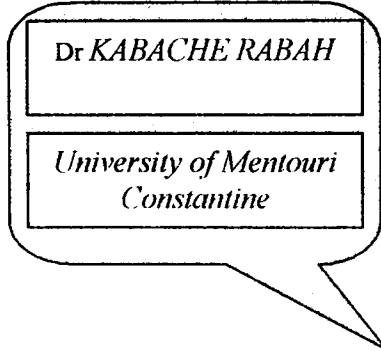


Bureaucracy and Politics In Algeria : 1962-1978



ABSTRACT

In this article, the author attempts to sketch out the formation and emergence of state bureaucracy which gained control of the means of production and administration after the political independence. The bureaucrats strengthened their position through the model of development which Algeria had adopted and which was based on heavy industry which was given priority.

ملخص:
الهدف من هذا المقال هو توضيح الدور الذي لعبته البيروقراطية الجزائرية في تنمية وتطوير المجتمع، وذلك من خلال تتبع تكوينها وظهورها كبيروقراطية دولة استطاعت أن تتمتع برقابة وسائل الإنتاج والإدارة، وأنها لم تكثف بهذه الرقابة بل عمدت إلى توسيع سيطرتها وتدعيم مواقعها من خلال نموذج التنمية الذي تبنته الجزائر، والذي كان معتمدا على الصناعات الثقيلة كخيار استراتيجي.

Immediately after political independence had been achieved in 1962, Algeria faced a severe political and economic crisis, its urgent task was to build completely new political and economic institutions. Its was pressured by its direct relationship with France. The Evian agreements which Algeria signed with France to end the war compelled her to remain dependent on the Franch aid, «the Evian agreements had assured France a privileged position in independent algeria in return for a sizeable amount of aid . The Algerian

nationalists had been forced to guarantee respect of French interests in the sahara oil fields and protection of all other French properties in the country... for its part, the French Government had pledged to maintain for three years an aid programme... and to provide Algeria with considerable technical assistance »⁽¹⁾.

Until a political and economic programme was drawn up in a conference held in june 1962 which came to be known as the Tripoli programme, a new platform was created defining the basic tasks of the new phase and outlining the path of Algeria's future development. It advocated the construction of a socialist society devoted to the service of Algerians. It called for genuine political and economic independence and social transformations. It recognised that the active forces of the war had been the peasantry and the workers who had given it its essentially political character. The programme was full of socialist principles and ideas such as the abolition of exploitation of man by man and the land to those who work it. A new economic system was to be based on the principles of socialist planning which in practice meant that the state would exercise control, that is to say, economic planning and the control of the economy by the state, with the participation of the workers. Through planning the accumulation of capital required for industrialization would be possible. A

programme of agrarian reform would be implemented through the creation of state owned farms and co-operatives. To achieve the objective of promising of the land to those who work it, the programme set forth the following principles :

- ✓ 1. Prohibition of transactions in land and in the means of agricultural production.
- ✓ 2. Limitation of property according to crops and yields.
- ✓ 3. Expropriation of areas surpassing a fixed optimum.
- ✓ 4. Free distribution of lands thus recuperated to landless peasants, or to those possessing insufficient land.
- ✓ 5. Democratic organisation of peasants in production co-operatives.
- ✓ 6. Creation of collective state farms on a proportion of the expropriated lands with the participation of the workers in management and benefits⁽²⁾.

A close look at the Tripoli programme reveals that its ideology was based on unity and national solidarity rather than «class struggle». Thus it overlooked the possibility that after independence the various classes could become antagonistic competitors for political and economic power.

The Tripoli programme was an immediate reply to the Evian agreement which tried to link algeria to France and to assure the maintenance of the close dependent relationship of Algeria with France . and also a response to the

G.P.R.A. which favoured a capitalist way of development. After drafting the Tripoli programme the issue was who would rule the country, i.e. which group within the FLN. The conflict was between two main forces. On the one hand there was the Provisional Government (G.P.R.A) which had emerged from the Tripoli conference headed by BenBelle ; one of the FLN founders who spent most of the war in jail.

BenBelle joined the military wing led by Boumedienne with his armed forces this maneuver brought BenBelle to power in 1962 and kept him in power against all rebellions made by competing contingents of the war time FLN during the 1962-1965 period. Having kept the G.P.R.A out of power and having silenced by the armed forces all the opposition, the only two forces which survived were those of BenBella and Boumedienne. BenBella was In favour of socialist experiments ; he advocated a socialist approach in the construction of an independent Algeria, leaning on a group of foreign leftist advisers who stressed a Marxist analysis of Algerian history and contemporary society. This orientation became clear in his promulgation of the decrees of march 1963 for self-management.

On the other hand Boumedienne was keen on the specificity of Algeria and her islamic character. He claimed Algeria's islamic heritage and condemned imported socialism demanding that the theoretical bases of Algeria's socialism should rest on arab-islamic doctrine and not on foreign ones⁽³⁾. Furthermore BenBella and Boumedienne came from a similar background and both favoured the peasantry and the urban workers. So they competed for the support of the same social classes. However, Boumedienne had secured the support of the army whereas BenBella had not yet improved the conditions of the peasantry and the urban workers. BenBella felt the strength of the military and he tried to limit Boumedienne's power by reducing the jurisdictions of the latter's friends forcing ministers of interior and foreign affairs, A.Madeghri and A.Bouteflika, to resign. BenBella progressively concentrated power in his hand by taking over the duties of the ministers of the interior, finance and information. Boumedienne who was the vice-president and minister of national defence was running the risk of being forced to resign. He planned the arrestation of BenBella and on the 19th june 1965 power was assumed by a revolutionary council headed by Boumedienne.

The main justification for the « coup d'etat » was that inefficiency and unplanned socialism were leading the country to economic chaos. BenBella was accused by Boumedienne of being responsible for financial crisis⁽⁴⁾. According to the new regime it was not socialism which was not accepted but the regime's inefficiency which had been renounced. Boumedienne stated a few months after the « coup d'etat » that « Socialism is not this incoherent collection of improvised measures and personal reactions that for three years gave the people only an erroneous idea of socialism. Socialism is a long and laborious process

of construction that requires the elaboration and application of a comprehensive plan »⁽⁵⁾. The support for the « coup d'état » came from the petty bourgeois elements who were threatened by BenBella's nationalizations of small shops and services which Boumedienne handed back to their owners after the « coup d'état ».

Right after independence many opportunities for upward mobility were available to members of certain classes especially the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. The Algerian bourgeoisie under the colonial period had very limited access to sources of capital mainly because it was confined to areas considered unprofitable by the settlers. After independence the Algerian bourgeoisie started buying up industrial, commercial and other properties at low prices from the terrified settlers. The petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, café-owners, artisans and other small trades tried to purchase small commercial establishments and in some cases actually took over without authority, properties and estates in the cities and towns. The big landowners contemplated the possibility of purchasing estates from settlers.

The professional educated elements, former colonial civil servants, FLN bureaucrats from the Provisional Government (G.P.R.A.) occupied the administrative structure of the state apparatus. The colonial administrative structure was merely reactivated by the post-independence bureaucracy without any radical changes. That is to say, Algeria inherited the colonial bureaucratic structure which was based on capitalist norms of government. The BenBella Government along with the ideology of socialism and its drive towards economic self-efficiency was compelled to convert the colonial bureaucratic structure to serve the intended new socio-economic goals. The bureaucracy was stratified as follows: the high echelons of the administration came from a bourgeois background. The middle echelons were recruited from the petty bourgeoisie who had been employed by the colonial bureaucracy. This personnel had been trained by the French Administration to serve administrative functions within the framework of the « Constantine Plan »: in the late fifties a Socio-Economic programme was introduced aiming at bringing guerilla warfare to an end.

An official census held in 1963 of the civil servants operating the new state gave the following figures: 13,729 French civil servants came from France under the auspices of technical assistance « Cooperation technique »; 22,182 Algerians of the colonial administration and 34,097 members of the FLN and the FLN Algerians recruited after 19 march 1962. According to this census the top positions of planning, decision-making and managerial positions were French and Algerian bourgeois⁽⁶⁾.

It was not surprising that the administration after independence « was still the cumbersome and overcentralised one that the French had set up »⁽⁷⁾. Post-war bureaucracy did not only inherit the colonial structure but also inherited

values, norms and attitudes characteristic of the colonial civil service, which was indifferent to and disdainful of the situation of the Algerian people. Concerning the self-managed sector, the Algerian agricultural and industrial workers took advantage of the vacuum left by the war and the departure of the Europeans to obstruct the way to the Algerian bourgeoisie. They moved simultaneously, without waiting for any directive from above to take control of the main means of production: land, industrial, enterprises and commercial establishments. The agricultural labourers employed on the colonial estates began taking over control of production. They formed self-management committees. The big Algerian landowners were thwarted in their attempt to purchase these properties.

The FLN cadres and the state bureaucracy were threatened by the growing influence and militancy of the U.G.T.A. which had enlarged its base to include the agricultural labourers. The U.G.T.A. considered itself the only organisation entitled to represent the interests of the working class and defend the principles of workers self-management in industry and agriculture.

The U.G.T.A. could mobilise the workers to resist growing pressures exerted upon them by the FLN cadres and the state bureaucracy. As early as December 1962 they forced the Government to sign an agreement to respect the U.G.T.A.'s autonomy. Despite this agreement, the U.G.T.A. was still under the pressure of the party (FLN) and state bureaucracy. An official report stated emphatically the U.G.T.A.'s opposition to attempts made by the FLN and the administrative bureaucracy to impose upon the workers state socialism which « allows the petty bourgeois spirit to persist and allows the exploiters to profit from the situation in reinforcing their privileges and consolidating their political positions »⁽⁸⁾.

The leadership of U.G.T.A. went on the rapid establishment of light industries in order to create immediate employment rather than the emphasis on capital intensive and labour saving industry. The report concluded that « certain party officials who are not unionists and probably have personal motives have tried to take over the structure of the U.G.T.A. and its constituent organisations »⁽⁹⁾. In response to this open criticism the Government put it under FLN control.

↳ *The strategy of « Boumedienne » :*

The « coup d'état » of 1965 was not anti-socialist attempt. Boumedienne was also committed to nationalization of foreign firms and promote development. Right after the « coup d'état » the Boumediene group recognised the inefficiency of the existing state apparatuses, so it started a policy of decolonisation of the bureaucratic structure and the introduction of new organisations of public function to be consistent with the needs of the country: Algerianisation and Socialism.

The Commune :

In 1967 new measures had been taken to set up new codes of communes redefining the administrative organisations and their socio-economic functions. This new reform considered the commune as the main territorial economic and cultural collectivity ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The aim was to satisfy the democratic requirement of collective decision-making and to provide the communes with the necessary means to participate adequately in the overall development of the country. The reform was particularly concerned to create jobs and to produce enough food for the Algerian People. Therefore these communes were to be administered by a Peoples Assembly elected every four years ; the Assembly in turn elects a President and two Vice-Presidents. Since 1971 the Communal Assemblies have been enlarged to include non-elected representatives of the party and the technical field ministries which have been given responsibilities over aspects of the agrarian revolution.

The Communal Assemblies were technically and financially dependent on the services of the central government. It has been reported that if an assembly had a clever and diligent executive council, it could formulate programme proposals in a wide range of fields, « get their requests through, smooth down local dissensions and create jobs » ⁽¹¹⁾.

Districts (wilayats) :

The second stage of decentralization after the commune reforms was the reform of the District. In 1969 new reforms were set up to give new roles and functions to the previous Districts. The number of Districts was increased from 15 to 31. The District is the link between the Commune and the Central Government. According to the District charter, the District is the meeting place for the harmonization of local interests and the national requirements. That is to say it is an institution that reflects local needs which were inseparable from national plan. Its management must be guaranteed by the elected representatives. The District therefore is a decentralised institution endowed with its own organs, with effective decision-making power, with the means and structures required for the functions to perform. It should be made clear that this sort of decentralization does not aim at the autonomy of the District, because as Remili puts it « our state is a unitary state , decentralization is only a technique to increase the participation of the District and the masses of people in the revolutionary power » ⁽¹²⁾. Furthermore, the District is not only a decentralized collective body whose actions are the extension of the Commune's action and join those of the state. It is also an administrative constituency which permits the central state administrations to reverberate their activity and better serve the

people. The District is run by an Executive Council, presided by a Prefect (Wali) appointed by the ministry of the interior. He represents the state.

The idea behind the Government's introduction of the Commune and District organisations was to mobilize the Algerian people around a specific policy, and to contribute to and participate actively in the economic, social and cultural life of the country. On the one hand the lack of sufficient human and material resources made the implementation of the policy of decentralization very difficult, and hence gave way to a strict control from the centre. They function « within a framework determined by the central government and administered by the Prefect »⁽¹³⁾. On the other hand the weakness of the party (Algeria was a single party state) at both national District levels made it very difficult to mobilize the Algerian population and to control the implementation of policies and to contribute to the formulation of the policies and programmes. So, the Party did not play any meaningful part in the political and economic life of the country. Because of this fact, the majority of the Algerian people had no interest and no trust in the Party. This is mainly related to the disenchantment of the Local Party cell with the central leadership. Interviews carried out in late 1967 showed that the decisions were the functions of the central leadership concerning either « the organisation of the Party or the future of the country. Quite often, the ministers were the first to make decisions. We wonder whether it is really useful for us to exhaust our energy in tasks often rewarded with disappointment »⁽¹⁴⁾. Thus Etienne was right in saying that « everyone knows very well that the Party does not exist »⁽¹⁵⁾. That is to say, it did not exist in the sense that it did not fulfil the functions which were attributed to it, but it existed merely on paper. The Party had shown that its main function had been to select candidates for the communal assemblies and state enterprises and its structure had often been used as a means of diffusing decisions and demands from the top down but never the other way around. So it has been used as a mechanism for the support of the continuation of the regime.

The Bureaucracy :

It was believed by Boumedienne's group that the reconstruction of the country and its economic independence could be achieved through nationalization of the natural resources, especially gas and oil, and by the state control of economy. Unlike BenBella who had nationalised relatively small concerns and had encouraged self-management by endorsing the workers initiative of taking over settlers agricultural and industrial enterprises, Boumedienne went on to tackle international corporations that controlled oil, gas and other resources. He started by nationalizing banks, insurance companies in 1967, and by the end of 1971, the major natural resources were under Algerian state control, and due to Boumedienne's strong belief in expertise and efficiency, he accepted the existing bureaucracy which he inherited from BenBella and brought into it those technocrats and specialists most of whom

had been trained abroad especially in France. He believed that they could rationalise economic planning. And he also believed that the state must take control over any activity. The basic justification of the Central State control was that the Government was in a process of laying the basis for an effective participatory socialism. The self-management sector was allowed to continue in existence but it was increasingly subjected to centralized control. It was not dismantled because the Government found it very difficult, mainly because of its serious political repercussions.

When the Government concentrated on the techno-bureaucrats to rationalise the planning and run Algerian administration, it did not take into account that these techno-bureaucrats might become a social category with interests and values of its own which would set it apart from, and in opposition to the interest of workers and peasants. As it was the Government concentrated on its nationalism, viewing high bureaucrats and technocrats as public servants with special talents to serve the cause of the Algerian nation. The techno-bureaucrats strengthened their position through the model of development which Algeria had adopted and which was based on heavy industry which was given priority. Having adopted this policy of heavy industry, the Government attributed 45 percent of its budget to industry and allotted only 15 percent to agriculture in its four-year plan of 1970-1973⁽¹⁶⁾. The argument ran that if an industrial base was not established by the time the mineral resources ran down the country would quickly slide back to a state of backwardness. Thus industrialization was considered as the sole remedy to develop the country. Boumedienne argues that « heavy industry... will be the locomotive which will draw behind it agriculture, light industry, and other carriages on the railroad of our economic life »⁽¹⁷⁾.

There was also an attempt to give consideration to other aspects of economic development besides industry, e.g. to social and political development to involve the masses of the Algerian population. The new measures were aimed at the achievement of socialism in terms of building a new kind of Algerian person and new social relations of production by democratising and decentralising the decision-making process in all aspects of Algerian society. Through education, it was believed, to prepare new Algerians to well-developed sense of social and political responsibility : by respecting the higher interests of the nation and the concept of public property and to be active participants in decision – making.

The process of democracy and decentralised decision-making were expected to be developed within the political structure, that is to say an autonomy from the Central Government was to be developed in the Communal Assembly.

Whether state bureaucrats like ministers, general managers of state enterprises, high officials of the FLN and the army leaders constitute a class or

not, is highly problematical. I consider them a class not in the classic capitalist sense : they may not own the means of production , but they do have monopoly control over the means of production and they also manage the state structure. They have a life-style that is distinct from the workers and peasants, in terms of material privileges and social contacts.

The basic argument is that although in the state enterprises « the ownership was that of the state but the management was characteristic of capitalism »⁽¹⁸⁾. Although Akkache's argument was before the introduction of the scheme of socialist management in enterprise of 1971, it is still valid. Because the bureaucrats who direct the massive state enterprises behave in the same way as capitalist owners, since they have the exclusive right to set wages and direct economic development. And as Lazreg argues, they extract surplus out of the workers, the latter receive a fixed wage incommensurate with the amount of work supplied⁽¹⁹⁾. The same applies to the self-management estates which showed that the agricultural workers did not participate in management of the finances of the estates nor did they marketed their products. This situation leads us to conclude that administrative control and the control of the means of production play a role equivalent to that of the ownership of the means of production.

Despite the considerable importance of the private sector it is still dominated by the hegemony of the state bureaucracy which has a strict control over vital economic and political areas.

Ultimately the state bureaucracy plays a dominant role in Algeria because it managed to control the state economy and political power. Therefore it should be pointed out that bureaucracy does not only mean that it is restricted to administrative management, but it is more than that it is a form of political power as well. Or as Benhouria puts it « Bureacracy is a form of political power before being a form of administrative management »⁽²⁰⁾.

In short, to assert that bureaucracy is a phenomenon which is highly detrimental to the society. It shows itself by the malfunctioning of the institutional apparatus, generating major distortions in the process of development as well as serious disturbance in daily life. The consequence is a wast of energy at every level of activity in the society.

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