

1992

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Algeria's Fundamentalists:
Their Historical Context
and Prospects for Success

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Presidential Scholar Research Project

94:19P

Dr. Vajpeyi

April 30, 1992

Introduction

Islamic fundamentalism, also known as Islamicism or Islamic revivalism, is a movement that has become much more visible in the last two decades. Fundamentalist groups have been growing in membership in many Middle Eastern nations, but the Islamic revivalist movement was most prominent in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, in which radical Shi'ites seized power from the Shah and his monarchy. A decade later, as that Islamic regime maintains power, many Islamic fundamentalist groups and parties have proliferated throughout the Muslim world. Although they do not hold power in any other country, in many nations Islamic fundamentalists are exerting great pressure on politics and society. This situation raises important questions about the nature of such groups, their memberships and the historical context in which they have grown. This paper will attempt to address these questions, using the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria as an example.

Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Middle East share many important goals, most importantly the imposition of an Islamic form of government. Secondary goals include a return to veil-wearing for women, prohibition of alcohol consumption, and a general rejection of Western culture and values. Membership in revivalist groups reflects the changing nature of Middle Eastern societies, which are composed largely of the young and unemployed. For reasons that will be discussed later, these people are the most

likely to be attracted to Islamic fundamentalism.

One important fundamentalist group that is impacting the politics of its society is the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) of Algeria. As in other Middle Eastern societies, Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria have a large potential pool of membership and support; 99 percent of Algerians are Sunni Muslims (Almanac, 1992). The FIS is typical of revivalist groups around the Middle East, as it has risen in opposition to a secular-style government currently facing economic difficulties. Fundamentalism and Islamic political thought do not represent a new phenomenon, though; in Algeria, they have been present for centuries. An analysis of Islam in Algeria's history and of the current popularity of the FIS suggest strongly that, despite positive motivations it offers to members, the movement is largely a negative reaction to current conditions. In other words, the FIS is popular not because of religion but because it offers an alternative to the unpopular FLN government. This reactive nature of the front, as well as conditions both internal and external to the movement, will make it difficult for it to succeed in its current form.

Islamic Influences in Algerian History

To better understand the current role of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria, it is helpful to examine its history and its effects in Algeria, as political movements like revivalism are largely recurrent (Bill, 1990). What is

characteristic of past movements often helps explain and predict current situations and their outcomes.

The founder of Islam, the prophet Mohammed, lived and died in what is now Saudi Arabia, but this did not prevent his life from becoming a model for Muslims everywhere, including in Algeria. Islamic forces reached Algeria within two decades of the Prophet's death in 632 AD and, despite initial resistance from the native Berbers, gained a power and popularity that have been present ever since (Entelis, 1986). In Algeria, as in other Arab nations, the Islamic religion blended with Arabic and North African culture to produce the beginning of modern Middle Eastern society. The consideration of Islam as part of Arabic culture is important to Algerians, and therefore it must be important for the political scientist, too, as an aid in understanding the individual and group behaviors that comprise Algerian politics.

An examination of the life of Mohammed shows clearly that the Prophet was not afraid to utilize political pressures to spread the word of Allah. Both within Mecca and in his later life, Mohammed took advantage of power-building techniques such as marrying his daughters to potential allies and mediating conflicts for other groups. He even utilized violent political means such as caravan raiding (Bill, 1990). Thus began a long relationship between politics and Islam: politics was used by Mohammed for religious purposes. During

that era Mohammed and his followers used political means to spread Islam; today, Islam itself is often used to carry out political goals. This phenomenon will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

Islamic-era Algerian society was relatively unbothered by outside forces until the Turk invasion and subsequent occupation which lasted from 1519 until 1830 (Entelis, 1986). Ottoman rule was far from harsh, however, and local representatives of the Empire largely allowed life to go on as before, "content to collect a salary" (Entelis, 1986, p.21). In other words, there was little need for Islam to enter politics.

It was not until the French took control of Algeria that the use of Islam for "religious resistance to state power" blossomed (Vatin, 1981, p.125). The French occupied Algeria for 132 years, from 1830 until the end of Algeria's war for independence in 1962 (Entelis, 1986). The harsh nature of French rule first provoked the Algerian nation into armed resistance, a situation to which Islam naturally lent itself. As the Algerian people would find out, Islam and Koranic passages can be used effectively to resist government or outside forces because of their. Islam was the religion of the large majority of Algerians, and could more legitimately motivate the people than could patriotism to this artificial state.

There is very little doubt that, however profound the

Islamic identity at the individual or community level remained, "it was the disruptive nature of French colonial policy that ultimately provoked the aggressive reassertion of an indigenous Algerian identity with strong ties to native Islamic culture" (Entelis, 1986, p.76). The result was an integration of Islam into Algerian nationalism. The French certainly gave native Algerians reason to protest: the infamous Code de l'Indigenat imposed by the French in the 1830s forbade native Algerians from speaking against France or its government. In addition, the Code made it illegal for Algerians to travel in their own country without a special permit (Entelis, 1986). At the same time, a number of Europeans settled in Algeria and were the recipients of preferential treatment, courtesy of the French government (Entelis, 1986).

A prominent leader of early Algerian resistance to France was Abd el-Kader, who specifically invoked Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, and orthodox Islam to rally Algerians around him in the 1830s (Entelis, 1986). Tradition and culture played an important role in choosing Islam as the resistance's central tenet. In fact, many Muslims did and still do equate Islamic achievement with Arabic achievement (Mortimer, 1982). The message of political freedom was in this case, however, considered more important than the messenger, Islam. This is evidenced by the strong participation in the united resistance by diverse Algerian tribes (Entelis, 1986). It

happened, however, that the best method for Algerians to show their dissatisfaction was through el-Kader's movement.

Algerians found it convenient to join a movement that both criticized the despised French imperialism and was dedicated to fighting it. The desperate conditions of the time helped compel Algerians to rally around a central figure; in this case that leader was el-Kader.

The early resistance to the French met the important goal of forming a treaty with the French when el-Kader signed the Treaty of Tafna in 1837, but this and other early successes of the movement brought neither lasting peace nor autonomy to Algeria (Entelis, 1986). The French gradually strengthened their hold on the country, and for decades the Muslim resistance was only sporadic and ineffective (Entelis, 1986). Nonetheless, Islamic influence was ever-present in Algerian politics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Islamic influence was not a major component of Algerian thought in the "assimilation with equality" movement led by Ferhat Abbas in the 1930's and 40's. In fact, Islamic thought was scarcely represented in that coalition, and was mentioned only vaguely to elicit support from the general population. Assimilation with equality was an unassertive plan for an "autonomous Algeria in loose federation with France" (Entelis, 1986, p.39). This plan was too unassertive for some, however. It prompted Ulama leader Shaik Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis to claim that "this Muslim nation was not

France.... [This nation] rejects assimilation; and has a patria of its own with its well recognized borders" (Cheriet, 1992, p.10). Ulama and other movements in the succeeding decade were to provide a strong nationalist alternative to Assimilationism. Nevertheless, Abbas' watered-down ideology was thought to be non-threatening enough for the French to accept, and many were confident that it would find success. Abbas was optimistic when, in May 1945, disaster struck his movement. During a peaceful pro-autonomy demonstration, some dissatisfied Algerians began a riot in the small city of Setif and slaughtered about 100 European settlers. The French-controlled state army, police, and European settler vigilante squads retaliated, killing over 6000 Muslims (Entelis, 1986). In the aftermath, the peace-loving Abbas was imprisoned, his political organization, Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty, was banned, and hopes for liberal reformism in Algeria were quickly devastated (Entelis, 1986). Despite the compromising nature of reformist Algerians, France harshly repudiated the "assimilationists." Ironically, this reaction made Algerians more likely to turn to more religious movements, which were then emerging with strong nationalist agendas.

One such independence movement was the same Salafiyya movement which was gaining prominence in other Arab countries at the time. It "aimed at reasserting the Islamic identity and Arab-Muslim heritage of individual Arabs" (Entelis, 1986,

p.42). More importantly, it was a precursor to the revolutionary group that finally ended French imperialism in Algeria. Also important during the pre-revolutionary period in Algeria was the Ulama movement of Ibn Badis. Although Ulama was also originally a religious, not necessarily political, movement, its teachings and statements "marked decisively the political culture and language of the national movement.... Through their extended network of [schools] and scout organizations, the Ulama exposed hundreds of children of the cities to the slogans of nationalism" (Cheriet, 1992, p.10). Seen in a historical context, the Salafiyya and Ulama movements were significant because once again a political movement called for change with Islam as a basis. They thus demonstrated that the ideals first defended in the early resistance against France were still alive in Algeria, even after 100 years of struggle.

Discouraged with French occupation, a group of Algerians finally formed the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action (CRUA) (Entelis, 1986). This assembly was committed to adopting violent means where compromise had failed, and on November 1, 1954, the National Liberation Front (FLN) was declared and the revolution began (Entelis, 1986).

Independence was seen as "the primary condition for Muslim Algerians both to regain their honor and to advance socially and economically" (Quandt, 1969, p.93). The independence movement under the FLN united a remarkably large number of

Muslims. It also demonstrated the continuing nature of the incorporation of Islam against state power in Algerian history. This time, however, the movement was successful, as a ceasefire was declared in 1962.

Post-Independence Algeria

The subsequent Algerian regime was first led by Ben Balla, a military leader of the FLN. Significantly, the Islamic rhetoric that was so important before and during the revolution was still recognizable in the programs of his and later regimes, but it was mainly subordinated to the leaders' real goal of a socialist state (Addi, 1992). This rhetoric included the notion of egalitarianism, which, like other Islamic ideas, was only a small part of the technocratic socialist Algerian state (Addi, 1992).

In 1965, there was a military takeover led by the President's chief of staff, Houari Boumediene, who took command and stabilized the regime over the course of a decade (Vatin, 1981). Boumediene was also a military leader, and in his disciplined mind, security was greatly important. He therefore made strict security a priority in his regime, within both government and society (Entelis, 1986). The rising cost of stability and of the implementation of the regime's ideals, however, was the loss of public participation in the political process (Entelis, 1986). After a decade, the need for reform was great, and in 1976 a new National Charter was approved by an overwhelming margin

(Entelis, 1986). The new charter's emphasis on political participation and a victory in the following Presidential election served to legitimize the rule of Boumediene. The Algerian president died in 1978, but he left behind the legacy of a stable national leadership. In addition, Algeria under Boumediene introduced socialist programs, such as free education and health care (Cheriet, 1992), and underwent rapid industrialization (Entelis, 1986). Although seen as positive by the government and by many foreign observers, these changes have more recently given Algerians, especially Islamic fundamentalists, cause for complaint, and the revivalist movement that has resulted is the focus of this paper.

Chadli Benjedid, the most recent president of Algeria, took power after the elections of 1979, making it a priority to reform the corruption that plagued the credibility of his FLN and the government (Entelis, 1986). Throughout his Presidency, Benjedid attempted to establish the primacy of governmental institutions over "residual regional and tribal solidarities" (Cheriet, 1992). The result of this policy thrust was particularly offensive to native Berbers. The modernization-minded technocrats in Benjedid's government were similarly unsympathetic to other groups in the area of personal status legislation (Cheriet, 1992). Consequently, some of his new policies also antagonized students, feminists and most importantly, Islamic fundamentalists (Cheriet,

Entelis). A host of other problems--economic, political and social--has befallen Algeria in the last decade, and consequently the government has been an easy target for criticism from the FIS. To its credit, in the last decade the FLN government has allowed increased public dissent and discussion in the form of legalized opposition parties. This was done in the hope that the government would be legitimized in a more democratic forum.

Despite the intentions of the FLN, the loosening of control over public dissent in Algeria seems to have backfired. Throughout the 1980's, different Algerian interest groups protested and demonstrated against the government, beginning with the Berbers in 1980 (Cheriet, 1992). Throughout the decade other anti-government groups became more active, most notably the FIS, other Islamic fundamentalists and feminists (Cheriet, 1992). The forceful presence of such diametrically opposed groups is a telling sign of the growing discord in contemporary Algeria. There are even strong political differences among members of the FIS itself, but the external conflict with the government has prevented these cracks from showing (Zunes, 1992). In 1988, there were fundamentalism-inspired riots during election time, and the violence has continued ever since ("Another chance," 1991). After violence erupted during the May campaigning period for what were to be June elections in 1991, President Benjedid declared a four-month state of

emergency in an attempt to calm the young, poor, dissatisfied urban class that was a main cause of the violence ("Algeria steps off," 1991). Such unrest has played into the hands of the the FIS, which, in the true spirit of political opportunism, characterizes the riots as an expression of Islamic revivalist thought. The FIS further fans the flames of violence by encouraging violence among and recruiting from the young urban poor (Gibbins, 1991).

As even non-fundamentalists agree, the FIS and Algerians have had much to complain about, and the problems facing the government are not easily solved. The socialist economic system installed by the FLN has failed to be the panacea it was expected to be. Even a near-perfect form of government, though, would have had difficulty guiding and funding Algeria's modernization. Although Algeria has been considered to be an excellent model of rapid industrialization for the rest of the third world, there are side effects of this modernization. As one author writes, "Industrialization has led inevitably to urbanization and the creation of a rootless proletariat cut off from its former rural certainties" ("Even here," 1983). This proletariat is comprised largely of young unemployed urban dwellers. Three out of four young Algerians are jobless, and many live in urban slums, often seven to a room and with their extended families ("Islam and," 1991). These urban residents spend their time "sexually, politically, financially and

spiritually frustrated" (Gibbins, 1991, p.32).

Such conditions lead to a myriad of family problems. Incest is rampant, especially between grandparents and grandchildren (Gibbins, 1991). Sons are often envious of their economically secure fathers, who can often afford to have a second, much younger wife. In contrast, the younger generation is often unemployed with little chance of marriage or self-support (Gibbins, 1991). Situations such as this increase young Algerians' desperation, especially in large cities like Algiers. "Such people, seeking some identity, cause or just dignity, are the recruiting ground and the cannon fodder of the fundamentalists" (Gibbins, 1991, p.32).

The fast pace of Algerian modernization has led to close contacts with the West, a phenomenon which disturbs Islamic revivalists (Vatin, 1981). In addition to leading Algeria outside the Muslim world for technological and economic help, Western influences are seen as a moral intrusion. The government is therefore seen as an enemy for yet another reason: it has opened the floodgates for Western-style "decadent" forms of entertainment. In the last five years, however, Islamic policy itself has actually made life worse for young people (Gibbins, 1991). Militant fundamentalists have closed night clubs, music halls and brothels that offended their sensibilities, but that were also a way for young people to relieve stress (Gibbins, 1991). It is no longer possible for many Algerians to even have a cup of

coffee at a sidewalk cafe, as these places, too, were found anti-Islamic and shut down by radical revivalists (Gibbins, 1991). These measures have further isolated and frustrated young Algerians, ironically making them more likely to be attracted to the sure answers given by fundamentalist leaders.

The Algerian government has also had a negative albeit important role in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the FIS. Hocaine Ait Ahmed of the Algerian Socialist Forces Front blames years of FLN misrule: "The fundamentalist phenomenon is the result of a dictatorship when there was no possibility of taking part in political life, in the administration of the city. They had no alternative apart from the mosques" (Gibbins, 1991, p.32). Economic progress and modernization have admittedly come at the price of political participation. The one-party Algerian political system and government have been closed to all but party members, and little attention has been paid to oppositionists such as the FIS until recently. In contrast, the mosques and their fundamentalist message have always been available to the masses. The constant exposure of Algerians to the mosques and their message coupled with lack of integration with the government has led many to join the FIS as their only political outlet. Although considered more democratic than the majority of its Middle Eastern counterparts, post-revolutionary Algeria has for decades intermittently outlawed

opposition such as the Islamic Salvation Front, resulting in the current desperation for a share in the government on the part of fundamentalists and other political groups. Although its own goals are not wholly democratic, the FIS knows that even a small voice in official politics is better than the recent treatment by the government. The FIS is not alone when it calls for democracy. Pressure for democratic elections has also come from ordinary voters, who are "fed up with decades of corrupt and incompetent one-party rule" ("Algeria on hold," 1991, p.18).

Despite all the problems that make Algerians turn to the otherworldly promises of Islamic fundamentalism, there is a very important positive motivation that leads them to join such groups. This motivation, cultural identity, is probably the most important cohesive force for Algerian fundamentalists. As one author states it, "Islam's importance is not the orthodox observance of the faith; rather it is the source of cultural identity" (Entelis, 1986, p.76). In the face of the problems that confront many poor Algerians, it would seem natural to return to one's own sense of culture and pride in one's heritage. The idealized view held by many Algerians of their Islamic culture is understandable, especially in light of the exploitation and corruption that they have survived in the last 200 years.

On the other hand, there are those who find fault with members' rationale for joining the FIS. FLN secretary

general Abdelhamid Mehri offers this critique of FIS members' motivations for joining the party: "There is a frustrated aspiration in some people who do not really know Islam and are motivated by a confused ideal of justice and purity" (Gibbins, 1991, p.32). This view of FIS membership, although harsh, has strong basis in fact. Mehri takes into account the low social standing of many of its members. Such people are not prone to be political philosophers who rationally determine that joining or acting with the FIS is the best course of action for the future of Algeria. This lower class, as in many other Middle Eastern states, is truly desperate and has nothing to lose (Bill, 1990). They do share some important goals with Islamic fundamentalist leaders, such as a redistribution of wealth, but members' hopelessness makes it misleading to characterize such individuals as highly religious. This evaluation is corroborated by the traditional view of Algerians as not a religious people "in the sense of abiding by dogma" (Entelis, 1986, p.72). Nevertheless, revivalist clergy take advantage of the current situation and use the poorly integrated lower class to further their own goals. During the riots last June, for example, many Algiers youths might have ignored a peaceful demonstration. However, they were antagonized "by the tear gas, the police shields, masks and guns" ("Algeria steps off," 1991, p.44). As they began to fight back, "bearded FIS stewards, brandishing Korans, shouting Allahu

akbar ['God is great'] and calling for an Islamic republic, urged the excited youths on" ("Algeria steps off," p.44).

Although Islam is highly important as a religious, cultural and political force in Algeria, it is crucial to recognize Islam's usefulness to groups and leaders representing a complete spectrum of ideologies. Using Islam to resist government or foreign oppression is only half the story; in Algeria, the government, too, has used political Islam to its advantage. Such use of Islam is not a new idea; Islam has been used to legitimize already empowered political systems since the time of Mohammed. This concept dates back to Koranic verses such as: "Obey God, his Prophet, and obey those in authority over you" (Bill, 1990, p.49). The FLN-controlled government has taken this message to heart. In Algeria, there are government-appointed local clerics, the government states its policies in Islamic terms, and FLN leaders claim to be faithful Muslims as well. Ever since Algeria's independence, the FLN's formulation of scientific socialism has permitted incumbent leaders to pursue a "radical modernization policy involving rapid and sweeping economic growth, the use of advanced technology and scientific know-how, and dependence on Western secularists for administrative, organizational and financial expertise" (Entelis, 1986, p.159), all while sustaining a moral policy that is nominally consistent even with Islam's strict prescriptions. The Islamic Salvation Front, then, may well

have a legitimate claim to Islamic belief, but, at least in the political arena, it is not a singular claim.

If Islamicists somehow managed to gain power in Algeria, the new government would be similar to the Iranian revolutionary regime. Islamic shari'a would be the preferred law of the land, and business and government ties with the West could be strained. The empowerment of the FIS would seem quite likely, as its candidates won 55% of the local vote in the 1988 elections. Additionally, the party claimed 49% of Parliament seats with outright majorities in the December 1991 elections ("Turn," 1992).

The road to a successful FIS regime, however, is by no means a clear one. After the elections of 1988, the FLN gerrymandered political boundaries in its own favor, slightly diminishing the FIS' electoral popularity ("Algeria steps off," 1991). It is more significant that the Salvation Front's record at handling local politics in the last few years has been unimpressive ("Another chance," 1991). The fact that the FIS' radical aspirations are inching closer to fulfillment has also scared off some voters ("Another chance," 1991). A more telling fact is that early this year, the Algerian state army has violently intervened in national politics, lessening even further the FIS' chances for success.

Current State of Siege

The current repression of the FIS and other Algerian

political parties by the government is of great interest to world observers because its outcome could help predict how fundamentalism will fare in conflicts in other parts of the region. The current Algerian confrontation began on January 11, 1992, when, to the surprise of many, President Chadli Benjedid stepped down. On January 15, the army stepped into the power void that had conveniently been left open when Benjedid dissolved Parliament a few weeks earlier. This coincidence has caused speculation that Benjedid was somehow involved in the army takeover, although the extent of his involvement in and support for the plan are unknown. In addition to taking power, the army also nullified the December 26, 1991 election results, in which the FIS had won an outright majority in 49% of Parliament's 430 seats ("Turn," 1992).

It now appears that within the highest reaches of the Algerian government there were two schools of thought on how to deal with the electoral success of the FIS ("How to," 1992). The first alternative was, of course, an immediate and firm crackdown on the Islamic resurgence. As this is the option chosen by the government, it is easier for observers to evaluate the immediate effects of the action. In the eyes of many, the army's takeover was misguided, partially because through its actions the army has delegitimized itself in the face of the country and the world (Zunes, 1992). The army aborted the very democracy that its government had created.

The coup will also likely prove short-sighted because ultimately it will only antagonize the FIS membership. This phenomenon has already been demonstrated in the aftermath of the army's takeover; there have been widespread violence and riots in Algiers, Betna, Constantine, and other cities (Hermida, 1992). According to a February, 1992 article in The Economist, "Millions of people who believe they were robbed of their vote are now in danger of turning in desperation to the men with machine guns. If they do, it could make Algeria's intifada a good deal scarier than that uprising in the West Bank" ("Fear," 1992, p.46).

The other alternative available to the FLN-controlled government was simply to permit the Salvation Front's elected officials to take office. This approach would have had certain advantages, the first of which was the anticipated exposure of the FIS' ineptitude at running a government. The FIS has been a highly effective resistance movement and has had many easy governmental targets to criticize. During its own brief and limited chance at governing, however, the FIS has been quite ineffective, at least within the everyday matters of local government (Gibbins, 1991). Consequently, many observers, including now ex-President Benjedid, have concluded that the Salvation Front would be equally ineffective at the national level. The FIS' "unthinking commitment to unfettered free enterprise" and an Islamic form of government would likely worsen Algeria's woes and

accelerate the country's awareness of the party's lack of governing expertise ("How to," 1992). As King Hassan of Morocco describes the situation, "Religion is not enough to rule a country" ("Fear," 1992, p.46).

A second advantage in allowing the FIS to take power would have been that differences within the party could have led it to form a moderate brand of pluralism (Zunes, 1992). The FIS is home to such varied members as radical terrorist zealots and moderate Muslims seeking change within the current system. Such pluralist differences might have brought the FLN the kind of relatively free democracy that it desired but did not expect. Just as likely would have been the possibility of the disparate party splitting into open factions under the pressure of governing. This scenario would have had the added advantage of clearing the way for a return to secular leadership (Zunes, 1992).

The FLN's obvious problem with giving up power to the Islamic Salvation Front is the unlikelihood of the FIS ever relinquishing it. Many Algerians fear that the democratic system "is being used [by the FIS] and will then be abandoned" ("Difficulties," 1992, p.97). Justification for this fear can be readily found in the FIS' own statements and its leaders' speeches. They have spoken of goals such as a non-democratic Islamic form of government, reduction of opportunities for women to work outside the home, segregated-sex schools, a return to veil-wearing for women, and

prohibition of all alcohol. If it had gained a two-thirds majority in the Algerian parliament, the FIS would have had the votes necessary to change the constitution and institute the spoken-of Islamic law. Even if a fundamentalist majority had proven too troublesome for the current regime, though, final power would have rested with the President until December 1993. If the National Assembly would have rejected his program, he could have legally and legitimately dissolved parliament ("How to," 1992). This presidential authority should have assuaged the FLN's immediate fears about surrendering power.

Discussion and Conclusion

Islam is the religion of the overwhelming number of Algerians, and it is an especially powerful shield behind which they can unite in the face of aggression. This phenomenon of national unity in the name of Islam has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout 200 years of Algeria's history, the first important instance being their resistance to the French in the 1830s and 1840s. Islam was not just a religion for those Algerians; it also represented the cultural achievements of Arabs and North Africans in general. The members of the early resistance were not necessarily faithful Muslims, however; they simply united in a coalition behind Islam to achieve a common end. The FLN itself later identified with Islam to gain the support of the nation in order to finally oust France in the war for Algerian

independence. These historical movements differ with the current FIS movements in one important respect: they united nearly all of Algeria in their struggle, whereas today Algeria is deeply divided. The Front's chances at political success are hurt by these divisions both within the party and with the rest of society.

"In practice, religious opposition to central power has almost never ceased to function since the end of the eighteenth century" (Vatin, 1981, p.121). This continuity is not the only important similarity between early Algerian resistance to the French and the modern fundamentalist opposition to the government. As with members of the earlier resistance movement, it is clear that all the members of the FIS are not members for purely religious reasons. They are dissatisfied with the way things are, and Islamic fundamentalism is the vehicle for their discontent. Thus, once again, Islam is a tool for grassroots resistance to government and outside powers. Understandably, the Islamic Salvation Front has many factors in its favor, including Algeria's woeful economic situation. The FIS appeals to "the jobless young, it is untainted by association with previous governments, and it has in the mosques a ready made network for spreading the word" ("Algeria steps into," 1990, p.51). The Algerian elections on December 26, 1991 have sent signals throughout the world, but especially to the Algerian government and other Arab states. The current rise of Moslem

fundamentalism may not be a completely religious movement, but it is a powerful one. If the government army maintains power it will be interfering with a legitimate movement that will likely continue to grow, just as Islamic resistance movements have previously in Algeria.

Although there is much uncertainty over how and when the current situation will be resolved, it is widely believed that the military will not be politically successful in its repression of the FIS (Hermida, Zunes, et al). This is not to say that the FIS will soon take over, although some kind of revolution is not out of the question. If the FIS were to take over violently, the result could be similar to what happened in Iran: moderate Islamicists in that nation were eliminated in the revolution's aftermath and radicals took the reins by themselves (Zunes, 1992). A more likely result is the continuation of the riots and unrest that have plagued Algeria in the last half-decade. Some observers even predict that repression will escalate the violence; such government policy is another easy target for the FIS' criticism, and could in fact lead to further growth of Islamic fundamentalism (Hermida, Zunes).

Continued repression by the Algerian government will very likely prove counterproductive to the future of Algeria. On the other hand, if the FIS is victorious, it may do little more than set Algeria's modernization back a century. Whatever party eventually gains power in Algeria will be

faced with the dilemma of either making concessions to the opposition or dealing with the continuation of destructive political violence, either by the army or by the masses. If pluralism and compromise are not included in the formula for government, the result will be a setback for relative peace and prosperity, and a loss for the nation as a whole.

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