

History

Although Algerians have always been the mainstay of the story that is Algerian history, it was the great empires of the Mediterranean – the Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines and Ottoman Turks – the armies of Islam from the east and finally the French who wrote the script. It is only since the second half of the 20th century that Algerians have been given a chance to make history for themselves.

THE GREEN SAHARA

Hundreds of millions of years ago, the Sahara was covered by expansive inland seas. Tens of millions of years ago, the Sahara was a desert larger than it is today. When the Sahara again turned green tens of thousands of years ago, and Europe shivered under the Ice Age, the Sahara became home to lakes and forests and a pleasant Mediterranean climate. Perhaps drawn by this idyllic climate, two distinct races appeared in North Africa between about 15,000 and 10,000 BC: the Oranian and then the Capsian (the former named after Oran in Algeria and the latter after Qafsa – ancient Capsa – in Tunisia). Their integration with indigenous peoples resulted in the spread of Neolithic (New Stone Age) culture and the introduction of farming techniques. The earliest evidence of lasting or semipermanent settlements in Algeria dates from this time.

Rock paintings and carvings in the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park (p194) and elsewhere (see p83) in Algeria, and across the borders in neighbouring Libya and Niger, are the greatest source of knowledge about this time when the Sahara was one of the nicest places to live in all the world. For more information on the Sahara's climatic periods, see p81.

It is from these Neolithic peoples that the Berbers (the indigenous peoples of North Africa; for more information see p40) are thought to descend. Taking into consideration regional variations and the lack of hard evidence, they appear to have been predominantly nomadic pastoralists, although they continued to hunt and occasionally farm. By the time of contact with the first of the outside civilisations to arrive from the east, the Phoenicians, these local tribes were already well established.

THE PHOENICIAN FOOTHOLD

The strategically located North African coast attracted the attention of the competing seagoing powers of Phoenicia and Greece, and the area's fortunes became inextricably linked to those of its conquerors.

The Phoenicians first came cruising the North African coast around 1000 BC in search of staging posts for the lucrative trade in raw metals from Spain. These ports remained largely undeveloped and little was done to exploit the interior of the continent. From the 7th century BC settlements were established all along the southern rim of the Mediterranean, including at Hippo Regius (in Annaba; p113), Saldae (in Bejaia) and Cesare (in what was formerly Iol, now Cherchell; p106) in Algeria.

The foundation of the major settlement of Carthage is traditionally given as 814 BC. Long politically dependent on the mother culture in

Archaeological evidence of human habitation in Algeria has been dated back as far as 200,000 BC, and some scholars believe that the presence of *Homo erectus* goes back further still.

TIMELINE 200,000 BC

The first sign of human habitation in Algeria

15,000–10,000 BC

The Oranian and Capsian people appear in North Africa

Tyre (in modern Lebanon), Carthage eventually emerged as an independent, commercial empire partly because Tyre came under increasing pressure from the Babylonians, but largely in reaction to Greek attacks on Carthage launched from Sicily. By the 6th century BC, the Phoenicians had established a settlement at Tipaza (p104), with further ports and market towns following at Hippo Regius and Ruiscade (now Skikda).

By the 4th century BC, Carthage controlled the North African coast from Tripolitania (northwestern Libya) to the Atlantic and although the Algerian ports were important, the real power lay in Carthage. Indeed, the ongoing viability of Carthaginian Algeria depended very much on events in Carthage and beyond. The Carthaginians did develop the hinterland, but this extended little beyond the mountains shadowing the Algerian coast. Always, the primary Carthaginian concern was maintaining a safe chain of ports and guarding trade routes.

The Carthaginians are credited with teaching the Numidians and Mauri (who were later called Berbers) advanced agricultural methods. For the most part, however, the Carthaginians uprooted the local tribes and forced them into the desert and mountain hinterland. Trade links between the Carthaginians and the small handful of Berber states grew in importance, but Carthage was not averse to demanding tributes and forcibly recruiting Berber conscripts for their massive army. Berbers made up the largest single group in the Carthaginian army in the 4th century BC.

The rise of the Roman Empire saw the Carthaginians and Romans clash in Sicily, which led to the Punic Wars and, ultimately, the downfall of Carthage. The first of the Punic Wars lasted from 263 to 241 BC, during which the Carthaginians lost numerous naval battles and finally accepted Roman terms and abandoned Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. Carthage consolidated its position in Africa but Roman armies landed at Utica (Tunisia) in 204 BC. Carthage capitulated and paid an enormous price, giving up its fleet and overseas territories.

With Carthage weakened by the failure of its overseas conquests, Berber kingdoms grew in power. These included Numidia, which encompassed much of northeastern Algeria, where the powerful King Massinissa held sway from his capital at Cirta Regia (modern Constantine) in the 2nd century BC.

Carthage hung on, despite incessant threats from Massinissa. In 149 BC, during the Third Punic War, the Roman army again landed in Utica, laid siege to Carthage and then overran the city in 146. It is unlikely that the Berbers mourned Carthage's demise. In the meantime, in 148 BC, King Massinissa died and the Berber kingdoms fell into disarray.

ROMAN ALGERIA

Rome quickly brought Carthage under its control and by 64 BC the whole of northern Libya was in Roman hands. Roman attention turned to the west when the Numidian ruler Jugurtha, Massinissa's grandson, massacred a number of Romans who were helping a Roman ally, Adherbal, defend the town of Cirta Regia. Jugurtha managed to resist several attempts by Rome to uproot him, but he was finally betrayed by Bocchus I, a Mauretanian king, in 105 BC. The boundaries of the Roman colony were extended and settlers (mostly veterans) were given land in the area.

Over the next 50 years, a trickle of Roman settlers moved in, and, after Julius Caesar crushed the last Numidian king, Juba I, in 46 BC, more organised state expansion got underway, fuelled by the realisation that North Africa could become the expanding empire's breadbasket.

When Bocchus II of Mauretania died in 33 BC, bequeathing his kingdom to Rome, Augustus fostered local rule by installing Juba II (a renowned scholar married to the daughter of Cleopatra and Mark Antony). After the murder of Juba's son, Ptolemy, in about AD 40, the kingdom was split into two provinces – Mauretania Caesariensis, with its capital in Caesarea (in modern Algeria), and Mauretania Tingitana, with its capital at Tingis (Tangier).

From this time until the decline of Rome in the 4th century AD, Algeria proved a stable and integral part of the empire. Agriculture was all important, and by the 1st century AD, Africa was supplying more than 60% of the empire's grain requirements. From African ports, too, came the majority of the wild animals used in amphitheatre shows, as well as gold, olive oil, slaves, ivory, ostrich plumes and *garum* (a fish-sauce delicacy in Ancient Rome).

By the middle of the second century, Roman veterans had founded settlements at Tipasa (now Tipaza; p104), Cuicul (Djemila; p132), Thamugadi (Timgad; p126) and Sitifis (Sétif; p128).

The period of Roman rule witnessed increasing urbanisation and prosperity in northern Algeria. The Roman presence saw some Berbers prosper. Some were granted Roman citizenship and many prominent Roman citizens were of Algerian origin; it was these wealthy locals who donated the monumental public buildings that graced the Roman cities of the region. The evidence of their patronage is particularly in evidence at Djemila.

At the same time, Roman encroachment created massive upheaval for the Berber tribes, with many losing agricultural lands and former autonomy. Berber uprisings were frequent. In response, the emperor Trajan (r AD 98–117) built a line of forts surrounding the Massif de Aurès and Nemencha mountains and from Vescera (modern Biskra) to Ad Majores (Hennchir Besseriani, southeast of Biskra) to mark out the southern limits of Roman rule. The southernmost point in Roman Algeria was at Castellum Dimmidi (modern Messaad, southwest of Biskra). Although it would later do so, Roman rule in the 2nd century did not extend west beyond Sitifis (modern Sétif).

With the spread of Christianity following the conversion of the emperor Constantine in AD 313, many of the Roman and Berber inhabitants embraced the new religion. Doctrinal schisms later gave prominence to one of the most famous figures of the early church, St Augustine (see the boxed text, p113), who became Bishop of Hippo Regius.

By the 4th century, tribal rebellion was endemic across the region, a sign that the end was near for Roman Algeria.

THE VANDALS & BYZANTINES

In AD 429, king Gaeseric (or Genseric), who had been busy marauding in southern Spain, decided to take the entire Vandal people (about 80,000 men, women and children) across to Africa, in one of the largest-scale mass migrations in history. By 430, Gaeseric had reached the gates of

Library of Congress – Country Studies (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/dzdoc.html>) provides a detailed overview of Algerian history in manageable, bite-sized portions.

When the Romans defeated Carthage, they were so afraid of the Carthaginians returning to power that the city was totally destroyed, sprinkled with salt as a symbol and damned forever.

Until the end of the 1st century AD, Rome's North African colonies produced one million tonnes of wheat every year, of which a quarter was exported to Rome. By the 2nd century, the levels of olive oil production and export reached similar levels.

4500–3000 BC

The last regular rain falls in the Sahara whereafter it becomes a desert

1000 BC

The Phoenicians arrive along the Algerian coast

814 BC

The Phoenicians' North African capital is founded at Carthage

263–241 BC

The First Punic War between the Romans and Phoenicians

Hippo Regius – St Augustine died during the ensuing siege. Much of northeastern Algeria was soon in the Vandals' possession and by the middle of the century Gaiseric's ships were in control of much of the western Mediterranean. Rome was all but a spent force.

The Vandals confiscated large amounts of property and their exploitative policies accelerated North Africa's economic decline. The Vandals, more adept at pillage and overseas conquests than in administering their colonies, fortified themselves in armed camps and the outlying areas fell once again under the rule of tribal chieftains. The Berbers became increasingly rebellious and, as the Vandals recoiled, small local kingdoms sprang up.

The Byzantine emperor Justinian, based in Constantinople (modern Istanbul), had in the meantime revived the eastern half of the Roman Empire and had similar plans for the lost western territories. His general Belisarius defeated the Vandals in 533. With Byzantine control limited to coastal cities and a few hinterland towns such as Timgad, Berber rebellions in the hinterland reduced the remainder of Algeria to anarchy and the potential prosperity of the provinces was squandered. Byzantine rule was deeply unpopular, not least because taxes were increased dramatically in order to pay for the colony's military upkeep while the cities were left to decay.

THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

With tenuous Byzantine control over Algeria restricted to a few poorly defended coastal strongholds, the Arab horsemen under the command of Amr ibn al-As swept all before them as they made their way across North Africa after having taken Egypt in 640. However, it was not until Uqba bin Nafi al-Fihri began his campaign of conquest that the full military force of Islam was brought to bear on North Africa.

For three years from 669 he swept across the top of the continent, establishing Islam's first great city in the Maghreb, Al-Qayrawan (Kairouan in modern Tunisia). With an army of Arab cavalry and Islamised Berber infantry, he marched into the Atlas and is said to have reached the Atlantic. By 698, the last remnants of Byzantine rule had disappeared and by 712 the entire region from Andalusia to the Levant came under the purview of the Umayyad caliphs (r 661–750) of Damascus.

Abu al-Muhajir Dina, Uqba's successor, cemented Islamic rule in Algeria, converting large numbers of Christian Berbers, especially around Tlemcen, Umayyad governors based in Al-Qayrawan administered eastern Algeria, with less rigorous control to the west.

Despite the rapid success enjoyed by the forces of Islam, the social character of Algeria remained overwhelmingly Berber. While largely accepting the arrival of the new religion, the Berber tribes resisted the Arabisation of the region. Although Arab rule flourished in coastal areas, the enmity between the Berbers (who saw their rulers as arrogant and brutal) and the Arabs (who scorned the Berbers as barbarians) ensured that rebellions plagued much of Algeria's hinterland. A mass rebellion, in reaction to the tyrannical behaviour of the occupying troops and inspired by the Muslim heresy of Kharijism (see the boxed text, p48), set out from Morocco in 740 and conquered the Umayyad armies west of Al-Qayrawan.

With the shift of the caliphate from the Umayyads in Damascus to the Abbasids in Baghdad in 750, the Muslim west (North Africa and Spain) split from the east. Three major Islamic kingdoms finally emerged in North Africa: the Idrissids in Fès, the Aghlabids in Kairouan and the Rustamids in Tahart in Algeria.

Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustum and his elected successors ruled a vast swathe of central and northern Algeria from Tahirt, southwest of Algiers, from 761 until 909. One of history's few examples of Kharijite or Ibadi rule (see the boxed text, p48), the Rustamids were also some of the most enlightened Islamic rulers of Algerian history, renowned for their patronage for the arts and scholarship in mathematics and astronomy, and for their justice and lack of corruption. Their enlightened ideals didn't extend to forming a permanent army and they were easily swept away by the more powerful Shiite Fatimids. Finding many supporters among the Kabylie Berbers, the Fatimids defeated the Aghlabids before marching on Egypt and founding Cairo in 972.

Before leaving for Egypt, however, the Fatimids entrusted their North African territory (Ifriqiyya, or roughly modern Tunisia and parts of Algeria and Libya) to the rule of the Berber Zirids (972–1148) who founded Algiers and made Algeria the centre of regional power almost for the first time in history. Bejaia also became one of the most important ports in North Africa. However, like the Berber Hammadids (1011–1151), their neighbours to the west, the Zirids were unable to resist pressure from within for religious orthodoxy and officially returned to Sunnism in open defiance of the Fatimids in Cairo.

The reply from Cairo was devastating: the Bani Hilal and Bani Salim (also known as the Bani Sulaim) tribes of Upper Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula were encouraged to invade the Maghreb, and over the following century North Africa was slowly reduced to ruins. The Zirids managed to hang on to a few coastal cities until 1148, while the Hammadids retreated to the coastal town of Bejaia, but northern Algeria had effectively been Arabised.

BERBER DYNASTIES

As Idrissid power in Morocco expired, a new force emerged from the Sahara. Inspired by a Quranic teacher, Abdallah bin Yasin, the Sanhadja confederation of various Berber tribes began to wage wars throughout the southern and central Sahara in a bid to retain control over trans-Saharan trade routes that were under pressure from the Zenata Berbers in the north. The Sanhadja were known as 'the veiled ones' (*al-mulathamin*) because of their dress, and later as the 'people of the fortress' (*al-murabitin*) – the Almoravids. In 1062 their leader, Youssef bin Tachfin, founded Marrakech as his capital and led troops on a march of conquest that, at its height, saw a unified empire stretching from Senegal in Africa to Zaragoza in northern Spain and reaching east as far as Algiers.

Almoravid rule brought a measure of prosperity to the region and prompted a flourishing of the arts in Andalusia and elsewhere. It was during Almoravid rule that the Grand Mosque of Tlemcen (p148) was built; it would later be used as a prototype for the Grand Mosque of Córdoba.

A Traveller's History of North Africa by Barnaby Rogerson is history made accessible and an ideal companion to your Algerian visit.

The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World by Ira M Lapidus and Francis Robinson is comprehensive and beautifully illustrated, and contains references to Algeria.

148 BC

Massinissa, king of the Numidians (Berbers), dies

146 BC

The Romans defeat and destroy Carthage, bringing Phoenician rule in North Africa to an end

46 BC

Juba I, the last of the Numidian kings, is defeated by the Romans

Mid-2nd century AD

Rome establishes Algeria's major Roman cities: Djemila, Tipasa and Timgad

Another Moroccan movement, 'those who proclaim the unity of God' (*al-muwahhidin*), known as the Almohads, denounced the religious laxness of the Almoravids and by 1160, Algeria was in Almohad hands. However, the empire grew too fast and soon began to crumble under its own weight. As it caved in, the Maghreb split into three parts: Ifriqiyya (Tunisia and parts of Libya) came under the Hafsid; Algeria under the Banu Abd al-Wad from Tlemcen; and Morocco under the Merenids. Although borders have changed and imperial rulers have come and gone, this division remains more or less intact today. The Abd al-Wadids (also known as the Zayanids) transformed Tlemcen into a major regional centre. They later formed an alliance with Granada in an effort to survive, but fell to the greater power of the Merenids in 1352.

OTTOMAN ALGERIA

Having successfully driven out the Muslims by 1492, Spain became a leading power in North Africa. They did so by establishing fortified outposts (*presidios*) along the coast from where they exacted tribute from passing ships and the tribes of the interior. Some of their strongholds in Algeria included Mers el-Kebir (1505), Oran (1509), Tlemcen (1510) and Algiers (1510); the Spanish Fort of Santa Cruz (p142) remains to this day.

At around the same time, the Turkish pirate Barbarossa (or Kheireddin; see the boxed text, opposite) and his brother Arudj were permitted to settle on the island of Jerba (Tunisia). Arudj captured Algiers from the Spanish, but they retook the city and killed Arudj in 1518. Thereupon Barbarossa allied himself with the Ottoman Turks in order to protect his Barbary possessions. With Ottoman support he secured control of the entire Algerian coast from Oran to Constantine, making Algeria the most powerful foothold for the Ottomans in North Africa.

There was a flurry of activity as Spaniards and Turks fought for supremacy in North Africa. Tripoli fell to the Turks in 1551, followed by Tunis in 1574. Together with Algeria, the three provinces were governed by a pasha, assisted by a dey (administrative chief), a bey (military chief) and janissaries (soldiers, known as *ojaq* in Algeria). Power in fact resided more in the dey in Algeria and the bey in Tunisia, and the pashas were little more than figureheads. The dey's power declined in Algeria with the assassination in 1671 of the last dey elected directly from Turkey.

During Ottoman rule, Algiers was the bastion of direct Ottoman power while the rest of the country was divided into three provinces with their capitals at Constantine, Médéa (south of Algiers) and later, after the Spanish abandoned it in 1791 after a massive earthquake, Oran. Further inland, local tribes enjoyed considerable autonomy and nowhere was this more true than in the Kabylie region.

In fact, almost from the beginning, Turkey's rule over its North African possessions was little more than a formality, although it was sufficiently powerful to exclude Arabs and Berbers from any significant positions. The sultan's name was used in the weekly sermons and new leaders sought confirmation of their nominations from Constantinople, but to all intents and purposes Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania acted independently, and frequently attacked one another.

THE PIRATES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

In the 16th and the 17th centuries, the secluded harbours and coastal cities from Morocco to Libya were havens for pirates who terrorised seagoing traffic in the southern Mediterranean and exacted tribute (ie protection money) from foreign governments to leave some ships alone.

Also known as corsairs, the pirates even had their own trade union or *taifa* (community) which sought to lobby on behalf of the pirate cause. Businessmen themselves, they understood that their survival depended upon a string of safe ports where no pursuers could track them down. Algiers and Tripoli in particular were cities where the entire economy came to revolve around the profiteering of pirates. Local rulers provided sanctuary and, together with otherwise legal merchants in the home ports, took their cut of the loot.

One of the most picaresque pirates of legend was the Turkish pirate Barbarossa ('Red Beard' or Kheireddin) who changed the course of North African history by securing the region for the Ottoman Turks. Born on the Greek island of Lesbos in 1483, Barbarossa and his brother Arudj quickly showed that they were destined for far greater things than mere pirating.

By 1510, the brothers were some of the richest North Africans of their generation and they seized control of Algiers in 1515. After Arudj was killed in 1518 at Tlemcen, the shrewd Barbarossa sniffed the political wind and realised that Ottoman power was on the rise. After he offered them Algiers, they returned the favour and appointed him governor. Suddenly the pirate-king had become respectable. In 1533, Süleyman the Magnificent was so impressed that he summoned Barbarossa to Constantinople and proclaimed him admiral of the Ottoman fleet. Until his death in 1547, he mounted successful raids on Tunis, Majorca, Italy and Nice on behalf of his Ottoman bosses.

And the name? Although historians hold to the fact that Barbarossa beard was indeed red, there remains some speculation that 'Barbarossa' was simply a mispronunciation of 'Baba Arudj'.

In all three, piracy played a pivotal role in the local economies, and the Barbary pirates, operating mainly from Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, were the scourge of Europe's Mediterranean shipping. European fleets occasionally blockaded North African ports and attacked the corsairs, but rarely with any lasting effect.

FRANCE TAKES CONTROL

The French presence in North Africa started in earnest in 1830, when they blockaded and attacked Algiers, supposedly because the dey of Algiers had insulted the French consul, but a more likely motive was the need at home for a military success to revive the flagging fortunes of Charles X.

Within three weeks of the French landing, 34,000 French troops took Algiers and the government of the dey had capitulated. The victorious French soldiers wreaked havoc on the Algerian capital, killing and raping thousands of locals, desecrating mosques and cemeteries and looting more than 50 million francs from the Treasury which was located in the Casbah. The French quickly took control of prime real estate and agricultural lands, further alienating and marginalising the local population.

A couple of weeks later, Charles X himself had been overthrown, although by then the French had become entrenched in Algiers and a French parliamentary committee ruled that the occupation should be maintained for no reason other than what it called 'national prestige'.

The Ottoman deys (administrative chiefs) were elected for life, but between 1671 and 1830, 14 of the 29 rulers were assassinated before completing their term.

The Barbary Corsairs: Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1480-1580, by Jacques Heers, is filled with the skulduggery and picaresque adventures of the pirates that raided with impunity from Algeria.

France annexed occupied Algeria in 1834 and administration (the *régime du sabre*, or 'government of the sword') of the colony was vested in a military governor-general.

Opposition came from Oran in 1832 and most notably from the bey of Constantine who shrewdly replaced Turkish officials with local Arabs and made Arabic the official language. When the French marched on Constantine in 1836, they were roundly defeated, although they finally took the city a year later.

Abdelkader was a Tlemcen-based sherif (descendant of the Prophet) who had been elected locally as the leader in the conflict with the invading European Christians. He was recognised by the French in the Desmichels Treaty of 1834, which effectively gave him control of western and inland central Algeria. Such was his charisma and ability to rally people that, by late 1838, the area under his control stretched from Biskra to the Moroccan border in the south, and from the Kabylie region east of Algiers to Oran in the north – almost two thirds of Algeria. This area virtually constituted a separate state, with its own judicial and administrative system.

By 1840, the French general Bugeaud had 108,000 soldiers in Algeria and one third of the French army was now on Algerian soil. By starving the local population, destroying crops and depopulating the countryside, the French began to claw back territory.

After a six-year struggle against the French, Abdelkader was forced into Morocco, where he called on the sultan, Abd ar-Rahman, for support. This was provided, but the army was trounced by the French at Isly (near Oujda in Morocco) in 1844. Abdelkader finally surrendered to the French in 1846 on condition that he be allowed to live in the Middle East. Despite this, he was imprisoned in Toulon, Pau and Amboise until 1852; he was finally allowed to settle in Damascus.

By 1847, General Bugeaud had conquered the greater part of the country and had been proclaimed governor-general of Algeria.

Algeria, by JR Morell, is an enlightening account of a journey through French-occupied Algeria in the 1850s with plenty of 19th-century sniffing and wide-eyed curiosity at local customs.

ABDELKADER'S LAST YEARS

Abdelkader was by far the greatest figure in Algeria's nationalist movement and is a national hero today, with many streets named after him and a major statue commemorating him in central Algiers. But few Algerian nationalists in the past few centuries have enjoyed such an unlikely retirement as did Abdelkader.

After he surrendered in 1846, he was imprisoned despite having been promised exile. The reason? The French minister of war had once been a French general in Algeria and had bitter memories of having been trounced by Abdelkader. In 1852, Louis Napoleon set him free and even granted him an annual pension of 150,000 francs. Abdelkader moved to Damascus where, in 1860, he acted quickly to avert a planned massacre of Christians by the Ottomans in the Syrian capital, in the process saving an estimated 12,000 lives, including the French consul. And so it was that the French awarded a man who was once one of France's most bitter enemies the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour.

He died in Damascus in 1883 after 36 years in exile. After independence, in 1966, Algeria's government brought his remains back to Algeria to mark the 136th anniversary of the French invasion of Algeria. Two years later, the Mosque of Emil Abdelkader (p120) was also built in Constantine in his honour.

French domination of the entire north of the country was not achieved until 1871, when the people of the mountains of the Kabylie region were finally subdued.

AN UNHAPPY OCCUPATION

During the first 50 years of French occupation, land was appropriated and European settlers – mainly of French, Italian, Maltese and Spanish origin – established their domination over the local inhabitants. Local culture was actively eliminated, and the Arab casbahs were replaced with streets laid out in grids. The Djemaa el-Kebir of Algiers (p93) was converted to the Cathedral of Saint Philippe, complete with a cross atop its minaret.

At a government level, the administration was dominated by Arabists who were generally more sympathetic towards the local population, a stance which led to increasing tensions between the French government and the *pieds-noirs* (see p42) or ordinary settlers. Napoleon III, who visited Algeria in the 1860s, found a fellow nobility in local tribal chieftains and he began to grow tired of the radicalism and racism of many European settlers in Algiers. His motives were hardly pure – he dreamed of a mostly-Muslim *royaume arabe* (Arab kingdom) with himself as *roi des Arabes* (king of the Arabs). Thwarted by colonial officials sympathetic to the settlers, Napoleon's plans came to nothing and French rule over the local population became increasingly exploitative and repressive.

When Napoleon III was defeated by the Prussians in 1870, French and other European colonists seized power in Algeria. A year later, the Kabylie region began a rebellion that quickly spread across a country that had become impoverished under the French. The French response was to confiscate massive tracts of tribal land, and military rule became even more repressive. Muslim Algerians had essentially become bystanders in their own country and their only permissible contribution to the running of Algeria came in the form of paying high taxes. Needless to say, few of the benefits of tax revenues were enjoyed by locals.

Apart from the wholesale appropriation of the best agricultural land, Algerians were imprisoned without trial and the school system for Algerian children was neglected, something which the sending of a handful of (mostly upper-class) Muslim children to France to further France's 'civilising mission' did nothing to conceal. This latter policy was one which the French would later regret, as the *évolués* (literally 'the evolved ones') began to wonder why French ideals of freedom only applied in France. This group of educated Algerians would plant the seeds of an Algerian nationalist movement in the lead-up to WWII. The more-than-170,000 Algerians who had fought for France during WWI also came to increasingly question French rule in Algeria. One of the most popular leaders was, for a time, Khaled ibn Hashim, the grandson of Abdelkader.

Calls for independence grew louder as predominantly younger Algerians formed nationalist groups and began agitating for autonomy or independence. These efforts culminated in the formation in 1937 of the Parti du Peuple Algérien, which was followed by the establishment of the Association of Algerian Ulama, a largely religious body, in Algeria itself. Although the first nationalist leaders pushed a largely secular line,

The Conquest of the Sahara, by Douglas Porch, is a rollicking tale of French ambitions to conquer the Sahara, with evocative reconstructions of the last days of the ill-fated Flatters mission.

In 1909, Muslims represented 90% of the Algerian population and produced just 20% of the country's income, but paid at least 45% and up to 70% of the taxes levied by the French.

At the end of the 19th century, the French authorities were spending five times more on educating European schoolchildren than they were on the Muslim children who made up 85% of students. In 1870, just 5% of Algerian children attended school.

SUBJUGATING THE SOUTH

By 1871, the French had secured effective control over all of northern Algeria, but Algeria's vast south was a different matter altogether. For centuries, the isolated oases of the Algerian Sahara had been largely untouched by events in the north.

The Sahara was the domain of the Tuareg (p41), the nomadic people of the desert, and they survived by serving as both the raiders and protectors of trans-Saharan caravans. Although dispersed throughout the Sahara, they formed loose confederations watched over by sultans who only had as much power as the disparate Tuareg tribes allowed them. From their capitals in Agadez in Niger and the Tassili du Hoggar (p189), the sultans mediated in disputes between Tuareg tribes. The Tuareg known as Kel Ahaggar (the People of the Ahaggar) were, by some accounts, the largest and most powerful Tuareg in all the Sahara.

Having established northern Algeria as their own, the French decided that it was time to seize control of the Sahara and the supposed riches of Central Africa that lay beyond. With dreams of building a railway across the Sahara, the French government sent two expeditions led by Colonel Paul Flatters deep into the Sahara. After the first was turned back by menacing Tuareg and a shortage of supplies, a second reached Amguid at the northwestern limits of the Tassili N'Ajjer escarpment, east of In Salah and north of Tamanrasset. A Tuareg ambush was lying in wait and those who weren't killed in the initial attack died slow and painful deaths on the long trek north. Just 12 out of 97 men survived the expedition. Colonel Flatters was not among them.

This attack bought the nomads time – two decades in fact – but in the first decade of the 20th century, French military expeditions succeeded in defeating the Tuareg and, for the first time, all of Algeria was under French sovereignty.

Islamic groups also grew in popularity, thereby revealing the first signs of a major fault line in Algerian society and one which would, decades later, have a devastating impact upon the country.

Despite ongoing repression, after WWII the French president, Charles de Gaulle, offered citizenship to certain categories of Muslims. This was considered inadequate, and an uprising near Sétif saw the massacre of more than 100 Europeans. Up to 45,000 Algerian Muslims were killed in response. By 1947, however, all Muslims had been given full French citizenship rights and the right to live and work in France. For the French, however, independence was a road too far.

THE ALGERIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

On 1 November 1954, the young guerrillas (*maquisards*) who had formed the new National Liberation Front (FLN) – a body whose stated aim was to bring down the French administration by military means at home and diplomacy abroad – launched a series of attacks across Algeria against a host of French government installations. On the same day, the FLN broadcast a message exhorting Algerians to join the fight for the 'restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam'. France's minister of the interior, one François Mitterrand, replied that 'the only possible negotiation is war'. The Algerian War of Independence had begun.

In addition to conventional French forces, the FLN found itself up against colonial farmers vigilante groups whose brutality during *ratonnades* (literally 'rat-hunts') was largely ignored by the French authorities.

With the countryside in turmoil, hundreds of thousands of colons fled to Algiers.

In a bid to curtail the war, Charles de Gaulle sent Jacques Soustelle to Algeria as governor-general with proposals for improving economic conditions for ordinary Algerians, but the FLN massacre of 123 French civilians near Philippeville (near Constantine) in August 1955 and the French retaliation that claimed up to 12,000 Muslim lives announced the outbreak of full-scale war.

By 1956, the fight for Algerian independence was being actively supported by Morocco and Tunisia, both former French protectorates, as well as Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the great emerging voice of Arab nationalism. Such support led to the construction by the French of a series of massive barbed-wire fences and observation posts to separate Algeria from both Morocco and Tunisia. The fence along the Moroccan border was over 1000km long, and the remnants can still be seen today.

In 1956, the FLN also began to take guerrilla warfare onto the streets of Algiers and other cities, as immortalised in the classic cult movie *The Battle of Algiers* (p53). The following year, the FLN, who had more than 40,000 guerrillas under arms, called a national strike and in spring alone carried out 800 gun attacks. Their trademark became night raids and ambushes on military and civilian targets. The Massif de Aurès, the Kabylie and the mountainous areas surrounding Oran, Algiers and Constantine became FLN strongholds. In-fighting within the nationalist movement was also a feature of the war and many Muslims suspected of ties to France were also increasingly the subject of FLN attacks.

The French response was equally brutal. French troops were granted permission to use any tactics necessary to quell the rebellion and this blanket immunity was manifested in the torture of prisoners and a policy of collective punishment for villages and families suspected of supporting the FLN. More than two million Muslim Algerians were forcibly resettled. Fighting alongside the 400,000 French troops in Algeria were as many as 150,000 *harkis*, Muslim irregulars loyal to France.

In 1958, with the colons demanding an even stronger French response, Charles de Gaulle took power again and it seemed as if the colons' wish had come true. De Gaulle was seeking an alternative to the FLN and proposed measures favourable to Muslim Algerians. By 1959, the French had secured military control over Algeria, but widespread opposition in France to the war was taking its toll, and former colonies across Africa soon began to gain independence.

The colons had meanwhile come to believe rumours that Charles de Gaulle was moving towards Algerian independence, and they led brand their erstwhile hero as a traitor. Two failed coup attempts and an escalation in terrorism by a settler terrorist organisation, the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS), were the last throws of the dice by the colons.

Their worst fears were confirmed when the French government opened negotiations with the FLN in Évian in May 1961. The result was a ceasefire due to take effect on 19 March 1962, and a referendum on independence followed in Algeria the same year. The result was six million in favour of independence and only 16,000 against. De Gaulle proclaimed

Frantz Fanon, who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*, was internationally recognised as the FLN's leading political theorist. His theories included an eloquent justification for the use of violence in achieving national liberation.

The Battle of the Casbah, by Paul Aussaresses, is an unprecedented exposé of French brutality and government complicity during the Algerian War of Independence as told by a former French army officer.

Throughout the 1954–62 Algerian War of Independence, the National Liberation Front (FLN) was active among Algerian immigrants in France, and its feuds with other opposition groups led to what were known as the 'café wars' in which nearly 5000 people died.

1671

Assassination of the last dey elected directly from Turkey

1791

The Spanish abandon Oran

1830

French army invades Algeria and takes control of Algiers

1871

French defeat Berber rebels in the Kabylie region and extend control over all of northern Algeria

Algerian independence on 3 July and it took effect on 25 September. The trickle of French settlers returning to France turned into a flood.

During eight years of war, as many as one million Muslim Algerians were killed (including 70,000 at the hands of the FLN), along with 18,000 French soldiers and 10,000 European civilians.

THE INDEPENDENCE YEARS

Ahmed ben Bella, a leading figurehead of opposition to French rule, became independent Algeria's first elected president. He pledged a 'revolutionary Arab-Islamic state based on the principles of socialism and collective leadership at home and anti-imperialism abroad'.

Despite the euphoria surrounding independence and Ben Bella's popularity, many of the old rivalries that simmered away during the war continued to plague the country and Ben Bella's leadership style did not foster orderly administration in a country still devastated by war. He was overthrown in 1965 by the defence minister and FLN chief of staff, Colonel Houari Boumedienne. Ben Bella spent many years in exile in Switzerland, but he would later return to lead his party, the Movement for Democracy in Algeria (MDA), in 1990.

Boumedienne was a cautious pragmatist. He set about rebuilding the country's economy, which had come unstuck at the time of independence with the departure of the majority of the country's administrators and technical experts, all of whom were Europeans. Unemployment and underemployment remained serious problems and many Algerians were forced to work in France, despite the ill-feeling which existed there towards them.

There was very little political change in Algeria under Boumedienne. The FLN was the sole political party, pursuing basically secular, socialist policies. Bad planning by the lumbering centralised bureaucracy saw agricultural production fall below levels achieved under the French. The economy was saved by the discovery of large gas and oil reserves in the Sahara, but few of the proceeds reached ordinary Algerians.

THE ROAD TO WAR

Colonel Boumedienne died in December 1978 and, at a meeting of the FLN in Algiers, Colonel Chadli Benjedid was elected president. Chadli inherited a country brimming with discontent.

Berber university students and others from the Kabylie region increasingly agitated against the government's Arabisation of government and education. When the government made extremely limited concessions to the Berbers, however, Islamists mounted vociferous protests. A deteriorating economy also pushed many Algerians into the Islamist fold, although how many did so out of disaffection with the failed promises of the independence-era elite rather than genuine religious conviction is not known. Once-liberal Algeria became a social battleground as conservative activists took their protests to the streets, targeting 'indecent' and what they saw as the country's moral decline.

The police cracked down hard on the Islamists. At the same time, the government sought to highlight their own Islamic credentials and drain popular support from the Islamists by opening new mosques and introducing family laws that seriously diminished the rights of women.

With the economy in freefall, Chadli abolished the central planning authority, the bastion of socialist economic control. The new legislation removed most public companies from direct government control and freed up the banking system. Chadli moved slowly for fear of opposition within the ruling FLN, as the party's old-timers regarded any moves away from central control of the economy with deep suspicion.

Massive strikes in October 1988 in Algiers quickly turned into riots and spread to Annaba, Blida and Oran. More than 500 people were killed in the resulting violence in what is still remembered as 'Black October'.

The government tried further changes and the 1989 reforms blew through Algerian society like a breath of fresh air. New press freedoms were married to a liberalising of the political system and in 1989, Abbassi Madani and Ali Belhadj founded the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut; FIS). The FIS quickly outpolled the ruling FLN in local elections.

The first round of Algeria's first free multiparty elections, held on 26 December 1991, produced another landslide for the FIS. Of the 231 seats decided (out of 430 in the National Assembly), the FIS took 188. The FLN won just 15 seats, 10 fewer than the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) – a Berber party.

The army stepped in, dissolving parliament, persuading Chadli to step down and replacing him with a five-man Haut Conseil d'Etat (HCE) led by President Mohammed Boudiaf. The second round of elections was cancelled, FIS leaders Abbas Madani and Ali Belhadj were arrested and others fled into exile.

Boudiaf lasted barely six months before he was assassinated in bizarre circumstances while opening a cultural centre in Annaba. The official line was that Boudiaf had been shot by a lone gunman, who also managed to wound 40-odd members of the audience before escaping undetected by the legions of security guards at the scene. Adding that the gunman had acted out of religious conviction didn't make the story any more plausible. There were suggestions that Boudiaf was the victim of an establishment plot hatched by people opposed to his attempts to tackle institutionalised corruption.

Whatever the truth of the matter, he was replaced by a hardliner in former FLN stalwart Ali Kafi, who remained at the helm until he was replaced by a former general, Liamine Zéroual, on 31 January 1994, with the country on the brink of civil war.

CIVIL WAR OR THE 'SECOND WAR OF LIBERATION'

Initial reports that Islamic leaders had rejected violence as a means of taking power from the military soon proved ill-founded. By the end of April 1994, more than 3000 people had died in the civil war that militants were calling the second war of liberation.

The rising death toll included a growing list of foreigners, most of them resident in the country. Among the victims were 12 Croatian engineers whose throats were slit after their attackers confirmed that the victims were Christians. Eight others were spared after convincing their attackers that they were Bosnian Muslims. Attacks against foreigners have been justified on two grounds: firstly, to sabotage Algeria's already

A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962, by Alistair Horne, is detailed and highly readable, and one of the best accounts of Algeria's struggle to be free of French rule.

London-based Darf Publishers (www.darfpublishers.co.uk) should be your first stop when trying to track down hard-to-find travellers' accounts of North Africa; there's a Libya focus but plenty available on Algeria.

1881

Tuareg raiders ambush and massacre the French military expedition of Colonel Paul Flatters in the Sahara

1947

Muslim Algerians receive full French citizenship rights and the right to live and work in France

1954-62

Algerian War of Independence

25 September 1962

Algeria becomes independent

troubled economy – which many regard as being propped up by the West; and secondly, as vengeance on the ‘spies of the unbelievers in the land of Islam’.

The vast majority of victims, however, were Algerians. Particularly targeted by guerrillas were policemen, mayors, judges and Francophile intellectuals. The attacks were claimed by various underground groups such as the Groupes Islamiques Armés (GIA) and the Mouvement Islamique Armé (MIA). The government responded with displays of force and the mass arrests of suspects. There was also irrefutable evidence that the government set up its own shadowy paramilitary groups which operated like South American-style death squads as they carried out (often collective) revenge killings.

The blood-letting peaked at 300 deaths a week in early 1994, signalling the failure of a so-called commission of national dialogue to have any impact on proceedings. It also signalled the end of the road for President Kafi.

President Liamine Zéroual proved unable to stem the tide of violence and in July 1995, the GIA exploded a bomb on the Paris Metro and in December hijacked an Air France airliner in Algiers. A November 1996 referendum approved constitutional reforms but for Algeria at the time it was one step forward, two steps back. During the first two weeks of Ramadan in 1997, more than 300 people were killed and grisly ritual massacres, reportedly by both sides, kept the country in a state of terror. In elections in 1997, legal Islamist parties such as the Movement of Society for Peace and the Islamic Renaissance Movement won around 22% of the vote.

With the population exhausted by almost a decade of war in which nearly 100,000 people were killed, the FIS offered to disband its military wing, although another group, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) vowed to continue the reign of terror. In April 1999, the military’s preferred candidate, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, won elections boycotted by opposition parties.

The killings continued.

ALGERIA TODAY

Although no-one can say for certain when the war ended, by 2002 the main guerrilla groups had either been defeated or had accepted the offers of a government amnesty. That’s not to say that Algeria’s problems are over.

The Algerian economy has been devastated by war and unemployment, and social dislocation remains high. In the predominantly Berber (Amazigh) Kabylie region, there is increasing discontent over unheeded demands for autonomy and recognition of Berber languages and culture. Security forces clashed repeatedly with the Kabylie Citizens’ Movement into 2003 with a mounting death toll the only discernible result.

President Bouteflika consolidated his hold on power in parliamentary elections in May 2003 and in 2004 he became the first-ever Algerian president to be re-elected by popular vote. The elections were, however, marred by allegations of vote-rigging.

A feature of President Bouteflika’s rule has been attempts to heal the deep scars that still divide Algeria. Although there was some disquiet

about such moves among human rights groups and victims’ groups, the Civil Harmony Act and Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation were approved by 97% of voters in a referendum in September 2005. The laws provided an amnesty for most crimes committed in the course of the war, and under the law Ali Belhadj, one of the founders of the FIS, was released.

The spectre of terrorism also remains a primary concern for Algerians. Although the GSPC announced in March 2005 that it could be prepared to disarm and accept the government’s offers of amnesty, it then formally allied itself with Al-Qaeda in September 2006. In January 2007, the GSPC formally changed its name to Al-Qaeda. GSPC militants were responsible for kidnapping 32 European travellers in the Algerian Sahara in 2003 and Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the serious bomb attacks of April 2007 which killed dozens and injured more than 100 people. They are believed to still have their base in Algeria’s extreme southwest, close to the border with Mali.

AllAfrica.com (www.allafrica.com) is the place to go for non-mainstream news coverage of Algerian history as it happens.

Modern Algeria, by John Ruedy, is one of few English-language histories of Algeria to have been updated in recent years (make sure you have the second edition published in 2005) and includes the 2004 elections.

26 December 1991

Algeria’s first multiparty elections won by FIS Islamist party

1992

Algerian army dissolves parliament and cancels second round of elections

1994–2002

Civil war

September 2005

Some 97% of Algerians vote for government amnesty for crimes committed during the civil war

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Although exceptions exist, Algerians are a forthright, passionate people who can seem to carry within them all the optimism, vision and conflict that the country itself possesses. Few require much prompting to voice what they see as the ills of their country, whether it be the president and his shortcomings or the Islamists and their fanaticism. Anger is a common emotion as Algerians look around at the country's abundant natural wealth and compare it with their own poverty – they're tired of official excuses and politicians of every ilk squabbling over riches that never seem to reach people like them.

Another common response to the perceived ills of the country is a sense of defeat. It is not unusual in Algiers and Oran in particular to find men of any age simply staring out to sea, dreaming of a better life in Europe; the women are most likely too busy to have time. Among these are the *hittistes* (see the boxed text, below), the vast numbers of young, sometimes educated men – almost a third of the population is under 30 and the youth literacy rate stands at 90% – who have grown tired of waiting for the promises of a new Algeria to become real and have been left with nothing to do and nowhere to go. As one Algerian told us, Ramadan was quite easy for him because he didn't get to eat during the day during any other month of the year anyway.

At the same time, the Algerian middle class is as sophisticated as any in the Arab world, their refined sensibilities, creativity and love of intellectual debate as evident as their dream that Algeria will one day be a tolerant, wealthy and peaceful society.

As Algerian passions repeatedly spill over and subside, home-grown music (most likely *rai*) provides the soundtrack, tracing the frenetic, roller-coaster ride that is the Algerian existence and reminding people just why, in spite of everything, they are so proud to be Algerian.

LIFESTYLE

Life for the ordinary Algerian revolves around the family, a bond that took on added significance during the years of conflict surrounding independence and the 1990s. Such has been the exodus of Algerians to Europe, especially France, that these bonds became infinitely more

WHAT ARE 'HITTISTES'? *Zahia Haf*

On busy streets, you will see young men standing around, leaning against walls, idling the day away. These are referred to as '*hittistes*', from '*hit*', meaning wall. Literally they are said 'to hold the wall'. They are jobless young men in their 20s, struggling to make a few dinars each day, if they are lucky, by selling small items. About 80% of the unemployed are under 30 and most of them are unqualified, which makes the search for work almost impossible. Most of the time they have nothing to do besides hanging around, talking to friends, watching girls go by and trying to chat them up. They usually stick to the same wall, making it their territory. Maybe it is a way to have their own space when they lack privacy at home. They all dream of greener pastures, somewhere on the other side of the Mediterranean.

When the Berlin wall fell in 1989, the running joke was: 'Instead of breaking down the wall, the Germans should send it to us...'. No matter how hard a situation is, Algerians always find a way to make light of it with their sense of humour.

complicated in the second half of the 20th century. However, the massive strain on social services ensures that family support networks – including remittances from overseas – nonetheless remain as important as ever.

Grafted onto the immediate family are multiple layers of identity, among them extended family, tribe and village, with an overarching national component of which every Algerian is proud, albeit with reservations. The nuclear family was traditionally large with numerous children, although some, mainly urban, Algerians now opt for a more manageable Western-style number of offspring.

Men generally marry later than women (for men the average age is 33, for women 29, the relative lateness of which is partly attributable to the high cost of staging weddings) and arranged marriages still frequently take place between the children of male cousins. This is, however, becoming increasingly rare in urban areas and in particular among families where members have returned to Algeria after years of living in Europe. This amalgam of Algerian and European values is one of the most fundamental changes determining the Algerian future, although the results are far from clear.

Life expectancy (73.26 years) is one of the highest in Africa and literacy (approaching 70%) is respectable, but these figures conceal overloaded health and education systems that many Algerians see as boding ill for the country's future. Housing is another major problem, particularly with the movement of people from rural areas into the larger cities in recent decades.

ECONOMY

The Good News

Algeria is one of the richest countries in Africa and in 2006 Algeria ranked third (behind neighbours Libya and Tunisia) among mainland African countries on the UN's Human Development Index, which ranks countries according to a range of economic and quality-of-life indicators. Such apparent wealth reflects the country's formidable natural resources: Algeria has the seventh-largest natural gas reserves in the world, is the second-largest exporter of natural gas and has the 14th-largest reserves of oil. High oil prices in recent years has meant that Algeria has a significant trade surplus, its external debt has been considerably reduced, inflation is low and GDP per capita sits at a comfortable US\$6603.

In pre-oil days and during the French occupation, agriculture was the mainstay of the Algerian economy and it remains an important feature of the domestic market, even as it contributes little to the country's export earnings.

The Bad News

That the Algerian economy is on the upswing only partially hides the fact that it has a long way to climb. The damage done to the economy by the years of civil war is still being felt and although investors are starting to return, unemployment remains high and general living standards are taking a long time to reach the potential that the Algerian economy undoubtedly has. As such, the issue of more equitably distributing Algeria's considerable wealth to ensure that all Algerians benefit – a quarter of Algerians live below the poverty line – is a matter of daily concern for Algerians.

The other major issue confronting the country's economic planners is how to diversify an economy that is almost wholly dependent on oil. High oil prices, promising results from recent oil and gas prospecting and high demand among Western countries for Algeria's low-sulphur

Each adult woman now gives birth to an average of 1.89 children, a far cry from the early 1990s when population growth rates were out of control and the country's population was doubling every 20 years.

Just 3% of Algeria is suitable for agriculture, but somehow Algeria manages to be 70% self-sufficient in food, up from just 40% 15 years ago. Major crops include wheat, barley, grapes, olives and citrus fruits.

oil conceals the fact that oil and natural gas account for 95% of export earnings. That's fine for the present, but the day that Algeria runs out of oil is one that most Algerians prefer not to think about.

POPULATION

Together, Arabs and Berbers make up 99% of the population. Historically these two groups have intermarried, making demarcation difficult, although most estimates suggest that 75% of the population consider themselves to be Arab, with a further 20% to 25% Berber. Other groups include the Tuareg and a small handful of *pieds-noirs* (French Algerians).

Algeria's population density stands at 13.8 people per sq kilometre, although so vast is Algeria's largely uninhabited desert region that population density in northern regions is much higher than these figures suggest. Around 60% of Algerians live in cities, but this figure is rising.

Arabs

The question of who the Arabs are exactly is still widely debated. Are they all the people speaking Arabic, or only the residents of the Arabian Peninsula? Fourteen centuries ago, only the nomadic tribes wandering between the Euphrates River and the central Arabian Peninsula were considered Arabs, distinguished by their language. However, with the rapid expansion of Islam, the language of the Quran spread to vast areas.

The first wave of Arab migration came in the 7th century as the armies of Islam spread rapidly across North Africa and established Arab-Muslim rule as far afield as Andalusia in what is now southern Spain. But it was not until the 11th century that vast numbers of Arab settlers arrived and the cultural Arabisation of the region began. The reason behind the migration was an attempt by the Fatimid dynasty ruling Egypt at the time to increase its hegemony over the outlying reaches of its empire. The Bani Salim largely remained in the eastern Libyan region of Cyrenaica, while it was the Bani Hilal who colonised large parts of northern Algeria.

Although the Arabs were relatively few in number in Algeria, their culture quickly became established through language and intermarriage. The term 'Arab' came to apply to two groups: in addition to the original nomadic Arabs, the settled inhabitants of newly conquered provinces such as Algeria also became known as Arabs.

Berbers

Berbers claim to be the descendants of North Africa's original inhabitants and most historians believe this to be true, arguing that the Berbers descend from the Neolithic peoples who arrived in the area up to 17,000 years ago. Other historians claim that the Berbers are descended from the remnants of the great Garamantian empire, which flourished in the Fez-zan region of southern Libya from around 900 BC to AD 500. Otherwise, little is known about their origins.

The name 'Berber' has been attributed to a collection of communities by outsiders, but rarely, until recently, by the Berbers themselves. The name is thought to derive from the Latin word '*barbari*', the word used in Roman times to classify non-Latin-speakers along the North African coast. 'Berber' is used as a loose term for native speakers of the various Berber dialects, most of which go by the name of Tamazigh. In fact, many Berbers do not even use a word that unites them as a community, preferring instead to define themselves according to their tribe.

When Arab tribes swept across North Africa in the 7th and 11th centuries, many Berbers retreated into the mountain and desert redoubts which they continue to occupy. In Algeria, by far the largest concentration of 'Berbers' are the Kabyles who inhabit the Kabylie Mountains in northeastern Algeria. Most often, groups from this region do not call themselves Berber at all, but, like the Tuareg, prefer to be known as Imazighen (singular: Amazigh), which means 'the noble and the free'. Other 'Berber' groups include the Chaouia in the mountains south of Constantine, as well as communities throughout the Atlas Mountains from Blida to the Moroccan border and beyond, and in the M'Zab region close to Ghardaïa.

The key touchstones of Berber identity are language and culture, although most Berbers are now bilingual, speaking their native language and Arabic. Within the Berber community, loyalty is primarily to the family or tribe. Households are organised into nuclear family groups, while dwellings within a village or town are usually clustered in groups of related families.

In keeping with their centuries-long resistance to foreign domination and to the imposition of religious orthodoxy, many Berbers belong to the Kharijite or Ibadi sect (see the boxed text, p48). True to their religious beliefs, Berber communities have long prided themselves on their egalitarianism. The traditional Berber economy consists of farming and pastoralism, meaning that most people live sedentary lifestyles, tied to their particular patch of land, while a small minority follows seminomadic patterns, taking flocks to seasonal pastures.

Although Berber agitation for sweeping autonomy in Algeria is unlikely to be granted any time soon, recent years have seen an increase in Berber-language education in Berber areas and Tamazigh is now recognised as a 'national language', although not an official one.

Tuareg

The Tuareg are the nomadic, camel-owning bearers of a proud desert culture who traditionally roamed across the Sahara from Mauritania to western Sudan.

The two main Tuareg groups in Algeria, whose members number an estimated 75,000, are the Kel Ahaggar from the Tassili du Hoggar and the Kel Ajjer from the area around Djanet, although within each group there are various subgroups which have slightly different languages and customs.

TUAREG ORIGINS

The origins of the Tuareg are not fully understood, although it is widely agreed that the Tuareg were once Berbers from regions stretching from southeastern Morocco to northeastern Libya. There are indeed marked similarities between many words in the Tuareg language of Tamashek and those in the Berber language of Tamazigh. When the Arab armies of Islam forced many Berbers to retreat into the desert in the 7th century, and when waves of Arab migration swept through the region in the 11th century, those who would become Tuareg fled deep into the desert where they have remained ever since.

Tuareg stories about their origins largely concur with this version of history, although most Algerian Tuareg claim to be descended from a single noblewoman, Tin Hinan, who arrived in the Tassili du Hoggar astride a white camel having journeyed from the Tafilalet region of southeastern Morocco. Finding the land to be largely uninhabited, the Tuareg say, Tin Hinan decided to stay and she became the mother of all Tuareg.

Historical Dictionary of the Berber (2006) by Hsain Ilahiane is the most comprehensive study of the history and culture of the Berber people of North Africa, with a range of alphabetical entries and maps.

The Tuareg, by Jeremy Keenan, is considered one of the best and most readable anthropological studies of the Algerian Tuareg.

A History of the Arab Peoples, by Albert Hourani, is the definitive text when it comes to Arab history painted in broad brush strokes. Better still, it's written in a lively style and is easy to dip into or read in full.

Amazigh Online (www.amazighonline.com) lists links to a host of interesting websites dedicated to the Berber (Amazigh) people, from scholarly articles to lively social and cultural debates.

The Tuareg traditionally followed a rigid status system with nobles, blacksmiths and slaves all occupying strictly delineated hierarchical positions, although the importance of caste identity has diminished in recent years. Until the early 20th century, the Tuareg made a fiercely independent living by raiding sedentary settlements, participating in long-distance trade and exacting protection money from traders passing across their lands.

The veils or *taguelmoust* that are the symbols of a Tuareg's identity – the use of indigo fabric which stained the skin has led them to be called the 'Blue People of the Sahara' – are both a source of protection against desert winds and sand, and a social requirement. For more information on the *taguelmoust*, see the boxed text, p68.

Traditionally, Tuareg women are not veiled, enjoy a considerable degree of independence and play a much more active role in the organisation of their society than do their Arab or Berber counterparts. Descent is determined along matrilineal lines.

The name 'Tuareg' is a designation given to the community by outsiders and it is only recently that the Tuareg have begun to call themselves by this name. The name is thought to be an adaptation of the Arabic word '*tawarek*', which means 'abandoned by God' – a reference both to the hostility of the land the Tuareg inhabit and to what other Muslims consider their lax application of Islamic laws. The Tuareg themselves have always, until recently, preferred to be known as 'Kel Tamashék' (speakers of the Tamashék language), 'Kel Taguelmoust' (People of the Veil) or 'Imashaghen' (noble and the free).

Traditional Tuareg society is rapidly breaking down, mainly due to the agrarian reform policies of the government, the influx of large numbers of Arabs from the north and a series of crippling droughts which have forced many people into the towns to search for work. For more information on the changes to Tuareg life, see the boxed text, p77.

Pieds-Noirs

Although few remain, the *pieds-noirs* (singular: *pied-noir*) are crucial to any understanding of Algeria's population mix. They are the 'Black Feet' or predominantly French settlers and their descendants in Algeria; the name is also used to refer to Algerian Jews.

After France occupied Algeria in the first half of the 19th century, settlers from all over southern Europe began arriving en masse. At first called colons, they planted deep roots in Algerian soil and by the 20th century most considered themselves to be more Algerian than French (except, it must be said, for many cases, when dealing with Muslim Algerians). By 1926, over 15% of the population were *pieds-noirs*. By 1959, there were more than one million *pieds-noirs* in Algeria – 10% of the population – and they accounted for more than 30% of the population of Algiers and Oran. There was also a large *pied-noir* population in Annaba.

The name '*pied-noir*' has been attributed to the fact that people of French origin in Algeria wore black boots, although in the early 20th century the name referred to all indigenous Algerians.

From 1954, as the country descended into a war of independence, the *pieds-noirs* fiercely supported France and were in turn targeted by Algerian nationalist forces. When President Charles de Gaulle effectively sanctioned Algerian independence in 1962, the *pied-noir* community levelled accusations of betrayal at the French government, but to no avail: 900,000 *pieds-noirs* fled Algeria in 1962, thereby gutting government administration in many places such as Oran. Many also laid waste

The Pastoral Tuareg, by Johannes and Ida Nico-laesen, is a two-volume, encyclopaedic study of the Tuareg, especially those of southern Algeria. It's a great addition to your reference library.

FAMOUS FRENCH PEOPLE WITH ALGERIAN ROOTS

Although not all considered themselves to be *pieds-noirs* (Black feet; descendants of French settlers), the following are some of the most famous French people to have been born on Algerian soil.

- Louis Pierre Althusser (1918–90) One of the leading Marxist philosophers of the 20th century.
- Albert Camus (1913–60) A leading light in the existentialist school of thought (although he rejected the designation), Camus won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 and some of his novels are set in Algeria.
- Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) The father of deconstruction theory was another of the most eminent philosophers of the 20th century.
- Yves Saint-Laurent (1936–) The exclusive French fashion designer was born in Oran and served briefly as a conscript in the French army during the Algerian War of Independence.
- Edith Piaf (1916–1953) One of the iconic French voices of the 20th century, Mme Piaf's maternal grandmother came from the Kabylie region of northeastern Algeria.
- Zinedine Zidane (1972–) Although the three-time World Footballer of the Year was born in Marseille and played for France, his parents were from the Kabylie region and many Algerians still claim him as their own; in 2006 he returned for a visit to the region.

to their properties so that they would be useless to Algerians. The effect on the Algerian economy was catastrophic.

Once they arrived in France – a place many *pieds-noirs* had never visited – most *pieds-noirs* were left to fend for themselves. Embittered by what they saw as France's rejection and angered by criticism of the *pieds-noirs*' often brutal tactics during the 1954–62 war, many chose to migrate to the Americas, Spain or New Caledonia. The *harkis* – Muslim Algerians who had supported French rule – fared even worse, as thousands were refused visas for France and were massacred by the National Liberation Front (FLN) after the French left. Around 100,000 *pieds-noirs* elected to remain in Algeria, but by the 1980s there were fewer than 3000 left.

Jews

Although Algerian Jews were often historically called *pieds-noirs*, they occupied a distinctive place in Algerian society from Roman times until 1994. Following their expulsion from Spain (especially Andalusia) in 1492, many Jews settled in Algeria, with particularly large communities putting down roots in Algiers and Oran. Algerian Jews were granted French citizenship in 1870 and by 1931 Jews made up 2% of Algeria's population and more than 10% of the populations of Constantine, Ghardaïa, Sétif and Tlemcen.

Algeria's postindependence government bestowed Algerian independence only upon Muslims and the overwhelming majority of the 150,000 Jewish Algerians fled to France. Following the Armed Islamic Group's declaration of war on all non-Muslims in Algeria in 1994, all but a handful of the last remaining Jews left the country and the final functioning synagogue in Algiers closed down. Many fled to Israel where they were granted instant citizenship. It is believed that fewer than 100 Jews remain in Algeria, with most of these living in Algiers.

SPORT

When Lakhdar Belloumi fired home Algeria's second goal to defeat West Germany in the first game of the 1982 World Cup, hopes were high that Algerian football (soccer) was entering a golden age and that Algeria was on the verge of becoming a major footballing power. Those hopes continued as Algeria again qualified for the World Cup finals in 1986 and

The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria 1937-62, by Joelle Bahloul, is an intimate portrait of the last days of the Algerian Jewish community who had lived in Algeria for millennia.

went on to win the African Nations' Cup in 1990. The promise was never realised and Algerian football has been in decline ever since, a state of affairs made all the more sad by the fact that football is wildly popular in Algeria and it is difficult to overestimate the passions which the sport inspires here. In a sign of how far the Algerian national team (known as the Desert Foxes) has fallen, in 10 qualifying matches for the 2006 World Cup, Algeria won just one game and finished behind Angola, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Gabon. As a result, Algerian football fans are largely restricted to cheering for Algerian footballers plying their trade in Europe – Madjid Bougherra, Ali Benarbia and Brahim Hemdani are among the better-known – or staking a claim for three-time World Footballer of the Year Zinedine Zidane who in return is quite publicly proud of his Kabylie Algerian roots.

Another important sport among Algerians is athletics. The Algerian national team came third at the 1999 African Games. Algeria's plans to host the 2007 African Games were thrown into disarray when Algeria was suspended from international track and field competitions due to government interference in the sport.

Other popular sports include volleyball, handball, boxing and martial arts, including a Maghrebi martial art known as El-Matreg in which two players fight using long sticks. In southern desert regions, horse and camel racing are popular, especially among the Tuareg during local festivals.

MEDIA

Radio and TV stations are government-owned and content is strictly controlled, which is the major reason why most Algerians tune into satellite TV stations from France and across the Arab world. When it comes to newspapers, many are privately owned and do – somewhat bravely, it must be said – criticise the government on a regular basis. That said, it is a criminal offence punishable by prison sentence to 'insult' or 'defame' the president, members of parliament, judges or the army; Algerian newspapers mark the passage of this law with an annual 'day without newspapers'. The government has proved itself more than willing to abuse this law and in 2005 alone, 114 journalists were prosecuted under the law, of whom 111 were fined or sent to prison. Newspapers that openly campaigned against the re-election of President Bouteflika are particularly targeted.

Internet censorship is less prevalent, although the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders speculates that this may be more to do with government ignorance than any new spirit of openness.

Algerian journalists not only have to run the gauntlet of government paranoia, but have also been targeted by Algeria's militant Islamist opposition. Between 1993 and 1997, 57 journalists were killed, with most murders blamed on armed Islamist groups. Although the situation has improved, journalism is still a perilous occupation in Algeria.

RELIGION

Sunni Islam is the official state religion in Algeria, adhered to by an estimated 99% of the population and one of the few things which unites Algeria's often fractious population. There are also Christian communities that are more historically than numerically significant.

Islam

THE BIRTH OF ISLAM

Abdul Qasim Mohammed ibn Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim (the Prophet Mohammed) was born in AD 570 in Mecca in what is now

Saudi Arabia. Mohammed's family belonged to the Quraysh tribe, a trading family with links to Syria and Yemen. By the age of six, Mohammed's parents had both died and he came into the care of his grandfather, the custodian of the Kaaba in Mecca. When he was around 25 years old, Mohammed married Khadija, a widow and a merchant and he worked in running her business.

At the age of 40, in 610, Mohammed retreated into the desert and began to receive divine revelations from Allah via the voice of the Archangel Gabriel – the revelations would continue for the rest of Mohammed's life. Three years later, Mohammed began imparting Allah's message to the Meccans. Mohammed soon gathered a significant following in his campaign against Meccan idolaters and his movement appealed especially to the poorer, disenfranchised sections of society.

Islam provided a simpler alternative to the established faiths which had become complicated by hierarchical orders, sects and complex rituals, offering instead a direct relationship with God based only on the believer's submission to God ('Islam' means submission).

Among Mecca's ruling families, however, there was a dawning recognition of the new faith's potential to sweep aside the old order. By 622, these families had forced Mohammed and his followers to flee north to the oasis town of Medina. There, Mohammed's supporters rapidly grew in number. In 630, Mohammed returned triumphantly to Mecca at the head of a 10,000-strong army to seize control of the city. Many of the surrounding tribes quickly swore allegiance to him and the new faith.

When Mohammed died in 632, the Arab tribes spread with missionary zeal, quickly conquering all of what is now the Middle East. By 670, the armies of Islam had arrived in Algeria and they had established themselves in Andalusia by 710, an astonishing achievement given the religion's humble desert roots.

THE QURAN

For Muslims, the Quran is the word of God, directly communicated to the Prophet Mohammed; unlike the Torah and Bible, which are the interpretative work of many individuals, the Quran is believed by Muslims to be the direct word of Allah. It contains 114 suras (chapters) which govern all aspects of a Muslim's life, from their relationship with God to minute details about daily living (p47).

In addition to drawing on moral ideas prevalent in 7th century Arabia, some of the Quran's laws closely resemble those of the other monotheistic faiths, particularly the doctrinal elements of Judaism and the piety of early eastern Christianity. The suras contain many references to the earlier prophets – Adam, Abraham (Ibrahim), Noah, Moses (Moussa) and Jesus (although Muslims strictly deny his divinity) are all recognised as prophets in a line that ends definitively with the greatest of them all, the Prophet Mohammed; 21 of the 28 prophets are mentioned in the Bible.

It is not known whether the revelations were written down during Mohammed's lifetime. The third caliph, Uthman (644–656), gathered together everything written by the scribes and gave them to a panel of editors under the caliph's aegis. A Quran printed today is identical to that agreed upon by Uthman's compilers 14 centuries ago.

Another important aspect of the Quran is the language in which it is written. Some Muslims believe that the Quran must be studied in its original classical Arabic form ('an Arabic Quran, wherein there is no crookedness', sura 39:25) and that translations dilute the holiness of its sacred texts. For Muslims, the language of the Quran is known as *sihr*

In 1992 Hassiba Boulmerka won Algeria's first-ever Olympic Gold Medal in the women's 1500m running. Boulmerka's feat was emulated four years later by Nouredine Morcelli, who won gold in the men's 1500m.

According to Reporters Without Borders (www.rsf.org), Algeria ranks 126th out of 167 countries in a ranking of world press freedom.

Muslims attribute a place of great respect to Christians and Jews as *ahl al-kitab*, the People of the Book (sura 2: 100–115). However, Muslims believe the Quran is the final expression of Allah's will and the definitive guide to his intentions for humankind.

halal (lawful magic). Apart from its religious significance, the Quran, lyrical and poetic, is also considered one of the finest literary masterpieces in history.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

To live a devout life and as an expression of submission to Allah, a Muslim is expected to adhere to the Five Pillars of Islam.

Profession of Faith (Shahada)

This is the basic tenet of Islam: 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet' (*La illaha illa Allah Mohammed rasul Allah*). It is commonly heard as part of the call to prayer and at other events such as births and deaths.

Prayer (Sala)

Ideally, devout Muslims will pray five times a day when the muezzins call upon the faithful, usually at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. Although Muslims can pray anywhere (only the noon prayer on Friday should be conducted in the mosque), a strong sense of community makes joining together in a mosque preferable to praying elsewhere.

Alms-Giving (Zakat)

Alms-giving to the poor was, from the start, an essential part of Islamic social teaching and was later developed in some parts of the Muslim world into various forms of tax to redistribute funds to the needy. The moral obligation towards one's poorer neighbours continues to be emphasised at a personal level, and it is not unusual to find exhortations to give alms posted up outside some mosques. Traditionally Muslims are expected to give a 40th of their annual income as alms to the poor.

Fasting (Sawm)

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, commemorates the revelation of the Quran to Mohammed. In a demonstration of a renewal of faith, Muslims are asked to abstain from sex and from letting anything pass their lips from sunrise to sunset every day of the month. This includes smoking. For the dates when Ramadan commences over the coming years, see the boxed text, p202.

Pilgrimage (Haj)

The pinnacle of a devout Muslim's life is the pilgrimage to the holy sites in and around Mecca. Every Muslim capable of affording it should perform the Haj to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The reward is considerable – the forgiving of all past sins. Ideally, the pilgrim should go to Mecca in the last month of the lunar year, and the returned pilgrim can be addressed as Haji, a term of great respect. In villages at least, it is not uncommon to see the word 'Al-Haj' and simple scenes painted on the walls of houses, showing that their inhabitants have made the pilgrimage.

THE MOSQUE

Embodying the Islamic faith, and representing its most predominant architectural feature, is the mosque, or *masjed* or *jama'a*. The building was developed in the very early days of Islam and takes its form from the simple, private houses where believers would customarily gather for worship.

The house belonging to the Prophet Mohammed is said to have provided the prototype for the plan of the mosque. The original setting was an enclosed, oblong courtyard with huts (housing Mohammed's wives) along one wall and a rough portico providing shade. This plan developed with the courtyard becoming the *sahn*, the portico the arcaded *riwaqs* and the haram the prayer hall. The prayer hall is typically divided into a series of aisles; the centre aisle is wider than the rest and leads to a vaulted niche in the wall called the *mihrab* – this indicates the direction of Mecca, which Muslims must face when they pray.

Islam does not have priests as such. The closest equivalent is the mosque's imam, a man schooled in Islam and Islamic law. He often doubles as the muezzin, who calls the faithful to prayer from the tower of the minaret – except these days recorded cassettes and loudspeakers do away with the need for him to climb up there. At the main Friday noon prayers, the imam gives a *khutba* (sermon) from the minbar, a wooden pulpit that stands beside the *mihrab*. In older, grander mosques, these minbars are often beautifully decorated.

Before entering the prayer hall and participating in communal worship, a Muslim must perform a ritual washing of the hands, forearms, face and neck. For this purpose, mosques have traditionally had a large ablutions fountain at the centre of the courtyard, often carved from marble and worn by centuries of use. These days, modern mosques have rows of taps.

The mosque also serves as a kind of community centre, and often you'll find groups of children or adults receiving lessons (usually in the Quran), people in quiet prayer and others simply dozing – mosques provide wonderfully tranquil havens from the chaos of the street.

Most Algerian mosques are officially off limits to non-Muslims, although permission can often be obtained from the imam between morning and noon prayers. You must dress modestly.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar
Ashhadu an la Ilah ila Allah
Ashhadu an Mohammed rasul Allah
Haya ala as-sala
Haya ala as-sala

The soundtrack to your visit to Algeria will be this haunting invocation, a ritual whose essential meaning and power remain largely unchanged in 14 centuries.

Five times a day, Muslims are called, if not actually to enter a mosque to pray, at least to take the time to do so where they are. The noon prayers on Friday, when the imam of the mosque delivers his weekly *khutba*, are considered the most important. For Muslims, prayer is less a petition to Allah (in the Christian sense) than a re-affirmation of Allah's power and a reassertion of the brotherhood and equality of all believers.

The act of praying consists of a series of predefined ablutions and then movements of the body and recitals of prayers and passages of the Quran, all designed to express the believer's absolute humility and Allah's sovereignty.

ISLAMIC CUSTOMS

In everyday life, Muslims are prohibited from drinking alcohol (sura 5:90–95) and eating carrion, blood products or pork which are considered unclean (sura 2:165), the meat of animals not killed in the prescribed

Covering Islam (1981), by Edward Said, is a searing study of how stereotypes have shaped our view of Islam, Muslims and the Middle East. Although the examples used are dated, the book remains as relevant today as when it was written.

Islam: A Short History (2006), by Karen Armstrong, is an accessible and sympathetic record of the world's fastest-growing religion without the sensationalism.

manner (sura 5:1–5) and food over which has not been said the name of Allah (sura 6:115). Adultery (sura 18:30–35), theft (sura 5:40–45) and gambling (sura 5:90–95) are also prohibited.

Islam is not just about prohibitions but also marks the important events of a Muslim's life. When a baby is born, the first words uttered to it are the call to prayer. A week later follows a ceremony in which the baby's head is shaved and an animal is sacrificed in remembrance of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to Allah. The major event of a boy's childhood is circumcision, which normally takes place between the ages of seven and 12. When a person dies, a burial service is held at the mosque and the body is buried with the feet facing Mecca.

ISLAM IN ALGERIA

Although Islam arrived in northern Algeria in AD 670, it was not until 711 that the north of the country yielded to the new faith. The initial conquests, which included the taking of Algeria, were carried out under the caliphs, or Companions of Mohammed, of whom there were four. They in turn were followed by the Umayyad dynasty (AD 661–750) with its capital in Damascus and then the Abbasid line (AD 749–1258) in Baghdad (in modern Iraq). Given that these centres of Islamic power were so geographically removed from Algeria, the religion of Islam may have taken a hold, but the political and administrative control which accompanied Islamic rule elsewhere was much more tenuous in Algeria.

THE IBADIS OF ALGERIA

Algeria may be almost universally Sunni in outlook, but the M'Zab, close to Ghardaïa, is famous for being home to a small community of Ibadi Muslims.

The Ibadis are an offshoot of the Kharijite sect, whose name literally means 'seceders' or 'those who emerge from impropriety'. The Kharijites' origins lie in the bitter struggle for leadership over the Muslim community in the wake of the Prophet Mohammed's death. Kharijites, who recognise only the first two Muslim caliphs as legitimate and believe in the absolute equality of all Muslims regardless of race, became renowned for their fierce and uncompromising belief in the primacy of the Quran rather than in loyalty to corrupt, supposedly Muslim authorities. As such, Kharijism has always been an ideology of rebellion.

Not surprisingly, the egalitarian Kharijite theology appealed almost instantly to the Berbers of Algeria. In particular, the doctrine that any Muslim could become caliph, which questioned the Arab monopoly over Muslim legitimacy, was of great appeal. Thus it was that the Kharijite missionaries who actively courted the Berbers in Islam's early days in Algeria enjoyed great success.

One of the leading strands of Kharijite thought was developed by one Abdullah ibn Ibad. This founder of the Ibadis espoused many Kharijite teachings, such as anti-authoritarianism and the strictest adherence to the Quran, but also developed a more tolerant outlook than his somewhat fanatical Kharijite predecessors, especially in his dealings with other Muslims. Ibadism quickly became a major power in Algerian life. From AD 778 until 909, much of Algeria was ruled by the Ibadi imams known as the Rustamids. The Rustamids presided over a period of stability, encouraged scholarship and the arts, and were notable for their piety and lack of corruption.

After the Rustamids were swept away by the Shiite Fatimids, Ibadi refugees retreated to the five oases of the M'Zab in the 11th century, where they have remained until this day. They are now frequently known as the Mozabites; for more information on this community, see the boxed text, p160. Many Algerian Ibadis or Mozabites now reject the use of the term Kharijite to describe their community.

Ibadism is now extremely rare in the Middle East. Apart from the M'Zab oases, other small Ibadi communities are found only in Jerba (Tunisia), the Jebel Nafusa (northwestern Libya), Oman and Zanzibar.

Islam took longer to spread to the far south of Algeria, whose history is to a large extent separate: only in the 15th century were the Tuareg finally converted to Islam.

The leading strands of Islamic thought brought transformations to Algerian life, many of which survive to this day. The orthodox Sunnis divided into four schools (*madhab*) of Islamic law, each lending more or less importance to various aspects of religious doctrine. In Algeria, as elsewhere in the Maghreb, the Maliki rite of Sunni Islam came to predominate and still does. Founded by Malik ibn As, an Islamic judge who lived in Medina from AD 715 to 795, it is based on the practice which prevailed in Medina in the 8th century. The generally tolerant Maliki school of Islamic thought preaches the primacy of the Quran (as opposed to later teachings).

The holy fasting month of Ramadan (see p46) is taken extremely seriously in Algeria and is universally and very publicly observed. For details on the implications of travelling in Algeria during Ramadan, see p14.

In addition to mainstream Sunni practice, there are also small communities of Ibadis (see the boxed text, opposite) in the M'Zab region. As with elsewhere in North Africa, there have been significant communities of Sufis in the country for much of Algeria's history; the many Algerian town names beginning with 'Sidi' testify to this fact. Current figures regarding Sufi adherence are not known, although its influence waned in the wake of the Islamic scholar Abdelhamid ben Badis who preached against traditional marabouts, established a network of Sunni schools and demanded a return to orthodoxy in the early 20th century.

Islam also provided a rallying cry for opposition to a succession of governments in the second half of the 20th century. During the Algerian War of Independence, nationalist fighters called themselves *mujahedin* (warriors of jihad), Algerian dead were routinely referred to as *chouhada* (martyrs) and a return to Islamic principles was central to the independence movement's platforms.

Mindful of the mobilising power of Islam in Algeria, successive post-independence governments sought to monopolise public Islam and keep the Islamic establishment firmly within its control by appointing imams and keeping a close eye on all mosques. Such policies proved useless in holding back the march of militant Islam and when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the first round of the 1991 elections, the resulting tension spilled over into outright war; see p35 for more information.

Although the war has largely ended, Islam remains at the centre of public life and has come to be the fault line at the heart of Algerian society – between adherents of militant Islam and predominantly middle-class, moderate Muslims. In elections in 2002, legal Islamist parties won 20% of the vote.

Christianity

Although exact figures can be difficult to come by, it is estimated that there are fewer than 5000 Christians in Algeria, most of whom are Europeans or nationals of other Western countries. The Algerian constitution forbids discrimination based on religious belief, although a 2006 law makes proselytising for Christianity a criminal offence punishable by a one- to three-year jail term and prohibits non-Muslim worship outside of state-approved churches.

The fact that Algeria now has a tiny Christian community belies the fact that two towering figures in Christian church history spent much of their lives in what is now Algeria.

'The holy fasting month of Ramadan is taken extremely seriously in Algeria'

THE WHITE FATHERS

One of the most enduring Christian presences in Algeria is the missionary society which is popularly known as the Pères Blancs (White Fathers). Founded by Cardinal Lavigerie, the Bishop of Algiers, as the Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa in 1868, the society for teaching Arab orphans quickly evolved into a society with grand plans for the conversion of Africa. In 1876, and again in 1881, two caravans of missionaries set out from southern Algeria but they were massacred en route to Sudan. An 1878 caravan proved more successful and laid the groundwork for missions in 42 African countries.

One year after founding the White Fathers, Cardinal Lavigerie founded a sister group for nuns, known as the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa.

The White Fathers, who still have their headquarters in Algeria, are unusual in that the rules of their mission require that members live in community homes of no fewer than three people, speak the language of the local people among whom they live, eat local food and wear local dress. Therein lies the reason behind the group's unusual name: their dress closely resembles the robes of Algerian Arabs, with a cassock and a burnous.

The first mission by the White Fathers was established among the Berbers of Jurjura, and missions throughout the Sahara later became their trademark. Visitors are welcome to visit the White Fathers hermitage and library in Ghardaïa (p158).

St Augustine served as the Bishop of Hippo Regius (now Annaba) from AD 393 to 430 and it was during this period that he developed the theology that would become so influential in the teachings of the early church. He was also one of the first Christian theologians to espouse the idea of 'just war'. For more information on the saint's life, see the boxed text, p113.

One of the most singular figures of 20th-century Christianity was Charles de Foucauld (see the boxed text, p189), who retreated into the Sahara where he worked among the Tuareg and lived an ascetic life as a Trappist monk. His simple stone hermitage at Assekrem (p188), whose name means 'the End of the World', is still home to a small number of monks from his order and can be visited.

WOMEN IN ALGERIA

Despite having played a leading role in Algeria's struggle for independence, life since then has been difficult for Algerian women.

In official terms, the situation is reasonable by regional standards. The Algerian constitution guarantees gender equality and Algeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw) in 1996, albeit with reservations. Later legislative provisions, particularly in relation to work, extended the principle of equality into the labour market.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that violence against women is rife and women have been targeted by Islamist militants since the early 1990s. A strong tradition of female activism meant that the Algiers of a few years ago is recalled as a place where dress codes were relatively relaxed. What to wear has, however, become a much tougher decision since Islamic militants in the early 1990s shot dead a schoolgirl in the street for not wearing a veil – and two veiled students were killed in retaliation as they waited for a school bus. 'You'll die if you don't wear the veil. You'll die if you do wear the veil, too. So shut up and die', wrote poet Tahar Djaout before he himself was killed in 1993. The cycle of violence may have abated, but Algeria's public face is now extremely conservative and the majority of women wear veils,

Women make up 27% of civil servants and almost 60% of secondary school teachers, and a record number of women candidates contested the 2002 elections.

even in once liberal Algiers. These vary from the lacy, white handkerchief-type ones worn in the north, which cover just the lower half of the face, to the robes worn by the women of the M'Zab (the area around Ghardaïa), which are held together in such a way that only one eye is visible.

Apart from violence, it was the 1984 Family Code that set back the cause of women's rights by decades. Effectively reducing women to the status of minors, the law has not been amended in the decades since. President Bouteflika ordered a review of the law in 2003, but like so many presidential promises of gender equality, the results have been a severe disappointment for Algerian women. Despite assuring Algerian women in 2004 that the government was ready to help them break free from the social constraints of a patriarchal society and enjoy their full constitutional rights, the president has let the review disappear without a trace after conservative critics of the government opposed it.

In January 2007, the UN sent its Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on violence against women on a fact-finding mission to Algeria. The Special Rapporteur's report is not expected to bring back much positive news.

ARTS Architecture

From the claustrophobic clamour of Algiers' Unesco World Heritage-listed Casbah to the red and white earth tones of the Saharan oases, Algerian architecture is a highlight of any visit to Algeria. Particularly in the north of the country, much of what you'll see is a fusion of styles – Roman, Byzantine, Spanish, Ottoman, French and indigenous Islamic to name a few.

Examples of this often incongruous but always eye-catching combination, the Souk el-Ghazal Mosque (p119) and Grand Mosque (p119) in Constantine date from the 18th and 14th centuries respectively and include Roman-era granite columns and Corinthian capitals as essential elements of their structures.

OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE

The rise of Christian Spain in the late 15th century brought to bear two important influences on the Algerian architectural landscape. The first was the arrival of Muslim refugees from Andalusia who brought with them new ideas regarding architecture. The second was less direct: in a bid to counter growing Spanish influence, rulers in the Maghreb turned

ALGERIAN ARCHITECTURE – THE HIGHLIGHTS

- Roman – Tipaza (p104); Hippo Regius (p113); Timgad (p126); and Djemila (p132)
- Byzantine – Djemaa Ali Bitchine (p93) and Notre Dame d'Afrique (p95) in Algiers
- Early Islamic – Mosque and Tomb of Sidi Boumediene (p149) and Grand Mosque (p148) in Tlemcen
- Spanish – Bey's Palace (p142) and Fort of Santa Cruz (p142) in Oran
- Ottoman – Dar Khedaoudl el-Amia (p94), Dar Hassan Pacha (p94) and the Palais des Rais Bastion 23 (p95) in Algiers; Palace of Ahmed Bey (p119) in Constantine
- French – Place du 1 Novembre (p141) in Oran
- Saharan – Ghardaïa (p156); Beni Abbès (p166); Timimoun (p169); El-Oued (p172); In Salah (p181); Djanet (p191)
- Modern – Sidi M'Cid Bridge (p119) in Constantine and Makam Echahid (p96) in Algiers

east towards the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and Algiers in particular benefited from this shift in focus. Ottoman architecture remained the dominant force until the arrival of the French in the 19th century.

The first building erected by the Ottomans was the Djemaa el-Djedid (p93) in 1660. Its Ottoman-style dome is still the most recognisable Ottoman landmark in Algeria, although the Andalusian influence evident in the minaret is typical of the time when a Moorish style still held sway. Much of the Islamic architecture in northern Algeria would later be destroyed or, more often, converted by the French to serve a Christian purpose. Although these buildings were returned to their original functions after independence, many now bear traces of colonial meddling. The Djemaa Ketchoua (p94), also in Algiers, was used as a cathedral by the French, although, thankfully, they made few alterations. The Djemaa Safir was one of the last Ottoman-built mosques in the capital.

The Ottomans left largely unscathed the overhanging buildings, wooden bay windows and delicate stucco work of the Casbah, primarily because they settled largely in the lower part of the city. Elsewhere most Ottoman palaces and townhouses featured an L-shaped entrance which led into an interior marble-paved courtyard surrounded by porticoes, horse-shoe arches and mosaic tiles on four sides. The Dar Hassan Pacha (p94), also in Algiers, is a particularly fine example.

SAHARAN ARCHITECTURE

Although new towns have grown up alongside them, the huddled dwellings of the oasis towns of the Sahara still use ancient building methods – sun-baked mud, straw and palm products, flat roofs – that are well suited to the harsh demands of desert life. In smaller settlements, many traditional flat-roofed Saharan houses have been neglected to the point of dereliction as a result of the relocation of their residents to modern housing elsewhere. Many such houses are vulnerable to rare but devastating downpours.

TRANSFORMING ALGIERS

Algiers long ago expanded seemingly beyond the capacity of its traditional architecture to cope. The Casbah, for example, is believed to have lost more than a thousand homes since independence because its cramped conditions can no longer meet the growing needs of the population. This is a major reason why Unesco inscribed the Casbah on its World Heritage list of endangered sites in 1992.

But there is also something about Algiers that captures the imagination – its clamour, its Mediterranean fusion of French refinement with Arab-Islamic aesthetics – and it has drawn some of France's most eminent architects. Le Corbusier spent much of the 1930s developing 12 ambitious projects for the rejuvenation of Algiers, only to discover that this is a difficult city to tame – not one of the 12 came to fruition.

More successful was Fernand Pouillon, whose sympathetic incorporation of traditional architectural styles in urban Algiers won him plaudits in France and Algeria alike. His reconstruction of the entire neighbourhood of Diar Essada in the mid-1950s was followed by similar success in the neighbourhoods of Diar Mahçoul and Climat de France. Pouillon later renovated one of the churches he built in Diar Essada as part of its postindependence conversion back into a mosque. Although commissioned by the French, Diar Essada became a postindependence icon for confidence in doing things the Algerian way to such an extent that it appeared on one of independent Algeria's first banknotes. Elsewhere, Pouillon was also extremely active in seeking to build tourist resorts along the Algerian coast that were both environmentally sustainable and incorporated into the local landscape. The Hôtel Gourara in Timimoun is another Pouillon creation.

Islam: Art & Architecture, by Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius, is comprehensive and beautifully illustrated and contains numerous references to the architecture of Algeria and its historical context.

Cinema

From *Chronicle of the Year of Embers* (directed by Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina), which won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975, to Rachid Bouchareb's Oscar-nominated *Days of Glory* in 2007, Algerian film has been charming international critics for decades. That doesn't necessarily translate into regional audience numbers to match Egypt's blockbuster industry. Nor does it convert into the government funding the industry deserves – like so many film industries the world over, Algeria's is facing a shortage of funds that is crippling the creative works of its directors. But if quality is the touchstone, the Algerian film industry is in rude health.

The first sign that Algerian film would become one of the most inventive in the world came in 1965 with *The Battle of Algiers*. Written and directed by the Italian Gillo Pontecorvo, this relentlessly compelling representation of urban guerrilla warfare on the streets of Algiers nonetheless owed much to Algerian creativity and suggested that Algerians had a natural affinity with the silver screen. The film, which remains a cult hit, was funded by the Algerian government and almost all of the actors were ordinary Algerians.

Algerian directors would quickly show that they, too, were capable of tackling the big themes and doing so with panache. Not surprisingly, given its impact on Algerian society, the 1954–62 Algerian War of Independence would become a recurring muse for Algerian directors. This cluster of war films served as a platform for later directors to tackle the serious issues of Algerian society and exile with an unflinching gaze – one of the defining characteristics of Algerian film. It can make for harrowing viewing but it's the sort of cinema that has the power to change the way you think about the world.

A case in point was Mohamed Rachid Benhadj's *Desert Rose* (1989), which has an almost claustrophobic intensity and which some critics see as a coming-of-age for Algerian cinema. The film recounts the story of a seriously handicapped man in a remote oasis village. Benhadj has described Mousa, the main character, as 'a symbol of Algeria, of the Third World in general, formed by rigid beliefs and intolerance, but now having to redefine itself as all the alibis on which its place in the world depended begin to fall away.'

Another fine example is the critically acclaimed *Rachida* (2002) by Yamina Bachir-Chouikh, in which a young teacher is shot by terrorists after she refuses to plant a bomb in a school. *Rachida* also represented the directing debut for this highly talented female director, who had written the screenplay for the 1976 classic *Omar Gatlato* by Merzak Allouache (see the boxed text, p54).

Similarly, the French-born Algerian director Bourlem Guerdjou won awards for *Living in Paradise* (1997) which looks at the dislocated lives of Algerian exiles living in France. His 2005 offering, *Zaina: Rider of the Atlas*, is also outstanding.

The Palestinian tragedy has also proved to be the perfect subject matter for Algerian directors, most notably in *Nakhla* (1979) by Farouk Beloufa. Few Algerian movies have been as warmly praised by critics and so fiercely targeted by government censors.

The already mentioned Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina has had one of the most distinguished careers, gaining no fewer than four nominations (one successful) for the Palme d'Or at Cannes. His filmography began with *The Winds of the Aures* (1966) and drew to an equally impressive close with *La Dernière Image* (1986).

La Guerre sans Nom (The War Without a Name), by director Bertrand Tavernier, is a documentary which consists entirely of meaningful interviews with French veterans of Algeria's War of Independence.

Arab Film Distribution (www.arabfilm.com) has a good list of Algerian films with plot synopses and details of how to buy them on DVD.

MERZAK ALLOUACHE

Amid Algeria's star-studded film industry, there is one director who stands out above all the rest: Merzak Allouache.

Born in Algiers in 1944, the award-winning Merzak Allouache witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by Algeria's War of Independence before studying film-making at the renowned Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (Idhec) in Paris. Known for his searing realism and the use of Algerian street dialect, he made the first of 16 feature films, *Omar Gatlatto*, which marked him out as a special talent. That film is widely seen as having definitively proved – both to critics and an Algerian audience – that Algerian cinema could combine both serious issues and popular appeal. Allouache chose to shoot the movie in the Bab el-Oued district of Algiers, a location to which he returned for *Bab el-Oued City* (1994), which won the International Critics' Prize at Cannes. The highlights of his glittering career include the following films:

Omar Gatlatto (1976) The aimless lives of young Algiers men are the subject of Allouache's first feature and the empty bravado, dislocation and hollow dreams of North African youth have never been better depicted.

Following October (L'Après-Octobre; 1989) One of his rare forays into the world of documentary film-making to recount the riots in the suburbs of Paris in 1988.

Bab el-Oued City (1994) The creeping violence and fear gripping Algeria in 1993 as Allouache was filming infuse every moment of this landmark film about two conflicted, flawed, utterly human young fundamentalists.

Hey Cousin (Salut Cousin; 1996) The in-between-cultures angst of the children of Algerian immigrants in France is interspersed with rare flashes of humour in one of Allouache's best films of the 1990s.

The Other World (L'Autre Monde; 2001) Algerians in exile and the worrying but irresistible call of the homeland provide the most enlightening and heart-rending moments of the Algerian civil war yet captured on film.

One of the most impressive recent debuts came with Djamilia Sahraoui's 2006 debut *Barakat!*. This excellent film follows the travails of an emergency doctor who returns home in 1991 to find that her husband has disappeared and has most likely been kidnapped by Islamist rebels. She is accompanied on her search by an older nurse who is a veteran of the independence struggle and the story becomes an intergenerational exploration of modern Algeria. It is outstanding.

Tony Gatlif, who was born as Michel Dahmani in Algiers in 1948, is one of France's most respected directors. His *La Terre au Ventre* (1979) is a story of the Algerian War of Independence, while *Exils* (2004), about Algerian exiles on their journey home, won a Best Director award at Cannes.

Jewellery

Although largely functional in purpose, Tuareg silver jewellery has evolved into an art form in its own right which is highly sought after by Western collectors.

The most unusual item is the *croix d'Agadez* (a stylised Tuareg cross of silver with intricate filigree designs) named after Agadez in Niger. Every town and region with a significant Tuareg population has its own unique version of the cross and by some estimates there are 36 different versions. Although European explorers saw the design as evidence of prior Christianity, traditional Tuareg see them as powerful talismans designed to protect against ill fortune and the evil eye. Some also serve as fertility symbols. The crosses are still used by Tuareg men as currency (eg for buying camels), although these days this is rare in Algeria. At other times, the crosses are worn by their wives as a sign of wealth.

Other silver items include: a wide range of silver necklaces (those containing amber are generally from across the border in Niger); striking, square, silver amulets that are worn around the neck by elders as a symbol

'Tuareg silver jewellery is highly sought after'

of status (some are also used in weddings by women); and ornamental silver daggers with leather hilts.

Almost as interesting as the silverwork are the 'artists' who create it. Tuareg blacksmiths (Inaden) have always occupied a special place within Tuareg society, perhaps because of their dark communion with fire, iron and precious metals. At one level, the Inaden were traditionally looked down upon by noble Tuareg because the blacksmiths are darker-skinned than other Tuareg and they lived on the margins of Tuareg villages and encampments. At the same time, the Inaden were purveyors of traditional medicines, custodians of oral traditions and go-betweens in marriage negotiations. As such, they are essential figures in most Tuareg ceremonies. Shunning a blacksmith is considered taboo in Tuareg society.

Literature

Algerian writers first made a name for themselves during the French colonial period when many found a market in France for their novels. Foremost among them was Tlemcen-born Mohammed Dib (1920–2003), who wrote more than 30 novels, plus works of poetry, short stories and children's books. Although writing in the language of the occupiers, Dib and his contemporaries reclaimed the language as their own. Awarded the Grand Prix de la Francophonie de l'Académie Française in 1994, Dib is seen by many as the father of modern Algerian literature. Sadly, few of his works have been translated into English, but *The Savage Night*, a 13-storey compendium, is an excellent window on Dib's world.

Kateb Yacine (1929–89) was a contemporary of Dib and was also considered one of North Africa's finest writers of the 20th century. His landmark novel *Nedjma* interweaves family history with the Algerian War of Independence and is considered one of the most important French-language novels ever written in the Maghreb. Jean Amrouche (1907–62) was another important pioneer of Algerian writing in French.

It is also impossible to talk of Algerian literature of the period without paying homage to Albert Camus (1913–60), a *pied-noir* (see p42) who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 and is considered one of the towering figures of French literature and existentialist thought.

Frantz Fanon (1925–61) was born in Martinique but will be forever associated with Algeria for his work *The Wretched of the Earth*, which was based on his experiences during the Algerian War of Independence and is considered an important revolutionary book.

After independence, Algerian writers found themselves confronted with the highly political question of which language to write in. French ensured a wider audience but was tarnished with a colonial brush. Arabic was politically correct, but limited the author to a small, local book-buying market. Tamazigh was itself a fraught choice for both political and economic reasons.

The highly regarded Rachid Boudjedra (b 1941) chooses to write in Arabic and produce his own translations into French. Mohamed Khaireddine chooses to write in French as an act of cultural resistance because Tamazigh is forbidden. Other writers from the Kabylie region and for whom Berber identity plays a critical role include Marguerite Taos Amrouche (1913–76) and Mouloud Mammeri (1917–89). Across the cultural divide, Tahir Wattar chooses to write in Arabic, although his work *The Earthquake* is widely available in English.

The perils faced by Algerian writers are by no means restricted to language. In 1993, Tahar Djaout (*The Watchers* and *The Last Summer of Reason*), a proudly secular novelist from the Kabylie region, was assassinated.

Art of Being Tuareg – Sahara Nomads in a Modern World (2006) is a stunning pictorial study of Tuareg life with informative essays on Tuareg culture, including poetry, music and the role of women.

TOP FIVE CONTEMPORARY ALGERIAN NOVELS

- *So Vast the Prison* by Assia Djebar
- *The Star of Algiers* by Aziz Chouaki
- *The Lovers of Algeria* by Anouar Benmalek
- *Sherazade* by Leila Sebbar
- *The Last Summer of Reason* by Tahar Djaout

One of the assassins later told police that Djaout was targeted because 'he wrote too well, he had an intelligent pen, and he was able to touch people; because of this he was a danger to the fundamentalist ideology'.

Women are among the leading crop of current Algerian writers whose works have been translated and are widely available in English. Assia Djebar is the most widely known and her novels (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison*) and nonfiction (*Algerian White and Women of Algiers in their Apartment*) explore the role of women in Algerian society through beautifully told stories. Another leading light is Leila Sebbar who moved to France aged 17 and whose novels (*Sherazade* and *Silence on the Shores*) centre around the lives of Algerian women living in France.

Other important contemporary Algerian novelists include Anouar Benmalek (*The Lovers of Algeria*), Aziz Chouaki (*The Star of Algiers*) and the prolific Yasmina Khadra (the pen name of Mohammed Moulessehoul) who made his name with *The Swallows of Kabul* but whose *Autumn of the Phantoms* deals with more Algerian themes.

Music

For a full run-down on the enduring Algerian music sensation that is rai, see the boxed text, opposite.

KABYLIE MUSIC

Although not as well known beyond Algeria's shores, the music of the Berber (Amazigh) people of the Kabylie region of northeastern Algeria is a mainstay of the local music scene. With its roots in the music and poetry of the Kabylie villages and in the exile and disaffection felt by many Amazigh in post-independence Algeria, Kabylie music has always provided something of a barometer for the health of Algerian society.

Kabylie singers from the colonial era such as Slimane Azem (1918–83) were, like many Kabylie, strong supporters of the push for Algerian independence. Azem's song 'Locusts, Leave My Country' became a de facto anthem for a generation of Algerians, both at home and in France. Western icons of the 1960s such as Bob Dylan later influenced liberal-minded Kabylie musicians who longed for their own counterculture revolution in Algeria. The Kabylie uprising of the early 1980s heard voices such as Djamel Allam's (b 1947) and Matoub Lounès' (1956–98) emerge as the soundtrack for a new generation of rebels; Lounès was to pay for his passionate advocacy for secularism and Amazigh rights in Algeria when he was assassinated soon after he returned home from France in 1998.

Female singers with Kabylie roots have also taken the world by storm, most notably Paris-based Souad Massi (b 1972) whose debut *Raoui* (Storyteller) was an instant hit in 2001. Her follow-up *Deb - Heart Broken* (2003) was, if anything, even better. Iness Mèzel is another important female Kabylie singer, while male Kabylie singers to watch out for are Akli D, Cheikh Sidi Bemol (www.louzine.net), Ait Menguellet and Takfarinas.

Azawan.com (www.azawan.com) is an extremely comprehensive website dedicated to showcasing the talents of Kabylie musicians.

RAI MUSIC Jane Cornwell

Want to know what Algerians on the street are thinking? Check out the country's most popular music genre: rai. Meaning 'state an opinion', rai – rhymes with eye – is ubiquitous in Algeria. Danceable, infectious and buoyed by synthesisers and drum machines, it pulses through windows, from car stereos, around markets and beyond. Lyrics in Arabic and French tell of the pain and joy of daily life, of betrayal and exile, lust and love. It's hardly surprising, then, that rai turns conservative Islamic groups apoplectic. Cassettes have been confiscated at road blocks, performers threatened and worse. But for Algeria's MTV-watching youth – the genre's largest consumers – modern rai is as rebellious and compelling as American rap.

Rai originated in the 1930s in Oran, a metropolis then divided into Jewish, French, Spanish and Arab quarters. French colonisation saw these cultural influences mix with traditional Bedouin music and its flowery poetic singing, *malhun*. Many early rai singers were *cheikhas* – women who'd bucked Oran's strict code of conduct and become entertainers and outcasts. The most infamous of these was Cheikha Rimitti. An illiterate, feisty orphan who sang of sex and poverty and recorded her first album in 1936, Rimitti (who drew a bird as an autograph) paved the way for singers such as the reggae-and-funk-loving Khaled. She died in Paris in 2006, aged 83, having performed just two days beforehand.

Mass migration into the cities of western Algeria plus the attendant world depression cemented rai as a genre – a blend of traditional Arabic elements, Western production and whatever else took its fancy. Back then rai appealed to an underclass eager to be heard, its *chebs* and *chabas* (young men and women) articulating their *mehna* (hardship and suffering).

Rai came into its own in the '70s and '80s. Fadela's outspoken 1979 hit 'Ana ma h'lali ennoum' gripped the country. Rachid Baba Ahmed threw in modern pop and became rai's most important producer. The first state-sanctioned Rai Festival in Oran in 1985 marked its emergence as a nationally accepted genre. Then came civil war and encroaching fundamentalism. Cheb Hasni, the great star of rai love, was gunned down in Oran in 1994; Rachid Baba Ahmed was killed a few months later. Khaled, the King of Rai, whose song 'El-Harba Wayn?' became an anthem for protestors, left for Paris after death threats. Others followed suit; France (and Egypt) is now home to a wealth of Algerian musicians including rai (ish) rocker Rachid Taha; chaabi-rai innovator Bilal; and rai fusionist Cheb Mami, who recorded a duet, 2000's 'Desert Rose', with Sting.

Second-generation Algerians including Faudel, the self-styled Prince of Rai, continue to make waves in Paris. The historic 1998 1,2,3 *Soleil* concert at Bercy stadium saw Khaled, Faudel and Rachid Taha (respectively the King, Prince and Rebel of Rai) entertain a 15,000-strong crowd; the excellent live album is released by Barclay. Rai continues apace in Algeria: Houari Dauphin, Hasni's successor, is huge. *Chebs* and *chabas* and their older, more traditional equivalents, *cheikhs* and *cheikhas*, sing in clubs and cabarets, and at festivals including Oran each August. Their lyrics may be more benign than those of their exiled, politicised colleagues, but their music still combines the best of all worlds.

Must-have Albums

- *Sahra* by Khaled (Polygram 1997)
- *1,2,3 Soleil* (Barclay France 1999)
- *Dellali* by Cheb Mami (Ark 21 2001)
- *N'ta Goudami* by Cheikha Rimitti (Because 2006)
- *Takitoy* by Rachid Taha (Wrasse 2004)
- *Baida* by Faudel (Ark 21 1997)
- *Lovers Rai* by Cheb Hasni (Rounders Select 1997)

TUAREG MUSIC

Although Algeria's Tuareg have made few contributions to the desert blues music that has become a cause célèbre for world music fans in 2005 and beyond, the country does have a claim to fame in this regard. The

**'Tin Hinan...
definitely
a name to
watch out
for'**

celebrated Tuareg group Tinariwen hail from the remote Kidal region of northeastern Mali, but they spent much of the 1980s and 1990s in exile as famine and then rebellion raged in their homeland. Part of that exile was spent in Tamanrasset and later in Libya. It was there that the band members learnt to play the guitar and much international success has followed.

Inspired by the success of groups such as Tinariwen and, more recently, Etran Finatawa from Niger, Tin Hinan is a young Algerian Tuareg group for whom critics are predicting great success and they're definitely a name to watch out for.

Painting

Most discussions of Algerian painting centre around French artists, among them Delacroix, Renoir, Matisse and Fromentin, who visited Algeria in the 19th century or early 20th century and whose work was transformed by a new approach to light and colour as a result.

This Eurocentric view of Algerian art reflects the fact that French colonial rule in Algeria did little to provide education or support for local Muslim Algerian artists. One artist who emerged during the colonial period was Mohammed Racim (1896–1975), who began his career as a craftsman illuminator in the Casbah of Algiers and went on to become a celebrated artist at home and in France. After meeting a French patron of the arts at a workshop, Racim was commissioned to illustrate a lavish edition of *Arabian Nights* and the project enabled him to move to Paris where he lived for eight years. Developing his skill as a miniaturist, he made stirring if somewhat idealised representations of aristocratic Algiers.

However, it was not until after independence in 1962 that Algerian artists truly began to flourish, most notably those known as the 'Generation of 1930' – artists born in and around that year. One of the most celebrated was Baya Mahieddine (1931–98) who was born in Algiers and was adopted by a French couple at age five. Never taught to read or write, Baya, as she is best known as a painter, instead taught herself to paint using gouache on paper and held her first exhibition in France aged just 16. She came to the attention of such luminaries as André Breton and Pablo Picasso and her stellar career never looked back with exhibitions of vivid colours and abstract figures in Paris, Washington and Algiers.

Mohammed Khadda (<http://khadda.yellis.net/>) was another eminent Algerian abstract painter (1930–91) who emerged in the post-independence period after he, too, emigrated to Paris and worked under Picasso's careful eye. In the euphoria of independence, he turned his back on the Western figurative tradition of fine arts in favour of representations of Arabic letters in creative calligraphic forms.

Other artists of note from the period include M'Hamed Issiakhem (1928–85) and Choukri Mesli (b 1930) who both learned their trade at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

More recent artists to take up Khadda's calligraphic mantle include Majhoub ben Bella (b 1946) and Rachid Koraïchi (b 1947). Other painters representative of the post-independence period include Ali Silem (b 1947), Redha Chikh Bled (b 1949), Hamid Tibouchi (b 1951), Samta Benyahia (b 1949) and Akila Mouhoubi (b 1953), while Slimane Ould Mohand (b 1966), Philippe Amrouche (b 1966), Raouf Brahmia (1965–) and Kamel Yahiaoui (b 1966) are the great hopes for the next generation of Algerian art.

For an excellent overview of Algerian art and works by European Orientalist painters who visited Algeria, visit the Musée des Beaux Arts (p97) in Algiers.

FOOD

The food you're likely to eat as a traveller in Algeria is unlikely to live long in the memory. Couscous with a meat or vegetable sauce, salads, rotisserie chicken, pizza and vegetable or lamb stews will be your staples.

Meal times in Algeria are broadly similar to what you may be used to at home. Breakfast is eaten generally until 9am or 10am, while lunch can be any time from 1pm onwards. Dinner can begin any time between 6pm and 8pm, although it's more likely to be the former.

In restaurants, etiquette is mostly identical to what you'd find back home. Many restaurants have separate family sections where unaccompanied men are not permitted. You should avoid eating with the your left hand. At home, Algerians usually spread out a plastic tablecloth atop a carpet on the floor and eat with their hands from a communal bowl. Prior to eating, the host will usually bring a jug of water, soap and a small plastic receptacle and will then proceed to pour so that each guest can wash their hands. At home, Algerian families eat together, but when guests arrive, men and women usually eat separately; Western women are generally considered honorary men and in such circumstances the traditional rules of segregation probably don't apply. As the meal commences, many say '*bismillah*' (a form of asking Allah to bless the meal). During the meal, the best morsels of meat will be gently pushed in the direction of an honoured guest. When sated, Algerians will say '*al-hamdu lillah*' (thanks be to God) whereupon other diners will encourage the person to eat more; if the person truly has finished, someone will say '*Saha, Saha*', meaning 'good health'.

If you're lucky, you may also come across tagine (a stew cooked in a ceramic dish of the same name), while seafood provides some much-needed variety in the north. Grilled meats are also something of a recurring theme (in the south, it may be camel meat), while the Spanish rice dish paella makes a surprising (and downright welcome) appearance on a few menus in better restaurants. Eggplant salads are also something of an Algerian speciality, while the spicy *harissa* (a red-chilli paste) gives considerable zest to many dishes.

Like in most Middle Eastern and North African countries, vegetarianism is something of an alien concept for Algerians. Vegetarians should always specify their requirements as soon as they arrive in the restaurant (ask for *bidoon laham*, without meat). Although most restaurants are obliging and keen to make sure you don't leave hungry, many won't be able to offer more than bread, salad, French fries, plain rice and perhaps an omelette. Many soups are precooked and include meat as a matter of course; often no substitute is available.

Other dishes you won't come across often, but you'll be glad when you do, include *harira* (thick, rich soup with chickpeas, lentils, meat and coriander), *merguez* (spicy seasoned lamb or goat sausages), *brik* (a flaky, deep-fried envelope of pastry stuffed with all manner of things), *chorba* (vegetable soup with noodles and meat) and *kefta* (meatballs made from seasoned, minced lamb). In Oran, the local speciality of *brannieh* (stew of lamb or beef with courgettes and chickpeas) is definitely worth seeking out.

French-inspired dishes make an appearance in some top-end restaurants of the north, and a coffee and a croissant have become a typically Algerian way to start the day. Sweet pastries of myriad other descriptions are also popular.

**'when sated,
Algerians
say
'al-hamdu
lillah' (thanks
be to God)'**

Environment

THE LAND

Algeria is one of geography's grand epics. At 2.38 million sq km, this is the world's 11th-largest country and the second biggest in Africa (Sudan is the largest). To help imagine Algeria's scale, consider this: most of Western Europe – including Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland, the UK and Portugal – would fit inside Algeria with room to spare. If that's just too big to contemplate, Algeria is almost equivalent in size to Western Australia, is 3.5 times the size of Texas or almost 10 times the size of the UK.

Most of Algerian territory is consumed by the Sahara Desert – over 90% by most estimates – although the northern, non-Saharan section of Algeria contains a surprising range of other landscapes. Just 0.9% of Algeria is covered by forests.

The Tell & the Northeast

Pushed up hard against the Mediterranean Coast, the Tell region of Algeria consists of the narrow coastal strip and its mountainous hinterland. Not surprisingly, this is the most densely populated area of the country. Apart from the coastal littoral, the Tell is dominated by the east–west Atlas Mountains, which are a continuation of the Moroccan Atlas and cut right across the north and into Tunisia. It is not an unbroken chain: it consists of a number of separate ranges, and so does not constitute an impenetrable topographical barrier.

There is some fantastic mountain scenery here, particularly in the many different subranges of the Atlas that make up the Kabylie region east of Algiers. In the Massif du Djurdjura lies northern Algeria's highest point at 2308m; the Petite Kabylie and Grande Kabylie ranges also plunge down to the Mediterranean from a great height. South of Constantine, the Massif de l'Aurès is another signature massif of the northeast. Between the peaks lie numerous high plains – both Sétif and Constantine sit atop the plains – and valleys making for a region of the country that is rarely short on topographical interest.

Most of Algeria's agricultural possibility – just 3% of the land is arable – lies within the Tell, especially the Mitidja Plain west of Algiers and around Bejaïa to the east.

As might be expected, the only major river systems are in the north of the country, and many of these are seasonal. The main reservoirs for irrigation are in the mountains to the west of Algiers, while those in the northeast produce the 5% of the country's power which is generated by hydroelectricity.

The High Plateaus & Saharan Atlas

Before reaching the Sahara proper, Algeria descends ever so slightly from the Atlas into what is known as the High Plateaus (Hauts Plateaux), arid, steppelike plains that run east for almost 600km from the Moroccan border. With an average height of around 1200m above sea level, these plains gradually drop down to around 400m around Bou-Saada. It's only geographers who, on a technicality, would deny that the High Plateaus differ from the Sahara and a quick look at a map of the region confirms that the low rainfall and barren soil is incapable of supporting more than a handful of settlements.

The distance from Algiers to Tamanrasset is more than 2000km, which is greater than the distance from Algiers to Paris.

Separating the plateaus from the Sahara, the Saharan Atlas (Atlas Saharien) consists of three massifs – Monts des Ksour, the Djebel Amour and Monts des Ouled – stretching from the Moroccan border near Béchar to Biskra. The highest point is 1927m. Serving as the final barrier between the Sahara Desert and northern Algeria, the Saharan Atlas gets reasonable rains and is home to a number of large oases such as Béchar, Aïn Sefra, Laghouat and Biskra.

The Algerian Sahara

As Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle write in *Sahara: A Natural History*, 'In Morocco you can taste the desert, but Algeria is full immersion'. Although the Sahara runs from the Atlantic Coast to the Red Sea, from the coastal hinterland of the Mediterranean to the Sahel deep in Africa, Algeria is one of the few countries where both the vast scope and infinite variety of the world's largest desert is on full, unremitting display.

Sand seas the size of European countries – the Grand Erg Occidental and Grand Erg Oriental – rise hundreds of metres in an ever-changing landscape of pristine lines sculpted by the wind. The Grand Ergs of central Algeria are slowly making their way across Algeria – north towards the Saharan Atlas and the Massif de Aurès and south towards the Tassili du Hoggar – engulfing the country in a seemingly unstoppable march of desertification. Although many regions of the Sahara received regular rains until 3000 years ago (see p81), it is believed that the Grand Ergs have not received meaningful regular rainfall for 12,000 years.

Despite the common misconception, the Sahara is not just one big expanse of sand. Gravel plains such as the impossibly barren Tanezrouft in southwestern Algeria and Mali and barren plateaus such as the Plateau du Tademaït (north of In Salah) provide some of the most featureless horizons in the Sahara. In Algeria's far southeast are some of the signature massifs of the central Sahara, especially the Hoggar (or Ahaggar) Mountains and the Tassili N'Ajjer, surrounded by vast sandstone or granite plateaus otherwise known as the Mid Sahara Rise. It is in the Hoggar, at Mt Tahat (2908m), where you'll find Algeria's highest point, although peaks

Sahara: A Natural History, by Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, is a lively biography of the desert with sections on the Sahara's climate, wildlife and human inhabitants and much more.

Geomorphology in Deserts, by Robert Cooke and Andrew Warren, may have been written in 1973, but it remains the definitive work on the Sahara's geography.

THE FORMATION OF SAND DUNES

Sand dunes are among the great mysteries of the Sahara. In the desert, sand particles are relatively heavy so even the strongest winds can rarely lift them much higher than an adult's shoulders. The slightest bump in the landscape can cause a phenomenon known as cresting, where an accumulation of drifting sand builds up. The slopes facing the wind are generally more compacted and less steep than those that lie on the other side of the ridge-line. The actual formation takes place where there were originally favourable land formations (often surprisingly small) and a constancy in the direction of the winds. Over time, with a base of ever more densely compacted sand, they become a 'permanent' feature of the landscape. Individual or small groups of dunes inch forward with time, pushed by consistent winds, although sand seas are relatively stable, having formed over millennia as rock is scoured and worn down to individual grains of quartz or sand.

Some of the most common types of dune are barchan or crescent dunes (the shape of the ridge-line); *seif* (Arabic for sword), which have long, sweeping ridges; and *akhlé*, a haphazard network of dunes without any discernible pattern. Unique combinations of all of these can be found in both the Grand Erg Occidental (p162) and Grand Erg Oriental (p172), as well as smaller sand seas elsewhere.

For more information on sand dune formation, the 1973 *Geomorphology in Deserts* by Robert Cooke and Andrew Warren is dense but comprehensive, while Ralph Bagnold's *Libyan Sands – Travels in a Dead World* (1935; see the boxed text, p66) is more accessible.

regularly approach 2000m. Owing their weird-and-wonderful shapes to volcanic eruptions millions of years ago, these otherworldly mountain ranges are a tortured terrain of soaring monoliths and deep canyons. The Hoggar alone occupies an area roughly equivalent to France.

The Sahara may cover more than 90% of Algeria, but it is home to less than 10% of its human population.

For advice on exploring the Sahara in an environmentally responsible manner, see p71; for some of the most important statistics of Saharan geography see the boxed text, p67.

WILDLIFE

Animals

The prehistoric rock paintings of the Tassili N'Ajjer and elsewhere suggest that elephants, giraffes and rhinoceroses once roamed the region. Not surprisingly, none remain and Algeria has few surviving mammal species. Most of the animal species which do remain have been pushed into ever-more-remote areas and you're extremely unlikely to see more than a handful of species (if any) during your visit.

Algeria is home to 92 mammal species, of which 15 are officially classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as threatened. More common species which survive include gazelles, porcupines, antelopes, golden jackals, Egyptian mongooses, spotted hyenas and European genets. In northern Algeria European wild boar and Barbary red deer remain reasonably prevalent, although both are a favourite of hunters.

In the Sahara the painfully shy waddan, a large goatlike deer whose agility is perfectly suited to its steep mountain domain, hides in remote mountain wadis in the Tassili N'Ajjer and Hoggar Mountains. The fennec fox is a gloriously adapted, largely nocturnal species with fur-soled feet to protect against scorching sands and comically large ears; it spends most of the hot daylight hours underground. The largest rodent in the Libyan Sahara is the gundi, which can stop breathing for up to a minute to hide itself from prey. Wolves are also present. The four-toed jerboa is a small rodent that sometimes hops through desert camps at night in search of food and is a favourite meal of the fennec. The extremely shy sand cat is also present in southern Algeria, while other species found in the Hoggar region in reasonable numbers include Cape hares, Ruppell's foxes and, to a lesser extent, Barbary sheep.

Lizards, snakes (the striped sand snake, the horned viper and the Saharan sand snake) and scorpions are also quite common; you'd have to be extremely unlucky to encounter snakes in winter.

Of the marine wildlife along Algeria's Mediterranean Coast, dolphins, porpoises and whales are all common.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The addax is a large antelope that once frequented the Hoggar and Tassili N'Ajjer regions but may have become extinct in Algeria. Remarkably, it never drinks water. The scimitar-horned oryx (a long-horned antelope) was officially declared extinct in Algeria in 1996. Other species for which it may be too late include the Barbary hyena and Barbary leopard. The dorcas gazelle is considered threatened, while the dama gazelle may have gone the way of the addax in Algeria due to hunting and human encroachment.

One of the most curious survivors in all the Sahara is the Saharan cheetah, of which between 200 and 500 are thought to survive in the whole

La Vie Sauvage au Sahara, by Alain Dragesco-Joffe, is the finest study (in French) of the Sahara's wildlife, including rare photos and analysis of the Saharan cheetah.

Sahara. Surveys in 2005 found that a small community of cheetahs – the world's fastest land animal – continues to hide out in the Hoggar Mountains. What makes their survival even more remarkable is the fact that the Saharan cheetah – whose colours have dulled in the Saharan sun – is extremely susceptible to stress and heat exhaustion.

In the north the Barbary ape (Barbary macaque) and Algerian wild dog are also considered at risk of extinction.

The Mediterranean monk seal is Europe's most highly endangered marine mammal, with just 600 surviving worldwide; a small colony remains in the caves and on rocky outcrops along Algeria's far northeastern coast. Over-fishing by commercial fleets in the Mediterranean and coastal pollution have reduced their numbers in Algeria to just 10. The leopard-like serval, which has the longest legs in the cat family, may survive in northern Algeria, but only in similar numbers to the monk seal.

BIRDS

At last count, Algeria had 183 endemic bird species, of which eight are considered endangered. In addition to these, hundreds of millions of migrating birds cross the Sahara every year, escaping the European winter for the warmth of equatorial Africa. Some have been known to cross the Sahara in just 40 hours, although the toll is considerable – up to half will not return. The same species are believed to have been following trans-Saharan migratory routes for millennia, from since before the Sahara was a desert.

Birds that you may come across include the Lanner falcon, Marbled teal, Barbary partridge, blue rock thrush, Greylag goose, golden eagle, Common or Red crossbill and desert sparrow as well as shrikes, larks, crows, turtle doves, vultures, herons, bitterns, wood pigeons, eagles and bulbuls. The sociable moula moula bird, with a black body and striking white face and tail, is a constant companion in the far south; the Tuareg call it the messenger bird or the deliverer of happiness.

In the Kabylie region, the Kabylie nuthatch, with its russet-coloured breast, is sometimes spotted above 1000m, although it is considered threatened, as is Audouin's Gull.

Plants

Along the coast of Algeria, the usual array of Mediterranean flora thrives, with large areas given over to the cultivation of olives and citrus fruit. You may also come across eucalyptus, bougainvillea and oleander. Other species include gall oak and cork oak.

Inland, the only vegetation is largely confined to the oases, where the date palm reigns supreme, along with fig, tamarisk and oleander trees. Outside the oases, Acacia arabica (acacia) often provides the only shade in the middle of the desert wilderness. Alfalfa grass and salt bushes often appear as if by miracle after rains.

Like the Sahara's few surviving mammal species, a few holdouts of Mediterranean plant species – such as Mediterranean olive, Saharan myrtle and tarout cypress trees – can be found at high altitudes in the Hoggar and Tassili N'Ajjer regions.

NATIONAL PARKS

Algeria has 11 national parks in addition to a host of other protected areas that encompass a total of between 5% and 10% of the country's land area. That said, although the Algerian government's record in setting aside protected areas has improved in recent years, these are rarely

Sahara Conservation Fund (www.saharaconservation.org) is an excellent website detailing efforts underway to protect Saharan wildlife and the Saharan environment.

national parks in the traditional sense – there are few park wardens, locals continue to live within most park boundaries and there are rarely official entry gates, all of which means you may end up visiting one of the parks without realising it.

Ahaggar National Park

The Ahaggar National Park (Parc National de l'Ahaggar) covers an astonishing 450,000 sq km, making it one of the largest protected areas in the world. Created in 1987, the park runs from In Salah to the Mali and Niger borders and encompasses the Hoggar Mountains (p188) and the Tassili d'Immidir (p182). There's an **information office** (☎ 029 734117; pl du 1er Novembre) in Tamanrasset.

Tassili N'Ajjer National Park

Covering 80,000 sq km, the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park (Parc National de Tassili N'Ajjer; (p194) is Algeria's other major park and arguably the most effectively run. The Office National du Parc Tassili in Djanet controls entry to the park, with a DA100 entry fee per person.

In addition to the rock art for which the park is famous, the park was set up to protect 28 endangered plant species such as Mediterranean olive, Saharan myrtle and tarout cypress, as well as threatened animal species such as the Barbary sheep, sand cat, cheetah and dorcas gazelle. The Tassili N'Ajjer National Park is also an important waystation for migrating bird species, while up to 10,000 people, mostly nomadic Tuareg, live within the park's confines.

Other National Parks

Two of the most important national parks in Algeria are located in the country's northeast, although facilities for travellers are practically nonexistent.

Taza National Park (Parc National de Taza), which was set aside in 2004, is situated on the Mediterranean Coast in the Kabylie region and its stunning cliffs and precipitous valleys (the landscape soars from sea level to over 1100m) are home to the endangered Barbary ape and the Kabylie nuthatch, as well as the largest stands of gall oak and cork oak in Algeria. The region is especially popular for raptor bird species.

Also of significance is the El-Kala National Park (Parc National d'El-Kala), which is hard-up alongside the Algerian–Tunisian border, close to Annaba. The park is home to two of Algeria's 26 entries on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. An important stopover for migrating birds on their trans-Saharan odyssey, these wetlands play host to rare waterfowl such as the tufted duck, white-headed duck, Ferruginous duck and purple gallinule.

In addition to these parks, there is one further coastal park (Gouraya National Park), five parks covering mountain regions (Theniet el-Had National Park, Djurdjura National Park, Chrea National Park, Belezma National Park and Tlemcen National Park) and one national park on the High Plateaus (Djebel Aissa National Park).

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Algeria's record on environmental protection is patchy, with daunting challenges and the primacy of oil production and consumption on the list of government priorities proving a destructive combination. Despite some public willingness to tackle the big environmental issues, the government has not, for example, signed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Africa & the Middle East: A continental overview of environmental issues, by Kevin Hillstrom, contains an excellent exploration of North Africa's environmental past and future, focusing on how human populations impact upon the environment.

Desertification

The major environmental issue facing Algeria is undoubtedly desertification – by some estimates, the Algerian Sahara grows by hundreds of square kilometres every year and the Sahara is now just 200km from the shores of the Mediterranean. The stripping of vegetation for firewood and soil erosion from overgrazing have meant that once-fertile soil has begun to unravel, hastening the desert's irresistible march.

Successive Algerian governments have tried a range of responses to combat desertification with limited impact. In 1975 the government planted what it called a 1500km-long, 20km-wide 'green wall' along the northern boundary of the Sahara and the cost of maintaining it drained US\$100 million from government coffers every year for two decades, only for further overgrazing and human encroachment to strip away much of the good work. Despite such efforts and some successes – some environmentalists claim that 26,000 sq km of pastureland have been reclaimed from the desert on the High Plateaus – the Department of Agriculture estimates that 130,000 sq km have become desert in Algeria in the last 10 years. In December 2006 President Bouteflika earmarked a further US\$2.5 billion for the fight against desertification.

The government also has ambitious plans to develop southern regions not only for environmental reasons, but also to stem the rising urban migration of peoples from southern Algeria. Algerian environmentalists have targeted the Taghit region in western Algeria for a possible national park and ecotourism project as a means of regenerating desert life in harmony with the environment. The government has also redoubled its efforts to plant desert-friendly trees in Saharan areas and develop agricultural regions in the south to arrest the region's environmental and economic decline.

Water

With more than 90% of Algerian territory covered by desert, water is not surprisingly a major environmental issue. Water shortages are common and pollution of water sources, especially in the north, from both domestic and industrial sources is a serious problem in many areas. Techniques for water purification are substandard, and rivers are being increasingly contaminated by untreated sewage, industrial effluent and wastes from petroleum refining.

Droughts are an increasing feature of Algerian life, even in relatively fertile areas in the north. These dry spells have not only fuelled an exodus from the rural south to the industrialised north, they have also left the land susceptible to devastating fires such as those that swept through the northeast in 1999.

Water shortages are particularly acute in the south where people rely on underground water sources for human consumption and crop production. It was ever thus in the Sahara – underground water channels known as *foggara* and dating back centuries discovered in the Adrar region were found to extend over 2000km.

The Mediterranean has also been contaminated by the oil industry, fertilizer runoff and soil erosion.

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The deforestation that has denuded so much of Algeria wasn't helped by the French, who repeatedly bombed northern regions with napalm during the 1954–62 Algerian War of Independence.

Algerian carbon dioxide emissions amount to 5.1 tonnes per capita, which makes it the 76th worst environmental villain in the world. US figures are 19.8 tonnes, while carbon dioxide emissions from the average Malian are just 0.04 tonnes.

Recent radiocarbon dating suggests that the water currently stored beneath the Sahara has been there for between 14,000 and 38,000 years, with smaller deposits from 7000 years ago.