leading village of the Aït Mahmoud tribe, which also includes the villages of Taourirt Moussa, the home of Matoub Lounes, and Tizi Hibel, the native village of the great Kabyle writer Mouloud Feraoun and of the young Massinissa Guermah, whose death triggered the disturbances last April.

The attitude of the new generation of Algerian businessmen towards the Algerian state is not one of hostility, but of conditional cooperation. While the Algerian state is very far from offering a political framework conducive to the general development of capitalist enterprise, the subjective outlook of the men who staff the régime includes a disposition to accommodate the interests of particular businessmen, and an incestuous and hectic culture characterised by the reciprocal rendering of services and favours has developed in élite circles. As a result, the most dynamic elements of the new bourgeoisie are those with *entrées* at the highest levels, a fact which encourages them to take out various forms of political insurance but inhibits them from investing in the politics of genuine democratic reform. Their business ventures depend on their relations with the executive of the state rather than the legislature, and for as long as the former deliver for them they have no interest in making an issue, or subsidizing others to make an issue, of the extremely stunted nature of the legislature's role and its prostration before the executive.

These various considerations make it possible to understand the RCD's situation over the last decade, and the particular political positions it has canvassed. It is entirely possible that they also explain the RCD's decision to boycott the presidential election in 1999, if the widely circulated rumour that Rabrab was personally investing in Bouteflika's candidacy is true.

Because it does not represent a substantial Kabyle interest inside Algeria beyond that of an élite minority on the make, political Berberism since mutating into the RCD cannot stand up to the Algerian government in any serious way. It accordingly expresses an ideological protest against the official nationalist conception of the nation-state and an ideological criticism of the political system of the nation-state rather than a political disposition to oppose the government in earnest by advancing practical demands or canvassing realisable political reforms. From 1989 onwards, the tendency to indulge rhetorically in Berberist dissidence has

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<sup>97</sup> The village is the subject of a most interesting monograph by H. Genevois, *Taguemount Azouz des Beni Mahmoud: Notes d'histoire et de folklore*, Fichier de Documentation Berbère, Fort-National (now Larbaa n'Aït Irathen), 1972. The Fichier, which published numerous invaluable studies on Kabylia until it was closed by the Algerian authorities in 1976, was run by the White Fathers (Pères Blancs), of whom Genevois was a leading light.

gone hand in hand with a tendency to accept co-optation by the régime on the most conservative, if not regressive, basis, providing ‘democratic’ legitimation to the army’s attitude towards democratic principles in January 1992 and since then, and ‘modernist’ and ‘republican’ endorsement of President Bouteflika’s supposed credentials in these respects in July 1999.

In travesty of the outlook of the desperate, young, unemployed rioters last April, the RCD was misrepresenting an element of the Kabyle population which it had long been uninterested in representing in any case. And, in quitting the government in May 2001, the RCD was not breaking with the régime at all. For, while its decision and the rhetoric which accompanied it may have been personally embarrassing for President Bouteflika, there can be no doubt that the line which the RCD had already adopted on the unrest worked to the interest of the régime as a whole, by pre-empting the proper political articulation of the Kabyles’ refusal of *la hogra*, by misrepresenting the unrest as the product of identity concerns all but peculiar to the region and therefore facilitating the régime’s efforts to confine the unrest to Kabylia alone, and by simultaneously sowing confusion within the Kabyle population itself.

In other words, the co-optation of Berberism since its mutation into the RCD in 1989 has been permanent. The formal presence of the RCD in the governing coalition or its formal absence from this have been neither here nor there.

Berberism has accordingly proved incapable of secreting or reinforcing the substance of a democratic politics in Algeria. Ever since the riots of October 1988, when the Algerian state went into flux, Berberism has proved extremely susceptible to manipulation by various forces at the expense of the democratic interest in Algeria. And because the immediate effect of political Berberism has been to ensure the misrepresentation of the Kabyle population, it has contributed very directly to the fact that this population, like that of the rest of the country, has continued to be denied genuine as opposed to purely formal enfranchisement, has not enjoyed the substance of citizenship, and has accordingly been permanently vulnerable to the numerous and varied abuses in which the Algerian authorities routinely engage.

Thus Berberism has had not only its share of the responsibility for the polarisation of Algerian politics between rival (Islamist, secularist) brands of intolerant utopianism in 1989-1991 and for the subsequent catastrophic descent into violence, but also a large share of the responsibility for the persistence of the problem of *la hogra*, the fundamental problem of the state-society relationship in contemporary Algeria, and for the violence which is the inseparable corollary of this problem.

### **From Berberism to democracy**

Given the distinctive aspects of their culture, the Kabyles may certainly be considered to have a particular interest of their own in the eventual democratisation of the Algerian state, in that the democratisation of the Algerian state is the precondition of the de-politicisation of the cultural issue, which is in turn the precondition of the emancipation of the Kabyles from whatever social and political disadvantage they may informally incur in consequence of their status as a minority in the cultural sphere. But the Kabyles will be able to contribute effectually to the democratisation of the Algerian state, and thus become the artisans of their wider political emancipation, only when those who aspire to lead them have first outgrown the infantile disorder of Berberist dissidence, and inoculated themselves against the susceptibility to political manipulation with which this infects them.

How might they effect this revolution in their political outlook?

I have argued that Berberism does not primarily express a concern for the preservation and promotion of the Berber element of the Kabyle identity so much as the French element. This has been stated as a fact, not as a debating point, and certainly not in order to de-legitimize Berberism, as its Arabist critics have done, on cultural-nationalist grounds which it would be inappropriate for me, as a non-Algerian, to invoke. The significance of the fact in question is not that it may or may not be perceived as making Berberism illegitimate in national terms, but that it disables its political adepts both from representing their notional constituency and from realising their own notional democratic purpose. In short, the fundamental implication of the fact in question is that, as a movement with significant ambitions, *Berberism is self-defeating*. But, while I believe this fact is important and illuminating, it is not the end of the matter.

The attachment of the Berberists in 1948-49 to the idea of *l'Algérie algérienne* expressed the Kabyles' attachment to the idea of a modern democratic republic *à la française*. This attachment articulated a combination of three things: the Kabyles' own democratic political impulses, derived from the tradition of a polity - the Kabyle *cit *, in Masqueray's perceptive term<sup>98</sup> - in which every man was an enfranchised citizen and had the right to express, and expect consideration for, his point of view; their subsequent enthusiasm for the idea of Progress as imbibed from the French, and the fact that they had become familiar with the French model of the modern state but with no other model, in part because Kabyle labour migration was oriented very largely to France, and in part because the universalist pretensions of the French political tradition had discouraged curiosity about other models.

French colonial rule put a definitive end to the Kabyle tradition of independence of the central power. But it did not put an end to the democratic impulses of the Kabyles, it reoriented these to the aspiration to belong to a wider state in which these impulses might be accommodated. In short, it bred the aspiration to accede to the status of fully enfranchised citizens within a modern state. For as long as the framework of *l'Algérie française* seemed capable of being reformed so as to accommodate these aspirations, it was natural for Kabyle intellectuals to be interested in the integrationist perspective. When it became clear that this option was a mirage, it was equally natural for Kabyles to rally to the separatist cause while retaining their aspiration for a democratic state, which they were still inclined to conceive along French lines, since no other model was familiar to them. Thus the demand for *l'Algérie algérienne* translated the desire for an independent Algerian state which would be as democratic as the French republic, indeed which would realise in respect of the Algerian Muslims the very democratic principles that France in Algeria refused to honour.

It follows that Berberism, in vehicling a preoccupation with the French element of Kabyle cultural identity, has actually been the disguised mediation of something else, namely the Kabyles' democratic aspirations. The problem is that the mediation has worked out, in the actual context of the degraded FLN-state and as a consequence of the relationship which the Berberist leaders have entered into with this state, as a terrible distortion of these aspirations and a perpetual diversion from them which has tended relentlessly to constitute itself into a massive obstacle to them.

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<sup>98</sup> Émile Masqueray, *Formation des cités chez les populations sédentaires de l'Algérie*, Paris: Laval, 1986; reprinted with an Introduction by Fanny Colonna, Centre de Recherches et d'Études sur les Sociétés Méditerranéennes, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1983.



The actual effect of Berberism has been to prevent the Kabyles from emancipating their democratic aspirations from their historically contingent and limiting implication in French culture as the precondition of their expressing these aspirations directly, in the shape of reasoned demands for realisable political reforms, and in a manner which makes them intelligible and acceptable to other Algerians. It has done this by inhibiting the Kabyles from acknowledging *both* the universal quality of their democratic aspirations - that is, precisely the quality which transcends the particularist aspect of the French democratic tradition (that is, above all, its secularist dimension) - *and* their particular historical roots in the Kabyles' own political traditions, which are characteristically Algerian political traditions.

Berberism has accordingly induced the Kabyles to lose sight of the affinity of their democratic aspirations with the central political substance of the Algerian national idea, the demand for citizenship, that is, for self-determination as the condition of political obligation and for substantive enfranchisement as the condition of human dignity. It is this affinity that they need to rediscover, recognise and build on. Given the interest of forces inside and outside Algeria in perpetuating the Berberist snare and delusion, the true democrats in Kabylia have a mountain to climb, but they have climbed mountains before.

## Abbreviations

APC	Assemblée Populaire Communale
APN	Assemblée Populaire Nationale
APW	Assemblée Populaire de Wilaya
FFFLN	Fédération de France du FLN
FFS	Front des Forces Socialistes
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
HCA	Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité
LADDH	Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme
LADH	Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme
MCB	Mouvement Culturel Berbère
MN	Mouvement de la Nahda (often referred to simply as En-Nahda)
MSP	Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix
MTLD	Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques
OS	Organisation Spéciale
PPA	Parti du Peuple Algérien
RCD	Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie
RND	Rassemblement National Démocratique

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

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### **Research Objectives**

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



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