Preface

Na Nigerian government, ee-oh
Dem dey talk be dat, ee-oh
"My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people are indiscipline"

—*Fela Kuti*

Never has an electoral campaign displayed such cynicism, in a country that is nevertheless familiar with power grabs . . . When talking to us, they resorted to the intimate language they use in the hushed atmosphere of their living-rooms, to speak about their drivers and their maids. "Chaʿab erkhiss," "people of nothing," "bare-footed," "ʿaryens," "digestive tubes," "raʿi," "shepherds" who only understand strength.

—*Ghania Mouffok*

Sitting in front of a fireplace, candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika is answering the questions of a French journalist before the first round of the 1999 Algerian presidential elections. The front-runner explains his incomprehension, as his six challengers have decided to collectively withdraw from a race that they consider to be rigged in his favor. "Abandoning and yet having the feeling that you have won. It's a bit

much. You really have to be Algerian to dare doing something like that," he explains with his blue eyes wide open and a large smile on his face. Bouteflika presents himself as a solution to a decade of turmoil. While the country is in the midst of a bloody civil conflict, the former minister of foreign affairs demands broad popular support: "If I don't have clear and massive support from the Algerian people, I'll consider that they are happy with their mediocrity. And after all, I am not in charge of making them happy against their will."[1] He poses as a providential man. A few days later, Bouteflika will be elected with 73.80 percent of the vote from an overall voter turnout of 60.91 percent. This is the beginning of a twenty-year period of rule. Throughout this time, the man who has just been voted president of the republic will never really put an end to the crisis faced by the country. Rather, he will contribute to making it the core principle of government.

Fifteen Years Later

Fifteen years have passed, and Abdelaziz Bouteflika is now unable to walk or speak after suffering a transient ischemic attack in April 2013. He nonetheless remains head of state, as no viable alternative has emerged within the ruling coalition. After the uprisings of 2010–2011 in neighboring Tunisia and Libya, and the French military intervention in Mali, regional uncertainty prevails. Moreover, Algeria's economy remains dependent on increasingly unstable hydrocarbon prices. Popular discontent is widespread, yet state officials present the ailing president as the guarantor of peace and development. It is remarkable to see a political charade embodied so perfectly by a single personality. What better allegory of a system of government based on the possibility of an imminent collapse than a head of state unable to take his presidential oath?

In Algeria, certainly, the head of state played his role as the representative of a flickering order. Yet if this allegory seems remarkable, it is also too convenient. Abdelaziz Bouteflika certainly acquired a great deal of power over the years, but he was just a man in a fragmented ruling coalition that controlled a modern and sectorized state. Accordingly, this book studies Algeria under the rule of Bouteflika (1999–2019), not the president himself. It describes a specific mode of government by crisis, one that draws

on the most vivid form of existential threat: the catastrophe. It studies the strategies of those who govern, but also the lived experience resulting from this mode of government. The following observations describe Algeria in the spring of 2014.

A DEMONSTRATION PREVENTED

I have not been to Algeria since June 2013. Seen from France, the past political year has been most peculiar. Following Bouteflika's stroke, observers were expecting him to withdraw from the presidential race in favor of an heir selected by the groups that constitute the ruling coalition. Yet an unlikely team of cronies and ministers has nonetheless managed to bring about his candidacy. Thus, the man who can barely utter a word is making his bid for reelection as a front-runner. In the meantime, public figures share expletives in broad daylight. Associates of the presidency denounce the shortcomings of the powerful military intelligence, the Department of Intelligence and Security (Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité, DRS). Meanwhile, allies of this department reply that the leader of the largest party in the country, the National Liberation Front (Front de libération nationale, or FLN), is an agent working for the French secret services.[2]

On the way from the airport, the urban landscape unfolds before my eyes. The frenzied construction policy supported by the government has altered the fabric of the city. In addition to the plethora of new hotels lining the road to downtown Algiers, I can see the future Great Mosque—one of Bouteflika's signature projects—slowly taking shape. Around the mosque, there is already a parking lot. On the other side of the freeway, a new mall has been built and hundreds of cars testify to consumers' enthusiasm. A little further, along the bay, a freshly finished boardwalk offers a welcoming space for joggers and strollers. The capital is acquiring the features of a global city. A metro and a tramway were inaugurated in 2011 and a new opera house is under construction. Overall, the investment of public funds continues steadily and allows for the proliferation of construction sites across the city.

Later, in downtown Algiers, I meet with two activists belonging to the Youth Action Rally (Rassemblement Action Jeunesse, RAJ), an organization founded in the 1990s. One of them is Nidhal, a founding figure of RAJ and

a friend who is hosting me. While organizationally autonomous, the association is linked to the Socialist Forces Front (Front des Forces Socialistes, FFS), the country's oldest opposition party.[3] Under the arches along the seafront, the two men stay a couple of meters away from each other. They speak elusively and use obscure nicknames ("you-know-who," "our friend"). Their discussion is shaped by caution. In their eyes, internal tensions within the ruling coalition could lead to rapid changes.

A sit-in staged by Barakat (Enough), a movement that denounces Bouteflika's bid for reelection, is planned for 4:00 p.m. near Maurice Audin Square. My companions notice bitterly that the organizers of the rally decided to hold it on their doorsteps. They imply, with a degree of accuracy, that Barakat's core activists belong to Algiers's educated upper-middle class. Indeed, the founders of the movement are journalists, lawyers, and doctors. According to RAJ's members, the authorities will tolerate the protest of the *barakistes*, as has been the case so far, to please international media. "All this is for the cameras," says one of them. As we walk past the entrance of the Faculté Centrale, we can see a dozen journalists waiting for the protest to begin. One detail attracts Nidhal's attention: according to him, the colossuses in blue uniforms who are waiting on the other side of the street come from the south of the country. He thinks that these policemen were brought here to take part in a brawl.

Suddenly, the first signs of the protest can be heard further up on Didouche Mourad Street. Following the shouts and cries, we are passed by the policemen, who run with long bludgeons in their hands. Just before Maurice Audin Square, a mass of pedestrians has formed. A handful of Barakat members make their voices heard. One after the other, they come out of the crowd and shout slogans hostile to Bouteflika's fourth mandate before being rapidly apprehended. As two officers are rounding up an activist on the stairs of a nearby street, a journalist and her cameraman rush toward the scene to record footage of the crackdown. This infuriates a group of young men who had until then witnessed the protest quite stoically from a nearby restaurant. "Get out! Go back to your country!" shouts one of them to the journalist. As the tension grows, neighboring shops begin shutting down. Meanwhile, agents of the General Directorate for National Safety (Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale—the Algerian police) take pictures of those who remain in the square.

After the police have removed the arrested protesters, the atmosphere slowly reverts to normal. Activists from diverse backgrounds, standing between police cars, are deep in discussion. A smiling man shows up and starts ostentatiously shaking the hands of known faces before leaving. A *barakiste* explains that this is the head of the city's police intelligence trying to sow doubt. Worried, Nidhal points at the weapons of the officers who monitor the square. "They carry automatic rifles (*klash*) in the middle of Algiers. The last time we saw something like that, it was in 1988," he says, referencing the bloody repression of the October uprising. Eventually, two men and a woman appear on the square brandishing posters of Bouteflika. A small crowd gathers around them as they shout slogans glorifying the president. They will disappear as easily as they arrived less than ten minutes later.

This first fragment illustrates the difficulty of apprehending the reality on the ground. Indeed, the scale and speed of the repression surprised even those who followed the campaign closely. One can also grasp the feeling of exhaustion and annoyance among some of the population, who have been the captive audience of a tense electoral process. Finally, it is important to note that actors draw on past episodes (here the uprising of 1988) to interpret the present situation and evaluate the possibility of a rise in violence.

RAJ IN TURMOIL

Well-known figures express their fears publicly. This is notably the case with Mouloud Hamrouche, a former reformist prime minister (1989–1991) who has become a common point of reference in liberal circles. During the campaign, Hamrouche intervenes repeatedly to share his concerns. In a widely discussed press conference, he speaks of a "crisis inside the regime" leading to "serious threats." A few weeks later, he reiterates his position and evokes the risk of increased violence. He suggests that the head of state (Abdelaziz Bouteflika), the army's chief of staff (Ahmed Gaïd Salah), and the head of the DRS (Mohamed Mediène) should conclude a settlement to resolve the current political impasse.[4] If this statement suggests an exceptional emergency, it also illustrates what I call the suspension of the catastrophe: year after year, presidential election after presidential election,

political actors warn of the risks of a major political upheaval. Indeed, Hamrouche's call is in fact largely redundant. Already in 2002, the prime minister at the time, Ali Benflis, explained that the country was facing "a multifaceted crisis [going beyond] factual and conjunctural factors that might have a lasting impact on its future."[5] In 2002, as in 2014, these political figures emphasize the precariousness of the country's situation in order to promote their reformist agenda.

What really happens on Election Day? Nidhal and I decide to go to Bab El-Oued, a neighborhood associated with the great uprisings of Algiers's past: during the War of Liberation (1954–1962); in 1962, against the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète, or Secret Armed Organization), a pro–French Algeria armed group; during the popular uprising of October 1988; and again in January 2011. A freelance journalist is coming with us. On this spring morning, Bab El-Oued is remarkably calm. Polling stations are sparsely occupied, and the exit polls improvised by our journalist friend indicate a rather flattering preference for the sitting president: no less than 100 percent of the vote would appear to be in his favor. This is far from surprising. In Algeria, citizens demonstrate their rejection of the "System" through abstention, which expresses both a lack of faith in the electoral process and a mistrust toward the country's putative representatives.[6] A surprise is unlikely, as it would mean that the state apparatus has turned against Bouteflika. Thus, after making sure that I am not myself a journalist, a man starts to reveal in front of me the orders that he claims to have received directly from Ali Haddad, CEO of a construction company and fervent supporter of the president. According to him, the election is already won. It is not even noon. Therefore, it is time to start mobilizing the fans of USM Algiers, a football club in which Haddad is the majority shareholder, to celebrate the victory. This kind of "spontaneous" celebration aims to demonstrate the democratic nature of the political order, and it is a performance directed at Algerians as well as international partners.

The following day, the government-owned newspaper *El Moudjahid*, which was the voice of the FLN during the War of Liberation, celebrates a "remarkable" official voter turnout of 51.7 percent. Emphasizing the legality of the election, the editorial presents Algeria as "the right example to follow with regards to human rights and democracy for countries that aim to take this path."[7] Yet Bouteflika's reelection is by no means uncontroversial in Algeria. Responding to the official praise, the private daily

newspaper *Liberté* dedicates its front page to "the pictures that have traveled around the world." They show the president in a wheelchair while his personal physician "whispers in his ears," "seizes six ballot papers," and "accompanies him in the booth"—a situation that is only legal in cases where a voter can prove infirmity.[8] As for the *Soir d'Algérie*, another private daily, it echoes the denunciations coming from various opposition parties. It also publishes an op-ed by Amin Khan, a "poet and former public servant," on the ruling coalition's illegitimacy, its inability to solve the country's crisis, and the place of dirty money in its internal functioning.[9] If the criticism is harsh, it remains nonetheless nebulous, targeting the "System" rather than specific individuals or institutions.

Political opponents are striving to regroup and offer an alternative path. Leftist activists from RAJ and the Socialist Workers Party (Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs, a Trotskyist formation) who I meet over the next couple of days follow these maneuvers from a distance, without great enthusiasm. The widespread discrediting of politicians and parties undermines any attempt to unify the country's myriad opposition movements. On the one hand, official opponent and former prime minister Ali Benflis announces the creation of a "front bringing together the forces of change." On the other, various parties who have boycotted the presidential election prepare a "national conference for democratic transition" that will soon give birth to a "Coordination for Liberties and Democratic Transition." As for the FFS, it calls on other actors to "seek consensus," and leaves the door open to both the government and opposition forces. One must also take into account the actions of Mouloud Hamrouche and his emissaries, who are exploring their options, as well as an attempt to create an alternative among members of the Left. In short, areas of convergence proliferate, which paradoxically reveals the fragmentation of the political field and makes an actual reunion unlikely. "They all hate each other," a Trotskyist activist affirms abruptly while we are having coffee.

RAJ's leaders have decided to join a coalition of associations and unions whose aim is the creation of "a democratic, autonomous and inclusive space of civil society for convergence and struggle." To justify this strategy Abdelouahab Fersaoui, the association's president, tells me that "it is necessary to act on the social and economic aspects first, in order to mobilize people and bring them back to political demands." This effort nonetheless takes on a secondary importance when an unexpected blow changes RAJ's

priorities. Following the protest in Maurice Audin Square, a member of the association was arrested along with a Tunisian friend. The reasons for the two young men's detention are unclear. As the authorities have not provided any information regarding the charges against them, where they are being held, or the date of any hearing before a judge, uncertainty increases and strategies diverge. While RAJ's leadership struggles to advance its project of convergence among social movements, grassroots members demand immediate street actions to free the prisoners. Former members, outraged by the length of the two men's detention, decide to get involved and start an online petition. The lawyers, linked to human rights associations, prioritize a legal approach to this conundrum. Finally, villagers from the detained activist's hometown protest his detention in the mountains of Kabylia, not far from Algiers. None of these actions prevent the judicial apparatus from imposing its rhythm and provoking concern about the possibly severe punishment the two men could face. They will eventually be sentenced to a suspended prison term two weeks later and released immediately. For RAJ, this unexpected crisis has revealed internal disagreements between former members, new leaders, and grassroots activists, which were in turn exacerbated by the unpredictability of state coercion.

This second fragment illustrates several key issues, starting with the redundancy of alarmist discourses nourished by political deadlock and repression.[10] This type of emergency rhetoric can be instrumentalized by reformist elites to advance their own agendas. Opponents, whether they belong to political parties, associations, or trade unions, are active but fragmented. While they have the ability to denounce the government in virulent terms, they are also constantly limited by an arbitrary and unpredictable coercive machine.

IN CHLEF

It takes about three hours to reach Chlef from the Agha train station, in the center of Algiers. The medium-sized town is situated in the Tell Atlas, between the capital and Oran, the second-largest city in the country. Surrounded by agricultural lands, it lies in the Chelif Valley and is known for the devastation it suffered as a result of two earthquakes in 1954 and 1980. After the last one destroyed most of the city, roughly twelve thousand

emergency trailer units welcomed those who had lost their houses. More than thirty years later, these "temporary" neighborhoods remain, fueling denunciations of the precarious living conditions that are said to prevail in the *wilaya* (governorate).[11]

In Chlef, my interlocutors' questions underline a widespread mistrust toward strangers and politics. Beyond the refusal to be recorded—which is nothing new—the self-censorship and the will to remain anonymous are especially strong in spring 2014. The elections justify an extra dose of cautiousness. When I meet with Karim, an architect who has agreed to introduce me to the basics of local urban planning, he explains that he cannot give any names. Those responsible for the problems he identifies (corruption, mismanagement, lack of political will) will remain anonymous to avoid getting him in trouble. Similarly, Mansour, a representative at the People's Assembly of Wilaya (Assemblée populaire de wilaya, APW), belonging to a small nationalist party, describes the bureaucratic deadlock and his difficulties communicating with the local administration. Yet he refuses to speak politics and limits our exchanges to technical details. Before leaving me after our first encounter, he insists on giving me a warning: "We live in troubled times, with everything that is going on at our borders. You need to understand that everybody here has a history, and we don't want to live this history again." He is referring to the so-called Dark Decade (*al-ʿUshriyya as-Sawdāa'*) of the 1990s, a time when Chlef and its surroundings were plagued by the extreme violence perpetrated by Islamist insurgents, state security forces, and unknown criminal elements.

The last time we see each other, Mansour explains that if I am to come back to Chlef, I will need an official document from the Ministry of Higher Education. Such a letter would dissipate the doubts surrounding my motivations. I certainly cannot blame him for thinking that a researcher could be a spy. One must admit that both professions produce a form of power-knowledge that benefits the state, among other entities. Nevertheless, the spy fever is particularly acute in this month of April 2014. Increased international attention linked to the presidential election, coupled with fears of destabilization by foreign agents after the Western military interventions in Libya and Mali, accentuate the suspicion inherited from the anticolonial struggle. A Franco-Moroccan freelance journalist who came to cover the election without a press visa was denounced publicly as a spy by the cable news channel Ennahar TV. She was rushed out

on a plane by the French embassy on April 16. More generally, the uncertain political context revives a defensive nationalism inherited from the era of colonization.

To be fair, negative discourses do not only target foreigners and members of the ruling coalition. In this Tellian city, I witness the recurring tendency of my interlocutors to criticize their fellow citizens. As we leave Nidhal's house in the morning, one of his neighbors, an old lady who knew him as a kid, asks about his sister. After Nidhal explains that she is now living in Canada and has no desire to come back, the woman welcomes this decision. According to her, "the further away you stay from Algerians, the better you are." She associates the hardships of everyday life with what are sometimes described as the population's intrinsic flaws. The same day, I am walking in downtown Chlef with a member of the General Union of Algerian Workers (Union Générale des Travailleurs Algeriens), who is also an employee of the local social security office. As we discuss the ongoing strikes, he doesn't hide his annoyance: "Workers are always demanding more money. This is the Arab way. They don't work, they make claims." The labor organizer lambasts an ongoing social movement, which he presents as a symptom of "Arabness."

The following morning, I have an appointment with Karim, who promised to introduce me to the subtleties of Chlef's land use plan. As we talk about the proliferation of irregular housing and the appropriation of sidewalks, he launches into a comparison with Paris. According to him, the difference in terms of cleanliness is once again a "problem of mentality" (*mushkila ʿaqliyya*). "If the people litter or if they leave their bags of potatoes, it is not only because of the city's public services. We don't have this notion of common interest as you do in Europe," he explains. It goes without saying that these discourses respond to different motives. Yet they also share a couple of commonalities. Firstly, they direct their criticism toward the Algerian population to explain what they perceive as a pervasive state of anomie. Secondly, they echo a set of caricatures that reflect colonial discourses (the Algerian as lazy, dirty, troublesome). The presence of a French researcher likely encourages this negative depiction. Disparagement serves to establish a sense of connivance with an interlocutor,[12] especially when they are expected to endorse pejorative representations of the target. Yet as we will see throughout this book, these caricatures were also fueled by the feeling of a never-ending crisis.

This third fragment allows us to discern in Chlef various iterations of a nationwide effort to elucidate this long-standing crisis. Actors designate those who are to be held responsible, whether they incriminate external enemies or blame the whole population. This moment of judgment, in Arendt's sense, is essential to the quest for meaning inherent to any critical situation.[13] This effort can lead to criticism of the "culture" of the people in a way that is reminiscent of colonial discourses. Thus, the Algerian case illustrates the need for a postcolonial analysis of the government of the crisis; only then can we distance ourselves from preconceived markers of political modernity.[14] Far from being a caprice or a merely performative claim, such a decentering is essential: if ever a space could be characterized by radical political, social, and epistemological crisis, structured by a long-term existential threat, it was the colonial space.

The Book

In the pages that follow, I pursue a set of pragmatic objectives, starting with an elucidation of Algeria's recent trajectory. As the country was the object of considerably less outside attention prior to the 2019 uprising (or "Hirak," which means "movement"),[15] this work aims to restore intelligibility to the analysis. In this respect, it studies Bouteflika's Algeria as a polity shaped by a long-standing systemic crisis, one that has impacted every domain of social life. While the Algerian government has pursued a form of institutional amnesia in the name of reconciliation, I demonstrate that the extreme violence of the Dark Decade remained the bedrock of the subsequent political order. Moreover, the reforms engineered in the name of preventing additional calamities allowed for the reconfiguration of that order, the co-option of new social groups, and the management of dissent. Paternalistic ruling elites coerced the masses in the name of disciplining a society prone to chaos. The prevention of an imminent disaster guided the process of state restructuring, from the transformation of security apparatuses to the erection of clientelist networks. In other words, this book also studies an extreme version of the government of the crisis. Invoking a "social imaginary of emergency,"[16] this *governance by catastrophization* is based on the anxious wait for a disastrous turning point and serves to manage a population and a territory.

The first chapter starts with a historical overview of the Algerian crisis, from the mid-1980s to the uprising of 2019. To familiarize the reader with the country's recent trajectory, I propose a periodization in four phases: premises, climax, latency, revolution. Then, I present the current state of the field, namely by reviewing the literature dedicated to Algeria as well as recent works on the restructuring of Arab "authoritarian regimes." Finally, I introduce recent theoretical debates on the notion of crisis and discuss the definition that will be used in subsequent chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the ruling coalition and the role of the crisis in its progressive reconfiguration since the end of the 1980s. While the ruling coalition is not the focus of this book, its internal dynamics exacerbate the fear of a political collapse and are essential to understanding the objective and subjective dimensions of the impending catastrophe. Chapter 2 looks at the most powerful institutions in the ruling coalition, the presidency and the army, and analyzes their respective roles in producing and mitigating the suspended disaster. It shows how they justified their dominant positions by claiming to protect the nation from a potential repetition of the Dark Decade. After dissecting the institutional and symbolic bases of their power, I investigate the moments of conflict in which military leaders opposed their civilian counterparts. This chapter introduces the cartelized power structure that allowed for the relative cohesion of a diverse set of actors and agencies within what is commonly labelled the *Pouvoir*. I contend that the ruling coalition is best understood as a cartel aimed at securing for its members privileged access to state power and limiting the risks resulting from external competition. At the same time, the cohesion of this cartel was undermined by internal competition, notably between the presidency and high-ranking army officers. The illegibility of these struggles fueled social anxiety and discredited the political authorities. Chapter 3 looks at how various reform initiatives enabled the transformation and extension of the cartel, beyond a core group of state elites. In order to provide a clearer understanding of its structure before the Hirak, I present a diagram of the cartel, with its different components, as well as their positioning vis-à-vis the state field. The final sections of the chapter focus on the role of corruption and clientelism, and the relationship between the state and society. They also describe the increased entanglements of public and private actors, thereby elucidating a power

structure that seems both pyramidal and diffuse, and ensures both exclusion and integration.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the consequences of successive political and media openings since the late 1980s. They show the weaponization of liberal representative institutions and how the resulting discontent with formal politics contributed to the advent of the 2019 uprising. Chapter Four turns to the adoption of a pluralist party system from the perspective of the so-called Presidential Alliance. The first section highlights the main rhetorical and organizational features of the two ruling parties (the FLN and the RND—the Rassemblement National Démocratique, or National Democratic Rally), as well as the peculiar trajectory of former prime minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem. The chapter then focuses on a moderate Islamist party that participated in the government coalition from 1999 to 2012, the Movement for the Society of Peace (Ḥarakat Mujtamaʿa as-Silm). It shows that the violence of the 1990s facilitated the latter's co-option in the name of saving the country. At the same time, the increased commodification of politics resulted in the discrediting of established political actors and their pervasive inability to produce legitimacy. Chapter 5 continues the analysis of pluralist politics by focusing on opponents in the political and media fields. It shows that the regulation of freedoms under Bouteflika was based on the articulation of a top-down process of democratization with a state of exception legitimized by the possibility of a catastrophe. Critical actors faced a hybrid and unpredictable repression based on nonlethal "democratic" policing and extralegal punishments. Nonetheless, the contentious form of local politics showed the limits of this "upgrading." Facing intense domestic pressures, the ruling coalition regulated the expression of dissent but was unable to fully suppress it. While seemingly unable to achieve meaningful change, opponents contributed to the circulation of highly contentious discourses. As such, they maintained pressure on the cartel even if their fragmentation prevented them from presenting a credible alternative. As the ruling coalition was constantly depicted as a criminal organization in the public space, its "resilience" remained effectively limited.

The last two chapters look at the social impact of the model of governance by catastrophization. Chapter 6 investigates the seemingly never-ending crisis not only as a principle of government but also as a

lived experience. Following a group of young men in the small town of Ain Bessem, in northeastern Algeria, it describes a quotidian existence marked by boredom, unemployment, and a feeling of entrapment and structural injustice (*ḥogra*). The chapter then describes the struggle of the National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed (Comité national pour la défense des droits des chômeurs), thus illustrating how social movements came increasingly to emphasize pacifism and patriotism and prioritize socioeconomic claims, while simultaneously drawing on a virulent anti-system narrative. Grassroots actors thus adapted to the model of governance by catastrophization and crafted new strategies to occupy public spaces that proved to be essential in the advent of the Hirak. Structural inequalities nonetheless contributed to the fragile status quo of the early 2010s, as the government responded to social unrest by prioritizing security-based policies and economic redistribution. In this context, activists persevered despite their exhaustion and testified to their experience of the catastrophe. Finally, chapter 7 focuses on the symbolic and epistemic violence resulting from this mode of governance. While subjected to the possibility of collapse, individuals proposed competing diagnoses in order to save their country. Despite widespread confusion, two distinct narratives emerged, both centered on the nature of the Algerian people. The first one was based on the continued assertion of an ideal of political sanctity inherited from the War of Liberation. Meanwhile, a competing narrative depicted an undisciplined, violent, and childish people who had allegedly failed to assimilate the principles of political modernity.

Reading Bouteflika's Algeria through the prism of governance by catastrophization, this monograph presents Algeria as a paradigmatic example of a system of government that has now spread around the globe. It shows how the routine management of multifaceted crises is based on a combination of paternalistic discourses, securitization, and reformism. At the same time, far from lamenting the powerlessness of the masses, this book testifies to the dilemmas and strategies of active resistance in an environment saturated with uncertainty and haunted by the ghosts of past violence.

The Suspended Disaster