Introduction

Beni Saf is a fishing port on the steep cliffs of the Algerian coastline that climbs north-eastwards from the Moroccan border: a collage of multi-coloured, cubed houses – blue, ochre and yellow – superimposed upon each other against a green hillside above the bay. The local deposits of iron ore that for a century provided employment in mining have been exhausted since the mid-1980s, and the port's famous sardines are becoming rarer and more expensive, but in midsummer the town attracts families and groups of friends who rent houses and spend their short holidays by the sea. A little under a hundred kilometres to the west, at Marsa Ben Mehidi, are beaches where conservative families take their vacations, where women in loose clothes and headscarves swim during the day and take in concerts by rap artists on the boardwalk by night. At a similar distance further east, the coast turns a corner and comes in sight of the long, red Mujurjo mountain that towers over the city of Oran and the dizzying sheer walls of Santa Cruz, the sixteenth-century Spanish fortress that stands on the peak of the mountain above the sea. Here, the Thursday evening weekend road from Les Andalouses to Aïn al-Turk, where men wear shorts, girls bathe in bikinis and young couples hold hands, is packed with cars moving along the uninterrupted chain of grills, barbeques and hotels. One of them sports its name, 'Beach House', the English words spelled out in Arabic script, juxtaposed to the respectable designation *aparthotel familial*. Further east, beyond the lively sprawl of Oran and its rapidly rising apartment and office towers, the twisting road along the corniche reaches the village of Kristel, perched in an inlet on the face of the cliffs running down to the sea. The village's fruit and vegetable gardens, watered from a spring permanently surrounded by children, are said to have supplied Phoenician trading vessels in antiquity, when the site was first inhabited. Above the gardens, a building carries the inscription *École communale 1897*. Above the school, on a promontory of rock over the road, a whitewashed stone cube surmounted by a dome marks the resting place of a *wali*, a Muslim saint. At Kristel the road turns inland before passing by the immense pipeline terminal at Arzew, the site of the

world's first liquefied natural gas plant and the country's main crude oil port, where at night the gas flares light up the sky in a bright amber arc. A little further east is the city of Mostaghanem, with its busy street market under the trees and the colonial architecture of the bustling, traffic-packed town centre. On a wall by the railway station, someone has painted a laconic slogan: *tahya firansa – vissa* ('Long live France – visa!'), the first two words in Arabic script, the last in an approximate French. The quiet, crumbling pre-colonial city overlooks the Mediterranean from its cliffs that rise on either side of a ravine filled with trees and birdsong, its empty, narrow streets of coloured houses sprinkled with satellite dishes, and its old mosques from which the call to prayer at noon rises like a sudden cloud of sound.[1]

The landscape is striking; the way people live in it, mark it and move through it, build upon it, name it and make a living from it displays both the diversity of contemporary life and the depth of historical time against which contemporary life is played out. Algeria's modern history has not generally been approached through descriptions of a beautiful and fascinating country, or a diverse and creative society going about its daily life. The history of Algeria, since the Ottoman period – three centuries of history hardly known outside specialist circles and still sometimes thought of in antiquated stereotypes of piracy, 'white slavery' and despotism[2] – through 132 years of French colonial occupation (1830–1962) and seven years of 'savage' colonial war (the war of independence, 1954–1962),[3] up to the more recent terrors of Islamist and state violence since 1992, has often been written about only in terms of upheaval, rupture, violence and trauma. That these have existed in overabundance in Algeria is not to be doubted, and the pages that follow will seek to account for them in their place. But the history of Algeria as a series of familiar clichés – heroism and horror, triumph and tragedy, anger and agony – is only part of what has made this country what it is, and does not begin to account adequately for the ways Algerians themselves have lived their lives, understood their country and their place in the world, have made, and continually make day by day, their own futures with the materials their past has given them.

No single study can give an adequate account of the complexity, the suppressed possibilities and unintended outcomes, the many and incommensurable aspects of the modern history of such a richly varied land and such a diverse society with so tumultuous a past. Nonetheless, the aim of this book is to explore, as far, as critically and as carefully as possible within the constraints of historical research – which necessarily differ from those of other disciplines, sociology, anthropology or political science, as well as from investigative journalism, while being informed by all of them

to a greater or lesser extent – what the reality of Algerian history has been for the people who have lived through it, what its motive forces have been and how these have been understood. Above all, I hope that the reader might gain some sense, not only of Algeria's history 'as it really happened' but of Algeria as a really existing place, rather than as a 'model' or a case study of Third World suffering or heroic revolution gone wrong, and of Algerians as the real people who live there, rather than as abstract actors in a tragic tale. It perhaps ought to be said, too, that this does not involve idealising or airbrushing any aspect of Algeria's history or contemporary social reality: the very least that the outside observer trying to make sense of this country owes its people, beyond an empathy with them and their history, is to look both it and them honestly in the face.

This book has two main, interrelated themes. The first is political and concerns the ways in which those who have most directly formed and shaped structures of sovereign power – Ottoman governors, French colonial settlers and administrators and Algerian nationalist leaders, bureaucrats and generals – have sought to construct institutions of state to rule over Algerian society, extract and profit from the country's resources and the labour of its inhabitants and provide mechanisms for regulating and directing social life.

At first sight, Algeria seems to illustrate to a very high degree the power of the modern state to control and transform social life, through both the dislocations and repression of the colonial period and the ambitious projects that followed independence. Again, this is certainly an important part of the story, and the 'fierce' aspects of the state, as well as its developmental ambitions, will often be referred to. But I will also be suggesting that the formation and exercise of state power in Algeria has never been a straightforward process, that Algeria's state structures have often impinged only tangentially on the lives of many of its inhabitants and that even the most ferociously assertive actions of state apparatuses have generally incorporated the country's people only incompletely into their orbit. They have often done so, too, with little or no understanding, and very inaccurate expectations, of what the consequences would be either for the state itself or for the people it made the subjects of its rule. The sometimes ferocious strength of a succession of states, and their simultaneous fragility and limitations, is thus a first recurring theme. In successive periods of the country's history, the balance between the extent and strength of the state, on the one hand, and its limits and fragility, on the other, has of course varied, but there is no story here of the progressive incorporation of all areas of life into the gradually encroaching power of a model 'nation-state'. Rather, a crucial question concerns the extent to which the transition from the domination of

a colonial state imposed by conquest to a national state created in a popular and revolutionary war of liberation, the fulcrum of Algeria's twentieth-century history and the process that drew upon it the attention and often the admiration of the world, has constituted a radical break in the country's history, or a transition in which longer-established power relationships between elements of society and the central, governing and distributing power of the state were able to reconstitute themselves, in new forms perhaps, but with some degree of continuity. The strength and fragility of the state, and the limits and absences as well as the possibilities and ambitions of its projects for governing and transforming society, will be seen as ongoing issues in post-independence Algeria.

Related to this theme is a second one, concerning the history of Algerian society. In a colonial cliché first expressed by Governor General Jules Cambon in 1894 and repeated by Charles de Gaulle in 1959, Algerian society was seen as nothing but a *poussière d'hommes* ('human dust'), disaggregated and anarchic,[4] incapable of generating the social ties and institutions that might constitute the bases of its own self-government, and united in unyielding resistance to the 'civilising' efforts of foreign occupation only by innate violence and the xenophobic 'fanaticism' of Islam. While the colonial prejudices can be dispensed with easily enough, many discussions of Algeria have retained this idea of a weak, fragmented society reduced to helpless prostration before the ravages of colonialism and the depredations of authoritarianism. Discussion has often focused on politics and the state to the exclusion of serious attention to Algerian society, its means of persistence and survival and the ways in which its history has been lived and understood 'from below'. This book argues that just as we need to nuance our understanding of the strengths and limits of state formation in Algeria, so we need to pay more attention to the making and sustaining of what in fact has historically been an extraordinarily robust, resilient society. Not only have social institutions often set limits to, and imposed themselves as interlocutors with, the state, they have also often filled the vacuum left by the absence, uncertainty or incompetence of the state. This is not to be read as a celebration of the autonomy of free social forces. Very frequently such institutions have themselves been oppressive or have worked to benefit a few at the expense of many; they have often filled gaps left vacant by the jurisdiction of the state and its lack of a guaranteed rule of law, but they have rarely themselves provided models of rule-bound, equitable and accountable arbitration. Nonetheless, enduring social solidarities and an extraordinary degree of social energy have continuously characterised Algerian society, and in accounting both for the hardships its people have experienced and for the ways they have survived them, attention to

these (and to their damaging as well as enabling effects, their capacity to produce inequalities and conflicts as well as to alleviate and negotiate them) will be seen to be essential.

In this respect, this book argues for a view of Algerian history that emphasises continuities as well as, sometimes more than, ruptures. This is not an argument for 'invariables' ('national constants' as official Algerian rhetoric put it in the 1970s) but for attention to the forms of social capital and solidarity, worldviews, codes of behaviour and self-understanding that govern the constitution of social relations, and their bases in the everyday material realities of social life, as they are changed or remade by different generations in new circumstances across time. The primary focus, then, is Algerian society and the continuous responses, innovations and strategies of people faced with the conditions of life dictated by their environment and inheritance, or imposed upon them by those who would rule them. Both the ferocity and the limits of politics are best understood, from this perspective, not through high policy and palace intrigue, nor by measurement against prescriptive (and in fact mythical) schemes of 'national awakening', developmental modernisation, 'Western-style' free-market democracy or the 'Islamic republic', but in terms of the constant interplay of social forces with the institutions of state, in which the former have often been more robust, the latter less coherent, than has frequently been appreciated.

These themes are explored here over three periods, and the organisation of the book reflects my attempt to explore long-term themes and continuities through the episodic unfolding of events and the disruptions they have often most obviously caused. The first chapter offers a synopsis of the Ottoman period, considering the broad outlines of social and cultural life and the relation of Algerians and their diverse places of habitation to the *beylik* (state) and the wider worlds beyond it. The colonial period is discussed through Chapters 2 to 4, which run in parallel as well as in sequence. Chapter 2 sees the long process of conquest, its effects and Algerians' varied responses to it, as far as possible from the perspective of Algerian society up to the eve of the First World War. Chapter 3 changes the angle of view, looking at the century-long construction of a 'French Algeria', a European-dominated colonial society, and the institutions through which it created what, by the 1940s, seemed a permanent settler state on North African soil but within the body politic of the French republic. Chapter 4 takes up where Chapter 2 left off, to explore the rapidly developing changes in Algerian society and its demands on and contests with the French state from 1912 to 1942. These three chapters reflect a conviction that the 'Algerian' and the 'French' histories of Algeria from 1830 to ca. 1940 need to be seen as

both distinct and intertwined; neither aspect can properly be understood without the other, and neither is sufficient as a 'true' record without the other, but these are the histories of parallel, occasionally intersecting, colliding or overlapping societies, not a single common narrative. Indeed, much of the bitterness of the war of independence and of its continuing reverberations in more recent times can only be explained by the peculiar way in which Algerian and French histories of Algeria are both interdependent and incommensurable. Chapter 5 considers the origins and unfolding of the war of independence, its multiple meanings and the diverse ways in which it was experienced, from 1942 up to the independence of the Algerian republic in 1962. Chapters 6 and 7 follow a more straightforward political chronology that also, in these years, falls in with major patterns of social and economic life, as Algeria experienced first the years of revolutionary state consolidation in the 1960s and 1970s, the mounting crisis of the system in the 1980s up to the dramatic events of 1988–92 and the terrible violence and uneasy 'normalisation' of the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Algeria today is an important as well as a 'difficult' country. Little known to most people in most of the English-speaking world, known often in confused and conflicting ways in Europe, especially in France, familiar to most only from news items about terrorism or illegal migration, it is (in surface area) Africa's largest country, a major source and supplier of oil and gas to Europe, a significant actor in the international relations of the Mediterranean region and a focus of attention (however undesired) for all those concerned with 'war on terror', European security and economic relations, immigration and Islamism, as well as for students of colonialism and anti-colonialism, insurrection and counter-insurgency, Third Worldism, 'socialist' development and transitions towards more liberal markets and (perhaps) democratisation, the legacies of imperialism in the postcolonial world and the making of 'the West' in its modern encounter with 'Islam' and 'the Orient'. If some of those readers whose interest in Algeria stems from any of these many reasons why we should pay attention to this country, its people and their historical experiences, find in these pages some clues about how Algerian history has also been lived by those whom it has first, and most of all, concerned, then this book will have served its purpose.

Researching and writing this book has taken far longer than I initially (naïvely) imagined. It would not have been possible without the support of several institutions, and many friends and colleagues. Marigold Acland first proposed that I take it on, when I was a Junior Research Fellow at the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford; I have her patience and enthusiasm, and Eugene Rogan's encouragement, to thank for making

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1 Ecologies, Societies, Cultures and the State, 1516–1830

In the late autumn of 1519, the leading citizens of Algiers composed a letter from 'the whole populace of the city' to Sultan Selim I, ruler of the Ottoman Empire who, only two years previously, had swept from Anatolia through Syria and Egypt, conquering the historic heartlands of the Arab and Muslim worlds. 'We had fallen', they wrote, 'in these troubled times from difficulty into difficulty', 'in an unhappy situation of weakness on the edge of misfortune', before the arrival of the man who was now at the head of their state, Khayr al-Din 'Barbarossa'. He, and with him the notables and populace of the city, now declared his 'devotion and faithfulness' to the victorious Ottoman ruler; all placed themselves in his service.[1]

Ottoman Algeria

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the central Maghrib – the broad swathe of North Africa between the domains of the Wattasid dynasty of Fez to the west and the Hafsids of Tunis to the east – was caught in a vast geopolitical crisis. The collapse of the late medieval Muslim kingdoms of Andalus in the face of the Spanish Catholic *reconquista* had culminated, in January 1492, with the fall of Granada. The Spanish advance across the Mediterranean, into fortified enclaves on the coasts of North Africa, accelerated the fragmentation of the dynastic states that had ruled the Maghrib in succession to the great unified medieval empires that had passed away in the thirteenth century. The central Maghrib that would become Algeria was not yet conceived of by any of its inhabitants as a single territory, much less one ruled from the port city of al-Jaza'ir Beni Mezghenna (*Alger* to the French, *Algiers* to the English), 'the islands of the Beni Mezghenna', an ancient but modest harbour built against the steep relief of the hillsides facing a small group of islets off the coast, an unsheltered anchorage at the western end of a broad bay. Political sovereignty over the plains and mountains of the central Maghrib and their inhabitants was contested between the Zayyanid dynasty, ruling from the

princely trading and textile-manufacturing city of Tlemcen, inland in the west of the country, the Zayyanids' rivals in Fez further west, and the opposing force of the Hafsids of Tunis in the east, who ruled over the learned port city of Bejaïa at the mouth of the Soummam river, 200 kilometres east of Algiers. Continuous regional warfare between them was now combined with the destabilising local effects of a Mediterranean superpower struggle: the Ottoman Empire, in the ascendant since the capture of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, contended with the Habsburgs, embarking on their own 'golden age' with the establishment and pillaging of a New World empire in the Americas. After the fall of Granada, the Spanish 'crusade' encroached on the central Maghribi coastline. Mers el Kebir, the great natural harbour just west of Oran, was taken in 1505, Tenes in 1508, Oran itself and Bejaïa in 1509. Two years later, Dellys, Cherchell and Mostaghanem were obliged to pay tribute to the Spaniards. All the principal coastal towns of the central Maghrib, east as far as the Hafsid domains, had fallen under Spanish control. In 1510, the notables of Algiers too sued for peace, and were obliged to cede possession of the offshore islands commanding their harbour, on which the Spanish commander, Don Pedro Navarro, built a fortress, the *peñon*, with a garrison two hundred strong.[2]

It was in this context that the notables, the chief citizens, of Algiers first called on outside aid, requesting help from an Ottoman adventurer recently arrived in the region – Aruj Bey, who along with his three brothers became better known in history and legend under the surname 'Barbarossa', meaning 'red beard'. Aruj, a Muslim soldier and seaman from the Aegean island of Mytilene, had his first successes as a corsair (privateer) operating from the island of Djerba off the southern coast of Tunisia. Private naval entrepreneurs acting for their own profit but within the context of Ottoman operations against the Spanish were already a feature of warfare in the region, as they were in the Atlantic and Caribbean, where English privateers harassed the Spanish fleet. In the 1490s, the Turkish privateer Kemal Reis, later appointed to command an Ottoman squadron charged with suppressing piracy in the Aegean, had led a corsair fleet against Spanish shipping off the Maghribi coasts.[3] The careers of the elder Barbarossa brothers, Aruj and Khayr al-Din, were especially successful examples of this wider trend. Having created his own fleet, Aruj was called upon to reinforce the attempt to retake Bejaïa from the Spanish. He tried, and failed, to do so twice, from his base at Jijel, but from there, as a leading anti-Spanish war captain, he began to carve out an independent political power of his own. In 1516, he was solicited by the population of Algiers to come to their aid.