

**Political Islam in Algeria between the Dilemma of Splits and the Option of
Alliances: The Movement of Society for Peace as a Case Study**

*L'islam politique en Algérie entre le dilemme des scissions et le choix des alliances : le
Mouvement de la société pour la paix comme étude de cas*

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the repercussions of the Arab Spring on the Islamist movement in Algeria through a case study of the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP), focusing on the phenomena of internal splits and political alliances and their impact on the movement's political performance and relationship with political power. The study adopts a descriptive approach and uses interviews with activists from the MSP's provincial office in Tiaret. It also draws on the theory of segmentation to analyze the movement's internal transformations. The study finds that internal conflicts and political alliances contributed to reshaping the movement's organizational and political structure, while its alliances during the 2012 and 2017 legislative elections were associated with political calculations arising from the transformations following the Arab Spring. The study concludes that these transformations did not strengthen the movement's political presence but rather revealed the difficulty of reconciling its Islamic reference with the requirements of democratic political practice.

Keywords: Islamist movement; Movement of Society for Peace (MSP); Arab Spring; Internal splits; Political alliances.

Résumé:

Cette étude vise à analyser les répercussions du Printemps arabe sur le mouvement islamiste en Algérie à travers une étude de cas du Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix (MSP), en se focalisant sur les phénomènes de scissions internes et d'alliances politiques, ainsi que sur leur impact sur la performance politique du mouvement et ses relations avec le pouvoir politique. L'étude adopte une approche descriptive et s'appuie sur des entretiens menés avec des militants du bureau de wilaya du MSP à Tiaret. Elle mobilise également la théorie de la segmentation pour analyser les transformations internes du mouvement. L'étude révèle que les conflits internes et les alliances politiques ont contribué à remodeler la structure organisationnelle et politique du

mouvement, tandis que ses alliances lors des élections législatives de 2012 et 2017 étaient liées à des calculs politiques découlant des mutations post-Printemps arabe. L'étude conclut que ces transformations n'ont pas renforcé la présence politique du mouvement, mais ont plutôt mis en évidence la difficulté de concilier sa référence islamique avec les exigences de la pratique politique démocratique.

Mots-clés : Mouvement islamiste ; Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix (MSP) ; Printemps arabe ; Scissions internes ; Alliances politiques.

Introduction:

Over the past decades, Arab and Muslim societies have experienced profound political and social transformations that have brought the relationship between religion, politics, and the state back to the forefront, particularly with the rise of Islamist movements and their growing presence in the political sphere. This presence has been associated with a series of transformations experienced by Arab states, especially the transition from one-party systems to political pluralism, followed by the outbreak of the wave of protests known as the “Arab Spring” in 2011.

In this context, Abdel Ghani Emad argues that: “In sociological analysis, sectarian, tribal, regional, and other forms of consciousness and behavior can only operate within the social interest network that defines the boundaries of the struggle over politics and the economy in the country.” This statement highlights the importance of social and interest-based structures in explaining political behavior, particularly in societies that continue to be influenced by sectarian, tribal, doctrinal, and religious affiliations, where collective loyalties may overlap with loyalty to the state and political institutions.

This issue also applies, to varying degrees, to the study of Islamist movements, which have found themselves confronted with the complex task of reconciling their Islamic reference with the requirements of modern political practice. These movements have increasingly been required to engage with concepts such as democracy, elections, the alternation of power, majority and minority, while maintaining their religious reference and political project. In this context, Mohammad Abu Rumman refers to the “turning point of political Islam,” which is linked to the complex issue of the relationship between religion and the state in the Arab world.

Research Problem: Islamist movements face the challenge of reconciling their religious reference with the requirements of political practice within the modern state. This has affected their positions on democracy, political participation, alliances, and the alternation of power, and has, in some cases, led to internal conflicts and splits. The Algerian case clearly illustrates this situation, as the Islamist movement has experienced, since the introduction of political pluralism in 1989, a series of organizational and political transformations ranging from internal divisions to political participation and alliances with the authorities. The Movement of Society for Peace represents one of the most prominent examples of these transformations, particularly through its involvement in the presidential alliance during the rule of the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, followed by a reassessment of its political positions and alliances after the outbreak

of the Arab Spring in 2011. Despite the new opportunities created by regional transformations for Islamist parties, the political results achieved by the movement after 2011 raise questions about the impact of its previous alliances, internal conflicts, and splits on its political performance. Accordingly, the research problem is centered on the following question:

What were the repercussions of the Arab Spring on the Islamist movement in Algeria, through the case of the Movement of Society for Peace?

Sub-Questions: The main research problem gives rise to the following sub-questions:

- How did the policy of alliance with pro-government parties before the Arab Spring affect the political results of the Movement of Society for Peace after 2011?
- Why did the Movement of Society for Peace resort to an alliance strategy during the 2012 and 2017 legislative elections, and how did these alliances affect its political results?

Research Hypotheses: The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- **First hypothesis:** The adoption of political alliances with the authorities, together with internal conflicts, contributed to the occurrence of splits within the Movement of Society for Peace and to the restructuring of its organizational structure.
- **Second hypothesis:** The alliance strategy adopted by the Movement of Society for Peace prior to the May 2012 and May 2017 legislative elections was associated with situational political calculations and an attempt to achieve political gains amid the transformations resulting from the repercussions of the Arab Spring.

Objectives of the Study: This study aims to develop a scientific understanding of the phenomena of splits and alliances within the Movement of Society for Peace by:

- Identifying the determinants and underlying causes of splits and alliances within the Algerian Islamist movement.
- Analyzing the impact of splits and alliances on the organizational structure and activist base of the Movement of Society for Peace.
- Examining the nature of the movement's relationship with political power.
- Analyzing the impact of the political transformations that followed the Arab Spring on the movement's political choices and alliances.
- Explaining the relationship between the movement's organizational transformations and its political and electoral results.

Research Method: The study adopts a descriptive approach by describing the phenomena of splits and alliances within the Movement of Society for Peace and analyzing the movement's transition between conflict and division on the one hand, and alliance and political participation on the other, in light of the domestic and regional political transformations experienced by Algeria and the Arab region, particularly following the events of the Arab Spring.

Data Collection Technique: The study relies on interviews to identify the perceptions of activists from the provincial office of the Movement of Society for Peace in Tiaret and to

examine their assessments of the phenomena of political splits and alliances, as well as the extent to which these phenomena have affected the movement's performance and its relationship with political power.

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Table (01): Profile of the Interviewed Informants

Informant	Gender	Degree	Age	Year of Joining	Position
01	Male	Computer Science	49	1994	Provincial Secretary of Organization
02	Male	Master in Arabic Literature	50	2001	Member of National Consultative Council
03	Male	Magister in Arabic Literature	56	1993	Member of National Consultative Council
04	Male	Master in Philosophy	53	1994	Member of National Consultative Council
05	Male	Master in Services Marketing	49	2000	Member of National Consultative Council
06	Male	Ph.D. in Arabic Literature	50	1997	Head of Provincial Office
07	Male	Bachelor in Arabic Literature	51	1998	Head of Municipal Office
08	Male	Ph.D. in Physics	47	1997	Member of Provincial Office
09	Male	Magister in Law	49	1999	Head of Provincial Office
10	Male	State Engineer	41	2003	Deputy Head of Provincial Office
11	Male	Master in Electronics	42	1995	Head of Provincial Office
12	Male	Master in Sociology	49		

Source: Prepared by the authors based on field interviews.

Operational Definitions of Concepts: Given the field-based nature of the study, it provides operational definitions of the main concepts in accordance with the research topic and objectives.

- **Political Islam:** Operationally, this refers to the political activity adopted by Islamist parties in Algeria, based on political practice and the pursuit of establishing a democratic system of government grounded in an Islamic reference.

- **Party Split:** This refers to a state of organizational and political conflict and disagreement within the Movement of Society for Peace, resulting in divisions that, in some cases, lead leaders or groups to leave the movement and establish other competing political organizations or parties.
- **Party Alliance:** In this study, this refers to the political and electoral alliances formed by the Movement of Society for Peace with other political parties or forces, particularly alliances characterized by a situational nature and shaped by political considerations associated with the electoral and political context.
- **Political Participation:** This refers to the participation of the Movement of Society for Peace in Algerian political life since the transition to political pluralism in 1989, including its participation in elections and elected institutions, as well as its involvement in political alliances with the authorities, particularly the presidential alliance that brought it together with the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the National Rally for Democracy (RND), two parties that differ from it in terms of political reference and orientation.
- **Movement of Society for Peace:** This refers to an Algerian political party with an Islamic reference that emerged as a political actor during the period of political opening and pluralism and is considered one of the major Islamist parties in Algeria. It has participated in elections and parliamentary institutions and took part in several governments during the rule of the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, within the framework of the presidential alliance that brought it together with the National Liberation Front and the National Rally for Democracy.

Theoretical Approach: The study adopts the theory of segmentation (segmentary theory/social segmentation theory) as a theoretical framework for explaining conflicts and divisions within political groups and organizations.

The intellectual roots of this approach can be traced to anthropological studies concerned with social structures and primary affiliations. Some early contributions by Ibn Khaldun may be considered relevant, particularly his analysis of *asabiyyah* (group solidarity) and tribal organization and their role in structuring relations within societies. In modern anthropology, this approach has been associated with the work of several scholars, including Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard and Ernest Gellner, who employed concepts related to social segmentation in interpreting political and social conflicts in North Africa and the Maghreb.

This approach focuses on internal divisions, collective loyalties, the nature of relationships among the components of a group, and the ways in which such divisions may affect the cohesion and continuity of an organization. From this perspective, the study seeks to apply this theoretical approach to the reality of the Algerian Islamist movement through the case of the Movement of Society for Peace, analyzing the transformations that have affected its internal and political structure, particularly its movement between states of division and splitting on the one hand, and alliance and political participation on the other.

The study also seeks to explain the impact of these transformations on the movement's cohesion, political choices, and relationship with political power, particularly in the post-Arab Spring period, which compelled Islamist parties to reconsider their political strategies and alliances.

1. The Dilemma of Partisan Splits within the Movement of Society for Peace

Researcher Mohamed Jabroun notes: *"Many parties, especially liberals, have accused the Islamist movement of bad intentions toward democracy, tactical belief in it, and used a bundle of evidence and proofs to support this judgment."*¹ Perhaps the stance of the Islamist movement toward democracy and political participation is one of the primary factors leading to splits within the Islamist movement. Democracy contrasts with *Shura* (consultation) for Islamists; therefore, it may be accepted tactically as a first step to reach power. However, the true dilemma and crisis appear after reaching power, raising the question: How will we deal with democracy as Islamists?

This is what Algerian Islamist political parties experienced since their inception following the approval of political pluralism and openness in 1989, where various internal conflicts emerged, dividing the Islamist movement into conservatives and reformists. Later, the reformists themselves divided due to the national security crisis and the interruption of the electoral process. During the era of the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Islamist parties—including the MSP—witnessed what became known as corrective movements, especially amid declining political performance, the absence of community-serving political strategies, and alliances with political power. All these factors accelerated the fragmentation of its internal structure into multiple entities, giving rise to new wings and parties rejecting the movement's conciliatory approach toward power and calling for a return to the legacy and ideology of the founder, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah.

1.1. Partisan Splits: A Reading of Motives and Outcomes

A party derives its strength, effectiveness, and internal/organizational cohesion from the leader's ability to manage it and control its structures and militants according to the *shura-cratic* principle adopted by the MSP since its founding. In the absence of these factors, "splits" emerge. An Islamist party differs from other parties; as Olivier Roy states: *"The party operates for Islamists more as a sect than as a party to seize power."*² Thus, any departure from the constants of the party/sect means division and splitting as a dogmatic inevitability within the Islamist trend. Italian researcher Andrea Cerom defined it as: *"The exit of a faction from the party to*

¹ - Mohamed Jabroun, *Islamists in Transition: From Instrumental Democracy to Philosophical Democracy: The Case of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party*, in *Islamists and the Democratic Governance System* (2013), p. 47.

² - Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (1996), p. 71.

*which it belongs, joining another party, founding a new party, or resulting from a faction's decision to distance itself or separate from the party."*³

This explains why partisan splits occur due to the absence of the spirit of democracy and dialogue, and the prevalence of obedience, especially within Islamist parties. This was confirmed by Informant (02): *"A quasi-pathological phenomenon related to political and organizational justifications and an intellectual methodology that strips them of credibility and political hunger for the ruler, weakens the momentum of engagement and supporting public opinion, shrinks the margin of political influence and proposition, and weakens its internal power in finding a democratic alternative."* This indicates that the image of a split for an MSP member is not confined within the party, but extends to political impact in the form of position temptations practiced by political power during the era of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Thus, the movement was penetrated and drifted far from its founding values.

Political power during that period worked to weaken partisan work through all means of enticement and intimidation. This was confirmed by Informant (11): *"Partisan split is an extension of state intervention in the political process and internal affairs of parties; a pathological phenomenon shared by internal factors represented by the love of leadership and the principle of absolute obedience, and external forces appearing in the absence of ideology in the militant and leader, giving a negative image of party discipline and leadership credibility in political performance, especially after splitting and thinking of holding leadership positions in new parties or ministerial portfolios within political power, similar to what happened with Hamas leaders at the beginning of the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule (1999–2011)."*

Consequently, through the views of informants, we find that the phenomenon of splitting stems from the absence of organizational structures within the party, leaving it in political unemployment that drives its militants to rebel and disrupt in the absence of dialogue and the inflation of leadership numbers. Another reason is linked to the political structure of the regime, which deliberately practiced pressure, falsification, and internal party infiltration to dismantle party structures and win over militants and fields through governmental or ministerial positions, especially given the presence of leaderships unable to fill the void left by the founding leader, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah.

1.2. Mahfoud Nahnah: The Symbolism of the Leader

Islamist movements are characterized by the idea of the reference leader who combines political and spiritual-religious authority. Therefore, the absence of such personalities—whether through death or withdrawal—leads to structural flaws in the party's makeup, threatens its existence, and affects its performance, given that *"referring authority, sovereignty, and the*

³ - Andria Cerom, *Intra-Party Politics and System Factional Conflict, Cooperation and Fission Within Italian Parties* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Milan, 2010–2011), pp. 180, 189.

repository of governance to Islamic theory and the person of the institution of the Guide⁴", governs Islamist movements, including the MSP.

This became evident in its repercussions on the movement after 2003, when it experienced a qualitative shift in political work following the death of its founder, Sheikh Mahfoud. His role as a founding personality and part of the old guard had a profound impact on shaping the internal structure of the movement—a cohesive structure that could not be touched. Conversely, views varied regarding his political approach and relationship with power, especially after his call for internal reforms prompted by the regime following the October 1988 events. Returning to the founder's persona, his *ijtihad* was not limited to preserving the internal components of the movement, but extended to external reform linked to the regime, making him the subject of criticism from popular bases representing the hardline wing within the movement, even though his vision aimed to build a democratic political culture with an Islamic background termed "Shura-cracy." However, this understanding could not be materialized, especially under the single-party policy prior to 1988.

From this standpoint, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah attempted to combine preserving the internal operational mechanisms of the movement with assisting the regime in imposing reforms according to a project to build an alternative system based on democracy. This is confirmed by Informant (09): *"The conflict existed before Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's death and escalated after it. In my opinion, most disagreements were not advocacy-based, but rather political and interest-driven."* This explains why the Sheikh was active during crises experienced by Algerian society; his background merged between social reform work and transitioning toward political work based on the philosophy of participation within the corridors of power.

This orientation made Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah, even after his death, the man who thought on behalf of the remaining militants and leaders. This was clear through the negative and positive images of the founding Islamist leader ingrained in collective memory as the central founding leader who remained a nourisher of the social imagination⁵. Based on the foregoing, the post-Sheikh death era produced the idea of the anticipated movement president, who was not yet agreed upon in the absence of dialogue, creating the problem of succession and its implementation mechanisms.

This was confirmed by Informant (07): *"The cause of the conflict was subjective, linked only to leaderships, whereas at the level of militants there was no major rift because most of them were tied to the movement ideologically and organizationally, not to individuals."* This means the conflict post-2003 was inevitable among conflicting wings within the movement's hierarchy over leadership, especially with the emergence of Abderrazak Makri (or rather Abu

⁴ 6 Fakhr Abu Awad, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Global Spread and the Concepts of Bay'ah, Loyalty, and Disavowal* (2014), p. 14.

⁵ - Mohamed Al-Jawili, *The Political Leader in the Islamist Imaginary Between the Sacred and the Profane* (2013), p. 33.

Djerra Soltani) as a leader who charted the path of participation as a mechanism to sustain the Sheikh's trajectory, versus a faction seeing the necessity of change, halting the participation policy, and shifting to the opposition ranks while altering internal regulations from endorsement and consensus (which characterized the Sheikh's era) to electoral democratic action for movement officials and leaders.

Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's policy before his death still casts its shadow on the movement's management between a faction defending his ideas in their advocacy-reformist aspect, and a faction representing the political paradigm that the regime attempted to contain to serve its interests. However, Abu Djerra Soltani attempted to contain the matter by internally restructuring the movement and liquidating Nahnah's legacy in management, appearing as a reformer of the movement's approach and work starting from the Third Congress.

1.3. The Third Congress: Internal Conflicts and the Beginning of Fragmentation

Following the death of Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah, the movement went through a transitional phase followed by the convening of the Third Congress, which installed Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani as the new president for a five-year term, securing 105 votes against 35 for his competitor Abdelrahmane Saidi out of all Consultative Council (Majlis Al-Shura) members⁶. This congress marked a historical event for the post-Mahfoud Nahnah era in managing the movement along his path and avoiding internal disputes. However, the exceptional circumstances of the congress stripped candidates of programs, as hinted by Abdelmadjid Menasra: *"Whoever thinks of succeeding Sheikh Nahnah is insane,"*⁷ an implicit statement on the difficulty of managing the stage, preserving historical legacy, gathering militants, and mobilizing them against the political regime.

Consequently, the movement split into a conciliatory current deciding on political participation and a current rejecting any rapprochement with political power. This orientation governs the Islamist movement both inside and outside Algeria; researcher Mohammed Abu Rumman notes that *"there is a current that prefers advocacy and ideology over the principles of the Islamist movement in its relationship with power,"*⁸ which often leads to splits, especially in the presence of leaderships lacking charismatic personalities. This was confirmed by Informant (08): *"Abu Djerra Soltani did not deviate from the political line established by the founding Sheikh and possesses undeniable legitimacy in the congress. The problem lies in the emergence of competitors, which did not exist during Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's era. That is, Soltani possessed legal legitimacy, but his social legitimacy as a leader was somewhat shaky."*

This explains why political rivalry within the movement grew more complex after Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's death. In the delegates' belief, disputes were inherited not only during the

⁶ - Mohamed Al-Baghdad, *The Poisoned Movement: The Crisis of the Movement of Society for Peace*, p. 68.

⁷ - Hakim Hossam, *The Crisis of the Movement of Society for Peace (2003–2009)*, *Algerian Journal of Public Policy*, Issue 10 (2016), p. 236.

⁸ - Mohamed Abu Rumman et al., *The Horizons of Political Islam in a Troubled Region* (2017), p. 16.

congress but prior to the founder's death. What fueled the situation and placed the movement before internal divisions was Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani's endorsement of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2004, which ignited conflict and tension among leaders. Informant (03) confirmed this: *"The political line the movement followed since its founding relies on participation as a strategic political choice; this choice brought internal problems upon the movement amid declining popularity among its militants."* This means social and political identity suffered popular and political decline due to the absence of a charismatic personality, the influence of certain leaders by participation and openness to others, the regime's ability to penetrate the movement through perks that led some leaders to bless all state policies, and the absence of a space for freedom and expression within the movement's institutions and structures.

Thus, the period between 2003 and 2008 under Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani's leadership was a sensitive phase marked by temporal arrangements built on the idea of succession rather than building new thought within the movement, while preserving internal legacy based on advocacy, reform, and an open political mindset toward power. This laid the foundation for splitting as a negative image of absent party discipline resulting from the race for power and the personal interests of certain leaders, stripping it of brilliance and political performance and accelerating the emergence of public splits starting from the Fourth Congress in 2008.

1.4. The Fourth Congress: The Dialectic of Conflict Among Leadership and the Entrenchment of Splits

After Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani headed the movement pursuant to Third Congress decisions, the features of splitting began to appear implicitly rather than explicitly—or at least the party was experiencing a crisis due to the absence of dialogue and the strengthening of internal ranks. This became starkly evident starting from the Fourth Congress in 2008 held under the slogan "Political Reform and Development," which entrenched division due to several reasons, most notably Abu Djerra Soltani assuming the post of Minister of State in 2005 within a presidential alliance framework, which the Consultative Council deemed contrary to movement principles.

This stance revealed the heterogeneous composition of the movement between reformists open to power and conservatives clinging to Islamic values represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and its founding elders. *"The more radical Islamists, disciples of Qutb and Khomeini, see the duty of rebelling against the corrupt Muslim state; it is the excommunication (takfir) of the ruler considered an apostate and transitioning to violence,"*⁹ or at least non-alliance with regime parties. This was precisely what Soltani's faction, which dominated decision-making centers within the movement, believed.

All these motives made the Fourth Congress a pivotal turning point in entrenching the policy of splitting. Informant (05) confirmed this: *"Conflicts escalated among leaders during the*

⁹ - Olivier Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

Fourth Congress for organizational rather than political reasons; rather, they were personal disputes spanning a full presidential term of the movement." Similarly, Informant (12) stated: *"The cause of the division was personal and interest-driven, especially since Sheikh Abu Djerra could not accommodate dissidents, nor were they prepared to, and the idea of division was pre-prepared as evidenced by meetings held prior to division to pave the way for accepting the matter."*

This explains why the idea of division formed as a result of personal conflicts and disputes rooted in relations between the two wings (reformist and conservative), which surfaced publicly under the pretext of violating organizational laws and deviating from Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's line. The congress focused on four core points:¹⁰ Who supervises organizing the congress? Where is the president elected—in the Consultative Council or inside the congress? Who is authorized to propose 5% of delegates outside the electoral process? In case delegates overthrow the bureau..., how is it reconstituted?

Based on the above, the causes of post-2008 splits can be traced to the absence of consensus over Abu Djerra Soltani's personality, the absence of democratic rules of the game and the entrenchment of obedience, departure from Consultative Council decisions, the lack of consensus on a conciliatory vision regarding core political issues, and the absence of a clear strategy regarding internal affairs and the movement's relationship with power from the standpoint of participation versus opposition. Particularly, Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani could no longer manage the movement with the unifying mindset of the Sheikh, amidst the emergence of a youth faction well-versed in political work and leadership yet lacking political experience, alongside a generation attempting to preserve advocacy-reformist work as a mechanism to confront external forces.

Actual public split manifested after the Fourth Congress, changing the movement's shape as it divided internally between a faction choosing opposition and a faction attempting participation in state corridors. The movement experienced this as an indicator of the beginning of internal disputes, transforming into an entity living on conflicts represented by warring factions seriously contemplating splitting. This meant further weakening the role of the largest Islamic party in Algeria, leading to a decline in political performance and influence over popular bases.

1.5. Repercussions of the Arab Spring: Islamic Awakening or Deepening Segmentation?

Following Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani's leadership for a second term, several new parties splintered from the mother movement (Hamas), starting with the Change Movement headed by leader Abdelmadjid Menasra as the inception of overt splitting, resulting from various accumulations formed after the death of founder Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah. This was followed by the Rally of Algerian Hope (TAJ) between 2008 and 2011, headed by Amar Ghoul, known for

¹⁰ - Moussa Hassan & Ibn Attallah, *The Oppressed Movement: A Response to the Book "The Poisoned Movement"* (n.d.), p. 269.

his popularity among movement militants, his assumption of multiple government positions, and his political integration across all political spectrums. Conversely, the National Building Movement (El Bina) was established in March 2013 by Mustafa Belhadi, a former movement cadre and former president of the Change Front.

Consequently, most leaders who splintered from the party were heavyweight and popular figures. This stripped the movement of its political brilliance, especially since the National Building Movement began its political path as a corrective movement within Hamas, then announced the establishment of the Change Front, ending with the establishment of the Building Movement. That is, it built its political weight by demolishing the other. All these events occurred amid the Arab Spring, known in Algeria as the "Oil and Semolina protests," which also marked the grassroots beginnings far from political parties. *"The fact is that the historical Arab opposition hesitated or delayed keeping pace with Arab uprisings and revolutions since their inception, and this applies to Islamists and others,"*¹¹ which magnified the severity of Arab Spring repercussions on the Islamist current, particularly in Algeria.

It also heightened internal splits within the movement between those viewing it as an Islamic awakening to restore Islamists to the political arena, and a faction viewing it as an opportunity to impose further splits, especially following the splitting of other movements. Informant (6) confirmed this: *"The Arab Spring changed many equations and balances, and Algeria was affected by that, especially since the governance system managed to dismantle the partisan structure and social peace to its advantage."* Similarly, Informant (12) noted: *"The repercussions of the Arab Spring, to the extent their resonance succeeded in Arab countries, did not benefit the movement; rather, they widened its rift due to splits."*

In the public eye, the movement was viewed as part of the ruling and loyalist parties, represented in the parliament supporting the regime and having representation in the government. This affected its image as an opposition current: *"The parliament member is necessarily part of the 'regime' even while showing hostility to it."*¹² Therefore, the movement could not adopt the popular movement (Hirak) and found itself accused by the street and even by its own popular grassroots bases.

Moreover, amidst popular mobilizations, the political regime blended a package of economic and social reforms targeting disgruntled youth, while enacting political reforms concerning the electoral law and ensuring greater neutrality of power. It also adopted rhetoric of intimidation and fear regarding a return to the atmosphere of the "Black Decade" (civil war) and invested in media as a tool to serve its interests, especially during election periods. Consequently, the regime reproduced itself through several splinter parties that became clones and posed no competitive threat to the regime, finding themselves instead supportive of its policy. This was clearly manifested among splinter parties due to the absence of internal identity

¹¹ - Abdelghani Imad, *Islamists Between Revolution and State* (2013), p. 37.

¹² - Saber Nafzaoui, *Islamists... The Question of the State and Questions of Governance* (2021), p. 360.

and ideological affiliation, and the lack of a forward-looking vision regarding the Arab Spring's repercussions on Algerian society through remobilization, closing ranks, and restricting rebels to achieve party cohesion.

This was what the regime sought to contain through ministerial positions, fragmenting the opposition, and encouraging and supporting dissidents, particularly when dealing with parties of significant influence in political life.¹³ This actually occurred within the Movement of Society for Peace, starting with Abu Djerra Soltani, then Abdelmadjid Menasra, Abdelrahmane Saidi, El-Hashemi Djaaboub, and other former Hamas leaders, where splitting became the dominant feature of the movement's performance. Thus, it benefited nothing from the Arab Spring compared to the Islamist tide in Egypt, Tunisia, and many Arab countries.

2. The MSP Post-2010: From the Inevitability of Splitting to the Contingency of Partisan Alliances

The circumstances experienced by the Movement of Society for Peace from the beginning of openness and pluralism until the era of the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika witnessed transformations at the level of its internal structure and its relationship with power in terms of consensus and concession. This plunged the movement into a state of ambiguity and raised questions such as: *"We 'Islamists'... What should we do? And what is to be done now?"*¹⁴

The movement lost its standing as an opposition force with popular weight, while simultaneously suffering several shocks and splits that drained many of its cadres. This contributed to the restructuring of the movement by reproducing itself according to new objectives aligned with variables to impose a future built on active participation away from the corridors of power. This was manifested through post-2010 changes—namely working to return to the ranks of peaceful opposition through political participation without allying with political power.

2.1. The Green Algeria Bloc: Between Arab Spring Outcomes and Political Regime Constraints

The political reforms introduced by the political regime amidst the repercussions of the Arab Spring placed the Islamist current before an era of building a situational Islamist alliance comprising three parties (Movement of Society for Peace, Ennahda Movement, National Reform Movement) in the first experience of its kind after political openness and breaking partnership with the tripartite alliance with the regime. It is noteworthy that Hamas was a party to most alliances, thus adopting the idea of participation as a mechanism to train cadres within state structures. Informant (09) confirmed this: *"Yes, the movement benefited from many positions in the ministries it supervised; even politically, movement sons proved their competence and function in managing state affairs."*

¹³ - Lamine Souikat, Partisan Splits in Algeria and Morocco, *Journal of Law and Study Records*, Issue 15 (2016), p. 203.

¹⁴ - Saber Nafzaoui, *Op. Cit.*, p. 330.

This explains the dual mindset of the Hamas member regarding entering the corridors of power—starting with Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani as Minister of State, followed by the sudden shift in the movement's path as it entered elections as an opponent of the regime through the 2012 legislative elections, accusing the regime of falsification and lack of transparency in most elections. This dual contradiction experienced by the movement helped the political regime thwart the Islamist desire to reach power.

Despite this, the movement worked to reproduce itself through political reforms adopted starting in 2011. Informant (04) confirmed: *"We had a reckless and rushed reading of Arab events; Islamist movements lived on the margins of power in the Arab region, unlike us in Algeria, so the results and outputs of the region cannot be taken and applied to our reality."* This explains the strength of the political regime, especially media-wise, in calming internal conditions and opening the field for party formation—meaning changes were situational.

Professor Fathi Boularas affirmed: *"True reforms include mechanisms for comprehensive change of the ruling system, whereas reforms accompanied merely by legal changes have proven limited in achieving real change, and past experiences are the best proof of that."*¹⁵ This prompts the assertion that the state sought to limit the occurrence of an Algerian Spring by invoking fear of returning to the Black Decade. All these factors did not prevent Islamists from forming a situational Islamist alliance, through which leaders were optimistic about sweeping the legislature. Informant (02) confirmed: *"The Green Bloc was a beautiful image of the possibility of the Islamist current's existence and masked the multiplicity of their splits."*

Similarly, Informant (08) stated: *"The alliance managed to create an alternative, but power intervened to change the result in favor of its own FLN and RND. This explains that forming the alliance was a healthy phenomenon that did not exceed being an honorable image for the Islamist militant in general and the Hamas member in particular due to its situational nature."* Simultaneously, it can be said that Islamist alliances are often situational due to intellectual differences among Islamist parties. What is *"meant by Islamists are those activist-revivalist movement members who meet around the goal of ruling by Islamic Sharia and diverge over means and visions on condition of being 'non-violent' and lacking 'political Taqiyya'."*¹⁶

Thus, the Islamist movement appears singular, yet at the intellectual and theoretical level, it is divergent and contradictory, incapable of uniting into a single bloc. Added to this is the policy of containing everything Islamic in favor of the regime through privileges and traditional practices, and the absolute decline in popularity of movement leaders following Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's death. This shaped a general popular orientation rejecting the arrival of the Islamist current to power due to the historical trajectory of the Islamist movement in Algeria, despite the rise of Islamists in Arab countries via ballot boxes.

¹⁵ - Ali Belazi, Constitutional Political Reforms in Algeria Following the Arab Spring Revolutions, *Journal of Constitutional Law and Political Institutions*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2021), p. 195.

¹⁶ - Saber Nafzaoui, *Op. Cit.*, p. 39.

2.2. The Green Algeria Bloc: Between Ambition and Failure

The Green Algeria Bloc was considered an Islamist political bloc comprising three Islamic parties (Movement of Society for Peace, Ennahda Movement, National Reform Movement). The idea of this alliance originated from coordinator Azzedine Djerara through a series of meetings with Islamist movement leaders aimed at reuniting Islamists—especially following splits experienced by the MSP—under a single partisan umbrella. Its birth was announced on March 7, 2012, at the Safir Hotel in Algiers.¹⁷

It was the first step to resolve disputes and conflicts and make Islamists think seriously about evaluating genuine political alternatives far from dogmatic discourses that no longer had any impact on popular bases: *"Our political Islamic discourses still circulate mostly within the circle of comparing Shura with democracy and questioning the legitimacy of Islamists accepting party work and peaceful power alternation."*¹⁸ This discourse is among the factors of Islamists' failure and division among themselves, stripping them of voter and militant trust.

Returning to the inception of the bloc or alliance, these parties interacted with the idea starting from the first meeting organized by leader Azzedine Djerara with Sheikh Abu Djerra Soltani on March 17, 2012, followed by his meeting with Ennahda Movement Secretary Dr. Fatah Rabie on January 27, 2012, and the final meeting on January 28, 2012, with National Reform Movement Secretary-General Hamlaoui Akouchi. Conversely, the idea was rejected by Sheikh Abdullah Djaballah, head of the Front for Justice and Development, and Dr. Abu Djerra Soltani, head of the Change Front. Notably, rejecting parties were mostly splinter groups or previously overthrown leaderships.

Looking at the timeframe, the bloc was situational, lacked a long-term political vision, and had an unclear electoral program, particularly due to the absence of consultation with all bases because of tight time constraints. Informant (01) confirmed: *"Alliance figures did not consult the base, which weakened the internal structure."* Likewise, Informant (08) noted: *"The electoral campaign at the leadership level was valuable, but at the grassroots level, we did not find militants of other parties other than Hamas militants, and even most candidates put forward by other parties possessed no Islamic affiliation or local popularity, which negatively affected movement militants and cost it its electoral reservoir."*

This explains that Hamas, given its militant base, did not benefit from the bloc, especially in the absence of a clear strategy from other parties, along with the lack of grassroots meetings between militants and sympathizers, thereby forfeiting the spirit of cooperation and joint work, which hindered the alliance's success.

At the level of the electoral program, leaders disagreed over implementation mechanisms, particularly since it touched all major axes, making its application, explanation, and communication to citizens difficult. This explains the absence of building a future prospective

¹⁷ - Ali Belazi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁸ - Heba Raouf Ezzat, *The Political Imagination of Islamists* (2015), p. 17.

vision to construct an Islamic entity far from traditional practices built on obedience and the sidelining of the militant base. Informant (07) confirmed: *"At the level of the electoral program, it was a political and economic program, but electorally it was below standard due to numerous difficulties in running and seat-sharing, which took up more volume than candidacy itself."*

This explains that Hamas, even in its alliance, could not keep pace with other parties due to the weight of its base versus other bases suffering from near-permanent vacuums during every electoral appointment, alongside the absence of a specific strategy with the return of demagogic Islamist rhetoric criticizing state policies and lacking an effective alternative. This rendered the alliance lacking credibility and stillborn, as agreed upon by observers of Islamist affairs in Algeria.

2.3. Hamas Post-May 2012 Legislative Elections: Collapse of the Alliance and Self-Search Experience

The Hamas household experienced a new setback following splits attributed by observers to the movement's trajectory during Abu Djerra Soltani's era. These splits materialized in the failure of the alliance and its acquisition of only 48 seats nationwide, despite the electoral reservoir possessed by bloc parties. The failure stemmed from the movement abandoning its opposition approach, entangling itself with regime parties in the preceding period, and keeping pace with them despite the vast difference between them: *"Historic political parties have lost and exhausted their purposes, and it is a grave mistake to compare the size and depth of the Islamist movement with the size and depth of those parties."*¹⁹

However, regime parties possess popular bases and can rehabilitate their image, whereas the Movement of Society for Peace lost its opposition image, costing it dearly on the popular level. This is attributed to several reasons, including the absence of a clear electoral program, criticizing state policies instead of finding realistic solutions, and appealing to voters' emotions rather than presenting local alternatives.

These outputs placed Hamas before the necessity of rearranging its household away from the bloc. Their first decision was to untie the partnership locally by entering local elections individually as an initial step suggesting internal structural amendments, rebuilding trust among the militant base, and navigating the political scene after the state's successful containment of internal crises post-2011. Informant (12) confirmed: *"No alliance built on ordinary transient goals like political spoils is bound to perish; one must think of something deeper."*

Similarly, Informant (6) stated: *"When the movement allied with those parties lacking structure and militant roots, it paid the price for this defect through its setback in the legislative elections."* This explains that the situational alliance did not help the movement internally in restoring trust to its militants, nor externally in securing a large number of seats, due to the lack

¹⁹ - Farid Al-Ansari, *Political Immorality and the Islamist Movement in Morocco* (2011), p. 10.

of coordination between leaderships and militants in forming electoral lists that would garner popular support.

This left room for other bloc parties to strengthen their ranks in certain regions of the country; consequently, Hamas founded organizational work rather than partisan work.²⁰ Informant (03) confirmed: *"Divergence of visions and drawing lessons from the previous experience of the Green Bloc did not achieve the fundamental goals for which it was established; it was futile for the militants."* This explains that the alliance did not help Hamas preserve its partisan identity or integrate under a single electoral partisan umbrella.

Conversely, Hamas acknowledged the traditional practices exercised by power to obstruct the Islamic project from reaching power. Informant (05) confirmed: *"The movement's exit from the alliance came due to the persistence of the falsification process practiced by power back then, and under transparency, one can judge the failure or success of the bloc—either fraud is committed against you and then you accuse your partner."* Here, one must hint at the victim mentality adopted by the movement prior to any electoral appointment to relieve embarrassment over final results, which is also evidence of the movement's inability to keep pace with the regime before every electoral test. Thus, the movement's exit from the alliance's mantle cannot be attributed solely to the power, but also to the bloc's situational nature and the absence of a clear strategy parallel to the pragmatic policy pursued by leaders to win personal rather than public interests.

2.4. The Fifth Congress: Hamas and the Option of Opposition

The Fifth Congress convened in May 2013 and witnessed the election of Dr. Abdelrazak Makri as new president by a sweeping majority of 177 votes against 65 votes for his competitor Abdelrahmane Saidi. Its proceedings represented a sort of understanding and commitment compared to previous congresses. Conference Bureau Chairman Zinedine Tobbal commented: *"The congress convened its sessions calmly, far from any tension in stance or fanaticism in opinions as occurred in the 2008 congress."*²¹

This congress marked a new phase for Hamas to transition from integration in political alliances with power to opposition as a mechanism characterized by political boldness. This was confirmed by Dr. Abdelrazak Makri after his election as president: *"The movement established its stance in not participating in the government because power in Algeria breached its commitments regarding respecting the will of the people and launching political and civil freedoms, which does not encourage us to continue on the participation option."*

The movement needed a personality practicing politics more than advocacy, represented in Makri—the militant more than the reformer. Indeed, *"The Islamist movement is not led by*

²⁰ - Ali Belazi, *Op. Cit.* (2021).

²¹ - Othman Lahian, Choosing an Opposition Figure to Head the Algerian Brotherhood, *Al-Arabiya* (May 5, 2013).

clerics, but by young secular-leaning intellectuals who present themselves as religious thinkers competing with or inheriting a class of corrupt scholars entangled with the existing power."²²

Informant (09) confirmed: *"The participation option left the movement in a political coma that Bouteflika exploited to his advantage."* This is an argument on the movement's political absence resulting from accepting participation after Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's death to entrench his ideas and prior political stances toward power. Makri attempted to set things right and play the role of political opposition, but things did not change much even after the movement returned to the opposition ranks.

This indicates the danger of splits experienced by the movement due to the absence of partisan identity and organic communication with power, particularly between 2008 and 2012. Dr. Abdelrazak Makri's opposition personality played a role in establishing a broad opposition front built on internal intellectual consensus and external popular support. However, he encountered regime obstacles, as confirmed by Informant (10): *"Regardless of the regime's strength and control over the joints of the political game, we saw that participation is useless for an Islamist party, just as the results of subsequent corruption spread are useless."*

This explains that the movement worked on internal organization and opened the field for cadres to revive political work instead of entering the corridors of power—something its president sought within a future project rather than a political program, aiming to restore the movement's political glory. He also established the idea of a dissenting alternative opinion independent of power.

However, notably during the presidential elections where the movement's stance was clear in rejecting all traditional practices and political change maintaining the late President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Hamas took its strongest decisions by refusing participation and refusing to endorse the president. Here, it can be said that 2014 was the actual beginning of restoring the movement's brilliance under its president Abdelrazak Makri.

2.5. The MSP Alliance: Implications of Merger and Post-2017 Gains

Following Islamists abstaining from participating in the 2014 presidential elections, the Movement of Society for Peace attempted to reproduce itself after adopting the opposition option through a new alliance with the Change Front under its name, signing a merger document on the path of withdrawal under a single banner. This alliance aimed to unify political discourse during the legislative election campaign and set scenarios for the post-results phase, striving to correct past errors and the negative effects produced by splits.²³

This alliance came as an opportunity to reunite Hamas internally after the setbacks of splits and its policy based on the paths of regime parties—an image Makri attempted to change since his arrival: *"Islamist movements have adapted and adapted themselves to coexist with Arab*

²² - Olivier Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

²³ - Abdelmadjid Ramadan, *Background and Outcomes of Partisan Alliances* (2018), p. 24.

authoritarian regimes."²⁴The post-2014 phase was a serious stage to return the movement to the ranks of real opposition, as hinted by Change Front head Abdelmadjid Menasra during the extraordinary congress under the slogan "All for Unity."

Informant (05) confirmed this: *"The reunification initiative came in preparation for electoral stakes at the time. Change was practically at the stage of electoral death, and Hamas lost much of its electoral reservoir; thus, unification was to rescue what could be rescued."* This explains that unity was interest-driven, melting previous disputes to close ranks, overcome past differences, polish the movement's image before public opinion, and resolve internal disputes.

This was achieved prior to the 2017 elections, especially since President Abdelrazak Makri's opposition approach contributed to re-attracting opponents to the movement after the state of dispersal post-2008, and the inability of leaders like Ben Guerina to rebuild party entities after leaving the corridors of power. Informant (01) confirmed: *"The crowding that occurred between the two parties was expected, especially after the return of many militants to the mother movement. The righteous lovers of Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah's approach strived in this endeavor after the disappearance of the dispute that led to division."*

That is, Hamas adopted the idea of change and renewal as two mechanisms to revive its political journey and curtail all disputes among wings. Informant (10) confirmed this: *"It was a clear strategy for consensus and reunification to reach power."* Returning to obtained results, we find they were good compared to 2012, proving the alliance's success and changing the pattern of political work based on dialogue rather than the principle of obedience.

Conversely, some explain that the shortage of positions stems from traditional regime practices, as confirmed by Informant (07). Serious comparison is credible when results are fair and true; however, the Algerian case alone is compared with the awareness that if true results appeared, everything would completely change. Nevertheless, achieving internal satisfaction rates among the base played a major role in securing 2017 gains, even though the base was waiting—explaining that the fraud machine in the Hamas member's view causes voter retrogression and alters results in favor of regime parties.

All these variables contributed, in the Hamas militant's view, to manipulating results, despite the post-2014 prospective vision characterized by rejecting the regime's game and creating an atmosphere of political competition far from temptations.

Conversely, the policy of splitting remained a prominent feature within the movement after excluding Dr. El-Hashemi Djaaboub, which met rejection from the Consultative Council, revealing flaws in party oversight among Hamas leadership. The post-2017 phase was considered a paved road to reclaim political presence away from power and re-prepare for the post-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika era, while simultaneously building a base for internal participation alongside opposition. Splits and divisions receded within its ranks, granting it a

²⁴ - Mohamed Abu Rumman et al., *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

larger margin for political work. This was effectively manifested during the 2021 legislative elections by securing 65–68 seats, explaining the popular reservoir lost due to appeasement with the regime.

Conclusion:

Based on this field study, we attempted to shed light on the structure of splits and alliances within the Movement of Society for Peace, starting from the passing of the movement's founder, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah, up to the announcement of the May 2017 legislative election results. During this phase, the movement experienced several political transformations—both internally through division, fragmentation, and internal conflicts that led to the emergence of breakaway parties, and externally through the repercussions of the Arab Spring in Algeria, which prompted state-led political reforms and shaped the movement's evolving relationship with political power through governmental participation and alliances.

Findings:

1. Internal conflicts, ideological friction, and leadership transitions following the passing of Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah significantly reshaped the organizational and political structure of the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP).
2. The party's engagement in political alliances, particularly the Green Algeria Bloc during the 2012 elections, was largely driven by situational political calculations tied to post-Arab Spring transformations.
3. While previous alliances with ruling authorities caused a loss of popular credibility, the transition back to an opposition stance and the subsequent merger with the Front for Change ahead of the 2017 elections successfully re-energized the party's electoral performance.
4. The movement's trajectory highlights the ongoing institutional challenge of reconciling its religious Islamic reference with the pragmatic demands of modern democratic political participation.

Recommendations:

1. The MSP must institutionalize transparent, democratic mechanisms for leadership succession and internal decision-making to prevent fractionalization and destructive splits.
2. The party needs to maintain a clear, consistent political line that balances its reformist Islamic identity with a constructive, principled opposition role, avoiding over-pragmatic alliances that dilute its popularity.
3. Strengthening continuous communication between national leadership and the grassroots militant base is essential to ensure cohesive electoral strategies and unified party discipline.
4. Islamist political parties should preserve their organizational autonomy and independent political vision, avoiding co-optation by ruling authorities through temporary governmental or institutional privileges.

Research Perspectives and Horizons:

Future research should explore the longitudinal evolution of Islamist parties in North Africa as they navigate post-transition political environments. Specifically, examining how

digital media platforms, shifting youth demographics, and new generational leadership styles influence party cohesion, ideological adaptability, and electoral mobilization will offer vital insights into the future trajectory of political Islam in the region.

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