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**The Re-Positioning of Algeria's Islamist Opposition: The Cooptation and
De-Cooptation of *Harakat Mujtama' Al-Silm***

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I. Introduction

The past couple of decades have seen a wealth of literature discussing the real and potential role of political Islam in democratic and pseudo-democratic electoral politics. From the ‘moderation-inclusion’ hypothesis, to the study of the successful cooptation of Islamist movements into ‘upgraded’ authoritarian structures in Morocco, Jordan, and pre-2011 Egypt, the vast majority of this literature, especially in English, has ignored the example of Algeria and the participation of ‘moderate’ *Ikhwani* (Muslim Brotherhood-style) Islamist parties in post-1991 electoral politics. The limited literature that does exist on present-day Islamist parties in Algeria tends to focus on ideology and moderation (e.g. articles by Michael Driessen, Tassadit Yacine) or on the parties’ transition from illegal *da‘wa* (proselytizing) movements to legal political parties, and the process of cooptation (French-language articles by Amel Boubekeur and Mohammed Hachemaoui). But while the motivations and incentives that led *Harakat Mujtama‘ Al-Silm* (HMS), Algeria’s largest Islamist party, to participate in elections and governing coalitions has been covered, no in-depth research has been conducted that attempts to explain HMS’s post-2011 shift from government to opposition. What is the significance of this change? Does it indicate a new process of de-cooptation, or is it a cynical ploy to briefly ride the wave of the Arab Spring, soon to be abandoned? If it is the case that HMS is becoming de-coopted, what effect has this had on HMS’s social base and popular support?

Our findings indicate that although HMS is internally divided on the issue, the party’s leadership is serious about its new position in the opposition, and we argue that Abderrazak Makri is indeed leading the party in a new direction of de-cooptation and serious engagement with the non-Islamist opposition. However, HMS, like all Algerian political parties, has

extremely weak ties to society, and this does not appear to have changed in any meaningful way since the party's switch to the opposition in 2012. In order for the *Tansiqiyya*—the coalition of opposition parties of which HMS is a member—to produce meaningful change and put serious pressure on the regime, it must take two key steps. First, it must circumvent the restrictions placed upon it by the *pouvoir*, a ruling inner circle comprised of political, military, intelligence, and business elites. Second, it must build more meaningful connections with society, and with key interest groups such as students, labor, and the private sector.

While the phenomenon of Islamist parties cooperating with secular or monarchical governments is better documented and researched in Jordan, Egypt, and to a certain extent in Morocco, post-war peaceful Islamism in Algeria, and certainly peaceful Islamism that is friendly with the *pouvoir*, has not received much attention. Understandably, the study of Islamism in Algeria has been dominated by the traumatic experiences of extreme violence during the civil war. And so, while the relationship between violent Islamism and the Algerian state has been explored in depth, groups like HMS and Abdallah Djaballah's *Jabhat Al-'Adala Wal-Tanmiya*¹ receive scant attention.

As President Abdelaziz Bouteflika grows older in his fourth term, and the ruling military elites have been unable to find a consensus candidate to replace him, certain secular-liberal and Islamist parties see an opportunity for meaningful change and political pluralism. Others fear a descent into chaos. Either way, there exists very little literature in English about the current political party system in Algeria, how political parties function, and the extent to which they are fully controlled or co-opted by the *pouvoir*/military state. In addition to contributing to larger

¹ Commonly abbreviated to El-Adala, Justice and Development Front

debates over Islamism and authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa, we hope to fill this gap in English-language material on the current Algerian political scene, so that political developments during and after the current succession crisis can be better understood.

II. Framework and Methodology

We approach the historical and current positions of HMS in Algerian politics by analyzing them along two key axes: First, we attempt to determine the party's position along an axis ranging from complete cooptation to absolute opposition.

Second, we will analyze the social strength (or weakness) of the party along an axis ranging from virtually no social base to a large social base that can be easily mobilized². Throughout this paper, Islamist politician and constant opposition leader Sheikh Abdallah Djaballah and the parties he has run³ will serve as a comparative example (and at times counterexample) to HMS. Djaballah's movement is relevant both because he represents an alternative political trajectory to HMS, and because he is one of the only other highly influential Islamist political figures in Algeria--and certainly the only Islamist figure capable of posing, through whichever party he is associated with, an electoral threat to HMS.

For the purposes of this study, complete cooptation will be defined as complete support for the regime and ruling party. Expressing dissenting opinions, or refusing to participate in government indicates a shift in the direction of opposition. Boycotting the political system entirely --except in cases of guaranteed free and fair elections-- and expressing forceful dissenting rhetoric or taking concrete actions that challenge the authority of the government would be absolute opposition.

An insightful analysis of present-day Algerian politics is impossible without an understanding of tumultuous political events of the past three decades. Although our main

² For a graphic illustration of these axes, see Appendix I

³ Chronologically: Ennahda, MRN, El-Adala. Djaballah was ousted first from Ennahda and subsequently founded the MRN, from which he was also pushed out. He is currently the head of El-Adala (Jabhat Al-Adala Wal-Tanmiya)

argument is that HMS has only recently begun a process of de-cooptation, we will also advance the claim that even during the height of HMS's cooptation, during its participation in government from 1992 to 2012, the party had a vision for itself, the Algerian state, and Algerian society that was distinct from that held by the ruling FLN⁴ and the *pouvoir*. Although Amel Boubekeur introduces the idea of HMS using its cooptation in order to become more 'professionalized', we are left wondering what the profession is - whether the goal of 'professionalization' is merely to become proficient at extracting rent within a democratic façade, or in order to gain enough political experience to eventually effect some change. We will argue that at least a significant faction of HMS leaders takes the second, more teleological view, and that the current shift to the opposition, therefore, is not simply an improvised, *ad hoc* change, but rather the fulfillment of an intentional long-term political trajectory.

Although a comprehensive historical analysis of HMS, the *da'wa* movements that preceded it, and the broader Islamic movement in Algeria is beyond the scope of this paper, we analyze HMS's and Djaballah's electoral performance and HMS's participation in government since 1990, in order to support our view of a semi-co-opted HMS with a separate political vision and ambitions of effecting real change.

Our findings are based on primary and secondary sources in Arabic, French, and English. We conducted interviews in Algiers from March 8 to 12, with academics, journalists, and political party leaders. All interviews in Algiers were conducted in Arabic, with one exception. We also conducted one in-person interview and one Skype interview (both in English) with foreign-based academics in Washington, D.C. Other primary source materials used include party

⁴ *Front de Libération Nationale, Jabhat Al-Tahrir Al-Watani*, National Liberation Front

publications kindly provided by HMS, party websites, and social media sites. These sources were supplemented with extensive secondary source materials including media reports and academic literature in Arabic, French, and English, as well as election results gathered from a mix of international NGO websites and Abdelnacer Djabi's exhaustive book on pre-1998 elections.

III. Existing Theories on Algerian Islamist Politics

Amel Boubekeur provides a slightly more updated analysis of HMS and the MRN in her articles published in 2008 and 2010. Boubekeur's argument is especially compelling in that it outlines the specific incentives and disincentives that the regime and the moderate Islamist parties have to perpetuate a situation in which these parties participate in a superficially democratic process. Boubekeur notes that the government benefits from the participation of Islamists in that it is able to project a pluralist, democratic image, which may help with EU relations and international aid. It is important for the regime to have Islamists specifically, and not just any defanged opposition movement, because the presence of 'moderate Islam' bolsters an image of a new Algeria that has moved past the civil war of the 1990s, known as the 'Black Decade'. From the point of view of the parties themselves, Boubekeur identifies a tradeoff between being perceived as selling out and other advantages of participation. Although the Islamists are not actually in power and are quite aware of the superficiality of democratic structures in Algeria and the government's attempts to co-opt them, they do not view this as an obstacle. Boubekeur elaborates:

“On the contrary, the fact that the Islamist elites are mainly co-opted through legislative elections reinforces the policy of *mousharaka* (partnership) that is at the heart of their current political strategy. It allows them to govern without yet truly having the means by engaging in a practical exercise of an apprenticeship of management of more daily politics and less revolutionary politics.”⁵

⁵ Boubekeur, “Les partis islamistes algériens et la démocratie: vers une professionnalisation politique?” Paragraph 19.

The idea of practical politics as a sort of apprenticeship, and of Islamists embracing pseudo-democracy as a sort of temporary democratic training ground is an interesting one that merits further exploration. If HMS and Djaballah truly see themselves as democrats in training, then this necessarily implies a teleological direction for their political activities. In fact, it would suggest that Islamist partnerships with secular opposition parties should be deepened in order to produce a meaningful alliance for change. But as Boubekour notes, for the time being, this in-between stage has important benefits for parties like HMS, as it allows them to spew vague rhetoric about the role of Islam in society, without the danger of ever actually being able to carry out some of the more sweeping reforms they call for.

Boubekour also brings up an important distinction between HMS and Djaballah's party (which at her time writing was the MRN). HMS, she notes, is almost unabashedly elitist, and draws most of its support from the upper and middle class. Djaballah represents a poorer demographic, and his political stance and ideology has been described as closer to quietist salafism than to FIS or the Muslim Brotherhood. Djaballah has strongly implied in interviews that he considers his party to be more principled and implies that he thinks HMS sold out.⁶ As such, he has boycotted most dialogue initiatives led by the regime, but, interestingly, has been willing to work with secularist opposition parties despite major disagreements.

In general, most of the moderation-inclusion-focused literature on HMS and Djaballah's parties focuses on regime-party relations, and either ignores or touches briefly on the role of popular support. In a pseudo-democratic system in which parties need to balance the need for state support with the need for popular support, which one takes priority? As Boubekour notes:

⁶ Al Jazeera, "Fi Al-'Umq: Al-Haraka Al-Islamiyya Fi Al-Jaza'ir"

“one of the negative impacts of this professionalization for the Islamist parties resides in the weakening of their ties with their base.”⁷ But how bad has the impact on their popularity been? How do we know how much support a party has in Algeria, and perhaps more importantly, how does that party know? Although it was beyond the scope of our research to produce any original data on the organizing capacity and social outreach of the parties in question, we have incorporated information about their social bases and popular support when available. To this end, we have relied extensively on electoral data, which, as we will explain, we believe to be a meaningful proxy for popular support despite widespread fraud.

Driessen, Boubekeur, and many others are inconclusive or ambivalent about whether or not the participation of Islamists in post-1992 Algerian politics is ultimately a net-positive for the chances of democratic development or a net-negative. Our theory of HMS’s de-cooptation suggests the former.

Hafez’s work focuses on social mobilization theory as a means to understanding the political violence of the Black Decade and the relationship between the state and Islamist entities. According to the author, political opportunities allow Islamist leaders to turn the grievances of the people into slogans and messages through “frames of mobilization” that they then use to radicalize youths. The issue with this sort of argument is that it rests on the base of a cultural explanation for Islamist political violence and ignores the role played by the state and the regime. While the author holds that the exclusionary setting set by the state plays a role in inciting Islamist opposition, he implies that the Islamist tendency towards rebellion is inherently cultural. According to Hafez, “social movements emerge in political environments that shape

⁷ Boubekeur, “Les partis islamistes algériens et la démocratie: vers une professionnalisation politique?” Paragraph 22.

their opportunities and constraints for action.” These opportunities and constraints thus influence the actions of movement actors and are the basis of the debate over the “efficacy and legitimacy of competing strategies,” particularly those of the existing regime.

In Algeria, Hafez explains, institutional exclusion was an important contributor to Islamist opposition before the 1992 coup. As a result, the impossibility of political contestation in Algerian politics and political institutions “encourage[d] rebellion by delegitimizing the ruling regime and disempowering moderate voices within the movement.” This is precisely what occurred at the inception of the Black Decade in Algeria. Hafez explains that while the absence of real political competition in Algerian politics may not allow a space in which moderate Islamists can participate, the inclusion of moderate Islamism might not guarantee a decline in radicalism because radicalism is an inborn facet of Islamism. It would, however, provide an Islamist political outlet for those at risk of becoming radicalized in the face of secular political regime. Again, the problem with this argument is that it assumes that all Islamist political and social elements are intrinsically unwilling to work with a secular opposition, a notion that has been nullified by the recent formation of several opposition coalitions in Algeria.

Whether social movement theory best explains these political dynamics is debatable. That relative deprivation from political participation guided the development of Islamist political movements in Algeria is well founded, but it does not explain the entire picture. In the aftermath of the Algerian Civil War, while FIS and other Islamist political forces have been driven out of politics, many other Islamist parties and organizations have chosen the direction of brokering with the regime and functioning within the existing political structure. Because the social mechanisms described by Hafez were so essential to the rise of FIS (and indeed, to the

transnational Muslim Brotherhood movement as well), the erosion of HMS's small social base creates a curious situation. What happens when what originated as a social opposition movement of disaffected and marginalized elements of society becomes a dismembered but significant political party, cut off from its social roots but enjoying more political power than ever before?

In order to understand how social movement theory and other theoretical frameworks explain Algerian politics, we have also done away with the rigid "regime versus Islamists" framework of that keeps us from understanding the complex political and social relationships between Islamist opposition parties and the regime. Although Luis Martinez does this well, his socio-political narrative is bounded by the assumptions that Islamism is flawed and inherently violent, that its violence is endemic, and that Islamists are unwilling to accept secular opposition. Martinez provides a nuanced and detailed analysis of Algerian politics prior to and during the civil war and focuses on the roles of political actors and political advantages and disadvantages, but there has been no follow up to this specific approach published since his. Regardless, his work provides important background analysis that serves to underscore the arguments in this paper.

IV. Counterarguments - “*Islamism in North Africa is Dead*”: A Minimalist View of HMS

Before going into the reasons why HMS can be considered an opposition party of some importance, it is worth first exploring the opposite argument: that HMS is a complete sellout, an entirely co-opted tool of the *pouvoir*, and that neither it nor any other political party is of any consequence in Algerian politics today. This minimalist view of HMS and of political parties in Algeria in general is most forcefully expressed by Algerian political scientist Rachid Tlemçani, who claims that “Islamism in North Africa is dead,” and argues that it is a mistake to evaluate Algerian politics through the lens of parties and elections. Leaving aside the somewhat more audacious claims about Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco that the above statement implies, Dr. Tlemçani makes an important point about the weakness of political parties, their lack of connections to society, and their inability to mobilize significant numbers of voters or protesters. If we classify the RND as a party of the regime, HMS is the largest opposition party in Algeria, and certainly the largest and best-funded Islamist party. And yet, in the last parliamentary elections in 2012, HMS’s *Alliance verte* (a coalition including other small Islamist parties) was only able to obtain 475,049 votes--less than 2% of the voting-age population in Algeria.⁸

Tlemçani also argues that it is impossible to carry out any meaningful analysis of election results in Algeria because of the large-scale election fraud that occurs. The existence of fraud in Algerian elections is widely acknowledged. Thus, official election statistics on both the *total* number of votes cast for regime parties (the FLN and/or the RND, depending on the election in question) as well as their *relative* performance vis-à-vis opposition parties should be taken with a grain of salt, although perhaps not totally disregarded. After all, if the election results were

⁸ International IDEA; IPU

entirely fabricated, surely the regime would invent a slightly more impressive voter turnout. Tlemçani, however, goes a step further, and argues that the election results for opposition parties are not a good measure of relative support, and that all election results are decided by the *cabinet noir*⁹ of the DRS¹⁰, Algeria's national intelligence agency. This would mean, for example, that HMS's outperformance of Djaballah's party in every post-coup election except 2002 is entirely meaningless and does not necessarily indicate broader support for HMS than for Djaballah.

Although the extent and exact mechanisms of electoral fraud in Algeria are extremely difficult to ascertain, it seems unlikely that the books are cooked to quite the extent that Dr. Tlemçani alleges. Other experts with whom we spoke¹¹ said that relative support for opposition parties *vis-à-vis* each other can be reasonably ascertained from election results. Madjid Makedhi, a journalist at *El Watan* who specializes in Islamist movements and political parties, and Abdenacer Djabi, in his extensive work on the 1995 and 1997 elections, both place special importance on the geographic distribution of votes as a key indicator of the general support and mobilization power of each party.

Additionally, if we accept both that the relative distribution of votes is entirely determined by shadowy intelligence forces, and that HMS is an entirely co-opted party, this fails to explain Islah's outperformance of HMS in the 2002 legislative elections. Why would an authoritarian regime seeking to allot election results purely based on its own interests, without taking into account popular opinion at all, allot more seats to Islah, an avowedly anti-*pouvoir*

⁹ A shadowy, ill-defined group of DRS elites

¹⁰ From the French *Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité*

¹¹ Makedhi; Anonymous

party, than to HMS, which was in the ruling coalition before 2002 and remained so after the elections?

Additionally, sources across the Islamist political party spectrum¹² confirmed that they believe the presence of election monitors at a polling station helps reduce the level of fraud. Of course, elections are clearly far from free and fair, and there are serious hindrances to the work of election observers; only five monitors—chosen at random from among the political parties, including many insignificantly tiny parties—are permitted to be present in any given polling station.¹³ But that the presence of observers deters fraud even partially would seem to indicate that the mechanism of fraud is more local than a shadowy group of men picking numbers out of a hat in the DRS headquarters. Our assumption, therefore, based on our readings of the election results and interviews with party members and other experts, is that while fraud to support the parties of the *pouvoir* (the FLN and the RND) is widespread—such as manipulation of votes of soldiers and in rural areas—the results of each opposition party *relative* to each other, and the geographic distribution of their results, does serve as a reasonably valid proxy for gauging levels of support. Although the FLN and the RND (which received 3.5 million votes in June 1997¹⁴, winning a national election less than four months after its founding in February of that year)¹⁵ have clearly benefited from large-scale fraud in their favor, we have found no evidence to suggest that HMS or the RCD, ever received similar fraudulent support. Obviously, on a micro-level, if the *pouvoir* decides to rig polling stations in city A to support FLN candidate X, and city

¹² Boulil & Saud; Djaballah; El-Dan

¹³ Boulil & Saud

¹⁴ IPU, Hachemaoui

¹⁵ RND Website

A has more supporters of Ennahda than of HMS, this action may end up having a damaging secondary effect on Ennahda's election results. Nevertheless, we will proceed on the reasoning that the number of votes cast for HMS and Djaballah's parties, serves as a more-or-less accurate representation of each party's ability to mobilize support.

While Tlemçani is dismissive of the importance of parties and elections in Algeria in general, another key aspect of the minimalist view of HMS is that it is a complete sellout. According to this argument, HMS, although originating before 1991 as a movement opposing the secularization of the state and the spread of socialist ideology, was entirely co-opted by the *pouvoir* following the 1992 coup, and is now inseparable from the regime.¹⁶ This line of reasoning holds that HMS's participation as a nominally oppositional party, especially early on in the 1990s is in fact an act of support for the regime that renders them a party of the *pouvoir*, and not a true opposition movement. Although we will not deny that HMS in the 1990s was co-opted, we will argue that its long-term strategic goals are and have been separate from those of the regime, and that it is currently assuming a more oppositional role than in its first two decades as a legal party.

Finally, in order to argue the significance of HMS's shift to the opposition, we will be arguing against another possible counter-argument: that this is merely a short-term tactical shift. This argument would hold that HMS, like other Islamist movements, responds to changes in pressure from constituents and the regime by altering its level of accommodation or opposition to the regime. The 2012 shift, according to this line of thinking, is no different, and merely represents a short-term response to the conditions of the Arab Spring. We contend that while the

¹⁶ Anonymous

former HMS leader Bouguerra Soltani, who led the initial shift to the opposition, may have intended such a short-term tactical adjustment, current party leader Abderrazak Makri has pressed for a deeper, long-term, strategic change in the orientation of HMS.

V. HMS pre-2011: Cooptation, Survival, and the Battle for Legitimacy

Before we discuss HMS's post-2011 transition into the opposition, it is important to first examine the role that they played in Algerian politics during the peak of their cooptation between 1992 and January 1, 2012. Multi-party electoral politics in Algeria is a relatively recent phenomenon. After Algerian independence in 1962, the FLN, which had emerged after 1954 as the hegemonic revolutionary group fighting in the Algerian War of Independence, established itself as the *parti unique*. This single-party system (*al-uhadiyya*)¹⁷ lasted until 1989, when, following an economic crisis, the collapse of the socialist welfare state, and massive protests beginning in 1988, the government passed a new constitution in 1989 legalizing other political parties and declared its intention to hold free multi-party elections.

The Islamic movement (*al-haraka al-Islamiyya*) in Algeria, however, has a much longer history, and both HMS and El-Adala have their origins in *da'wa* movements inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that originated decades before the first multiparty elections in 1990. HMS's organizational antecedent can be traced back to 1962, immediately following Algerian independence, when Sheikhs Mahfoud Nahnah and Mohamed Bouslimani founded an organization called *Jama'at Al-Muwahhidin* (Group of Monotheists).¹⁸ Nahnah and Bouslimani had close organizational ties to what Dr. Zoubir Arous describes as "*harakat al-Ikhwān al-umm*" (the Muslim Brotherhood mother organization) in Egypt, and their organization took on the appearance of *the* Muslim Brotherhood franchise in Algeria.¹⁹

¹⁷ Djabi

¹⁸ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 15

¹⁹ Arous

In 1976, Nahnah's Jama'a rose to prominence for its vigorous opposition to President Houari Boumédiène's socialist constitutional document, *Al-Mithaq Al-Watani (Charte Nationale)*.²⁰ Nahnah and many of the *jama'a*'s members were arrested and imprisoned following acts of civil disobedience including cutting power lines.²¹ During this period, Nahnah's movement first came into contact with Djaballah's *da'wa* organization based in eastern Algeria. Although Djaballah had been influenced by the transnational *Ikhwani* movement and had developed contacts with members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood residing in Algeria, he has never been organizationally associated with the Brotherhood.²² Djaballah thus represented the Algerian nationalist *Ikhwani* trend, sometimes called "Algerianist." Nevertheless, Nahnah, Djaballah, and many other Algerian Islamists met and were influenced by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood teachers and preachers in Algeria at the time.²³

In 1979, Chadli Bendjedid was appointed President of Algeria, heralding a shift toward an economic opening to the West, and later a more tolerant political landscape. In 1981, Nahnah and other members of his *jama'a* were released from prison, and the country experienced a degree of political liberalization.²⁴ During this period, *Ikhwani* groups had their first experiences with electoral politics when they participated in student elections,²⁵ similar to the early experiences of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

²⁰ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 15

²¹ Al Hiwar Channel

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 16

²⁵ Al Hiwar Channel

Following a major financial crisis, major protests on October 5, 1988 set off a series of events that would eventually lead to the electoral success of FIS. 1988 also saw the launch of HMS's charitable organization, *Jam 'iyyat Al-Irshad Wal-Islah* (The Association of Guidance and Reform).²⁶ In 1989, a new constitution legalized political parties, but neither Djaballah nor Nahnah decided to create a party initially. However, following FIS's sweeping success in the 1990 local elections, both sheikhs decided to create their own parties - Nahnah's was called *Harakat Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami* (HAMAS, Movement for an Islamic Society), and Djaballah's was called *Harakat Al-Nahda Al-Islamiyya* (Ennahda, Islamic Renaissance Movement). These parties participated in the 1991 legislative elections, but were no match for FIS, and neither obtained any seats in parliament. HAMAS and Ennahda obtained 368,697 and 150,093 votes respectively (compared to FIS's 3,260,222)²⁷, and while HAMAS's results were relatively spread out across the north of the country, Ennahda was only able to obtain a significant number of votes in the east, especially in Annaba and Constantine, where it originated.²⁸ Djaballah's movement has never been able to move beyond its status as a regional party, and remains unable to mobilize significant support outside its eastern strongholds.²⁹

HAMAS took a non-confrontational, if not explicitly supportive, stance toward the *pouvoir* following the 1992 military coup, and was approached by the military government as early as 1992 as a partner for 'dialogue.'³⁰ HAMAS participated in the 1994 National Consensus

²⁶ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 16

²⁷ Hachemaoui; Djabi

²⁸ Djabi, p. 149

²⁹ Anonymous; Djabi; Makedhi

³⁰ Anonymous

Conference³¹, which appointed General Liamine Zérroual as Interim President of the Republic, and formed the National Transitional Council³² - a non-elected interim legislature that remained in place until the 1997 legislative elections.³³ This was to be HAMAS's first experience in government, and cemented their status as a party fully co-opted by the regime. In the eyes of their opponents, they had sold out³⁴, but as we will discuss further, this did not mean that they had lost all popular legitimacy.

In an attempt to resolve the civil war and restore democracy to Algeria in January 1995, representatives of the outlawed FIS, the Amazigh nationalist party FFS³⁵, Djaballah's Ennahda, two other secularist parties, and, interestingly, the FLN³⁶ now in opposition, met in Rome and signed the Sant'Egidio Platform. This remarkable convergence of socialists, *watani*³⁷ nationalists, Amazigh nationalists, and Islamists, known as *majmou'at al-'aqd al-watani* (group of the national contract), called for a process of national reconciliation and democratic reforms.³⁸ Notably absent from this process, were HAMAS and the RCD³⁹, both participants in *Al-Majlis Al-Intiqali* with warm relations with the regime.

The presidential election of 1995 was in many ways a test of strength for the *pouvoir*. Not only did it take place against the backdrop of continuing insurgent violence and threats to voters

³¹ *Nadwat Al-Wifaq Al-Watani/Conférence de consensus national*

³² *Al-Majlis Al-Watani Al-Intiqali/Conseil national de transition*

³³ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 16

³⁴ Anonymous

³⁵ *Front des forces socialistes/Jabhat Al-Qiwa Al-Ishtirakiyya*

³⁶ Djabi, p. 166

³⁷ Watani refers to general Algerian nationalism as opposed to Amazigh nationalism

³⁸ Ibid. p. 163

³⁹ *Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie/Al-Tajammu' Min Ajl Al-Thaqafa Wal-Dimuqratiyya*). The RCD is a secularist-Amazighist party and its position vis-à-vis the FFS is generally analogous to the relationship between HMS and Djaballah's movement.

by armed Islamist groups, the election also faced a boycott movement by the unlikely alliance of Sant'Egidio signatories, who wanted reforms to take place before elections. While Djaballah and the other signatories felt that participating in the elections would lend legitimacy to the *pouvoir* and hurt the cause of democracy, Nahnah and his party saw an “opportunity to re-situate and reform the Islamic movement”⁴⁰ in their favor.

The regime’s gamble paid off, and the elections occurred with minimal violence, and 75.69% turnout⁴¹ - the highest of any election in Algerian history thus far⁴² and a slap in the face to the Sant'Egidio Group. The Military’s candidate, Liamine Zérroual was re-elected with 61.14% of the vote.⁴³ Although fraud is reported to have occurred, and HMS members claim that it took place on a large scale,⁴⁴ other reports indicate that electoral irregularities occurred on a smaller scale than in later elections, and were not sufficient to alter the outcome of the elections.⁴⁵ Although HAMAS leader and presidential candidate Mahfoud Nahnah lost the election (HMS members claim he should have won),⁴⁶ 1995 was the peak of HAMAS/HMS’s electoral history. Nahnah received 2,907,857 total votes in 1995, which, although amounting to 25.38% of total votes cast, was a dramatic improvement over the party’s last results in 1991, when they received only 368,697 votes, and no seats in parliament.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 171

⁴¹ This figure is likely inflated and it is debatable to what extent it reflects reality. It is nevertheless clear that turnout was nowhere near as low as the boycotting parties had hoped it would be.

⁴² International IDEA

⁴³ Hachemaoui

⁴⁴ Boulil

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State

⁴⁶ Boulil

⁴⁷ Hachemaoui

The almost eightfold increase in votes for HAMAS cannot be explained by Nahnah's charisma or the mobilizing power of his party alone. Mohammed Hachemaoui explains that HAMAS, as the sole Islamist party, was able to "recuperate a portion of FIS's electorate," including a segment he refers to as the "pious bourgeoisie." Indeed, Nahnah's 2.9 million votes comes surprisingly close to the 3.2 million votes that propelled FIS to its overwhelming victory in the 1991 legislative elections. In addition to FIS constituency, HAMAS was also able to benefit from Ennahda's decision to boycott the elections. Djaballah's movement lacked the discipline to be able to enforce the boycott, and local Ennahda party leaders in M'sila, for example, openly defied Djaballah's orders and called for members to support "the Islamic candidate."⁴⁸ The FLN leadership, also signatories of the Sant'Egidio platform, faced a similar situation, with local leaders mobilizing voters to support Z roual.⁴⁹ This relationship between HAMAS on the one hand and FIS and Ennahda on the other was echoed in the results for the RCD's candidate, Saïd Sadi, who received more than five times as many votes as his party did in 1991. Just as HAMAS was able to benefit from FIS and Ennahda's absence and recover a large segment of their electorate as the only participating Islamist party, the RCD benefited from the FFS's decision to boycott and recovered the Amazighist vote, winning Kabyle-majority provinces Tizi Ouzou and B jaïa with 86.42% and 84.42% respectively.⁵⁰

Despite HAMAS' loss and their complaints of fraud, the party was given two ministerial posts in Z roual's new government. In 1996 an amendment to the constitution banned explicitly religious parties, and so *Harakat Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami* became *Harakat Mujtama' Al-Silm*

⁴⁸ Djabi, p. 171

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 166

⁵⁰ Ibid.

(Movement of Society for Peace, HMS), but other than the cosmetic name change, the party's platforms remained the same.⁵¹ Although the new Arabic acronym for the party, HMS, could logically be pronounced with two short *a* vowels (*hamas*), party members tend to pronounce it as *hims* - a change that may serve to distance the party from Palestinian Hamas (*Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiyya*, Islamic Resistance Movement), which also originated as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

After failing to enforce a boycott in the presidential election of 1995, the Sant'Egidio process fell apart, and all of its signatories (with the exception of the banned FIS) participated in the 1997 legislative elections. Ennahda's decision to participate cut into HMS's share of the vote, but Nahnah's party nevertheless retained a very respectable 1,553,154 votes (14.8%), and obtained 69 seats in the 380-seat APN.⁵² HMS, as the second-largest party in parliament, received seven ministerial posts. Ennahda performed very well compared to 1991, obtaining 915,446 votes and 34 seats in parliament.⁵³

Ennahda and HMS both had major party conferences in 1998, which produced very different results for the leader of each party. Following the relatively strong showings in 1995 and 1997, Mahfoud Nahnah was re-elected president of HMS, but Djaballah faced significant dissent within the ranks of his party. The dissenters, who criticized Djaballah for his refusal to participate in the 1995 election, were eventually able to wrest control of the party from him,

⁵¹ Boulil; Soltani & Al-Dhahab p. 16

⁵² *Assemblée populaire nationale / Al-Majlis Al-Sha'bi Al-Watani* - the lower house of parliament

⁵³ Hachemaoui; IPU

leading Djaballah to leave and form a new party, *Harakat Al-Islah Al-Watani (Mouvement pour la réforme nationale*, abbreviated MRN or Islah).⁵⁴

Though he had previously been able to run for president, Mahfoud Nahnah was barred from candidacy in the 1999 presidential election along with several other politicians on the pretence of not meeting the constitutional requirement stipulating that candidates must have participated as *mujahidin* during Algeria's War of Independence.⁵⁵ The party claims that Nahnah's disqualification was entirely politically motivated because he had not been old enough to serve as a *mujahid* at the onset of Algeria's War of Independence. Nevertheless, "fearing that Algeria would fall into the hands of the secular *éradicateurs*⁵⁶ or that it would return again to the spiral of violence,"⁵⁷ HMS joined the ruling coalition, *Al-I'tilaf Al-Hukoumi*, with FLN, RND, and Ennahda (sans Djaballah) to support the nomination of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, despite the snub to Nahnah.

Joining the coalition, however, came at a cost for HMS. Though the party had not been involved in government since 1994, their participation in the ruling coalition was seen as a large step towards their complete cooptation and they performed rather poorly in the 2002 legislative Elections. HMS obtained only 523,464 votes (7.05%), while Djaballah's newly-founded party, Islah (MRN) won 705,319 votes (9.50%) and received five more seats than HMS.⁵⁸ Islah's success over HMS demonstrates that the newly-established party was able to fill the need for a

⁵⁴ Djabi, p. 171

⁵⁵ Algerian Constitution, Article 73

⁵⁶ During the Algerian Civil War, the *pouvoir* is said to have been divided into two camps, the hawkish *éradicateurs*, who favored a zero-tolerance approach to political Islam and armed groups, and the *dialoguistes*, who favored dialogue with Islamist groups to achieve peace.

⁵⁷ Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 17

⁵⁸ IPU

real Islamist opposition party created by HMS's participation in the coalition, and may indicate that HMS was seen as having sold-out, while Djaballah was seen as clean and un-corrupted.⁵⁹

The perceived cooptation of HMS was only further demonstrated when HMS politicians were appointed as ministers to several ministries, including the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources.⁶⁰ Although the party as a whole was firmly allied with the *pouvoir*, this alliance caused considerable internal controversy and discomfort. One HMS MP, speaking in the late 1990s, astutely noted that the way the parliament functions:

“does not serve democracy... The APN is much more at the service of the *pouvoir* than of the people who voted for its members... Is quitting a solution? Is it necessary to play the game? Quitting reveals weakness in politics. Sometimes we think that we are serving as alibis and accomplices”⁶¹

Thus, we see a remarkable degree of self-awareness in HMS's decision to participate in government, and a recognition that the party was allowing itself to be co-opted.

In 2003, Nahnah passed away and Bouguerra Soltani took over as president of HMS. Later, in 2007, Islah went through a far more contentious transfer of power, as Djaballah was driven out of the party by forces more amenable to accommodating the regime, in a clear echo of his experience with Ennahda in 1997.⁶² Djaballah claims that this was part of a deliberate government plan to infiltrate, undermine, and divide his movement, and other, non-Islamist observers share this view.⁶³

⁵⁹ Dris-Aït-Hamadouche, p. 5

⁶⁰ Anonymous

⁶¹ Hachemaoui

⁶² Dris-Aït-Hamadouche, pp 90

⁶³ Djaballah; Makedhi

VI. The Loss of the Islamist Social Base

In order to understand the sociopolitical dynamics in present-day Algerian politics, it is necessary to look back at the interactions of political movements with the Algerian populace, most notably FIS. FIS represented the first viable national opposition group with a strong social base. Though FIS was certainly not the first Islamist political movement in Algeria, the party served as a catchall, bringing together many different Islamist strands for a common political cause. These diverse Islamist movements had previously remained on the periphery of politics before joining forces in the 1980s. When the Islamic revival eventually occurred in Algeria, FIS cemented itself at its center, and as Islamism became a majority movement, the party gained popularity with the masses. While the government struggled to maintain public order and stabilize the failing economy, “a new state emerged in which Islamism pervaded all public life.”⁶⁴ Groups like FIS and Nahnah’s *jama‘a* were able to establish many philanthropic and *da‘wa* organizations during this period with financial support from Saudi Arabia and other benefactors for religious activities, social services, and other services such as organized *hajj* trips, earthquake relief, and informal economic sector organization.

Seen as a foil to the *pouvoir*, FIS initially set out to “cleanse” Algeria of corruption and of its un-Islamic trappings but quickly transitioned from a social movement to a political movement with the goal of gaining political power in order to execute their vision of an Islamic Algeria independent of Western influence.⁶⁵ Up until this point, the *pouvoir* tolerated Islamist movements as a way of counterbalancing the Amazighist and democratic opposition movements,

⁶⁴ Djerbal

⁶⁵ Ibid.

but by the end of the decade, the failure of the state and its functions made FIS a realistic threat to the government. During this time, FIS was a nebulous, internally fractured group due to differences in ideology and orientation, making it difficult to contend with and control.⁶⁶ While there were factions within FIS who were interested in participating democratically and peacefully, elements that held undemocratic views and violent tendencies also existed and would eventually begin to gain influence. These ideological fractures and violent tendencies among FIS membership were exacerbated by the meddling of a threatened *pouvoir*, and this, according to Daho Djerbal, created “the seeds of explosion in Algeria” at the beginning of the 1990s.

Other opposition movements with strong, but often regional, social bases also existed, including proto-HMS, Djaballah’s group, and several socialist/labor and Amazigh movements. Though most of these movements existed long before FIS, none of them could mobilize the disillusioned youth of Algeria at the level that FIS was able to. Nahnah’s movement offered an alternative Islamist opposition, but it was unsystematic and its ideology may not have appealed to Algerians because of the widespread perception that it was a pan-Islamist or *Ikhwani* party with strong connections to the Muslim Brotherhood mother organization.⁶⁷ Perhaps, too, young Algerians saw more appeal in a newly emerged Islamist opposition movement than in an older one. Ultimately, FIS was simply better at translating popular urban discontent into organized political action. In the meantime, the ability of socialist and labor opposition forces to appeal to the public was weakened by the *pouvoir*’s almost complete control⁶⁸ over socialist and labor

⁶⁶ Djerbal

⁶⁷ Arous

⁶⁸ The Islamist movement did attempt to form their own union, but it was unable to break the dominance of the UGTA.

organizations such as the UGTA⁶⁹. And while the Amazighist movement had previously been the staunchest opposition front to the government, their ethnic-regional ideology limited their connections to Algerian society as a whole.

Generally speaking, the social structure of Islamist movements like FIS made it easy for them to appeal to and recruit people. With low socioeconomic prospects, the youth were a demographic ripe for the picking. This was further underscored by the lack of a relationship between the *mujahidin* generation and the succeeding disillusioned generation of the financial crisis. FIS met the need created by this generational gap with two charismatic leaders from each generation: Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, respectively.⁷⁰

As FIS quickly gained a following among the masses, the state began to open its doors to the democratic vision espoused by some of the more moderate members of the movement, and initiated the democratic opening in 1989.⁷¹ FIS proved successful in the Algerian local elections of 1990, followed by the legislative election of 1991 in which it was the first party, defeating FLN and FFS.⁷² According to Djerbal, however, FIS had already begun to gain opposition in society in the previous of years, and the party's internal fragmentation began to suppress its ability to grow further. This fracturing proved useful for the *pouvoir*, who used the widespread fear of the extremist tide to strategically weaken FIS and the Islamic movement overall.

The FIS narrative serves two purposes. First, it provides a more dynamic background of the broader Islamist movement in Algeria, and second, it serves as an important comparative tool

⁶⁹ *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens / Al-Ittihad Al-'Amm Lil-'Ummal Al-Jaza'iriyin*, General Union of Algerian Workers

⁷⁰ Djerbal

⁷¹ Djerbal

⁷² Djerbal

for analyzing the strategic successes and missteps of the individual movements and their relationships to Algerian society. Because they were banned from participating government, groups like proto-HMS and FIS derived their influence from social activities such as *da'wa* and the provision of parallel services. Though FIS was banned shortly thereafter, it serves as the sole example of a successful Islamist social movement in Algerian history. While HMS has enjoyed modest popular support over the last several decades, it cannot be aptly described as a social movement owing to the party's inability to organize and the limitations placed upon it (and all opposition parties) by the state. Since the 1992 coup, the *pouvoir* has made a concerted effort to prevent the kind of social influence that FIS was able to mobilize, and they have succeeded.⁷³ To put it simply, non-regime parties in Algeria have been almost entirely cut off from their pre-existing and potential social bases since the inception of the Black Decade.⁷⁴

As leading HMS member Sid-Ahmed Boulil put it, "it is easier to establish a political party in Algeria than it is to establish a social organization [*jam'iyya*]." Using legal and bureaucratic restrictions, the government kills two birds with one stone; making it difficult for opposition parties to connect to society while further fracturing the vote by facilitating the creation of political parties,⁷⁵ a phenomenon that Djaballah partially credits for the fragmentation of his two previous parties. Djaballah and others⁷⁶ also claim that the DRS has systematically worked to infiltrate his parties and divide them from the inside.

⁷³ Anonymous

⁷⁴ Tlemçani

⁷⁵ Djaballah

⁷⁶ Makedhi

Furthermore, Algerian opposition parties are heavily limited when it comes to their ability to organize and campaign politically and electorally.⁷⁷ For example, while non-regime parties face heavy legal and bureaucratic restrictions on campaigning, the FLN and RND are able to circumvent these restrictions through their access to state media resources.⁷⁸ These fairly recent socio-political dynamics are a departure from the system that existed for these movements before 1990, one in which many of their leaders got their start in student politics. As a result of these mechanisms, no viable Islamist social movement exists in Algeria, and because these opportunities have not existed in a long time, the parties have little experience and few future prospects for large-scale social mobilization. In the 1995 presidential election, for example, HMS was able to capture a large portion⁷⁹ of the FIS electorate. Because HMS was inexperienced and unable to appropriate the existing FIS social infrastructure, however, their electoral success was clearly temporary. In 1997, HMS was still able to take advantage of FIS's momentum and garner 1.6 million votes, but since 2002, the party has never received more than 550,000 votes in a national election.⁸⁰

A more recent example is the party's inability to organize protests and mobilize people on the issue of *ghaz sakhri* (shale gas), which has polarized Algeria in the last several months. With significant economic, geopolitical, and environmental implications, the issue of fracking has attracted almost all of the opposition parties, none of whom have been able to successfully co-opt the issue. According to Tlemçani, this is the result of the legal mechanisms used to restrict

⁷⁷ Makedhi

⁷⁸ EU EOM

⁷⁹ Hachemaoui

⁸⁰ IPU

opposition parties, widespread public disenchantment with political parties, and the public weariness of Islamism following the Black Decade.

Overall, national election results indicate that HMS's small social base has been in decline since the 1990s (see Appendix II). Though local electoral results are not easily available, national electoral results can serve as an important indicator for the parties' levels of support at the local level. Parties like HMS and Djaballah's El-Adala have local connections through their constituencies, powerful tribes, and patronage networks that create a base of people who rely on them in exchange for their support.⁸¹ In this respect, however, HMS is distinct from El-Adala and virtually all other opposition parties in that its electoral results are spread out across the country. Although there are specific areas where their popularity is concentrated (M'sila, Oran, Batna, and other small cities in the northwest and north-center of the country),⁸² this indicates that they are a national party whose appeal transcends traditionally regionalist loyalties.

This is in contrast to Djaballah, whose even smaller social base lies mainly in the east of the country.⁸³ Though his movement outperformed HMS once at the polls in 2002, part of Djaballah's failure to develop a stronger connection to society probably lies in his leadership style. Although Djaballah seems to be well respected, including by his political rivals, each party he has run has been an "*insan-hizb*" (one-man party).⁸⁴ HMS and other political parties have been able to weather splits, but Djaballah's parties have tended to rely solely on him, and so are easily destabilized by dissent and repeated infiltrations by the DRS. Although Sheikh Djaballah

⁸¹ Anonymous

⁸² Djabi, Anonymous

⁸³ Makedhi

⁸⁴ Boulil & Saud

is widely respected for his intellectual and religious knowledge and his scholarship on Islamic governance, he appears to show little enthusiasm for the quotidian aspects of politics, coalition building, political capacity building, and organizing. HMS leadership on the other hand, demonstrates considerable enthusiasm for political party development and social organizing, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

VII. The Arab Spring and the CNLTD: A New Chapter for Algeria's Opposition Parties?

Algeria has been referred to as the country that was “immune to the Arab Spring”⁸⁵ because, while unusually large protests did occur from 2010 to 2012, there was no large-scale concentrated effort to bring down the regime and remove Bouteflika from power. The most obvious reason for this is Algeria's experience of the 1992-2002 Black Decade (following the political opening of 1989), which claimed the lives of over 150,000 Algerians in assassinations, terrorist attacks, military operations, and massacres of whole villages. As one analyst put it, the experience of the 1990s:

“has taught Algerians the dangers of contestation... [and] remains an open wound within the society, preventing it from reproducing the next-door revolutionary model. In the collective mind, revolution involves considerable risks that the current generation of Algerians are not willing to take”⁸⁶

Furthermore, although the Arab Spring was known for the slogan “*Al-sha ‘b yurid isqat al-nidham*” (the people want to overthrow the system), and many activists and protesters were aware of the fact that simply removing the head of state would not solve the country's problems, the protest movements in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, and Libya ended up coalescing around the removal of the leader. Because the Arab Spring movements were spontaneous and not controlled by any single political faction, the natural lightning rod for all criticism of the regime was the head of state. President Bouteflika, however, is perhaps more inconsequential than any other Arab head of state. As aging man in his fourth term as president, it is sound to assume that Bouteflika is not running the country, a fact that is not lost Algerians. The small cadre of military officers who *are* most likely in charge, are a secretive, shadowy group, and thus very difficult to

⁸⁵ Benakcha,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

protest or organize against.⁸⁷ For the above reasons, *inter alia*, the political structure of Algeria has remained intact throughout the post-2011 period.

Yet, despite the lack of structural change or meaningful threat to the rule of the *pouvoir*, a significant, if subtle, paradigm shift has occurred socially and politically. Whereas large-scale protests were previously a fairly rare occurrence, they have occurred more frequently since 2011, including major incidents in oil towns in the south over the recent shale gas controversy. Algerian political parties, and HMS in particular, have also been a major part of this shift. Prior to 2011, HMS was in a governing coalition with the FLN and the RND, and there was no large-scale coordination between the Amazighist, socialist, and Islamist opposition parties.

After the events of the Arab Spring, on January 1, 2012, HMS announced that it would withdraw from the presidential alliance and contest the legislative elections in April as an opposition party.⁸⁸ While sparked by the events of 2011, HMS's shift toward the opposition was years in the making. In 2009, for example, one of the largest splits in HMS party history occurred when Abdelmedjid Menasra, the vice-president of the party split and formed a new party. Menasra and Soltani had clashed over HMS's closeness to the regime, and Soltani's willingness to support a constitutional amendment that allowed for Bouteflika to serve as President for a third term.⁸⁹ Although Menasra's new party, *Harakat Al-Da'wa Wal-Taghyir* (*MPC*⁹⁰), has not proven to be an electoral threat to HMS, his reasoning eventually prevailed in the party he left.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The National

⁸⁹ Ghanem-Yazbeck, "The Decline of Islamist Parties in Algeria."

⁹⁰ From the French *Mouvement pour la prédication et le changement*

HMS contested the 2012 elections as part of the *Takattul Al-Jaza'ir Al-Khadra* (AAV⁹¹), including Ennahda and Islah (the parties Djaballah had left). Although Soltani had predicted an unreasonably high 22-25% of the vote⁹², HMS performed worse in 2012 than it had in any election since 1991, with the AAV obtaining only 475,049 votes.⁹³ In the aftermath of this defeat, Soltani was ousted at the 5th HMS party congress in May 2013, and replaced by the current leader of the party, Dr. Abderrazak Makri, a founding member of the party and former HMS MP.⁹⁴ In addition to his political differences from Soltani, Makri has been described as having a less authoritarian managerial style.⁹⁵ While Soltani attempted and failed to reproduce Nahnah's cult of personality,⁹⁶ Makri's leadership has been more consensus-based, and has focused on revamping HMS's internal structure. Under Makri, the party has developed two distinct wings—a political one and a 'strategic' one—the latter being charged with specific policy areas (the economy, social issues) and outreach groups (women, youth, universities, the Algerian community abroad).⁹⁷ This change coincided with a similar shift within the RCD, which also appointed a younger, more opposition-minded President, Mohcine Belabbas.⁹⁸ This new generation of leadership in HMS and RCD helped solidify both parties' drift away from the regime, but also toward more pragmatic relations with other parties of the opposition.⁹⁹

⁹¹ From the French *Alliance de l'Algérie verte*

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ IPU

⁹⁴ HMS Official Website, "Siyar Dhatiyya: Ra'is Al-Haraka Dr. Abderrazak Makri"

⁹⁵ Anonymous.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Boulil & Saud

⁹⁸ Makedhi

⁹⁹ Ibid.

In January 2015, HMS and the RCD announced that they would boycott the 2014 presidential election, saying “conditions weren’t right for a free choice for Algerians.”¹⁰⁰ This was the first time in HMS’s history that it had boycotted an election. The inevitable fraudulent re-election of an aging president represented an important opportunity to mobilize public frustration, and began a shaky partnership through the *Tansiqiyya* (coordination) of secular and Islamist opposition parties. This partnership was not always a smooth one, and at a rally for the boycott movement in March, there were reports that RCD and HMS supporters “heckled and chanted at each other across the stadium.”¹⁰¹

The *Tansiqiyya* in its original form was called *Al-Tansiqiyya Al-Wataniyya Lil-Ahzab Wal-Shakhsiyyat Al-Muqati’a* (The National Coalition of Boycotting Parties and Individuals) and, as the name suggests, primarily focused on boycotting the 2014 presidential election and opposing Bouteflika’s presidency. After the elections, in April 2014, the group decided to continue its work, and renamed itself *Al-Tansiqiyya Min Ajl Al-Intiqal Al-Dimuqrati* (The Coalition for Democratic Transition). Since the elections, the coalition has been able to broaden its platform to include support for a new constitution, free and fair elections, and has recently included coordination against the exploitation of shale gas. In its current form, the group includes HMS, Ennahda, El-Adala (Djaballah’s party *du jour*), RCD as well as other small parties and independents such as former Prime Minister Ahmed Ben Bitour, and is known as *Al-Tansiqiyya Al-Wataniyya Min Ajl Al-Hurriyyat Wal-Intiqal Al-Dimuqrati* (CNLTD or CLTD¹⁰²).¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ New York Times, “Islamist Party to Boycott Algerian Election”

¹⁰¹ Markey & Chikhi

¹⁰² From the French *Coordination nationale pour les libertés et la transition démocratique*

¹⁰³ CLTD Facebook Page; Ghanem-Yazbeck, “The Future of Algeria’s Main Islamist Party”

Although the CNLTD continues its work, it remains fragile. The FFS has organized a rival coordination organization called *Tayyar Al-Mubadara Al-Wataniyya Min Ajl Al-Tawafuq (Initiative du Consensus National)*, which includes ex-HMS splinter groups.¹⁰⁴ And despite the CNLTD's stated commitment to securing concrete concessions from the government before ending its campaign, HMS broke ranks and engaged in dialogue with the regime in early 2015.¹⁰⁵

Although it may be tempting to view the *Tansiqiyya* as insignificant, and to dismiss it as a temporary alliance of convenience that has accomplished little and already shows signs of weakening and splintering, the initiative nevertheless remains an unprecedented act of opposition coordination. Although still far less impressive than opposition activities elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, the *Tansiqiyya* represents what Arous described as “*bidayat najd al-mu'arada al-jaza'iriyya*” (the beginning of the maturation of the Algerian opposition).¹⁰⁶ While some¹⁰⁷ have pointed to the Sant'Egidio platform and its failure as a less than optimistic precedent for the coalition, the Sant'Egidio process took place under very different circumstances. Sant'Egidio took place against the backdrop of horrific violent atrocities, an existential threat by the *éradicateurs* to all of the parties involved, and did not include HMS or RCD. The *Tansiqiyya*, on the other hand, began during peacetime, has already produced a year of sustained contact and cooperation between parties that previously had very little to do with each other, and have brought HMS and RCD, parties previously seen as co-opted, into the fold of the opposition.

¹⁰⁴ Arous

¹⁰⁵ Ghanem-Yazbeck, “The Future of Algeria's Main Islamist Party”

¹⁰⁶ Arous

¹⁰⁷ Djaballah; Boubekeur, Interview; Ghanem-Yazbeck, “The Future of Algeria's Main Islamist Party”

Furthermore, HMS and RCD have incurred serious risks (and most probably serious costs) in order to distance themselves from the regime. Following the period of ‘authoritarian upgrading’¹⁰⁸ and the ‘de-liberalization’¹⁰⁹ of the electoral system from 1995 to 2001, the *pouvoir* made a concerted effort to “erect and maintain barriers between parties in general, and specifically between obedient Islamist parties and the so-called democratic camp.”¹¹⁰ Political activist Rabah Saïd claims that the DRS specifically attempts to keep these barriers intact by infiltrating political parties and undermining inter-party coordination.¹¹¹ This gives us an idea of just how difficult and audacious an undertaking the *Tansiqiyya* is.

Finally, apart from any efforts to covertly undermine the CNLTD or the parties involved, it is clear that HMS has lost access to key sources of patronage and funding by crossing over to the opposition, indicating that their commitment to the opposition runs deeper than a temporary, superficial change in rhetoric. Participating in the government has given HMS access to ministries such as Fisheries and Marine Resources, Public Works, and Industry and Small and Medium Enterprises, which bring with them access to public funds, power over their distribution, and access to channels of rent and patronage that would be otherwise unavailable.¹¹² Of course, this is not to say that HMS lacks other sources of patronage and funding from the municipalities that it controls through local elections, to public funding and tax breaks given to members of parliament, to the sponsorship of Pepsi magnate Djilali Mehri, HMS has enough of a political

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous

¹⁰⁹ Hachemaoui

¹¹⁰ Saïd

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Anonymous; Soltani & Al-Dhahab, p. 17

machine to sustain itself without controlling ministries.¹¹³ Indeed, a cynical but not entirely unsound view of post-2011 HMS might suggest that the party is temporarily trying a more populist approach in order to ride the wave of the Arab Spring, and make up for their loss of ministries and *pouvoir* support by winning more seats in the APN.

But while the timing of the shift would seem to be opportunist, it should be clear by now that in order for it to work, this strategy needs to be a long-term one. HMS's poor performance in 2012 demonstrated that merely announcing a shift to the opposition would not be enough to mobilize large numbers of new voters. Whether the low turnout for the party was because HMS "ignore[d] issues that affect the everyday lives of voters"¹¹⁴ or because of voter distrust for the party, it is clear that in order for the withdrawal from the *Tahaluf Ri'asi* to produce fiscal and electoral dividends, the party will need to continue and deepen its engagement with the opposition. HMS lost voters in 2002 after the party joined the government, and again in 2012 after leaving the government, and so it appears that tactically oscillating between the government and the opposition is not a viable strategy, and could run a small party like HMS into the ground.

While there is a faction of HMS, including Soltani, who advocates a return to 'dialogue' (read: re-cooptation¹¹⁵) with the government,¹¹⁶ it also seems that Makri himself and those who support him within the party seem determined to continue on their path of opposition. Soltani has a history of very close relations with the *pouvoir*, and has been accused of personally torturing a

¹¹³ Anonymous; Hachemaoui

¹¹⁴ Ghanem-Yazbeck, "The Future of Algeria's Main Islamist Party"

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

rival being held in police and/or DRS custody.¹¹⁷ It would appear that Soltani's plan was for HMS to make a short-term tactical shift to the opposition because of the post-Arab Spring political climate. Indeed, when HMS caused a rift within the CNLTD in January by opening a new 'dialogue' process with the government and other opposition parties, some speculated that this signaled a return to business-as-usual for HMS, suggesting that "the MSP has become so tied to the regime, tamed, and co-opted that it cannot serve in any way as a real challenger or a counterweight to Algeria's ruling authority."¹¹⁸ But in February, HMS appeared to back away from this effort, reconciling with its partners in the *Tansiqiyya*.¹¹⁹ Later, on February 24, the anniversary of Algeria nationalizing its petroleum resources, the *Tansiqiyya* organized protests in Algiers against shale gas exploitation.¹²⁰ Shale gas had become a hot-button issue in Algeria in the previous months, and large-scale protests had occurred in cities in the south, including in the southern petroleum town of In Salah¹²¹, but protests in Algiers are highly uncommon, and viewed as a red line by authorities.¹²² Although the protest was small and quickly crushed by security forces, it made much more of a statement, and received far more headlines than the usually tame, small protests in other provinces. The leaders of the CNLTD were clearly aware of this, and on the eve of the planned protest, Makri stated:

"If the opposition is allowed to protest, then it will be a victory... and a continuation of peaceful resistance. And if we are prevented [from protesting] and the capital is shut down, then that too will be a victory,

¹¹⁷ Kal, *The Moor Next Door*

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ APS

¹²⁰ Al-Quds Al-Arabi

¹²¹ Shirak

¹²² Anonymous, Boulil & Saud, Makedhi

because we will have made the regime resort to showing once again its fragility, its failure, and its lack of self-confidence.”¹²³

Although HMS’s weak social base makes some of its acts of protest seem insignificant, (e.g. a protest of “tens of people” in Sétif in April 2015¹²⁴) its continued efforts to bridge gaps with other members of the *Tansiqiyya*, and organize protests in the face of internal opposition should be seen as a significant step away from its pre-2011 position.

Although, as mentioned, Soltani, who still controls a powerful faction of HMS, retains close ties to the regime, and saw HMS’s initial shift as a tactical one, Makri’s faction has so far prevailed, and is taking the party through a much deeper, strategic change. Under Makri’s leadership, HMS has shown its willingness to burn bridges with the *pouvoir* by boycotting the elections, losing its control over ministries, defying the DRS by forming and staying in the *Tansiqiyya*, and testing the boundaries of protest and free speech. Makri’s HMS has also shown interest in deepening the party’s connections to society by restructuring the party.

¹²³ El Watan

¹²⁴ HMS Official Website, “Waqfa Ihtijajiyya Bi-Sétif Didd Al-Qawanin Al-Mu’arida Lil-Qiyam Al-Wataniyya”

VIII. Conclusions

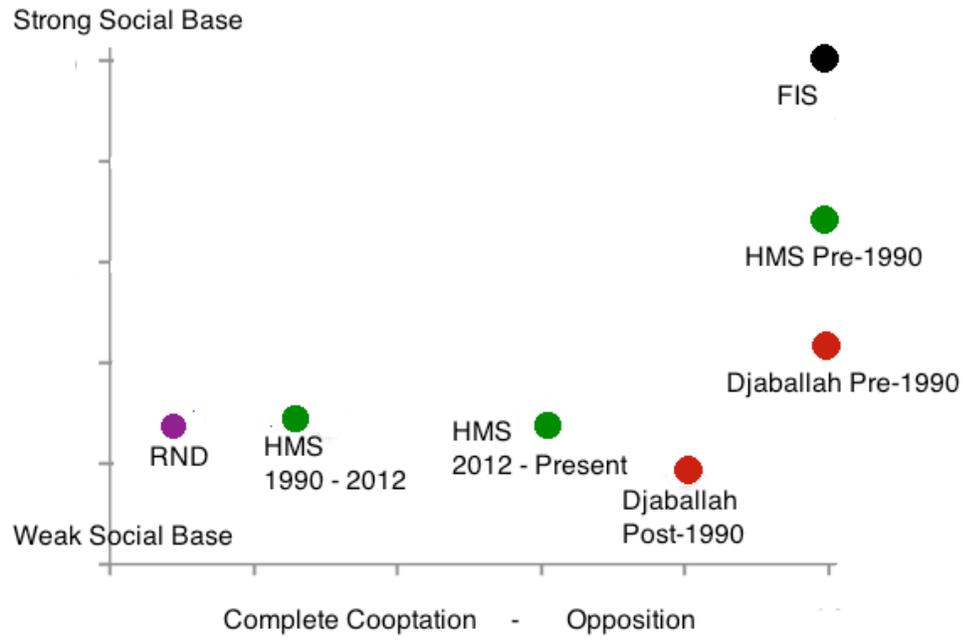
The trajectory of HMS—from illegal social movement, to co-opted political party, to tentative member of the opposition—is far more complicated than a simple example of moderation and inclusion. Our findings indicate that HMS has always considered itself an independent party with a reformist agenda, and that its cooptation and “professionalization” in the 1990s was intended to eventually give way to opposition and contention when the system opened up again as it had in the 1988-1992 period. Despite years of participation in upgraded authoritarian structures, HMS has developed an understanding of democracy as politically useful and inherently valuable, and its decision to withdraw from the government was prompted not by an attempt at exclusion by the regime but by an internal conversation about the direction of the movement and its ideology. El-Adala’s structure as a one-man party does not position it as a meaningful powerbroker even within the relatively powerless Algerian opposition. The party not only lacks a social base, but also is not professionalized in the way that HMS is. Djaballah’s movement is, however, sincere in its commitment to reform and multi-party democracy, and his voice remains an important and influential one in the Algerian opposition movement. As long as both HMS and Djaballah remain in the *Tansiqiyya*, the credibility and history of refusing cooptation will remain valuable to HMS. Fusing Djaballah’s brand with HMS’s professional capacity could potentially yield better results for Algerian Islamists.

While Islamism in Algeria is not dead in the political sense, nor is it dead in the minds of millions of Algerians, no party since FIS has been able to harness the appeal of Islamist ideology and achieve its full electoral potential. Social mobilization remains the most serious challenge facing HMS and the entire Algerian opposition, and playing politics while ignoring the hard

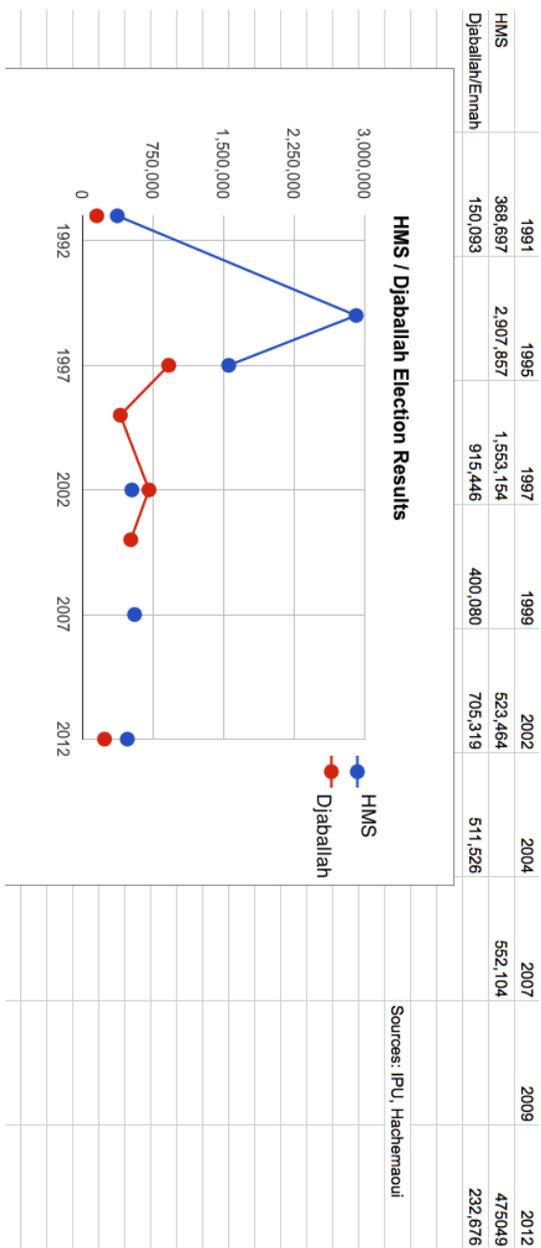
work of organizing an electoral base and addressing concrete issues of short-term interest to voters will not be a sustainable strategy for an opposition movement that hopes to create meaningful change.

The *Tansiqiyya* initiative of the past couple of years is both sincere and intended to be a long-term strategy, but in order for it to succeed, the disconnect between parties and society must be addressed. In order to explore potential ways in which this could happen, we recommend an in-depth study of local electoral politics in Algeria, because this is the level at which ordinary citizens connect most with politicians.

Appendix I: Conceptual Graph of the Cooptation/Social Power Axes



Appendix II: Election Results



Appendix III: Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAV - *Alliance de l'Algérie verte - Takattul Al-Jaza'ir Al-Khadra* Green Algeria Alliance

CNLTD/CLTD/Tansiqiyya - *Coordination nationale pour les libertés et la transition démocratique - Al-Tansiqiyya Al-Wataniyya Lil-Hurriyyat Wal-Intiqal Al-Dimuqrati* National Coordination for Freedoms and Democratic Transition

DRS - *Département du renseignement et de la sécurité - Idarat Al-Isti'lam Wal-Amn* Department of Intelligence and Security

El-Adala - *Jabhat Al-Adala Wal-Tanmiya* - Justice and Development Front

Ennahda - *Harakat Al-Nahda Al-Islamiyya* - Islamic Renaissance Movement

FFS - *Front des forces socialistes - Jabhat Al-Qiwa Al-Ishtirakiyya* - Socialist Forces Front

FIS - *Front Islamique du Salut - Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya Lil-Inqadh* - Islamic Salvation Front

FLN - *Front de libération nationale - Jabhat Al-Tahrir Al-Watani* - National Liberation Front

HAMAS/MSI - *Harakat Al-Mujtama' Al-Islami - Mouvement pour une société Islamique* - Movement for an Islamic Society (old name of HMS)

HMS/MSP (pronounced Hims in Arabic) - *Harakat Mujtama' Al-Silm - Mouvement de la société pour la paix* - Movement of Society for Peace

MRN (Al-Islah) - *Mouvement pour la réforme nationale - Harakat Al-Islah Al-Watani* - Movement for National Reform

RCD - *Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie - Al-Tajammu' Min Ajl Al-Thaqafa Wal-Dimuqratiyya* - Rally for Culture and Democracy

RND - *Rassemblement national démocratique - Al-Tajammu' Al-Watani Al-Dimuqrati* - National Rally for Democracy

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