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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE *HIRAK*. THE VISUAL PERFORMANCE OF DIVERSITY IN ALGERIAN PROTESTS

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ABSTRACT: Based on the analysis of the first year of the *Hirak*, the Algerian protest movement started on February 2019, the article focuses on its visual performance and on the narrative emerging from it. Banners, posters and photos highlight the *Hirak*'s specific attempt to give a new meaning to the discourse about the Algerian people and its unity. Particular attention is given to the visual performance of Algerian diversity exemplified by the deployment of the Amazigh flag during the protests. The flag became more than a cultural symbol and represented an instance of freedom and a manifestation of the people's will to escape traditional hetero-definitions of belongings and identities.

KEYWORDS: The *Hirak*, visual performance, Algeria, Amazigh, diversity.

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1. Introduction

Research on the visuality of contemporary social movements in North Africa have often focused on the importance of social media in spreading revolutionary demands and mobilising protesters, especially during the 2011 Arab uprisings (Bennett and Segerburg 2013; Gerbaudo 2012; Mekouar 2016)[1] and on the enhancement and diffusion of visual arts – from photography to graffiti, from caricatures to paintings – during the demonstrations (Comito and Moresi 2020; Lacquaniti 2020; Korody 2011). While linked to the develop-

[1] The analysis of the role of digital platforms in North African contemporary protests is beyond this article's aims. On the topic see El-Hibri (2014), Mekouar (2016), and Morozov (2011).

ment of visual arts, the protests' visual performance – the *ensemble* of tools used to confer an identity to the movement, articulate a self-representation and communicate its demands – has not been investigated extensively. Following Aulich (2020), visual performance is understood as the *here and now* of the protest, including the crowds, banners, posters, speeches, chants, songs, as well as the confrontation strategies (usually, with the police). Such an aesthetic of the protest produces a socially-built "visual culture", which provides the researcher with unique and context-bounded information about social, cultural, and political changes undergoing in a given society (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). As "visibility lies at the intersection of the domains of aesthetics (relations of perception) and politics (relations of power)" (Brighenti 2007, 324), power is largely a struggle for visibility – who and what can be seen and in what way – and for the control of symbolic individual and collective definitions.

Building on this reflection, this article focuses on visual performance as a tool for understanding Algerian contemporary protests. From its independence in 1962 onwards, the country has experienced, as Lazreg (1998) underlines, a real symbolic saturation of the public space, squeezed between colonial, nationalist and Islamist symbols. The deconstruction of such symbolisms has been one of the challenges faced by the *Hirak*, literally "the movement", a wave of protests that began on February 2019. Algerians throughout the country gathered in the streets and the squares twice a week, on Fridays and Tuesdays, to protest against President Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term – leading eventually to his forced resignation on the 2 April 2019 – and more generally, against a regime accused of being unjust, authoritarian and disrespectful of people's social, cultural, political and economic demands. The *Hirak* has displayed its specific visuality (Chenoufi and Dirèche 2020), with the protesters' emphasising global symbols of opposition in combination with traditional ones to propose a different popular narrative of the Algerian identity. At the same time, this represented a renewal of Algerians' relationship with their past (Fabbiano 2019) and an attempt at building a new semiotic for a future citizenship (Derradji and Gherbi 2019).

Focusing on the first year of the *Hirak* – from February 2019 to March 2020 – the main argument of this article is that the movement's visual performance constituted an attempt to overcome the post-colonial traditional discursive definitions of Algerian social and cultural identity. In fact, it strived to affirm an organic definition of the *people* through the re-articulation of some of the elements of that very post-colonial narrative and through the enhanced visibility that marginalised identities enjoyed. In particular, the article addresses the de-construction of the narrative concerning the homogeneous unity of the Algerian people, focusing on the case of Amazigh[2] identity. The symbolic significance of the latter has been highlighted during the *Hirak*, particularly since General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, the Army chief of the staff who led *de facto* the Algerian transition until the election of President Abdelmajid Tebboune in December 2019, prohibited the display of the Amazigh flag during the protests. This article argues that the issue of the Amazigh flag highlights the *Hirak*'s attempt at questioning the regime's hegemonic narrative order, overturning the symbolic violence of its discourse (Bourdieu 2001) and re-signifying the representation of the people's unity (Laclau 2008). This analysis is based on the visual material available online: photos, slogans, cartoons, videos and interviews released during the protests by the demonstrators. These are phenomenologically approached as visual manifestations intended as a class of expression produced in social movements (Doerr and Milman 2014).

2. Protests' visual performance in North Africa: The Uprising (2010-2011)

[2] The article uses "Amazigh", "Berberophone" or "Berber" interchangeably, depending on the circumstances. On the etymology of the term Amazigh, see McDougall (2003) and Hoffman and Crawford (1999). For the word Berber, see Maddy-Weitzman (2016). The latter estimates that almost 7.5 mln of Algerians are Berberophones, circa 20-25% of the population. They are divided into different groups, the most significant of which are Kabyli and Chaouci.

Protests have always been consciously or unconsciously visually performed. As Tilly (2008, XI) underlines "ordinary people found vigorously vital ways of making their voices heard in the midst of repressive regimes, they clung to the same few forms of collective expression and modified those forms only slowly". Such forms of "contentious actions" are part of a performance's repertoire, defined as "the repetitive character of claim making" (Tilly *ivi*, XII), linking "some concrete group of people to some other individual, or groups, generated and changing as a function of continuing interaction – struggle, collaboration, competition, or some combination of them – among groups" (Ibid.). Following Butler (2015), performance is inherent to protests' ontology, as it articulates the protesters' identification inwardly and communicates their requests outwardly. The bodily presence, the disposition, and the aesthetics of the bodies gathered together in the (public) space define who the "we, the people" are, drawing discursive lines between those who are excluded and included, embodying ethnic, linguistic, national, cultural and political narratives, personifying instances, imaginaries, and more or less defined proposals for social change, and determining which real events were iconic compared to the protests' identity.

The repertoire of protests, according to Tilly (2008), changes slowly and often within limited choices. From the point of view of the aesthetics of performance, as Aulich (2020) points out, not much has changed in terms of its immediate visual, aural and formal characteristics since the early nineteenth century. Nonetheless as performances are "learned and historically grounded" (Tilly 2008, 4), their repertories do change according to the reaction of the government and its constriction, to the history of contentions in a given country, and to the political opportunity of the moment. The repertoire is therefore "not only what people do when they make a claim; it is what they know how to do and what society has come to expect them to choose to do from within a culturally sanctioned and empirically limited set of options" (Tilly 1978, 151, cit. in Tarrow 1993). Following Tarrow (1993) innovations in the repertoire are most likely to occur in "moments of madness", at the beginnings of protest cycles when to protesters all seems possible: they are at the same time tested, amended and diffused through larger cycles of mobilisation, within which "new forms of contention combine with old ones, the expressive encounters the instrumental, traditional social actors adopt tactics from new arrivals, and newly invented forms of collective action become […] permanent tools of a society's repertoire of contention" (Tarrow 1993, 284; on innovation, see Chapi in this Special Issue).

In the 21st century, with the spread of what Aulich (2020) calls prosthetic devices, such as smartphones, and the democratisation of the web, which has contributed to the proliferation of independent platforms and social networks[3], the "people" has gained the opportunity to autonomously narrate itself and to spread its own repertoire of performance. As Castells (2014) underlines, the global spread of wireless communication, particularly in the first decade of this century, has allowed socio-political mobilisations to take over web communication platforms and consolidate their autonomy from governments and traditional media. Protesters and activists – empowered by devices that provide them with perpetual connectivity – can use their communication skills to multiply the impact of social protests, in some cases by inspiring protests, fuelling resistance, promoting presidential candidates, contributing to build movements which can even overthrow governments and political regimes. Protesters' have bypassed in this way professional media in the revolt's discursive production and have consequently become the protagonist of the replacement of the dominant narratives and at the same time of the creation and the definition of a global public sphere. The circulation of images and videos of the protests, the visual reproduction of the iconic moments of the mobilisations, and the diffusion of the artistic performances accompanying the demonstrations, help foster a counter-audience, expanding the political space beyond its physical dimension (Olesen 2013). If events and images are two dif-

[3] On the possibility and the implication of protesters' self-narration, see Doerr, Mattoni and Teune (2013).

ferent features of protests' visual performance, the digital dissemination of images contributes to the creation of shared visual knowledge between those physically embodying the protests and producing their visuality on the ground, and those spreading and sharing it on digital and analogical media, modifying it, and actively getting involved in the creation of symbols that are globally identifiable (Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013).

In North Africa, the visual potential of the protests and their analytical relevance became particularly evident during the Arab uprisings of 2010-2011. In his work, Bayat (2013) talks about "social non-movements" as the form of aggregation and resistance, as well as the creative adaptation among ordinary people in the public space dominated by neo-patriarchal states, to characterise who did participate in and animated the protests. Social non-movements enacted silent invasions of the ordinary through passive and informal networks, or artistic expressions and urban sub-cultures. These *invasions* poured into the public sphere at the outbreak of the protests, which, rooted in the need to be seen and recognised, transformed ordinary action – collective prayers, gendered interactions, dispositions of anti-regime symbols – into a vivid tool of "counter-visuality" (Mirzoeff 2020). The demands for participation and political, economic and social recognition was also expressed in such acts of visual and discursive subversion. Such "counter-visuality" was produced in the protests and their mediated narratives circulated in analogical and digital formats within transnational public spheres, as well as in real place such as local cafes, reading rooms, and the protests themselves (Bayat 2017).

The production of such visual material resulted into an outburst in the self-production of images. While not replacing mainstream media (Aday et al. 2013), this allowed protesters in the squares to act as the protagonists by both physically participating in protests and producing embodied images of them. It follows that *citizen journalism* played a fundamental role in documenting, without ideological pre-orientations, the daily life of the mobilisations, political actions, icons, and, last but not least, state repression (Khosrokhavar 2016). Even before people took to the streets for the first time, images had become a crucial resource in consolidating the emotions of potential protesters. This played an important role in initiating the mobilisation itself. The immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010 and the rhetoric about his tragic reaction against the disrespect and the violence of the local police became a paradigm of martyrdom in the protesting squares at transnational level.[4] The images of his sacrifice were spread via social media and were elaborated by artistic productions, thus becoming symbols and icons of global injustice (Lim 2013; Bayat 2017; Olesen 2013). Tahrir square in Cairo too had become a spatial archetype of contemporary revolts: the crowd singing and demanding the regime's fall became a model that has inspired a series of occupy movements across Europe and North America (see Rivetti and Cavatorta in this Special Issue). The slogan *"ash-sha'ab yurīd"* (the people want), adaptable e adapted to national circumstances,[5] proposes the idea of unity among the people on the basis of common demands and experiences as opposed to traditional forms of unity based on nationality and language. Despite the protests' different composition and development at national level, in fact, their performance in 2010-2011 reproduced the idea of protesters' belonging to a common destiny of liberation, covering territorial issues and favouring emulation between behaviours, in the context of general common complaints of corruption, *hogra* and monopolization of political power (Camau 2012). Everyday practices themselves visualise the performance of the proposed social change, narrating/representing the very imaginary of the future, trying to embodying the questioning of traditional forms of social and cul-

[4] According to Khosrokhavar (2016, 209), this created a Werther effect, "a series of imitations in the Arab countries and even in Europe".

[5] In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (but also Syria) "*ash-sha'ab yurīd 'isqāṭ al-niẓām"* (the people want the regime's fall); in Marocco and in Jordan "*ash-sha'ab yurīd 'iṣlāḥ al-niẓām*" (the people want the regime's reformation); in the case of Palestine, "*ash-sha'ab yurīd 'inhā' al-'inqisām*" (the people want the end of the division) between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Khosrokhavar 2016).

tural exclusion, linked, according to circumstances, to gender, ethnicity and class (Butler 2015; Bayat 2017; Khosrokhavar 2016).

One of the consequences – and at the same time an evidence – of the relevance of the physical public sphere as a place of visual performance, is the enhancement of visual art during the uprisings. In general, the 2010-2011 protests expanded the space for artistic expression, especially those narrating the revolution itself (Comito and Moresi 2020). Regardless of its forms – writings, drawings, stencils, graffiti – art is often performed in public spaces, embodying the re-appropriation of the public sphere and the centrality of it. The arts have amplified the protest's message and slogans, while also contributing to their visual representation. As Korody (2011) points out, streets and squares have always been emblematic of how people act and occupy the public space. It follows that the presence of the visual arts in symbolic places and the suburbs of Arab cities represents the entry of ordinary subjectivities into the public sphere. It also deconstructs the traditional separation of the public and private spheres, thus embodying an aesthetic and performative freedom which goes beyond national control, deletion and censorship (Lacquaniti 2020).

The link between protesting, political actions and the production of a visual culture – "the shared practices of a group, community or society through which meanings are made out of the visual, aural and textual world of representations and the way such practices are engaged in symbolic and communicative activities" (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 3) – is crucial to understand the people's desired identities and aspirations. Indeed, protests are embodied by protesters who, gathering in a public space, exercise "a plural and performative right to appear" (Butler 2015,11) through specific forms of agency, social practices of resistance and definition of identities. Even during protests, visual performance reveals traces of new discursive orders and narrative forms of inclusion and exclusion. It inspires possible future imaginaries, which are produced and disseminated by the demonstrators themselves, and which are useful to understand some of the hidden meanings of the demonstrations. Visual performance also allows to notice and see attempts at cognitive subversion, that is a "conversion of worldviews" which, according to Bourdieu (2001, 188) preludes political subversion.

3. Protests and the people in contemporary Algeria

In 2010-2011, protests involved Algeria although they never turned into widespread threats to the regime's stability. In early January 2011, protesters took to the streets to demonstrate against the lack of accountability of the political class, the *hogra,* the lack of consideration for citizens as exposed by corruption, economic exclusion, authoritarianism, and lack of freedom.[6] These demands had been already raised during countless popular uprisings which have marked the socio-political history of independent Algeria (Dris Aït Hamadouche and Dris 2012), among which are the worker strikes of 1977, the so-called "Amazigh Spring" of 1980, the protests of 1988 against governmental economic policies (Aït-Aoudia 2015), strikes and trade union actions by various professional categories in the 2000s (Beddoubia 2015), the so-called "Black Spring" of 2001 in Kabylia[7] and the Berber protests in the south of the country, in particular in the Mzab

[6] From this point of views Algerian revolts of 2011 had been more economically demands' driven then those occurring in the neighbouring countries (see Dris Aït Hamadouche and Dris 2012). For a specific analysis of the uprising (2010-11) see Khader (2012); Laachir (2014); Messari (2012), al-Aswani (2011). For the "Arab Spring" in Algeria, see Gadrat (2011) and Volpi (2013).

[7] The term Black Spring (*Tafsut Taberkant* in Tamazigh) refers to a series of protests that involved the Berber regions, following the killing of Massinissa Guermahh, a Tamazigh high school student, by the Algerian police. The killing caused violent clashes between civilians and the police, along with about 130 official victims. The protests culminated in the March of Al-

(Dufresne Aubertin 2017), the longstanding mobilisation of feminist movements, in particular against the 1984 family law and its subsequent amendments (Moghadam 2001; Salhi 2010; Djelloul 2020).[8] As Lazreg (1998, 3) underlines, Algerians have always felt entitled to political change and protest in the name of the very founding principles of the Algerian state, and because they felt betrayed by a government that "claimed to be universalistic in its aims, yet was privatistic in its practice". Beyond their specificities – leaving aside the *waqt al-'irhāb*, the Dark Decade or the civil war of the 1990s[9] – most of these popular uprisings promoted a host of demands including the recognition of cultural rights, equality, dignity and work, the right to housing, universal access to social rights, and educational reform. They denounced the immobility of an authoritarian state that replicated itself – see the Barakat movement against the fourth term candidacy of President Bouteflika in 2014 (Ben Hounet 2019) – and which is the root cause of emigration toward Europe, or *harraga* (Souiah 2021). As Belakhdar (2019) points out, organised social movements were also complemented by numerous practices of daily resistance, silent invasion of the ordinary by ordinary people (Bayat 2013), and by discursive and subversive practices through the arts, electoral boycotts (Dris Aït Hamadouche 2009) and mobilisations in football stadiums (Amara 2012).

According to Belakhdar (2019), protests and subversive discursive practices can also be understood as forms of renegotiation of state-society relations through unconventional channels: the protests, indeed, were often expressed outside existing frames and through violent clashes, blocks or strikes (Selmane 2020). The government has regularly managed the revolts by implementing mixed policies of repression and distribution of resources, neglecting citizens' political demands, while increasing public spending and services, activating forms of patronage, co-opting different social forms within the protests and dividing the opposing front (Volpi 2000; Martinez 2012). Since independence, it has also managed to control revolts and discontent through a weaponization of "the people's unity", as a "quick fix" for multiple political, economic, and social fractures. The definition of the "Algerian people" in opposition to the colonial order – whose destructive effects could only generate consensus for such counter-narrative (Lazali 2018) – resulted into a performative discourse with "the aim to produce the symbolic unification of a society in its struggle for emancipation" (Serres 2012, 1).[10] After independence, the unitary representation of "the people" as the only legitimate "nation" (Laclau 2008) was the tool deployed to deal with the persistence of fractures and differences. The state acted in the name of the people, thus structuring a discourse and a set of institutional and political practices to harvest legitimacy. According to Laclau (2008), "the people" is an *empty universal*, which is constantly re-signified in the struggle for hegemony. The fiction of its uniqueness and unity is built by cancelling and hegemonizing differences (Ibid., 66). The concession of cultural rights, such as the introduction of the Tamazigh Berber language as the national – but not yet official till 2016 – language of the Republic after the "Black Spring" of 2001, is a good example of the government's attempt to appropriate and "grant" rights to avoid a serious, and intersectional, engagement with the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity, not to jeopardise the definition of national unity it supports.

In Algeria, this unitary representation of the people was articulated using Arabism, Islam and nationalism as its discursive foundational elements. These have become crucial for the people's self-identification, whereby variations and differences are not acceptable, and are configured as betrayals or seditions, which are to be punished in an exemplary way to safeguard the unity of the people which guarantees the post-colonial

giers, against the economic, political and cultural abandonment of Kabylia and for the introduction of a democratic system (Maddy-Weitzman 2011).

[8] On uprisings in Algeria history, see Evans and Phillips (2007); McDougall (2017).

[9] For a deep analysis of the Algerian Dark Decade, see Martinez (1998).

[10] Translated by the author.

state (Serres 2012). As soon as the country achieved independence, thus, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) aimed at standardising national identity on the basis of an unquestionable Arab Islamic foundation. It also promoted a Manichean view of national history, divided between heroes and villains (Evans and Phillips 2007). In this narrative, the people and the FLN were a single body. The nation was identified with a single revolutionary, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial party which was religiously oriented toward reformist Islam, consistently with the slogan of Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis, Salafist leader of the *Jamʿiyyat al-ʿUlamāʾ*: "Islam is my religion, Algeria is my nation and Arabic is my language" (Maddy-Weitzman 2012; Evans and Phillips 2007; Serres 2012). Accordingly, the state acted in order to eliminate from the national project all the dissonant elements – cultural, social, economic, linguistic, political – and, at the same time, all the real and potential enemies of its unitarian project: in this frame, popular political mobilisations were allowed only if functional to the perpetuation of the people's unity and to the strengthening of the discourses and rhetoric that sustained that unity.

The rhetoric of the state as guarantor of unity found a new articulation during the Dark Decade of the 1990s. Because of the civil war, Algerian society needed to re-establish that idea of the people's unity, to stand the violence and divisions of the time, aligning with the urgent need for security and the return to "normalcy". In such a context, post-conflict political normalisation was predicated not only upon traditional symbols – Arabism, Islam, nationalism – but also on the idea that only the state could guarantee peace and order. Bouteflika's presidency was marked by this need for societal safety, which resulted into the strengthening of a securitarian state. He was elected in 1999 with the mission of ending violence, promoting national reconciliation, and re-defining the role of Islam and its institutions in the public sphere post-civil war, reaching a "historical compromise" with Islamism. The theme of national harmony was pivotal for the legitimacy of the state, and Bouteflika associated his image with the new-found peace and the need to re-unite the "Algerian family", devastated by what was seen as a national tragedy (Dirèche 2021). To achieve this, the marginalisation of dissonant cultural and social elements, and the exclusion of any forms of dissidence from public political discourse was necessary, using different coercive mechanisms.

Bouteflika's biography served this project. He was a *mujāhid*, an fighter for national independence, who also served in institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Houari Boumedienne's presidency, the "golden age" of Algeria's post-independence national history. As Stora (2020) points out, first and foremost he was a man of the Algerian nation who branded himself as the last descendant of an honourable genealogy of fighters for independence. In parallel, he strengthened state control over religious authorities and religion itself, whose public visibility was enhanced (Driessen 2012; Andezian 2002) and which became thus part of the plan to reinforce the state post-civil war.

In this framework, dissent and protests were and still are seen by state authorities as a sedition and a betrayal toward the people's unity, security and wellbeing. Obedience to the state is invoked in the name of the best interest of the people and their safety. Identity also plays a role in this, as all identities considered to be non-compliant with the homogeneity of the people's unity, represent a possible return to the Dark Decade (Belakhdar 2019). From this point of view, the memory of the civil war is used to fuel a "disaster imagery" which is politically advantageous for the government and the state (McDougall 2017).[11]

The protests of 2020-2011 and later 2019 questioned this symbolic and political framework. However, the growing bitterness of protesting activities at national level and the dramatic parallel evolution of the situa-

[11] This exclusionary rhetoric accompanied the cosmetic reforms implemented by the state in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The government claimed that those reforms addressed the people's demands but in reality, they left the distribution of power intact. In March 2016, the law on constitutional revision was passed, officially recognising Tamazight, the Berber standard language, as one of the official languages of the state.

tions in Libya and Syria, reinforced the regime's assumption to be the only one capable of guaranteeing peace and security (Volpi 2013).

Figure 1 – Protesters in the streets of Algiers (2019) - *Source:* *Abdelmoumen Taoutaou | Dreamstime.com*

4. The *Hirak* and the repertory of Algerian protests

As pointed out, the representation of the people's unity had the ambition to "fix" existing tensions, which however have surfaced at various stages in Algerian history. Such tensions have created a material and symbolic repertoire of protests in Algeria, in spite of regime's patronage, coercion, co-optation. This repertoire constitutes an important reference for the *Hirak*, the movement that emerged in mid-February 2019, at first in medium-sized and small cities, then in the whole country, reaching the capital Algiers on 22 February, although public gatherings have been prohibited in the city since 2001 (Belakhdar 2019) (Fig. 1).

Protests began as a reaction to the announcement that President Bouteflika would run for a fifth term. The announcement acted as "a moral shock".[12] His candidacy for a fourth term in 2014 – which came after the president had a heart stroke the year before which left him seriously ill – had already caused some protests in 2014, by the Barakat movement. The experience of the fourth term, then, had greatly humiliated the Algerians, who had witnessed the president's embarrassing meetings with foreigners, such as the one with the French Prime Minister Valls in 2016.[13] The failure of Bouteflika's entourage to find a replacement became apparent, like the persistence of a power elite that continued to maintain the *status quo* and its privileges without considering the needs of the people (Selmane 2020). The people's confidence in the regime's integrity and its ability to provide for the population's needs had already been severely tested by the *panama papers* disclosure of numerous corruption deals, along with some significant arrests of senior officials for international cocaine trafficking (Belakhdar 2019). Moreover, from a socio-economic point of view, the country was experiencing a general crisis given the increase in the price of consumer goods, the progressive devaluation of the national currency and the consequent decrease of its purchasing power, the structural absence of prospects for a large part of the population, widespread unemployment, high levels of emigration among the young, the decreasing oil revenues, and the national healthcare crisis, exacerbated by a cholera epidemic and later covid-19 (Belakhdar 2019; Selmane 2020). These elements highlight a crisis in the capacity of the state to face effectively social demands. Such inability, following Laclau (2008), has opened up the possibility for the construction of new symbolic ties, enabling a re-definition of the hegemonic representation of the people and its unity.

[12] The expression "moral shock" defines a social experience in which an event provokes a reaction of indignation, which is strong and physical, pushing individuals to engage in collective actions (Belakhdar 2019).

[13] https://www.lematindz.net/news/20447-non-monsieur-sellal-ce-sont-ces-images-qui-posent-probleme.html

The protest focused initially on a clear political issue as protesters in the streets shouted “no to the fifth term”[14] – one of the few slogans directly addressing Bouteflika – “*système dégage*” (elites go away), “*non au cinquième mandate*”, “*libérez l’Algérie*”, leading to the withdrawal of the longest serving president, something that had never happened in Algerian history.[15] The rejection of the political system and, above all, the army’s involvement in civil government –“*dawla madanīa māshī ’askarīa*” (civil and not military state) – continued even after the fall of Bouteflika, targeting the transitional government, represented by the the “3Bs” – Noureddine Bedoui (Prime Minister), Abdelkader Bensalah (the interim president), and Tayeb Belaiz (Head of the Constitutional Council) – and General Ahmed Gaïd Salah (Volpi 2020) (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Dégage les 3Bs (2019) - Source: *Abdelmoumen Taoutaou | Dreamstime.com*

Since its inception, the *Hirak* has displayed peculiar characteristics in terms of composition, objectives, size, and strategies of mobilisation. Like the 1988 and 2010-2011 uprisings, *Hirak* protests were called by statements issued anonymously (Belakhdar 2019), mirroring its a-cephalous nature which makes it difficult to co-opt by the regime. *Hirak*’s lack of clear structure and leadership, however, also complicated the possibility of a direct dialogue between the protesters on the one hand, and the government or the opposition parties on the other hand. Electoral participation was also difficult for the movement, which could neither express a candidate nor a preference for one of the candidates in elections.[16]

Collectives and associations – feminists (Djelloul 2020), religious, environmental – movements of unemployed people, autonomous unions, professional bodies, as well as individual citizens, participated in the movement, despite their different ideological affiliations, with the common goal of re-establishing people’s dignity (Dirèche 2021; Ghermoul 2020). It is important to foreground that the protests invited to re-signify the concept of unity. The *Hirak* was a large movement, with the demonstrations taking place throughout Algeria, and as such, it subverted the possibility of re-deploying the representation of the previous protests, which had been defined by the ruling authorities as sectarian and regional, like in the case of the Berber Spring of 1980 and the Black Spring of 2001. The very choice to protest on Friday after the prayer was a

[14] From this point of view, Volpi (2019) suggests that the *Hirak* is more similar to the *colour revolutions* in Eastern Europe and Central Asia during the 2000s, despite the latter involving post-electoral mobilisations usually framed by opposition political parties.

[15] To this day, none of the Algerian presidents has reached the end of the mandate due to military coups or political manoeuvres. While in line with this history, Bouteflika’s withdrawal was caused by popular will.

[16] In the presidential elections of December 2019, Abdelmajid Tebboune was elected in the first round with 58.15% of preferences. Although running as an independent, Tebboune has a history rooted in the FNL, and hold a series of ministerial posts in independent Algeria. He won the 2019 election in the context of a very low turnout because of the popular boycott of the vote.

sign of union of religious and secular sentiments, marking a difference with the protests of 2010-2011, which were scheduled on Saturday to distance themselves from any religious references (Volpi 2020).

Contrary to previous mobilisations and especially those of 1988 and 2010-2011 which were sociologically marked by the presence of young male protesters (Belakhdar 2019), the *Hirak* was characterised by diversity in terms of generation and gender. While the demography of the country – with about the 54% of the populations under the age of 30 (Fabbiano 2019; Dirèche 2021) – was evident in protests, different generations of activists took part (Zoubir 2019). An example is Djamila Bouhired, a hero of the battle of Algiers and a critic of the regime, who participated in demonstrations. As Ouaissa (2021) points out, unlike 1980s protest movement which mostly consisted of culturally and economically marginalised groups, the *Hirak*'s base included middle-class people whose economic position and social prospects for progress had become increasingly unstable.

This wide participation was also guaranteed by the pacific imprint of the demonstrations, where forms of violent confrontation with the security forces were avoided, marking a distinction with the past and a steady will not to alienate the larger population (Selmane, 2020). The *Hirak* was generally peaceful[17] and inspired by the slogan "*silmiyā*" (peace) and "*Khawa, Khawa*" (Brothers, brothers). The latter addressed the different components of the movement, calling for internal unity, but also called on the security forces to fraternise with the protesters, avoiding divisions and sedition (Mellah 2020). The idea of brotherhood also was strengthened by the implementation of what Butler (2015) called horizontal relationships and Belakhdar (2019) defined as "practices of intense solidarity", that is exchange of water and food, mutual care and peer-to-peer scouting for safety during demonstrations. This signalled a change from the routine of the previous protests, determining a re-appropriation of the public space through citizenship practices (Derradji and Gherbi 2019; Fabbiano 2019). Being decentralised, fluid, spontaneous, the *Hirak* built a space where every citizen could feel personally responsible for the movement, thus influencing the protests' performance and rituals (Ouaissa 2021), and enhancing the significance of visual self-narration to understand the meaning assigned to those practices by the protesters.

5. Visualizing the *Hirak:* The symbolic representation of the movement

The *Hirak*'s visual performance reveals the re-articulation of the Algerian protests' symbolic repertoire. In particular, the national past is re-articulated and saved from the regime's symbolic violence. In this way, protesters could offer an alternative to the hegemonic representation of the people's unity. Photography, documentary, in particular, were used to offer new ways for "telling" the people and the movement (Gillet 2018). While raï and pop-raï music have always been the most common media to communicate the protesters' demands (McMurray and Swedenburg 1991; Aadani 2006; Miliani 2002), the development of visual arts in neighbourhood countries has established an awareness of the relevance of the visual in communicating protests. The enhancement of visuality is also part of a larger frame, that is the relationship between social movements and organised football fandom.[18] In Algeria, stadiums have always been places for politis, [19] as football – the colonial sport *par excellence* – is for the Algerian regime an instrument of international visibility and a means of internal political legitimacy. Despite the state's control over football, stadiums have continued to be a space of political contention in the post-colonial era, with a keenness to visualise the protest-

[17] This is one of the reasons why the *Hirak* has been labelled as the "Revolution of Smiles" (Acherchour 2019).

[18] On the involvement of football supporters and teams in contemporary social movements in Arab countries, see Raab (2014) and Tuastad (2014). Specifically on the Arab Springs, see Khosrokhavar (2016).

[19] On the role of football in independent Algeria, see Amara and Henry (2004), Amara (2012) and Fates (2009).

ers' demands.[20] Following the outbreak of the first mobilisations in 2019, those with experience of clashing with the police in stadiums were at the helm of the protests, also transposing stadium protest performance in the streets. For example, the song *La casa del Mouradia*, the anthem of the revolt, is the chant of the Ouled El-Bahdja supporters of the USMA in Algiers. The title evokes the Presidential Palace, located in El-Mouradia neighbourhood, and, at the same time, the Spanish television series *La casa de papel*, significantly borrowing a series of raï topics, highlighting the suffering of young Algerians.

The *Hirak* can be considered a "theatre of collective and political life by citizens revisiting their history and taking over their independence" (Derradji and Gherbi 2019, 1).[21] It is not a case that one of the first acts of protesters was the *détournement* of Bouteflika's portraits and posters on public buildings, images that were later circulated in the web. These acts have a particular meaning, considering that in the recent years the president, ill and unable to attend public events, was often "replaced" by his own portrait (Stora 2020).[22] This appropriation also brings about a narrative of rejection of state control over public and private life (Lazali 2018).

The *Hirak* refused post-colonial governmental narratives, to the extent that Ben Hounet (2019) defined it as a *mûrissement*, in Fanonian terms, of colonialism, the coloniser and the colonised subject. By challenging the post-colonial government, its corruption and ineptitude, the *Hirak* symbolically became the heir and guardian of the spirit of national liberation, whose principles had been betrayed by the state (Belakhdar 2019). As Dirèche (2021, 10) wrote, through the *Hirak* and "in an new way after independence, Algerians unanimously ask their political leaders a recurring question: what have you done with our independence?".[23] The references to key figures of the war of liberation – such as Larbi Ben 'Mhidi or Ali la Pointe – and the physical presence of elderly fighters at the demonstrations, such as Djamila Bouhired, have contributed to increasing the symbolic capital of the movement. Even the slogans directly recalled the founding event of the Algerian state. Slogans such as "*ash-sha'ab yurīd al-istiqlāl*" (the people want independence) and "one and only hero, the people", which directly recall the 5 July 1962, renewed a promise of emancipation, dignity, justice and freedom. Such symbolic capital was made more powerful by the use of the flags,[24] the singing of the national anthem and other partisan songs, and the exhibition of photos of the martyrs of independence (Fabbiano 2019). National history was articulated in critical terms, however. For example, the ineptitude of the contemporary political class was denounced through a critique of the dominant role of the military in the Algerian state since independence. Criticism of the so-called "3Bs" (Bensalah, Bedoui and Belaïz) was a historical reference to Krim Belkacem, Abdelhafid Boussouf and Lakhdar Bentobal, the "triumvirate" of the independence and also a symbol of the dominance of the military wing of the FLN on the political leadership during the war (Vince 2020; Hashemaoui 2020). National pride was also gendered by the display of the portraits of feminists and revolutionary women, such as Baya Touhami Fadhma N'Soumer, Hassiba Ben Bouali, and Amina Merabet, celebrating a genealogy of female resistance and remembering a past of broken promises for gender liberation (Fabbiano 2019). The re-discovery of such common and collective legacy led to the recovery of social bonds, which had deteriorated due to the civil war and the government's ongoing weapon-

[20] During the Amazigh Springs, for example, protesters used some Kabyli supporters' choirs such as – "*nous ne sommes pas des Arabes, Tamazight dil likoul*" (we are not Arabs, Tamazight in the school curricula). During the Algerian Arab Spring, protests were raised in stadiums or around national football events (see Amara 2012).

[21] Translated by the author.

[22] During the commemorations of 5 July 2018 a presidential portrait was paraded, while during the 9 February 2019 FNL meeting, a painting was added to the president's effigy (Belakhdar 2019).

[23] Translated by the author.

[24] On the use and significance of the national flag, see Mebtoul (2019).

ization of conflicts and divisions. In slogans, banners ad protest posters, Algerians called each other brothers or revolutionaries, rejecting divisive authoritarian policies and recreating shared and heterogeneous memories. The memory of the Dark Decade was also re-signified collectively. The process of national reconciliation was criticised. After the civil war, the urgency of national reconciliation was taken as an excuse by the state to act "as if nothing has happened" (Dirèche 2021, 11)[25] to claim innocence, eschewing all responsibilities. This memory re-emerged in the protests, through the display of the pictures of those who were taken by the police and disappeared. Placards with pictures were carried by their families, who joined the demonstrations demanding truth about their relatives (Mellah 2020).

Other memories too resurfaced and were re-appropriated by the protesters, in an effort to reject the differences implicit in the idea of "national unity" as articulated by the official history of independent Algeria. Those who fell victims of violence in 1988, the Kabylians murdered in 1980 and 2001, and the protesters who died in the hands of the security forces in 2010-2011, were remembered and celebrated. The slogans "*Algérie libre et démocratique*", which recalls the struggles for democracy of 1990, "*Pouvoir assassin*" and "*Ulaç smah Ulaç*" (there is no forgiveness) – which referred to the mobilisations of the Black Spring in Kabylia (2001) – featured in all demonstrations as part of an Algerian protests' repertoire. They tried to dampen community tensions and enhance the autonomous work of re-imagining the nation bottom-up, refusing institutional mediations (Fabbiano 2019).

6. The visual representation of diversity

As mentioned earlier, the Amazigh linguistic and cultural identity has often been denied and marginalised by the nationalist project, ostracised as an instrument of separatism and sedition (Aït Kaki 2003; Dirèche 2020). Contrary to the so-called "Berber myth"[26] – which Tlemçani (1986) defines as a feeling of suspicion because of the alleged Berbers' complicity with the colonial power – the Amazigh actively participated in the liberation of the country. After independence, however, the construction of modern Algeria led to the progressive marginalisation of Berber identity, reduced to a folkloristic aspect of the pre-colonial culture which was unnecessary, even harmful, to a modern nation-state (Goodman 1998). *Amazighity* was only allusively mentioned in the first national and constitutional document, which, significantly, dated the birth of the nation during the Arab penetration in the 8th century (Maddy-Weitzman 2012). This marginalisation resulted in a series of revolts between 1963 and 1965 and later in the 1970s, which culminated in the "Amazigh Spring" in the 1980s (Goodman 2002).

After the 1988 uprising, the collapse of the single party regime and the beginning of Dark Decade, Berber identity was framed as an alternative to the FLN/Islamist dichotomy. Berbers organised in cultural associations and political parties with the ambition to represent the demands of the whole of Algeria beyond linguistic or ethnic divides (Maddy-Weitzman 2012). In the mid-1990s, to avoid the opening of another front of confrontation alongside the Islamist one, President Liamine Zeroual established the High Commissioner for Amazighity. This move resulted in the introduction of the newly codified Tamazight language in some regional schools and in the media. Tamazigh also was included in the preamble of the 1996 Constitution – "Islam, Arabism and Amazighity" – as one of the pillars of national identity. These "cosmetic" reforms however did not prevent the outbreak of the Black Spring in 2001, and the ensuing boycott of the 2002 political

[25] Translated by the author.

[26] In Algeria, this discourse was accompanied by the development of a series of research centres, archives and newspapers for the scientific study of the Berber language and culture in order to reify the differences between Arabs and Berbers and politically justify the "francization" of Berberophones (Maddy-Weitzman 2012; Jay 2015).

elections. During the protests of 2010-2011, unlike Algeria's neighbouring countries (Jay 2015), the Amazigh question did not enjoy political visibility, mirroring the isolation of Berber-majority regions and the marginalisation of their demands. After 2012, when a heavy snowfall left many Berber villages inaccessible for weeks, the Amazigh movement organised a series of protests – more or less violent – which have continued during the following years, denouncing the negative effect of the governmental economic policies on peripheral or rural areas. During the 2010s, as protests radicalised, cultural rights have become an instrument for the government to appease the protest movement through symbolic concessions, such as the constitutionalisation of Tamazight as an official language in 2016 and the establishment of Yennayer, the Berber New Year, as an official paid holiday in 2017 (Dirèche 2020).

In the same years, a Berber transnational movement spread, contributing to format cultural symbols of "Amazighity", its language and its flag.[27] This latter was designed in 1970 by Mohand Aarav Bessaud and combined three colours, one for each element of the homeland – blue for the sea, green for the mountains and arable land, yellow for the desert – and the letter "*yaz*" in red, a symbol of resistance, to represent the martyrs of the Amazigh cause (Jay 2015; Maddy-Weitzman 2012). While the flag's first public appearance dates back to demonstrations in the 1980s, its diffusion began when it was adopted as the official flag during the first Amazigh World Congress (CMA) in Tafira, Canary Islands, in 1997. During the 2000s, it was used in the Moroccan Rif protests and in Libya and Tunisia during the 2011 uprisings as a symbol of cultural resistance against authoritarian politics.

In Algeria, the flag was not popular among non-Berberophones, and it was not a common sight at the beginning of the *Hirak*. Its display has gradually become more common as a symbol of resistance but also as part of the anti-government narrative that was developing. In fact, protesters have increasingly used it to signal opposition against nationalist homogeneisation and appreciation for the heterogeneity of the country's identities. In 2019, the display of the Berber flag alongside the national one nationalised an Amazigh symbol which, beyond culturalism, acquired the meaning of martyrdom and resistance (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 – Algerian National Flag, Palestinian Flag, Amazigh Flag - ***Source:*** *Abdelmoumen Taoutaou | Dreamstime.com*

This meaning was amplified by the regime's reaction to the multiplication of Amazigh flags in the public space. The re-

[27] The Amazigh flag is different from that of the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia (MAK), whose demand is the independence for Kabylia (Tilmatine 2019).

gime accused protesters of carrying a symbol of separatists, colonisers' friends, and foreign intruders (Tilmaltine 2019). General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, the strong man of the regime, gave a speech on 19 June 2019 in front of the third Military Region in Béchar, saying:

> Attention should be paid to a sensitive issue, (…) attempts to infiltrate popular marches, where flags other than the national one are waved by tiny minorities. Algeria has only one flag, for which millions of martyrs have sacrificed themselves (….) It is the only flag that represents Algerian sovereignty and independence as well as its territorial integrity and its popular unity. It is unacceptable to manipulate Algerian people's feeling and emotions (...) instructions and orders were thus issued to security forces to firmly apply the laws (…) against those who hurt Algerian feelings on this sensitive issue.[28]

Although Gaïd Salah did not directly name the Amazigh flag, the reference is clear. After the speech, those carrying the Berber flag were arrested – while those carrying Palestinian or Sudanese flags, both symbols of resistance, were not. According to some observers,[29] defining the Berber flag as a foreign reference was a provocation and an attempt at dividing the protesters (Dirèche 2020). Moreover, such propaganda also served to silence some of the demands of the protesters and to prevent Kabyle protesters from reaching Algiers, both symbolically and practically – that is, making them invisible in the protests but also making them feel unwelcome. Immediately after the speech, about 42 activists were arrested for their writings, their statements or for carrying the Amazigh flag.[30] Despite the constitutional recognition of Amazigh identity and language, the display of the Amazigh flag during the protests was considered illegal, with the excuse that no official legal text recognises it, defines its characteristics, or regulates its use. At the Friday 21 June protest, Amazigh flags were even more visible. A banner read "*Arabes, Amazighs, khawa khawa*" (Arabs, Amazigh, brothers brothers) (Fig. 4, Fig. 5).

The speech did not only popularise the flag as a symbol of opposition and resistance to abuse, but also became an opportunity for the *Hirak* to show its dislike for the role of the military in the management of the state. The *communiqué* issued by the World Amazigh Congress later in June 2019, recalls this controversy by nicknaming the General Ahmed Gaïd Salah "soldier Gaïd Salah" and highlighting his unpreparedness to be a statesman:

> He declared that "Algeria has only one flag" and that he would not admit that some citizens, whom he described as a "very small minority", could "wave other flags during demonstrations". Without naming it, the general thus attacked the Amazigh emblem and the tens of thousands of people who wear it in popular demonstrations in Algeria. The soldier Gaïd Salah is unaware that there is no Algerian law prohibiting the

[28] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I71JWfPfi2g&feature=youtu.be (translated by the author).

[29] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/794165/politique/algerie-les-arrestations-de-porteurs-de-drapeaux-amazigh-sont-anticonstitutionnelles/

[30] Among them, 27 were sentenced in November 2019 to serve in prison for terms between six months and a year by the Court of Algiers. In addition, they had to pay a fine of 30,000 dinars (around 230 euros). They were accused of disobedience to the regime. The courts outside the capital had released prisoners accused of the same crime. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/04/en-algerie-nouvelles-incarcerations-de-manifestants-pour-avoir-brandi-le-drapeau-berbere_6017930_3212.html. These sentences were highly symbolic and also concerned well-known personalities within the political and civil society such as Samira Messouci, the youngest person elected to Tizi Ouzou's Assemblée populaire de wilaya (APW) within the Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (RCD) party.

Amazigh flag and that international and regional instruments ratified by his country recognise and protect the rights of the indigenous Amazigh people.[31]

Figure 4 – Protesters wearing Guy Fawkes masks, painted as Algerian and Amazigh Flag - ***Source:*** *Abdoudjel15/commons.wikimedia.org*

Soon the weekly mobilisations became a way to denounce arbitrary arrests and rights violation committed in relation to the so-called "Amazigh flag question". In this way, the wider arbitrariness of the regime and the general conditions of Algerian prisons were denounced too. In this context, the Berber flag became a way to occupy the public space by reiterating once again the rejection of the regime's symbols and control. Moreover, the flag became a transnational symbol, an original emblem of North African unity – the Tamazagha being a supra-national homeland –, a rejection of colonial geographical definitions and the false division between Berbers and Arabs. The "Amazigh flag question" became a way to build brotherhood, reversing the regime's speech itself. This issue unexpectedly became so relevant that some men of the regime intervened to limit the consequences of Salah's speech. The chief of staff of the Algerian National Parliament and member of the FLN, Abou El-Fadel Baadji, gave an interview to the Russian agency "Sputnik" in September 2019, later disseminated by Algerian newspapers.[32] While trying to position the government and the FLN above this political rift, El-Fadel Baadji involuntarily confirmed the symbolic nature of it when he conflated the Amazigh question with the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia (MAK), a separatist movement, revealing the regime's anxiety with territorial unity and national identity. The interview also revealed the need felt by the regime to remain the only guardian of the nation and, consequently, its desire to crush the autonomous and bottom-up process, led by the *Hirak*, to re-imagine "the people".

Figure 5 – Protesters wearing Amazigh Flag and Algerian National Flag - ***Source:*** *Abdelmoumen Taoutaou | Dreamstime.com*

[31] https://www.congres-mondial-amazigh.org/2019/06/20/alg%C3%A9rie-le-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ral-veut-interdire-le-drapeau-amazigh/ (translated by the author).

[32] https://fr.sputniknews.com/maghreb/201909101042068524-la-justice-algerienne-a-rendu-son-verdict-sur-les-drapeaux-berberes-exhibes-lors-de-manifestations/ (translated by the author).

7. Conclusions

In the last two years, because of the challenges posed by the *Hirak*, the Algerian political power has undergone a series of reconfigurations, starting with the resignation of President Bouteflika on 2 April 2019 (Malti 2020). As Chenoufi and Dirèche (2020) underlines, during the first year of life, the movement has re-engaged past traumas and memories, whether of colonial, nationalist, or Islamist origin, through visual material. The constant work of weaving together lineages of diversity – whether ethnic or ideological – to achieve a synthesis has jeopardised the regime's attempts to divide the protesters along traditional identity cleavages – as the General Gaïd Salah tried to do.

The "*Hirak* of the people" was able to define itself incorporating officially dormant stories, especially those of the women and of Amazigh culture, into an authentic aesthetic and visual dimension, through which a process of reconciliation could be started out (Belakhdar 2019). This work and such visual performances have continued for 56 weeks, deflating co-optation by the regime and boycotting elections, till demonstrations were suspended in March 2020 when the covid-19 epidemic began.

The impact of the epidemic on protests cannot be fully assessed yet. On the one hand, the regime weaponised public health to break the movement, carrying out crackdowns, arrests and summary trials against protesters. According to the *Comité National pour la libération des détenus* (CNLD), which was created in August 2019 by a group of activists and lawyers, around 120 people have been held for supporting the *Hirak* since the start of the lockdown and 30 of them were eventually arrested. The release of 5,000 detainees from prisons for public health reasons in April 2021 did not include any of the 250 detainees who had ties to the movement. Most of them were arrested for circulating images on the Internet, or, like many journalists, for having reported on events related to the *Hirak*. Significantly, some of these 250 detainees were charged for undermining national unity.[33] During the lockdown, activists have managed to keep the movement going by moving it from the squares to the digital space. Moreover, several sit-ins were organised throughout the country with limited participants and respecting social distancing, to denounce the arbitrary arrests and the conditions of detention of prisoners. The relocation of protests into social networks produced a new way of occupying the public space. Private spaces are displayed in virtual protests, with pictures of acts of protests performed from balconies, windows or gardens being disseminated on the Internet with the intention of emulating the *Hirak*'s "invasion" of the streets. After the summer of 2020, public demonstrations restarted. On 5 October 2020,[34] a demonstration commemorated the pro-democracy movements of 1988, while on the second anniversary of the *Hirak* a series of mobilisations were organised between 16 and 22 February 2021.

As Sakthivel (2020; see also Ghiabi in this Special Issue) pointed out, the pandemic did not represent the end of the movement, but an opportunity to organise political demands in a more systematic way. For instance, the *nida22* platform[35] has accompanied mobilisations in the square with online thematic tables to discuss a host of issues, from *Hirak*'s principles to action plans to translate demands into policies. While its success to enlarge the movement has been only partial, the platform highlighted the resilience of the *Hirak*, its work and demands. The transformation of demands into legislative, institutional and policy actions represents a challenge for the *Hirak* and its heterogeneous components. Moreover, some divisions have emerged during the second year of the *Hirak*, revealing cleavages largely seen as incompatible, as in the case of the debate around the role of *Rachad*, the movement founded in 2007 by, amongst others, former activists from

[33] https://orientxxi.info/magazine/l-algerie-sous-pandemie-silence-dans-les-rangs,3909

[34] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/5/hundreds-protest-in-algiers-despite-ban-on-gatherings

[35] https://www.facebook.com/Nida22.DZ

the FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut*), within the *Hirak*. The polarisation of *Hirak*'s internal factions beg the question of the movement's effectiveness in building shared memories, especially around particularly traumatic events, such as the Dark Decade of the 1990s. One of the main challenges for the *Hirak* is in fact a symbolic one, about its ability to protect the Algerian people's unity through differences, collective memory and people's reconciliation.

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