

**Civil Society in a Weak State:
The Political Functions of Associational Life in Algeria,
1987- 2005**

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This study analyses the significance of Algeria's associative sphere in the context of the state's attempts to retain legitimacy. Starting from a critique of portrayals of Algerian 'civil society' as a force conducive to democratization, and by framing the period under study in a broader historical perspective, the thesis examines the changing relationship of the state to voluntary associations in both the colonial and post-colonial eras. It considers the place of associational life in the political economy of economic reform, investigating the role it played in facilitating the state's retreat from service provision. Consideration of the notion that civic associations shape people's propensity towards cooperation and collective action, facilitating democratic politics through the injection of trust and social capital, provides the starting point for analyzing their internal dynamics and the incentives driving their functioning. A further examination of the social bases of the associative sphere then leads to questioning its independence from the state, and highlights the role of the associative sector in tempering the fracture between the state and those social groups that most suffered from the collapse of Algeria's post colonial political framework. A critical examination of the proposition that civil society organisations legitimate and strengthen representative political institutions such as parties and parliament provides the opportunity to show how the associative sphere contributed to preserving the dominance of the executive in the political system despite the introduction of multi-partism. Finally, the study analyses donors' use of advocacy and service-delivery associations in democracy-promotion programmes, arguing that their focus on the country's 'civil society' contributed to the state's efforts to preserve its international legitimacy. In this light, rather than a driver of democratic change, the associative sphere appears as one of the elements of conservation used by a weakened state to reacquire legitimacy and reinforce its capacity to secure voluntary acquiescence in its rule.

*To Alice,
for the grey areas,
and all that ensued.*

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Abbreviations

AAC	Alliance of the Associations from the Centre (<i>Alliance des Associations du Centre</i>)
APW	Wilaya Popular Assembly (<i>Assemblée Populaire de Wilaya</i>)
ACB	Béjaïa Citizens Association (<i>Association Citoyenne de Béjaïa</i>)
AD	Algerian Dinar
AFEPEC	Women's Association for Personal Fulfilment and Citizenship (<i>Association féminine pour l'épanouissement de la personne et l'exercice de la citoyenneté</i>)
AI	Amnesty International
AIB	Islamic Charitable Association (<i>Association Islamique de Bienfaisance</i>)
AITDF	Independent Association for the Triumph of Women's Rights (<i>Association Indépendante pour le Triomphe des Droits des Femmes</i>)
APC	Municipal Councils (<i>Assemblées Populaires Communales</i>)
APN	Popular National Assembly (<i>Assemblée Populaire Nationale</i>)
CASA	Algerian Confederation of Autonomous Unions (<i>Confédération algérienne des syndicats autonomes</i>)
CIMADE	Ecumenical Service for Self-help (<i>Service Oecuménique d'Entraide</i>)
CISP	Italian Committee for Peoples' Solidarity (<i>Comitato Italiano di Solidarietà tra i Popoli</i>)
CNEC	National Coordination of Children of Martyrs (<i>Coordination Nationale Enfants des Chouhada</i>)
CNEJE	National Council for Mutual Aid for Youth and Children (<i>Conseil National d'Entraide pour la Jeunesse et l'Enfance</i>)
CNES	Economic and Social National Council (<i>Conseil National Economique et Social</i>)
CNOT	National Committee against Forgetting/Forgetfulness and Treason (<i>Comité Nationale contre l'Oubli et la Trahison</i>)
DEC	Municipal Executive Delegates (<i>Délégués Exécutifs Communaux</i>)
DJS	Directorate of Youth and Sports (<i>Direction Generale Jeunesse et Sport</i>)
DRAG	Directorate for General Relations and Affairs (<i>Direction des Relations et Affaires Generales</i>)
DRS	Directorate of Security and Information (<i>Direction des Renseignements et de la Sécurité</i>)
DSP	Directorate of Public Health (<i>Direction Santé Publique</i>)
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
Egalité	Association for the Equality of Men and Women (<i>Association pour l'égalité entre hommes et femmes</i>)
ENA	Etoile Nord-Africaine
ENTV	Public Television Network (<i>Entreprise Nationale de Télévision</i>)
EPL	Local public enterprise (<i>Entreprise Publique Locale</i>)

EU	European Union
FFS	Socialist Forces Front (<i>Front des Forces Socialistes</i>)
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front (<i>Front Islamique du Salut</i>)
FLN	National Liberation Front (<i>Front de Libération Nationale</i>)
FOREM	National Foundation for Health Promotion and Research Development (<i>Fondation Nationale pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Développement de la Recherche</i>)
FORUM	Businessmen's Forum (<i>FORUM des Chefs d'Entreprises</i>)
GIA	Islamic Armed Groups (<i>Groupes Islamiques Armés</i>)
HCA	High Commissariat for Berber Affairs (<i>Haut Commissariat pour l'Amazighité</i>)
HCE	High State Committee (<i>Haut Comité d'Etat</i>)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IFHR	International Federation of Human Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMED	Mediterranean Institute (<i>Instituto per il Mediterraneo</i>)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JORA	Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne
LADDH	Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (<i>Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme</i>)
LADH	Algerian League of Human Rights (<i>Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme</i>)
MAB	Associations' House of Bologhine (<i>Maison des Associations de Bologhine</i>)
MASSN	Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity (<i>Ministère de l'Action Social et de la Solidarité Nationale</i>)
MCB	Berber Cultural Movement (<i>Mouvement Culturel Berbère</i>)
MDS	Democratic and Social Movement (<i>Mouvement Démocratique et Social</i>)
MEDA	European Union Mediterranean Democracy Programme
MJS	Ministry of Youth and Sport (<i>Ministère de la Jeunesse et Sports</i>)
MSP	Movement of Society for Peace (previously, Movement for an Islamic Society (<i>Al-Harakat li Mujtama' Islami</i> , HAMAS)
MTFP	Ministry of Labour (<i>Ministère du Travail et de la Formation Professionnelle</i>)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ONASJ	National Organisation for the Youth (<i>Organisation Nationale des associations pour la Sauvegarde de la Jeunesse</i>)
ONDH	National Observatory on Human Rights (<i>Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme</i>)
ONEC	National Organisation of Children of Martyrs (<i>Organisation Nationale des Enfants de Chouhada</i>)
ONM	National War Veterans' Organisation (<i>Organisation Nationale des Moudjahidine</i>)
ONVT	National Organisation of the Victims of Terrorism
OST	Socialist Workers' Organisation (<i>Organisation Socialiste des Travailleurs</i>)
PAGS	Socialist Vanguard Party (<i>Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste</i>)

PIFP	Population Initiative for Peace
PPA	Algerian People's Parti (<i>Parti du Peuple Algérien</i>)
PT	Worker's Party (<i>Parti des Travailleurs</i>)
RACHDA	Algerian Rally Against Contempt and Treason (<i>Rassemblement Algérien Contre la Hogra et la Trahison</i>)
RAJ	Rally for Youth Action (<i>Rassemblement Action Jeunesse</i>)
RC	Rotary Club
RCD	Rally for Culture and Democracy (<i>Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie</i>)
RND	National and Democratic Rally (<i>Rassemblement National Démocratique</i>)
SATEF	Autonomous Union of Education and Training Workers (<i>Syndicat Autonome des Travailleurs de l'Education et de la Formation</i>)
SIT	Islamic Labour Union (<i>Syndicat Islamique du Travail</i>)
SNAPAP	Autonomous National Union of Public Administration Personnel (<i>Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique</i>)
SNATA	Autonomous National Syndicate of Algerian Workers (<i>Syndicat national autonome des travailleurs algériens</i>) and the Algerian
SNES	National Union of Higher Education (<i>Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur</i>)
SOSBEO	SOS Culture Bab El Oued
UGTA	General Union of Algerian Workers (<i>Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens</i>)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	General Union of Algerian students (<i>Union Générale des Etudiants Algériens</i>)
UNFA	General Union of Algerian Women (<i>Union Générale des Femmes Algériennes</i>)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Chronology

1 July 1901	Law on Freedom of Association (Loi Waldeck-Rousseau) promulgated in France and its colonies, including Algeria (re-phrase; Algeria was not a colony).
5 May 1931	Creation of the Association of Muslim Ulema
5 July 1962	Proclamation of Algeria's independence
15 September 1963	Ahmed Ben Bella is elected first President of Algeria
31 December 1962	Decree re-instating the 1901 law on freedom of association.
19 June, 1965	Military coup led by Colonel Houari Boumedienne. Ben Bella is deposed as President.
3 December 1971	Promulgation of Ordinance 71-79 restricting associative freedoms
27 December 1978	Death of President Boumedienne
9 February 1979	Chadli Benjedid is elected President
20 April 1980	Riots in Tizi Ouzou mark climax of Berber spring
Sep – Jan 1981	Demonstrations of Algerian women against the introduction of the Family Code.
2 November 1982	Confrontation between Islamist and left wing students at Ben Aknoun university, one leftwing student killed..
14 January 1984	Chadli Benjedid re-elected President
9 June 1984	Introduction of Family Code
13 April 1984	Islamist rally at funeral of Sheikh Abdellatif Soltani in the Algiers' district of Kouba
30 June 1985	A group of academics and lawyers establish the Algerian League of Human Rights (LADH). Most of them are arrested and tried by the State Security Court for "Threat to National Security."
5 July 1985	Individuals defining themselves as 'children of the martyrs of the revolution' (enfants des chouhada) commemorate their parents publicly. 200 people are arrested.
21 July 1987	Introduction of Freedom of Association Law 87-15; The law maintains several constraints on establishing and managing associations
4 – 10 October 1988	Riots erupt across the country. The army fires on demonstrators in Algiers, Oran and other towns. Hundreds killed.
3 November 1988	Partial amendment the constitution reinforces powers of prime minister and National Assembly.
24 December 1988	Chadli Benjedid re-elected for a third term
23 February 1989	Ratification of entirely new constitution recognizing right to found

	“associations of a political character” inaugurates formal political pluralism.
12 June 1990	The FIS wins the municipal and regional elections
4 December 1990	Promulgation of Freedom of Association Law 31-90
26 December 1991	The FIS wins first round of parliamentary elections.
11 January 1992	Military Coup and cancellation of second electoral round. President Chadli Benjedid resigns.
14 January 1992	Establishment of the the High State Committee presided by Mohamed Boudiaf and including Khaled Nezzar, Minister of Defense. A National Consultative Council including a range of associations’ representatives is established to take the place of Parliament
Jan – Feb 1992	Demonstrations across the country against the coup.
9 February 1992	The HCE institutes the State of Emergency.
4 March 1992	The FIS is dissolved by the Algiers administrative tribunal
29 June 1992	Mohamed Boudiaf is assassinated in Annaba.
30 November 1992	Curfew introduced in Ain Defla, Algiers, Blida, Bouira, Boumerdès, Medea, Tipasa following the intensification of violence across the country.
February-September 1993	Wave of assassinations targeting Algerian intellectuals
31 January 1994	The High State Council designates Liamine Zeroual as head of state
1 June 1994	The Paris Club agrees to rescheduling Algeria’s foreign debt (\$26 billion)
24 December 1994	The passengers of an AirFrance Airbus are taken hostage at Algiers’ airport by an Islamist commando. The Airbus is later hijacked to Marseille, where the hijackers are killed and passengers freed on 26 December 1995.
13 January 1995	‘National Contract’ for a solution to the crisis (also known as the Rome Platform) published by the main opposition groups in Rome
16 November 1995	Liamine Zeroual is elected President of the Republic
27 March 1996	Seven Trappist monks are kidnapped from the monastery of Tibhirine. They will be found dead on 30 May.
5 June 1997	Parliamentary elections won by the RND
28 August 1997	Raïs massacre. Between 100 and 300 people are brutally killed by armed guerrillas.
5 September 1997	Beni Messous massacre. Between 120 and 180 people are murdered.
22 September 1997	Bentalha massacre. Between 85 and 400 villagers are killed.

23 October 1997	RND wins the local elections. The opposition denounces widespread fraud.
19 January 1998	A EU troika delegation composed of deputy foreign ministers from Luxembourg, Britain, and Austria visits Algeria to investigate allegations of human rights abuses. It will be followed by a EMPs delegation.
22 July 1998	UN delegation of 'eminent persons' visits Algeria
11 September 1998	President Zeroual announces his intention to hold early presidential elections
27 April 1999	Abdelaziz Bouteflika is elected President
16 September 1999	Referendum approves Bouteflika's "Civil Concord Initiative"
Jan-Dec 2000	Attack on civilians and army continue
July 2000	The EU launches a programme supporting Algerian associations
29 March 2001	Interior Minister Zerhouni claims that there are 842 national and 57,117 local associations active in the country.
18 April 2001	Massinissa Guermah – a young Kabyle – killed in police custody in Beni Douala, 15 kms from Tizi Ouzou, the region's capital. The episode sparks 'Kabylia's Black Spring' and months of violent conflict between the demonstrators and the security forces.
10 November 2001	Intense floods hit Algiers killing several hundred people
30 May 2002	National Liberation Front (FLN) wins the parliamentary elections
10 October 2002	Local elections won by the FLN
8 April 2004	Landslide victory by Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Presidential Elections
24 February 2005	President Bouteflika acknowledges that 150000 have died from the violence during the conflict since 1992
29 September 2005	In a referendum, voters back government 'Reconciliation plan' to amnesty many of those involved in the violence
13 January 2006	The Ministry of Interior releases information acknowledging the existence of more than 73.000 associations in Algeria

Chapter 1. Civil society in weak states

“An association is an army...talk is needed to count numbers and build up courage, but after that, they march together against the enemy”.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Introduction

Between the mid-1980s and 2005 Algeria went through a failed political liberalisation process and reversal into authoritarianism, a protracted economic slump leading to a massive fall in living standards, and a decade long conflict between the army and Islamist guerrillas which claimed some 150,000 lives. During this same period, the country also experienced a sustained multiplication of voluntary associations and grassroots groups which, according to official figures, today make Algeria one of the most ‘association dense’ countries in the Middle East and North Africa.¹ Despite the puzzling concomitance of protracted wide scale violence, political turmoil and associative growth, there is to this day a striking lack of information about and in-depth analysis of Algeria’s associational life, which leaves it as one of the most elusive elements of the country’s recent political trajectory. This study aims to fill the gap.²

This introductory chapter takes four preliminary steps towards this goal. First, I describe the premises of Algeria’s weak state, clarifying how the issue of legitimacy defines the main questions inspiring this study. Second, I frame this perspective within the broader debate on the nature and fate of Arab liberalisation reforms, showing how this literature is leading to a reconsideration of the functional role of civil society in democratisation processes. Third, I outline the structure of the discussion, and spell out the way the argument is organised. The final part of the chapter describes the material on which the research is based, as well as the methodology used during fieldwork.

¹ According to government figures cited in *El Watan* 14 January 2006, by 2006 Algeria counted 73000 associations present in the country. Though low by Western standards (in France, around 75000 associations are created every year), this figure is high compared to the Arab region. See Denoeux and Gateau, 1995; Marzouk, 1997; BenNefissa, 2000; Yom, 2005.

² The main works on the subject (Dahak, 1982; Babadji, 1989) are dated, and do not cover the period considered here. In his contribution to Kazemi & Norton, 1995 – one of the seminal studies on civil society in the Middle East - Entelis notes the exuberance of Algeria’s associative sector and draws a number of conclusions regarding its impact on the country’s prospects for democracy, without basing his analysis on empirical observations. This is a general trait of the views on Algeria’s civil society which appeared in the literature through the 1990s. None of the recent studies, collections or review articles on civil society in the Middle East – such as Ben Nefissa [2000; 2004], Sajoo [2004] and Yom [2005] - mentions the Algerian case.

Algeria's weak state

Political instability has been one of the main features of Algeria's recent political development. Since at least the riots which shook the country in October 1988,³ the state has endured sustained levels of political violence manifesting itself in a variety of forms. These include: a) a decade long conflict between the army and the Islamist insurgents – a conflict which the army had clearly won by 2005, but which at more than one point during the 1990s seemed to be tipping in favour of the guerrillas, raising the prospect of the outright collapse of the Algerian state [Zartman,1995;Nicholson,1998];⁴ b) low intensity violence which continued in residual form well beyond the army's declared victory and the government's amnesty initiatives;⁵ c) Mass upheavals such as the one exploding in Kabylia in the spring of 2001, itself a reminder of the turmoil shaking the region in 1980; and d) recurrent episodes of localised rioting persistently punctuating local political life in virtually every corner of the country.⁶ Algeria appears to represent an example of political instability as described by Buzan - a scenario where significant sections of the population challenge the institutions that uphold the state, or in some cases the very idea of stateness, in the form of anti-systemic groups who in the worst of cases decide to express themselves through violence [Buzan,1983:45-61]. In this sense, the Algerian state consequently represents an example of a weak state, one that turns to violence in its efforts to penetrate society, shape social relationships and extract resources [Migdal,1988].

Indeed, explanations of the origins of Algeria's violence abound, but apart from those that questionably link the violence to Algerians' peculiarities – such as a specific propensity to engage in conflict [Martinez, 2000] – the vast majority point to the collapsing connection between the state and an increasingly disaffected society [Layachi, 1995; Zartman, 1995;

³ Between 5-10 October 1988 massive demonstrations against the government erupted all over the country. On the 10th of October, the army fired on the rioting crowd in Algiers, killing several hundred people.

⁴ Few observers of Algerian affairs remained firm in dismissing the possibility of an Islamist victory. A notable exception is Roberts, who since the early stages of the conflict stressed that “the Islamists...have little prospect of coming to power in their own right” [1993, 2003].

⁵ On 29 September 2005, Algerians approved President Bouteflika's Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation through a referendum, thus allowing legislation that pardons individuals convicted of armed terrorist violence, approved on 22 February 2006. The new Charter builds upon the previous 1999 Civil Concord initiative and the 1995 *Rahma* (pardon) law. In 2005, Algeria still counted an average of 40-50 killings monthly. Although this represents a transformation of remnants of a politically motivated insurgency into wide-scale banditry, it nevertheless shows the state's failure to completely restore internal order, and prevent spillover effects in the region and Europe. On 14 September 2006, Al Qaeda announced its alliance to the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) - the most prominent guerrilla group still active in Algeria – as a way of targeting Western interests in the Magreb.

⁶ On Algeria's 'civil war' see Martinez [2000; On the the Kabyle riots, see Roberts, [2001b], while on riots in general in Algeria see Gallissot [1991].

Joffe, 2002:30; Hirst, 2001]. Perceived in turn as fragile, dysfunctional or even approaching total meltdown, at more than one point since 1992 the state has seemed incapable of fulfilling some of the most basic functions of statehood, such as ensuring security and maintaining the monopoly of the use of force [Leveau, 1995; Martinez, 1998; Carment, 2003: 414]. Henry notably described the Algerian state as “a bunker state” no longer “hold[ing] durable arrangements with ... society” [1999: 2], while Volpi stressed the “persisting mistrust between an elitist regime and its subject population”. Silverstein explained Algerians’ penchant for conspiracy theories by referring to the same “climate of political mistrust” and “lack of communication” between rulers and ruled [2000: 8], whereas Roberts found in the ubiquitous usage of the word *hogra*⁷ the linguistic evidence of “the rupture between the state and the people [lying at the origins of] the breakdown of the Algerian polity” [2002:1].

Yet, as the inventory of the causes and effects of state weakness kept growing, collapse as feared by so many observers did not happen. Indeed, today’s Algeria remains ruled by the same groups – in fact by some of the very individuals - who gained power 40 years ago, at the time of the country’s independence. What accounts for the resilience of the Algerian state? To answer this question one has to start from an examination of the process leading to the decline of Algeria’s postcolonial state.

Since at least the death of Houari Bouemedienne in 1978,⁸ the Algerian state has progressively sunk into a legitimacy crisis whose origins are rooted in the decay of the post-colonial political system. For almost 30 years after independence, the state claimed to be the sole representative of a unified and consensual society. The interfacing of state and society was ensured by the party of the National Liberation Front (*Front de Liberation Nationale*) and the network of mass organisations linked to it.⁹ The prime function of this organisational machinery was to absorb, articulate, and channel social demands and respond

⁷ ‘Hogra’ (or *hagra*) means ‘contempt’, ‘scorn’. It is usually associated with the attitude of the state vis-à-vis the people.

⁸ Houari Boumédiène (real name, Mohamed Ben Brahim Boukharouba) became President of Algeria on 19 June 1965 and remained in power until his death on 27 Decemberr 1978. He fought in the war of liberation against the French since 1955, becoming chief of staff of the FLN army in exile, and then Minister of Defense in the first Ben Bella government. His strong political base in the army allowed him to orchestrate the 1965 bloodless coup which deposed Ben Bella

⁹ Mass organisations represented all social categories: professional activity, such as labour – the General Union of Algerian Workers (*Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens – UGTA*); women’s interests - General Union of Algerian Women (*Union Générale de Femmes Algériennes*); education the General Union of Algerian students (*Union Générale des Etudiants Algériens*); and, most importantly, fighters’ of the national liberation war – National War Veterans’ (Organisation *Nationale des Moudjahidine – ONM*).

by combining the ideological capital which the state had gained from the liberation war with the financial capital derived from the oil and gas rent [Leca & Vatin,1975; Hudson,1977].

The legitimacy crisis faced by the Algerian state can be attributed to the parallel emergence of a set of internal and external factors which together came into play in the period between the mid to end 1980s. Internally, the ideological bases of the regime were fractured by the dynamics of a rampant demography, which made the millions of Algerians born after 1962 find it increasingly difficult to relate to a system which held the revolution as the only source of legitimacy [Roy, 1994:275]. As the rapid urbanisation and population boom was already putting the system of rent distribution and the patronage networks it supported under strain, the collapse of the hydrocarbon prices in the mid-1980s dealt it a fatal blow. The growing fiscal imbalances in turn led first to a rapid deterioration in the quality of public services, and then to a massive downscaling of the state's role as service provider. State withdrawal was carried out under an unpopular economic policy of partial liberalisation further affecting falling living standards and compounding the effects of the generalised economic downturn in the eyes of the citizenry.¹⁰ Externally, the collapse of the Soviet bloc aggravated the situation by eliminating what Roberts called "the principal external premises...of the substantive sovereignty of the Algerian state" [Roberts, 2003:349].

Besides leading to a progressive alienation of society from the state – a configuration reminiscent of the way rulers ruled relations developed during Algeria's earlier experiences of state formation under the Ottoman and French colonial endeavours [Quandt, 1998:109]¹¹ - the crisis of the Algerian state also sparked the first experiment of political liberalisation in the Arab world. The state responded by dismantling the post-colonial legitimacy system

¹⁰ Algeria provides a perfectly fitting empirical actualisation of the cycle of legitimacy loss and state weakness described by Ghani, Lockhart and Carnahan in their theoretical discussion on state-building [2005]: "Loss of legitimacy is the key to the fragility and failure of states. The vicious circle begins with the loss of trust by citizens in the ability of their state to create an inclusive political, social, and economic order made predictable by rule of law. Some of the markers of the process of loss of legitimacy are: an increase in illegality, informality, and criminality in the economy; ineffective delivery of basic services, such as health, sanitation and education; failure to maintain or expand essential infrastructure; increase in corruption; and appropriation of public assets for private gain. As a result, administrative control weakens and the bureaucracy is seen as an instrument of abuse of power, in turn leading to a crisis in public finances – where both revenue and expenditure become unpredictable and budgeting becomes an exercise in emergency management. The ultimate marker is loss of legitimate use of violence by the state and emergence of armed groups that through recourse to violence openly mock the authority of the state and gain control of various areas of the country".

¹¹ The Ottomans ruled over parts of Algeria (the Constantinois, the Algerois and part of the Mitidja plain) between 1525 and 1830, when they were overthrown by the French (1830-1962). Colonial rule established some of the main features of Algerian state. Laroui argues that the image of a state 'disembedded' from society pervades the Maghrebi political imagination, which never emancipated itself from the colonial experience. For other examples of analogy between the reciprocal alienation of state and society in contemporary and colonial Algeria see Martinez, 1998; Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981 and Ruedy,2005. For a snapshot of the long literature on the breakdown of state society relations and its manifestations, see also chapter 5.

centred on the representational primacy of the FLN and then proceeding to a rapid opening up of the political system. In the brief time between the October 1988 riots and the January 1992 military coup, the swift introduction of a new constitution, political pluralism and free local and national elections seemed to transform a single party political regime into a liberal democracy, and provide an answer to the legitimacy crisis affecting Algeria's postcolonial state.

The 1992 coup and the ensuing conflict reversed this impression, but only to a point. [Quandt, 1998; 2005]. Besides sending Algeria's political system into a decade long flux, the introduction of pluralist politics also changed the course of Algerian studies. The framework central to the study of the Algerian polity built around the investigation of state building and the related issues of legitimacy, stability and political order gave way to an almost unique attention to the problematic of democratic change, only partly obscured, for the whole duration of the conflict, by a focus on violence. The issue of whether democracy could ever be brought back to the country often hid the tendency – not unique to Algerian studies – to consider democracy as the only solution to crisis, thus neglecting a rounded analysis of the way the Algerian state tried to surmount its weakness. As William Zartman put it in 2005, “much of the current discourse on Algeria seems to be stuck in 1992, when the sudden democratisation process was snuffed out” [2005: 216]. This book seeks to show how one of the casualties of this bias has been a correct understanding of the development of the country's associative sector and the role it played in the political economy of Algeria's weak state.

Civil society in liberalised autocracies

The global rise of voluntary associations during the 1990s has fuelled a vast literature on the contribution of civil society to political development. Although the notion of civil society has notoriously been characterised by a degree of definitional ambiguity, its mainstream variants are generally articulated around the view of associationalism in 19th century America made popular by Alexis de Tocqueville [Whittington, 1998; Lewis, 2002: 571]. This view revolves around the idea of an associative realm, independent of the state, which occupies the space between the latter and the individual. [Walzer, 1991,1992; Perez-Diaz, 1993; Hall, 1995; Comaroffs, 1999; Pease, 1999; Borneo & Nord, 2000].¹²

¹² For a penetrating critique of the Tocquevillian revival both in historical perspective and its contemporary application to its original context, the US, see Berman [1997] and Shapiro [1997]. For a more articulated view see Kaviraj [2003]

There are two applications of this Tocquevillian view of civil society. The first is analytical. In it, associational life becomes a conceptual device to investigate state-society relations. As put by White, civil society can be used as a tool to “interpret the generalised contestation between state and society” or a framework that “leads one to focus on the balance of power between state and society and to investigate the ways in which members of society act to protect themselves from [the] state” [White, 1996]. In its second use civil society represents a normatively charged research object. Particularly when applied to authoritarian contexts, the focus here lies on the functional role played by the associative sphere as a precondition of democracy. The rise of associational life is viewed as a mechanism for expanding political freedoms through collective empowerment and popular participation, an arena capable of rolling back the repressive state [Gellner, 1994:5], and eventually sparking democratic change [Diamond, 1996].

It is in this dual capacity - epistemological and normative - that the focus on civil society has gradually shifted from the role played by voluntary organisations and grassroots groups in the demise of authoritarian regimes in Latin America [O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986] and Eastern Europe [Keane, 1988] to the democratisation processes in Africa [Bratton, 1989; Chazan, 1992], and then the Middle East and North Africa [Hudson, 1991; Bellin, 1994; Norton, 1993 & 1995; Schwendler, 1995; Marzouk, 1996],¹³ thus becoming a prevailing assumption of global political analysis. Despite the fact that the idea of a positive, universal connection between associational life and democracy has been questioned from various angles, both in general [Armony, 2005] and with specific reference to the Middle East, [Gellner, 1991; Sadosky, 1993; Wiktorowicz, 2002; Abdel Rahman, 2005; Yom, 2005], to this day the ‘civil society in democracy perspective’ remains the dominant paradigm for understanding the emergence of the associative sphere in the South.

The scant literature mentioning the remarkable rise of associational life in Algeria is no exception to this rule. With Algeria being perceived as an exemplary case of failed democratisation and reversal into repressive authoritarianism [Entelis, 1994; Zoubir, 1995; Djebaili, 1996], for years observers of Algerian politics have saluted the associative sector’s rapid expansion as an encouraging sign of the country’s democratic prospects. At the same time, state authoritarianism has been singled out as the main obstacle to its consolidation [Layachi, 1995]. Drawing parallels with the blossoming of associational life in Eastern Europe and its role in resisting the Communist regimes, Constance Stadler for instance

¹³ This vast literature can hardly be fully represented here. A number of monographic studies and in-depth articles focus on other countries, most notably Yemen [Carapico, 1998], Egypt [Bianchi, 1989; Singerman, 1995; Abdel Rahman, 2005], Morocco, [Denoeux and Gateau, 1995]; Jordan [Wiktorowicz, 2000; 2002]; Tunisia [Alexander, 1997].

portrayed the associative sphere as growing out of the dialectical confrontation with the state, and saw it as “the germination of a counter-hegemony in Algeria” [1994]. By striking the same chord, Kazemi and Norton highlighted the democratic prospects raised by the “impressive array of rights-oriented groups [who] emerged...especially in Algeria”, but at the same time regretted “the failure of the regime in Algiers...to foster rather than repress civil society” [1996:114]. In 1999, Zoubir claimed that “the indisputable existence of an increasingly resolute civil society provides the potential for genuine democratisation”[1999: 29].

In addition to questioning the extent to which associational life has really contributed to Algeria’s democratisation process, this book tries to reframe its significance for the country’s political development according to a different perspective. The very notion of democratisation as the main framework for the analysis of political development has in fact recently been subject to increasing scepticism, following the realisation that in many developing countries what initially had appeared as democratic change often turned out to be something else altogether. As noted by Carothers [1999:14] several countries formerly presumed to be undergoing a democratic transition ended up “in a grey middle zone [...] having neither moved rapidly and painlessly to democracy nor fallen back into outright authoritarianism”. For the Middle East and North Africa, the “end of the transition paradigm” [Carothers, 2002] bears particular relevance: despite the introduction of measures of political liberalisation, in terms of substantial democratisation the region has lagged behind most of the countries initially included in the Third wave of democratisation [Huntington, 1993]. Indeed, since at least the mid 1990s, guarded optimism concerning the prospects for democratic change in the region has given way to concerns about the obduracy of authoritarian politics, and rising doubts about the capacity of Arab political transitions to achieve democracy [Salame, 1994; Hudson, 1996; Bellin, 2004; Ghalioun, 2004; Posusney & Penner, 2005].

From perceptions of ‘slow’ democratic transition, the attention has therefore turned to the possibility that Arab regimes’ subsequent attempts at opening up the economy (*infatih*), and introducing political pluralism (*ta’addudiya*) - without losing overall control of the political process - have given rise to new types of regime shaped around autocratic cores hidden under formally democratic features. Attempts at capturing the features of this new wave of hybrid regimes have brought about a distinctive terminology.¹⁴ The outcome of political

¹⁴ Zakaria’s ‘Illiberal democracy’ [1997] and Brumberg’s ‘Liberalised Autocracy’ are the most well known examples. This terminological flurry often neglects that already in 1989, Bernard Badie had described the outcome of the first experiences of political opening in the Middle East as ‘pluralized

reforms in Algeria was defined as a form of “pluralism without enfranchisement” [Roberts, 2000, 2003: 263 et seq]. Zakaria described Arab democratisation efforts as an experience in the establishment of ‘illiberal democracy’, whilst Robinson [1998] saw in the reforms implemented in Jordan a process of ‘defensive democratisation’. With reference to Yemen, Schwedler [2002] talked of ‘tactical liberalisation’, i.e. subsequent moves performed by rulers aimed at opening and closing the political system at convenient times, a term later utilised by Diamond [2003] to describe the outcome of liberalisation reforms more broadly in the region.

Daniel Brumberg’s definition of liberalised autocracy is by far the soundest formulation of these attempts. Brumberg distinguishes between, on one hand, full autocracies (i.e. regimes which do not tolerate even the smallest degree of pluralism, such as Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq before the US intervention) and on the other, liberalised autocracies - i.e. regimes that due to “a set of interdependent institutional, economic, ideological, social and geostrategic factors [have] created an adaptable ecology of repression, control and partial openness”. Liberalised autocracies, he writes, “provide a kind of virtual democracy” whereby the promotion of “a measure of political openness in civil society, in the press, and even in the electoral system” is coupled with the state’s unrelenting control over the security establishment, the media and patronage networks [2003: 3]. In the set of countries chosen to support his argument, and in addition to Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt, Brumberg includes Algeria [2002: 57].

The contribution of this literature to a better understanding of Arab political reform is still in its infancy. Although the identification of liberalised autocracies has led to a re-examination of the expectations raised by the transition paradigm, it has not however transcended the latter’s overall framework [Armony and Schamis, 2005]. For instance, by describing liberalised autocracy as “a type of political system whose institutions, rules, and logic defy any linear model of democratisation” [2002: 56], Brumberg still uses on the one hand ‘full autocracy’, and on the other ‘real democracy’, as yardsticks for his definition. As Armony and Schamis make clear, “the major empirical finding of this latter research has been that, while the majority of these new regimes exhibit democratic features such as free and fair elections, a significant number deviate from the standards and practices that are inherent to the very idea of democratic rule” [2005: 13]. The weakness of Brumberg and co. relates to their failure to provide a novel perspective with which to interpret political change.

authoritarianism’, whilst Clifford Geertz had talked of Moroccan regime’s efforts to liberalise the economy whilst retaining the upper hands on the political process as ‘authoritarian liberalism’ [1979].

Yet, the analytical value of this literature goes beyond the mere acknowledgement of the failure of the transition framework. Besides questioning the democratic content of Arab regimes, the liberalised autocracy view unveils the rationale of political reforms in the region. It reveals that formal moves towards liberalisation have enriched the repertoire of rulers' survival strategies, providing a set of antidotes to the legitimacy crisis pervading the relationship that Arab states entertain with their societies, rather than a real remedy to the destabilising causes and effects of state weakness. Contrary to 'pacted transitions', where challenges to autocrats generally result in the official incorporation of opposition groups, and a consequently broader enfranchisement of the citizenry, liberalised autocracy results from "a protracted cycle in which rulers widen or narrow the boundaries of participation and expression in response to what they see as the social, economic, political and geostrategic challenges facing their regimes" [Brumberg, 2002: 57]. According to Robinson [1998: 387] the process of "defensive democratisation" is best understood "as a series of pre-emptive measures designed to maintain elite privilege ... while limiting the appeal of more fundamental political change". "Uncertain about its ability to survive a deepening crisis", continues Robinson, "the regime undertakes sufficient reforms to assure its political longevity, but without altering the core structures of power". The best example is provided by the instrumental use of elections to portray an appearance of democratic institutionalisation abroad, whilst in truth establishing an 'official political society' in which elections are used to reward or sanction friendly or innocuous political parties, whilst opposition groups posing a real threat are generally excluded from the competition.¹⁵

The way the liberalised autocracy literature treats the development of associational life in Arab countries also represents an emancipation from the Tocquevillian framework. On the one hand, the focal point is still the questioning of the assumption of the associative sphere as a precondition of democracy which exposes the introduction of associative pluralism as having no significant effect on the advent of democracy. If Brumberg for instance makes the general point that "civil society organisations [have not] been able to pierce the armour of liberalised autocracy" [2002: 3], Wiktorowicz [2002] highlights the 'limits of NGOs' in breaking state control, whilst Yom denounces the general failure of civil society to bring forward democracy [2005]. On the other hand though, the significance of associational life is more explicitly analysed in the context of rulers' survival strategies. The literature identifies three main functions played by the associative sphere in making up for the effects of state weakness. The first is the safety valve function, whereby associational life is a way

¹⁵ For the Algerian case, see Roberts, 2003, op. cit.

for governments to allow “opposition groups a way to blow off steam [without] undermining the regime’s ultimate control [Brumberg, 2003: 6]. The second is the divide and rule function. Here, the associative sphere becomes the battleground used for the “juggling act central to regime survival” to weaken opposition groups, through divisional and cooptation tactics [Brumberg, 2002: 61 & 2003: 5; Yom, 2005]. The third is the social control function. “Civil society organisations – writes Wicktorowicz - remain “embedded in a web of bureaucratic practices and legal codes which allow those in power to monitor and regulate their activities” and those of the individuals and groups populating the associative realm [2000].

Despite the range of perspectives it opens up, ultimately there are two problems with the way this literature treats associational life. The first is the still limited attention paid to it. The associative sphere is generally mentioned in passing, neglecting a more focused exploration of its functional role within liberalised autocracies. Secondly, this literature tends to remain stuck in a top-down perspective. From a tendency to treat the associative sphere as a realm where citizens could work towards ‘democratisation from the bottom up’, civil society becomes a tool in the hands of the state to control society from the top.

Taking Algeria as a case study, this study aims to add to our understanding of the role played by associational life in the political economy of liberalised autocracies. The approach taken maintains the double use of civil society as interpretative tool and research object, but it reverses the perspective used and the questions asked. Instead of a tool to explore the dynamics of “contestation between state and society”, civil society becomes a prism for the analysis of movements of appeasement, reconciliation and adjustment between the two. Rather than a framework to “investigate the ways in which social groups act to protect themselves from [the] state”, associations are analysed as the sphere where certain elements of society actively *seek* the protection of the state.

If this involves distancing the analysis from a classic Tocquevillian framework, it does not at all mean abandoning the way civil society has been conceptualised by other strands of Western political theory. The revival of the idea of civil society has made a selective use of Tocqueville’s views on political development. It has focused on the concerns made popular by Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*, but neglected those he expressed later, which went in somewhat different directions. In the analysis of the newly conquered territory of Algeria made in his capacity of Member of the French Chamber of Deputies, in which he described the place as less propitious to civilised government than any he had ever seen, Tocqueville’s preoccupation was no longer the limitation of central power, but the

establishment of a functional political order built on a centralised modern state capable of acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of the ‘natives’ [Klausen, 2002, Pease, 1999].

In very much the same way, contemporary mainstream definitions of civil society tend to neglect the earliest usages of the term. This explicitly included the ideas of political order, legitimacy and centralised power - ideas finding their roots in Hobbes’ conceptualisation of civil society as the basis of state sovereignty. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, where civil society represents at once the ‘outer bulwarks’ of the state through which the ruling class maintains its dominance over society, but also the sphere where different social groups perform a war of attrition to position themselves within or against the hegemonic field, is the latest manifestation of this view [Gramsci, 1975].

It is by embracing this reading of civil society that this study asks a) to what extent has Algerian associational life contributed to democracy and b) what role has it played in the political economy of the legitimacy crisis affecting Algeria’s weak state. By highlighting the extent to which associational life has hindered - rather than boosted - Algeria’s democratisation process, the study shows some of the functions the associative sphere has performed in addressing the causes and effects of state weakness. The discussion examines whether the blossoming of civic associations - normally presumed to be a sign and a vector of political change – actually represents an element of conservation of some of the institutional arrangements regulating state-society relations and at the same time a vehicle for the joint responses put in place by sectors of the state and society to mend their broken relation.

The political functions of associational life

The revival of the neo-Tocquevillian notion of civil society is built on a series of more or less explicit assumptions assigning voluntary associations a functional role in promoting democracy. The articulation and questioning of these assumptions provides the backbone of the book. By adopting the idea of “plausible rival hypotheses” as explanatory strategy, each chapter tests the application of these assumptions to the Algerian case and tries to develop alternative explanations. The argument therefore aims at seeking rival explanations for the same set of events [Campbell, 1989: 7] by comparing each theory with the actual course of events, or the same set of events with a different hypothesis and possibly a different theory [Yin, 1989: 16].

Chapter 2, drawing on limited available sources, provides an introductory overview of the development of the associative sphere in colonial and post-colonial Algeria. The aim of the chapter is to frame the period under study (1987-2005) in broader historical terms, and clarify why 1987 is taken as cut off date for the start of the more in-depth analysis. The discussion identifies a number of continuities and discontinuities in the state's relation to the associative sphere which are important to understanding the latter's subsequent development. More specifically, it shows that the contemporary identification of the associative movement as a source of opposition to the authoritarian state neglects, or indeed misinterprets, the substantially different role it played at other stages of the process of political liberalisation.

The functions played by associational life in the political economy of economic reform are dealt with in chapter 3. According to mainstream civil society frameworks, the presence and activity of voluntary associations are consequences of and at the same time provide a solution to the effects of the state's retreat from the public space, and more specifically from its service-provision roles. This argument has been at the centre of a global agenda aimed at going beyond the binary division of state and market by 'empowering civil society', an agenda which has been termed as a 'post-Washington consensus' [Fine, 1999, 2001]. The argument developed tries to – in Yom's words - question this "zero-sum logic, whereby more civil society means less state, and a strong civic sector means a weaker regime" [Yom, 2005]. The discussion shows that rather than contributing to fill the gap in public service provision left by the retreating state, the associative sphere became instrumental in alleviating the pressures placed on the authorities for failing to deliver.

The idea that civic associations shape people's moral dispositions, and that this has direct and indirect consequences for democratic politics, is the Tocquevillian theme from which chapter 4 starts. In addition to questioning the image of Algeria's dense associational life conveyed by academic portrayals, donor reports and media accounts, the chapter asks whether associations are indeed the product of high levels of social capital and trust present in Algerian society, or whether more material incentives are at play, incentives which emerge from the consequences of political and economic decay pervading the country in the 1990s.

The limits of the contemporary identification of the associative movement as an engine of democratisation are further tested in chapter 5, which considers whether the associative sphere constitutes a realm for the activation of political participation, opposition and contestation. The chapter analyses the social bases of associational life to question the

degree of autonomy of the associative sphere from the state and shows the role this played in tempering the fracture between the state and some of the social groups which had constituted the main beneficiaries of the post colonial political framework, and the main victims of its collapse.

Chapter 6 tests the proposition that civil society organisations legitimate and strengthen representative political institutions, such as parties and parliament. The 2004 Presidential confirmation of Abdelaziz Bouteflika through elections which the internationally community deemed as ‘fair by regional standards’¹⁶ appeared to break a decade long period of electoral rounds rigged in the procedures and doctored in the results. The start of Bouteflika’s second term also coincided with an apparently more restrained political role of the military since the aborted elections of 1992. The discussion questions the extent to which this can be considered as a positive sign for a return to democracy in the country. By looking at the interplay between the associative realm and the party sphere, the discussion highlights a key function played by the associative movement - preserving the dominance of the executive in the political system despite the introduction of multi-partism.

Donors’ use of civil society organisations in democracy promotion programmes and the more general idea that cross-border civic interactions between non governmental organisations (NGOs) from the North and South gives rise to pressures for change in authoritarian settings is analysed in chapter 7. The discussion shows that rather than limiting the sovereignty of the Algerian state, the donor community’s focus on the country’s associative sphere has contributed to the state’s efforts to preserve its international legitimacy.

Researching Algerian associational life

In Algeria - and in other countries whose regulatory framework is modelled on or derived from the French system – ‘association’ (*jam'iyyat*) means a private, generally non-profit organisation independent of the state, whose establishment and operations are nonetheless regulated by law. In Algeria, as in the course of this study, terms such as ‘associational life’,

¹⁶ The statement was made by Bruce George of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly during a press conference held immediately after the closing of polling stations. Together with Anne-Marie Lizin, a Belgian Senator also part of the delegation, George expressed the opinion that the elections had been carried out in a proper manner. For an opposite view, see Steven A. Cook, “Algeria’s Elections: No Democratic Turning Point,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Arab reform Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (April 2004).

‘associative sphere’, and ‘associative movement’ are equally used to refer to the set of associations active in the country, and at the same time the institutional space they occupy as well as the social and material practices characterising their activities. Debating societies, Islamic charities, development NGOs, consumers’ organisations, members’ clubs, foundations and advocacy organisations such as human rights and women’s groups all fall under the broad category of associations, and all are regulated by the same law.¹⁷

This vast reservoir of organisational activity has constituted the main object of this study, which draws on research undertaken between October 2000 and January 2006 based on primary and secondary sources. Primary material mainly derives from a) semi-structured and unstructured key informant interviews; b) mainly unpublished material produced by various associations; c) unpublished donors’ reports; d) classified records concerning some 150 associations held by the wilaya (governorate) of Algiers. This material was collected during eight months field research carried out between July 2001 and February 2002 in Algiers, Oran, Tizi Ouzou, Ghardaïa, complemented by additional research trips in October 2002 and November – December 2004.

The interviews primarily targeted associations’ members and representatives, Algerian government officials, politicians, donors’ representatives, and Western NGO workers, as well other entrepreneurs, public sector employees, and other types of informants orbiting around the associative sphere.¹⁸ Informants were identified via a classic snowball technique: a restricted set of actors was selected mainly through secondary sources and initial exploratory contacts. During the interview, each actor was encouraged to reveal their ties to, or opinions of, other actors. These new actors were in turn contacted, and a new focal group formed from which a new cycle began. One of the benefits of this method is that it allows for the triangulation of both the information and the perspectives acquired during each interview, leading hopefully to a more balanced interpretation.

¹⁷ Law 90-31, 04 December 1990

¹⁸ A detailed list of people interviewed is included in the Annex.

Chapter 2. From repression to instrumental use: associational life through colonial and postcolonial times

Introduction

In 2004, Ali Fawzi Rebaïne – the leader of a small opposition party called *Ahd '54* (*The Oath of 1954*) - surprised observers of Algerian politics by successfully gathering enough signatures to take part in the Presidential elections. A clear outsider, Rebaïne ended up with less than one percent of the vote, and joined the chorus of those questioning the fairness of the electoral procedures and Abdelaziz Bouteflika's victory. Here is how, a couple of years before, he remembered his political upbringing:

I come from a family involved in politics. My mother and father, my brothers and even my aunts, all took part in the liberation war. Not all of them were involved in politics later on. My father had been in the unions. My granduncle wrote the Soumman platform,¹⁹ and became a minister [under Ben Bella] but retired from politics after the [1965] coup. In the 1980s I had friends in the Berber Cultural Movement. Around 1984/85 when I was about to get out of prison for some demonstrations – some of them told me they had constituted an association of *Enfants des Chouhadas* [Children of the Martyrs of the Revolution] and that they wanted to set up a network of associations at national level, but they were stuck in Tizi [Ouzou]. What we wanted was to defend the memory of the martyrs, to prevent the state from speaking in the name of our fathers. We decided to stop the official commemorations of the dates of the revolution – the 5th of July, the 1st of November etc. Some of these people were also involved in the creation of the first league of human rights. The day they arrested us, on the 5th of July 1985, there were 300 of us. Despite the climate of fear back then, and the reluctance to meet up in public, we were many. From Algiers, Boumerdés, Chlef, Blida.²⁰

The period from the mid-1980s to the army coup in 1992 can be called the time of Algeria's 'associative spring', a time when groups representing a range of diverse political interests started emerging from the widening cracks of the state's faltering legitimacy. It was also the time when long-lasting views of Algeria's associative sphere were formed. Drawing on the oppositional stance that members of underground groups like Rebaïne's held towards the state, these views combined with mainstream notions of civil society and democratisation to influence the interpretation of the associative sphere's impact on Algeria's political

¹⁹ The Platform of the Soummam Congress of the FLN in August 1956 provided a political manifesto calling for a free, independent and democratic Algeria. It was drafted by a small team supervised by Abane Ramdane and including in particular Amar Ouzegane, Ali Fawzi Rebaïne's great uncle.

²⁰ Interview with Ali-Fawzi Rebaïne, President of *Ahd '54*, Algiers 15 January 2002

development for years to come. This interpretation though is as limited as the period on which it draws.

The following discussion lays the ground for a reinterpretation of the relationship between state and associative sphere by taking a longer view. By looking at the period between the emergence of the associative sphere in colonial Algeria and the start of the political liberalisation process in the 1980s, it reveals a number of continuities and discontinuities in the state-associations relationship which have been neglected by the more recent literature on the impact of “civil society” on the country’s politics.

Cafes, *nadis*, and sport clubs in the demise of colonial Algeria

Although Algerian society has been characterised by forms of autonomous organisation active outside the sphere of the state and independent of the government long before the colonial period, such as corporations, religious lodges (*zaouïas*), brotherhoods (*turuq*) or village assemblies (*jama'ât*), the beginning of associational life in its modern form takes place with the French conquest, and more explicitly with the enactment of the 1901 law on freedom of association. From then on, associational life flourished under French rule, becoming a characteristic feature of colonial society and reflecting at the same time its more general features. Though not exceptional, the presence of Algerians in settlers’ associations was in fact rare,²¹ and the associative sphere in its initial development generally reflected the central dynamic of colonial rule: the separation of coloniser and colonised [Ageron, 1968].

This though did not prevent Algerians from establishing their own associations. As noted by Carlier [1995: 43-65], particularly since the 1920s, the country experienced the multiplication of associations called *nadi* – Arabic for ‘circle’ or ‘society’. Appearing around 1910 in conjunction with the emergence of the Young Algerians movement (*Mouvement des Jeunes Algériens*), the popularity of the *nadi* reached its apogee around the time of the Muslim Congress in 1936. Often characterised by multiple (sporting, philanthropic, cultural, etc.) objectives, *nadis* generally found their recruits from the ranks of the newly formed Algerian elite (liberal professions, teachers, intellectuals, public servants and Muslim clergy) [Carlier, 1995: 43]. Moreover, though characteristic of the major Algerian cities (Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Tlemcen), *nadis* appeared even in middle and small towns in the interior.

²¹ For example, during the course of its entire history, from its foundation in 1878 to independence in 1962, the Oran Geographical Society accepted 86 Algerians as members, an average of one a year. In 1939 the association counted 689 members. [Benkada, 1999: 124]

By the end of the thirties, the nadi had become the main centre of socialisation for the Algerian intelligentsia, and radically transformed the political opportunities of upper middle class Muslims.

Although the colonial administration tried to keep 'native' associations under tight control, the associative movement soon became central not only to the socialisation of the elites, but also to their politicisation. The evolution of the Association of Muslim Ulama is interesting in this respect. Created on 5th of May 1931 in Algiers by Abdelhamid Ben Badis [1889-1940], the Association was initially characterised by a religious and ethical agenda which later became increasingly loaded with pro-independence stances. In the same way, from a vehicle for resisting colonial hegemony, the associative sphere became central to the organisation of the nationalist movement which led the liberation war against the French [Lacheraf, 1967]. Both the *Etoile Nord Africaine* and Messali Hadj's Algerian People's Parti (PPA) – the two main political formations preparing the ground for the emergence of the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* – FLN) - benefited from an extensive network of associations. To exploit their revolutionary capacity though, the elites gathering around the nadi had to meet with the masses.

The popular counterpart to the nadi was the café. It constituted the aggregating centre for the masses: the city's workers and traders met up there and there welcomed the newcomers, people that had left the interior to find a job in the urban centres. In the café, the newly urbanised exchanged news from home regions, and rumours about events in the capital and the country in general. Newspapers were exchanged, and with them the popular commentary on the news. For many the café's chairs constituted the first opportunities for talking politics. Both the result of urbanisation, nadi and café were geographically close, but socially separated: the nadi was highly exclusive and structured, the café on the other hand was inclusive and disorganised. Yet, in a dialectic twist typical of much late colonial history, these two separate worlds were to be connected by those against whom they would rise, the French.

Particularly during the period immediately preceding and following the 2nd World War, the two worlds of the elite (*khassa*) and those of the mass (*'amma*) did to some degree find a common ground in the associative experiences set up by the colonial power, most notably in French professional and trade unions, mass organisations, cultural societies, music and sport associations [Entelis, 1995; Carlier, 1995: 45]. As Entelis [1996: 55] points out "politicised Algerian civil society owes its origins to the pre-revolutionary period, when it absorbed much from the French notions of associational life and state-society relations". While based

on colonial cultural values, these organisations provided places of exchange for those who came from the nadi and those who belonged to the café. More interestingly, they increasingly provided a meeting point for the Algerian youth of different social backgrounds, the same youth that in 1954 would start the war of liberation. So, although at the time of its appearance in Algerian cities the nadi was limited to Muslim cultural, intellectual and commercial elites, its combination with proto-associative spaces (the café) and with colonial associative experiences (the sport club, the union, etc), contributed to mobilise the people fighting for the liberation war. Liberation in turn produced a completely different elite, forged through war, in which the social categories that had belonged to the Muslim urban circles – professionals, intellectuals, bureaucrats – and that had formed a vanguard in mobilising support for the war – no longer had a place.²² Equally, during most of independent Algeria there was no place for nadis, clubs or civic associations either.

Independence, incorporation and repression

Immediately after the war of liberation associations began to flourish again, but already under the Ben Bella presidency (1962-1965) the regime's attitude towards them was one of tolerance rather than enthusiasm. A first law on freedom of association was promulgated immediately after independence, on the 31st December 1962, with the aim of officially reinstating the 1901 law on freedom of association. Nevertheless, through a series of decrees, circulars and ordinances the authorities subsequently reinterpreted the law, restricting its liberal character. A 1964 administrative circular by the Ministry of Interior instructed the walis (prefects, governors) to carry out thorough investigations on the "real aims" of any newly formed association and prevent the constitution of any group "that under the cover of social, cultural or artistic activities, could constitute a threat to the state's internal or external security"²³ [Dahak, 1982]. One notable casualty of this was *Jam'iyyat Al-Qiyyam al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Values Association), a conservative Islamic grouping established in 1964.²⁴ The association was first disbanded in 1966, and then dissolved in 1970 [Moore, 1999; Roberts, 1988 and 2003], together with another Islamic association, *Djounoud Allah*.²⁵

²² Leca and Vatin (469-470) discuss how intellectuals and bourgeois strata were excluded by the core combination of leading elites after 1965, with the fall of Ben Bella. The consequences of the liberation war on the *bourgeoisie* and its relation to the newly established *pouvoir* are further explained in Etienne (1977: 56-60).

²³ Ministry of Interior Circulaire 2 March 1964, see Dahak, 1982 annexes 8-14

²⁴ On al-Qiyyam, see Hugh Roberts, 'Radical Islamism and the Dilemma of Algerian Nationalism: The Embattled Arians of Algiers' *Third World Quarterly*, 10, 2 (April 1988): 556-89, Hugh Roberts *North African Islamism*; for a specific reference to al-Qiyyam's position vis-à-vis women, see Knauss [1992]

²⁵ *Algérie-Actualité* No.1122, 16 April 1987.

In an attempt to depoliticise social divisions under the unifying flag of Algerian socialism, the state established a system of supervision structured around a number of mass organisations carrying out its mobilisation project, and took a progressively harder stance towards independent associations. The 1971 ordinance²⁶ crystallised and reinforced the authorities' bridling tactic, by hardening the procedures for granting official recognition to associations. Art 2 of the 1971 ordinance put in place a system of 'double recognition' whereby, in addition to requesting the consent of Wali (for local associations) or the Ministry of Interior (for national associations), any newly created association had to request a preliminary agreement of the Ministry overseeing the sphere of activity covered by the association itself- health, youth, culture, etc [Babadji, 1989:229]. According to Dahak [1982], this restrictive ordinance and its applicative decree were primarily motivated by the hostility expressed by certain religious brotherhoods towards the objectives of the Agrarian Revolution, which was started a month before the introduction of the ordinance.²⁷

Following Boumediène's death in 1978, the size and features of the associative field changed, as did the attitude of the state vis-à-vis independent associations. This process went hand in hand with the beginning of the demise of one of the premises of the state's legitimacy – the notion of Algeria's unanimous society. The riots exploding in Kabylia in 1980 following the cancellation by the authorities of a university lecture in the capital Tizi Ouzou signalled the problematic integration of the Kabyle region in the process of Algeria's state formation. The 1980 'Berber spring' – as it came to be known – saw the birth of the Berber Cultural Movement (*Mouvement Culturel Berbère* – MCB), a loose organisation calling for the recognition of the Berber identity (*Amazighité*) and language (*tamazight*) and based on the clandestine associative network which had developed in Kabylia [Aïssani, 2001].²⁸ From being rooted essentially in the greater Kabylia and Algerois regions, over the course of the years the Berberist associative sector expanded as myriads of associations mushroomed in Algeria's coastal towns.²⁹ Although their stated purpose was often the simple propagation of the Berber identity and culture, these associations were fundamental in providing the ideological material and human capital feeding opposition parties such as the

²⁶ Ordinance 71-79, 3 December 1971 ; Journal Officiel de la République Algérien, p.678

²⁷ This appears as a striking parallel to the debate around the introduction of the 1901 law on freedom of association in France, in which the Interior Minister Waldeck Rousseau was accused of using it as an instrument against religious congregations in the fight for *la laïcité* (see *Le Monde* editorial on the centennial of the Law of 01/07/01 'Long vie aux associations' in *Le Monde* 20/06/01).

²⁸ Most notably the Amugas association founded in Algiers by Mouloud Mammeri et Ben Mohamed, and the Twizi association in Tizi-Ouzou [Aïssani, 2001]. For the tension between the cultural and the political in Berber associations, see Chaker, 1989.

²⁹ Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité '1er Annuaire des Associations Culturelles Amazighes' Algiers 2000

Socialist Forces Front (*Front des Forces Socialistes* – FFS) and, later, the Rally for culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la culture et la Démocratie* – RCD) [Chaker, 1989].

The first women's rights groups to be established in Algeria also appeared during the early 1980s. Their birth was spurred by the government's attempts to pass discriminatory legislation concerning the legal status of women and their role in society, legislation which later became commonly known as the Family Code.³⁰ The first independent women's committee was created in 1981, in Algiers and Oran, followed by an association called *Isis*, which fought against the promulgation of a draft Family Code [Daoud, 1992: 174]. The universities provided the milieu where groups including *Egalité*, *Triomphe*, and *Ahlan* were subsequently created.³¹ As with Berberist associations, the women's movement was fundamental in the constitution of the most secular elements of Algeria's party sphere,³² supplying it with a political agenda and charismatic young leaders such as Louisa Hanoune (later leader of the *Parti des Travailleurs* - PT), Khalida Messaoudi (RCD) and Nacera Merad. [Knauss, 1992: 161; Gadant & Harbi, 1995; Daoud, 1996; Lazreg, 2000].

But by far the most important section of the associative movement growing in the 1980s was that of religious associations. Limited to a few hundreds in the 1970s,³³ during the following decade Algeria experienced an explosion of religious associations, whose mission often revolved around the construction of mosques or the organisation of the *hadj*, to the extent that by 1987 the country counted several thousand religious associations scattered over the entire territory [Sgrena, 1997: 26]. These organisations provided much of the mobilisation network that allowed for the sudden emergence and immediate vigour of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique de Salut*) in 1989.

Comprehending the position of these groups vis-à-vis the authorities is important to understanding the impact Algeria's associative spring had on the country's political development in the following decades. Despite their own distinct outlook and objectives, what was common to religious, women's and Berber associations was their challenge to the state, which they felt lacked the legitimacy it ostensibly enjoyed due to its increasingly apparent failure to deliver on the promises of the revolution. As the story of generational divide depicted in Rebaine's account points out, those active during Algeria's associative spring defined themselves as much in terms of the competing images of society that their

³⁰ Under the impact of the demonstrations, President Chadli Benjedid withdrew the Family Code, only to present it again to the National Assembly in 1984, when it was approved.

³¹ Chapter 4 and 6 contain more details on the birth of these associations and the way they evolved.

³² Gadant Monique et Harbi, Mohamed (1995) 'Quel pôle démocratique' *Esprit* n.208 Jan.

³³ In April 1980, the wilaya of Algiers included a total of 187 religious associations.

associations advocated and pursued as of their strained relationship to the state which had raised, but now was abandoning, them. Formally illegal, but if innocuous generally tolerated, women's groups, Berber grassroots and Islamic charities lived for years in constant tension with the state, in a juridical limbo where their existence depended on the mood of the authorities, until finally this mood changed.

From repression to instrumental use

Far from being straightforward, the authorities' reaction to the emergence of autonomous associations between the mid-1980s and 1992 sheds light on the way the state has related to the associative sphere ever since. Besides a number of repressive measures involving the disbanding and dissolution of dozens of associations and the imprisonment of their members, the state started co-opting the discourse of the most vocal and combative groups. The mass organisations were its first tool to this end. To contrast the emerging women's groups, the state proceeded to placate the *Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes*, which had long constituted an internal source of conflict for the government as much as a tool for mobilising women's support. In turn, the UGTA set up its own women's section, as did the *Union Nationale des Etudiants*. When the mass organisations were of no use, the authorities proceeded to the outright creation of friendly groups - the story of the two leagues of human rights is a case in point.³⁴ And finally, as the legitimacy crisis of the Algerian state was rapidly spiralling out of control, repression gave way to encouragement.

Consciously motivated as a means to smooth the way for state disengagement from service provision (health, culture etc) in the aftermath of the fiscal crisis provoked by the 1985 drop in oil prices, the start of the Algerian debate around freedom of association in the mid-1980s coincided with the years in which the FLN came to experience generalised disrepute in the eyes of the population, and increasing questioning of its monopoly of political representation. There are various and yet largely converging interpretations of why the authorities decided to proceed to the introduction of the first law on freedom of association in 1987.³⁵ According to Harbi [1989: 138], the 1987 law was part of a general strategy recommended by the military and approved by the presidency and aimed at reformulating the state's relation to society by using means different from the discredited FLN and its satellite

³⁴ The motives and events accounting for the almost simultaneous creation of two human rights associations in Algeria at the end of the 1980s are explored in chapter 6.

³⁵ Law 87-15 21st July 1987. A second law was enacted in 1990, and remained in force until 2005.

organisations [Babadji, 1989: 238].³⁶ This interpretation coincides with Kapil's view that through the 1987 law, the political aim of the president and his reformist allies in the army and higher technocratic echelons of the administration was to allow the growth of an "associational field strictly controlled by the state, but completely autonomous from the FLN" [1990: 510]. As Roy explains, the state's crisis of political legitimacy, which materialised in the crisis of political representation and in the crisis of the party of the FLN, made it necessary to invent new intermediaries between the state and society and new forms of political legitimation [Roy, 1994: 276]. Through the introduction of freedom of association, a seemingly minor political move, the *pouvoir* – or more specifically certain elements of it – was seeking novel bases for its legitimisation through the "representation of [new] social links with the national community" [Carrier, 1989: 129].

This is how Khalida Messaoudi, women's rights activist in the 1980s, Member of Parliament for the opposition party of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la culture et la Democratie* - RCD) in the 1990s and finally Minister in Abdelaziz Bouteflika's governments after 2000, remembered the emergence of the first groups of activists as a dialectical development of the single party's hegemony, while hinting at the same time at the instrumental reasons behind the state's new attitude vis-à-vis these groups in the 1980s:

"I'm now 43 years old, and 70% of Algerians are less than 30 years old. Back then the freedom to meet was not yet there, there was the singly party, a party-state and mass organisations attached to the party. We were the generation in which all hopes were placed. They had liberated the country; we had to develop it. For the political rhetoric we were '*les forces vives de la nation*'. And when I compare myself to my nieces, they cannot understand what it was. My experience does not resemble theirs. They might perhaps own a pair of trainers that I could not have. But we had something more solid, like the quality of teaching, and we were considered to be precious. And it was our teachers - mainly feminists - that shaped us, that helped us convince ourselves that the single party was the real cause of our misfortunes. And therefore it was clear to us that in order to take things forward we had to organise autonomously. My father was a small secretary general of my town, and my mum a housewife with 8 kids to take care of. I had access to the university because education was free, and of high quality. Hence a little elite of students, a little *vanguard*. We were the consequence of all that. But we were naïve, because back then we did not understand that the state was using us".³⁷

³⁶ On the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the 1987 law, see chapter 3.

³⁷ Interview with Khalida Messaoudi, Minister of Communication, former President of Rachda, Algiers 23 January 2002

Understandably, the FLN strongly opposed the opening up of the corporatist system to the new associations, fearing to lose the benefits accrued by its monopoly in the utilisation of its satellite organisations. Harbi [1989:137] suggests that the FLN's harsh defensive reaction to the new law was further enhanced by the climate of economic instability generated by increasing talk of impending economic reforms: the prospect of the free market seemed to not only jeopardize labour, but also endanger party cadres' stable political careers at the top of the state, and the political capital accrued from privileges and connections. But there were far more important reasons for the FLN to oppose the 1987 law, which in the corridors of power was clearly perceived as a means to do away with the single party, through "the regularisation of an associative movement of a religious bent, the actual political reservoir of Islamic parties" [Musette,2000:103]. According to Ministry of Interior figures, by 1987 Algeria counted more than 11,000 religious associations.³⁸ In letting the Islamist associative field grow, the Chadli government was going against the earlier post colonial tradition - evident since the disbandment of al-Qiyam - of severity vis-à-vis organised Islam, in line with what Roberts described as the "hegemony of Algerian nationalism over Algerian Islamism" [2003:23]. This change in attitude derived not only from a strategic reconsideration of the state's relationship with society, but also from the shifting institutional equilibria between party and presidency, and the balance of influence affecting the different factions within the power structure – including the army – as a whole. In addition to being meant as a general disassociation from the discredit affecting the Party of the FLN, the Presidency's support to associations was part of a longer term strategy of appeasement towards the religious wing of the party, and its increasing following in society, which in part aimed at counterbalancing the party's internal opposition to Chadli's neo-liberal reform agenda.

The Chadli Presidency defined the premises of the state's relation to the associative movement for the decades to come. It marked a turning point for the authorities' stance towards associations, which shifted from sheer repression to a more discerning, and at times conciliatory, position. This position was accentuated after Chadli's resignation in 1992 following the army's intervention to cancel the second round of national elections that was going to assign a large majority of parliamentary seats to the Islamic Salvation Front. As the networks of religious associations and leagues supporting the FIS were being disbanded, those sections of the associative movement representing those social groups which had identified the FIS as a threat to their very existence, sided with the military junta which took

³⁸ *El Moudjahid* 12 May 1988.

control of the state to legitimise the new political order.³⁹ In the aftermath of the 1992 coup, observers of Algerian politics concerned with the fate of the political reforms in the country saluted the attitude of the state vis-à-vis associations as a positive development in the democratisation of the country [Garon,1996:153], thus opening the way to the application of neo-tocquevillian perspective to Algerian associational life. Layachi [1995:187] for instance wrote: “the spring of 1993 could be rightly called the spring of civil society because it witnessed relatively intense interaction between elements of this nascent civil society and the state”. The way this interaction has evolved into something completely different from democracy has yet to be told.

Conclusions

The changing attitude of the state vis-à-vis the associative sphere can be read as a footnote in the history of colonial and post colonial Algeria, or used as an interpretative lens to better understand state-society relationships. In the years preceding the introduction of political pluralism, the authorities’ repressive stance vis-à-vis associations typical of the years of Boumedienne Presidency years gave way to a more ambivalent attitude. This attitude still marks state-associations relations today.

In both colonial and post-colonial Algeria the associative movement has given birth to anti-systemic oppositions. The networks of cultural associations, and debating societies in colonial Algeria provided the main intellectual hub for the development of Algerian nationalism. The revolutionary ideas of the intelligentsia combined with the mobilisation potential of the less elitist trade unions and sport clubs to produce the intellectual and human capital which eventually brought colonial rule down. In post-Boumedienne Algeria, the thousands of Islamic charities and mosque building societies which mushroomed in the 1980s produced the same revolutionary threat, materialising first in the possibility of a landslide victory by the FIS, and later in the political violence which fuelled the conflict between army and guerrillas. As we shall see, this configuration produced something entirely different from the image of confrontation between civil society and the state so often portrayed by the literature. Menacing both the state and the social groups opposing the FIS, the Islamist threat laid the foundations of a bartering game involving support and legitimacy on the one hand, and security and protection on the other.

³⁹ Chapter 6 explores this episode in more detail.

Chapter 3. Outsourcing failure: state insulation and scapegoat politics in Algeria

Introduction

Between Friday 9th and Saturday 10th November 2001, the Algerian coast was struck by prolonged and intense storms which caused death and damage in various parts of the country. Nowhere else was the toll higher than in the capital itself. On the dawn of Saturday, a chunk of land collapsed from the Bouzareah hill on Algiers' heights transforming itself into a mudslide which submerged the main highway and followed it right into the city's western districts, taking anything to be found on its course into the sea. The way the authorities responded to the calamity provides a case study of the role played by the associative sector in Algeria's process of economic reform and state retreat.

Since the incorporation of 'civil society' into the 1990s development agenda [Evans, 1996], considerable attention has been paid to associations' role as a remedy to the 'ineffective state'. As the Comaroffs show [1999], the very roots of Western re-appropriations of the notion of civil society coincided with the emerging evidence of the manifold shortcomings of state-led development in Eastern Europe. Since then the idea of associational life as a solution to the failure of the state has accompanied mainstream views of civic associations' role in the processes of economic and political development of countries in the South. [Lewis, 2002: 571]. In addition to being identified as actors smoothening state-downsizing through the occupation of the service-provision vacuum left by the failing state [Robison, 1997;], civic associations became identified with forces able to 'keep the state in check' and bring about the demise of authoritarian politics [Bratton, 1989; Chazan, 1992; Khan, 1997: 114].

As a piece of UN-sponsored research shows, analyses of civic associations in the Middle East reflect these assumptions: "given the gradual retreat of the state from its traditional social responsibilities [...] in the Middle East experience 'pressure from below' is highly relevant to development" [UNSRID, 2000:v]. The emerging associative sectors of the region appeared as an opportunity to roll back the failing state as well as strengthen participatory forms of political organisation by providing an alternative to top-down processes of economic change [Singerman, 1995; Sullivan; Norton, 1994 & 1995; Schwindler, 1995; Entelis]. Today, as Jenkins and Goetz notice, "the accepted position is that social networks are most likely to solidify into agents for change when the state is in retreat" [1999: 44].

A closer examination of how voluntary associations provide support to the state is important to qualify the validity of these views. The role Algeria's associative sector played during the process of economic reform needs to be assessed against the political conditions characterising the inception of the reforms. Until the end of the 1990s, Algeria's track record of economic adjustment and failed democratisation made it appear as a typical case of 'failed state insulation'. In Algeria though, a degree of insulation was effectively achieved, and through means different from those normally explored by the literature. As shown by the emergence of a discourse which focused on the inefficiencies of Algeria's associative sector and made it complicit in the failures of state retreat from service delivery, associational life successfully provided one such means.

Structural disadjustment as insulation failure

At the end of the 1990s, for its initial success at redressing the fiscal imbalances haunting macroeconomic stability, Algeria was praised as one of the best pupils of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [Henry, 1999]. Yet, very clearly the accomplishments on the budgetary and debt management sides were not achieved without paying a harsh price [Dillman, 1998]. The reform package impinged directly on the economic well-being of the population at large, with austerity measures hitting both the demand and supply sides of the economy - such as dramatic and unending currency devaluation, massive public sector downsizing, subsidies reductions and government spending cut backs in all social and cultural domains. Moreover, Algeria's reacquired balance in its main macroeconomic indicators was not matched by resumed growth. A progressive downturn in industrial production encouraged years of economic decline, made visible by GDP growth stagnating at an average of 1.7% between 1992 and 1999 - 80% lower than the level recommended by the World Bank to stabilise unemployment rates at current levels (WB, 2000).

The social and political effects of this process have to be assessed not only in terms of their depth, but also in relation to the time span which they occupied. Algeria's economic adjustment was in fact a protracted affair which began well before the signing of the loan facility agreement with the IMF in 1994 allowing for debt rescheduling. Economic reforms were initiated under the presidency of Chadli Benjedid in the early 1980s, and hastened by the collapse of oil prices in the mid 1980s. The consequences for the kind of paternalistic welfarism characterising Algeria's social contract were dramatic and so was the fall of Algerians' living standards. In 2002, facing real GDP per capita falling back to 1975 levels and the comeback of hyperinflation, Algerians entered the third decade of economic decline.

This track record prompted the Economic and Social National Council (CNES) - a think tank composed of government-appointed members - to define the achievements of the reform programme as a prime example of 'structural disadjustment'.⁴⁰ What had gone wrong?

A wide body of literature explains the success and failures of economic adjustment by focusing on the political conditions prevailing at the inception of the reforms. One strand asserts that a condition of 'state insulation' is necessary to carry out effective macroeconomic restructuring. Drawing on David Easton's framework of political system [1965], state insulation can be defined as a condition by which the organisations of government – which in Easton's terms mean the decision-making departments of the state, such as the executive, the parliament, or the military – are able to retain power after decreasing the amount of resources allocated. Despite a demand overload, the protection from the pressures of public demands make it possible to avoid a reshaping of the political system.

The literature points to three preconditions for effective insulation and successful adjustment. The first concerns the presence of a core coalition dominating the decision making departments of the state and preventing both inner conflicts and external opposition from hampering the effective implementation of reforms. Such conditions in turn allow for the second prerequisite - a long-term political horizon allowing the core coalition to develop a durable strategy for carrying out the reform and to link its political survival to the successful implementation of such reforms. [Nelson, 1989 & 1990]. The third precondition concerns the presence of an efficient bureaucracy gifted with a well-defined esprit de corps and led by a technocratic, change-driven elite [Hirschman, 1999].

Chile and Ghana's experiences provide two clear examples of adjustment via insulation. Economic reforms were started under military-backed presidential regimes which closed the political space and reduced opportunities for voicing dissent. In each case, the reform policies were implemented by a closed policy making group with strong technocratic inclinations (Ghana had her own version of Chile's 'Chicago boys'). In carrying out adjustment, both countries benefited from bureaucracies with a capacity for quick adaptation to new plans or at least which allowed for little or no opposition to new practices, like those central to the developmental experiences of Japan and South Korea [Robinson, 1996; Toye,

⁴⁰ Kamel C. 'Bilan sans complaisance du CNES' *El Watan* 12/06/02. A detailed and concise account of the mismanagement of the reform process can be found in Dillman [1998]

1991; Luckham, 1996: 161].⁴¹ In accounting for Ghana's success story, Callaghy [1990: 277] highlights Rawlings's Provisional National Defence Council's narrow organisational base, and stresses its "insulation" from "important socio-political veto groups". Haynes [1993: 455] underlines the closure of the political field achieved through the state's sheer autocratic nature – hence its insulation from pressures coming from both 'elite' and 'popular' forces. The main conclusion of the state insulation literature is that in the absence of such conditions at the inception of reform, preventive measures of political adjustment need to precede economic ones.

At the time of the implementation of economic reform Algeria hardly met any of these three fundamental conditions. First, instead of being firmly controlled by a core coalition devoted to and capable of implementing economic reform, Algeria's institutions of government were ravaged by stalemating divides.⁴² The nature of these divides was widely portrayed by western observers to be centred on the question of economic reform itself – the hardliners in favour of the status quo against the group of technocrats gravitating around the presidency. It was also believed to be impinging purely on the single party's internal balances. In reality, such divisions went deeper and further than the FLN. Economic reform was in fact just one of the many issues on which the state's inner alliances were being reshaped through the interplay of army, party and bureaucracy [Roberts, 1994].

Second, instead of constituting the driving policy around which the reformers' attention and political survival revolved, the prospective implementation of adjustment raised distracting scenarios. According to Kapil [1990: 511], in the second half of the 1980s, following the collapse of oil prices, policymaking did revolve around the awareness of having to solve the state's financial crisis. The outcome of this awareness though was not the efficient tackling of the crisis, but three new aims including a) the realisation of the opportunities for personal enrichment emerging from the reforms, especially through the granting of import licenses and opportunities to partake in the benefits of the privatisation schemes [Tlemçani, 1999]; b) scenarios of factional conflict aggravated by the reforms themselves, which pushed state actors at all levels to devote vast political energies to their solution; and c) the necessity to

⁴¹ It is interesting to note how these very experiences have recently attracted ample interest in Algeria. South Korea's developmental state's role constituted the central issue of the conference 'Quel Développement Pour l'Algérie?' organised by the FORUM des Chefs d'Entreprises and held in Algiers on 19th January 2002 (See *Lettre du Forum*, n.8, Feb. 2002), while the comparison of Algeria's adjustment with Pinochet's Chile often recurs on the economic columns of various newspapers. For a primary example see the insert dedicated to this point in *El Watan* 30/07/01.

⁴² On the divisions between reformers and conservatives, see Ahmed, Kaci 'Des luttes des classes aux luttes de clans' *La Tribune*, 3/10/02

adjust the economy itself, in order to avoid financial collapse. Thus, the political process became influenced by day to day considerations which disrupted the quest for a long-term strategy to solve the state's impending financial collapse.

The features of Algeria's bureaucracy constitute the last missing precondition for insulation. In 1990, commenting on the capacity of the last reformist prime minister to conduct the reforms, Lahouari Addi maintained that "nobody believes that Mr Hamrouche can implement a policy change by relying on the same administrative personnel responsible for the preceding stagnation".⁴³ At the inception of the adjustment efforts, Algerian bureaucrats seemed far from the well-trained, dutiful and efficient machine envisaged by the state insulation model.⁴⁴

But besides factional divides, lack of a long-term strategy, and bureaucratic slack, there is one fundamental factor motivating Algeria's insulation failure. It concerns the very decisions made by the reform-oriented coalition to open up the political space at a time when social discontent was at its height.

Insulation revisited

The interplay between bottom up pressures generated by economic discontent and the institutional changes produced in response has been identified as key to explaining Algeria's brisk democratic experience and its following shift to authoritarianism. [Leca & Leveau, 1993]. This observation can be framed in the literature on the sustainability of democracy in times of economic restructuring, exemplified by the works of Adam Przeworsky [1991: 136-187; 1995; Robinson, 1996]. Thus, the October 1988 riots have been widely perceived as 'bread' riots pushing political reform [Owen, Murphy, 1998: 79, Sadiki, Seldon & Watson].⁴⁵ Accordingly, the decision to carry out the 1989 democratic opening is interpreted as an attempt by Chadli's clique of reformers to maintain support, by granting democratic representation in exchange for a reformulation of the social contract, doing away with the paternalistic welfarism of the oil bonanza years [Alexander, 2000: 480; Owen, 1998]. In turn, the opening of the political space during the brief democratic interlude rendered the

⁴³ L. Addi 'Vide de Pouvoir et intolérance. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1990

⁴⁴ See for instance various dossiers and articles appearing since at least 1987 on Algérie Actualité, attacking Algerian bureaucrats for their slackness, inefficiency and underperformance. These attacks continue today.

⁴⁵ For an opposing view on the significance of the October 1988 events and their characterisation as bread riots, see Roberts [2001b]

state unable to cope with the demand overload, itself generated by increasing social grievances and the necessities of adjustment. This made it prey to the populist rhetoric of the electoral contender – the Islamic Salvation Front. The necessity to correct this mistake became the motive for the drastic re-closure of the political space carried out through the 1992 coup. The story often told in the literature is that Algeria’s sequence of economic and political reforms became a paradigmatic case of how “simultaneous democratisation and structural adjustment proved unworkable” [Dillman, 1998: 5] and of how Algerian political elites “got the politics wrong” [Quandt, 1998]. Therefore, according to these views, rather than being due to its missing the preconditions for appropriate insulation, Algeria’s stalemated political change was due to the fact that its government actually failed to seek insulation, implementing instead a totally opposite policy of political opening, with the fatal consequences that we know.

These conclusions need revision. By paying closer attention to the conditions under which adjustment was carried out, a different set of strategies and opportunities allowing for insulation emerge. The first can be defined as a ‘demands swap’ opportunity. Due to increased levels of insecurity, public preferences are altered and experience a substitution in favour of more demands for security and less for welfare. Demands for the allocation of services and material resources decrease, with no need to directly repress dissent. Clement Henry forcefully puts this analysis forward by arguing that the enduring climate of violence offered an opportunity for the Algerian state to reformulate the social contract. “By empowering insecurity [thus] increasing the value of security, the bunker state...revised the tacit contract offering welfare” [1999: 1]. In Henry’s words, Algeria’s “paradigm of adjustment” is one in which “insulation [was achieved through] the mindless massacres of thousands of civilians, enabl[ing] the regime to carry out draconian economic policies”. Instead of being the result of failed economic reform, Algeria’s violent stalemate constitutes the means towards its very achievement.

A second insulation strategy assumes the features of political diversion. In order to maintain legitimacy and authority, the core coalition diverts public attention away from the causes and consequences of economic failure by creating and focusing on a new problem. Designating an enemy and embarking on a war is the foremost example of political diversion [Hess & Orphanides, 1995].⁴⁶ Testas [2002: 170-174] applies the diversionary hypothesis to the

⁴⁶ It is worth noticing how the very beginning of French rule in Algeria was itself a form of diversion. Ageron writes: “The expedition of Algiers was not connected with the colonial policy of the Restoration Bourbon monarchy, but was a makeshift expedient for internal political consumption, carried out by a government in difficulty seeking the prestige of a military victory” [1991:5].

Algerian scenario, by maintaining that the FIS was used as “an internal enemy...in the democratic game played by Chadli...to maintain legitimacy and authority” in times of economic crisis, a claim supporting Roberts’s view that the FIS was used by Chadli & Co as an ally or auxiliary, at least at first [1994]

A subtler version of diversionary politics is achieved through the misrepresentation of dissent. In this variant, social discontent is recognised but its causes are diverted from socio-economic grievances and relegated to realms where solutions can be found or political damage can be limited. The riots which started in the spring 2001 in Tizi Ouzou and shook the region of Kabylia for several months provide a recent example of dissent misrepresentation. Instead of being acknowledged as the long repressed product of mass unemployment, overcrowded housing and inadequate social services, the Kabyle riots were treated by the government and by the Kabylia-based Rally for Culture and Democracy in terms of ‘the Berber identity question’. This enabled the regime to isolate ‘Berber’ Kabylia from the rest of the country and to avoid tackling real policy issues, such as the economy [Roberts, 2001a].

A third and yet unexplored form of diversionary politics was played through associational life. In this scenario, service-delivery failures and economic breakdown are acknowledged, but responsibility for them is diverted from the state and positioned on individuals or organisations whose function - in the economy of adjustment - is to face discontent and take (part of) the blame. In turn, the diversion of responsibility away from the state drives sentiments of abandonment, helplessness and uncertainty in the public, thus transferring conflict to the level of society and participating in the politics of “empowered insecurity” depicted by Henry.⁴⁷ To explore this, we need to go back to the very moment when the discourse on economic reform started being promoted, in conjunction with the state’s vigorous endorsement of voluntary associations.

Introducing the scapegoats

Well before civil society became a mainstay of the international development agenda, Algeria was already pioneering a discourse promoting the benefits of associational life.⁴⁸ The

Obviously, neither of the strategies seen above (demands swap and diversionary politics) is confined to colonial times, nor to developing countries alone.

⁴⁷ On uncertainty as a consequence of ‘social demoralisation’, see Jordan, Bill [2002] ‘Demoralisation, Exit, and Mobility’ Paper presented for a conference on Demoralisation, Power and Authority, Cardiff University, 5th, 6th April.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the role played by these issues in transforming the 1980s development agenda into the post-Washington consensus, see the introduction, and Fine [1999].

peculiarity of the Algerian case lies not only in the timing, but also in relation to what was happening in neighbouring countries. While in Egypt, for instance, service-oriented voluntary associations and self-help community groups were undergoing state repression [Singerman, 1995; Sullivan, 1994], in Algeria, an emerging discourse on associational life was providing a gateway for the introduction of new ideas of democracy and citizenship.

In July 1987, just a month after his nomination as interior minister, El Hadi Khediri – a man with a tough reputation gained during the previous decade spent as director of the police – prominently entered President Chadli's reformist circle by presenting a bill on associative freedom⁴⁹ to the lower house (*Assemblée Populaire Nationale*, APN). Compared to previous regulations, the new bill appeared extremely liberal in character. It proposed to replace the previous ordinance of 1971 requiring any association to receive provisional authorisation from both the ministry of interior and the ministry concerned with the association's area of activity, with one demanding merely a declaration of creation, without ex-ante recognition.

The bill was portrayed as marking a sea change in state-society relations. In presenting it to the Assembly, Khediri emphasised the differences with the 'previous' authoritarian order. He depicted the creation of associations as "spaces of freedom", as a way "to seriously guarantee the deepening of the democratic process engaged by [the] country". He went on to explain that associational life would allow for the transformation of "workers" into "citizens", and the transition from a conception of citizenship 'under state tutelage', to one in which citizens enjoyed full capacity to fulfil their own initiatives as well [Babadji, 1987: 100].

The relevance of Khediri's speech to the development of state-associations relations in the coming years has to be assessed on three levels: a) the way sectors of the state welcomed the emergence of freedom of association; b) the reaction from parts of the intelligentsia; c) the discourse emerging from the (still) state-controlled press. The bill in fact faced enormous resistance, not only from inside the party apparatus but also from MPs in the APN. Thirty-three interventions marked the parliamentary debate on freedom of association, thirteen of them overtly maintained that the party had to retain control over old and newly created associations [Babadji, 1987: 109]. Thus, in order to avoid defeat and give the impression of overcoming the stalemate, a new law was passed that kept the requirement of preventive recognition for regional and national associations. Moreover, its decree of application⁵⁰ stipulated that local associations involved in activities that *could be performed by public*

⁴⁹ Later approved as Law 87-15, 21 July 1987.

⁵⁰ Decree 88-16, 2 February 1988.

services had also to acquire government recognition. So, in 1987, restrictions were still active on three levels: the object of the association, the preventive control and the ex-post control. Any association that did not receive the ex-ante recognition from the ministry could not open a bank account, rent an office, own a post-box or meeting room, publish material, or entertain any relations with the authorities.

As it became clear that the state was going to retain control over the activities of new associations, the atmosphere of democratic change initially brought about by the whole affair soon faded. To the section of the new intelligentsia who at the time interpreted the new bill as the beginning of a democratic opening, it soon appeared clear that what was at stake was not freedom of association per se, but rather the *use* the state was going to make of it. According to Babadji, the final product of the entire debate within and outside parliament signalled that the introduction of voluntary associations was not so much aimed at guaranteeing the right of citizens to group according to common interests - as Khediri initially put it - but “rather at introducing new tools for relaying the action of the state” and controlling society. “If there is a retreat of the state – he wrote - it is prudently carried out and nothing prevents us from believing that it is only transitory” [Babadji, 1987: 109]. These views though proved only partially correct.

In the months preceding the presentation of the bill, coverage of the previously ignored issue of associative freedom started generating a plethora of articles and commentaries in the state-controlled press. Here though, a different angle on the functions of associational life was being taken, which emphasised the linkages with the process of state disengagement from service provision. In truth, during his speech Khediri himself briefly mentioned this very issue as a way of convincing the APN to pass the bill [Kapil, 1990:509-510].⁵¹ Yet, what initially appeared to be a nuance in the government’s plan gradually gained more prominence in the press, almost becoming the heart of the matter. Nowhere more than in the columns of *Algérie Actualité* - the ‘liberal weekly’ appealing to the young intelligentsia⁵² -

⁵¹ For the full text of Khediri’s communication as well as the MPs interventions, see *Journal Officiel des débats de l’APN, troisième législature, première année, n°5*, (6 July 1987)

⁵² At the time *Algérie Actualité*’s columns hosted a range of academics and journalists who were later to become ‘Algeria’s consciousness’ abroad, either because they left the country in the wake of the conflict to teach in French universities, or because they were recruited as freelance journalists by Western newspapers to cover the country’s events. Among them, Bachir Dahak and Babadji themselves belong to the first group, while Ghania Mouffouk, and Baya Gacemi to the second. The sway the weekly held on the young intelligentsia is well portrayed by Khalida Messaoudi : “More than the clandestine (communist) party - that they were able to repress whenever and in whatever way they wanted - it was the cinémathèque that played a marking role for my generation ...Algiers was at the capital where Mahmud Derwish, Kateb Yacine, Gillo Pontecorvo met up...Luckily we had the cultural pages of *Algérie Actualité*’....Can you imagine what *Algérie Actualité* meant for us ? From the cultural point of view there was an atmosphere that had a big role in defining an elite – we are the

the enthusiasm for the still meagre associative sector⁵³ was taken as an opportunity for exploring intermingling ideas of new citizenship, democracy and unbearable budget deficits, in ways closely anticipating donors' prescriptive stance on civil society emerging in the few years to come [Hearn, 2001]. M.Khellifi for instance wrote: "associations come to breathe a new dynamic into social life, liberating the citizens from the bureaucratic yokes blocking all individual and collective initiatives [...] [By] inducing new habits, associative practice is a form of enlargement of the national democratic field. [...] Associations crystallise the need of self expression and the desire to be helpful [and] they propose themselves as tools that disengage the state from a certain number of tasks"⁵⁴. For Dahak, writing in the same columns during the weeks preceding the presentation of the new bill, this point was central: "the new state vision on associations – he wrote - is dictated by the imperatives of the crisis, obliging the state to stop its investments in the socio-cultural sectors."⁵⁵ By 1989, when Fadela Benabadji was overtly tackling the issue by titling her article '*To disengage the state: associational life*', the king was naked.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, driven by Chadli's constitutional reform, the newly enacted law⁵⁷ stressed the democratising aspect of associative freedom – not its welfare provision role. The political aspirations of the young intelligentsia, not the economic necessities of the state, seemed to be fulfilled:

For people like me, and all those pushing for the [1990] law, it was inconceivable that on the one hand we had a hyper liberal framework concerning political parties, and on the other an extremely restrictive law for apolitical associations. It didn't make sense.⁵⁸

consequence of all this [Interview with Khalida Messaoudi, MP, President of RACHDA. Former RCD vice president, counsellor to President Bouteflika and Minister of Communication. Algiers, 23 January 2002

⁵³ At the end of the 1970s there were 2185 associations in Algeria, of which more than half were composed of pupils' parents associations (609) and sport associations (687) [Dahak, 1980]. An approximate estimate of the number of associations in 1988 is 11.000. In 1980 the wilaya of Algiers counted 707 associations, of whom 187 were religious and 187 culturally orientated. In 1987, the same wilaya counted 1500 associations overall. Dahak, B. *Algérie Actualité* n.1122, 16 April 1987.

⁵⁴ *Algérie Actualité* 1120 2 April 1987 .

⁵⁵ *Algérie – Actualité* 23 April 1987.

⁵⁶ Pour décharger l'état: la vie associative *Algérie Actualité* 1226 12-13 April 1989. Also quoted in Kapil [1990: 534]. See also various dossiers on *Algérie Actualité* 1120, 2 April 1987; 1122, 16 April 1987; 1123, 21 April 1987; 1210, 22 December 1988; *Révolution Africaine*, 1217, 20 June 1987; *El Moudjahid*, 4 April 1987.

⁵⁷ Law 90-31, 4th of December 1990.

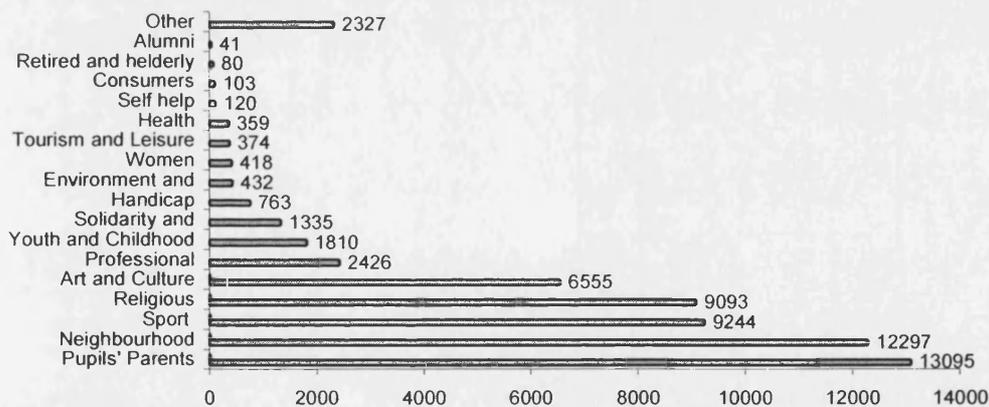
⁵⁸ Interview with Maamar Aatafa, advisor to the Minister of Social Action and National solidarity, former director of the Associative Movement Directorate of the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity (MASSN), Member of the Board of Directors of 'Touiza', Algiers, Interview, 15 January 2002.

Examining how and why the associative element of Chadli's opening survived Algeria's authoritarian revival will shed light on the role the associative movement played in relation to the state's need to divert discontent. This will then lead to revising the interpretation of the country's political change as a mistaken sequence of economic and political reforms.

Diverting discontent

Between 1990 and 2006, Algeria's associations grew from 11,000 to a staggering 73,000. The breadth of this evolution is as important as its numerical dimension. Expanding in parallel to the shrinkage of the state's intervention capacities, associative activity increased to cover vast sectors of welfare provision and social care. This is made clear by the way the ministry of interior categorises local associations [Figures 3.1 and 3.2].

Figure 3.1 Local associations by category, 2001



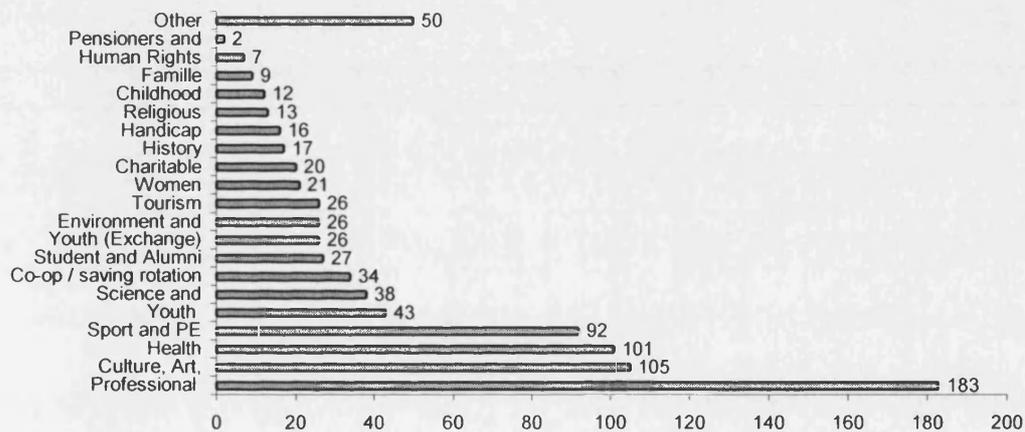
Source: Ministry of Interior, 2001

The continuing intermingling of 'democratic' change and 'economic' retreat has been a prominent feature of the authorities' interpretation of such growth. Playing to both internal and international publics, the governmental rhetoric constantly reiterated associations' relevance to the country's democratic development, without omitting to stress their contribution in filling the vacuum left by the disengaging state.⁵⁹ Foreign donors encouraged this trend. In 2000, under the Democracy Assistance chapter of its MEDA programme, the

⁵⁹ The relationship between the emergence of associational life and the external legitimacy of the state is dealt with in chapter 7.

EU launched a 'Programme in support of development-oriented associations,'⁶⁰ while in 2001, within the framework of the 'Democracy Grant', the American government granted subsidies varying between US\$ 8000 and US\$ 20000 to eight Algerian NGOs, in order to buy PCs, office equipment and medicines. Western embassies in Algiers often contribute to the organisation of meetings and seminars on the involvement of associations in the social and cultural sectors. Since 1987, at least three major government-sponsored conferences⁶¹ on the welfare provision role of the associative movement have been held. The latter, which dealt specifically with the role of development oriented NGOs in eliminating poverty, was sponsored by the World Bank.

Figure 3.2 National associations by category, 2001



Source: Ministry of Interior, 2001

In order to examine the insulating functions of associational life, this rhetoric must be analysed from two perspectives: first, the use the state made of associations; second, the impact associational life had on society. The upheaval starting in Kabylia in the spring of 2001 and the proposals for the arrangements for the reworking of local governments provides a case study of the first perspective.

Local Governments' institutional decay

In the wake of the first wave of riots, Prime Minister Benflis attributed widespread popular malcontent to "a crisis of local politics". Besides targeting income registry headquarters,

⁶⁰ EC (2001) 'Protocole d'Accord du Programme d'appui aux associations algériennes de développement', Algiers

⁶¹ They were held on the 13 and 14 of December 1987, 16 and 17 June 1996, and 28, 29 and 30 October 2000.

gendarmerie barracks, political parties' offices as well as other symbols of the administrative and political infrastructure of the state, the rioters showed a particular keenness in hitting local government buildings - such as wilaya headquarters, daïras and municipal councils (*Assemblées Populaires Communales, APC*).

The reasons for targeting local government buildings do not merely lie in their geographical proximity to the demonstrators. The targeting of APCs was a function of the tasks they performed, and of the progressive depletion of the resources they should have been endowed with. As Taïbi [1990:305,fn:15] points out "local governments are particularly important as centres of allocation of material and immaterial goods"... "The range of products offered by the commune is vast and includes civil status documents, building permits, registers involving commerce, employment, housing, and land ownership, as well as a certain number of authorisations and licenses". Although this had been true at least since independence, by 2000 financial bankruptcy was putting in question the APCs capacity to keep on performing their role. APCs' total deficit increased from AD5bn in 1994 to AD15bn in 1999. According to the government, the number of indebted APCs has reached 1183 in 2000, while according to the CNES this figure was even higher.

Along with financial collapse went the system of power relations between bureaucrat and citizen. For over a decade, local governments' soft budget constraints helped keep in place patronage mechanisms based on resource distribution which were now becoming unsustainable. During this time, no general effort to reformulate local governments' institutional framework was attempted, but the pressures of hard budget constraints progressively limited the capacity of outreach of patronage networks, and exclusion brought discontent. The very same patronage mechanisms that constituted the modus operandi of local administrators, as well as the institutional imagery of their related cliques, ended up appearing as condemnable corruption. [Taïbi,1990]

This situation is evidenced by an independent consultant working for the wilaya. By citing the dangers of his professional activity, he expresses his disappointment regarding the situation of property rights in land:

Take a map of Algeria and throw a dart on it: I defy you to tell me whom that spot belongs to. I spend days trying to figure out who owns which parcel of land, and believe me, it is not a matter of time, it is a matter of interpretation, because ultimately nobody knows. And in

this country one day you get interpretations wrong and you get rich, the other day you get them right and you end up in jail.⁶²

Two categories of scapegoat suffered the brunt of local governments' institutional inadequacy. The first is composed of those bureaucrats who, after the cancellation of the 1992 elections, took over a vast majority of APCs as centrally-appointed "commissaires" (*délégués exécutifs communaux*, DECs), inaugurating what later became known as '*la république des DECs*'. Many of them ended up serving jail sentences for corruption scandals often involving cadastral improprieties and illegal appropriation of state-owned land.⁶³

Political parties provide the second category. In this respect, the experience of the *Rassemblement National Démocratique* (RND) is a special case. The RND was created immediately before the 1997 elections, and won both national and local rounds - the latter by such a vast margin to make the presence of electoral fraud blatant. But in addition to being associated to electoral fraud, the RND soon became synonymous with local mismanagement and corruption, a perception amplified by the fact that after the 1997 elections the majority of APCs were governed by RND-led coalitions, at a time in which local government was facing financial breakdown. The price that the RND had to pay for playing the scapegoat function it played was twofold: first, a number of RND mayors and administrators followed their DEC predecessors to prison, and second, on the wave of popular discontent due to its performance in local politics, the RND lost a vast share of its support and relinquished its position of first party to the FLN following the May 2002 legislative elections.⁶⁴

Civic associations make up the third category of scapegoats. This was introduced after the 2001 black spring riots, when PM Benflis linked his plans for solving the 'communication failure' between local governments and citizens to the inclusion of 'elements of participative democracy' to be implemented 'with the help of the associative movement'.⁶⁵ In a declaration to the APN in June 2001 Benflis stated "for the present and near future, we the

⁶² Interview with Moha Mouloud 'Géomètre Expert, Tizi Ouzou, December 2001. This statement is not to be taken as an exaggeration. It probably applies to much of the land in the plains and in the vicinity of the towns (although not to land tenure in the mountains where traditional village structures, land tenure patterns and local customs and rights have survived). William C. Byrd writes : "for years, the cadastre and a system of registering of property rights have not been put in place, despite their irrefutable necessity. ' Algérie – contre performances économiques et fragilité institutionnelle ' *Confluences Méditerranée* n.45 2003

⁶³ Djillali *Démocratie et Corruption en Algérie* provides a well-documented recollection of the wrongdoings of Algeria's *délégués exécutifs communaux* DECs, and of how the many facets of the local government crisis were attributed to the maliciousness of bureaucrats.

⁶⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the state and the parties not exclusively focused on the RND, see Chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Kaci, A. 'La Politique de l'Arouche' *La Tribune*, 24/07/01

government, imagine Algeria as a society organised in a dense network of civic associations”.⁶⁶ Three months later, he summoned “civil society to solve the problems once dealt with by the state”... “civil society’s involvement - he said - is essential and imperative in order to build a modern, civilised and imaginative country”.⁶⁷ In February 2002, again during a speech to the APN, Benflis declared: “I would like to underline the government’s attention to civil society and to its contribution to promoting the public interest. The associative movement is first of all a clear example of the consecration of the fundamental liberties and of human rights as stipulated in the constitution ... Keeping in mind the rapidity and the complexity of the changes affecting the socio-economic field, the government intends to put in place durable and definitive mechanisms intended to increase civil society’s involvement in the management of public affairs”⁶⁸. Interior Minister Yazid Zerhouni (who as Khediri before him often appeared to be an associational life enthusiast)⁶⁹ clarified the PM’s plans for reworking the local government system. Discussing the possible ways out of the bad management syndrome suffered by most APCs, the Interior Minister put forward a three-legged proposal aimed at “solving the country’s problems at local level, where the *hogra* is largely felt”,⁷⁰ by “renewing local councils’ system of government”. This was to be achieved by a) endowing the walis with “more decision making power”;⁷¹ b) limiting the prerogatives and powers of the APCs’ elected members; c) involving the associative movement in the decision making process at the local level.⁷²

Far from being limited to wishful thinking or mere programmatic expectations, the government’s agenda for local government reform was based on a number of examples of a happy ‘collaboration’ between the executive and civic associations, in which popular discontent was diverted away from the former and onto the latter. The Association Citoyenne

⁶⁶ Dahmani, I. ‘Benflis à l’APN’ *Le Jeune Indépendant*, 27/06/01.

⁶⁷ A. Lemili ‘L’implication du mouvement associatif, sinon rien’ *Jeune Indépendent* 18/10/01

⁶⁸ www.cg.gov.dz/gouvernement/chef-G/discours/Reponse-APN.doc

⁶⁹ *El Moudjahid* (30-31 March 2001) reported Zerhouni’s satisfaction with “national and local associations ... functioning in complete freedom and taking active part to the social, economic and cultural life of the country” .

⁷⁰ Hammadi ‘Quel Code pour les communes’ *Le Matin*, 23 July 2001.

⁷¹ According to the Interior Minister “Algeria is under-administered”, for three main reasons. First, lack of human capital: only three per cent of employees have a university degree. Second, the “security situation”: security guards sent to protect public buildings were on the APC payrolls, and thirdly the dissolution of local public enterprises (EPL) reducing financial resources for the APC in Kaci, A. *La Tribune*, 24/07/01

⁷² Interview on the Official Algerian Television (ENTV), 26 October 2001. Despite having been on the government’s agenda for several years, the reform of the Local Government Law (Code de la Commune) has not taken place yet. The most recent Code de la Commune was approved with law 90/08 of 7 April 1990. The only documented attempt was that of the Sbih Commission (from named after its Chairman, Missoum Sbih, now Algeria’s Ambassador to France), which was appointment by President Bouteflika in 2000 to lay down a plan for reforming the state, including local government.

de Béjaïa (ACB) provides one of the most exemplary cases.⁷³ Before its disbandment, the ACB entertained a close relationship with Bejaïa's wilaya and APCs. Indeed, through its organisation of social work, charitable activities and social events, the ACB experienced a peculiar fusion of the associative and administrative fields. The two spheres merged structures, roles and tasks, thus seemingly reshaping the modes of local governance as described in Benflis and Zerhouni's vision. Once social discontent arose though, the local administration left the ACB to absorb social frustrations, to the point that it announced its disbandment after rioters had raided its offices and set them on fire.

Two more examples of how the Algerian associative movement deflected social discontent in cases of clear state failure are to be found in the Bab El Oued floods and the Hassi Messaoud affair.

The Bab El Oued flooding

Bab el Oued (BEO) - the "river's gate" in Arabic – is one of Algiers' most famous working class districts. Its name today stands for Algeria's urban ills: overcrowding, mass unemployment and social exclusion. To many, the fact that it was also the district with the highest death toll following the November 2001 flooding, seemed an especially bad trick of fate, as well as a clear sign of the state's disregard for the lower classes. While the prime causes of the tragedy were an exceptionally heavy rainfall and ill-fated urban planning schemes (including in particular the construction of a highway on the river bed), the authorities failure to foresee the dangers and to appropriately manage relief operations make the BEO floods an exceptional example of state failure. It was termed 'genocide by negligence' by those pointing the finger at the country's lack of available expertise to anticipate the events, the lack of appropriate maintenance of the capital's drainage system and particularly the failure to restore the large draining pipes blocked to prevent the islamist guerrillas from using them.⁷⁴ Because of the lack of appropriate equipment to empty the streets from the tons of mud, the army had to step in and take charge of operations inside the district, and three conspicuous white trucks sent from Casablanca by the Moroccan government were involved in the lighter drainage procedures.

Yet, more than an example of the authorities' ineptitude, the floods have to be considered as a prime proof of the state's insulation capacity. In the wake of evident government's failure and with rising popular discontent, no member of the cabinet resigned and no official was

⁷³ The ACB's case is described in more detail in chapter 6.

⁷⁴ See 'La colère gronde à Alger' *Le Monde*, 14 November 2001.

fired. President Bouteflika did not visit the place until three days after the events, only to declare that “responsibility for what happened rests neither with the government or with a party...it is God putting us to the test”.

Meanwhile, slow aid delivery and widespread accusations of incompetence were causing a charged political environment, thus pushing government officials in pursuit of fresh scapegoats. Colonel Mustapha El-Habiri, Director General of the Civil Protection did not use a soft hand in chastising the associative movement that, according to him, “was conspicuously absent at the time of the tragedy hitting the BEO neighbourhoods”. The chief of the firemen squads “confided that associations, despite being numerous, have disappeared right when we needed their help”.⁷⁵ Quite rapidly, in addition to the authorities, Algeria’s indiscernible associative sector also came under the limelight and was exposed as a culprit. At different stages the press remarked “the scandalous absence of the associative movement on the ground”.⁷⁶

These accusations soon reverberated among the BEO inhabitants. When the authorities announced that new housing would be provided to all those who lost their dwellings in the mudflow, the number of affected people suddenly surged. During the month it took to draw the definitive lists of recipients even harsher accusations of incompetence and favouritism emerged.⁷⁷ But for Ali, staring at the A4 papers containing the provisional lists of beneficiaries hanging outside Bab el Oued police station, the fault was not completely with the authorities:

If the *comités de quartier* (neighbourhood committees) were active, for the authorities it would be easier to distinguish those who really have lost their flats from those who are just pretending. Apparently there should be at least 100 *comités de quartier* in Bab el Oued but I do not know of anybody who’s involved in any of them. They’ve all been set up by the state (*le beylik*) and that’s why nobody really gives a damn.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the very few effectively active associations were facing mounting pressure from the population. Immediately after the floods, SOS Culture Bab El Oued (SOSBEO), an association primarily involved in promoting the local cultural and music scene, transformed

⁷⁵ Amina A. et Nefla B. ‘Le plan ORSEC n’a pas fonctionné’ *Le Jeune Indépendant* 29 November 2001.

⁷⁶ Bendaoud, L. ‘Mouvement associatif: absence de culture, responsabilité de l’État’ *Liberté* 20 November 2001.

⁷⁷ Hasna Yacoub ‘Les laissés-pour-compte de la tragédie’ *La Tribune* 19 November 2001.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ali, musician, 43 years old, Bab el Oued, 12 December 2001

the garage it used for bands' rehearsals into a storage and distribution point for food, clothes and other aid. Its members were twice involved in scuffles with the inhabitants which at various stages contested its decisions regarding the distribution of aid. As a consequence, SOSBEO had to start carrying out part of its relief activities almost undercover:

The people next door are in the same conditions as these families, maybe in even worse conditions. But we can't deal with both: we are artists, not firemen. Do you see that guy? He jumped in the mud to save people during the flood. Do you think anybody thanked him? Nobody will thank us. So we decided to keep this quiet, and at least allow a couple of families to have a decent 'Ftur.⁷⁹

At the same time, for many associations, the international resonance of the events increased the incentives for getting involved. The 'fund chasing' race it generated shows how conflict can entrench itself inside the associative movement. SOS culture Bab El Oued - itself well connected to the French associative sector – criticised the course of action taken by the Rally for Youth Action (RAJ):

[It] is true that I and he [Hakin Haddad, RAJ's secretary general] have different political views, but for BEO we could have worked together. Instead, they failed to show up, they did not even come here to see what happened...they had all their time to write their little project to scrape a bit of money off the Swiss embassy, and then come around to demand our room for the last day of Ramadan.⁸⁰

The extent to which the associative sector was 'used' for diverting pressures and sharing discontent is best made clear by those limited cases of associations that seemed to be outperforming the authorities, thus undermining their primacy. The many instances of clashes involving the authorities and associations when the latter were 'too successful' in organising relief show this side of the story. In fact, while the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity (MASSN) decided to avail itself of the associative sphere for aid distribution, the wilaya departments showed particular contempt for the prominence certain associations were acquiring, particularly those receiving vast quantities of goods from overseas, like SOSBEO:

Ould Abbès (the MASSN minister) is a good guy, he was here immediately and we work together. But the wali is an idiot, and his petty bureaucrats are just the same. They think they are

⁷⁹ The Ftur indicates the breaking of the daily fast during Ramadan. Interview with Nacer, Secretary General SOS Culture Bab El Oued, Algiers, 2 December 2001

⁸⁰ Interview, Nacer Secretary General SOS Culture Bab El Oued, Algiers, 19 January 2002

in a competition and don't let us work. They decided to move their distribution point to *Les Trois Horloges* (the centre of BEO district), in order to be more 'visible', and the Red Crescent hassle us day in day out claiming that it's them who are in charge of aid delivery.⁸¹

The same kinds of quarrels were arising in other parts of town, as a representative of another cultural association involved in aid delivery clarified:

We came from Tizi with a truck full of clothes, covers and toys for the kids. It was a sign of solidarity from the people back in Kabylia. But the civil protection and the police stopped us in Bouzareah, and told us to leave the truck there. They said it was because in a way or in another the Islamists were going to get hold of the stuff and distribute in the mosques, but it is clear they will use it themselves.⁸²

Preserving factional equilibria

Even though at some stage the scapegoat politics backfired, thus forcing the authorities to tame down those associations showing excessive zeal, the associative sector's original mission in sharing the blame for the mismanagement of the relief operations was unquestioned. The popularity acquired by a limited number of associations constituted at best only a minor menace to the position of certain bureaucrats, and certainly not a threat to the state. Yet, the Bab el Oued floods showed another dimension of the interplay of state and associative spheres. It is the dimension of the state's internal conflict which transpires from SOSBEO positive collaboration with the MASSN and its contrasting and conflictual encounters with the wilaya departments and the Red Crescent. The virulent attack on the authorities carried out by Dr. Mostapha Khiati (the president of the Algiers-based association Foundation for Health Promotion and Research Development - *Fondation Nationale pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Développement de la Recherche* (FOREM) in front of a crowd of western diplomats provides another clue:

I could not believe my ears. First he invites us (a delegation from the Canadian Embassy) to El Mithek (an official residence attached to the Presidential Palace) and then over dinner he burst out in a long speech on the situation in BEO and the incompetence of those responsible.

⁸¹ Interview, Belkacem, 41 years old, President of SOS Culture Bab El Oued, Algiers, 2 December 2001.

⁸² Interview, Nadia Aït Zaï, lawyer, Secretary general of the Aït Menguellet Association, Algiers, 19 December 2002.

They say Khiati works for the state: maybe, but after meeting him several times, I still can't make sense of whom he stands for.⁸³

In addition to providing a view of his personal ambitions, the reasons behind Khiati's attacks clarify the sway the associative sphere gained over the state's internal workings:

Khiati does not miss any opportunity to mock Ould Abbès because he aspires to be in his place in the near future, or maybe to become the next minister of Health.... particularly now given that everybody is talking about the elections. And after the BEO's events even more so, as by keeping him out [of the relief operations], they deprived him of a very important stage for showing off.⁸⁴

Khiati's attacks show how insulation cannot solve the prime problem of Algeria's adjustment process: the presence of factional divides at the core of the state. The conflict between Khiati and Ould Abbès shows that the role the associative sector assumed in filling the vacuum left by the state also made it a battlefield in which these very divides are played out. But associations can also constitute a sphere in which these internal conflicts are smoothed, subdued and played down, as shown by the events in Hassi Messaoud.

The Hassi Messaoud Affair

On the night of July 13-14, 2001, in the Saharan town of Hassi Messaoud, one of the country's most important oil centres, a crowd of around 300 men attacked at least 95 women living alone in their flats. All of them reported severe injuries and signs of torture, some were gang raped and some died from their injuries. Their houses were looted and set on fire. The attack was carried out after an imam allegedly accused single women living in the area of 'dissolute' behaviour and fornication during a Friday sermon. The police intervened only at 3 am, and failed to prevent similar atrocities from taking place the day after.

The Hassi Messaoud affair was widely interpreted as an example of the 'return of violent Islamism'.⁸⁵ Yet, despite the religious connotations of the violence, its economic orientation

⁸³ Interview with Chantal de Varennes, First Counsellor at the Canadian Embassy and Canadian Consul, Algiers, 27 January 2002.

⁸⁴ Interview with Marco Ramazzotti, head of the Italian NGO Comitato Italiano di Solidarietà tra i Popoli (CISP) in Algeria, 1 January 2002.

⁸⁵ An analysis of the titles of the francophone press is eloquent in this respect. 'L'intégrisme islamiste vient de provoquer un nouveau drame en Algérie' (Abla Chérif, *Le Matin*, 15 July 2001), 'Un intégrisme qui n'a rien perdu de sa virulence' (Ali Ouafek, *Liberté*, 17 July 2001), 'La violence de l'obscurantisme islamiste' (Karimene Toubbiya, *La Tribune*, 19 July 2001), 'L'Algérie face à l'intolérance islamiste' (*Le Matin* 21 July 2001), 'Les saints et les catins' (Latifa Benmansour, *Le Matin*, 21 July 2001), 'La psychose de la campagne de ré-islamisation et de moralisation opérée par les milieux islamistes' (Mounir B., *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 21 July 2001).

was scarcely highlighted. Among invocations of 'god is great', the assailants also shouted slogans against the state and against those who came to 'steal the jobs' of the local population, like 'get out of our country!' 'Hassi Messaoud is ours!', 'Our children are unemployed while you eat our bread'. For the most part, the women attacked were from other parts of the country and were all employed by foreign oil companies as cleaners, cooks and secretaries.⁸⁶

The events caused grave embarrassment for the government, firstly because they clearly put one more question mark on Bouteflika's civil concord policy, and secondly because of the high sensitivity of the oil town for the country's foreign relations. But in the face of the uproar, the government preferred to keep a low profile. The press reported that charges against an unspecified number of men were brought.⁸⁷ The women were placed in a local hostel in order 'to guarantee their security', where they were apparently left without access to medicines or sufficient food. No care was dispensed, on the grounds that the 'place was not equipped for the circumstances'.⁸⁸

From then on, the management of the Hassi Messaoud affair was 'outsourced' outside the state's direct sphere. First, a delegation of three women MPs was sent on the 18th of July, among whom was Khalida Messaoudi, the internationally renowned feminist and president of women's association 'RACHDA' *Rassemblement Algérien Contre la Hogra et la Trahison* (Algerian Rally Against Contempt and Treason).⁸⁹ After the visit she stated that the women needed medical and psychological care and that they had to be removed from the hostel. Shortly afterwards RACHDA was entrusted with all the aspects of the care and rehabilitation process, and the association produced a number of internal and international communiqués framing the analysis in Algeria's long history of violence against women.⁹⁰ The whole affair seemed to fade away, never to reappear again in the press, or in the government's considerations.⁹¹

Fettouma Ouzegane, a fighter during the war of independence and a feminist activist still involved in the women's movement despite her advanced age, described her visit to Hassi Messaoud with a delegation of women's groups a few days after the event in these terms:

⁸⁶ Youssef Rezzoug *Le Matin* 17/07/01.

⁸⁷ *La Tribune*, 17/07/01 reported 40 arrests, while *Le Matin* only nine.

⁸⁸ *Le Matin*, 20-21 July, 2001.

⁸⁹ *Le Matin*, 20-21 July, 2001.

⁹⁰ See RACHDA's statement on the affair titled 'The coming back of the inquisition' in *Le Matin* 17 July 2001.

⁹¹ *Le Matin*, 20-21 July, 2001.

Hassi Messaoud, one had to be there to see. She [Khalida Messaoudi] behaved as if she is the state. She arrives a day before everybody else, and she leaves a day before everybody else. She directs the doctors, and she's got the connections with the police. It looked like we were sent there to watch her. But that's fine, that's just the way it is. I told Maryam [Bellala, president of SOS Femmes en Détresse] not to get involved in this affair, that this is political. They have to stay social, afar from politics, because they risk being destabilised. What 'Lalla Khalida' does not understand is that she's being used. She is used by a state that wants to keep its hands clean.⁹²

By sending its most prominent and internationally renowned feminist to Hassi Messaoud, and by entrusting her association with such delicate matters as psychological care and support for the victims, the state appeased the international community, and at the same time could afford not to take an official position on the affair. Moreover, the decision to entrust the analysis of the violence to an overtly anti-Islamist association enhanced the simplifications made by the sensationalistic press coverage, which focused on the religious orientation of the atrocities, but gravely understated their economic nature. The state's economic failure (the condition of mass unemployment and uneven livelihoods prevailing in the town) was at once masked by such simplification, and at the same time served as a justification for the state's 'incapacity' to intervene (the lack of appropriate equipment and personnel). Thus, the outsourcing of the Hassi Messaoud affair outside the state's sphere limited damages to the civil concord policy, while 'Islamist sensibilities' inside the state were spared the inconvenience of commenting or getting involved. The associative sphere allowed the factional equilibria to be preserved.

This conclusion is backed by the interpretation that Marco Ramazzotti gives for the reasons why he ended up working with Dr. Khiati in Bentalha - one of the villages that endured the worst massacres of all the guerrillas years. His story provides similar, yet somewhat parallel, features to the Hassi Messaoud affair.

Personally I do not care who Khiati is linked to. I knew there were ECHO⁹³ funds available to be spent in Algeria and I had to find a counterpart for the project. Khiati solved all the problems, sometimes he even went too far, but without him I wouldn't be the first foreign NGO to have a formal agreement with a ministry (Health), and I wouldn't be here writing the project report for the donors. Some say that a general backs him, that Khiati is a former Barbéfélène⁹⁴. But that's the point: Khiati is important for me because of the contacts he has,

⁹² Interview with Fettouma Ouzegane, Algiers, 16 January 2002

⁹³ European Commission Humanitarian Office

⁹⁴ Term used to describe the Islamist wing of the FLN since 1989.

and maybe if he didn't have those contacts the children in Bentalha would not benefit from the kind of psychological care we are providing them with.⁹⁵

So if, in Hassi Messaoud, responsibility for dealing with an episode of religious violence was entrusted to the most secularist of women associations, in Bentalha it was Dr Khiati's FOREM, and its (albeit tacit) religious sensibilities that were right for the job. In both cases though, the state could afford not to intervene explicitly, letting its associative sector handle public relations and deal with the consequences of potentially divisive events.

From state failure to civic failure

As is evident in the Bab El-Oued case, one of the results of the increased involvement of associations in social and cultural service provision and the expectations raised by government discourse was a deterioration in the citizenry's view of the role and relevance of the associative sphere. Yet, to understand the extent to which this evolution assumed the traits of 'a public opinion' on associational life, our analysis cannot be completed without the view taken by Algerian 'opinion makers'.

In the run-up to the last state-sponsored conference on the associative movement, which participating World Bank officials termed 'a failure',⁹⁶ an international team of consultants was recruited in order to carry out an appraisal of the NGO sector in relation to poverty reduction strategies. Despite stressing that segments of the associative sector are "involved in valuable welfare and short term reaction to handicap sufferers and is increasingly engaged in gap-filling for the government as government services shrink", the report underlined the fact that government's reliance on NGOs to conduct poverty reduction schemes and development initiatives was misplaced. Given the actual potential of the NGO sector – the report also concluded - associations are "not, as far as we could see, oriented to, nor interested in, innovative long term development projects\programmes addressing issues of endemic poverty in rural areas, rural small towns or poverty pockets in the large cities".⁹⁷

The fact that the government rejected the conclusions of the report does not mean that frustration with the country's associative sector is not felt also within the state apparatus. At

⁹⁵ Interview with Marco Ramazzotti, head of the Italian NGO 'CISP' Algeria's operations, interview I February 2002.

⁹⁶ Jonathan Benthall, INTRAC chairman, private communication, 17 April 2002.

⁹⁷ J.Benthall, private communication 17 April 2002. The report was not published and the government refused to pay the team of consultants for the work.

the *Maison des Associations* in Bologhine (MAB),⁹⁸ where a number of service-delivery associations are based, one civil servant spelt out his dissatisfaction in this way:

They come here saying they've set up an association and want to be registered, and cannot even write. Can you believe it? Any ordinary fellow that cannot even write his name has the right to create an association. Ok, the right to create an association has to be guaranteed, but you see, the law has a great shortcoming: it does not require a minimum level of intellectual ability. The law should at least require associations' promoters to have a bare minimum of preparation. In order to facilitate the procedures, it is important to be able to write and talk well, no matter what for, whether you need to target sponsors or speak to the people.

In order to solve these problems, after the recognition procedure, there has to be a follow-up, an audit, a control from the administration. Maybe even before granting *l'agrément* we should introduce a psychometric test at the level of the wilaya: In order to get official recognition, the president and the bureau's members have to pass the test. If the guys are total zeros, if the president can't even help himself, how can he pretend to be able to do something for other people? Associations have to be managed by influential people (*par des gens haut placées*), not by beggars.⁹⁹

At the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, a counsellor to the Minister uses similar tones:

It must have been around two weeks after the events in Bab El Oued, a group of people came and asked to see the Minister. They said that their association had helped out during the floods, and they wanted to be paid. When we refused, they asked to be given a job. For as long as people don't understand what voluntary work means we will never have an associative movement in this country.¹⁰⁰

This kind of disillusioned analysis reverberates across Algeria's private press.¹⁰¹ In a tirade typical of many editorials on the inadequacy of the country's associative sector, Sofiane Bensalam remarks that "in Algeria, associations are set up and dissolved depending on the weather. The inflation we experience in the matter is [the consequence of] having dealt with this issue with a certain slack, bartering the need for quality in favour of numbers. The responsibility lies within those associations that are associations in nothing but their name....

⁹⁸ The *Maison des Associations* was created in 1998 by Chérif Rahmani, Governor of Great Algiers, in order to facilitate the establishment of civic associations by providing them with space to set up an office at a moderate price.

⁹⁹ Interview, Nabil Mekhzani, MAB ad interim Director, Bologhine, Algiers, 23 October 2001

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Yazid Saïdi – Head of Communication, MASSN, Algiers, 5 February 2002

¹⁰¹ Bendaoud, L. 'Mouvement associatif: absence de culture, responsabilité de l'État' *Liberté* 20 November 2001; Soheib Berber 'Mouvement associatif: la grande désillusion' *El Watan* 25 September 1996.

freezing registration [years ago] could have contributed to cleaning up the associative field in order to get rid of all parasitic associations swarming out of a political conjuncture promising new perspectives towards the consolidation of civil society”.¹⁰² A different newspaper highlights “associations’ representatives’ sheer lack of knowledge of the simplest management tool”,¹⁰³ whilst another advocates the ‘shutting down [of] thousands of associations managed by notorious opportunists’.¹⁰⁴

So the stress on associations’ representatives’ lack of necessary technical skills is coupled with, and enhanced by, a lack of ‘civic feeling’. In extending this view to the realm of academic analysis, Omar Derras writes that “beyond its quantitative importance, the associative phenomenon is unorganised or at least it is still undergoing a stage of immature structuring [...]The pictures and the perceptions of [associations’] representatives – he argues - allow us to observe that apathy and lethargy characterise the situation...[as well as] the lack of one of the essential values of associative work – the sense of responsibility – [which] is not really felt or appreciated by associations representatives” [Derras, 1999, fn 2, 38].

By the time development agendas started promoting the idea that not only state failures but also ‘civic failures’ matter [Fine, 1998] such a view was already firmly rooted in the minds of the Algerian public and opinion makers. In this sense, Algeria provides an example of the impact of ‘post-Washington Consensus’ ideas in transforming state-society relations. Algerian associations failed to fulfil the role shaped by the dominant political discourse at the time of their emergence. They failed to meet the expectations that the government had raised for them. And the failures of Algeria’s associative sector became the failure of Algeria’s society.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the progressive induction of notions of civic failure constituted a prime element of Algeria’s paradigm of adjustment, and that the associative sphere provided a prime element of this development. It all started with the swift passage from the dogma of the state’s unique prerogative of intervention to widespread notions of ‘associative responsibility’. This induced a fleeting change from the norm of ‘social wait and see attitude’

¹⁰² Sofiane Bensalam ‘Assainissement’ *El Watan* 7 March 2002. Italics mine, see also D.B. ‘Mouvement Associatif: quelle force de proposition?’ *El Watan* 14 June 1998.

¹⁰³ *Le Matin* n. 1578 10 April 97

¹⁰⁴ Zahir M. ‘Enquete sur les finances des associations’ *L’Expression* 23 June 2005.

to new canons of self-help and of “*citizens taking responsibility themselves*”. The twist in how such changes were interpreted and applied allowed associational life to become an opportunity for limiting the political damage caused by economic reform. Rather than merely disengaging the state from its service provision duties, associational life contributed to absolving the state from its responsibility for economic mismanagement, thus transposing failure to Algerian society’s presumed managerial, cultural and civic shortcomings. As clearly appeared in the Bab El Oued floods, its main achievement was to make the hardships of economic reform acceptable by inducing a pervasive sense of social failure, thus further rooting conflict and insecurity at the social level.

Moreover, Algeria’s associative sector shielded the state from its own inner dynamics. The examples of Hassi Messaoud and Bentalha show how prominent associations like RACHDA and FOREM can be called on to intervene in crucial circumstances, allowing the treatment of politically sensitive events to be outsourced outside the state’s sphere, thus preserving the shaky balance of alliances at its core. This evidence questions existing explanations of Algeria’s recent political trajectory. In particular it requires a revision of those interpretations centred on the mistaken choices of policy makers who choose to open the political space when insulation was instead needed. In this light, it is worth remembering that ‘divide and rule’ is an expression commonly used by every ordinary Algerian. And scapegoat politics might well be a category of divide and rule politics. Analogies with other episodes of Algeria’s history come to mind. Martinez’s idea of ‘a return to the beylik’ to describe the stalemate produced by the conflict leans in this direction. In drawing the comparison with the Regency of Algiers between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Martinez [2000: 220] writes: “just as the Janissaries left local governors (beys) to deal with the dissidence of tribal confederations, the current government leaves it to prominent local citizens and their militias to contain the Islamist guerrillas’ violence”. Ageron [1991: 9-10] makes a similar remark concerning the turbulent inception of French domination, when “General Clauzel, who was at one and the same time imperious and devious, thought that it would be easy to establish French rule using Muslim chiefs as French agents”. During the times of economic reform which the above analysis has been concerned with, scapegoats have multiplied. They included not only associations, but also DECs, walis, cadres and a number of competent state-company directors who were jailed on grounds of wrongdoing and subsequently released without charge, once their previously successful companies had been shredded and

privatised.¹⁰⁵ Algeria's history shows us a pattern of 'indirect unruliness' usually established in times of political crisis.

By keeping in mind the functions of disorder as a means of preserving power [Chabal & Daloz, 1999] one is left to ask whether the failures of economic reform were really a consequence of policy mistakes, but also whether they played a more 'positive' role. One is left to ask whether Algeria's peculiar type of insulation was instrumental to adjustment, or whether the functional relationship has to be read the other way around; or indeed whether both the democratisation process *and* structural adjustment, both the opening up of channels of voice *and* the process of state retreat were themselves functional to insulating the regime from society.

¹⁰⁵ On the experience of public sector employees in the era of liberalisation in Algeria, see Kadri, Belaribi [2000] *Un cadre au foyer Algiers* : Casbah

Chapter 4. Out of trust? Presidents and families versus Algeria's associative decay

Introduction

In 1998, Chérif Rahmani, the Governor of the Greater Algiers District, highlighted his support for the associative sector by creating a *Maison des Associations* in the Algiers district of Bologhine. Initially intended as a pilot scheme to be replicated in other parts of the capital and possibly in other wilayas, the main aim of the Maison des Association de Bologhine (MAB) was to address what was widely acknowledged to be the biggest obstacle to setting up an association - the lack of affordable office space. Against payment of a moderate fee, the MAB provided registered associations with an official address, the possibility of holding meetings and conferences, as well as a variety of services like individual mail boxes, telephones, fax and internet access. During the spring of 2000 though, the Greater Algiers District was returned to its former administrative status of wilaya¹⁰⁶ and by October 2001 rumours of ongoing talks about using the MAB building to relocate the Wilaya's Department of Arts and Culture emerged. The MAB staff had been expecting such a move for a long time:

They finally realised that there's not much to do here. The MAB hosts 150 associations, but no more than 30, or maximum 40 ever showed up. I have worked here for a whole year and I have seen 10 or 15 of them, the others are total strangers. What I know is that most dossiers are left incomplete; most of them haven't even paid last years' fees and do not even bother replying when we contact them. They don't do anything. You want to know what I think? The majority of these associations are just bogus.¹⁰⁷

As seen in the previous chapter, by the end of the 1990s this kind of disenchanted scepticism about the associative sector was not uncommon in Algeria. Yet, outside Algeria the mood was very different. Besides being known for the blend of intense violence, political turmoil, and relentless economic decline characterising its domestic politics, Algeria was recognised as the Arab country with the highest number of voluntary associations [Ben Nefissa, 2000]. Attracted by the coincidence of outstanding associative activity with enduring economic and political troubles, analysts focusing on Algeria's emerging associational life interpreted it as

¹⁰⁶ The initiative apparently came from President Bouteflika himself, annoyed by the visibility acquired by Chérif Rahmani. Rahmani later became Minister of Environment and Territorial Development in Ali Benflis's Government 26 August 2000, position which he maintained under the two successive governments headed by Ahmed Ouyahia (May 2003 – May 2006) and Abdelaziz Belkadem (May 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Nabil Mekhzani. 36 year old, MAB ad interim Director, Bologhine, Algiers, 23 October 2001.

a striking example of associative success taking place in the most adverse circumstances. Yet, they strangely failed to engage in a proper investigation of such an odd concomitance. The following discussion shows how this omission made Algeria a perfect case for the application of mainstream views of civil society, but also laid the basis for a misinterpretation of the associative sector's scope, role and significance for the country political development. Foreign portrayals of Algeria's associative sector have mainly relied on mainstream notions of civil society, social capital and trust. Such interpretations need to be reconsidered by reassessing the degree of associative activity in the country, and taking a closer look at the internal dynamics of Algerian associations. In this light, the development of Algeria's associative sector acquires a different significance from that postulated by mainstream notions of civil society. Rather than a locus of reciprocity, solidarity and cooperation, associations appear as the by-product of increasingly conflict-ridden social relations and reveal some of the strategies deployed by individuals to cope with political change.

Social capital in Algeria

The emergence and multiplication of Algeria's associations occurred at a time when civil society was becoming a fashionable research topic across the whole spectrum of the social sciences. Since analyses of Algerian associations have much to do with the way 'civil society' entered mainstream development agendas and the ensuing interpretations of the link between associational life and political development, it is worth having a look at some of the foundational arguments for such interpretations, such as Robert Putnam's study of democratic governance in Italy [Fine, 1999: 4].¹⁰⁸ In trying to explain the determinants of regional governments' performance, Putnam notices that a) better performing regions show a high density of "neighbourhood associations, choral societies, cooperatives, sports clubs etc." [1992:73], and that b) badly governed regions feature negligible levels of associative density. Putnam links associative density to endowments of 'social capital', i.e. "features of social organisation - such as networks, norms and trust". These are seen as lowering the information costs arising from collective action and facilitating widespread co-operative relations and the pursuit of win-win outcomes [1993:180]. This argument establishes a

¹⁰⁸ A plethora of other studies explicitly applied his framework to a number of different countries, especially in the developing world, and the list would be too long to cite here. Putnam himself refocused the same problematic on the US, deriving pessimistic inferences on Americans' declining civic engagement. The virtual library hosted by the World Bank Social Capital website gives an idea of the sway acquired by SC inside both academia and development agencies. For a literature review see Harriss and de Renzio, 1997; Fine, 2001).

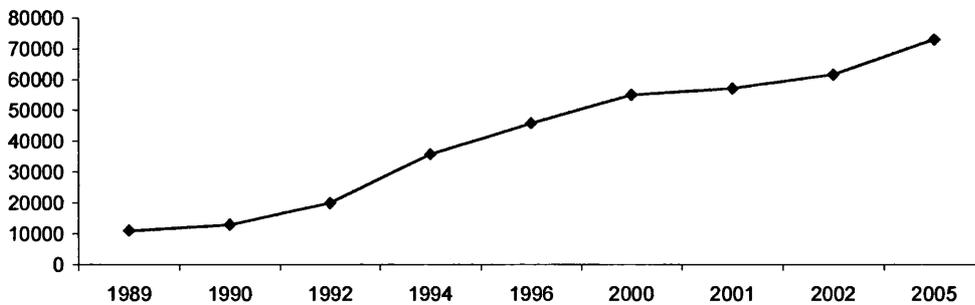
causal link between civic/associative development and political and economic performance, as shown by assertions such as “the state ...operate[s] more efficiently in civic settings”, or “good government is a by-product of singing groups and soccer clubs” [Putnam, 1993: 176-181].

Putnam’s concept of social capital spawned a deluge of research and contributed to the development of mainstream academic theories of civil society which thanks to their ‘prescriptive universalism’ [Comaroffs, 1999; Lewis, 2002: 575-6] were applied to a number of countries and to all sorts of political and economic settings.¹⁰⁹ Many of these studies support the idea that social capital can be ‘measured’. Civic associations are a site where trust is built, stored and spread and thus the vibrancy of associational life represents a proxy for the presence of networks of horizontal co-operation, norms of reciprocity and society’s endowments of social capital [Avritzer, 2000; Lewis, 2002: 571]. Indicators of associationalism such as the width of associations’ membership or the number of associations per capita are taken to measure levels of social capital within a country and thus indicate a proxy for its future developmental trajectory [Putnam, 2000; Mishler & Rose, 1997; Rose, 1998].¹¹⁰

This approach partly explains the enthusiasm with which foreign observers have viewed Algeria’s associative sector. Official figures show that during the fifteen years which elapsed since the introduction of freedom of association in 1989, Algerian associations grew at exponential rates [Table 4.1]. What is also striking is that, in terms of growth, they seem to have surpassed the associative sectors of other Middle Eastern countries like Morocco and Egypt, which show equivalent or even larger populations, legal systems allowing comparable degrees of associative freedom, and longer histories of associational life. [Marzouk, 1997: 196; Ben Nefissa, 1997; Denoeux & Gateau, 1995].

¹⁰⁹ Putnam himself without any qualms transfers his conceptual framework from Italy to the USA to assess the presence of social capital in America

¹¹⁰ Besides associational life, Putnam uses newspaper readership and indicators of political participation to define levels of ‘civic involvement’. Nevertheless, throughout his own work and many of the ensuing analyses it inspired, the vibrancy of associational life takes the lion’s share in accounting for social capital. For a rating of Arab countries according to cultural measures including societal trust measures, which precedes Putnam’s social capital, see Hofstede [1991 pp.53, 68, 84 and 113].

Figure 4.1 Growth of Registered Local Associations 1989-2005

Sources: 1990¹¹¹; 1992¹¹²; 1994¹¹³; 1995¹¹⁴; 2000¹¹⁵; 2001¹¹⁶; 2002¹¹⁷; 2005¹¹⁸

The outstanding growth of the associative sector offered a terrain for the application of the conventional wisdom on civil society to Algeria. Ben Nefissa highlighted the Algerian case by remarking that “it would be accurate to describe what happened in that country as a veritable explosion of associations...set up within the space of few years [2000]. Zoubir [1999: 36] observed that “literally thousands of associations...springing up everywhere...[from] human rights leagues to others focus[ing] on such concerns as ecology, religion, consumer protection”, and claimed that “a civil society revealed its existence”. In a separate paper commenting on the outcome of the 1999 elections, Zoubir [1999: 11] wrote:

“The main difference with the past is that the debate is public and no longer taboo. The construction of a democratic order is still painful, especially since nation and state building has not been completed. The most positive aspect of all though is that a vibrant civil society has made its appearance in Algeria. Despite its weaknesses, it has demonstrated a level of dynamism that is rarely equalled elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa”.

In realms as diverse as women’s rights and private business, associations became synonymous with society’s astonishing assertiveness [Dillman, 2000; Sgrena, 1997] and were alternatively portrayed as forms of autonomous organisation demanding a shift from authoritarian practices, as solidarity groups resisting the climate of violence, or as safety nets compensating for the near collapse of social services [Fath, 1990; Layachi 1995; Lloyd,

¹¹¹ Rouzeik, 1994

¹¹² Ben Nefissa, 2000: 16

¹¹³ MASSN, 2000: 17,

¹¹⁴ Algeria’s official report on socio-economic rights presented to the UN commission on social, economic and cultural rights, reported in *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 14 November 2001.

¹¹⁵ Government Communication to Amnesty International, *El Moudjahid* 11 November 2000

¹¹⁶ *El Moudjahid*, 30-31 March 2001.

¹¹⁷ UNDP Algiers Offices, February 2002.

¹¹⁸ Zahir M. ‘Zerhouni demande des comptes’ *L’Expression*, 23 June 2005.

1999]. In an analysis reminiscent of Fukuyama's views on trust [2001], Yacoubian [1997:18] saw in the mounting number of associations a sign of society's resilience, an expression of "social self-reliance, collective action" and "a culture of participation".

In relation to Algeria, mainstream views of civil society, social capital and trust dominated the interpretations given to the emergence of the country's associative sphere. Since this interpretation was primarily based on quantitative evidence, before examining the extent to which the associative sector can be likened to a realm of social co-operation and civic trust, we need to take a closer look at the figures.

Associative decay

Far from being confined to the staff of Bologhine's *Maison des Associations*, the idea that 'active' associations are far fewer than reported by official figures is widespread in Algeria, especially among the press, Algerian academic circles, as well as representatives of the associative movement themselves, such as Prof. Mostapha Khiati, President of the prominent FOREM. In October 2001, at a debate organised by the French Institute for International Relations, Khiati criticised the ambiguity of the 1990 law on freedom of association, which oversaw "the emergence, in a very quick time, of more than 70,000 associations in areas as diverse as sport, the construction of mosques, cultural identity, neighbourhood welfare, professional interests, etc. ...all having equal status because of their inclusion in the same legal framework".¹¹⁹ A few months later, in his office at the Belfort Hospital in El Harrach, Khiati qualified his statement:

I said 70,000 because this is the figure I was given. But of course the reality is quite different. At the end of the day most associations are not really there. You've got 14,000 associations established to build a mosque, with a fixed-term objective but which remain registered for a long time either because the mosques are never finished, or because they simply are not removed from the lists. Then you have district and areas committees...well these are only sleeping entities and are not really active. Then you've got sport associations, that were already there at the time of the FLN and that are still there now. Then there are the others, among which not many really do any work.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Les ONG en Algérie*, speech delivered during a meeting at the Institut Français de Relations Internationales 31 octobre 2001 [www.ifri.org/F/Débats/Interventions/2001/0110_khiati.htm]

¹²⁰ Interview with Prof. Khiati, FOREM President, 1 December 2001, El Harrach, Algiers

Khiati's analysis is similar to the one provided by Zoubir Salhi, vice president for social development of the high-flying Algerian NGO Touiza, who nevertheless puts his finger on the role of 'culture':

Touiza never existed exclusively on paper, like many other associations. It's a matter of attitude, of culture, if only two thirds - or maybe less - of associations which are "administratively declared" are really active. There is a lot of *attentisme*, an attitude that is historically rooted. Touiza's success lies in the different attitude we have. From the beginning our work had a voluntary character, and we were able to pool the energy and resources in this sense. We never waited for the state to realize our projects.¹²¹

Far from being limited to the views of representatives of the civic sector trying to single out the uniqueness of their associative experience, the discrepancy between registered and active associations has been noticed by other observers. A UNDP report on the work of environment-related associations states that out of three hundred associations nationwide which were contacted to collect data, only 46 were taken into consideration, "the others being either dissolved, on stand-by or simply non-existent".¹²² In his survey of Oran-based associations, Derras remarks that while "the Associations Bureau of the Wilaya gives an approximate figure of 1800 registered associations...the vice president of the APW¹²³ estimates that, of the total number of associations created in Oran, only 200 are still active [1999: 96,113].

Recurring press stories on the baffling absence of associations that should supposedly be active provide evidence of the national spread of the phenomenon. Corroborating the case of Oran, *El Watan* stress its 'disappointment' in noticing how "according to estimates the total number of associations in the wilaya is 1388 – quite a lot, given their small visibility. These numbers seem to refer to a cumulative sum that over the years neglected to take into consideration associations which ceased their activities".¹²⁴ Wondering where the resources allocated to the associative movement go, a journalist writes: "In Maghnia, like in other regions, associations involved in different domains seem to be burgeoning, but on the ground they are totally absent."¹²⁵ Already in 1997, A. Djabali asserted that "among the associations

¹²¹ Interview with Zoubir Sahli, Touiza Vice – Président chargé du développement solidaire, Algiers 11 September 2001

¹²² UNDP (1998) *Le Mouvement Associatif et l'Environnement* June, Algiers, p.32

¹²³ Wilaya Popular Assembly (Assemblée Populaire de Wilaya) It is the body elected at regional level, but does not manage the wilaya administrative units (like the association bureau) which depend on the Ministry of Interior via his appointee, the wali.

¹²⁴ Djamel Benachour 'Mouvement Associatif: Déception à l'Ouest' *El Watan* 23 November 1998.

¹²⁵ Chahreddine Berriah, Maghnia: Où va l'argent des associations? *El Watan*, 30 May 1996 .

recognised by the wilaya of Annaba, several hundred remain purely fictitious”¹²⁶. In the same year the wilaya of Tiaret was in a similar situation.¹²⁷ But the most candid confirmation of the uncertain size of the associative sector comes from the authorities themselves. In 2000, an unpublished report commissioned by the MASSN admitted that in Algeria “associations mushroomed in the 1990s, but now the majority of them exist in name only”¹²⁸.

Providing an estimate of the proportion of the associative sector showing some degree of activity is beyond the scope of this study. When this research was carried out such information simply did not exist, even though in principle it should have been available to the government. The law on freedom of associations requires associations to re-register annually “in order to regularly provide public authorities with information concerning changes in their membership, their financial condition and the origins of funds”.¹²⁹ Wilaya administrations are supposed to erase from their lists all associations not complying with this rule during subsequent years. However, this audit is not carried out on a systematic basis and, as is clear from the statements of both associations’ representatives and the press, inactive and disbanded associations remain on the wilaya lists. This, as the MASSN internal report admitted, created a condition whereby “in practice [there is] a governmental ignorance of the scale and variety of the sector...the Ministry of the Interior has no up to date database that is valid or of any use in controlling associations’ activities and finances, and it is questionable whether it could manage the incoming data in a useful way even if it did have it”.¹³⁰

Poor governmental record keeping is not necessarily seen as a ‘problem’, and does not prevent the authorities from making very precise claims. In March 2001, Interior Minister Zerhouni praised the government’s track record in upholding civil liberties by stressing “the incontestable reality of 57,117 local association and 842 established at national level”.¹³¹ Nearly one year later, addressing the lower chamber of parliament, Head of Government Benflis stated: “freedom of association is today a tangible reality: the associative movement numbers more than 60,000 local associations, and more than a thousand at national level”.¹³² These claims are the stuff on which the image of thriving associative activity portrayed by analysts was built. But this image was invariably based on figures reporting the number of

¹²⁶ A. Djabali Annaba / Plusieurs Associations Fantomatiques’ *El Watan* 22 March 1997.

¹²⁷ A.B. ‘Tiaret :Des assises lointaines’ *El Watan* 11 May 1997.

¹²⁸ MASSN (2000) p. 15.

¹²⁹ Art. 18 of law 90.31, 4 December 1990.

¹³⁰ MASSN Internal Memo(2000) p.15 A more detailed analysis of funding of associations and the audit procedure is provided in chapter 5. Chapter 6 delves into the arbitrary use of the recognition procedures by the Ministry of Interior.

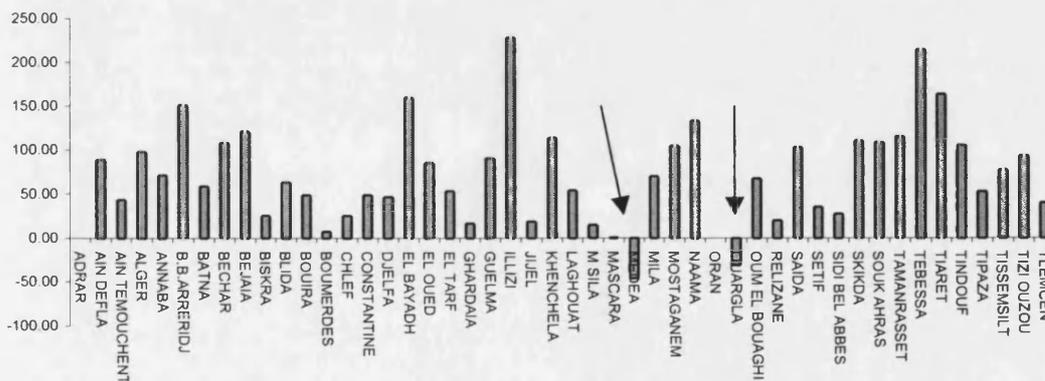
¹³¹ *El Moudjahid*, 30-31 March 2001.

¹³² www.cg.gov.dz/gouvernement/chef-G/discours/Reponse-APN.doc

registered associations, while omitting any reference to the absence of associations on the ground.

Despite the lack of hard data on this discrepancy, there is evidence to support a particular hypothesis. This relies on data concerning patterns of growth of local associations, and the procedures employed by wilayas to keep track of such growth. According to the MASSN, “some Wilaya administrations have been undertaking a process to clean up their lists of local associations in order to establish a clearer picture of the size and quality of the sector in each region”¹³³. Such ‘cleaning up’ of associations’ lists was invoked at various stages by the press,¹³⁴ and we know that in 1998 it was about to be carried out in Oran [Derras,1998]. Table 2, which shows the growth in registered local associations between 1994 and 2001, suggests that other wilayas updated their lists.

Figure 4.2: Percentage growth in registered local associations by wilaya 1994-2001



Sources: UNDP (2001), MASSN (2000)

The table shows average growth at 72.19%, with peaks reaching 163% in the wilaya of Tiarét, 214% in Tebessa and 221% in Illizi - trends in stark contrast to the modest 7.4% growth in Boumerdes, and Mascara’s stagnation at 0.54%. What is most remarkable though is the trend shown by the wilayas of Medea and Ouargla, where over the years the number of registered associations actually *decreased*. By assuming that the concerned wilaya authorities cleaned up the associations’ lists – an assumption which seems valid at least in the case for Ouargla, where the authorities update their lists regularly¹³⁵ - and by

¹³³ MASSN (2000) Internal Report

¹³⁴ See for instance Sofiane Bensalam ‘Assainissement’ *El Watan* 07 March 2002.

¹³⁵ See ‘Gel des Activités de 222 Associations’, *El Watan* 20/06/94 and *La tribune* 20th October 2001. The update was also carried out in Ghardaia in 1994 Ghardaia: Les associations inactives suspendues

extrapolating the results at national level, the discrepancy between registered and active associations would have to be reckoned in the tens of thousands. This would substantiate the widespread belief that official figures are misleading and provide a certain twist to the story of associative vibrancy made popular by the literature. During its first 15 years, Algeria's associative development went through a wild process of formation whose outstanding rates of growth were matched by equally outstanding degrees of inertia and decay. A few examples of the dynamics characterising relations among members shed light on what allows for survival and determines decay in Algerian associational life.

Out of distrust

Popular outside Algeria, the vision of the associative sector as a site of trust by no means corresponds to domestic views. If anything, associations are better known to Algerians for the climate of mistrust reigning inside them. In taking a sceptical look at the benefits of the associative sector, one journalist for instance claimed that "in the Algerian associative movement, the relationships among members look like those between unfortunate lovers [showing] first enthusiasm and commitment, and then arguments, misunderstandings and divisions".¹³⁶ Representatives of Algerian associations themselves attribute their abortive associative experiences to strained relations among members. On the basis of a survey of perceptions among the membership of Oran-based associations, Derras claims that "the unhealthy climate generated by internal rivalries and fallings-out constitute one of the main flaws leading to the atrophy of associations". Seventy per cent of respondents in his sample cite conflicting relations as the main problem affecting their associative experience, while seventeen per cent chose not to express themselves on the subject. [1998:113]. This might explain associations' often limited membership. In Maghnia for instance, "at present, even when they have an office, associations are not active and many are composed of no more than two or three people".¹³⁷

Asserting that strained relations among members are at the core of the decline of associations provides only one side of the story. An equally valid claim would be that lack of trust among members not only determines associative decay but also accounts for their multiplication. A number of examples can be cited in this respect, with Algeria's Rotarians providing a notable one. Algiers' first Rotary Club (RC) was created immediately following the approval of the

El Watan 23/07/94. This would explain why in terms of associative density, Ghardaia is the worst performer among the Southern Wilayas (see table 3).

¹³⁶ *El Watan* 5 may 1997.

¹³⁷ Chahreddine Berriah, Maghnia: OÙ va l'argent des associations? *El Watan*, 30 May 1996.

1990 law on freedom of association. In the space of a dozen years the capital could count five more Clubs. What is striking in the Rotary Clubs' growth is that it does not necessarily stem from any particular increase in members, but follows the dynamic of internal schisms. While still serving as president of the RC 'Alger La Blanche', Dr Hamid Brahimi declared that at the end of his 2001 mandate he would quit the club to found another one - the RC 'Alger La Baie'. In the process, his circle of friends from 'La Blanche' left their previous club to follow him, and form the core membership group of the new club. Moreover, the RotarAct (young Rotarians) attached to the previous club was disbanded, and some of his members set up a new one linked to 'La Baie'. Brahimi's daughter, who for some years had been a prominent member in the RotarAct 'Alger La Blanche' put the reasons behind the change in this way:

Everybody was aware that it had become quite difficult to work. For years the projects were stalled because of tensions inside the club. This is why my father decided to start a new club, together with Khodja and others friends of his, who were more active. With the Rotaract it has been the same, and from the very beginning. There are always some clans that emerge. In the end we didn't even meet up any more, and so we were happy to leave. If we left it's out of the distrust that developed.¹³⁸

Besides questioning the link between associational life and trust, this impressionistic account of the way Algerian associations 'grow' by multiplying through divisions points to two recurrent features of Algeria's associative development. One is the prominent role of the president, and the other is the presence of family members among the core membership group. A few examples show how these elements are prevalent in a wide variety of associations and particularly in those that survive the associative sector's tendency towards inertia and decay discussed above.

Surviving decay: associative presidentialism

The process by which associations split into two (or more) because of the personal drive of some members is far from being peculiar to the Rotary Clubs. The women's movement provides another prominent case. As seen above,¹³⁹ women's groups constituted one of the pioneering elements of Algeria's associative sector, both chronologically and in terms of

¹³⁸ Interview with Amira Brahimi, commercial agent for Pfizer pharmaceuticals and Rotaract member Algiers, 21 July 2001

¹³⁹ Chapter two provides a historical account of the development of the women's movement.

their activities. Because of the political context in which they developed and the vocal stance they adopted, women's associations attracted the lion's share of international attention, which often portrayed them as the bastion against fundamentalism and violence.¹⁴⁰

Among the first to be created, the Association for Equality between men and women under the law¹⁴¹ was led by Khalida Messaoudi. This is how she recalls the beginnings of the association:

The first association (*Equality*) counted four Trotskyists out of 40 members. I was elected president and Louisa Hanoune¹⁴² secretary general. The rest were women committed to the cause of women's rights...at that time we had an enemy, and we thought in these terms and we were respected for that. At university the boys mocked us, because we were feminists, but they also helped us, especially with security when we had meetings. It was a constant battle, and we were so driven by our own hatred. If *Equality* has been the association where there was most debate [it was] because of these circumstances. We had some huge dust-ups, but it worked. Until the day when somebody decided to 'cleanse' a town in Ouargla of all the women who lived there alone. It is the same thing that happened in Hassi Messaoud,¹⁴³ they set the place on fire. The association held a meeting with the idea of going into the street and holding a march, but the Trotskyists refused, saying that what had happened was due to social exclusion, that these people suffered from poverty and unemployment and that one had to address the economic and social issues to solve the situation. It was at this point that the association split: the Trotskyists did not back down. Even if the bylaws stated that decisions were taken by majority and that in the case of a tied vote the president's vote decided, we had always worked on the basis of consensus. It was here that I stepped down, and in January [1990] we set up *Triomphe*.¹⁴⁴

But then it really started. I don't know whether one day we could draw the balance sheet of all the destruction. Beside the dead, the infrastructure, terrorism did something worse: it emptied the public spaces. People left the country. So in 1993, of the 12 members of the bureau, only three were still living in Algeria. Now there are only two. During the electoral campaign for Zeroual, in the years between 1993, 1994 the women's movement was still the most active one, intellectuals had left, and public opinion was in fact women. The presidential elections were the occasion for members of women's association to get on the street, two from SOS Femmes en Détresse, two from *Triomphe*. Because what happened to our associations happened to all of them: associations were still there, but they were like

¹⁴⁰ Chapter 7 develops this point.

¹⁴¹ *Association pour l'égalité entre hommes et femmes*, more commonly known as *Egalité*

¹⁴² Louisa Hanoune, like Khalida Messaoudi, is a women's rights activist turned politician. She leads the Workers' Party (*Parti de Travailleurs*, PT).

¹⁴³ The Hassi Messaoud affair is dealt with in chapter 3

¹⁴⁴ The independent association for the triumph of women's rights, *Association Indépendante pour le Triomphe des Droits des Femmes*, AITDF

heads without bodies. In November 1995, when we set up *Rachda* we tried to do things differently, we really tried to work with a base.¹⁴⁵

Eight years after Messaoudi was elected MP,¹⁴⁶ the association *Triomphe* still existed. I met its president at a meeting of women groups' representatives aimed at calling for a boycott of the October 2002 local elections. Sitting among her colleagues, she portrayed Messaoudi's career in this way:

Just think that in the lists of the United Nations she is still mentioned as president of *Triomphe*. Abroad, you Europeans see Khalida as the symbol of the women's movement, when in fact she tried to ruin one association after another. She started well before *Equality*, she started at university in the student committees. And then she went on. She even claims she contributed to set up *SOS Femmes en Détresse*, when she did everything to wreck it, given that she could not control it. If she got to where she is today it's because of the women's movement.¹⁴⁷ Everybody knows that she was in it for her personal ambitions.¹⁴⁸

Messaoudi's account of the deeply political reasons for the splits inside the associations she led might not be shared by her fellow activists, but her comparison of women's groups as 'heads without bodies' would less easily be rejected. Certainly not by Mrs Harhad herself, who is not only *Triomphe*'s president, but also its only member. The identification of associations with their leader seems to be characteristic of many women's associations, impinging not only on their internal affairs, but also on the way they relate to each other. This is how Malika Remaoune, president of the Oran-based *Association féminine pour l'épanouissement de la personne et l'exercice de la citoyenneté* (AFEPEC), describes the rival tensions pervading the world of women's associations in Algiers:

Here in Oran the situation is different. It might be because it is the capital, because they are near the administration, I wouldn't know, but in Algiers they have a different way of working. Every time I go to Algiers for a meeting we end up with nothing. There are always problems of

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Khalida Messaoudi, President of RACHDA and Minister of Communication, Algiers, 23 January 2002. RACHDA is Messaoudi's last association. When she entered the government she was still President, with no executive powers. Chapter 5 and 6 provide more insights into this association.

¹⁴⁶ Khalida Messaoudi was elected on the lists of the Rally for Culture and Democracy, which she left in May 2001. More on Messaoudi's political career in chapter 6, which deals with the relationships between associations and the party sphere.

¹⁴⁷ The case of *SOS Femmes en Détresse* is dealt with in detail in chapter 6, again in the context of the analysis of the relationship between the associative and party spheres.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Ouardia Harhad, President of the Association Indépendante pour le Triomphe des Droits des Femmes AITDF, Algiers, 7 October 2002

leadership, of organising future actions. There are too many people around the table who only think of themselves.¹⁴⁹

But the problems in the organisation of collective action are certainly not exclusive to Algiers' associative life. The paralysis affecting an EU-funded project aimed at building a network of associations with the idea of sensitising Algerian society to women's needs shows that the same issues also arise from the way Oran-based associations such as the AFEPEC operate:¹⁵⁰

Eight associations were in it from the start: RACHDA, AFEPEC, SOS Femmes en Détresse and others. Malika Remaoune was central to the whole project. She was the one getting the contacts with IMED¹⁵¹ in Italy. But the project required that one person be employed to manage the money. An accountant was recruited. But then the AFEPEC representative in the steering committee meddled with the whole process, claiming that their association was the leading agency, and that the money was to be managed by some of their members. That's why the project stopped. At IMED the person in charge of this really does not understand what happened. If you're not based here I guess it's difficult to understand. It's just that when one tries to put all these people together one doesn't get anywhere.¹⁵²

Women's associations' limited membership as well as the central, and at times overbearing, role of their president is not unfamiliar to representatives of international organisations and NGOs working in Algeria. But, as the case of IMED shows, when these justify their operations and reasons for being in Algeria by appealing to the existence of a thriving local 'civil society', their awareness of the reality on the ground can turn into a cause of embarrassment. Amnesty International provides another case:

But where are they, where are these associations? They ask to meet us at the [Hotel] Saint Georges, they come and talk. But it's always the same faces, usually the president and someone else. I have never seen the list of members of these pseudo-associations, and certainly not the members themselves, and - trust me - I asked to, and many times.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Malika Remaoune, AFEPEC President, Oran 23 October 2001

¹⁵⁰ This project was part of the "European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights", funded by the EU. Chapter 7 examines the EU's democracy assistance programme in Algeria in more depth.

¹⁵¹ The Italy-based Istituto per il Mediterraneo (IMED) was chosen as executing agency of the project.

¹⁵² Interview with Riccardo Varotto, Italian Embassy's intern, Algiers 4 October 2002

¹⁵³ Interview with Donatella Rovera, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Amnesty International Secretariat, London April, 2001. Chapter 7 describes how the centrality of the president might not always be a burden for donors, particularly when implementing civil society support programmes.

Despite being a strikingly recurrent feature of the women's movement, associative presidentialism is far from being unique to it. While investigating the issue of the governance structure of environmental associations, and more particularly the extent to which it can be qualified as democratic, UNDP states "inside associations, the president is the key person and represents the most stable element. [Out of forty-six associations], only thirty-three proceeded with the re-election of their management boards. Seventeen re-elected the entire executive bureau but only nine re-elected their presidents. In all these cases, apart from one or two exceptions, there was a systematic reappointment of the same president" [1998:41].

When commenting on this 'presidential bias', Algerian observers tend to consider it as an aberration. Derras, for instance, explains the "deterioration of the relationship between the president and the rest of the members" and the low turnover of presidents inside associations through "the weakness in the tradition of collective commitment, the inexperience at the level of management and the lack of associative culture". [1998:109]. These views though fail to recognise that if associative presidentialism appears as such a frequent feature of Algeria's voluntary sector, it might be because the associations that survive the process of decay are frequently those precisely centred around, or sometimes limited to, their determined, energetic and often ambitiously individualistic presidents.

The ambivalent nature of the centrality of the president - its being disapproved of while at the same time considered necessary for associations' continued existence - is further illustrated by two very different examples. One youth constituting sitting on the permanent bureau of the Rally for Youth Action (RAJ) explained the 'formal' lack of a president in their association in the following way:

When Dalila [Taleb] left RAJ¹⁵⁴ we decided not to elect another president. We do not need a president. Hakim has been here for years and if RAJ is still going on it's purely [due to him]. Even if the law requires having a president, having elections, what does it matter? For them it would be better if we all went back home, some back in Kabylia, and the others on the street, unemployed. And instead we'll continue to cause upset, like we've done the other day, on 10 October.¹⁵⁵ Did you

¹⁵⁴ Dalila Taleb, former president of RAJ, was elected as MP on the lists of the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) in 1997. Hakim Haddad, who back then was already secretary general, was also running on the FFS lists, but failed to get elected.

¹⁵⁵ 10 October is the anniversary of the October 1988's bloodshed, when during massive demonstrations all over the country, the army fired on the crowds in Algiers, killing several hundred people. RAJ commemorates this episode every year in Algiers's Place des Martyrs, despite overt pressures from authorities.

see Hakim speaking in Place de Martyrs? He wants to remain secretary general, because he's too good to be president".¹⁵⁶

The tension between adhering to formal governance requirements and carrying out significant levels of activity also emerges from the work ethic characterising the Islamic Charitable Association. One of the most popular Islamic charities in Algiers, if not in the entire country, *l'Association Islamique de Bienfaisance* (AIB) was founded by Sheikh Chemseddine Bouroubi, grandson of an Imam and *enfant du quartier*. In July 1989, at the age of 24, after 14 years of Coranic School, Chemseddine decided to commit himself full time to directing the association:

We are not a ministry. We have 15 members because it's required by law, but we do not have the resources to pay for so many people. We are not a ministry, but a charity. We do have elections, every few years, but it doesn't matter who's the president. It is getting the work done that matters. Do you know how many associations there are which don't do anything but meetings? There are 14 projects to run, and a number of commissions in charge of all of them: the Social Affairs commission deals with health, weddings and orphans. Then there's a women commission in charge of the Professional Training for women, and so on. We give away 2000 school bags a year and soon it will be Ramadan. People get in touch with us from all over Algeria to work with us, and they ask me to use the name of the association, but I've always refused. At the Conference on the Associative Movement they wanted to make me the representative of the associative movement in Algiers, but I declined. I've got ministers visiting me every other week, congratulating me for my work. I tell them that all I want to do is work. And they don't let me. Now they say they need the metro line to go right under here and that I need to move, but there's no way I'll move if they don't give me another space like this.¹⁵⁷

The AIB looks more like a small business venture than an association. Its four employees spend every morning dealing with the associations' public image. The association produces an incredible amount of "informative material" – leaflets, press adverts, posters - explaining the rationale of its activities. By 11 am each day, 2000 letters containing promotional leaflets reach the post office to be sent all over the country. As Chemseddine makes clear: "here, we are specialists in marketing campaigns". A brief text explains how the reader can contribute to the associations' activities, while full coloured pictures describe the associations' diverse projects. Every leaflet stresses the trustworthiness and the reliability and the 'return' of the donation, to which five current account numbers follow - a conventional one, a postal one,

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Nasim, RAJ member, 12 October 2001

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Chemseddine Bouroubi, President of the Islamic Charity Association, Belcourt, Algiers, 4 September 2001.

one in foreign currency and two *zakat* accounts. The name of the association appears in Arabic, in English, and, in slightly smaller characters in French. According to Chemseddine, this is purely due to the fact that English these days is more fashionable.¹⁵⁸ As Chemseddine states: “charities have to be structured, organised and effective...instead of distributing the *zakat* anarchically, it would be better to set up a bank and invest the money rationally, in large and profitable projects.”¹⁵⁹

The reasons for Chemseddine’s concern about his visibility will be clear later on, when the events leading to the authorities’ decisions to freeze his association will be addressed.¹⁶⁰ For now it suffices to note that the AIB provides another clue leading to the questioning of the link between associational life and trust. Unlike the “networks of Islamic charities implanted in the Mosques” [Ben Nefissa, 2000] which during the 1980s – before their activities were blocked following the dissolution of the FIS in 1992 - thrived on the voluntary work of supporters, the Islamic Charity Association based its success on its president’s drive. In this regard the AIB is similar to many of those associations that were created in the 1990s and which carried on their activities in domains as varied as the environment and women’s rights. Its presidential character does not contrast with its religious message, just as Dr Brahimi’s drive never contrasted with the formal objectives of the Rotarians, or Messaoudi’s central role within half a dozen women’s associations did not conflict with the cause of women’s rights, at least in the short term. Because of the patterns of managerial style and the governance arrangements characterising them, these examples of surviving Algerian associations appear more similar to start-ups or informal economic ventures than to the model of a civic association. They survive through the entrepreneurial drive of a sort of associative CEO, with few members, or more often some employees, revolving around him or her. An examination of how these members and employees are chosen shows that presidents are far from being alone inside associations: their family often surrounds them.

Surviving decay II: associative familism

Edward Banfield’s theory of the amoral familist society [1958] provided Putnam with the explanation of why Italian regions had diverged in their associative density and levels of

¹⁵⁸ Benrabah instead attaches political significance to the use of English when he writes about the reform of education: “the introduction of English in primary schools follows from the attempt to progressively get rid of the French language, and “cut the grass” under the francophones’ feet. The superiority of Shakespeare’s language is an Islamist claim and its acceptance by the authorities is a concession in their favour”.

¹⁵⁹ M. Yacine ‘Association de Bienfaisance: de l’Aumone à la Charité d’Entreprise’ *El Watan*, 5 May 1998

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 6

social capital, leaving the South lagging behind while the North was blessed with prosperity and good government. When Banfield carried out his study, he described the Southern Italians as characterised by “amoral familism” - a pervasive predisposition to rely solely on the nearest circle of relatives and distrust anyone else. The familist culture causes those impersonal social relations on which the civic ethos thrives to atrophy. Hence, in Putnam’s framework, the South’s low associative density and its poor political and economic development.

It is strange how transpositions of the civil society/social capital paradigm to developing countries regularly skip over the issue of familism, when the cultural, economic and political role of the family is so remarkable. Some observers of the Middle East and North Africa, for instance, consider it as the basis of society’s functioning and structure and, more importantly, the main driver of its adaptation to exogenous political and economic change [Sharabi, 1988]. In the case of Algeria, putting the family into the analysis of associational life would foster a reconsideration of its significance.

As we have seen, associations’ often dismal membership is as known as the gap between active and formally existing associations. Besides orbiting around the president, the core membership group frequently comprises one or more individuals from his or her family. In order to back their claim that “democracy inside associations is only effective from a formal point of view”, the UNDP-sponsored consultants evaluating environment-related associations notice that “the omnipresent and central role of the president...is accentuated by the proximity of the bureau whose symbiosis with the president is confirmed by the fact that more than a third of the 46 bureaus [surveyed] contain more than one person having the same family name....this element raises the issue of the kinship ethos characterising part of the associative movement” [UNDP, 1998:41].

Far from being unique to environment-related associations, it would appear that this family character pervades the entire associative sector. Associations based at the Maison des Associations in Bolognine show a frequent occurrence of members sharing the same family name, especially that of the president (see Annex). The cynical stance of the director of the MAB sheds some light on the reasons behind ‘family-run’ associations:

If the law requires a minimum of 15 members to set up an association, and you want to do it, who are the first people you turn to? You need somebody that deals with the finances, another that deals with the APC, or the wilaya. Who better than your brother, or your son to do it? And then after three years there are the elections of the bureau: your cousin, who was

treasurer, gets elected as the secretary general, you make your new brother in law vice president, and your son becomes treasurer. You of course remain president, and on top of that the money stays with the family”.¹⁶¹

The value of these comments is somewhat reflected in the experience of the National Council for Mutual Aid for Youth and Children (*Conseil National d'Entraide pour la Jeunesse et l'Enfance*- CNEJE) – a prominent association enjoying consultative status at the UN NGO committee. In his office based in the commercial centre of Ryad El Fath, Mr Bengana, the CNEJE's president, explains why he chose to employ his niece as secretary:

She's nice and reliable, with a degree in business and marketing. Even if she weren't my niece I'd employ her anyway. And yet it's true that this is not a normal association, and that we deal with personalities of a certain calibre, and often with sensitive issues. You cannot just have faith in anybody to do this job.¹⁶²

Associations do not always revolve around the axis of the family from their birth. Some become more family-centred as they develop. Amira Brahimi's account of the reasons why she followed her father in the new Rotary Club illustrates this, as do Mme Saïdani's reasons for leaving *Tharwa Fadhma n'Soumer*, a women's rights associations based in Algiers:

Tharwa has become *une association de famille* managed by Ourida Chouaki (president) and Yasmina [her sister]. They keep all the documents at home, and the fax and PC are there too. Djazia [Djazia Aït Kaki, secretary general of *Tharwa Fadhma n'Soumer*, and at the same time member of Mme Saïdani's *Actions Solidarités*] does not have access to anything, she is literally cut out of the management of the association. Now, they also have their link in France: a woman of their family married a Frenchman from Toulouse. They get money from French NGOs and every other month they get their little trip to France. I preferred to set up my own association, even if I had to use my husband's grocery shop as an office. In fact I'm planning to set up another one, l'Association de Femmes d'Alger: we have already 45 members, we cover almost every wilaya. We think we can register as national association.¹⁶³

In lamenting her exclusion from the family-run management, Mme Saïdani neglected to mention that besides the Chouaki sisters, *Tharwa Fadhma n'Soumeur* also included another family, the Aït Kaki, which beside Djazia included her sister Leila. When Leila quit, Djazia

¹⁶¹ Interview with Nabil Mekhzani, 36 year old, MAB acting Director, Bologhine, Algiers, 14 September 2001

¹⁶² Interview with Belgacem Bengana, CNEJE President, Algiers, 8 January 2002

¹⁶³ Interview with Mrs Malika Saïdani, President of 'Actions Solidarité Femmes d'Alger', Algiers, 14 October, 2001

was left struggling to sustain the Aït Kaki's attempts to control the association, ultimately losing the fight. Associations can indeed become the arena in which family rivalries are played out. Yet, often in cases where there is a family the association has a better chance to survive its internal tensions. The development of SOS Culture Bab el Oued (SOSBEO) provides one example.

According to some of its members, in the summer of 2002, Belkacem Aïdoun, SOSBEO president, left Algeria with more than AD200,000 (at the time equivalent to a black market value of US\$2000) belonging to the association and joined his wife in France. The money came partly from a sum (AD59,000) granted by CARITAS to fund a project providing professional training to eight young people in France. The latter were refused visas by the French embassy, and the money was left with Belkacem for an indefinite period. Furthermore, he pocketed an additional AD150,000 from the sale of a sound system and other material the association used to organise concerts.

The report made by Nacer Meghenine, SOSBEO Secretary General, to other members following Aidoun's departure, reads

For a while the objectives of the president had no longer coincided with those of the association, which has always proclaimed 'Algeria First' as its achievements so far testify. Unfortunately little by little, in the eyes of its president, SOS Culture became SOS Belkacem, as many ironically say, who considered it as his promotion and travel agency. He did not understand that the choice of creating an association having music as main mean to reach young people in the neighborhood was not an end in itself. He often contested completely transparent choices, like the mission to Brussels of the vice-president and the treasurer, which resulted in a grant of AD700,000. This money was then used to rent a space for the associations' headquarters. This space belonged to Belkacem's family and was very over-priced given that it was nothing more than a garage, ...Rather than a president, he revealed himself as a petty dictator. '*Houmisme*'¹⁶⁴ and opportunism prevailed over proper management and the association's interests, to the extent that members of the bureau are not allowed to use or know the official email address of the association, while his friends do. While the relationships with his friends were privileged, he isolated himself from the majority of the youth in the association, whom he deems dangerous and derides. And he takes this attitude not only towards the youth but also towards women. With his misogynist attitude he does not allow his wife – a member of the bureau - to take part in any activity, while at the same time she enjoys the privileges

¹⁶⁴ Houmisme : tendency to favour one's friends and neighbours living in one's houma, district, *quartier*.

of her position. ... the association has been dealt a hard blow by the wrongdoings of its president, and the time has come for a new general assembly.¹⁶⁵

Following the general assembly, Djamila - Nacer's wife - was made Secretary General and her sister remained the associations' Treasurer. The SOSBEO Bureau was now completely centred on one family, Nacer's. A few weeks after the reorganisation of the bureau, Nacer, the new president, was already envisaging the association's future:

He has embarrassed us vis-à-vis our partners abroad, and the people who believed in us here. He considered the association as his private property and many had understood this for a while. He behaved like the manager of a firm, with the attitude: 'if I leave; I take the keys with me' and so on. This time besides the money he took the official stamps of the associations, and even our address book. Now that Belkacem has gone, we can set up the new room where people can rehearse. Before financing the redevelopment of the new building, CARITAS obviously wanted to make sure that this affair was sorted out. They're betting their money on us, and this time we won't disappoint them.¹⁶⁶

Four years later SOSBEO was still up and running. It kept organising concerts and promoting young musicians inside and outside Algeria, still giving a hard time to the authorities at every possible occasion and still providing the entry point to Bab El Oued for foreign correspondents, in search of sub-proletarian hittistes¹⁶⁷ and their stories of marginalised youth.¹⁶⁸

Ignoring the family in the analysis of Algerian associational life has certainly facilitated the application of notions of civil society, but it also concealed part of the story. It is true that the family ethos of Algerian associations can appear 'amoral'. It tends to regulate conflict by excluding non-family members, thus stifling the openness of associational life, and maintaining its logic in pre-public dimension of the family. But associative familism also has positive functions. It keeps the association together, protects its development from internal and external threats and preserves a degree of cohesion among core members, which is necessary to take the association's activities forward in an efficient and effective way. It is

¹⁶⁵ Rapport du Secrétaire Générale au Président de l'association SOS Culture et à tous les membres adhérents p. 1

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Nacer Meghenine, SOSBEO President, Algiers, 4 October 2002

¹⁶⁷ Term derived from the word *hitt*, wall. Literally, person propping up the wall. Term generally used to indicate the unemployed youth lining the streets of major towns cities.

¹⁶⁸ Nacer Meghenine appears at length in the coverage of Bab el Oued in the 5 March 2003 by Radio France International following the visit of France's president Jacques Chirac in Algeria. More on SOSBEO in the following chapters

worth asking if associations of this kind are really worth sustaining. As will become clear later on, key actors, including foreign donors and the state, tend to think so.

Conclusions

As Max Weber once remarked, ‘the quantitative spread of organisational activity does not always go hand in hand with its qualitative significance’.¹⁶⁹ Algerian associational life is not always a locus of trust, and associations do not seem to form horizontal networks of reciprocity and cooperation, as claimed by much of the literature. Primarily, the notion that the Algeria of the 1990s was a burgeoning field of associative activity was largely based on official, but misleading, figures. These figures report only one side of Algeria’s process of associative development (its outstanding rates of growth) but ignored another, the equally astonishing tendency to collapse and decay to which associations often fall prey. Second, the dynamics regulating the establishment and multiplication of associations can be attributed to the emergence of ‘distrust’, i.e. divisions, fallings-out and factional rivalries among associations’ members, as much as to social trust. Third, associations that survive decay, and particularly those that do well in terms of reputation, scope of work and intensity of activity, generally do so because of the energies deployed by a single actor (usually the president), and not a group of members. Rather than pointing to individuals’ newly found logic of collective action, sometimes associational life seems to respond to a collective ethos of individual ambition and enterprise. Finally, very often an associations’ central figure is accompanied by his or her family members, which constitute the association’s core activist group. To an extent, associative familism discourages the development of ‘horizontal’ cooperation inside and outside associations. But it also ensures each association’s existence, by suppressing or preventing ‘non family’ members from engaging in dangerous interferences or threats to an association’s equilibrium, thus helping it achieve viability and visibility vis-à-vis the outside world. In part this might be due to the fact that when assessing associations, ‘trust’ does not count much either to those inside or outside associations. What counts is the effectiveness of their operations, their financial viability and the visibility of their impact or sheer existence. If associations do not always follow a civic ethos, it is because the associative logic is often an individualistically utilitarian one.¹⁷⁰

These remarks are not meant to be sweeping generalisations. There is no attempt here at claiming that presidentialism and familism are traits making up an ‘ideal type’ of the

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Berman, 1997: 407.

¹⁷⁰ Abdellah Tamine ‘Les associations gagnent en efficacité’ *El Watan*, 14 October 2000.

Algerian association, or that decay is the overriding pattern of Algeria's associative development. Nor should this analysis lead us to draw a scenario *à la* Putnam, whereby these patterns of associative development stem from Algerian society's failure to develop civicness and social capital. As seen before, this is a conclusion Algerians themselves, to the benefit of the authorities, came to.¹⁷¹ Rather, these findings should encourage a reconsideration of the neglect shown by enthusiastic observers of Algeria's associational life for the conditions in which it developed, and raise some doubt about the theoretical foundations supporting their views.

Among the many points of criticism raised against mainstream views of civil society like the one embodied by Putnam's concept of 'social capital' or Fukuyama's notion of 'trust', the most relevant here is their disregard of the role that politics plays in development [Putzel,1997]. The "civil society consensus" disregards the interests and motives driving individuals and groups to get involved in the associative sphere, and the political framework in which associational life is embedded. It is in this respect that the 'strong society, strong state' view of Putnam, Fukuyama and co. appears a radical shift, but in truth contributes to maintain features of the previous paradigm, such as the neglect of political analysis and the anti-state perspective which is at the core of the Washington consensus [Fine,1999;2001]. It is this disregard of politics that makes the civil society paradigm so easily applicable to different settings, but which also contributes to getting the picture wrong, as the Algerian case demonstrates.

In trying to readjust the interpretation of Algerian associational life, the following chapters will set out by considering the political conditions in which it developed.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 3

Chapter 5. Algerian associations from voice to loyalty

Introduction

On the morning of 21 July 2001, commuters waiting in *Place Audin* – home to one of Algiers' busiest bus stations – found themselves in front a more exotic choice of destinations than usual. During the previous night, the names of Algiers's districts appearing on the departures boards had been defaced and the routes renamed. *Audin-El Mouradia* now read *Audin-Los Angeles*; *Audin-Le Golf* had turned into *Audin-Nice*; while *Audin-Hydra* was now *Audin-Las Vegas*. An example among many of Algerians' pervasive irony, this episode also shows one other trait of their outlook – the widespread aspiration, particularly among youth, to leave the homeland.¹⁷²

Emigration dreams are certainly not restricted to Algeria's disenfranchised and frustrated youth. In this case though, they went hand in hand with another form of 'expatriation', this time played domestically, and whose consequences the state is still grappling with – political violence. As the interview Meriem Vergès conducted with a *hittiste* showed [1995], the sensation of "living in a foreign country" common to many under 30s nourished both their desire to leave an environment void of opportunities and their aspiration to see it one day radically changed. At the beginning of the 1990s, the frustrated expectations of the youth filled the political reservoir of radical Islamism and in turn their swelling number fed the ranks of the guerrilla groups that declared war on *taghout*, the illegitimate state. [Pierre & Quandt, 1996: 11; Martinez, 1998].

Youth alienation is but one of the manifold symptoms of the breakdown in Algeria's state-society relationship. These have been at the centre of analyses of the country's political development for over a decade, generating a copious literature on the various dimensions of Algeria's failing state.¹⁷³ Quite oddly however, no corresponding analysis of the conditions allowing for the resilience of the state has yet been developed.

¹⁷² Already in 1991 a survey conducted by the National Office of Statistics showed that 37% of under-35s wanted to emigrate. See Rarrbo [1995:210] and Lakhdar [2000:14-15].

¹⁷³ See introduction.

The 'sustainability' of the legitimacy deficit of the Algerian state can be partially explained through a political economy of Algerian associational life. The associative sphere has often been interpreted as a democratic solution to the authoritarian impasse, as the emergence of an institutional realm capable of narrowing down the state-society gap. As will be clear, associations did indeed provide a partial answer to the legitimacy deficit of the Algerian state, albeit of a very different nature. To understand the role of associational life in the country's political change we need to consider the origins of the state's legitimacy deficit in the crisis of Algeria's post-colonial pact and the shifting role of the public sector in articulating the state society relationship. The identification of the social categories on which the associative sector is based, the resources driving its growth and the institutional mechanisms regulating its relationship to the state show that despite their initial potential for political *change* associations ultimately contributed to preserving the *stability* of the political system and its fundamental institutional arrangements. In this light, associational life emerges as a sphere where state and society renegotiate their relationship to adjust to economic and political shocks. Not so much the expression of voice, but the renewal of post-colonial loyalties and the avoidance of harmful political exits are the stuff associations are made for.

Post-independence loyalty, political exit and civic voice

To make sense of the Algerian youth's emigration dreams and the motives of the Islamist insurgents, as well as the more general dynamics of physical and political exit in the country, it is useful to remember A.O. Hirschman's analysis of organisational decline and survival [1970]. Hirschman showed that organisations tend to rely on three main mechanisms to maintain the support of their constituencies: exit, voice and loyalty. Firms avoid decline and improve performance by facing up to the market, i.e. the permanent possibility of customers' 'exit' to products carrying better opportunity costs. But they also seek their customers' allegiance through non-market means, such as for instance freebies and 'loyalty' cards. Lastly, to stay afloat, companies attempt to remain in tune with consumers' preferences by allowing voice - the expression of customer (dis)satisfaction. Similarly, the organisational and institutional decline and success of unions, parties and states depends on varying blends of exit, voice and loyalty: militants, voters and citizens ensure organisational survival by expressing dissent, developing extra rational (ideological) links to the 'organisation' they belong to and inflicting exit sanctions.

If viewed through Hirschman's framework, Algeria's political history appears as a shift from the stability of post-colonial loyalty to the discomfort of multiple forms of exits such as the one carried out by the Algerian youth. Post-independence Algeria appeared as a country that "despite serious obstacles [...] emerged as one of the most stable and seemingly successful of the Arab revolutionary republics" [Hudson, 1977: 364]. Algeria's remarkable postcolonial stability depended on four dimensions. Ideologically, the bases of state legitimacy rested on the political capital derived from nationalism and anti-colonial struggle; Financially, the revenues generated by hydrocarbon exports allowed for soft budget constraints in social and welfare expenditure. Institutionally, the state "reactivated" and exploited the traditional networks of patronage and clientelism pervading Algerian society [Etienne, 1977]. Organisationally, the party-state system provided the apparatus enshrining the legitimacy of the independence struggle and allowing the hydrocarbon rent to trickle down through welfare systems, subsidy arrangements, guaranteed employment schemes etc. [Liabès, 1988: 238; Luciani, 1990]. The result was a tacit social contract based on the promise of increasing or at least sustained prosperity in exchange for restrained demands for political rights [El Kenz, 1991; Testas, 2000]. Voice as a political mechanism was made unnecessary, or rather redundant, by an abundance of sources of loyalty.

Algeria's faltering stability in the mid-1980s was due to the concomitant emergence of three factors. First, plummeting oil prices caused falling government revenues and acute budget deficits resulting in a tight fiscal crunch and cuts in social welfare [Blunden, 1994]. Second, with their political capital discounted by the 20 years elapsed since the liberation war, the authorities had to deal with new generations less receptive to the appeal of independence struggle [Vandewalle, 1992]. Third, the combination of rapidly increasing population and rising expectations put under pressure the organisational machinery of consensus building – party, mass organisations, etc. The October 1988 riots marked a dividing line in the history of post-colonial Algeria [Bourenane, 1989; Boukoubza, 1991; Garon, 93]. Interpreted as either due to the relentless fall in living standards [Seddon and Watson], or to "a generalised disavowal of the regime" [Roberts, 1992: 448; 2001], the scale and spread of the demonstrations as well as the precise targeting of symbols of the FLN-state, such as party offices, police commissariats, appeared as a clear end of the consensus established between rulers and ruled.

Since then, the ‘breached pact view’ – i.e. the idea that the legitimacy deficit affecting the Algerian state derives its origins from the collapse of the pact through which the people had entrusted their post-independence allegiance to the authorities, in the collapse of loyalty, has been one of the mainstays of Algerian studies [Tozi, 2000; Mae-Estrada, 2002]. John Entelis [1996: 1, 1999] for instance viewed the political stalemate as stemming from the breakdown of the “ruling bargain struck by the leadership with its people at independence”, while Kapil cited the vanishing “civic pact” as the prime reason for the violence [Kapil, 1995]. Domestic and foreign media reinforced these portrayals. In 2001 for instance a *Jeune Independent* op-ed argued that “[s]ince 1986, Algeria’s bases are crumbling because no alternative solutions have been found to the rupture of the social contract between *le pouvoir* and the people”.¹⁷⁴ From the columns of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Ghania Mouffouk justified the explosion of the 2001 Kabyle riots by claiming that “sticks and stones are the only means that millions of underprivileged Algerians have to demand a new social contract”, whilst Ihsane El Kadi [1998:58] wrote that *throughout the 1980s and 1990s* “Algerians have torn entire pages of their social contract apart”.¹⁷⁵ In one of its critical attacks on the executive, the news website *Algeria-Interface* mocked the government for “clinging contracts for military hardware”, while “being incapable of securing anything resembling to a social contract”.¹⁷⁶ Far from remaining limited to the academic and media communities, the collapsed pact argument is also central to the rhetoric of the political opposition. Speaking from a US-based detention centre, one of the main representatives of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS, *Front Islamique du Salut*) declared that “the FIS believes that no political stability can be attained without a social contract and trust established between governing and governed”.¹⁷⁷ From the other end of the political spectrum, the secularist Rally for Culture and Democracy denounced President Bouteflika’s policy of *concorde civile* and ‘the climate of impunity’ caused by it as yet another violation of the social contract.¹⁷⁸

With Algeria shifting from a polity based on loyalty to one weakened by exit, the emergence of Algeria’s associative sphere was interpreted as an opportunity to reform the social contract around an institutional realm of ‘voice’. Drawing on de Tocqueville’s examination of 19th century American associationalism and in line with

¹⁷⁴ Rachid Hammouche ‘Pour une réconciliation sociale’ *Jeune Indépendant* 30 January 2001.

¹⁷⁵ Mouffouk, G [2001] ‘Algeria: only way up and out’ *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July.

¹⁷⁶ *Algeria-interface* 7 December 2001.

¹⁷⁷ Communiqué by Anwar N. Haddam, President of the Islamic Salvation Front Parliamentary Delegation Abroad, Detention Centre of Manassas, Virginia 20 May, 1997 <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/20may97.htm>

¹⁷⁸ http://www.rcd-algerie.org/html/bulletin_decembre.html December 2002.

donors' Good Governance agenda [Lewis, 2002: 571], these analyses see "voluntary associations enhanc[ing] democracy by expanding the number and range of voices addressing government ...more civic actors means more opportunities for a wider range of interest groups to put pressure on and act as a watchdog vis-à-vis the state...to have a 'voice' [Silliman & Noble, 1998: 306; Mercer, 2002: 8].¹⁷⁹ In relation to Algeria, the civic voice argument portrayed the associative sphere as a promising – if partial - solution to political crisis. In praising the creation of a space for legal, non-violent protest, Layachi provocatively opposed 'instating civil society' to 'reinstating the state' as the most viable option for the re-foundation of the Algerian polity [1995]. In his discussion of the obduracy of Middle Eastern authoritarianism, Henry Moore singled out Algeria by arguing that, as compared to other countries equally stuck in the mires of authoritarian politics, "Algeria may be exceptional in that ...it has such a vibrant civil society ...that pressure for change may prove irresistible' [1999: 4].

A look at the professional categories present in Algerian associations casts some light on the validity of the civic voice view of the associative sphere, and shows that not only change, but also continuity, characterises its relationship to the state.

The social bases of associational life

One of the ideas underlying neo-liberal portrayals of civil society is that its growth is driven by emerging and increasingly assertive social groupings engaged in a struggle with the state to maintain or reshape the contours of the public-private divide [Gill,2002; Norton,1996]. In the Algerian context though this view is only partially confirmed. As seen in chapter 2, women and human rights' groups and more generally the set of Algeria's associations emerging at the beginning of the 1980s were indeed born within professional categories carrying new social and political demands, such as members of the liberal professions, academics, lawyers etc.¹⁸⁰ 20 years down the line though, the groups constituting the bulk of the social base of associational life are no longer the same.

¹⁷⁹ For notable examples of the neo-Tocquevillian view see Mercer [2002] who provides a review of "the Anglophone academic literature on NGOs, civil society and democratisation in order to highlight assumptions and biases produc[ing] this dominant normative consensus'. Lewis [2002] argues the usefulness of thinking about civil society from outside the boundaries of neo-Tocquevillian paradigm. These points are more widely dealt with in the introduction to the book.

¹⁸⁰ Before 1987, the creation of associations and their activities was regulated by a 1971 ordinance. Chapter two examines the development of the legislative framework regulating associations' relation to the state, from the colonial period to the present. Chapter 3 explores the state discourse on associations and its emphasis on democracy.

Tables 5.1 to 5.3 provide a breakdown of membership by professional affiliation for three samples of local and national associations active in different domains.¹⁸¹ Table 1 (MAB-Bologhine sample) shows associations' members as being generally in full employment. Nearly two thirds are occupied in different branches of the public sector, with the biggest share employed in the civil service (30.85%), education (27.24%) and health (5.25%) sectors. Only less than 20% of members are employed in the private sector.

Table 5.1 Associations membership by professional affiliation (Maison des Associations of Bologhine, Algiers 2002 n=723)

	President	Bureau Member	Member	Total (%)
Civil Service (local and national)				
Executive	8	13	8	
Middle Ranking	2	43	54	
Low Ranking	6	40	49	
Total Civil Service	16 (29.09%)	96 (42.48%)	111 (25.15%)	223 (30.85%)
Education				
University Teacher	3	6	21	
Teacher	4	24	37	
Clerical	1	5	12	
Student	4	21	59	
Total Education	12 (21.82%)	56 (24.78%)	129 (29.2%)	197 (27.25%)
Health				
Doctor	4	8	9	
Nurse	0	1	16	
Total Health	4 (7.27%)	9 (3.98%)	25 (5.65%)	38 (5.25%)
Public Enterprise				
Executive State Enterprise	1	2	3	
Engineer	3	8	9	
Administrative	1	10	20	
Worker	2	4	30	
Total Public Enterprises	7 (12.73%)	24 (10.62%)	62 (14%)	93 (12.86%)
Private Sector				
Shopkeepers	2	7	22	
Entrepreneurs	1	1	3	
Liberal Professions	4	13	17	
Other	7	15	47	
Total Private Sector	14 (25.45%)	36 (15.93%)	89 (20.1%)	139 (19.23%)
Unemployed	2 (3.64%)	5 (2.21%)	26 (5.9%)	33 (4.56%)
In full employment	49 (89.1%)	200 (88.5%)	357 (80.7%)	606 (83.12%)
Not in full empl (Stud+Unemp.)	6 (10.9%)	26 (11.5%)	85 (19.3%)	117 (16.18%)
Total	55 (100%)	226 (100%)	442 (100%)	723 (100%)

Sources: Primary Research at MAB, Bologhine

The Oran sample shows some similarities, but also a few differences. First of all here again we find the bulk of members employed in the public sector (66.32%). Not surprisingly, the share of members employed in the civil service (12.63%) is much

¹⁸¹ The data presented in Table 1 draw on primary research conducted at the Maison des Association of Bologhine, Algiers, between July 2001 and October 2002. Data on the Oran and Environment samples are based respectively on Derras, 1999 and PNUD, 1998. Coming from various sources, the data are only partially comparable, but do nonetheless provide a detailed picture of predominant professional groups within Algerian associations. See annex B for the list of associations included in the MAB sample.

less pronounced than in Algiers, the administrative capital, while the education (29.75%) and health (5.26%) sector figure prominently in this sample too. More surprisingly, Oran-based associations have less members employed in the private sector (11.58%), but a higher share of members employed in public enterprises (18.68%) and unemployed (8.68%).

Table 5.2 Associations' Membership by Professional Affiliation - Oran (n=380)

	President	Bureau	Total
Civil Service			
Executive (Cadre)	4	4	
Middle Ranking (Fonctionnaire)	5	8	
Lower Ranking (Empl./Assist./Secretary)	4	23	
Total Civil Service	13 (13.78%)	35 (12.3%)	48 (12.63%)
Education			
University Teacher	1	4	
Teacher	13	18	
Clerical (Adj. Education)	-	5	
Student	15	57	
Total Education	29 (30.5%)	84 (29.48%)	113 (29.75%)
Health Sector			
Doctor	5	10	
Nurse	-	5	
Total Health	5 (5.2%)	15 (5.26%)	20 (5.26%)
Public Enterprises			
Engineer	5	14	
Executive State Enterprise	3	18	
Administrative (Secretary / Agent Tech.)	4	15	
Worker	5	7	
Total Public Enterprises	17 (17.9%)	54 (18.94%)	71 (18.68%)
Private Sector			
Shopkeepers	12	16	
Entrepreneurs	-	-	
Liberal Professions	3	7	
Other	4	2	
Total Private Sector	19 (20%)	25 (8.77%)	44 (11.58%)
Unemployed	8 (8.42%)	25 (8.77%)	33 (8.68%)
Other	3 (3.15%)	3 (1.05%)	6 (1.58%)
No Response	1 (1.05%)	44 (15.43%)	45 (11.84%)
In full employment	72 (75.8%)	203 (71.3%)	275 (72.3%)
Inactive (Stud + Unem)	23 (24.2%)	82 (28.7%)	105 (27.7%)
Total	95 (100%)	285 (100%)	380 (100%)

Source: Derras 1998

The third sample includes only associations dealing with environment-related issues.¹⁸² Because of the way the information has been collected and organised in the original source [PNUD,1998], defining the split between the various categories is more problematic. For instance, entries such as Cadre and Engineer could apply to both public and private sectors.

¹⁸² Yet, the UNDP study from which the data is drawn from argues that these associations are usually active in a variety of domains irrespective of their name or central mission, as Algerian associations in general.

What is interesting though is the high percentage of engineers in the sample, which seems to point to a link between type of profession and association activity and between professional level and level of associative responsibility. These features are also evident in the MAB sample, where in a number of cases membership is heavily linked to the professional activity of its members and the sector where the association is active.

These data show that Algerian associational life is no longer the expression of the strata that in the 1980s helped convey Algeria's civic voice into the international arena. The exponential growth and diversification of associations have widened their social bases to progressively embrace a broader spectrum of social groups. Among these, the liberal professions and the private bourgeoisie are a distinct minority, while salaried categories including public sectors workers, teachers, doctors, engineers, now form its prime human material.

Table 5.3 Environment associations' membership by professional affiliation (local and national, country- wide)

	President	Bureau	Members
Executive (Cadre)	8 (17.7%)	86 (23.69%)	5475 (17.62%)
Teacher	15 (33.3%)	69 (19.00%)	11231 (36.15%)
Engineer	10 (22.2%)	91 (25.06%)	-
Liberal Profession	8 (17.7%)	61 (16.8%)	2199 (7.07%)
Students	- (0.0%)	- (0.0%)	6500 (20.06%)
Agent Technique	- (0.0%)	- (0.0%)	1458 (4.69%)
Workers	- (0.0%)	- (0.0%)	2632 (8.47%)
Other	4 (8.88%)	56 (15.42)	678 (2.18%)
Unemployed	- (0.0%)	- (0.0%)	887 (2.85%)
Total	45	363	31060

Source: UNDP,1998

The presence of bureaucrats in the ranks of North African associations has been documented, but the phenomenon in Algeria shows some peculiarities. Denoeux and Gateau showed the influence of the higher circles of the Makhzen¹⁸³ on Morocco's associative sphere through 'regional associations' led by former ministers and royal advisors, and through a number of consultative councils based on associations supported by the royal cabinet [Denoeux&Gateau,1995:19]. Ben Nefissa's assessment of Egypt's civic sector equally unveiled the overlapping between the associational sphere and the state, and particularly the bureaucracy. "A great part of associations – she claims - notably development associations, are led or indeed created by officials

¹⁸³ The term "makhzen" literally means "warehouse" but has long been used in Moroccan Arabic to refer to the country's elite, the state or the King's immediate circle. It is also used to refer to Morocco's opaque power structure.

of the ministry of social affairs itself" [BenNefissa,1995:41]. In Algeria however, the overlap between the human material of the state and that of the associative sector involves not only the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, but also lower ranking employees in central and local government, as well teachers, doctors and nurses, etc. It is therefore worth asking what are the motivations pushing these groups into the associative sphere. Part of the answer lies in their social trajectory.

From state-class to associative class: The rise, fall and exit of Algeria's public sector strata

Algeria's experience with forms of physical and political exit such as the one examined above goes back to well before 1988. Indeed, the politically motivated departure of brains and arms was one of the first challenges the state had to confront at the dawn of independence. Between 1961 and 1962, 900.000 people, mostly of European origin, left the country, starting an outflow that went on for years. Among these were individuals ensuring much of the colony's productive capacity - entrepreneurs, farmers - but also those responsible for the functioning of the administration and its interface with society, such as civil servants, doctors, teachers [Etienne, 1977: 298; Stora, 2001:10]. Finding a solution to the shortage of skills necessary for running the administrative machinery of the state and its basic social services meant a huge effort on the part of the newly independent state, and one leading to a massive social transformation.

The social strata emerging from this process shared a destiny closely linked to that of the state, through a relationship lying at the core of Algeria's post-colonial pact.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ The quest for placing the social groups born out of the first phase of state building under some unitary label has long and inconclusively haunted researchers. Halpern's concept of New Middle Class [1963] has been one of the first and most influential, if much disputed, attempts to bring together those owners of technical and intellectual capital such as white-collar workers, civil servants, public-sector managers and those in the public sector. Others have disputed the application of the concept of class as analytical category to Middle Eastern social structures. Waterbury's discussion of the notion of state bourgeoisie is a notable example [1991]. In relation to Algeria, Roberts's dissection of whether the Algerian bureaucracy had a class character is a case in point [1982]. This is no place to take up this debate again. There is no question here of saying that these groups are oriented towards collective action or have the character of 'class for itself', but simply, that the individuals belonging to these groups define their economic and social status in relation to the state, and in this sense they share a world vision, are governed by shared interests and develop similar social practices, which can remain individualistically, rather than collectively, oriented. In Algeria, to use El Kenz's words, the strata "constituted of individuals entirely tied to the state", was "the only Algerian middle class". In this sense, for its broadness and inclusiveness, Longuenesse's category of 'intermediate strata' [1979] i.e. those categories made up by educated, salaried and fairly well

From the elite of westernised civil servants described by Gellner as the ‘mamluks of the modern world’ [1981: 169] and by Etienne as the ‘technostructure of Algerian independence’ [1977: 304] down to the teacher in rural Algeria, these groups were fundamental to the state building project. They shaped social expectations around a synthesis of themes combining industrial development, agrarian reform, anti-imperialism and ensured the trickling down of the oil rents and the expansion of state welfarism [Camau, 1978: 124]. These groups ensured the state’s legitimacy not simply through their own direct allegiance, but rather through the articulation of the apparatus of consensus within society [Leca, 1990: 154]. Acting as the state’s political broker and stabiliser group, the *fonction publique* in Algeria played the role of Binder’s *Second Stratum* - “the necessary mediating instrument without which the ruling class cannot rule” [Binder, 12-3].

In return, the state middle classes could enjoy the benefits of a public sector which became a source of social status and a certain degree of prosperity. Pierre Bourdieu placed “the functionaries and lower ranking employees, as well as those assured of a stable and relatively remunerative job and all the related privileges, and freed from manual work” in the higher echelons of the indigenous class structure at the eve of independence. [1970: 125] This privileged position kept on improving during the next two decades. As Addi pointed out, the reward for carrying out the “the task of managing the public space and obtaining the consensus of the people” was “the privilege of extracting resources” [1999: 178]. For civil servants such privilege materialised in the capacity to control and direct the allocation of public resources, and exerting a degree of control over them, through embezzlement and corruption. The combination of high salaries and patrimonial practices of appropriation resulted in generally high standards of living.¹⁸⁵ Besides, their capacity to extract, appropriate, redistribute the ideological and economic material generated by the construction of the Algerian state endowed them with high social position [Leca, 1990].

In this light, the liaison binding the Algerian state and the public sector strata can be seen as approaching the archetypal clientelistic relationship - a dyadic hierarchical relationship of reciprocity linking actors or entities deriving mutual benefits from it irrespective of the power asymmetries involved. Contrary to recent dismissals of clientelism as dysfunctional [Putnam, 1993: 173-175], clientelism has in the past been

off individuals employed by the expanding public sectors in the Middle East, is the one that approximates the definition of “state middle classes” used in this chapter.

¹⁸⁵ In this sense, under Veblen’s definition of *leisure class*, the cohesion of these educated and salaried strata constituted rested on their living standard and status differentiation.

seen as central to state-society relations in Algeria. Bruno Etienne [1977] described the Algerian civil servants as enjoying the comfortable dual position of both patrons and clients. To the state they were clients, by acting as intermediaries distributing the material and symbolic elements of state building to society, through the administration of the allocation of goods, state contracts, welfare, education and notably the oil rent. To the citizen they were patrons, as access to state goods and perks, knowledge of the legal and administrative twists of the newly built state allowed them to exploit the system to secure favours from clients [Taïbi, 1990].

The state-public sector relationship was however going to change. Writing at the end of the Boumedienne era – the apex of the unique phase of true state-building in post-colonial Algeria - Etienne suggested that with the establishment a legal-rational form of authority typical of a modern state, Algerian bureaucrats would have progressively lost their political leverage, and the patron-client relationship linking state and public sector groups would eventually have faded into one of normal dependence of the latter vis-à-vis the former. The unfinished business of Algeria's state building in the 1980s and its near collapse in the 1990s disproves Etienne's guess. As the material and social status of the public sector strata was defined in relation to the state's material and ideological construction, which they contributed to and depended upon for their own existence and reproduction, when the modalities of state building were put into question the state middle classes faced their decline.¹⁸⁶ This process happened in three dimensions. First, the fall in oil prices and the economic slump of the mid 1980s called for a reduction in the size and cost of the public sector. With the shrinking of resources pushing an abrupt revision of the mode of development, Algeria's civil servants were trapped in what David Hirshman calls the 'box of bureaucratic decline', whose four corners are lack of resources, low incentives, poor public service commitment and low legitimacy [Hirshman, 1999: 287]. As their purchasing power was eroded by exchange rate devaluation, inflation and blocked salaries, bureaucrats, doctors, teachers and academics also saw the deterioration of their professional status

¹⁸⁶ Boukhobza [1991: 36] made clear how the social positioning and sense of belonging of Algeria's administrators, fonctionnaires, cadres and more widely public sector workers depended on the way the state perceives, treats and take care of them. He wrote "Each social category has its own leaders whose legitimacy is drawn from their position and their capacity to embody the perceptions and ideologies of the groups to which they belong. The relation to the state is mediated by the degree of recognition that the latter manifests vis-à-vis the role of the former through the *prise en charge* of their respective interests. By the whole of the administrative and technical cadres, the state is perceived through the norms it applies and puts in place to choose its representatives at different levels...for the consideration that is granted to them. The perception of the state for these social categories and the type of representation of this state in their consciousness are thus profoundly correlated to the cleavage between the oft-repeated official rules and the real practices of those who decide".

and social role.¹⁸⁷ Second, as the justification for cut backs in welfare expenditure became associated with the chronic inefficiencies of the public sector, public employees became the object of a smear campaign that portrayed them as the causes of the crisis.¹⁸⁸ Already in 1987, the state made the necessity of public sector reform as one of the mainstays of its discourse on institutional renewal, leaving white collars, teachers etc with much of the responsibility for the crisis [Addi,1990]¹⁸⁹ [Boussoumah, 1992]. The need to “break down the bureaucracy” characterised several initiatives implemented at that time, such as the institution of a state secretary in charge of civil service and administrative reform”,¹⁹⁰ and formed part of a press campaign against the bureaucracy.¹⁹¹ Far from ending with the 1980s reforms, both public sector reform initiatives,¹⁹² and the smear campaigns in the press¹⁹³ remained a defining trait of Algeria for years to come, with obviously negative implications for the status of civil servants, who remain identified with the prime source of *hogra*.¹⁹⁴ Third, economic liberalisation and the growth of the informal economy led to the emergence of new social strata challenging the economic and social position of civil

¹⁸⁷ A. Benyahia: ‘ Un pouvoir d’achat dégradé’ *El Watan* 26 April 2003; A. R. ‘Rémunérations et pouvoir d’achat : salaires de misère’, *El Watan* 24 February 2004 .

¹⁸⁸ In line with domestic perceptions of the public sector, foreign portrayals of the Algerian administration often depict it as the main obstacle to political development. Pervaded by and allowing for corruption, Algeria’s self-serving bureaucracy attempts to maintain its hold on the public space and stretch its grasp on the private sphere [Talahite,2000]. Private interests occupy positions within the state apparatus [Martinez, 1998; Djerbal,1997] through forms of predatory neo-patrimonialism which stalemate those reforms necessary to address the people’s ever deteriorating living conditions [Belkacem, 2001; Dillman,2000].

¹⁸⁹ “How to regain the trust of citizens? The most lucid within the FLN [knew] the answer: by dismissing the numerous political, administrative and economic cadres who were nominated not because of their skills but because of their belonging the dominant clientelistic groups”. L. Addi: ‘*Vide de Pouvoir et intolérance*’. *Le Monde Diplomatique* June 1990.

¹⁹⁰ *El Moudjahid*: ‘ Compte rendu des travaux du conseil des ministres’ 26 November, 1987 pp. 2-3.

¹⁹¹ ‘La lutte contre la bureaucratie. Consolider l’Etat de droit’ *El Moudjahid*, 30 November 1987; ‘Des hommes de qualité pour une administration de qualité *Révolution Africaine* n. 1250, 12 February 1988 p. 19.

¹⁹² Committee on the Reform of the structures and missions of the State, usually named Missoum Sbih Committee from the name of its president. The final report stated that in order to accomplish the necessary state reform, around half of Algeria’s 1.3 million civil servants (*les employés de la fonction publique*) need to be scrapped of their permanent contracts” *Algeria interface*, 14 November 2002 http://www.algeria-interface.com/new/article.php?article_id=643 .

¹⁹³“La crise de l’état ...non pas seulement celle de l’incapacité du pouvoir politique à réaliser un projet consensuel, mais plus encore dans son incapacité à réaliser ses promesses à travers un appareillage administratif incompétent et faiblement efficace. {...} L’état politique est aujourd’hui malade de son administration...les gouvernants, tuteurs de l’administration, n’ont pas l’initiative dans son mode d’organisation et la responsabilité dans la recherche de la performance”. Douma, M. ‘L’état malade de son administration’ *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 29/11/01

¹⁹⁴ See Khelifa, Kamel ‘*La hogra en question*’ *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 21 October 2001 p. 15 part one and two *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 22 October 2001.

Chapter 3 looks at how associational life has also been subject to this kind of scapegoat politics.

servants, academics, doctors. The fall in purchasing power and status was harsher when measured in relation to the expanding category of Algeria's *nouveaux riches* emerging from the interstices of the new informal economy.¹⁹⁵ As UNDP recognised "the government's attempt to carry out liberalisation was carried out through an alliance of private interests and state actors at the expense of the middle class and public employees" [1997:41]. The fear that the ascending trajectories of street vendors, smugglers, illegal builders, etc. inspired in the middle classes and the intelligentsia can be grasped from the titles of (particularly francophone) newspapers and from the vehemence with which Algeria's academic discourse has condemned these new economic practices [Harrold].¹⁹⁶ Echoing those op-eds depicting those profiting from informal economy as "predators...establishing their reign"¹⁹⁷ and putting society "under a state of siege",¹⁹⁸ Mohammed Boukhobza in 1991 described the state as "responsible for the abnormal inversion of social hierarchies", by writing: "we have witnessed a veritable inversion of social hierarchies... the characteristic of all this generation of *nouveaux riches* is to spread over almost all the social space, trying to impose themselves as the Algeria's new middle class,¹⁹⁹ while the public sector strata were suddenly 'no longer in the middle'.²⁰⁰

The progressive weakening of the public sector strata can be explained in the logic of clientelism. Building on the idea of patrons and clients' inter-dependence, John Waterbury suggested that mutual vulnerability (whether real or perceived) is critical to maintaining the tension keeping clientelistic relationships working [1977]. As "patronage is a means of protection *for the politically exposed, both for the weak and for the politically powerful*" [1977: 336-7] the degree to which a patron (client) can rely on the services (favours) of his/her client (patron) depends on the latter's factual or apparent weaknesses in the relation to the external environment. Yet, no actor is prepared to see the other's weakness/vulnerability pushed too far, as the mutual benefits accruing from the relationship would be imperilled. Therefore patrons might have a stake in the clients' weakness, and clients might relish their patrons'

¹⁹⁵ Martinez's work on Algeria's conflict and the actors benefiting from it is interesting for the profile of the *nouveaux riches* [1998].

¹⁹⁶ Guerroudj *ibid.* p. 42

¹⁹⁷ Mebarek, B. 'Biskra: Le règne des trabendistes' *El Watan* 26 October 2001.

¹⁹⁸ Anonymous 'Blida, Les Marchands ambulants assiègent la ville' *El Watan* 26 October 2001.

¹⁹⁹ Boukhobza. M'hammed (1991) *Octobre 88: évolution ou rupture?* Alger: Bouchène. For similar analyses by some of Algeria's most eminent academics see Tlemcani, *State, Bazaar and Globalisation*; and Daho Rabal on *Monde Arabe*.

²⁰⁰ Mustapha Chelfi 'The middle class is no longer in the middle' 23 October 2002 http://www.algeria-interface.com/new/article.php?article_id=632&lng=e.

undermining, but only to an extent. Tied in a dialectical relationship analogous to Hegel's slave and master, patrons would not be without their clients, and vice-versa [Gellner & Waterbury, 1977].

Indeed, the decline in the social and political outlook of the state middle classes had a profound impact on the state. Once the pillars of nationhood and state building, these groups started sharing the same aspirations of the disenfranchised Algerian youth.²⁰¹ As Rarrbo writes "if once emigration concerned low skilled workforce, since 1985 the first candidates for exiles are middle and upper cadres [1995: 211]. In December 2002, during a plenary session of the National Consultative Social Council (CNES), one of its members declared that 400.000 Algerian cadres left the country between 1992 and 1996, the equivalent of what "the country ha[d] produced during a decade".²⁰² Tozy believes that from the very beginning the impact of this outflow was more than symbolic: the "thousands of senior officials, creative artists and intellectuals who fled the country and sought refuge abroad deprived the country of a major part of its vital forces and of important bases for the support of the regime [2000: 48]". As with the youth, physical and political exit came together. According to Chibber, "the policy responses to budgetary deficits in the late 1980s led to the middle classes' exit from the FLN" [1996:127]. The opening of the political system at the end of the 1980s further clarified the progressive withering of social component of the state's legitimacy. In the 1990 and 1991 elections, the Islamic Salvation Front managed to rally these social groups in a vote of protest against the regime. Beside targeting those constituencies benefiting from the collapse of the party-state system such as the alliance of petty traders, the small business sector and the poor), the FIS's message appealed to those "that [had] previously benefited from the post-colonial settlement [such as] low-level bureaucrats, administrators, and the educated segment of the population". [Chibber, 1996:127]

More than a decade after an army coup neutralised the electoral threat posed by the FIS, the situation of the disenchanted public sector strata was not ameliorated, and the legitimacy of the Algerian state remained in question. The issue of whether or not the state managed to retain a relationship with the public sector as a basis of support and a

²⁰¹ Benchiba, Lakhdar 'Le mur de l'argent fragmente la société algérienne' *Le Monde Diplomatique* October 2000 pp.14-15; N. Grim : 'Retraites Anticipées, deparmenisation, marginalisation. 120.000 Cadres perdus pour l'Etat. *El Watan*, 17 February 2002.

²⁰² Bouakkaz, Salim : '400.000 cadre ont quitté le pays en quatre ans', *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 17 december 2002 ; Mohammed Salah Mentouri: 'Les Incertitudes sur le moyen terme sont trop nombreuses' *Algeria-Interface*, 15 January 2003 http://www.algeria-interface.com/new/article.php?article_id=671.

sphere of political brokerage regulating conflict in society had not been raised. To be fair, the authorities did not fail to act to this effect. Contrary to the treatment administered to state enterprises, the drastic downsizing of the bureaucracy and public services sectors such as education and health as advocated by the IMF and the World Bank was avoided until well into the second Bouteflika Presidency. Moreover, measures to reduce the “alarming proportions” reached by the outflow of white collar workers were also put in place.²⁰³ The associative sphere was a less clearly stated, but certainly equally effective attempt deployed by the state to retain partial control of the disenfranchised middle classes, and the realm where the two could redevelop a mutually beneficial relationship.

The associative sphere as political settlement

Institutional change involves winners and losers. If groups and individuals exerting a degree of influence on the trajectory of reforms happen to be among the potential losers, they are likely to oppose change, for instance by carrying out exit sanctions [North, 1990]. Transition bribes are the side-payments that a reform initiating state needs to provide to those effectively resisting change to offset their perceived or actual costs [Khan, 1995]. The volume of these side-payments constitutes the price of the ‘political settlement’ – the price of loyalty. In order to minimise it, the state has a stake in keeping opponents disorganised. The most effective transition bribes therefore work in an opposite way to Olson’s ‘selective incentives’ [1971]: they target the individual within the group, not to encourage its inclination towards collective action, but to undermine it.

Since its very beginning, Algeria’s associative sphere provided the institutional space for negotiating the political settlement between state and public sector groups. In the early 1980s, impending decline was already looming large on the social and economic

²⁰³ In July 2003, Fatima Zohra Bouchemla, the Minister for the Algerian community abroad, recognised that “Ninety percent of those who have left the country [did it for] reasons such as insecurity, the inadequacy of the scientific environment, bad working and living conditions”. Driven by the awareness of the “extent and quality” of “national skills” outside the country – the Minister declared that the government was going to deploy a set of incentives to put to fruitful use this expertise for ‘the development of the nation’. “It is always possible to act on the patriotic fibre of these Algerians – she said – so that through missions, scientific stays, exchanges, etc ... émigré academics, intellectuals, managers, athletes, financiers and artists... can deploy their competencies for Algeria’s local development”; O. Sadki ‘L’Algérie veut rapatrier se cerveaux’ *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, 24 Avril 2003; Nabila Amir: ‘Experts Algeriens Etabli à l’Etranger – Des compétences à exploiter’, *El Watan* 28 July 2003.

horizon of the groups that were going to constitute the bulk of Algeria's associative movement. For those within the first advocacy associations, the questioning of the political system went hand in hand with the signs of the impending failure of the economic system, "in a context of disillusion and 'de-classing' [in which] frustrations served as detonator for a repositioning of [...] the individual vis-à-vis [...] the state" [Karem, 1995: 216-217]. According to Moncef Bennouniche, a former member of the LADH board, the explosion of the human rights debate derived not only from the limits of a closed political system, but also from its "economic failure... yielding nothing but poverty and disparities".²⁰⁴ As Karem points out, "human rights militants were marked by a sort of disenchantment, by the awareness that socialism could neither ensure development, nor guarantee the abolition of mounting social cleavages" [1995: 217]. With the acceleration of their material and social fall, rather than demanding more 'autonomy and separation from the state' as assumed by proponents of the neo-Tocquevillian vision of associational life [Layachi, 1995; Zoubir, 1999], those at the centre of Algeria's associative spring experienced their progressive 'disconnection' from the state with gloomy dejection. Writing in the aftermath of the 1988 riots, Bourenane saw the origin of the country's decline in the '*situation de déconnexion*' affecting the relations between civil and political society [1989: 67]. Ali El Kenz described the "uneasiness of the middle classes" and that of a "civil society left to itself", abandoned "by a state whose organisational logic had reduced *its social mediation instruments* to its apparatus of order and repression"[1991: xxi].²⁰⁵

The state responded to the unrest of the public sector strata on their own associative ground. Even before the first measures introducing freedom of association were approved, the state developed a discourse aimed at 'encouraging the blossoming of the associative movement'²⁰⁶ and portraying associational life as the embodiment of a new form of citizenship.²⁰⁷ According to Nacer Djabi, this was part of a strategy primarily targeting those strata that were losing out from the processes of economic and social change hitting Algeria at the time:

²⁰⁴ M. Moncef Bennouniche, former member of the LADH Management Board, quoted by Karem, M. (1995) 'La question de droits de l'homme au Maghreb' *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, vol. XXXIV p.215-225.

²⁰⁵ Italics mine.

²⁰⁶ As codified in art.43 of the 1996 Constitution. *Manual for the setting up and managing associations* published by the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity.

²⁰⁷ The elements of this discourse, and particularly the interplay between economic reforms and ideas of democratic citizenship, are analysed in chapter 3.

After 1985 *le pouvoir* felt the need to change its social bases. It's here that the idea of civil society was born: as a means to link up with the urban middle class, those in the administration, particularly the francophones. They (the group of reformers working within the President's Cabinet) wanted to change the system. First they tried from the inside: the *Cahiers des Reformes* coming out in those years lay out the objectives and the means to achieve this. But the FLN and the UGTA were too big an obstacle. And so they tried with the associations. The idea was that if the FLN catered for the rural strata, associations were its contrary, they targeted the urban civil society. And so the latter could be recruited to bring down the former.²⁰⁸

Tellingly, the state gave official recognition to the social and material decline of the state middle classes and their associative aspirations almost simultaneously. Measures of political liberalisation coincided with the official undermining of the previously privileged status of public sector employees. The law on freedom of association²⁰⁹ was passed just a few weeks after the law abolishing permanent employment contracts and introducing the temporary contract as general rule. The related abolition of the "general statute of workers" definitely raised the spectre of public sector cuts and the end to inflation-adjusted wage increases.²¹⁰ Then, in an attempt to re-establish its links with the discontented urban strata, the state did not limit itself to portraying the emerging associative sector as a realm where a new form of state-society relationships could develop: it proceeded to its direct creation by using the human material at his disposal: civil servants. According to Musette, immediately after the 1990 Law on associative freedom, the relevance of the associative movement among the general public was minimal. "The first associations – he argues - did not receive a massive adhesion...they were created by the authorities ... by seconding certain functionaries to lead them" [2000:103].

More than ten years down the line, the linkage between public sector retrenchments and the development of the associative sector kept reverberating in the discursive armory of public sector reform, just as economic grievances keep on influencing the day to day lives of those inside Algeria's associative movement. Charged with the task of reforming the administration, in 2001 the Sbih Committee²¹¹ praised an increase in the number of associations as a form of participative democracy "to

²⁰⁸ Interview with Nacer Djabi, University Professor, Algiers 8 August 2002

²⁰⁹ Law 90-31.

²¹⁰ Law n.90-11, 21 April 1990 relating to work relationships.

²¹¹ See fn 71

respond to the needs of society, in areas such as culture, social and humanitarian protection'.²¹² Then, in line with World Bank recommendations, the same committee supported plans to lay off 500,000 civil servants, in the same areas.²¹³ A few blocks away from the government's building where the Sbih committee had met, civil servants, university teachers and top-ranking bureaucrats forming the executive bureau of Touiza – probably Algeria's most prominent development NGO in Algeria – met to discuss the failures of Algeria's economic policy, ending up reflecting on its effects on their own living standards:

Do you know how much a magistrate earns? Less than a street vendor. Selling cigarettes on the street can get you up to 1000 Dinars a day, and a judge, with all his titles, can probably get the same after years of service. A middle cadre like me earns between 12000 and 15000 AD a month. And do you know how much this pullover costs? I had it for 70 Francs in Paris. Here (in Algiers) probably far more. Well, if I earn 15000 dinars, you see, that in order to get dressed I need almost a month's salary.²¹⁴

Understanding the appeal which associational life has to public sector workers requires an acknowledging the character of some of the side-payments the state provided to the public sector strata in order to retain their loyalty.

From state distribution to distributive associations

Among the types of public policy identified by Lowi [1964], redistributive and regulatory policies are those more often linked to civic associations [Clarke, 1998b: 44]. Their focus is believed to lie on macro political issues and actions aimed either at making government more responsive (the voice argument) or unburden it from its service delivery functions, as seen in chapter 3. The benefits are thought of as accruing either to large sectors of the population or to constituencies among the poor and the marginalized. There is enough evidence though to show that in Algeria the associative sphere is involved in another type of public policy: distribution.

²¹² Faycal Metaoui, ' "La démocratie participative" oui, mais', *El Watan*, 2 December 2001.

²¹³ "200 000 in the health sector, 360 000 in education, and 25 000 in higher education : D.A. '500 000 fonctionnaires menacés de dépermanisation', *El Watan*, 4 September 2003.

²¹⁴ Interview with Gasmi Askli, school inspector, Algier, 7 October 2002

The political economy of rent distribution in today's Algeria remains largely obscure and, as a consequence, its importance is underestimated. As mentioned before, since the nationalisations of the oil and gas sector in 1971, the rent generated from the hydrocarbon exports provided one of the foundations of Algeria's post-independence political system. Proponents of the breached pact argument often assume that October 1988 showed the inadequacy of distribution as a viable institutional mechanism to retain consensus. It is true that oil price decline in the aftermath of the 1980s oil crisis decreased the capacity of the hydrocarbon rent to satisfy the mounting demands of a population undergoing swift demographic growth and rapid urbanisation. Yet, the share of the hydrocarbon sector has emerged largely unscathed by the disruptive developments of the 1990s: after all, oil and gas exports still account for more than 95% of total exports, 30% of GDP and some 60% of government revenues [Aïssaoui, 2001: 1]. It is therefore strange that despite recognising its undiminished importance, domestic and foreign observers often limit the role of the hydrocarbon rent to the appropriation strategies of the decision makers occupying the highest and most opaque echelons of the state [Pierre & Quandt, 1996: 15].

The oil and gas rent as an element of consensus building remains fundamental to Algeria's political process. What has changed since the early post-independence decades is the way it percolates into society. The demise of the FLN-state and its affiliated mass organisations engendered the collapse of part of the organisational architecture hosting Algeria's distributive institutions [Vandewalle, 1996: 210]. After the opening up of the political system following the 1989 constitution little attention has been paid to the institutional mechanisms that keep the rent flowing. There are however indications that far from weakening it, the introduction of pluralist politics actually helped the reproduction of the distributive character of the Algerian state: the difference being that instead of one single channel - the FLN and its organisations - the state can now avail itself of several - the range of political parties mushrooming in Algeria's political landscape [Roberts, 1998].

The associative sphere is populated by less visible and yet equally effective distributive machines. Support to the associative movement took (and still takes) the form of a massive provision of public funds, uniting state and associations in the common origin of the resources financing their budgets. As an Algerian journalist has

observed, “Associations, like the rest of Algeria, run on oil. If oil prices are high, then in that year the associative movement will be rich”.²¹⁵

Since the promulgation of the 1990 law on associative freedom at least 11 ministries have opened one or more specific budget lines to support associations.²¹⁶ Subsidies to associations operating in related fields often constitute a sizable part of the available financial capacities of the ministry. Between 1991 and 2005 for instance, funds from the Ministry of Youth and Sport (*Ministère de la Jeunesse et Sports* - MJS) increased from AD 100m to AD 952.5m, absorbing in some years more than 10% of the Ministry’s overall budget, including operating costs. In 2004, a year of Presidential elections, the MJS budget for associations more than doubled (Figure 5.1).

In addition to direct funding from the Environment, Social Action, Youth and Sports ministries and other line agencies, the Ministry of Interior has a local governments budget which includes allocations to wilayas and APCs for subsidies to local associations. The fact the budget for local associations can be ‘too high’ gives an idea of the scope and size of the state’s effort in supporting the country’ associative sphere:

The APC (*Assemblée Populaire Communale* – municipal council) has one single budget line allocated to associations, except sport associations, for which there’s a special line. In 1999 there was more money than associations, we did not know how to spend it. So I decided to call them all up and hear what they had to offer me, and since then the number of associations has certainly increased. Now we have reached a parity between associations and resources, which is manageable. We have achieved an equilibrium”.²¹⁷

The way decisions concerning allocations are taken clarifies the distributive logic by which public funding to associations is carried out and the way the associative sphere is “seen by the state” as a consensus tool [Scott, 1998]. Overall funding to Algeria’s associative sector is decided centrally as one single envelope in the context of the Finance Law fixing the yearly budget of the state. Parliament plays an incremental

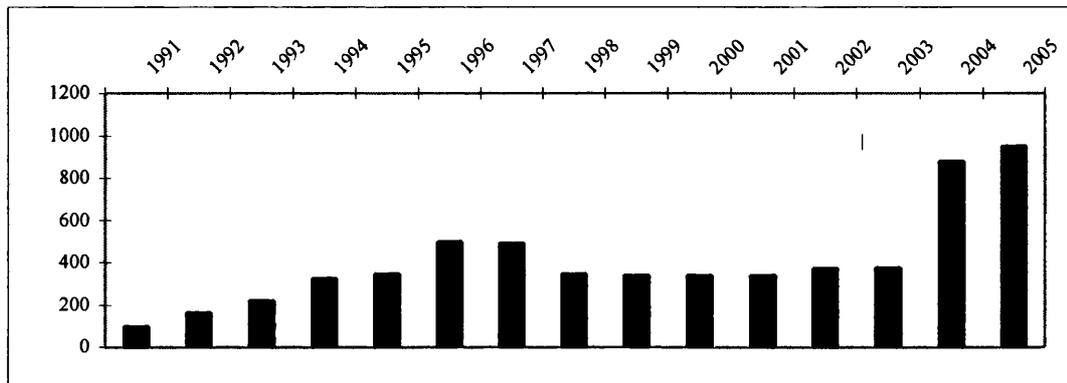
²¹⁵ Interview with M. Larbaoui, Journalist at *Liberté* Algiers, 19 November 2001

²¹⁶ The Ministries concerned are Labour; Social Protection and Professional Training; Tourism; Habitat (Environment); Social Action and National Solidarity; Youth and Sport; Culture; Interior; Finance; Moudjahidin, Health; Higher Education and Scientific Research. See *Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne* (JORA)

²¹⁷ Interview with Badia Sator, President of Sidi M’hamed APC, RACHDA vice-president, member of the Rally for Culture and Democracy, General Practitioner, 6 October 2002

role, with MPs²¹⁸ regularly pushing for increases in the overall envelope at the moment the Budget Law is debated. During one such parliamentary session, in October 2001, Ould Abbès, the Minister of Solidarity and Social Action, warned associations that “funds are there, and they are even considerable, no question about that...[but] there won’t be any subsidies to associations that don’t support the government”.²¹⁹

Figure 5.4 MJS Funding to Youth and Sport associations 1991-2005 (AD millions)



Source: JORA, various issues²²⁰

This overall envelope is then split up between the various government departments, where efforts are deployed to reach the maximum number of targets by multiplying the number of allocations:

It would be very difficult here to draw up budgets at the start of the year, it is not like in the other directorates. There it’s simple. You’ve got statistics, you know how many people there are in each category, how many elderly and disabled will need help. Here I do not know how many associations will ask for help each year. We try never to reject a proposal. Ultimately we tend to support every single project, though in different percentages. Sometimes it’s 5%, sometimes 50%.²²¹

²¹⁸ Particularly those MPs linked to associations, as we shall see in chapter 6

²¹⁹ Mohamed Naïli ‘Pas de subventions aux associations qui nous critiquent’ *Le Jeune Independent* 23 October 2001.

²²⁰ JORA ; n.5 30 January 1991; n.36 31 July 1991; n.2, 8 January 1992; n.5, 24 January 1993; n.47, 18 July 1993; n.2, 9 January 1994; n.45, 13 July 1994; n.3, 18 January 1995; n.38, 19 July 1995; n.2 10 January 1996; n.44 17 July 1996; n.2, 8 January 1997; n. 48 , 23 July 1997; n.3, 21 January 1998; n.51, 15 July 1998; n.3 13 January 1999; n.49, 25 July 1999; n.2, 17 January 2000; n.49, 9 July 2000; n.7 24 January 2001; n.38/39 21-22 July 2001; n.3 15 January 2002; n.49 17 July 2002; n.1 5 January 2003; n. 42, 16 July 2003; n.1 04 January 2004; n.49, 8 August 2004; n. 10, 30 January 2005.

²²¹ Interview with Mr Touafek, Head of the Direction for the Associative Movement, MASSN Algiers, 16 July 2001.

Far from being simply Touafek's concern, rewarding as many associations as possible is an objective of his ministry and the government in general. In 1999, for instance, the MASSN supported 33 national associations by granting a total of AD 80 millions, while the Ministry of Labour (*Ministère du Travail et de la Formation Professionnelle*, MTFP) spent around AD 16 millions to support 98 associations.²²² If official figures for registered associations overestimate the number of active associations, as our data (chapter 4) suggest, the MASSN and the MTFP were able to provide substantial resources to more than half the number of associations concerned by their respective spheres of activity. This means not only that funding becomes fragmented into small amounts, but also that associations are encouraged to refer to several official sources to finance their activities:

Often we enter into partnerships with other sponsors. I tend to favour this kind of partnership. Next summer for instance we are supporting a camping holiday for disabled people organised by the *Organisation des Enfants des Chouhadas* by contributing with 10%. The Ministry for the Moudjahiddin contributes another 60%, the Presidency with another part and so forth.²²³

The periodic denunciations of misuse found in the press make clear that this dispersion of funds ends up reaching associations' members:²²⁴

Money is certainly not what associations lack. Some members of certain local associations utilise the funds for their own personal profit. They manage to change their life style, personal expenses, etc. It's time that the general inspectorate of finances ran some enquiries on the financial management of these associations, whose members have often opened a second account in order to avoid such controls.²²⁵

As the data in section four show, a large proportion of presidents, secretary generals and members are from the administration. A report of the national Audit Court (Cour des Comptes) illuminates the level of overlap between state and associative sphere in terms of human and financial capital, to the extent that one can almost be considered as an extension of the other:

²²² MASSN Internal memo, July 2000, p. 30.

²²³ Interview with Mr Touafek, Head of the Direction for the Associative Movement, MASSN Algiers, 16 July 2001.

²²⁴ See also Ziad Salah 'L'argent des associations' *El Watan*, 17 May 1999.

²²⁵ F.S. 'Que font les associations locales?' *Le Matin* 28 November 2001, n.2971.

In the case of the association ‘Arts et Spectacles’, public funds were utilised for purposes different from what originally agreed in the contracts, notably concerning the remuneration of [seconded] *functionaries of the ministry*, which appears non justifiable. Such violation results from the illicit control of the Centre for Culture and Information (CCI) – an external service of the ministry of culture – by the Association Arts et Spectacles, whose president is no one other than the director of CCI.²²⁶

Equally, the Secretary General of the Festival Committee of the Wilaya of Oran (*Comité des Fêtes de la Wilaya d’Oran*) is the president of the APW Social Affairs Commission, while the president and the treasurer are employed by the wilaya.²²⁷ A similar situation applies to the Federation of Social Associations (*Fédération des Associations à caractère sociale*), an umbrella organisation of more than 170 associations, whose President, Hamidi Youcef, was elected to an Oran APC for the FLN, and whose employees work in various local government levels: commune, daïra, wilaya.²²⁸

Rather than simply funnelling ‘side-payments’ to their members, associations channel resources to society at large:

[A]ll too often we have to deal with people that come here to ask for a subsidy to celebrate a national holiday, and distribute gifts: this is the spirit in many associations, it’s the mentality of the providence state through the associative space.²²⁹

In the mind of local administrators, the role of the associative sphere as a distributive institution reaching out to society emerges more clearly:

Berbers, Arabs, Mozabites: these terms don’t really matter to me. My conception of society is one based on the family. The individual would not exist without the

²²⁶ JORA n. 76 19 November 1997 p. 203 In the same Annual report, the Cour des Comptes quotes five other associations incurring in financial mismanagement and administrative favours: *Association des Réalisateur*s, *l’Association des Scientifiques*, *l’Association des Amis de la Culture de Sétif*, *l’Association ‘El Djahidia’*, and *l’Association des Amis du Tassili N’Adjer*. The president of the latter is A. Aouchiche, former minister under Boumediène. His association, like many others, is ‘multifunctional’: it is listed as an environmental association in the UNDP report, but according to the Cour des Comptes it specializes in the organization of cultural events too.

²²⁷ R.R.O ‘Aux frais de quelle princesse’ *El Watan*, 1-2 October 1999.

²²⁸ Benachour ‘Mouvement Associatif à Oran: Bruits et chuchotements’, *El Watan*, 13 February 2000.

²²⁹ Interview with Yazid Saïdi – Head of Communication, MASSN, Algiers, 5 February 2002.

family, nor would these groups. The wilaya of Ghardaïa presents a complex reality from the social point of view. And in this sense I consider myself lucky to be able to avail myself of its dense associative movement, and to have a minister committed to supporting the associative movement who encourages me to have a permanent contact with it. Since the beginning we have deployed all our means to maintain an active and healthy associative sector, and we have a constant relationship with them. Associations allow us to go beyond the communities, and reach the family, what really matters.²³⁰

By working as an interface linking state and society through a constellation of distributive acts, the associative sphere helps minimise the cost of the political settlement. Through ministries, wilayas and APCs the state multiplies itself through a range of funding sources, different application procedures and manifold disbursements. In turn, to finance their activities, associations deploy their connections to tour and tap various departments. The state encourages a generalised perception that side-payments are available, by maintaining a distributive logic developed during a time of oil bonanza, even during periods, such as the mid 1990s, when such a time seems long gone. The distributive state is resuscitated from the dire straits of the fiscal crunch and economic adjustment, and with it the clientelistic practices it engendered.

Patrons and clients in associations

It is unfortunate that since the works on the relationship between the patron-state and the client-bureaucrat in post-independence Algeria [Etienne, 1977; Roberts, 1982; Taïb, 1990] the subject has not been taken up by more recent investigations. For an update would be far from superfluous, as much has changed. Rather than an increased dependence of the public sector strata on the state expected by Etienne, the economic and political shocks of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a higher 'vulnerability' of both. As Waterbury [1977: 339] suggested, it is in these transitional settings, where "the traditional forms of vulnerabilities [are] traded in for the vulnerabilities of modernisation", that we find the clearest evidence of the formation of new forms of political clientelism. Sometimes, the emergence of the very organisations and institutions often believed to reduce the central role of clientelism and patronage in state-society relationships, such as those associated with democratic development,

²³⁰ Interview with M. Boudiaf, Wali of Ghardaïa, October 2002.

actually provide the ground for the renewal of clientelistic formations, as the development of Algeria's associative sphere shows.

As seen before, state distribution of resources to associations was not simply the result of a top down project of consensus building. It followed the calls coming from within the associative sphere itself for side-payments offsetting the cost Algeria's public sector strata had paid – and are still paying. But because these costs are not merely financial, but also related to the loss of the previously privileged position of being clients of the state, and patrons of the public, financial side-payments could never be enough. Nor could the discourse developed by the state to turn the bureaucrats it tried to undermine into the representatives of Algeria's 'civil society'.²³¹ True, state funding of associations and the distributive practices in which associations themselves engage in redistributing subsidies to society are the first element of a refoundation of the old patronage relations. But to maintain their social status bureaucrats and public sector workers had to extend their range of action, through for instance the opportunities offered by Algeria's booming informal economy, whose expansion constitutes one of the very threats to their social status.

To use the words of James Scott, in Algeria "as in many third world countries [public sector groups] have passed from super-ordinate class, to a subordinate and declining class, whose infra-politics need to be understood" [Scott,1985]. These infrapolitics often revolve around the survival strategies deployed by public sector employees in the wake of economic reforms. When their status and salaries shrink, "civil servants [and] front line service deliverers deploy coping strategies designed to ensure household survival" [Hanlon, 2002: 13].²³² In the perceptions of a UN official, these strategies constitute some of the prime motivations inside associations:

After working with them it becomes clear that associations are tools for the financial and political repositioning of the individuals who create and join them.

²³¹ On this, see chapter 3

²³² In 1995 UNICEF and UNDP published *Pay, Productivity and Public Service* arguing that in the five African countries studied "as a result of the erosion of basic service providers' remuneration, corruption and privatised user fees" were widespread, and concluded that "the elements associated with the decline in public service quality are all elements of coping strategies designed to ensure household survival. They cannot be eradicated so long as additional incomes beyond government pay are necessary for the survival of the majority of public servants who are front-line service deliverers". See Adjededi et al. 1995, quoted in Hanlon, 2002: 13].

Associations are not only a source of good money, they are almost another career.²³³

The economic opportunities offered by associations go in fact far beyond the financial flows emanating from the state. Formally, associations are requested to stay away from profit making activities, but policing of such requirement is de facto non-existent. What is clear, on the other hand, is that associative 'activities' are not subject to taxation. A classified list of associations which are exempted from VAT and imports duties is kept at the level of the Ministry of Interior.²³⁴ Similar lists exist at the level of each wilaya for local associations. This complex of facilitations makes associations prone to be exploited by the commercial interests of its founders and members, and involves them in the dynamics of the informal economy:

Once the association is set up and they have the receipt proving the wilaya's recognition, they start asking for little donations, a little help. We already had a few cases of members using the official stamp of the association for their own ends. The president of the 'El Fouhsane' association uses the name of the association to introduce goods in the country. And because he's connected to the port authorities he also sells the laissez-passer for the customs. Entire containers are allowed to come in. And on top of that, he uses the offices (of the Maison des Association) for his own deals. He comes here in the morning with his secretary; he does his business in total tranquillity.²³⁵

The influence of commercial interests on associative activity is not necessarily kept secret. On the main door of the CNEJE headquarters - located in the central shopping centre complex of Riad El Fath - one can read, in smaller characters; CNEJE Informatique. The president of the association, Mohammed Bengana, explains:

For an association renting an office here would be impossible. It's too expensive. So we decided to use the office for our company, in order to amortise the expenses. We import software and PC parts. We also hired a secretary, who can help out within the association.²³⁶

²³³ Interview with Leila Tadj, UNDP Programme Officer, Algiers, October 2002.

²³⁴ Abdelhaq Illeli 'Des Associations sous contrôle'
<http://www.algeria-interface.com/french/politique/assos090201.htm>

²³⁵ Interview with Nabil Mekhzani, Algiers, 23 October 2001.

²³⁶ Interview with Belgacem Bengana, CNEJE President, Algiers, 8 January 2002. The CNEJE is described in charter 3.

In tolerating the overlap between civic and commercial activities, the state manages to reinforce its links with its associative clients, and *viceversa*. Official recognition of an association entitles members to set up current accounts, renting an office and 'recruiting' staff. In Algeria none of these is a trouble-free endeavour, and they often involve connections and contacts within the administration. Through an association, though, access to the higher levels of the administration can be easier:

Nothing happens in Algeria without kickbacks (pot-de-vins), everything is based on contacts. It sometimes takes me weeks, or even months to find the thread to a colonel or a mayor, to obtain what amounts to a fundamental right of the women [victims of abuse and taken care of by the association]... As an individual you have to pay, as an association you go through a system of relationships. This raises an essential issue: associations, like APCs, are not subject to proper mechanisms of control. The only difference being that until today, contrary to the scores of mayors now in prison, no president of an association has ever been arrested.²³⁷

While Maryam Bellala seeks contacts within the administration to carry out her associative duties, others set up associations in order to gain contacts within the administration. A resident of the Cité Co-opemade in the Algiers' district of Kouba points out how the situation has changed since the neighbourhood committee which he contributed years before has been disbanded:

We used to have a *comité de quartier* (neighbourhood committee) here which functioned well. For instance we managed to stop a construction project that was going to spoil that green area. But there isn't one anymore. And do you see the way this place is kept now? There's no point in struggling when you do not even own the flat. It's normal that as soon as you have some money you try to leave. That's why there are no *comités de quartier* here. Even when somebody sets up a *comité*, most of the time it is to have an 'in' at the wilaya or at the APC.²³⁸

As seen before, the dispersion of funding through associations forces individuals to extend their networks of contacts within and around what still is an opaque administration. But even the very task of setting up and leading an association requires the same process. Official recognition of associations is still arbitrary, and the departments concerned usually claim to be running massive backlogs. Research at the

²³⁷ Interview with Mme Bellala, Secretary General of SOS Femmes en Détresse, Algiers, 5 December 2001

²³⁸ Interview with I.K., Journalist, Kouba, Algiers, September 2001

Maison des Associations shows that the average time for gaining recognition is over 18 months. Most associations function for years with the *récépissé* released by the Ministry or the wilaya, a provisional document acknowledging receipt of the application for recognition. This allows associations full rights to operate, but the administration can at any moment 'refuse' recognition. This keeps associations in a permanent state of attentisme, a wait-and-see attitude vis-à-vis the state.

In these situations a friendly hand inside the ministry or the wilaya can help speed up the various dossiers. Procedures for gaining eligibility for government subsidies are subject to the same rules. In principle only associations having been conferred the *statut d'utilité publique* can receive government funds.²³⁹ Yet, Algeria's Audit Court (Cour des Comptes) notes the "absence of clear selection criteria for the attribution of subsidies" which results in a "climate of generalised tolerance" and subjective decisions.²⁴⁰ This means that applicants need to secure and maintain support within the administration in order to first gain recognition, and then ward off the dangers of financial controls.²⁴¹ When applicants come *from* the administration, things are very easy:

The president of the Ligue Sports Universitaires worked as inspector in the minister's cabinet (youth and sport) and one day took his retirement to dedicate himself entirely to his association as president. Just imagine, somebody with children who are still at school leaving his job in order to be *un cadre associatif*. But this gives him the opportunity of going out of the country at the expense of his association, and to get foreign currency to bring back. And more than that, it gives him the opportunity to develop a number of contacts, for instance with the Olympic Committee – and if you want to understand politics in Algeria you just have to dig into the Olympic Committee: the last time the issues have been debated in parliament they forced everybody to leave their weapons outside.²⁴²

²³⁹ Chahreddine Berriah 'Où va l'argent des associations?' *El Watan*, 30 May 1996. During the 1997 'Forum National des Associations', the government (precisely Mrs Rabéa Mécherchène, Delegated Minister to Social Solidarity) assured that the rules concerning the status of 'public usefulness' were going to be revised, in order to make the law applicable. Until May 2002 though, nothing changed. See Souhila H. 'La quête d'un nouveau statut' *El Watan*, 12 April 1997.

²⁴⁰ See Rapport Annuel de la Cour Des Comptes in *JORA* n. 76 19 November 1997

²⁴¹ Controls on the use of associations' funds are not infrequent, but their underlying reasons and the criteria according to which they are carried out are unclear. See for instance *La Tribune* (20 October 2001) for a case in Ouargla, where the wilaya directorate of youth and sports (DJS) suddenly decided to audit the accounts of 102 cultural and social associations benefiting from public funds.

²⁴² Interview with Saïda, 34 ans, former Secretary at Federation Mechanical Sports, Algiers 5 October 2002

And when they are within the administration, the relation with the state is even easier. The case of Mr Atatfa is exemplary in this respect. For a few years the head of the directorate for the Associative movement at the MASSN, he now fills the post of advisor to the minister. Stockpiles of folders labelled 'Touiza' line the walls of his office at the Ministry:

How do I combine my job in the ministry and my associative activity in Touiza? It's true, it's hard. I haven't been at Touiza's office for three months now. I was too busy at work. But as you can imagine I can solve many of the problems of the association from here: managing projects and writing proposals, we've got people who do that. But dealing with the bureaucracy can also take a lot of time and that's mostly my contribution.²⁴³

The increasing frequency with which public sector workers opt for pre-retirements, leaves, secondments or straightforward resignations to take up positions of responsibility within an association has already made Algerian observers talk about 'associative professionals'.²⁴⁴ Equally often though, as seen before, rather than quitting their jobs, these individuals simply combine it with their new associative responsibilities. This gives them an opportunity to rebuild and regain the lost status of the civil servant as dispenser of favours, a patron vis-à-vis the citizen:

It is not simply a question of money but somehow of prestige too: an office, a chair, a car, the privileges that come with 'having one's own association', of having one's own office. Here an office-based 'job' is still the only respectable job...even better therefore if you have two.²⁴⁵

Explaining the interplay between state and associations simply as the product of public sector employees' coping strategies would miss part of the picture. In accounting for the effects of new public management reforms on Africa's bureaucracies, David Hirschman claimed that "rather than reduce the bureaucrats' sphere of interest, [the reforms] served to expand the opportunities available to them...[the bureaucrats] read and interpreted the new set of incentives and disincentives from [their] own perspective and responded actively in [their] own

²⁴³ Interview with Maamar Atatfa, Founding Member of Touiza, Ministry of National Solidarity and Social Action, 15 January 2002 Algiers

²⁴⁴ Benachour 'Mouvement Associatif à Oran: Bruits et chuchotements' *El Watan* 13 February 2000

²⁴⁵ Interview with Marco Ramazzotti, CISP director, 13 September 2001, CISP Algiers offices

interests...the bureaucracy might have been bypassed, but the bureaucrats were not. [1999:292]. Although based on high-ranking African officials, Hirschman's argument equally applies to Algeria's middle and lower ranking civil servants, doctors, teachers and other front line service delivery agents, who found in the associative sphere an opportunity to recycle and exploit their position and contacts within the bureaucracy to their own advantage:

How do you think these new NGOs can keep themselves together? Sure they tap government and donor's funding but in the end they do not even pay any salary. Take FOREM for instance: Khiati is often able to do big things with few means. He actually has a tendency to have things done in the cheapest way, which I guess is good in a way, but for us it can be a problem. After all, we don't need to save money: we need to run a project in the best way given the amount of resource available. Sometimes Khiati's logic runs against our own. His staff is an example. FOREM pays the salary to only one person, the secretary based at the association's headquarters in Hussein Dey. But then again, his personal secretary working at the Belfort hospital does a great part of the job and she is on the hospital's payrolls. Besides this he also employs Zohra who works as Project manager, a young graduate from the Ecole National d'Administration (ENA) who works as legal adviser, a journalist who works as a so called press officer, and two psychologists working in Bentalha. But these people are not paid by Khiati, they are paid by the wilaya of Algiers, through a pre-employment scheme which usually allows young people to work in public enterprises. We are talking of nothing more than 6000 DA a month. But in the end these people are not at the FOREM for the money, but to get some experience. They are happy to work for Khiati and it is him that tells the wilaya to employ them. The problem for me is that often they are not competent, and when they are they soon leave to work somewhere else. This is why there is a big circulation of personnel at FOREM and this is why Zohra now works for us. At least we have been able to train someone to write projects.²⁴⁶

Far from simply helping public sector employees respond to job insecurity and wage cuts through a range of economic opportunities, associations allowed them a chance to enhance the political capital attached to their position within the state apparatus. By turning themselves into associations' representatives, public sector employees responded to the declining power of the office by combining it with the situational

²⁴⁶ Interview with Marco Ramazzotti, CISP Headquarters, Hydra Algiers, 16 December 2001

rents²⁴⁷ provided by associations, thus reacquiring the role of patrons in a range of clientelist networks pervading family, regional and communitarian lines:

We employ Samir's father-in-law because he's somebody we can trust. Moreover, he's retired, with AD 24000 (£160) a month with 7 people to look after. The AD 9000 a month he'll receive for a living are going to make a difference for him.²⁴⁸

29 year old and unemployed, Ali works in a internet café from 4:30 pm to 9:30 pm. The internet café is located in the new offices of the CAPE, a group of associations aiming to provide training to unemployed youth:

The internet café makes around AD 1000-2000 a day. I get AD 300, enough to survive. The rest goes to the association. I do not know how they use it. But this is not what bothers me. If we say we are active in Belcourt it means we need to work with the people of Belcourt. If it was up to them [the bureau members], they'd keep the door of the shop permanently closed; one is from Blida and wants to set up a cultural event in Blida, the other is Kabyle and wants to take the association there. But if we have to work like this, if everybody joins the association to help their friends at home they might as well set up their own association.²⁴⁹

This is exactly what certain representatives do:

For us Mzabis, contributing to the welfare of the community is very important. It's a value that they inculcated in us since we were kids. I became aware that I could do little inside the administration, but I could use my skills and talents in the association.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ The term situational rents (*rentes de situation*) is widely used in Algeria to define rent seeking opportunities. Mouloud Hamrouche, former Prime Minister, was among the first to use it in a public debate, when he publicly accused FLN members to be the "retainers of situational rents". The re-emergence (in different shape) of rent-seeking behaviours in political systems experiencing changes in economic forms of production such as a switch in emphasis from planning to market has been described by Fforde [2002] in an analysis echoing Waterbury "re-emergence of political clientelism in different forms in transitional settings" seen above. For rent seeking in Algeria, see Dillman, 2000 and Talahite, 2000. On the specific linkages between rent seeking and clientelism in the state administration, see Addi, 1999 and Taïbi, 1990.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Nacer, Secretary General of SOS Bab El Oued 4/10/02]

²⁴⁹ Interview with Sid Ali, photographer, Collectif d'Associations pour l'Aide à l'Emploi (CAPE) employee, Algiers, 4 October 2002]

²⁵⁰ Zoubir Bellala, vice president of Association for the Safeguard of the Mzab valley, Ghardaïa, 15 October 2002

But besides traditional cleavages, associations also reproduce clientelistic relationship across more modern ones:

My thesis supervisor asked me to join her association on the study of traditional Arabic poetry. The reason is that she's not very good, and she knows it, and she knows that others know. She's the director of the history department, can you imagine? A francophone leading a department of arabophones. The association serves to portray her as less of a francophone, in the eyes of her colleagues, and she goes rounding up people like me, simply because we are arabophone. I'd rather not take part, but still, I need somebody to present my thesis"²⁵¹

Conclusions

The length of time over which the breached pact view served as the basis for understanding Algeria's political development almost makes it an article of faith, an interpretative *passé-partout* applied to anything ranging from elections' results to the political mindset of the Algerians.²⁵² These arguments though provide a static view of the Algerian polity. Here is their limit. That state and society stand in a relationship of reciprocal alienation seems undeniable. More problematic is to define where the lines of such cleavage lie, and how they have been evolving over the course of the last two decades. And if the exhaustion of Algeria's post-colonial pact was already evident in the 1980s, what has, since then, prevented the total collapse of the polity? In an attempt to answer these questions analysts focusing on Algeria's civil society often mistook the emergence of Algeria's liberalised autocracy with a real dynamic of democratic change. The birth and development of associational life provides a case in point in this misunderstanding.

This chapter has questioned mainstream views of Algeria's associational life and, in so doing, has questioned recurring assumptions about the character of state-society relations in the country. Far from contributing to a shift to a polity based on democratic voice, the civic sector has helped the preservation of loyalty and the mechanisms supporting it. Rather than altering them, it has contributed to preserve the institutional arrangements (distribution, clientelism) interfacing the state apparatus

²⁵¹ Interview with Mohamed B. , Algiers, 3 February 2002

²⁵² This of course does not mean that - despite its widespread sway on Algerian studies - every analyst of Algerian politics explicitly subscribes to the 'breached pact' view.

with society, and has 'recast' the groups (mainly stemming from the public sector) previously involved in the management of postcolonial loyalty.

In showing that part of the institutional arrangements regulating state-society relationships under the post-colonial setting remain alive and kicking today, under different forms and in a much more adverse environment than the one they stemmed from, the discussion has also tried to argue that notions of breakdown and collapse are to be used with caution. The question which remains to be answered is to what extent Algeria's weakened state will be capable of going beyond the ad hoc acquisition of loyalty from certain social groups and reshape itself around broader and firmer bases of political support.

Chapter 6. Party bypass: associational life and the management of political pluralism

Introduction: Algerian parties and their discontented

In November 2000, a year and half into Abdelaziz Bouteflika's first term in office, a group of young officers led by Mohamed Touati - considered as the army's ideologue – were given the task of devising a strategy to get the country out of its decade-long political stalemate.²⁵³ The document they drafted provides an interesting insight into the way the Algerian army conceived its role in fixing the failures of Algeria's political change. Besides portraying “the current crisis [as] the result of the biases introduced by the democratisation process since its launch” [...], the document advocated “a complete reconstitution of [Algeria's] political landscape”. According to the army's analysis, since the introduction of political pluralism, Algeria's parties had mainly succeeded in generating popular discontent with clear repercussions on the country's political stability and reputation abroad. As to a solution, the document called for “the dissolution of all political parties” present on the political spectrum, a three year break with party politics, followed by a reconstitution of parties under different names and different rules of the game.²⁵⁴

The disappointment shown by Touati's young officers, and the solutions they suggest, confirm the role played by (parts of) the Algerian state in managing political pluralism in the country. According to what amounts today to a consensus, the 1989 opening of the political system and the country's experience with party politics since then have to be understood in the context of the authorities' progressive legitimacy loss, and the mechanisms they deployed to retain power. The demise of FLN's monopoly of political representation did little to transform Algeria's political system; as Roberts has pointed out, “[t]he Party had been a façade for the real power structure; the introduction of pluralism replaced a monolithic façade with a pluralist one, but this fell a long way short of a substantial change to the form of government.” [Roberts, 1999: 386]. In this sense, rather than representing specific groups in society, Algerian parties cater for the various factions in the state, which retain control over their activities to seek legitimacy, either by using the parties as clientelist relays to co-opt individuals within or close to the parties or, more importantly, to establish a form of electoral representation in society. Lahouari Addi for instance believes that “the

²⁵³ ‘L'armée rêve de dissoudre tous les partis : Un document confidentiel expose les projets du pouvoir’ E. L. *Libération*, 1 June 2001.

²⁵⁴ The document was later published by the website Algeria-Watch “Analyse des conjonctures des origines récentes de la crise aux perspectives. Quoi faire, comment et pourquoi?”

regime does not conceive the elections as a modality of political competition, but rather as a way of legitimising and re-legitimising itself. ...it does not consider parties as competitors but as 'assistants' helping to acquire an electoral representation. In this scenario, the results of elections do not only reflect the fights at the core of the state, but also serve as a way to make them official and open." [Addi, 2001].

Yet, in addition to confirming widely held views on the genesis of Algeria's party system, the document also raises several important questions. First, the army's disappointment with parties calls for an explanation of why the attempts at engineering political pluralism have been less than successful. Second, as the 'reconstitution of the political landscape' envisaged has not yet taken place, the document calls for an analysis of whether the authorities have pursued different avenues to encourage the country's process of political institutionalisation. Since 2001, in fact, Algeria has gone through several electoral rounds and, mainly after the re-election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika for a second Presidential term, has been perceived as a more politically stable country. How did Algeria's pluralist politics cope with a party system that was recognized as ineffective by those very elements in the regime that had put it in place? Last, the document calls for an analysis of why Algerian parties have failed to emancipate themselves from the state's tutelage and become a true force of democratisation in the country.

The hypothesis put forward here is that some of the answers to the three questions above - a. what are the causes of the state's unfulfilled expectations for the parties? b. how did the authorities remedy the malfunctions of the party system? c. why did Algerian parties fail to emancipate themselves from state control? - can be found in the increasing role of the associative sphere in the party-political realm since the mid 1980s. Authors attributing a democratising role to the emergence of the associations in Algeria have often neglected their relationship to other actors born during the liberalisation era, particularly the parties. To this day there is no analysis of the way the associative realm relates to Algeria's party system, electoral politics and state institutions such as Parliament and the executive, nor of the role played by the authorities in facilitating or discouraging such interactions. This has allowed a neglect of the way associations - under the strict supervision of the state - have grown to become an alternative to parties in the political game. As a by-product of their increasing political role, associations contributed to further the imbalance between the executive and Parliament, by centralising power within the former and undermining the latter. To see how, it is necessary to start by looking at the state's attitude vis-à-vis the party sphere, and the strategies it deploys to control it.

Hyperpluralism in Algeria

Not the least point of convergence in the views of Algeria's political development over the last fifteen years has been the ineffective role played by political parties in Algeria's process of political change. [Roberts, Addi, 2001; Willis, 2002]. In this sense, very few observers of Algerian politics would disagree with the premises of Touati's officers' analysis. The point of contention would rather lie in the type of solution they put forward. Liberal theory perceives the strengths and weaknesses of political parties as a function of the links they establish with social groups. The origin of political parties in Western democracies is associated with the emergence of socio-political cleavages representing deep societal divides arising during historical processes key to nation-state building and economic transformation [Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Flora et al., 1999]. Issues such as the definition of national boundaries and the role of minorities, the secularisation of state institutions, the consequences of different economic policy options, etc generate conflict dynamics between social groups which eventually crystallise in party systems [Schmitter, 1992]. As these processes usually take place over long periods of time during which citizens' preferences remain in flux without anchoring themselves to any specific party organisation, the institutionalisation of party systems is often problematic in new democracies [Pridham, 1990]. In this sense, the weakness of Algeria's political parties could be accentuated by Algeria's unfinished business of state and nation building determining blurred and fluid socio-political cleavages, or by the shortness of Algeria's affair with pluralist politics, or both. Recent surveys yielding interesting insights on Algeria's electoral sociology have supported the relevance of these two hypotheses to explain Algerian parties weakness.²⁵⁵

According to a more established view though, the lack of popular support affecting Algeria's parties is directly related to the state's conception of parties' role, and the way it tries to control them. While Roberts asserts for instance that "an essential part of the regime's strategy [has consisted in] keeping Algeria's parties where it wants them – on the end of a leash – [...] to ensure that they never acquire more legitimacy than is necessary from the regime's point of view" [2002b], Addi [2003: 26] stresses that the state's efforts to prevent parties from acquiring a strong social rooting explains why the FIS and the FFS "have been neutralised". Including legal and more covert means ranging from disbandment (as in the case of the FIS) to refusing official recognition (e.g. the Wafa party²⁵⁶), the armoury

²⁵⁵ See Boukra, Liess 'Réflexions sur un score électoral contesté' *Le Quotidien d'Oran* 21 April 2004

²⁵⁶ In 2000 to justify the decision not to allow official recognition, the Minister of Interior argued that the *Wafa* represented 'a reconstitution of the 'dissolved party' – the FIS *El Watan* 9 November 2000 – cited in Willis [2002: 20]

deployed by the state to control parties' capacity has actively contributed to the population's declining trust in their role [Roberts, 1998: 225-231; Addi, 2001; Willis, 2002]. The authorities' habit of fiddling with the ballot box to - in the best-case scenario - 'correct' election results has progressively undermined the electorate's perceptions of parties as an instrument of articulation of their preferences. As Roberts [1998b: 24] argues, electoral rigging has "made it difficult if not impossible for the various parties [...] to act as effective vehicles of a genuine development of democracy. As a result, popular cynicism about the voting process [ended up being] compounded by cynicism about the political parties themselves". Another reason why parties "are far too weak and divided, and accordingly are too vulnerable to manipulation by the various factions of the Algerian army" has to do with the rentier nature of the state. Besides enhancing parties' discredit vis-à-vis the electorate, Algeria's opaque distributive political system of public funding accentuates parties' stake in their relationship with the authorities, rather than their electoral bases [Roberts, 1998: 229-230].

In this light, Touati's young officers' contemptuous attitude towards political parties shows some of the ironies of the Algerian state's experiment with the engineering of political pluralism: by preventing their social rooting, the state undermines the very function it assigned parties, the maintenance of legitimacy. But in revealing the state's failed expectations concerning the role of parties, it also calls for an explanation of what has gone wrong in the regime's management of political pluralism. Part of the answer lies in the factionalised nature of the Algerian state, and in the attempts by the various factions composing the state to control political parties through divide and rule politics. Commenting on the results of the October 1997 elections, Roberts wrote that "effective political representation was once again monopolised by regime-sponsored parties, except that now there were now two of these (the RND and the FLN) as well as two of everything else – two constitutional Islamist parties (the Mouvement of Society for Peace – MSP, and En-Nahda) two parties based on the Berberophone Kabyle minority (the RCD and the FFS), etc. a state of affairs that maximised the regime's room for manoeuvre and its ability to play off the parties against one another ad infinitum" [1998: 23]. This situation is certainly not exclusive to the 1997 elections, nor is the result of the spontaneous articulation of the electorate's preferences. Along the years, the state has sponsored 'duplicate parties' for every political cleavage (Islamist, Berberist, Nationalist, etc) in an attempt to reduce each party's individual appeal [Addi, 2003]. Following the disbandment of the FIS in 1992, the state has continuously backed the presence on the political landscape of at least more than one party tapping the Islamist electorate, or at least its more moderate components, like Hamas, En-Nahda, and lately Abdellah Djaballah's *Islah*. As to the Berberist/secularist electorate, the

formation of the RCD in 1989, and the backing it received by then President Chadli's circles, was deliberately aimed at countering the FFS's hold on the Kabyle electorate [Roberts, 2001a]. And finally, the creation of the RND in 1997, which partly contributed to curtailing the FLN's monopoly in the representation of the Arab/nationalist 'family'.

In transferring its own internal divides into the party sphere, it is likely that the regime has underestimated the effects on the overall institutionalisation of the party system. Effective party system consolidation requires a balance between the number of parties competing for power and the social cleavages shaping the polity. If entry barriers to political competition remain low, the polity can experience a sustained formation of parties inducing a condition of 'hyper pluralism'. A high number of parties engenders a fragmentation of the party system, with several parties crowding up the various cleavages shaping the political spectrum. A number of narrowly focused issue-based parties emerge and disappear without relying on any particular social group [Huntington, 1968; Dalton et al, 1984; Putzel, 2002] in turn contributing to political parties' failure to establish solid links with social groups [Duch, 1998: 151]. By undermining citizens' perceptions that their preferences are articulated in any meaningful or effective manner, party proliferation further weakens the ties between social groupings and parties, in turn affecting their mobilisation roles. The process of 'partification of politics' [Arato, 1994], which usually follows the first stages of liberalization, becomes unsustainable, leading to unviable political parties, and ultimately to popular demobilization. Hyper pluralism due to party proliferation has characterised Spain at the beginning of the post-Franco democracy [Barnes et al, 1985], the dawn of South Korea's democracy [Shin, 1994], the Philippines' protracted experience of 'imperfect democracy' [Putzel, 1999] and Thailand's recent process of political change [McCargo, 1997].

Rather than simply being an unintended consequence of divide and rule strategies, party proliferation has also been an integral part of the regime's vision of the country's political system. Hyper pluralism has indeed been a feature of Algerian politics since the 1989 political opening. The rushed process of political liberalisation started in 1989 gave rise to dozens of political parties, often much too small to mobilise enough voters and militants [Lazreg, 1994]. Barriers to entry were extremely low. The only formal requirement to create a party and gain official recognition concerned membership, requiring that at least 15 individuals registered as founding members. In fact, rather than raising barriers to entry, the state provided incentives to party creation. During the 1989-1990 fiscal year, the budget set aside to finance new political parties amounted to more than AD 2 million. Willis' [1996: 121] claim that in 1989 a number of personalities were approached by the regime to form

new political parties, might explain why in 1991, commenting on the introduction of multiparty politics, a former minister admitted: “we have officially financed a number of old mates clubs”.²⁵⁷

Party’s proliferation might therefore have a lot to do with why Algerian parties have been a disappointment for a) analysts of Algerian politics examining their potential for political change; b) the Algerian electorate and its demands for democracy and participation as well as c) elements of the Algerian state in search of avenues to further the country’s political stability. By trying to control parties by supporting their replicas, the state underrated the extent of potential damage to the broader institutionalisation of the party system, thus leading to the situation lamented by Touati’s young officers. Algerian parties’ lack of solid class-bases [Roberts, 1998: 230] and weak links to social groups suggests that the Algerian context might have indeed experienced a condition of hyper pluralism contributing to parties’ weakness. This in turn could explain parties’ tendency to engage in highly dogmatic agendas rather than concrete policy issues such as the economy, in an attempt to mobilise the electorate around strong moral platforms and identity matters [Roberts, 2001].

The party proliferation argument obviously also has limits. Some for instance will point out that although entry barriers to political parties were virtually nonexistent in the first phase of liberalisation, since the 1992 coup the authorities have substantially discouraged the establishment of new parties, through legal and bureaucratic means.²⁵⁸ The analysis that follows will show that party proliferation is not the only factor responsible for a condition of hyper pluralism. If other players emerge on the political landscape that share some, or all, of political parties’ main functions such as popular mobilisation and electoral competition, the polity might also experience hyper pluralism. The growth of Algeria’s associative sphere and the role it played in the state’s project of pluralism engineering are very much part of this story.

²⁵⁷ Duteil, Mirelle (1995) ‘La nebuleuse du Pouvoir’ *Esprit*, n. 208 Jan. p.102

²⁵⁸ The constitutional revision of 1996 made the conditions for the creation of political parties stricter compared to 1989, and was described as ‘a potentially crippling assault on the prerogatives and prospects of the existing political parties [Roberts, 1996: 14]. Art 14 of the new law raised the number of founding members from 15 to 25, requiring that members should represent at least one third of the country’s 48 departments. The law additionally established a 5% threshold for parties to clear in order to be represented in the National Assembly, thus forcing parties to strengthen their territorial presence and popular hold more generally. The new law led to a drop in the number of political parties taking part in elections, down from 49 in the first round of the 1991 elections to 39 in June 1997 [Bouandel & Zoubir, 1998: 181-2].

Associations and parties: from alliance to distance

From the emergence of Western democracies up to the 'third wave' of African democratisation, civic associations have been perceived as being key to democratic transition and consolidation, not only through their direct action but also by supporting the role played by political parties [Lindsay, 1939; Pateman, 1970; Dahl, 1971; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Linz, 1990; Arato, 1994].²⁵⁹ Ensuring a pluralistic political system [Bratton, 1989], reducing the state's role as autonomous political actor [Pridham&Lewis,1996], and spreading an understanding of the democratic rules of the game in society [Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehard, 1990; Putnam, 1993] have all been identified as crucial functions played by both parties and associations. Liberal theory assumes that these common functions give rise to symbiotic relations whereby a) associations are central to the establishment of political parties and, in turn, b) political parties contribute to maintain a thriving associational life. Agulhon's analysis of associational life in Southern France's villages shows how the aggregation of citizens' demands by associations in the initial phases of liberalisation often translates into explicit political agendas, which eventually form the starting point for the creation of party action. Associations are responsible for the creation of the political platforms on which parties base their electoral agendas and the continued articulation of interest groups' preferences after the electoral battle. In turn, party politics helps maintain an active associative sphere by calling upon grassroots organisations for support, particularly during electoral times. Kauffman [1999] shows how in late 19th century American cities, interest group mobilisation was driven mainly by the necessity to support specific party platforms. In a similar vein, Tilly [1975: 277] highlighted how competitive electoral politics pushed associations to grow and multiply in order to assist parties in carrying out activities like acquiring financial and human resources and mobilise the electors, devising platforms and even campaigning in the wake of elections.²⁶⁰

The development of Algeria's associative sphere in the 1980s provides a perfect example of the convergence of parties and associations' roles described by liberal theory. As seen

²⁵⁹ One of the few opposing views is provided by Sheri Berman's analysis of associative networks in Germany during the Weimar republic, where instead of supporting political pluralism, associational life contributed to alienating people from mainstream political parties, ultimately playing into Nazi totalitarianism [Berman,1997]

²⁶⁰ "It is well known that the development of national electoral systems promoted the formation of durable political parties...the confrontation of British, French, Italian and German experiences suggests a much wider effect of elections: they legitimised and promoted the growth of associations as vehicles for collective action. Religious associations, trade associations, friendly societies, and even social clubs whose everyday activities were drinking and talking flowered in the age of elections" [Tilly,1975:277]

above,²⁶¹ the 1980s associative spring was a direct response to specific political cleavages (secularism/islamism; the gender divide, and the minority issue) that could not find an expression in the vision of unified society portrayed by the state's official discourse. According to Karem [1995], it was their opposition to the state that brought these associations to share the objectives – and to a certain extent the membership – of clandestine and more distinctively political groups, primarily the MCB in Kabylia, but also the PAGS (Parti de l'Avant Garde Socialiste, and the Organisation Socialiste du Travail (OST), which later became the Workers' Party (PT)).²⁶² Besides the synergies, the relationship between emerging associations and clandestine political parties was also ridden with conflicts:

Back then, at the time we constituted the Association des Enfants de Martyres, with hundreds of people, women and former war veterans, certainly we had contacts with parties, mainly with leftwing groups. They were mainly personal links. Because the difference between them and us was that they operated secretly. We rejected that. At the beginning people did not want to get out of Tizi, but in six months we had already organised 6 wilayas. The movement was completely self-financed, totally on a voluntary basis. For us it was evident that the associative movement had to be against the pouvoir, and that the result was inevitably jail. But our strength was to have invaded the public sphere, to be on the street. All the parties that tried to use the organisation were excluded. For instance, Louisa Hanoune started distributing leaflets of the party (PT) during our meetings and demonstrations, so we excluded her and her friends.²⁶³

Highlighting the degree of conflict pervading the first stages of party-association interaction is important to understand how their relationship evolved. Seemingly continuing the kind of partisan-associative interactions which liberal theory attributes to the early stages of democratisation, the years between the October 1988 riots and the cancellation of the second electoral round in 1992 marked a turning point in the relationship between parties and associations. In the atmosphere of exuberance due to the demise of the single-party state, newly created (or recognised) parties kept engaging with the associative sphere to share ideological, financial and human resources. And when a friendly association could not be found, parties proceeded to create them outright. By explaining the reasons for her ousting from the RCD, Khalida Messaoudi hints at the approach taken by the new parties to the associative field in the post 1989 environment:

²⁶¹ Introduction, section 3

²⁶² Gadant, Monique et Harbi, Mohammed (1995) 'Quel pôle démocratique ?' *Esprit* n.208 Jan.

²⁶³ Interview with Ali-Fawzi Rebaine, President of Ahd '54, Algiers 15 January 2002

When *le Pouvoir* decided to introduce multiparty politics, every party created its own association, its small 'mass organisation'. They [the RCD] tried to control women's associations, but they couldn't ... they could not stand that I acted autonomously as the president of a women's association, in collaboration with other women MPs from different parties. So just before kicking me out they created their own women's group. The single party leaves you with a single party mentality.²⁶⁴

The ascent of the FIS exemplifies the partisan origins of associational life in post-1989 Algeria. Basing its initial electoral capacity on its linkages with the vast network of mosque building societies that had developed during the 1980s [Sgrena, 1997], in the aftermath of the 1990 local elections the FIS proceeded to extend its mobilisational bases through a nationwide associative network covering universities, factories, and neighbourhood committees. The Islamic leagues - each one directed by a member of the FIS' s executive board - the *Majlis Ech-Choura* - controlled a multitude of affiliated associations created in those years, to form a para-political associative network that somewhat reflected the system of mass organisations linked to the FLN [Boukra, 2002: 104-109]. Since then, Algerian parties' drive to create associations persisted all along 'Algeria's transition', as shown by the reflections of a young candidate to the 2002 local elections for the Islamist party *Islah*:

Currently we do not have associations that we manage here in Bab el Oued, as Hamas does. Sure, we have a base in the mosques, but only informally. In our party it's the leader that gives the direction, and that is what counts for the people. And our legitimacy comes from having always been in the opposition, never involved in their shady deals. Soon we'll also have our own associations, it's just a matter of time.²⁶⁵

Far from being limited to the Islamist sphere, and despite the fact that Algerian Law prevents civic associations from entertaining relationships with political parties, the partisan bases of associations are the rule across the whole political spectrum.²⁶⁶ In addition to confirming (and at the same time qualifying) Khalida Messaoudi's view of the RCD's attempts to control women associations, the modalities by which RACHDA was born show how the creation of associations is aimed at enhancing the parties' perceived mobilisation capacity rather than at building a veritable social base.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Khalida Messaoudi, President of RACHDA and AITDF. Former RCD vice president, subsequently counsellor to the President, Algiers, 23 January 2002

²⁶⁵ Interview with Yazid, *Islah* Supporter, Algiers, 5 October 2002

²⁶⁶ Article 11 law 1990-31: associations are distinct in their objectives, denomination and functioning from any political association. They cannot entertain any relationship with political associations whether organic or structural, nor receive subsidies, gifts or funds nor participate to their functioning. The normative framework of Algerian associational life is described in detail in chapter 2.

Around November 1996 we organised the 'National Conference of Democratic Women'. We took the lists of the RCD and sent buses to pick them up in Tizi, Béjaïa, Boumerdes, etc. We said there were 312 women at the Hotel El Aurassi that day, but we pumped the figure up a bit. Three quarters of the women in the hall had come by bus. At that time it was great that the RCD could demonstrate its existence on the terrain, to show that we could gather so many people. The Congress somewhat constituted the General Assembly for the establishment of RACHDA. But the vote took place at the RCD headquarters in El Biar. She [Messaoudi] did not want to stand for president, and so we insisted, knowing that at that time she represented Algerian women's fight. So she accepted, but only while saying that we needed to put up another three or four candidates, because she did not want to stand alone. I stood as candidate together with Djamila Oufrouf and another who left immediately. The façade was there for the press, other associations, and the 'resource persons' as she called them, people like Miloud Brahimi or Issad Rebrab for instance. Mr Rebrab paid for the whole thing, conference facilities at the hotel, transport and everything.²⁶⁷

In addition to the need to prove their mobilisation capacities, a second and equally important reason for parties to create their own associations is access to material resources:

Since Bouteflika [came to power] there's a new system, which attributes subsidies to parties according to their parliamentary representation. Before, the financing of parties happened informally – kind of by fax - with money transferred directly from the treasury to the current accounts of the parties themselves. The state was never really generous with us, of course, while most other parties are on the *pouvoir's* payroll. As far as we are concerned the books are there, anybody can come and check. Our party functions mainly through the contribution of private founders. And *Verdict* – the association that we created to shed light on the presence of harkis inside the state 'apparatus' - will help raise funds for the next electoral campaign.²⁶⁸

Besides parties' institutional needs to establish real or fictional mobilisation bases and raising funds, the links between party and associative sphere are very much driven by individuals' strategies. As seen in chapter three, Algerian associations are strongly focused on a central 'totemic' figure, often incarnated by the association's President. Besides pervading the associative realm, *zaimism*, i.e. the central role of the *zaim*, the leader, is widespread within Algerian parties too [Willis, 2002]. Because of the strongly centralised structure of parties, political entrepreneurs seek to carve out a role for themselves in the

²⁶⁷ Interview with Ouardia Harhad, former secretary-general of RACHDA, Rassemblement Algérien contre la Hogra et pour la Démocratie, Algiers, 10 October 2002.

²⁶⁸ Interview with M. Chellal, Secretary General of *Ahd '54*, Algiers 14 January 2002

associative realm, without the need to break completely with their party activity. Shortly after her appointment as President of the women's association she had herself created, Noura Djaffar responded in this way to a question about its links with a party representative of the nationalist family, the RND:

It does not matter if I'm a RND member or not. And I am no exception, you know? In one way or another, we [MPs] are all attached to some association or other. This is a normal country, and in normal countries MPs maintain links to the associative movement.²⁶⁹

Once again, the financial opportunities offered by associational life also lure party members to move to the associative field, as made clear by Rabah Hamitouche, a consultant for the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung:

I've been in the FFS for 12 years, and held functions in the directing committee in 1989 until 2001, when I got out because of political differences. My place is inside the associative movement now. I believe it is about time the associative movement were considered as a real employer. A union activist receives a salary? Well, the same has to be done with the associations. The thousands of cadres who work with us don't get anything, as not all of them can work as associations trainers. The gift of time has to be remunerated.²⁷⁰

Besides permitting autonomous spaces for action, and material opportunities, the straddling of partisan and associative sphere allows individuals in parties an insurance against the risks of political life. According to Arab Izarouken, this was a clear calculation of those strata responsible for the emergence of clandestine associations in the 1980s:

Most women's groups and secular associations were set up by people belonging to the PAGS. In 1989, when it was the time to decide where to stand, most of them decided to stay in both camps: the parties and the associations. Staying in both camps was intrinsic to their political culture, they had done it before: with the *pouvoir* and in the opposition. When the first becomes too sensitive, one can retreat to the second.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Nouara Djaffar, MP, RND member, President of Women's Rights Association, Algiers, December 2001.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Rabah Hamitouche, *Formateur Associatif* Algiers, 14 October 2002.

²⁷¹ Interview with Arab Izarouken, Head of European Commission Project Management Unit, and former member of Family Planning Association, Oran, 7 February 2002.

As political affiliations can damage one's credibility, it is not rare to find associations' representatives that strive to keep away from party politics, as in the case of the president of SOS Culture Bab El Oued:

We in the association share the same political convictions, but they remain personal, they do not take over our work. In 1997 Belkacem [then SOS's former president] was offered the opportunity to run for the MDS (ex-Ettahaddi²⁷²) at the APC elections, but we decided against. Here [in Bab el Oued] over the years we have built up a reputation. We are known as *ouled al houma*, (sons of the neighbourhood), and if we start messing with politics the reputation of SOS Culture will go. People here in Bab el Oued do not vote. Everybody says that they have had enough of politics. These people, these petty parties that spring up 10 days before the elections, it's the Pouvoir. Even the FFS has a foot in the opposition, and one in the system"²⁷³

The case of Jam'iyyat al-Irshad wa 'l-Islah (the Association for Guidance and Reform) - a religious association created by Mahfoud Nahnah in 1988 - exemplifies the distance that the associative sphere tries to maintain from the parties. Only two years after creating Irshad, Nahnah constituted the Movement for an Islamic Society (*Al-Harakat li Mujtama' Islami*, HAMAS), renamed Movement of Society for Peace (MSP,) in 1996. Irshad became identified as the association supplying HAMAS and later the MSP with financial resources by exploiting a vast network of benefactors spread across the entire country, as well as providing the training environment for future party cadres. From the beginning, Irshad's organic links with the political sphere proved dangerous, and remained problematic later on:

In 1992 the association claimed 240,000 members and 20,000 activists, but nowadays they are less. After 1992 the members of the association started to be targeted by the terrorists. Two of its presidents were killed, and in some parts of the country they were forced to slow down the activities because of the threats they received. Now things are going back to normality. But there are some inside the association that want it to be less involved in politics, they say that politics brings discredit to *Irshad*. They claim that the party is draining money and skilled people from the association.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Headed by Hachemi Cherif, the Mouvement Democratique et Social (MDS) was not much more than a renaming of Ettahaddi (the Defiance), itself born out of a splinter of the PAGS at its Congress in December 1992. See Roberts, 2003b.

²⁷³ Interview with Nacer, president, SOS Culture, Algiers, 4 October 2002.

²⁷⁴ Interview with Slimane Chenine, former member of *Jam'iyyat al-Irshad wa 'l-Islah*, MSP Head of Communication, Algiers 12 September 2001.

Far from unique, the stance of Irshad wa 'l-Islah towards HAMAS-MSP is paradigmatic of the increasing uneasiness of the associative movement in keeping strong links with the party sphere, as confirmed by the president of 'SOS Femme en Détresse':

For a party like the RCD it is important to be linked to an association like ours. We were *the showcase* of women's rights in Algeria (*on était la vitrine des droit des femmes en Algérie*). We were also one of wealthiest association in the country. But our members were not all members of the RCD, some were linked to the FFS. So Khalida Messaoudi and others of the RCD convinced the president to have a general assembly and faked a split between the members. The President of El Biar RCD section put the room for the general assembly. I tell you, in that occasion the RCD displayed the same methods of the FLN. Because if it is true that the FLN and the RND offered us a number of things (to side with them), it is also true that the RCD was not waiting for a better opportunity to dishonour us. After we organised a counter-assembly they accused us of being *des gens du pouvoir, au solde de la sécurité militaire*. Associations need to be apolitical, firstly because the law says so, secondly because inside the association members have different political sensibilities: we have learned that if we were to do politics, the association would break up.²⁷⁵

These accounts shed some light on the trajectory of party-association relationships in Algeria since the introduction of political pluralism. After an initial stage when the clandestine nature of parties and associations brought them together in opposing the state's monopoly of political power, the relationship evolved first into one of dependency of associations on parties, and then into one of increasing distance. If, on the one hand, parties' initial attempts at creating an associative basis were common to the entire political spectrum, so later on was the tendency of broad sectors of the associative movement to distance themselves from party politics. Far from pointing to a general movement towards the separation of civic and political spheres, this tendency calls for a better understanding of the role played by the associative movement since 1989, and particularly in the period following the decrease of violence and the authorities' increased efforts at normalising the country's political situation, epitomized by Touati's young officers' concerns. The comments made by the President of Djazairouna regarding the demise of the CNOT (Comité Nationale contre l'Oubli et la Trahison) – an alliance of associations and parties aiming at defending the rights of the victims of the violence²⁷⁶ - show that for associations acquiring distance from party control does not necessarily mean giving up politics: "We have decided not to associate ourselves with political parties of whatever tendency any longer. I don't want to have any political

²⁷⁵ Interview with Maryam Bellala, President SOS Femmes en Détresse, Algiers, 5 December 2001

²⁷⁶ 'Le mouvement des disparus s'essouffle' ; www.algerie-interface.com 19 October .2001

colouring. The political aspects of our dossier are our responsibility. And we'll take care of them ourselves". As we shall see, associations' desire to be involved in politics while remaining autonomous from the parties found an encouraging interlocutor in the state.

Associations and the state: from opposition to collusion

The trajectory of Algeria's associative sphere's relationship to the state can be thought of as the inverse of the one it has entertained with the party sphere. Already in the 1980s, at the very beginnings of Algeria's 'associative spring', the state's reaction to the emergence of Algeria's associative sphere was far from straightforward. Besides a number of repressive measures, ranging from withholding official recognition to outright dissolution, the authorities countered the opposition coming from clandestine associations by co-opting their discourse. The mass organisations were its initial tools to this end. To counter the emerging women's groups, the state proceeded to regain the support of the Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes (UNFA), which had constituted a source of conflict for the government as much as a tool for mobilising women's support. In turn, the UGTA set up its own women's section, as did the Union Nationale des Etudiants.

When the mass organisations ceased to be of much use, the authorities proceeded to the outright creation of friendly groups, often in an effort to stifle hostile ones. The creation of the two leagues of human rights is a case in point. A first human rights association was formed out of the initiative of a small group of individuals meeting in Tizi Ouzou in 1985, many of whom were also active in other groups, including women's organisations, and particularly the Association des Enfants des Chouhadas [Harbi, 1989; Chaker, 1985]. This first League was immediately banned and some of its leading members incarcerated, including its president, Ali Yahia Abdennour. With the tacit backing of the authorities, a splinter group led by Miloud Brahimi took over the initiative and appropriated the association's name - Algerian League of Human Rights (Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme, LADH). Only after the 1989 Freedom of Association Law was the first League granted recognition under the name of Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (Ligue Algérienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme, LADDH) [Chaker, 1985; Karem, 1995].

The fact that the emerging associative field gave the authorities the opportunity to engage in the same divide and rule strategy that later became a distinctive feature of the state's attitude

to political parties is far from accidental, particularly if we consider the extent to which the associative field ended up reflecting the divisions at the very core of the state emerging at the time. As seen in chapter 2, despite being formally motivated as a means to smooth state disengagement from the burden of health, education and cultural service provision in the wake of the 1980s fiscal crisis, the introduction of the 1987 law allowing for a relaxation of the 1971 rules on the formation of associations had more political aims. Besides attributing to associations the role of service providers,²⁷⁷ the Minister of Interior presented the bill to the National Assembly as a way “to seriously guarantee the deepening of the democratic process engaged by our country”. In fact, the start of the debate on freedom of association coincided with the years in which the FLN came to experience heavy pressures on its monopoly of political representation [Harbi, 1989]. The crisis was structured the division between the reformers (grouped around the President’s cabinet) and the conservatives (clustered in the party of the FLN). With the 1987 law, the President aimed at allowing the growth of an associational field controlled by the administration, but completely autonomous from the FLN.²⁷⁸

Occurring already more than a year before the riots of October 1988 pushed the authorities to open the political system, the introduction of the 1987 bill revealed the first clear attempt by the state to use the associative sector for political purposes. From then on, the relationship of the state to the associative sphere mutated irreversibly from one of confrontation to negotiated partnership. Fearing to lose the political capital that accrued from the privileges and connections and the monopoly in the utilisation of its satellite organisations, the FLN succeeded in voiding the bill of its more liberal features. The law maintained the requirement of the double recognition procedure, thus effectively blocking the opening up of the corporatist system to new associations, and quite possibly, preventing the demise of the FLN. This meant that the scores of associations that had appeared during the mid 1980s kept operating in constant tension with the state, in a legal limbo that made their existence dependent upon the mood of the authorities, until they finally found official recognition in 1990. By then, though, the attitude of the most vocal associations had changed considerably. The advent on the political stage of the FIS turned the hostility that the more secular strata of Algerian society felt for the state into a desire for protection. The oppositional nature of the associative movement changed correspondingly. Besides women’s groups, which had long fought against the Islamist threat, a range of other associations emerged in opposition to the

²⁷⁷ See Chapter 3

²⁷⁸ On the state’s strategy to broaden (or switch) its social bases from the rural to the urban strata see the interview with Nacer Djabi in Chapter 5

Islamist associative movement, some of them aiming to fight on the same fields of social service provision and youth mobilisation:

It was clear that we were playing [the authorities'] game, that we were doing them a favour. But why do you think that in that period we were always granted the authorisation to organise parties and concerts. We had to play their game, we didn't have a choice. People forget that the biggest gathering ever organised by the FIS was held here, in Bab El Oued, in 1991. It was Ben Hadj, Adami was there too but did not speak. The place was packed. This is the reason why we set up SOS. For Kacem, Djamilia and myself, the main purpose of the association was to counter the Islamists on their own terrain, here in Bab El Oued, by working with the youth of the neighbourhood. And our strategy was the same. Every time a bomb exploded in the neighbourhood, we organised a party. At one point in Bab El Oued, one day it was a bomb, and the next a concert.²⁷⁹

Whilst forcing the more secular elements of the associative movement to side with the authorities, the FIS's network of affiliated associations reinforced the state's perception of the political nature of the associative movement. In very little time, the Islamic Labour Union (Syndicat Islamique du Travail – SIT) managed to become a dominant force of organised labour thus managing to seriously threaten the UGTA's position. Rachid Malaoui, President of the National Autonomous Union of Public Administration Personnel - *Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique* (SNAPAP) - remembers how the state's early strategy to counter the rise of the SIT – once again based on divide and rule – failed, provoking the realignment of the UGTA – which had distanced itself from the authorities' strategy of political opening:

We had the law [on unions] through marches and demonstrations because even if initially [the authorities] included *la liberté syndicale* in the constitution, they later did not want to implement it. And then they did not give us recognition, because you know, the Algerian *Pouvoir* does not grant recognition if inside they haven't got somebody they can manipulate as they like. With the SIT the *Pouvoir* required the sectoriality criteria to be respected: but the Islamists set up different unions, and then without the agreement they declared themselves united in the SIT, and de facto the SIT became the Islamists union. Now what people do not know is that they drained all the workers from the public economic sector off the UGTA: and this is why the UGTA backed the army in 1992, because with the Islamists there, not necessarily in power, but simply there, its destiny was doomed. Today, since the law forbids the dissolution of a union, the Islamic Leagues are

²⁷⁹ Interview with Nacer, President of SOS Bab el Oued, Algiers 29 November 2004

disbanded by decree every 6 months...and now the workers of the public and private economic sector are left only with the UGTA.²⁸⁰

If the confrontation between Islamist and secular forces made civic associations a new actor in the Algerian political system alongside parties, the official confirmation of associations' political role came with the 1992 coup interrupting the national elections, exactly when, for the first time, the party sphere demonstrated its shortcomings as the vehicle for political change. Vast sectors of Algeria's emergent associative movement backed and subsequently ratified the coup by adhering to a newly created institutional setting that channelled and amplified the grassroots' secularist and moderate voices. Several organisations, more or less tied to sectors of the state,²⁸¹ created a "Salvation Committee" for Algeria, lobbying for the suspension of the elections [Garon, 1996:153]. A number of official consultative bodies set up after the coup saw an over-representation of professional, cultural, women and youth associations. The High State Committee met with the most active elements among the various associations that had come to occupy the social and professional landscape of Algeria since 1988. These included leaders of the national union of public enterprises, the federation of the Associations of local public enterprises, the Association of the Friends of Algiers, the Protection of the Casbah association, the Culture and Progress Circle, the National syndicate of Algerian Jurists, the Lawyers National Order, the Islamic supreme council, the national association of Imams, the National Association of Zaouias, etc. According to Rouzeik, among other foremost institutions which included associations' representatives were the National Dialogue Commission, in which associations were allowed a vast number of seats (while political parties were excluded), the Conference for National Dialogue, where "the presence of the associative movement was remarkable: its representatives took more than half of the seats"; the National Transition Council, to which associations were given 85 seats over a total of 200; and the National Economic and Social Council "composed of 180 members including various representatives of the economic and social sectors" [Rouzeik, 1994].

²⁸⁰ Interview with M. Rachid Malaoui, SNAPAP president, Algiers, 24 October 2002

²⁸¹ Among these associations was the *Ligue Algérienne des Droits de l'Homme* (LADH). Created immediately after the promulgation of the 1987 law allowing freedom of association, the LADH appeared immediately as an ally of the Presidential cabinet inside 'civil society': "while any association usually had to wait for at least a month before acquiring the recognition, the LADH only waited for a few days" (Babadji, 1989: 240). Babadji, together with Kapil (1990: 520) and Harbi (1989) show how the Presidency and the Government not only found a strategic ally in the LADH in the fight against the FLN, but later fostered personal ties with it, ties that became important with the coup. The Interior Minister Khediri (reformer, former head of the security services DGSN) was "personally linked to the founders of the LADH de Miloud Brahimi" [Harbi, 1989].

All along the years of violence, the state did not cease to fight the battle against the Islamists by intervening in the associative realm by supporting ‘friendly associations’. Created in October 2000 with the aim of aiding orphans and old people, the Association de Bienfaisance Machaal El Yatim, received “the blessing of the Ministry of Solidarity”. As Mme Saad, its president, says, the association’s “numerous projects aim to help people in need, thus countering the work of associations of Islamic tendency. We aim to provide training to young boys and girls in areas like woodcraft, hairdressing and tailoring. These are activities usually carried out by Islamic Associations. El Yatim association is planning to organise an *omra* for the hadj”.²⁸²

As political parties did at the beginning of the liberalisation period, the administration also proceeded to the direct creation of associations:

It was in 1996. At the time in Blida we had separate buses for men and for women. Blida was “*une zone chaude*”: even the women working inside the wilaya had to wear the scarf. But between 1996 and 1997 the army seemed to be getting a grip and winning the war. The director of the DJS (Directorate for Youth and Sports) at the wilaya at the time was not from Blida, but from Tizi (Ouzou): these people wanted to break that atmosphere; they wanted to send a message. So the DJS decided to set up a sport association. As my aunt worked there as a physical education specialist, they asked her if she wanted to manage the association, as secretary general, while keeping her job and salary. My aunt accepted and she brought in a friend of hers, who used to work as an aerobic teacher. The president was someone who used to be a football coach in his spare time; he knew the head of the DJS and the DRAG secretary general.²⁸³ I also got in through my aunt. So we started off with a football team and aerobic classes, and then we created a cycling section. We were starting to expand and after the first subsidy of AD 20,000, in 1997 the wilaya gave us more money. The ministry also created a co-ordination of Sport Leagues, and we became part of it.²⁸⁴

The state’s attempt to rally support in the battle against the Islamist through the associative field was far from always being consistent. SOS Bab el Oued’s experience shows how different sectors of the bureaucracy can have different attitudes to the same association:

²⁸² El Moudjahid 11 October 2000

²⁸³ DRAG: Directorate for General Relations and Affairs (*Direction des Relations et Affaires Générales*). The secretary general is the number two at wilaya hierarchy. They hold a considerable amount of power. In general, while walīs are nominated and thus come and go, secretary generals develop their careers inside the same administration, and thus are able to constitute a stable power base.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Ouathék, B. Khalifa Airways Steward. El Biar, Algiers 18 January 2002.

You see they're setting up those pavements, they were too high with respect to the road... and, well, it was an initiative of the association. But if we did not have contacts inside the wilayas, acquaintances, at personal level, people who share our same values, the same spirit, people on the same wave length as us vis-à-vis the Islamists, this wouldn't happen. [...] But since 1997 the APC has always been against us. First they asked us to work with them, as we refused, they boycotted every single initiative. We received funds from the APW on specific projects, but none from the APC. It was the APC who sent the DRS to investigate me and Kacem. [...] Of course I've got contacts at the APC. And what do you think? The day after the elections when the FLN will have won, I'll go up there and congratulate the new mayor. I need to work with him, and they have an interest in working with me. They know we are a force in Bab el Oued, that we have an influence on the opinion of young people here.²⁸⁵

Rather than simply pointing to an incoherent stance towards the associative field, the different treatment reserved to SOS Bab el Oued by the local and regional authorities reveals the factionalised nature of the Algerian state, and the fact that the associative movement, like the party sphere, developed into one of the battlefields where this factional conflict is played out, as originally designed by Chadli's reformers. Factional divides explain why Algeria counts a National Organisation of Children of Martyrs (Organisation Nationale des Enfants de Chouhada (ONEC) and a National Coordination of Children of Martyrs (CNEC):

The CNEC was formed by people dissatisfied with the Organisation Nationale des Enfants de Chouhada (ONEC). The ONEC was Hamrouche's idea in the first place. They wanted to have their own group. First a co-ordination at the national level was set up in Algiers, composed of 21 members. Then we looked for someone in each wilaya that could set up a coordination and that could ask for recognition at the level of the prefecture, and so forth down to each daïra and commune...at the end we had 7000 members, a high number for an organisation that developed so quickly.²⁸⁶

Factional divides also explain why Algeria has experienced a multiplication of business associations: which have long been perceived as one of civil society's driving forces towards the liberalisation of the political system [Dillman, 2000]:

The reason why there is a multiplication of business associations is not that each is an extension of a party. It's because they're all turned to the government, waiting for favours from their friends. It started in 1989 with the granting of import licenses and the scarcity of foreign exchange. It kept on being that way. That's why we created the FORUM and that's

²⁸⁵ Interview with Nacer, SOS Bab el Oued President, Algiers, 4 October 2002

²⁸⁶ Interview with M. Taïbi, CNEC Member, Algiers, 3 February 2002

why we only include entrepreneurs of a certain calibre: we want the government to listen to us, and not the other way around.²⁸⁷

Normally characterised by more overt opposition to the state, the independent unions did not escape the factional nature of the regime and its corollary of divide and rule strategies. The split of the SATEF (Algerian Syndicate of Education and Training Workers) – an independent union that often took strong positions towards the government - is an example. On 28 and 29 of June, two simultaneous SATEF congresses were held in two different towns. The representative of the first SATEF, accused the secessionists of “being in the hands of the pouvoir”, that granted local facilities to the rival faction in order to hold their congress.²⁸⁸

The increasing relevance attributed by the state to the associative sector is also demonstrated by the progressive re-emergence of the old mass organisations. Although the demise of the single party system initially distanced these organisations from the state, marking a corresponding decline in their membership and influence, with the return of the FLN to the state's ranks, old mass organisations like the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA), and the National War Veterans' Organisation (ONM) have reacquired a prominent, if not always overt, role. The UGTA remains the only interlocutor recognised by the state to represent workers' interests. Other former mass organisations are known to play a central role in vital decision making processes, such as those intervening in the spoil system regulating the selection of ministers and wali and other high levels positions in the national bureaucracy.²⁸⁹ More importantly, since 1992 the organisations belonging to the 'nationalist family' – such as the War Veterans' Organisation - have increased in number, through the appearance of a plethora of smaller groups such as the National Organisation for the Youth (Organisation Nationale des associations pour la Sauvegarde de la Jeunesse - ONASJ).

As the reappearance on the political field of the mass organisation showed the state's willingness to enlarge the boundaries of Algeria's 'official civil society', the ever stricter regulation of the associative field during the 1990s signalled the authorities' need to put it to use.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Reda Hamiani, FORUM member, businessman, former minister of SMEs, Algiers, 17 December 2001.

²⁸⁸ A. Lemili 'Un Satef bicéphale' *Le Jeune Indépendant* 22 October 2001.

²⁸⁹ Information received by Redouane Boudjemaa, former Journalist El Youm.

Managing associative pluralism

While the literature on the state's strategies to control the party-political sphere abounds, there is to this day no account of the way the state controls the associative movement. This is unfortunate, as control of the associative movement has been an integral part of the state's broader strategic goal of manufacturing political pluralism, as well as the main reason why the associative sphere has progressively withdrawn its support to political parties. To understand how, one has to start from the series of legal and bureaucratic codes which provide the state with subtle ways to stifle or encourage associations.

As seen in chapter two, the evolution of Algerian law on associative freedom has gradually introduced a more liberal environment for associational life. Yet, despite being considered as a considerable improvement on the previous legal framework, the current legislation (based on law 1990-31) leaves the government with ample discretionary powers to interfere in associations' functioning and activities. The first concerns recognition. Besides introducing the obstacle of double recognition (ministry of interior and relevant ministry for national associations and wilaya directorate for local associations), the 1971 ordinance did not establish any time limit for the authorities to accept or reject the request for recognition, an ambiguity that remained with the 1987 law.²⁹⁰ Although the 1990 law on associative freedom introduced a 30 days time limit after which official recognition is to be considered granted, the administration's practices, and its interpretation of the law, did not change. Following the introduction of the state of emergency in 1992, every police commissariat set up a special office charged with investigating newly created associations as soon as official recognition was sought, reconstituting *de facto* one of the main elements of the restrictive environment established under the 1971 ordinance. These practices have been gradually abandoned with the relaxation of the security situation, but can still be used discretionarily. In fact, with the growth in the number of associations in the country, it seems that the procedures for recognition have become progressively stricter, as the president of SOS Femme en Détresse testifies:

In the beginning it was easier: one had to apply as national association, and then members had to register in each of the 15 wilayas. That's how we got our agreement. Now you have to have a list of members in different wilayas from the start, otherwise

²⁹⁰ A few months after the promulgation of the law, a commentator asked: "how much time do the authorities have to give or refuse recognition, after the submission of the documents? And what legal ways can an association pursue if no answer has been provided? If the objectives of these associations are not illicit, why are they not receiving any answer? This remains a question for the legislator". A. Ben Alam, 'Les délais et les lois', *Algérie Actualité*, 1120, 2-8 April 1987.

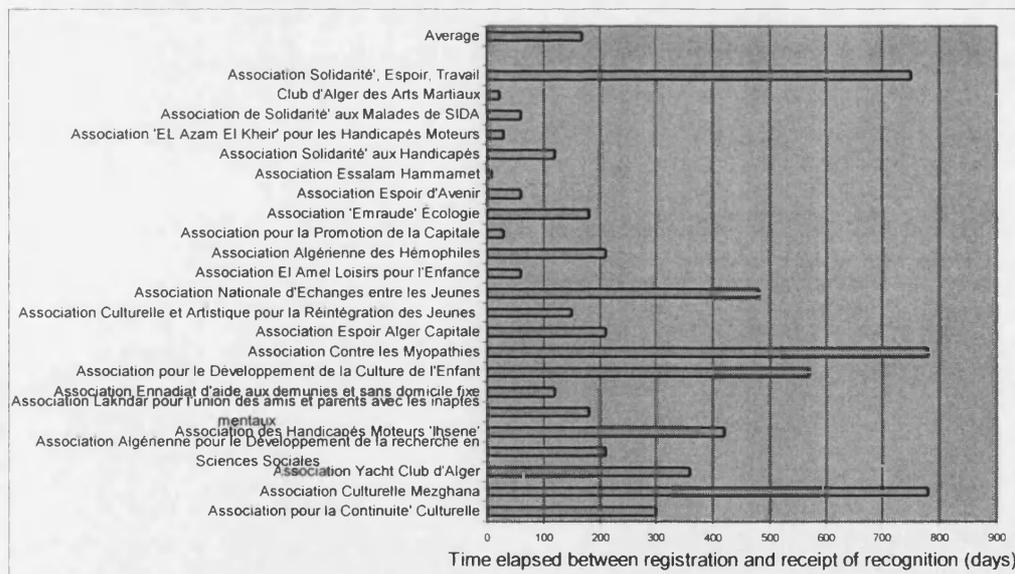
they do not even consider the application. In the bill (to reform the 90:31 law) that the parliament is discussing, this restriction will be made explicit, and a number of associations will be declared illegal.²⁹¹

Commenting on the changes in the recognition procedures, the mayor of the Algiers' commune of Sidi M'hamed - herself a member of RACHDA, the prominent women's group - makes clear that the progressive hardening of the administration's stance on associations corresponds to a deliberate policy:

If they stopped the agreements it's because there is a great attention to selecting associations recently. Lately the police enquiry takes more and more time. Maybe there's also the desire of a 'clean-up' of the sector.²⁹²

Of the 150 associations based at the Maison des Associations of the Algiers' district of Bologhine, in 2002 only twenty-two had received official recognition. For those that had received it, the time necessary varied considerably [Table 6.1].

Figure 6.1. Slow recognition



Source: Associations' registration dossiers, Maison des Association de Bologhine, Algiers, 2001

This state of affairs constrains the operations of associations considerably. Although the law states that associations can start operating one month after submitting their applications, a

²⁹¹ Maryam Bellala, President of SOS Femmes en Detresse 7 October 2002

²⁹² Interview with Badia Sator, Presidente APC Sidi M'hamed, RACHDA vice-president, member RCD, doctor (GP) 6 October 2002.

number of by-laws, ordinances etc effectively install hurdles to associational functioning, preventing an association that has asked for but not received official recognition from renting an office, opening a current account, or seeking permission to hold a meeting or demonstration.

On the one hand, the changes in the recognition procedures have allowed the state to limit the leeway of certain associations, or categories of associations, that constituted a more direct threat for the regime, such as for instance the independent unions. In 1999, the state blocked the creation of the National Syndicate of Autonomous workers (Syndicat national autonome des travailleurs algériens - SNATA,) and the Algerian Confederation of Autonomous Syndicates (Confédération algérienne des syndicats autonomes (CASA) in 2001.²⁹³ But at the same time it has encouraged the development of linkages between the administration and the associative field. Here is how the deputy director of the Maison des Associations in Bologhine interprets the bureaucracy's fuzzy procedures for associations' recognition:

If you meet the director of the DRAG (Directorate for General Relations and Affairs), take a look at his desk. The piles of papers you'll see are all requests for official recognition. Most of them will never be looked at. A contact at the wilaya is the best chance of getting things moving for most [associations].²⁹⁴

Public funding of associations has played a similar role. Commenting on the influence of funding on the stance of cultural associations vis-à-vis the state, the daily *La Tribune* writes: "since law 90-31 of December 1990 ...associations sprang up like mushrooms... everywhere one could see associations born for all sorts of purposes. Cultural affairs, like all other sectors, saw its own army of associations born with an equally challenging, denouncing and assertive vigour. But since then the strategy of the majority of associations vis-à-vis the state [has shifted] towards one of allegiance, and they do everything to prove they are worthy of public subsidies".²⁹⁵ Indeed, the availability of public funding for associations is far from being kept secret and, according to a Ministry of Solidarity employee, widespread:

The only associations that do not come here begging for subsidies are religious associations; they are real associations: as they are well organised and their members

²⁹³ More on Independent Unions, and the involvement of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Chapter 7.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Nabil Mekhzani, 36 year old, MAB acting Director, Bologhine, Algiers, 14 September 2001.

²⁹⁵ Hassan Gherab : 'Le mouvement associatif mis sous perfusion et en veilleuse : la subvention, nerf des associations culturelles', *La Tribune*, 20 October 2005.

actively participate, they look for funds outside the state, and thus they can preserve their autonomy”²⁹⁶

As Ould Abbès’s October 2001 parliamentary statement concerning funding to associations made clear,²⁹⁷ although access to state resources is certainly encouraged, it is also made clearly conditional on political ‘compliance’.²⁹⁸ According to one of the Ministers’ aides:

What the minister said in parliament is not abnormal: everywhere in the world associations know that in order to get funding they cannot criticise the source of funds: Algeria is just the same. But in Algeria this sounds strange, because one is not supposed to speak openly: well, because of the circumstances we were forced to come out with a very strong message. The minister did not aim at the associations. We believe in the associative movement. He aimed at those parties that through more or less autonomous associations attack the government.²⁹⁹

When recognition has already been granted and offers of public funding prove ineffective, the executive can authoritatively decide to suspend or dissolve an association. Suspension or dissolution can be due to internal conflicts among members (of which the immediate arbiter is the Ministry of Interior, or its delegates at wilaya level, not civil tribunals)³⁰⁰ or, more often, to corruption and embezzlement of funds. In 2001 for instance more than 102 cultural and social associations in the Ouargla region faced the possibility of dissolution due to financial mismanagement.³⁰¹ Sometimes, though, the disbandment of an association has more political aims, as when the association concerned rejects an alignment with the state³⁰². The dissolution of the Association Islamique de Bienfaisance headed by Shemseddine Bouroubi is a case in point.³⁰³ After 13 years of activity, the AIB launched a fundraising campaign for a ‘National Marriage Fund’ promising to help young couples with the organisation and the financing of their wedding celebrations. The association was dissolved

²⁹⁶ Interview with Djamila S. Assistant to Yazid Saïdi MASSN Director of Communication, Algiers 24 January 2002

²⁹⁷ Mohamed Naïli ‘Pas de subventions aux associations qui nous critiquent’, *Le Jeune Independent*, 23 October 2001. The Ould Abbès’s statement is analysed in chapter 5

²⁹⁸ Ziad Salah : ‘L’argent des associations’, *El Watan*, 17 May 1999.

²⁹⁹ Yazid Saïdi, head of Communication of the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity, interview 14 January 2002. The parties Saïdi referred to were Hamas and Ennahda at the time part of the government coalition, and the RCD, in the opposition.

³⁰⁰ As in the case of the ruling over SOS Femmes en Détresse.

³⁰¹ *La Tribune*, 20 October 2001.

³⁰² The Division Chief of Security of the Wilaya d’Oran for instance, asked the wali to disband the Association for the Promotion of Student Tourism, because its president Rachid Maalaoui, also SNAPAP’s secretary general, held a press conference without authorisation, criticising the government’s action. Ministère de l’Interieur, Direction General de la Surete de la Wilaya d’Oran, communication 6934 of 24 November 2001.

³⁰³ The Belcourt-based Association Islamique de Bienfaisance is analysed in Chapter 4.

by the Administrative Chamber of Algiers, on the grounds of “gift collection without authorisation, and the launch of a “publicity campaign by means of press [...] By proceeding to repeated fundraising, the association has exceeded its prerogatives without demanding the necessary authorization from the authorities: this grave transgression lets us suppose that the association aspires to a status of state institution”.³⁰⁴ An acquaintance of Shemseddine, who was well informed of the workings of the state, confirmed that some of the reasons behind the AIB’s dissolution lay in its attempts at ‘outdoing’ public services:

Shemseddine has worked too much, really. And now it is Ramadan, you should see how many people he assembles during Ramadan, too many. And apparently he was expanding to other wilayas. He does not want to work with the authorities, and at the same time he shows them up. So they decided to shut him down, for 6 months...in 6 months we’ll have already had the elections and Shemseddine will be able to work again.³⁰⁵

Commenting on the dissolution of the AIB, another observer argues that Shemseddine’s main fault has been to lack links to the state:

Le pouvoir is not opaque, it’s diffident, confused. The question it always asks is: who are they? An association like RAJ, at least they know what it is. It is when you do not have a label that you become obscure, thus dangerous. Shemseddine’s problem was exactly this. In order to work you have to have a political allegiance, or at least make it up. If your allegiance is to the government, even better.³⁰⁶

Particularly since the late 1990s, the need to distinguish friends from foes in the burgeoning associative sector pushed the state to sponsor the creation of a number of public bodies with a consultative status, charged with the task of providing authorities with advice on contested issues such as the family code, human rights, or the Berber question. Beside co-opting prominent members of associations by appointing them to their boards, organisations such as the High Commissariat for Berber Affairs (*Haut Commissariat pour l’Amazighité* - HCA), or the National Observatory on Human Rights (*Observatoire National des Droits de l’Homme* – ONDH, later transformed into the National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights) function as relays between the state and the associative movement. In the words of its president, Nouara Djaffar, one of the aims of the Human Rights commission is to encourage “the components

³⁰⁴ Y.R. : ‘L’association de bienfaisance de Belcourt suspendue’, *Le Matin*, 2970 27 November 2001.

³⁰⁵ Chenine Slimane, MSP communication manager, Hamas headquarters, El Biar, Algiers, 1 December 2001.

³⁰⁶ Interview with M. KIES, EU MEDA team leader, Algiers 20 October 2001

of the associative movement whose objectives coincide [with those] of the commission”.³⁰⁷ This encouragement, which often translates into access to public funds, in turn contributes to the emergence of new, and state-friendly, associations. Because of its links with the Human Rights Commission, the birth of the Independent League for the Defence of Human Rights in Algeria (LIDDH) in October 2001 immediately raised doubts surrounding its stated independence from the authorities.³⁰⁸

Typical of the state’s tendency to enhance ‘the legibility of society’ in order to better control it [Scott, 1998], organisations like the HCA or the Human Rights commission are not only central pillars of the strategy to control the associative movement. They also provide a way to bring highly political matters such as the Berber question, the women’s status and human rights issues into the associative realm and away from the party-political sphere, thus reducing the ability of the parties to make them the basis of their political agendas. Bringing together more than 540 associations in the Oran area, the High Council for Youth and National Unity is an example of this process. According to Brak Farouk, the High Council’s President, the creation of the organisation aimed to “influence political decisions [concerning youth] from outside the partisan framework [...] and become “a form of alternative to the Algerian experience of political parties, which has clearly shown its limits”.³⁰⁹

The tendency towards the ‘departification’³¹⁰ of political issues, and the increasing role of the associative sector in dealing with them, finds its corollary in the number of associative representatives within government and parliament. Elected on the list of the RND, Noureddine Benbraham justifies his presence in Parliament in these terms:

My role here is to defend the interest of the associative movement. At the moment my only concern is making sure that there’s enough money for associations in next year’s budget. I was chosen because I represent these interests and sensitivities, I’m not an expression of the [RND] party, my history is not in the party, it’s in the associative movement.³¹¹

Despite its past opposition to the authorities, RACHDA is one association that has been particularly successful in providing the state with cadres. In addition to its president, Khalida

³⁰⁷ ‘De l’ONDH à la Commission de droits humains’, *Quotidien d’Oran*, 10 October 2001.

³⁰⁸ S.H. : ‘Naissance d’une ligue indépendante?’, *Jeune Indépendant*, 14 October 2001.

³⁰⁹ ‘Rassemblement de la Société Civile: une autre enseigne’ *El Watan* 18 February 2001

³¹⁰ For a previous instance of the use of the term ‘departification’ applied to Russia’s political system under Boris Yeltsin see Moser, 2002

³¹¹ Interview with Noureddine Benbraham, RND member and MP, President of the Algerian Muslim Scouts, Algiers, 17 January 2001

Messaoudi, who after leaving her party – the RCD - was appointed as Communication Minister and then Minister for Cultural Affairs, RACHDA's vice president also entered the administration, albeit at a lower level:

Khalida Messaoudi left me in charge as caretaker, as one cannot be minister and president of an association at the same time. She still is president, but I do the job now, and probably will in the future. I've done it from here (as mayor of the Sidi M. commune APC) for quite a long time, I'll still be able to do it with the stethoscope in my hands.³¹²

Despite her stated plans though, Badia Sator did not go back to her old medical profession after her position as mayor of Sidi M'Hamed. She was appointed head of Cultural Affairs at the wilayas of Algiers' reporting directly to the Minister, and former President of her association.³¹³ Far from being limited to associations enjoying national and international renown like RACHDA or the Muslim Scouts, the appointment of associative representatives to official posts concerns smaller associations. Despite its vocal stance towards the government, SOS Bab el Oued was also involved in the authorities' selection of public officials from the ranks of the associative field:

Two people from the secret services came to see me. Apparently the way I confronted Nourani (the wali of Algiers) when he came to Bab El Oued after the flooding impressed them.³¹⁴ It's true that I stood between him and a crowd of young people that would have easily killed him. But I was frank with him that day. And they know the way we work, they respect us for the work we've done during the worst years. So they asked me if I wanted to stand for mayor of Bab el Oued. I say that I'm not in any party, and certainly don't want to be associated with the FLN or the RND. They said I would stand as an independent, as a representative of civil society. To be honest I've been thinking about it quite a lot. But it's too early. People here would not understand. And anyway I have to find somebody else to entrust SOS to first.³¹⁵

The strategies deployed by the state to steer the development of the associative field share a number of similarities with those used to control parties. As with parties, public funding is central in encouraging the multiplication of associations, while at the same time legal and bureaucratic codes allow the government to favour 'friendly' organisations and bar more

³¹² Interview with Badia Sator, president of the Sidi M'hamed APC, RACHDA vice-president, General Practitioner, Algiers. 6 October 2002

³¹³ Bouteflika / *Interprétations politiques* *El Watan*, 17 April 2003.

³¹⁴ The flooding of Bab El Oued, in November 2001 is described in chapter 3.

³¹⁵ Interview with Nacer, President, SOS Culture Bab El Oued, Algiers, 5 December 2004.

autonomous ones. Partly because of the easiness of controlling associations, the state has progressively perceived the associative sector has as an alternative to the party sphere. Like political parties, associations often emerge in response to the need of different factions of the regime in need of a social representation and relays in society. Besides turning into a realm where factional divides are played out, throughout the years the associative field has become a reservoir where the state can co-opt individuals and appoint them to public office, without having to rely on parties affected by mounting discredit.

But the interference of the associative sphere into the realm of the party-political does not end here. The possibility to compete for power to determine who governs is a crucial characteristic distinguishing political parties' and associations' nature [Diamond, 1994]. In the Algerian state's strategy of managing political pluralism, even the electoral game was not spared from the progressive expansion of associational life's political role.

From electoral committees to civic associations, and back

In the summer of 2001, a raging crowd stormed the headquarters of the Béjaïa Citizens Association (Association Citoyenne de Béjaïa, ACB), pillaged its offices and set them on fire. The reasons behind the ACB's sacking date back to Algeria's 1999 presidential elections and more specifically to the modalities of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's electoral campaign.

The ACB was born as one of Bouteflika's *Comités de Soutien* - campaign supporters' committees hastily created in the few weeks preceding the elections. Besides individuals close to Bouteflika's immediate circle, including Kamel Adjeriou,³¹⁶ the ACB's president, as well as Lahcène Seriak and Rachid Aïssat (two of Bouteflika's closest counsellors), it is widely believed that sectors of the state were involved in the decision to create a network of caucuses.³¹⁷ The supporters' committees marked a clear change in the regime's approach to sponsoring the election of its chosen man for the Presidency, which had previously gone through the exclusive support of the parties.³¹⁸ The rationale behind the creation of a network of electoral committees rested precisely in Bouteflika's need to convey a distinctively non-partisan image. Being perceived as the Pouvoir's nominee, Bouteflika presented himself as the 'consensus candidate' and avoided potentially 'divisive' links to political parties. This allowed him to elude the widespread discredit affecting the whole party sphere, but more

³¹⁶ Kamal Adjriou had formerly held the position of wilaya security superintendent in Skikda.

³¹⁷ 'Les Services au centre de luttes de Sérail', *Algeria-Interface*, Algiers 1 November 2001

³¹⁸ On the role of parties in the selection of Algeria's President by *Les Décideurs*, see Addi [2003]

specifically those parties which traditionally supported the government – like the FLN and the RND. Bouteflika's feelings vis-à-vis political parties were made clear a few months after his election. During a press conference organised in the occasion of Hosni Mubarak's visit, the President echoed Touati's young officers' view of the role of political parties by declaring: 'Algeria faces a complex situation caused by problems of regionalism, tribalism, and intolerance, and worsened by political pluralism.'³¹⁹

Following Bouteflika's election, instead of sticking to their political mandate most of the electoral committees rebuffed their electoral roots and mutated into civic associations.

Even before the elections we had thought about creating an association and we were the first committee to apply for official recognition. I guess we intended it as a sort of reward for the work we'd done during the electoral campaign. They must have liked our idea, because in "Oran it was Bouteflika's brother himself who supported the creation of a similar association. My dad and my cousin were really proud. We soon tried to expand the membership by creating a branch in every daïra, commune and district of the wilaya. I myself set up the university branch of the association."³²⁰

The positive response at the highest levels of the state endowed the ACB with financial and material resources. From electoral campaigning, the ACB turned itself to social work and events organisation, such as fund raising for anti-AIDS campaigns, or giving receptions for foreign NGOs representatives during their visit in Algeria. Membership included a few well-connected notables, public sector cadres and a considerable number of lower rank public employees, which gave the association immunity from the sort of administrative impediments normally faced by associations. Indeed, the association's collaboration with the local authorities, and particularly with some wilaya departments³²¹, was so wide-ranging that for outsiders it was difficult to distinguish whether the administration or the association were responsible for the organisation of ACB-labelled events,³²² to the extent that, at one point, the ACB Secretary general had to stress the distinction between the two, by highlighting that "the association never existed to replace the commitment of men and women working at the wilaya".³²³

³¹⁹ Quoted in *La Tribune*, 13 June 1999

³²⁰ Interview Kolli Al Ghani, IT professional, 25 years old, former ACB member, Algiers 4 February 2002

³²¹ Specifically, the departments of Youth and Sport (DJS) and Health (DSP).

³²² See for instance Slimani, M. 'Béjaïa: Un radiothon et des interferences', *El Watan* 12 February 2001.

³²³ Kamel Medjdoub : 'L'ACB s'autodissout' *El Watan*, 28 October 2001.

The administration's support to the ACB was matched by indifference, or indeed scorn, from Bejaïa's population. After its creation, the ACB's founders decided to extend its structure and deepen the association's reach at local level to better involve the citizenry. In a development common to other associations sharing the same origins, the ACB set up a number of local ACB offices at commune and village level. At one point, the Association Citoyenne de Tizi Ouzou - the ACB's twin sister – counted more than 280 local associations and 90 village committees.³²⁴ Nevertheless, this 'grass-rooting' efforts were soon to show their limits:

Our aim was to include more people, but in the end it did not work. We thought people at the lower levels would be active, and provide feedback. But after they received the [IT] equipment and the funds nothing happened: nobody was there to recruit other people or organise things. But certainly it's also our fault. Even though we were active on many fronts, every time someone of the *Pouvoir* came to Béjaïa it was up to us to organise the reception. So we ended up being labelled as the 'events association'.³²⁵

In reality, despite its members' attempts to endow it with a more civic outlook, the ACB never emancipated itself from its political origins. Already a few months after Bouteflika's election, together with associations from other parts of the country, the ACB ended up under the 'National Co-ordination of Associations supporting the Presidential Platform,³²⁶ an umbrella organisation supporting the President's policy agenda,³²⁷ under the leadership of Amar Saïdani, formerly known as a member of the FLN's Central Committee. That the demonstrators should have burned down the ACB's headquarters during the riots which erupted in Kabylia in 2001 - together with tax offices, APCs and parties' offices - shows the degree to which the population had recognised the political role played by the associative field, and was willing to sanction it accordingly.³²⁸

Yet, the Kabyle riots did not mark the end of the associative sphere's journey into the realm of the party-political. Already in January 2001 (four month before the riots actually started), Saïdani's Coordination had met up to discuss the possibility of transforming the structure into a party.³²⁹ This would have effectively constituted a remake of the creation of the RND four years before to support Liamine Zeroual's presidency:

³²⁴ Assia T. : 'Que vise le gel des subventions?' where ?, 3 April 2000.

³²⁵ Interview with Kolli Al Ghani, Algiers 4 February 2002

³²⁶ *La Coordination des Associations à Soutien de la Plate-forme Présidentielle*.

³²⁷ Particularly Bouteflika's civil concord initiative.

³²⁸ Dj. A. : 'Bouteflika a-t-il perdu ses relais en Kabylie ?', *Le Matin*, 28 October 2001.

³²⁹ Hassan Zerrouki : 'A chaque Président, sa constitution et son Parti?' *Le Matin*, 24 January 2002.

Without the help of the secret services Bouteflika would not have been able to set up his support committees. Already during the elections there were rumours that these support committees were going to be transformed in a political party. But this would have only meant taking away the RND from the political game to introduce another party. And also, for Bouteflika the *comités de soutien* had been a winning formula.³³⁰

Indeed, Bouteflika's scornful view of Algerian parties was confirmed by the evolution of the National Coordination. At the Congress organised to decide the Coordination's future, its representatives voted against the conversion into a party, opting instead for a national association covering the whole country through "the setting up of regional co-ordinations and bureaux at the levels of the communes and daïras, and regional coordinators".³³¹ In the words of one commentator³³², this choice was due to the fact that "in the eyes of Saïdani and his friends, the anarchy that reigns in the country is symptomatic of the ineptitude of political parties. Without a strong popular legitimacy, power cannot be exercised in the country, and this cannot be obtained from the 'social body' unless civil society is organised". Saïdani's view – continues the article - is that the solution to the "perversion of parties [...] consists in a new adjustment of the associative movement" and that "other associations need to be disciplined and subscribe to the presidential programme, or choose to be simply swept away for cause of public uselessness".

Saïdani's view of the role of the associative movement found its actual realisation during the campaign for Bouteflika's re-election. Foreign academics, media and governments saluted the result of the 2004 presidential elections as 'largely free and fair'. The few dissonant voices highlighted the unfair means used by Bouteflika to undermine his main rival – former prime minister and FLN Secretary General, Ali Benflis – and secure a second term. These included "his abuse of state finances, his control of the media and his influence over a notoriously weak-willed judiciary." [EIU, 2004]. Yet, although more informed observers described the election as a "study in contemporary Algerian politics [...as] it lacked clear platforms or genuine parties",³³³ the large-scale deployment of civic associations by the executive during the campaign passed completely unobserved.

Quite interestingly, as in 1987, it was the FLN that signalled the failure of the party-political sphere to properly second the designs of the regime, thus sparking the overt entry of the

³³⁰ Interview with Baya Gacemi, Freelance journalist, Algiers 17 September 2001.

³³¹ Djamel b. 'Le Mouvement Cherche une Suite', *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 23 January 2002.

³³² Lemili, A. "Les Comités de Soutien à Bouteflika réactivés", *El Watan*, 31 January 2002.

³³³ Robert Malley and Hugh Roberts: 'Algeria's next move after the voting', *International Herald Tribune*, 17 April, 2004.

associative field into the political game. The resignation of the FLN's Secretary General Ali Benflis from his position as Prime Minister in the weeks following the party's March 2003 Congress confirmed his long rumoured intention to stand as candidate in the 2004 presidential elections against Bouteflika. As the FLN effectively turned from being the largest party of the ruling coalition to the first of the opposition, its membership split between pro-Benflis and pro-Bouteflika supporters, rallied under the leadership of Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem, thus complying once again to the rules of the factional game.

Besides attempting to tame the FLN's challenge by dividing it into two camps and igniting an internecine crisis that would effectively prevent it from enjoying its traditional appeal as the party of national unity,³³⁴ the President and his allies launched their response through the associative field, actively promoting the re-appearance of pro-Bouteflika associations. After a "period of hibernation",³³⁵ Saïdani's National Coordination was "reactivated", and was involved in a year long nationwide campaign in support for the incumbent candidate,³³⁶ as well as in various attempts at gaining control of several FLN offices in the Western regions through the use of physical force.³³⁷ The run up to the April 2004 elections saw the emergence of several other umbrella organisations grouping hundreds of associations supporting the incumbent candidate. The Alliance of Associations of the Centre (*Alliance des Associations du Centre*, AAC)³³⁸ provides a good example of the mobilisation capacity of these bodies. Born on 4 of March 2004 and led by Houria Bouhired – architect, MP and daughter of the war heroine Djamila Bouhired – the AAC gathered more than 600 associations, including the national artists association, the national association of school children parents, the national associations of Algerian farmers etc.³³⁹

The associative realm became once again one of the main arenas where the factional struggle revolving around the electoral game was conducted. The Benflis camp responded by setting up its own associative relays. By the time of the election, it could boast more than 2500

³³⁴ 'La rivalité entre MM. Bouteflika et Benflis provoque une crise au FLN', *Agence France Presse*, Algiers, 9 September 2003.

³³⁵ Yasmine Ferroukhi: 'Les comités de soutien au Président s'agitent', *Le Matin*, 16 April 2003; Nouri N.: 'Manoeuvres autour de la présidentielle à Constantine: Les relais du Président s'agitent', *Le Matin*, 14 May 2003.

³³⁶ 'Dans la perspective de l'élection présidentielle Saïdani «lance» la campagne', *El Watan* 13 May 2003.

³³⁷ 'Tentative d'occupation de certains locaux FLN: A qui profite la confusion?', *El Watan*, 8 June 2003.

³³⁸ 'Centre' here as a geographical rather than political connotation, meaning 'the centre' of the country

³³⁹ CP.: 'Houria Bouhired anime un meeting à Rouiba', *El Moudjahid*, 31 March 2004.

support committees, as well as the backing of a number of associations.³⁴⁰ The anti-party discourse of these organisations made clear their mission to fight the electoral battle outside the discredited party-political sphere. While noting the emergence of pro-Benflis associations in the Oran area as a “boomerang effect” caused by Bouteflika’s use of the associative field, *Le Matin* described them as a “worthy initiative framed outside the parties’ official structures”.³⁴¹ The National Coordinator of the Committees supporting Benflis stated: “we are a group of ordinary citizens with no political links who decided to organise themselves to support their chosen candidate”.³⁴² The position of the CNEC exemplifies the extent of the polarisation of the associative field in the run up to the election. After having initially expressed its support to Bouteflika’s re-election together with other organisations of the “*famille révolutionnaire*” such as the ONM, the UGTA and minor organisations like the General Union of Traders and Craftsman,³⁴³ the CNEC members deposed its pro-Bouteflika president and switched to Benflis’s side, in turn producing a split within the organisation.³⁴⁴ In a similar development, after publicly expressing its support to Bouteflika’s candidature, the Forum of the Entrepreneurs lost a number of its most prominent members, including Issad Rebrab and Reda Hamiani.

What made the real difference between the mobilisation capacities of the two camps was the administration’s discriminatory attitude. The 2004 election provided the clearest example of how the executive’s leeway in stifling or encouraging associations’ activities was put to political use. Already in May 2003, during parliamentary questions, an FLN MP asked the Minister of Interior why he had agreed to “grant several cultural associations the authorisation to hold political meetings specifically aimed at attacking a political party, and specifically the FLN”. He obtained no response.³⁴⁵ A few months later *El Watan* wrote: the challenge to Benflis [...] is ensured through the manifold associations operating under the good will of the Ministry of Interior [...] which is far from maintaining the neutrality required”.³⁴⁶ In addition to obstructing the activities of associations from the opponent’s camp, the bureaucracy was instrumental in transforming pro-Bouteflika’s associations into the transmission belts for the incumbent’s financial largesse. Whilst the associations supporting Benflis denounced the blockage of all public funding,³⁴⁷ Bouteflika’s campaign

³⁴⁰ Nadir Benseba, ‘Benflis : « Bouteflika ne passera pas » *Le Matin* 13 March 2004.

³⁴¹ A. S. Ahcène : ‘Oran : l’effet boomerang’, *Le Matin*, 7 July 2003.

³⁴² M. S. : ‘Comité de soutien à Benflis à Béjaïa’, *El Watan*, 22 October 2003.

³⁴³ APS 4 and 5 February 2004

³⁴⁴ ‘CNEC : Retrait de confiance à Bounedjma et soutien à Benflis’, *Le Soir d’Algérie*, 20 March 2004.

³⁴⁵ Nabila Amir : ‘Parlement : L’indifférence de Zerhouni’, *El Watan*, 10 May 2003.

³⁴⁶ Ali Bahmane : ‘L’Algérie entre dans une période électorale à haute risque’, *El Watan* 2 September 2003.

³⁴⁷ A. S. Ahcène : ‘Oran : l’effet boomerang’, *Le Matin*, 7 July 2003.

was characterised by the allocation of large financial transfers to the wilayas, which, by means of the walis' financial autonomy, percolated to Algerians through the network of supportive associations.³⁴⁸

Abdelaziz Bouteflika's 2004 election constitutes one of the most accomplished chapters in the state's long-lasting effort to manage Algeria's political pluralism. Almost two decades after the introduction of the 1987 freedom of association law³⁴⁹, which as seen in chapter two was "a move apparently recommended by the army and approved by the presidency" - the associative field provided once again the state with a tool to bypass Algeria's unruly political parties or, if seen through Touati's young officers' eyes, their demonstrated ineffectiveness in implementing the country's political institutionalisation process.

The long-term effect that this will have on the nature of Algerian political pluralism remains to be seen. What is certain is that the situation of hyperpluralism induced by the political ascendancy of the associative field had an immediate effect on the parties' vigour. As noticed by the national press, the start of Bouteflika's second term marked a period of "struggle for political parties in opposition as well as in government [...] caused by their mediocre performance during the presidential elections [and] characterised by their difficulty in translating society's expectations [and] representing citizens' demands".³⁵⁰ Meanwhile, a number of associative structures with clearly political agendas have kept emerging, confirming once again the extent of overlap between the executive and the associative sphere, and the latter's intention to fill the vacuum left by political parties' inertia.³⁵¹ The 'National Alliance of the Associative Movement and Civil Society' - part of the plethora of associations rallying behind Bouteflika's National Reconciliation initiative - is a good example. Headed by Djamel Ould Abbès - the Minister of National Solidarity - in the capacity of national coordinator, and built on a group of wilaya coordinators based in Algiers linked to a network of offices over the whole country, the National Alliance made its appearance by claiming to be "open to include other associations to support and realise the programme of the President" under the slogan of 'peace, solidarity, reconciliation'³⁵². According to Saïd Benabdallah - the Alliance coordinator for the Oran region and former wali of Mostaganem - the Alliance's mission coincides with a new challenge for the

³⁴⁸ Salima Tlemçani : 'Bouteflika :22 milliards de dinars aux walis', *El Watan*, 22 July 2003; F.M. : 'Bouteflika à Djelfa : Générosité électoraliste', *El Watan*, 23 July 2003. The 2004 increase in public funding to associations is shown in Table 5.4

³⁴⁹ Law 87-15, 21 July 1987

³⁵⁰ Z.C. : 'Les partis désertent la politique', *El Watan*, 9 August 2004.

³⁵¹ AA : 'Soutien au Président de la République', *El Moudjahid*, 27 August 2004.

³⁵² 'Rencontre nationale du mouvement associatif : de nouvelles perspectives et un rôle important attendu pour les associations', *La Tribune* 25 December 2004.

authorities: “organising the associative movement and adapt it to its increasingly important role”.³⁵³

Conclusions: associational life and the departification of Algerian politics

Research on the role of civic associations in political transition processes often points to antithetic conclusions. On the one hand, authors focusing on the distinction between political and civic spheres often stress the latter’s overpoliticisation and lack of autonomy from the state [Witkorowocz, 2002]. On the other, liberal theory’s focus on the role of the associative sphere in democracy is sometimes accused of suggesting a model of the polity in which the central issue of power is diluted in the antipolitics of a civil, but fundamentally apolitical, society [Fisher, 1997].

Algeria’s process of political change shows that, by blending civic activism and political objectives, the associative sphere can be central to sidestepping the institutions fundamental to democratic politics. After the failure of its strategy centred on using political parties to meet its legitimacy needs, the state found in the proliferation of civic associations more flexible forms of political (dis)organisation. At least formally, associations enhanced the pluralistic nature of Algeria’s political system, but also contributed to further destabilise the political parties’ role. A by-product of this was the weakening of the institutional apparatus centred on the parties - the legislature - and the increasing centralisation of power within an executive able to control the associative sphere through legal codes and bureaucratic practices warping the application of the country’s liberal legislation on associative freedom. Within the executive sphere, the Presidency benefited the most from this process. Starting already during the Chadli years, the instrumental use of the associative realm found its apex under Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s two terms in office. After allowing Bouteflika-The Candidate to present himself above the discredited party sphere, the associative field provided Bouteflika-The President with non-party-political channels for conveying his policy agenda, and then with a network of electoral relays that contributed to thwart the threat brought by the FLN – at the time, still the strongest party on the political spectrum.

This story may have broader implications for the future of Algeria’s political system. If, as it seems, Bouteflika’s re-election really marked a fundamental step in the emancipation of the Presidency from the control of the army, the political involvement of Algeria’s associative sector can be credited with playing a role in enabling Algerian politics to make the transition

³⁵³ ‘Les associations des Aurès : Il n’existe pas d’autre alternative’, *El Moudjahid*, 16 August 2005; Adlène Meddi : ‘Soutien totale de la CNEC à la Charte’, *El Watan*, 23 August 2005.

from the opacity surrounding the military's higher ranks to the more open realm of civilian decision-making. Yet, it is worth asking to what extent Algerian associations have really contributed to a form of political consolidation – the “process through which organisations and procedures acquire value and stability” [Huntington,1968:12]. Despite the warm welcome given by foreign observers to the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election, the procedures leading to its result raise doubts that go beyond the country's democratisation prospects. As shown by the case of the ACB, in addition to undermining political parties and reducing Parliament's role vis-à-vis the executive, the use of associations for political purposes has damaged the credibility of associational life and associative freedom as juridical concepts and institutional practices. The dynamics of creative destruction characterising Algeria's institutional framework cast a long shadow on the political stability of the country, so dear not only to Touati's young officers, but also to the international community at large.

Chapter 7. Civic engagement: Algeria's associative sphere and the international arena

Introduction

During a discussion on the position of Algeria vis-à-vis France and the United States at his house on the hill hosting the American Embassy in Algiers, Osman Bencherif - then teacher of English at the *Lycée Descartes* – recalled his past days as Algeria's ambassador in Washington:

Being woken up by a call from Algiers every other night was really not my thing. The constant pressure from Amnesty and Co. was almost the only thing I dealt with. Every time they came out with a report or a press release it was hell. And of course it was normal. The government was holding back all sorts of possible information, the number of those killed, their identity. The same with the 'disappeared'. And the argument of these guys at the time was very strong: you're fighting somebody who won the elections. As to me personally, the pressure was too high, and I eventually had to quit.³⁵⁴

By his own account, Mr Bencherif apparently suffered from the emergence of what some analysts refer to as transnational civil society.³⁵⁵

Since the 1980s, the global expansion of non-state actors taking place in developed and developing countries alike has encouraged a concomitant surge in international civic interactions, often fuelled by increasing volumes of development aid. This has led to a reconsideration of the way international relations are conducted. As a subset of the liberal/idealist branches of International Relations studies, transnational civil society theory sees the associative sphere as a realm of social practice, material resources and power relationships, which transcends the boundaries of its host country to influence the latter's relationship with foreign partners. In its more normative variants, these perspectives stress the positive functions of transnational civic ties, by highlighting their role in promoting the upholding of human rights [Dunne & Wheeler, 1999; Risse, 2000], the spreading of environmental culture and standards [Lipschutz & Mayer, 1996], the

³⁵⁴ Interview with Osman Bencherif, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Algeria to the United States, January 1995-June 1996, Algiers, 28 January 2002

³⁵⁵ Price [2003] defines transnational civil society as self-organized advocacy groups that undertake voluntary collective action across state borders in pursuit of what they deem the wider public interest.

avoidance of the use of force in the resolution of international conflict [Kaldor, 2003] and the furthering of the democratisation prospects of authoritarian regimes.

This has in turn encouraged examinations of the impact of transnational civic networks on the role of the state in the international system [Price, 2003]. The rise of transnational civic interactions is increasingly seen as the emergence of a 'Third force' in world politics [Fiorini, 2000], highlighting a trend towards the de-territorialization of politics and the economies, and a progressive loss of state sovereignty, particularly in policy areas where international NGOs play a distinctive role, such as human rights, corruption and the environment. It is often noted that grassroots and NGOs are today capable of altering the international position of a country and enhancing its isolation by, for instance, highlighting human rights abuses, public sector corruption, and authoritarian practices and bringing these to the attention of international public opinion. The opposite though is less often noted: examples of situations where the NGO sector has been instrumental in reducing a country's isolation are not as commonly reported.

Algeria provides an as yet unnoticed exception to this rule. To understand the impact of the associative sphere on the country's political development, we need to go beyond its strictly domestic implications and embrace one additional dimension: that of the functions played by the associative sector in shaping the country's foreign relations during and beyond the crisis years. In Algeria too, the joint role of domestic and international NGOs and international organisations has been seen as a driving force towards democratic change in the country, particularly in comparison to that played by foreign governments. Akacem, [2005:163] writes: "it is ironic that non-state actors may have had a greater impact on [Algeria's] internal developments than powerful states with substantial economic leverage". This view needs to be qualified, both in relation to the alleged impact of international actors on Algeria's democratisation, as well as the presumed separation between the action of state and non state actors.

During the crisis the associative sphere constituted one of the main channels of information used by foreign actors within and outside Algeria to understand and at the same time portray the dynamics of the conflict and the country's evolving politics. In becoming a main element of the separate and, at the same time, astonishingly consistent discourses about Algeria put forward by media, academia and foreign donors, the associative sector ended up being the vehicle for those elements of Algerian society and the Algerian state most interested in reaching out to the international arena to provide their version of the events. During and after the Algerian crisis, the associative sphere turned

into one of the realms where the relationship between the government and its international partners could be progressively restored. Whilst remaining a channel of political information contributing to limit Algeria's isolation, the associative field became a bargaining tool through which the authorities could engage with each other, mend their relationship, reconcile positions, and accommodate their mutual interests and needs. Formally intended to support and encourage Algeria's society's demand for democracy, donors' support for the country's associative sector helped the authorities make the institutionalisation of liberalised autocracy accepted at international level, and supported foreign governments' diplomatic efforts at portraying themselves as partners of a regime en route towards democracy.

Threatened civility: associations in the international limelight

Since 9/11, Algeria has mainly entered the pages of international newspapers through the scores of Algerian nationals hunted, arrested and tried all over the world on terrorism charges. Though far from being good publicity, this represents a definite improvement on the type of coverage received prior to the 2001 events, when Algeria made the news through varying statements reporting the total numbers of victims caused by its decade long conflict and new allegations of army involvement in the atrocities. This type of coverage coincided with a period during which, according to domestic observers, Algeria was "boycotted, isolated, quarantined, kept away from the international scene for a whole decade by its own internal crisis".³⁵⁶

In truth, the configuration of Algeria's foreign relations had long been undergoing a period of flux. The death of President Houari Boumediène marked the end of Algeria's position as a leading member of the non-aligned movement and the Organisation of African Unity - a position further questioned when the economic and financial crisis hit the country in the mid 1980s [Zoubir, 1999: 15-29]. The 1992 coup and the start of the violence sparked an additional fracture in Algeria's foreign relations. In the space of a few months, Algeria moved from being the first country in the Arab world to express a potential for democratic change to the clearest example of democratisation failure and its risky consequences. After the first round of elections had raised the prospect of a landslide

³⁵⁶ Abdelkader Khemri: 'Une diplomatie qui rayonne à nouveau', *Afrique Asie* 149, February 2002. On the internationalisation of the Algerian question during the crisis, see Roberts, 1998.

for the FIS, and the emergence of an Islamic state on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, the interruption of the political liberalisation process led to the explosion of wide-scale domestic violence with global spill-over effects. These included refugees flows concerning primarily Europe, as well as the danger of an internationalisation of the conflict, which became a clear possibility with the hijacking of an Air France airbus in December 1994, a series of terror attacks in France in 1995 and the parallel killings of foreigners in Algerian territory, culminating in the assassination of a group of French monks in 1996. In 1994, Western governments closed their embassies in the country and the number of visas granted to Algerians fell dramatically. Foreign press agencies ordered their correspondents to leave and the main airlines cancelled all flights towards Algeria.

The perception of Algeria as “a time-bomb” by the international community dates back to this period [Testas, 2002], as does the sudden realisation of the military nature of the Algerian regime. If Algerians suddenly felt ‘under embargo’ [Stora, 2001: 23], it was also because their government had become a far less respectable partner to deal with. This was not simply related to the interruption of the electoral process, which, despite the vocal reaction of elements of Western public opinion to the ‘official intrusion’ of the military in public life, was tacitly or overtly considered a ‘lesser evil’ compared to a possible FIS electoral victory. The Algerian authorities’ position became even shakier when rumours alleging the implementation of a state terror policy started reverberating in the international arena. The international community found itself in a position of “double distance” vis-à-vis Algeria given its rejection on the one hand of the FIS, and on the other of a corrupt, ineffective and authoritarian government possibly involved in perpetuating the conflict [Martinez, 2000].

Three factors are usually cited to explain how Algeria emerged from this period of international isolation. First, the almost total defeat of the Islamist guerrillas, together with the reconciliation policy implemented by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, led to an amelioration of the security situation, and contributed to stifle questions regarding the practices used by the army. Second, the rise of the hydrocarbon prices once again made Algeria an unavoidable partner of an oil-starved West, as signalled by the strings of Western oil and gas companies queuing up to strike a deal with the government. Third, 9/11 itself made the Algerian military a privileged partner of Western governments eager to learn from its decade long experience in fighting Islamic insurgents and tap the intelligence gathered by the country’s secret services.

Much less consideration is usually given to the strategy deployed by the Algerian authorities to break the country's isolation, which to this day remains to be told. If the more overt elements of this strategy - such as the authorities' attempts, starting with the election of Liamine Zeroual as president in 1995, to put the country back on the rails of democratic change (or at least to portray it as if it was) – are well known, the more obscure ones remain based on allegations. During the summer of 1993, the government's response to the Islamists appeared to change from one based on containment and repression, including the arrest and internment of suspects in camps and counter guerrillas activities, to a more active one which involved the establishing of a climate of fear in the country, through practices allegedly including assassinations, the 'disappearance' of terrorist suspects and prisoners, which culminated in widespread rumours concerning the involvement of the military in the massacres which took place in the villages of Raïs, Beni Messous and Bentalha during the late summer of 1997.

If only a fraction of such allegations was corroborated, the policy of terror implemented by the military and aimed at 'making fear change sides' – to use the words of Redha Malek, Algeria's prime minister in 1993-1994 – would provide one of the largest and most dreadful examples of disinformation campaigns in the history of the country and beyond. What is certain is that in addition to quelling the population's support for the Islamist guerrilla movements, the regime desperately needed to convince international public opinion of its legitimacy by showing that accepting the coup and the emergency measures did indeed mean accepting a 'lesser evil', because at stake were far more than democratic ideals. Certainly, this policy achieved some very mixed results. If the exacerbation of the violence did enhance perceptions of the threat posed by political Islam domestically and abroad, it also complicated a clear-cut understanding by international public opinion of the dynamics of the conflict. The emergence of the question 'who's killing whom in Algeria?' (*qui tue qui?*) after the massacres and its long lasting echoes through the international arena are evidence of the extent to which the army's strategy might have backfired.³⁵⁷

What is certain is that, in addition to complicating any understanding of the Algerian situation, the amplification of the climate of violence enhanced the attention which the international community paid to Algeria. Only a relatively small share of Algerians living in the 1990s had experienced their country solely during a time of armed conflict. On the

³⁵⁷ The peak of these allegations came with Souaidia's *La Salle Guerre* and Yous's *Qui a tué à Bentalha* which contained allegations on the army's involvement in the massacres and in conducting a 'dirty war'.

other hand, for much of the West, the violence became the main prism through which Algeria was watched and known. The fact that one of the most popular analyses of the country [Martinez, 2000] has as its fundamental hypothesis the relevance of a “war-oriented *imaginaire*” characterising Algerians’ social relations – an imaginative frame of reference where violence is the key to social and political success - is telling in this respect. But although the pervasiveness of the violence in media portrayals of Algeria during the 1990s is understandable, its consequences are not to be taken for granted. In commenting how the conflict completely altered the global perception of her country, Fatma Oussedik wrote: “It is under the pressure of [...] violence and armed conflict that [Algeria] has become more familiar, less secretive for the Western watcher”. With the start of the violence – Oussedik continues – “the page of orientalism has been turned: the “new cliché” in the Western perception of Algerians consists of “a relationship of compassion” [Oussedik,1998:117-118].

A by-product of this ‘new orientalism of compassion’ investing Algeria was the propelling onto the international stage of what was perceived to be a more positive side of a country rife with violence, such as its emerging associative sphere. As we have seen, the emergence of Algeria’s associative sphere dates back to the end of the 1980s.³⁵⁸ Already in the very early 1990s the country was registering astonishing rates of associative growth. But only after the beginning of the conflict, with violence ravaging the country and the prospect of the collapse of the Algerian state surfacing amongst diplomatic and academic circles [Zartman, 1995] did interest in civil society enter Algerian studies prominently. To use Slyomovics’s words [1995:11] “the focus on a social order in which violence had become pervasive produced the interest in ‘civil society’”. Zoubir’s statements provide an example: “the tragedy in Algeria is that the manifold crisis also bolstered movements of rage or violent nativist responses to failure [...] in parallel to the emergence of civil society and a vibrant associational life” [1999: 39].

The image of a civil society under threat became especially relevant for analyses dealing with the condition of Algerian women and the human rights situation [Sgrena, 1997]. Writing about women’s organisations, Lloyd states: “women’s right to public action has been fundamentally challenged in this virtual civil war, and they have been at the forefront of resistance to violence, in different forms of political action and at different levels of society [1999: 479]. Increasingly perceived as representing the capacity of Algerians to cope with the crisis, ‘as gene carriers of the good society – microclimates for developing

³⁵⁸ Algeria’s associative sphere before 1989 is explored in chapter 2.

values like tolerance and cooperation, and the skills required for living a democratic life". [Edwards, 2004], under Western eyes associations appeared to be growing as the conflict was intensifying, as a form of 'social antibodies' to the violence. Through portrayals depicting 'a civil society [as a] victim of the confrontation between state and Islam' [Termeulen, 1999] associational life became equated to an immunity system developed by a society under strain:

In full confrontation with fundamentalism and the regime, the grouping of Algerian women into associations has backed a profound reorganisation of civil society. As these women, engineers, architects, young people and businessmen, Algeria is undergoing a period of associative effervescence. Numerous Algerians see in this swarming the terrain for a reconstruction of society.³⁵⁹

As clarified by Mossa and Beaudet: "the themes that concern the associative movement are those at the heart of society's survival, [...civil society] is obliged to fight for its survival in very harsh conditions" [1995: 8].

From the realm of academic scholarship and media portrayals, this image percolated down in the more concrete realm of the aid industry. So in a document setting out the main lines of cooperation with North African NGOs, the Coordination Committee for European/Maghrebi NGO relations described the need to work with Algerian civil society in these terms: "in Algeria despite the harsh conditions...not a day goes by without the birth of a new association. The motives vary: mobilisation to defend people's rights, civic fight for women's emancipation, etc. It is first of all a fight for democracy and citizenship. Despite the strong tensions and the crisis, the development of associational life in Algeria is an element of hope".³⁶⁰ In November 2000, the website of the Ecumenical Service for Self-help stated: "Algeria's associative movement is proving its dynamism and vitality. Moreover, the events in the country show how it is more and more indispensable to make sure that a civil society take root in the country, to inject a dynamic of peace, fraternity and responsible citizenship. In the context of a grave economic, social and political crisis, the associative milieu represents a hope".³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Dominique de Laage : 'Par le courage des Femmes', *France Sud Ouest*, 5 May 1998

³⁶⁰ 'Suivi des activités du Comité de Coordination des ONG Europe/Maghreb.' *Liasion Info Bulletin des ONG de l'UE engages dans l'action Nord-Sud*, n. 29, July-August 1997.

³⁶¹ <http://www.cimade.org/ssi/001/htm>

In search of civic voices

As with most other elements of the regime's disinformation campaign during the conflict, its use of the national and foreign media to restore international credibility remains largely understudied. Stora's dissection of the restrictive environment imposed by the authorities on the national press after 1992 [2001: 23-30], Lise Garon's analysis of the position taken by the media [1998], and Ait-Embarek's analysis of the rhetoric of terror used by the military provide notable exceptions [1996].³⁶² For several years, the international media found in the Algerian drama, with its spectacularly dreadful images and uncertain ending, an immense source of coverage able to scare, bewilder and entertain its Western watcher. To this effect, the media faced two obstacles. The first was to provide the audience with an interpretative framework capable of making Algeria's unfathomable crisis understandable to the Western audience. To overcome the first obstacle, the media proceeded to the oldest and most effective storytelling tool: portraying the conflict through a binary dramatisation of the events: the guerrillas and the army were cast as the main characters of the conflict, while in the less enticing episodes concerning the country's political development, the adversaries were the Islamist and the secularists. The second obstacle was to make use – or to be seen as making use – of reliable, trustworthy information. In addressing this second issue, the media made some of the characters of Algeria's polarised drama also one of the main sources of the script.

As the conflict developed, Algeria's associative sphere ceased to be the mere object of the attention of international public opinion to become a realm populated by actors able to convey information on Algeria and from Algeria, and more importantly, considered trustworthy of doing so by the international onlooker. In her account of the West's evolving relationship towards Algeria during the crisis, Oussedik highlights that although since colonial times "the production of orientalist perceptions on Algeria had continued to be carried out in France", the advent of the violence helped the inclusion of Algerians themselves in the production of media and academic discourse [1998:117]. Clearly, by referring to the category of Algerians "*très médiatisés*" Oussedik does not have in mind the ordinary members of the Algerian diaspora living in France, but rather prominent Algerian personalities with an audience in France, such as members of the country's 'civil society'. Her allusion to Algerian women as "*Debout*" (standing up) is an implicit reference to Khalida Messaoudi – probably the most renowned Algerian women's rights

³⁶² See also Benjamin Stora's analysis [2001]

activist outside Algeria, and author of the widely translated book titled *Une Algérienne Debout*³⁶³ [1998:117].

As the organisation of trustworthy, reliable Algerian voices was becoming increasingly crucial to the West's understanding of political developments in the country, what the international discourse generally called *movement associatif* also became clearer, revealing an entrenched bias in both media and academic portrayals to equate the associative sphere to only its secular, modernist components. Once again, this was especially evident with the issue of women. As Munoz pointed out "almost exclusive attention is given to Westernised women in Arabic and Islamic countries, or those from 'modernist' circles. The secular-feminist sector, according to the Western model, is undoubtedly the most familiar source of information (in fact the only one) to the reporter, although it is not the most representative of these societies" [Munoz, 2002]. The modernist bias in the treatment of the women's issue in Algeria was specifically underscored by Salima Ghezali, a prominent Algerian journalist who pointed out that 'the foreign observer tends too often to consider modernist women as the sole expression of female emancipation whose message is understood in the West' [El País, 30 April 1995, quoted in Munoz, 2002].

Media attention to Algeria's associative movement in turn translated into a plethora of initiatives where associative representatives were given the opportunity to describe, explain and provide advice on the Algerian crisis, initiatives often praised as the possibility for 'Algeria' to reach out to the global sphere [Lloyd, 1999]. The number of examples is quite extensive. When, for instance, five Algerian asylum seekers in France were invited to a meeting organised by the Toulouse-based association Ayda to explain the dynamics of the conflict, they were introduced as 'representatives of that civil society which rejects the FIS, [and which] without weapons to defend itself, is organising the resistance clandestinely through its large associative networks'.³⁶⁴ At an academic conference organised at Georgetown University on 30 January 1998, after highlighting the lack of information concerning the human rights situation, the representative from Human Rights Watch stressed the need to reach out to the existing human rights organisations in the country. At another conference,³⁶⁵ the only 'witness' from Algeria invited was Malika

³⁶³ The title of the English version of Messaoudi's book is *Unbound*

³⁶⁴ Jean-Pierre Tamisier : 'La voix des démocrates algériens', *France Sud Ouest*, 17 March 2005.

³⁶⁵ Conference organised by the University of Michigan Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Johns Hopkins Bologna Center, held on 14-15 May 1999 in Bologna, Italy, titled *Algeria and Europe: Algerian/Maghrebi Voices Abroad and European Reactions*

Remaoun of the Oran based Association of Women for Personal Emancipation and Citizenship - AFEPEC) to speak about women's rights in Algeria.

Far from being limited to the media, the mutating portrayal of Algeria's civil society's supposedly endangered existence into a definition of the associative movement restricted to its more secularist components became the standard in academic discourse too. [Sgrena, 1997; Moussa and Beaudat, 1995; Entelis, 1994, 1996; Lloyd, 1998]. This of course is not specific to the Algerian context. Not the least of the difficulties faced by the literature discussing the development of civil society in the Middle East is due to the role of religion.³⁶⁶ With Islamic NGOs often being characterised as not responding to democratic principles, it is not surprising if academic discourse on civil society in the Middle East tends to exclude them from working definitions. In the Algerian context though, the uneasiness on the part of authors writing on the country's associational life about including Islamic organisations is even more understandable. Islamic charities were a pillar of the rise of the FIS as major political player on the national scene, and as such, they remain inextricably associated with perceptions of an obscurantist fundamentalist threat to Algerian society [Munoz, 1999].³⁶⁷

The issue in the selective way through which Algerian civil society was defined abroad is not so much due to the fact that neglecting religion-oriented associations meant leaving aside a number of Islamic charities which actually opposed the violence – sometimes paying a price for it – as, for instance, *Irshad el Islah*. It has to do with the role the associative sphere played in shaping Algeria's international position. As seen above, the fascination with the burgeoning associative movement abroad was partly due to the international community's discomfort with having to put up with 'a lesser evil' - an authoritarian military regime tainted by allegations of horrific human rights abuses. The focus on civil society as Algeria's only chance for a resolution of the political stalemate allowed the international arena to keep engaging with the country and avert the uncomfortable issue of the legitimacy of the state.

This approach brushed off the fact that, long before the perception of a struggle between 'civil and uncivil societies' enhanced the international profile of the more secularist,

³⁶⁶For a stance on the incompatibility of civil society and Islam see Gellner [1994] Lewis, 1995; Hawthorne, 2004

³⁶⁷ This perspective ignores the fact that excluding religion-oriented organisations means excluding a vast number of Islamic charities which opposed the Islamic guerrillas' violence and paid a price for it.

westernised and pro-eradicators³⁶⁸ elements of the associative sphere, these same groups had already entered the national political stage to back the 1992 interruption of the electoral process and the banning of the FIS.³⁶⁹ By the time the international arena's need to address the lack of reliable, detailed information on Algeria's drama had found in civil society a supposedly trustworthy source, and media and academic discourses on Algeria's associational life converged in a more or less tacit definition of the associative sector as restricted to its more Westernised elements, Algeria's associative sphere had become a major player in the internationalisation of the Algerian question. This became progressively clear to those actors, in Algeria and abroad, concerned with the international legitimacy of the Algerian state.

Grassroots legitimacy

During and after the worst episodes of the Algerian crisis, Western governments' persistent reluctance to probe deeper into the darker aspects of the conflict, particularly those involving alleged instances of grave misconduct by the state in its efforts to restore order, has been interpreted as an example of their incapacity for action on the international stage, and in the case of France, of collusion [Youngs, 2005]. In response to an increasingly outraged Western public opinion, at three stages the international community gave the impression of being willing to question the Algerian authorities' version of the events. On January 19 and 20, 1998, the European Union sent an official delegation of three foreign ministers from Luxembourg, Britain, and Austria, with the purpose of convincing the authorities to allow a special United Nations *rapporteur* on human rights to look into the circumstances surrounding the atrocities. Three weeks later, another delegation of nine European MPs, led by EMP André Soulier spent four days in Algeria, with the declared aim of shedding light on the massacres. And finally, on 22 July-4 August 1998 a UN delegation of eminent persons, led by former Portuguese President Mario Soares, was dispatched to Algeria to "gather information" and report to the UN Secretary General. During each of these visits, foreign observers met with representatives of the country's associative movement. At no point did any of these delegations question the representativeness of the associations they met or the views these relayed, despite warnings to this effect.³⁷⁰ Part of the reasons lie in the fact that in itself, meeting with civil

³⁶⁸ The term 'eradicators' (*eradicateurs*) identifies those components of the Algerian regime opposed to any type of dialogue or settlement with the Islamists, favoured by the 'conciliators'.

³⁶⁹ This is examined in chapter 6

³⁷⁰ In an open letter to the Members of the delegation published in the days before the mission, several personalities including Patrick Baudoin, Pierre Bourdieu, François Gèze, Pierre Vidal-Naquet pointed out that « the delegation will meet with representatives of 'civil society' as well,

society members was meant to provide legitimacy to their fact-finding missions, and their ensuing conclusions.

Reporting back to the European Parliament on the results of the Mission, Mr Soulier discarded any allegations of “allegiance with Algiers” by pointing out that “EMPs are not supporting the Algerian government nor its opposition...we remain open and alert. We support democracy”. “The consultations – he continued - have been broadened to a vast spectrum of actors, including civil society organisations...nobody says that the military-industrial regime in place is a good one: let’s step back from the notion that in Algeria everybody agrees with the government...but nobody has questioned the role of the army [in the massacres]”.³⁷¹ From the columns of the *Figaro*, the words of H  l  ne Carrere d’Encausse, another member of the Soulier mission, exemplify how the view of Algerian associations as ‘social antibodies’ taming the devastation of Algerian society translated into their legitimisation as sources of information capable of providing the international community with a clear-cut interpretation of the dynamics of the violence: “we hear sometimes, here and there, that the Algerian government has been complicit in this horror for dark reasons of power, or to comfort its legitimacy. With only one exception,³⁷² all the interlocutors we met (i.e. all legal political parties, and the associations of civil society) say that this is false. Having heard them, having heard those women whose husbands have died from the terrorists’ bullets, it is evident that the question ‘*qui tue qui?*’ does not need to be asked ever again”.³⁷³

The only international organisations willing to probe deeper into the different facets of the crisis, and question the dichotomic images of a conflict between good (authorities/secularists) and evil (insurgents/Islamists) were the main international human rights NGOs.³⁷⁴ Since 1997, when the state seemed to regain the upper hand in its battle against the Islamists, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the

with associations of women, public sector employees, businessmen and trade union members. The delegation will certainly be impressed by their opinions, including their attacks to the authorities, and by their courage in the face of Islamist terror. But if the members of the UN mission limit themselves to these meetings, they will certainly leave Algeria with the sentiment that despite still living difficult moments, the country is on the road of a true democracy, as witnessed by the plurality of the interlocutors met. And yet, these represent only a small portion of society.» www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/un/misionu.htm

³⁷¹ ‘UE/Algerie : la mission parlementaire milite pour le dialogue avec Alger’, *Europolitique*, 21 f  vrier 1998.

³⁷² The only exception was the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), which vocally questioned the authorities’ version of the events. During a press conference in Algeria, Andr   Solier publicly tore up a letter given to him personally by the LADDH’s president, Ali Yahia Abdennour.

³⁷³ H. Carrere d’Encausse : ‘La Terreur Islamiste’, *Le Figaro*, 16 f  vrier 1998.

³⁷⁴ See for instance HRW Report Algeria: ‘Neither among the living nor the dead: state-sponsored disappearances in Algeria.’ February 1998, vol.10(2)

International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR) started investigating the allegations of assassinations, kidnappings, and massacres surrounding the army's counter-guerrilla practices. In fact it was largely through these organisations, that the *qui tue qui?* question, firstly relayed by the media, retained international resonance. And it was exactly on these issues that Algeria's military leaders perceived "the risks of the internationalisation of the Algerian question as a major threat" [Martinez, 2000: 46]; proving these allegations would have raised the possibility of army members being tried in international courts.³⁷⁵

This is how Osman Bencherif, who, as we have seen, had had first-hand experience of the influence of international NGOs, described the role of Algeria's associative sector in fencing them off:

The lack of information played a very bad role in the legitimacy of the *pouvoir*, when there is no information only the bad news has resonance. I think that, in that period, women's associations and all those organisations in the associative movement that stood up to the position of international NGOs did a great job. Somehow they provided the information that the state did not provide, they communicated what the war really was.³⁷⁶

At more than one point, the domestic response to the human rights NGOs was organised through the associative sphere. Already in 1997, for instance, shortly after the publication of an AI report on human rights in Algeria, Hafsa Koudil a prominent women's activist, criticised "the unacceptable blackmailing" operated by these organisations [Charef, 185-187]. This type of attack intensified in the following years. After being prevented from accessing the country to investigate the various allegations concerning the army's involvement in the violence, Amnesty International was officially invited by President Bouteflika to visit Algeria in May 2000. AI demanded to meet with the army's high ranking officers, to no avail. Instead, a plethora of civil society groups came forward to testify, including some of the most renowned women's and human rights associations like *Rachda*, the Algerian League of Human Rights (LADH), the Organisation of the Victims of Terrorism (ONVT) and *Soumoud*.³⁷⁷ This is how Donatella Rovera, a member of the AI delegation, reacted to their spontaneous offers of help:

³⁷⁵ The sudden flight of General Nezzar, former Minister of Defence and president of the High State Council from Paris on 26 April 2001, following the official filing of accusations of torture against him in the French capital during his visit, illustrates the degree to which high ranks army officers feared such accusations.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Osman Bencherif, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Algeria to the United States, January 1995-June 1996, Algiers, 28 January 2002

³⁷⁷ Soumoud ("steadfastness" in Arabic) is an association of the families of the disappeared during the violence.

What are these associations, and what do they represent? Honestly I don't know. Rather than asking who's inside these associations, one should ask who's behind them.³⁷⁸

The reason for Rovera's attitude is that all along AI's visit, these associations put up a common front against its main rationale, namely probing deeper into the allegations of human rights abuses.³⁷⁹ On the last day of AI's visit, several other groups joined the representatives of these associations in the organisation of a joint meeting to denounce the "logic and the perspective" adopted by AI, and the "exhumation of the 'who kills whom' paradigm".³⁸⁰ The position of these organisations was then restated in an open letter sent to AI during the following days by seven associations, to denounce the organisation's attitude to "Algeria's reality, which has been marked since the beginning of the conflict, by a chilling scepticism when it was a matter of condemning Islamic terrorism".³⁸¹ The same dynamic of confrontation between international NGOs and local associations took place when the IFHR came to Algeria – again at the invitation of the President – to investigate the same allegations.³⁸²

The role played by this set of associations "sent by the authorities" to counter the accusations launched by Amnesty, HRW and IFHR led Hocine Aït Ahmed (leader of the *Front des Forces Socialistes*) to declare that "Algeria's international relations are no longer the monopoly of the state".³⁸³ Far from subscribing to the idea that the increasing role of the associative movement on the international arena corresponded to a decline of the state's weight, Aït Ahmed's words highlight the degree to which, in the eyes of Algerian observers, the associative sphere was part of the regime's channels of parallel diplomacy aimed at re-establishing its legitimacy.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International, Middle East and North Africa Programme, London, April 2001

³⁷⁹ Samia Lokmane : 'Soumoud et le collectif des femmes democrates à AI : vous avez failli à votre mission', *Liberté*, 13 May 2000.

³⁸⁰ Salim Tamani : 'Meeting à la Salle Ibn Khaldun : non à la demarche de Amnesty', *Liberté*, 11 May 2000.

³⁸¹ The associations included: the Association for the Defence and the Promotion of women's rights (Adpdf), National committee against forgetting and treason (CNOT), Djazaïrouna, the Independent Associations for the Triumph of Women's Rights, (Aitdf), The Algerian Rally of Democratic Women, Soumoud, and Tharwa Fatma n'Soumer. 'Sept associations écrivent à Amnesty', *La Nouvelle République* 11 May 2000; 'Sept associations interpellant les ONG de Défense des Droits de l'Homme' : 'L'Intégrisme n'est pas un groupe d'Opposition' *Liberté* 12 May 2000.

³⁸² Also see other articles in *Le Matin*, *La Tribune* and *Liberté* between 1 and 4 June 2000. It is interesting, at this point of the analysis, to note that during the same press conference, Merabet declared that, whilst expressing his disappointment in the meetings with AI and the IFHRs, he was "very satisfied with the meetings with the representatives of Human Rights Watch". Feriel H. 'Soumoud fait le bilan de ses rencontres avec les ONGs' *Liberté*, 5 June 2000.

³⁸³ *El Watan* 22 March 1999

In 2002 Abdelkader Tigha – a former member of Algeria’s military intelligence (Direction des Renseignements et de la Sécurité, DRS) - broke his six years’ silence and revealed what he knew about the involvement of the Algerian secret services in the assassination of seven Trappist monks on 21 May 1996, officially attributed to the Armed Islamic Groups (GIA). The affair had constituted one of the darkest moments in the Algeria-France relationship due to allegations that the Algerian military had devised the plan to kidnap and then assassinate the monks in order to shake France off its ‘double distance’ position vis-à-vis Algeria and induce it to back the governments’ efforts against the terrorists.³⁸⁴ The authorities responded to the resurfacing of the accusations with a deafening silence, broken only by the voices of the associative movement. So, a few days after *Libération* had published Tigha’s accusations, the government’s newspaper *El Moudjahid* reported that

[G]athered in Algiers for a national meeting, the associative movement has expressed in a communiqué its indefectible support to the Popular National Army, and all the security forces, for their fight against terrorism. The associative movement denounced the manipulations by Algeria’s enemies to re-launch a thesis long dead, that of the ‘*qui tue qui*’, asking why every time that an attempt to bring the Algerian and French people closer is started, some voices are raised to stop and paralyse it.³⁸⁵

The most visible aspect of this strategy is evident in General Nezzar’s reliance on associations’ representatives to defend him from the allegations brought against him by Habib Souaïdia, a former army officer and author of *La Sale Guerre* – a book containing direct and detailed accusations concerning the army’s involvement in the massacres, which sold thousands of copies in France and which is illegally distributed in Algeria:

Members of the Comité National contre l’Oubli et la Trahison (CNOT) were asked [by General Nezzar] to support him in his defence against the accusations of Saouïdia.³⁸⁶ Apparently the CNOT has accepted, and so has Djazaïrouna.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Arnaud Dubus : ‘Les sept moines de Tibehirine enlevés sur ordre d’Alger’, *Libération*, 23 December 2002.

³⁸⁵ ‘Les sept moines trapistes ont été tué par le GIA’, *El Moudjahid*, 28 December 2002

³⁸⁶ Ex-army officer and author of *La Sale Guerre* – a book containing direct and detailed accusations concerning the army’s involvement in the massacres, which sold thousands of copies in France and which is illegally distributed in Algeria.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Mme Malika Saïdani, [14 October, 2001] Algiers. The CNOT publicly attacked Souaïdia’s books in the newspaper *Le Matin*, calling it a ‘diatribe’ (*brulot*) aiming at exonerating Islamism of all the barbaric crimes it had perpetrated, *Le Matin*, 18 February 2001.

In addition to fencing off the accusations of human rights abuses, the state used the associative movement to dispute claims of a stalled democratisation process. This is clear from the way the authorities manipulated the figures on the number of associations in the country. In July 1999, few weeks after his confirmation as President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika stated that the conflict in Algeria had claimed 100,000 dead. The following year, the government affirmed that since the political opening Algeria had seen the birth of 55,000 associations – a ratio of one grassroots organisation for every two dead. Far from being a senseless statistic, the idea that associative growth was somewhat correlated with the intensity of the conflict was being officially reinforced by Algerian authorities themselves. Throughout the 1990s the authorities have used the growth of the associative field to show the healthy state of civil liberties in the country and thus to prove that the process of political transition was continuing. According to Algeria's 1995 official report to the UN Commission of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights "only 9 national associations have been recognised between 1976 and 1988, in contrast to 678 in the following 6 years", proving "that freedom of association is now an irrefutable reality in Algeria" and that "the associative movement is one of the prime actors of the country's social, scientific and cultural life".³⁸⁸ In September 2000, in a communication on the status of civil freedoms to Amnesty International, the Ministry of Interior noted that "while only 200 associations had been formed by 1991, by 2000 they had grown to a staggering 55,000".³⁸⁹ In at least two ways, this ministerial statement constituted a conscious misconstruction of the development and state of the associative movement. As we have seen,³⁹⁰ by 1991 Algerian associations already numbered 13,000. In making 1991 the official year of the start of the associative euphoria in the country, the authorities seconded the paralleling of associative development with the development of the conflict operated at international level. Moreover, the image of a vibrant associative sector developing in the country in fact contrasted with the opinion that the government had of its real importance. As already made clear,³⁹¹ in 2000 the authorities were well aware that most of the tens of thousands of associations in the country existed on paper only.

The state's instrumental use of the associative sector is clear if one compares the different way the authorities treated associations' requests for recognition domestically and abroad. On the one hand, the government failed to provide any response to the large number of associations' requests for official recognition. On the other, the authorities used the number of demands for recognition to demonstrate the width of the associative field to

³⁸⁸ *Le Quotidien d'Oran* 14 November 1995

³⁸⁹ *El Moudjahid* 11 November 2000

³⁹⁰ See chapter 2

³⁹¹ See chapter 4

outside observers, in order to prove, as Algeria's official report to the UN Committee on economic, social and cultural rights shows, that 'associative freedom constitute[d], with political parties, one of the most dynamic and unavoidable realities of scientific, cultural and economic life in the country'. The speech given by Ahmed Attaf - Algeria's foreign minister – to the 54th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights provides an example of the authorities' use of "the outstanding development of the associative movement" to fend off questions about human rights abuses:

The difficult conjuncture due to the terrorist factor has not altered the authorities' will for transparency. Do we need to recall that at international level, the visit of foreign parliamentary delegations, eminent public figures, and the visits during the last 10 months of more than a thousand journalists have allowed the international community to correctly understand Algeria's reality? A reality that some, to achieve unspoken goals under the fallacious concern of the defence of human rights, are still trying to deform, practising a new and irresponsible form of 'negationism'. ...At national level, the freedom and diversity of the national press, parliamentary debates, and the dynamism of 54,000 associations active in Algeria are further elements guaranteeing this transparency. The creation of a National Observatory of Human Rights, the installation of alternative dispute mediators and a Mediator of the Republic, as well as a national associative movement in full growth, constitute the indication of my country's will to be a society in line with the times, fully integrated in the globalisation process, completely distant from events negating human progress. ... The development of the associative movement and the blossoming in civil society of thousands of NGOs [...] testifies to the collective work towards the protection and promotion of human rights.³⁹²

The discursive use of the associative sphere for external consumption was also evident at a conference of Arab Interior ministers held in Algiers less than two years later. The hosting authorities distinguished themselves by giving a communication on 'Managing voluntary associations', when the issues on the agenda dealt solely with internal security, terrorism and drug trafficking. After duly enumerating the growth of voluntary associations in different sectors, the speech remarked:

[T]he clear vitality of the associative movement in [the] country" which "expresses the re-appropriation of our traditions and values of mutual aid and solidarity. Faced with the exigencies of modernity and democracy, nothing more normal for Algeria to reintegrate these ancestral experiences in the framework of civil society's need for

³⁹² Speech given by Ahmed Attaf to the 54th Session of the UN Commission of Human Rights, Geneva, 18 March 1998

expression...offering individuals the ideal framework for participation on the basis of common affinities and interests.³⁹³

The authorities' official backing of the 'social antibodies' view of the associative movement put forward by foreign observers abroad paid off in terms of new opportunities for engagement between Algeria and its partners. Thus Bernard Stasi – European MP, and president of the Association France-Algerie - asserted that "in Algeria there is a civil society that deserves to be supported. We need to make clear that in France we believe Algeria can be a democratic country".³⁹⁴ In advocating the necessity to get out of a position of 'double distance' vis-à-vis Algeria, *Le Figaro* found in the associative movement a 'Third Way' for France's engagement with Algeria: "civil society, even if this term can sound strange in a country at war, has not disappeared in Algeria. It resists, by doing its job, in its place, as it is. Let's link up, let's twin. Not simply city to city, or town to town, in a traditional way, but association with association. Who could possibly oppose this kind of contacts, this kind of practices? One more time, let me voice this appeal: may the democrats help the democrats".³⁹⁵ On 1 May, passing from words to actions, Bernard Stasi arrived in Algeria in his triple capacity of EMP, Mediator of the French Republic and President of the French association 'Cités Unies', to meet with "his Algerian counterparts" from the associative movement to establish links between the two sides of the Mediterranean".³⁹⁶ Just a few weeks earlier, the French government had made it clear that 'the re-establishment of a open, natural and constructive dialogue' with Algeria by means of the civil society channel was official French policy. In describing the parliamentary speech by Hubert Vedrine – France's foreign minister – in response to a question by a socialist MP on France's attitude towards Algeria and his focus on the associative movement, *Maghreb Confidentiel* wrote: by inciting the launch of relations with Algerian civil society (a task entrusted to the French Ambassador, Jean Audibert) Paris evidently no longer has any particular feeling [*état d'âme*] vis-à-vis the Algerian regime".³⁹⁷ Donors' promotion of Algeria's associative sector had officially started.

³⁹³ Ministry of Interior, 'La Gestion des Associations', Communication given at the 17th Meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council, held in Algiers on January 29-31 2000

³⁹⁴ Bernard Stasi's declaration appeared in a joint article reporting the views of a number of European intellectuals with ties to Algeria and entitled: 'We shall not let the Algerians down', in *La Croix*, 7 February 1997. The other contributors were Jules Roy, Alain Michel, Benjamin Stora, Marco Impagliazzo, Yves Bonnet, Jean-Pierre Chevenement, Mireille Elmalan.

³⁹⁵ Jean-François Deniau : 'Fin d'un ramadan sanglant. Algérie : pour une troisième voix', *Le Figaro*, 10 February 1997.

³⁹⁶ *Maghreb Confidentiel*, 30 April 1998.

³⁹⁷ *Maghreb Confidentiel*, 9 February 1998.

Democracy promotion between stability and change

During the 1990s the promotion of democracy became a major objective of international aid donors and one of the main elements of political conditionality attached to foreign aid [Carothers, 1999; Burnell, 2000]. Democracy assistance – loosely defined as “aid designed to foster opening in a non-democratic country or to further a democratic transition in a country that has experienced a democratic opening” [Carothers, 1999: 6] – is a broad label covering a variety of aid packages targeting different elements of a country’s political system. These can be divided into projects and programmes taking a top-down approach to democratisation - aiming directly at the transformation of those elements of the country’s institutional apparatus responsible for ‘democracy supply’- such as the executive, Parliament and the Judiciary - and those that aspire to facilitate democratic change from the bottom up, by encouraging society’s ‘demand for democracy’, such as those targeting civil society organisations [Denoux, 2004].

From an initial focus on fostering community development, socio-economic equality and human rights [Van Rooy, 1999] donors such as the EU and USAID have increasingly framed their civil society support packages within the broader objective of promoting democracy through a variety of strategies including strengthening advocacy organisations that push for specific democratic reforms or help the development of a civic, democratic culture through citizen education programmes. However, as the presence of a dense network of civic associations and grassroots groups has come to be regarded as a precondition of democracy, regardless of their specific mission and activities, in the eyes of donors ‘civil society’ has increasingly been seen as “an end in itself” [Sabbatini, 2002:8].

In recent years however, the emergence of ‘the end of the transition paradigm’³⁹⁸ has swiftly taken root in a development industry hard pressed to demonstrate results on the ground and has led to serious questioning of the results of democracy assistance, to the extent that some authors termed the beginning of the 2000s “a century of diminishing expectations” for democracy assistance [Santiso, 2001].³⁹⁹

As a subset of democracy assistance, civil society support has not escaped these criticisms. After falling prey to the age of “civil society romanticism” [Carothers, 1999a:

³⁹⁸ See introduction, section 3

³⁹⁹ For a discussion of how the disenchantment with democracy promotion included media, academics and practitioners alike see Carapico [2005: 2-4].

248; Carothers & Ottoway, 2000], the academic community has expressed increasingly sceptical views on civil society support as means to fostering democracy in authoritarian settings. With respect to the Arab world, these qualifications stem more from the allegedly inherent incompatibility of Muslim society with democracy [Gellner, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Hawthorne, 2004] than from doubts about the effectiveness of aid support programmes to civic associations in breaking the coercive apparatuses of Arab regimes [Carapico, 2002; Bellin, 2004]. More crucially, only very rarely have critics of civil society assistance programmes questioned the role of donors and identified them as a cause of the problem, rather than a solution [Sabatini, 2002; Challand, 2005]. Part of the reason for this bias is the fact that all too often the disenchantment with civil society assistance programmes was not matched by parallel efforts to understand their full rationale. If, as elsewhere, support for Arab associational life has often fallen short of expectations, why does the development establishment continue to generate hundreds of civil society interventions?

Any public policy – including aid directed at fostering associational life in Southern countries - can be, and usually is, multifunctional, in as much as it may serve multiple objectives, not all of which are always expressively stated or even contemplated by the governments and development agencies responsible for their design and implementation. As James Ferguson demonstrated [1990], the significance of development interventions goes beyond their declared objectives to include tacit and unintended functions which shape, expose or veil the political reality on which they impinge. These considerations apply with even more vigour to the perceived failure of democracy promotion programmes, which, as it is all too often forgotten, might not always be entirely geared towards success. Since its beginning, the Western enterprise of promoting democracy in the developing world was allegedly one of enlightened self interest, primarily focused on economic and security goals [Carapico, 2005:5]. Robinson [1996] for instance showed that to international actors, the accomplishment of ‘low intensity democracy’ in developing countries – what could also go under the name of semi-authoritarianism [Carothers, 1999], or liberalised autocracy [Brumberg, 2003] – can be functional, due to its capacity to quell domestic opposition and mitigate political instability through a form of ‘consensual domination’ made possible by ‘the hegemony of the democratic ideal’.⁴⁰⁰

The application of this neo-Gramscian perspective to international democracy assistance programmes facilitates an understanding of how donors reconcile the apparently diverging aims of promoting political change and encouraging political stability [Hawthorne, 2001],

⁴⁰⁰ See Youngs, 2005: 212

a challenge typically confronting donors in the Middle East and North Africa [Entelis, 2005: 8]. This challenge is even more significant when donors face the need to engage with failing or failed states or 'difficult partners' - environments where the political system is unstable due to political turmoil, economic crisis, and outright conflict or where donors' engagement with domestic authorities is made problematic either due to their unwillingness to cooperate, or to the 'inconvenient' nature and actions of the regime, as when the government is characterised by authoritarianism and scarred by a negative [government's] human rights record [OECD, 2001a; 2001b]. In such cases, democracy assistance also helps donors' domestic need to sell the engagement with an authoritarian state to public opinion.

For the better part of the 1990s, Algeria provided one such environment. Besides fear and incomprehension, the West's relationship with Algeria since 1989 has been one ridden by guilt. In addition to the fall in living standards following the collapse of oil and gas prices in 1985, and popular dissatisfaction with the Chadli regime [Roberts, 2001b] the riots which shook Algeria in October 1988 and pushed the regime into turmoil were encouraged by price rises induced by import restrictions in line with the IMF stabilization plan [Moore, 1994:13].⁴⁰¹ One of the results of the regime's need to comply with its Western partners was its detachment from what had so far constituted of its main interface of political representation – the party of the FLN - and the introduction of multi-party politics [Roberts, 2005:9]. The result marked the beginning of Algeria's crisis.

Since then, the approach taken by Western governments to Algeria's financial and political stability has been a somewhat more cautious one. No foreign government condemned the revocation of the 1992 elections or military action. Indeed, according to Youngs, the European Union offered a fourfold increase in development aid making "Algeria one of the biggest gainers, in both proportionate and absolute terms, in the distribution of European aid during the early 1990s" [Youngs, 2005: 96].⁴⁰² In addition to increasing aid, the EU proceeded to a rescheduling of over \$20 billion of Algeria's official debt, paving the way to two Paris Club debt reschedulings [1994-1995] supported by a one year IMF stand-by loan and followed by a three year enlarged financing facility in 1995, which, as Martinez suggests, helped release financial resources necessary to

⁴⁰¹ While formally declining IMF advice and assistance, the Chadli government started a liberalisation process to open the economy to the market, including import restrictions, in line with IMF recommendations.

⁴⁰² Based on data from Crawford [1997 : 97] See also Young, 2005:227, fn.1 Youngs's analysis of EU's support to Algeria conflicts with Roberts's view that EU's position was dictated by the goal of compelling Algeria to undertake the structural adjustment program under IMF rules, condition upon which all financial and aid support was granted, or rather suspended [2002c: 109-111].

upgrade the army's outdated weaponry in the struggle against the armed militias [Martinez, 2000:152].

Only since the end of the 1990s, the amelioration of the security situation pushed Algeria's Western partners to develop longer term foreign policy guidelines which explicitly included the objective of democratic change in the country. But the longstanding concern with stability did not fade away. Consider the EU for instance. As in other European foreign policy documents, in the EU Mediterranean Democracy Programme (MEDA), the issue of "democracy, good governance, and human rights" is framed in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it is an instrument of political conditionality, or a condition for cooperation in other areas. On the other, it is parallel to other overarching policy goals, primarily ensuring stability. Analyses of how the EU democracy promotion has been implemented show that its conditionality function often suffers from the conflicting goals of improving and institutionalizing relations with the neighbouring countries [Schimmelfennig, 2005].

This applies to Algeria's case too. The EU has never tried to force any consistent political conditionality prior to signing its association agreement with Algeria. Indeed, none of Algeria's Western partners has ever addressed the issue of the persisting weakness of Parliament, nor of the shaky grounds on which the rule of law rests [Roberts, 2005]. As a matter of fact, with the only possible exception of the EU mission's recommendation to reinforce the institutional role of the presidency (and, implicitly, to correspondingly reduce that of the military), the Algerian authorities have constantly opposed any type of donor's intervention, or even suggestion, aimed at targeting the country's institutional structure. The dismissal in June 2003 of Paolo Lembo - the UN resident coordinator - as 'persona non grata' helps understand the authorities' opposition to any foreign interference with the domestic process of institutional development. Allegedly motivated by UNDP's 'hyper activity' in the aftermath of the earthquake which devastated the Algerois region in may 2003,⁴⁰³, and the visibility acquired by the Mr Lembo, his removal was in fact due to:

his stubborn willingness to work in the area of institutional reform. Obviously we were aware of the opposition we faced externally. But maybe we underrated the opposition inside the [Algiers'] office. It cost me my job too, as I was the one who drafted the project for supporting the Judiciary. And I don't regret it. Because what we were

⁴⁰³ José Garçon : 'Un gèneur onusien non grata à Alger' *Libération*, 26 June 2003. Salima Tlemcani : 'L'Algérie demande le départ de Paolo Lembo' *El Watan*, 26 June 2003.

working on was more than the usual capacity building project: in the long term it aimed at transforming procedures. The same with the project targeting the Assembly. They couldn't wait for the opportunity to say that we did too much after the earthquake, and that we overshadowed the government.⁴⁰⁴

Foregoing any attempt at encouraging 'democratic supply', donors have instead concentrated on promoting 'democratic demand'. Since then, donors have portrayed the country's nascent associative sector as *the* realm where Algerian democracy could still have a chance to flourish [Dillman, 2002]. Already in 1997, in advising US policy-makers and diplomats on the US relationship with Algeria, Mona Yacoubian – a member of the US Council on Foreign Relations – made clear the expectations placed by foreign observers in the associative sphere towards the solution of the Algerian crisis:

The great emphasis should be placed on building a strong civil society, an essential key stone for a stable democracy. US policy-makers should focus on Algerian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as important players who offer the greatest hope for a peaceful future. Several Algerian NGOs working in areas as diverse as AIDS prevention and treatment, the environment and women's rights continue to operate despite the ongoing violence. By helping to facilitate a "culture of participation" these and other NGOs can play a key role in fostering Algerian civil society. Their work should be strongly encouraged.

... US diplomats should maintain contact with these groups, foster exchanges with their American counterparts, and facilitate the work of American NGOs attempting to support Algerian groups. In their meetings with senior Algerian officials, US diplomats should emphasize the important contribution NGOs can make toward establishing lasting peace in Algeria. They should encourage the Algerian government to allow these groups to operate freely and without government restraint. [Yacoubian, 1997:18]

Speaking at the Georgetown University conference on the Algerian crisis on 30 January, 1998, Yacoubian clarified the type of diplomatic strategy to be used by the US in intervening in Algeria. Considering the limited leverage of the U.S. on Algeria, Yacoubian suggested that the U.S. influence the events through "behind-the-scenes efforts", by developing outlets for moderate groups to "express their concerns. The North African specialist John Entelis extended Yacoubian's advice to France's policy makers, suggesting that "the French government needs to go beyond working with the Algerian government

⁴⁰⁴ Telephone interview with Giuseppe Perricone, former assistant to the UN Resident Representative, 17 July 2004

and also work with Algerian civil society”.⁴⁰⁵ As a matter of fact, these analyses were very much in line with French and US governments thinking at the time. As seen above, already in early 1998 France considered civil society as the appropriate channel for conducting relations with its former colony. For the US on the other hand, it was a means to foster political change. Speaking to the Congress International Relations Committee in February 1998, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Ronald E Neumann, declared that:

Labour organizations, professional associations, women's groups, human rights groups, a free press and humanitarian organizations already active in Algeria are also agents for constructive change and for the rule of law. These things exist. They are a tribute to the Algerian people and hold the hope of the future. And they are all fragile. We are working to promote these burgeoning organizations and the growth of civil society in Algeria. We continue to encourage improvements in civil society, including strengthening the rule of law and furthering freedom of the press.⁴⁰⁶

Since then, ‘civil society’ was raised to the status of panacea to solve a range of Algeria’s ills. In its 2000 report, the International Crisis Group recommended the EU “to support the political reconstruction process in the country, by fostering a dialogue with the Islamist and accepting the Barcelona charter of deeper integration, and [...] support the growth of civil society” [ICG, 2000]. In the wake of the signing of the EU-Association Agreement, the International Federation of Human Rights encouraged the EU to support human rights and civil society.⁴⁰⁷ In its 2003 *Global Corruption Report*, Transparency International highlighted the endemic levels of corruption at all level of the public sector made worse by the expansion of the black economy, identifying in “an increased role of civil society” a possible alternative to the government’s reluctance to properly tackle the problem.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, until at least the end of the 1990s, the degree of attention raised by Algeria’s emerging civil society groups started irritating the Algerian authorities. This is how Abdelaziz Bouteflika responded to a question on the subject by Middle East Insight magazine in the months preceding its first presidential election:

⁴⁰⁵ “The Algerian Crisis: International Implications and Reactions” 30 January 1998, Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Washington DC

⁴⁰⁶ Statement of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ronald E Neumann before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, 5 February, 1998 <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/cmenas/algeria/Volumel/statement.html>

⁴⁰⁷ EU-Algeria Euro Parliament Vote on the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with Algeria 30 September 2001

⁴⁰⁸ Samia Lokmane : ‘L’Algérie, un état pourri ? Transparency International divulgue les pratiques en cours dans notre pays’, *Liberté*, 14 July 2003.

MEI. What is the best way for the international community and the United States in particular, to encourage development of civil society in Algeria?

A. B. First of all, why speak of civil society and not the Algerian people as a whole? I find it difficult to accept that in Algeria, there could be individuals who are more Algerian than the rest of us. We need to shield civil society against sterile polemics. It should become able to contribute efficiently to the effort of national reconstruction, because it has wasted too much time. We now need to deal with what is fundamental and avoid wasting time on endless diversions created by those who, here or abroad, have used to their own ends the tragedy of the Algerian people. Today, Algerian society has enormous social needs which resulted from damages inflicted by terrorism to the economy. Everything needs to be built, particularly in socio-educational sectors. The victims of our tragedy also need concrete and meaningful help from the national and international communities. But, anyway, since you are focusing on civil society, I think that the United States would make a great contribution to Algeria, if they provided an assistance that is loyal, devoid of any selfish considerations, and respectful of our position of not tolerating any interference in our domestic affairs. As I said, so long as the conditions I mentioned are respected, we would welcome any kind of assistance.

But while consistently rejecting projects and proposals affecting the balance of power between different elements of the political system, the Algerian authorities never rejected programmes aimed at supporting civil society. It is to the reasons for this behaviour that we now turn.

The anti-politics of civil society support

Almost no international actors have ever questioned the real degree of development of Algeria's associative sector, or the extent to which it could actually be an element of political change. Once again, Amnesty International provides the notable exception. In its response to the government's report concerning the state of human rights and freedom of expression, AI "was pleased to note the considerable increase in the number of Algerian associations and NGOs, but remains concerned that, of the 55,000 in operation in the country, the few which have been critical of the government continue to face considerable problems and restrictions."⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁹Amnesty International memorandum to the Algerian government of 23 August 2000, published in *El Moudjahid*, 18 September 2000.

In truth, by the late 1990s the donor community in Algeria was well aware of the many shortcomings of the associative sector. An unpublished study commissioned by UNDP in 1998 on environmental associations found not only a lack of managerial competence and financial resources necessary to accomplish associations' stated objectives, but also widespread undemocratic practices within an associative field in which most organisations are at best heavily centred on the president, and at worst limited to one or two people.⁴¹⁰ It also hinted at the wide degree of state control of the associative sphere, by stressing particularly the arbitrary recognition procedures and capricious granting of the status of public utility.⁴¹¹ In 2000, the Ministry of National Solidarity invited INTRAC, a UK based NGO training outfit, to provide advice on how to reinforce the NGO sector involved in poverty reduction activities. Again, the report highlighted the democratic deficit within associations coupled with capacity concerns. Moreover, the study raised doubts about the boasted dynamism of Algerian civil society by overtly questioning government's figures concerning the size of the associative sector, which at the time was claiming that a staggering 55,000 associations were active in the country. This time the report was not only left unpublished, it was also classified by the government. In January 2002, an EU evaluation mission which was supposed to come to Algeria "in order to meet representatives of Algeria's civil society and identify *independent* associations and organisations for allocating significant financial aid" was cancelled, as the Algerian embassy in Brussels denied issuing the consultants' visa. According to rumours relayed by the press, and taken up by the opposition, the incident was due to 'the regime's fear of an authentic diagnosis of political and civil liberties in the country'.⁴¹² The same year, the World Bank and the EU were considering how to create 'an enabling environment' for associational life by 'encouraging' the government to modify the 1990 associations law and reduce the administration's leeway in controlling the associative sector.⁴¹³ To this stage, despite much talk over the years about impending legislative amendments, no result has been reached.

The international euphoria over Algeria's associative sector soon turned into a proliferation of civil society assistance programmes ensued, administered by official aid agencies, international NGOs and foundations, aimed at encouraging Algeria's democracy. Their rationale appeared vindicated in the wake of April 2004 Presidential elections, which were saluted as the country's most transparent yet and the first veritable

⁴¹⁰ UNDP [1998] 'Le Mouvement Associatif et l'environnement', Algiers, unpublished document. See chapter 4.

⁴¹¹ On the state's arbitrary practices in granting public recognition, see chapters 5 and 6.

⁴¹² Djamel B. : 'Le FFS écrit aux parlementaires du vieux continent', *Le Matin*, 6 February 2002.

⁴¹³ M. Kies, EU Delegation Staff, personal communication, Algiers, 28 January 2002.

sign of Algeria's being back on the democratisation track. Yet, few civil society support projects have been geared explicitly towards democracy. A deeper look at the way these programmes are conceived and administered shows that the promotion of democracy might not be the only, or indeed the prime, objective behind these interventions.

The EU provides once again a good example. The four priorities of the European Union's MEDA Democracy Programme which also includes Algeria, are the strengthening of democratic electoral procedures; the establishment of the rule of law and the upholding of human rights; encouraging peace and preventing conflict; and supporting a "pluralist, democratic civil society" [Karkutil & Buetzier, 1999]. Besides not taking any concrete steps towards the first two pillars of its strategy (elections, rule of law), EU aid to Algerian associations has never been geared towards democracy promotion, except very indirectly. Instead, four main themes emerge from the analysis of the civil society support initiatives sponsored by the EU and other donors.

The first concerns donors' attempt to maintain international attention on Algerian associational life. The need to actively promote Algeria's associative sphere abroad and the availability of aid money to this effect is made clear by the number of programmes including this as a main objective. Thus, for instance, the first phase of a EU initiative run in cooperation with the ARPEJ, an Algerian association, aimed at "installing a permanent cooperation between actors of Algeria's and European civil society...to enhance reciprocal awareness." Another project aimed at setting up a Euro-Algerian Forum of Associative partnerships aimed at identifying 30 associations on each side of the Mediterranean and organising events including actors of Algerian civil society with the aim of sensitising European public opinion to Algeria's associational life.⁴¹⁴ In November 1998, a series of Algerian associations were invited to Europe by French NGOs, to join an initiative called the *Caravane d'Associations Démocratiques Algériennes* – described as an "associations parade, aimed at demonstrating the existence of a real associational life in Algeria, and starting a dynamic exchange with French associations".⁴¹⁵ A programme launched in 2005 involving 60 associations in Europe and Algeria was aimed at "a better awareness of the 'Other'".⁴¹⁶

In promoting the existence of an active civic sphere in Algeria, these initiatives have often tended to portray an ebullient associative sector, without mentioning its well known

⁴¹⁴ Programme Meda Democratie, 1998 'Synthese par Pays

⁴¹⁵ *Communic'Actions – Bulletin Départemental de Documentation Pédagogique de Charente Maritime* n. 25 March 1999

⁴¹⁶ Partenariat Euro-Med. Algérie, Programme Indicatif National 2005-2006 p. 21

shortcomings. To palliate to what domestically appeared as stagnation and decay in associations' activities and membership, in their programme proposals donors often include initiatives aimed at 'federating civil society organisations', 'networking associations' and encouraging the establishment of 'associations of associations'. The EU, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the National Democratic Institute and Caritas have all run initiatives aimed at making associations work together, usually with limited results. According to an official of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs:

on the one hand, there's need for more efficiency. Networking associations is meant to encourage associations to identify and share expertise and resources. On the other, there are our needs, and here 'partnerships' also means enhancing the 'visibility' of the associative movement.⁴¹⁷

A second clear trend consists in concentrating support towards development-oriented associations rather than advocacy organisations. Already in 1998, under the MEDA democracy programme, the EU granted roughly 500.000 Ecu to Touiza and ARPEJ - two Algerian associations well known abroad - for projects aimed at "the insertion of young marginalised people into society through their professional training", and "the psycho-educational rehabilitation of young people". The orientation of these funds did not change when the EU's financial commitment to Algerian associations increased. If anything, the goal of democracy promotion was entirely dropped. The five million Euros allocated in the framework of the MEDA II programme were explicitly aimed at "reinforcing the role of civil society in Algeria's development process...and will essentially support NGOs engaged in social development work, women's rights, environmental protection, including archaeological domain, community development and sustainable development."⁴¹⁸ In their civil society support programmes, most donors in Algeria have chosen the same route.

There exists a debate on whether the promotion of associations engaged in service delivery activities can promote democracy. Certain donors claim that supporting advocacy NGOs and community based, service delivery organisations instead of vocal advocacy associations can equally be considered as producing incremental steps during a usually long democratisation process, through the progressive inclusions of associations' members and the target populations [Denoeux, 2004: 99-110]. What is certain is that, in choosing to

⁴¹⁷ Mme Zervudacky, Directorate General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID), Paris, 10 November 2005

⁴¹⁸ '5 Millions d'Euros pour le programme d'appui aux associations Algériennes de Développement', *Synopsis Euromed*, 3 December 1999. See Report from the Commission 'Annual Report of the MEDA Programme 1999', Brussels, 20 December 2000 COM(2000) 472 Final

sponsor development-oriented associations in implementing politically neutral projects, the international community has seconded the government's attempts to confine the associative sphere's realm of action to social exclusion and poverty reduction, thus not only limiting public acceptance of associations' advocacy role, but also legitimising the state's progressive retreat from public service delivery and its inclination, when needed, to outsource failure, as seen in the previous chapter.

This choice is linked to the third theme underlying civil society support programmes in Algeria, which revolves around a focus on strengthening the organisational, managerial and financial capability of Algerian associations. Since the mid 1990s, the EU started engaging in activities aiming at "reinforcing the capacity of the associative sector", for instance through the activities run by the CIMADE (Ecumenical Service for Self-help) targeting a group of five associations. With the launch of the second phase of the programme supporting development-oriented NGOs, this became a prime objective. In its 2005-2006 National Indicative Programme for Cooperation with Algeria, the EU suddenly recognises the "limits of the associative movement in Algeria", whose roots can be identified in its "young age, inexperience...and the absence of any training to associations' members and cadres' which lies at the origin of the chronic instability of associations". The programme therefore aims at "training associations cadres in project identification and management, communication techniques and financial management".⁴¹⁹

This emphasis on the 'professionalism' of Algerian associations was certainly not restricted to the EU. In 2001, Population Initiative for Peace (PIFP) a UK-based NGO, received financing from the EU to train 17 local associations from the Algiers, Ghardaïa, Tlemcen, and Skikda regions in "management and communication" skills. During the workshops organised by PIFP, selected associations members were trained in planning, strategy, gender and development, communication, management of project cycles, evaluation and fundraising. "The representative of PIFP explained to *Le Matin* "we teach them how to manage from an optimal point of view their associations, i.e. targeting a specific project, acting strategically, and develop a communication system to better valorise the mission they defend and raise the interests of donors".⁴²⁰

In 2006, in addition to the EU, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the US-funded National Democratic Institute ran similar activities, also including fundraising and donors' targeting. Raising the interests of associations' members around this type of activities is

⁴¹⁹ <http://www.cimade.org/ssi/001/htm>

⁴²⁰ R.N. : 'Une ONG Anglaise forme dix-sept associations', *Le Matin*, 11 January 2001.

easy, as well as advantageous, for donors. As seen in chapter three, the emphasis on entrepreneurship, with its rhetoric centred on ‘efficiency and effectiveness’, is widespread within Algerian associations, which are often more similar to start-ups than charities, and increasingly more keen, to use Eade’s words, on “mobilising money over people” [2000: 12]. In this sense, the overarching goal of professionalizing associations is reminiscent of the processes defined by Escobar [1995:48] as ‘institutionalising development’. The need of the donors to identify potential funding opportunities, disburse funds in a sustained way, and demonstrate results finally ends up compromising the role of associations as agents of change. In a process reminding of the ‘antipolitics machine’ of development aid described by Ferguson [1990], associations were turned into vectors of ‘technical’ solutions void of political content.

Reaching out to the state

It is interesting to note that amongst the management training activities provided to Algerian associations, very few include advocacy, and none is oriented to increasing the membership of associations.⁴²¹ As also highlighted in chapter three, foreign operators find the presidentialism and low participation levels characterising associations bewildering. In the months preceding its departure, the US Embassy official charged with managing relations with civil society admitted bitterly:

I’m not sure that after years in Algiers I know many associations. Sure I know a few people that claim to be heading one association. It’s always the same people who come to the receptions, and it’s always the same people who come asking for money.⁴²²

This leads to the fourth theme characterising foreign support to the associative movement, which revolves around donors’ relationship to the authorities. If restricted membership makes defining what an association is problematic, it does not necessarily disrupt donors’ work:

We work with a restricted number of associations. You know, often it’s difficult to know who’s behind them. So in a way we tend to stick to those few characters introduced to the diplomatic community. They don’t miss a party or a national celebration, and believe me with more than 100 diplomatic missions here there’s one

⁴²¹ In 2004, a project administered by the National Democratic Institute and including training in advocacy techniques provides the only exception.

⁴²² Gregory Slotta, 1st Counsellor, US Embassy, Algiers, 29 January 2002

every other week. So after a while we know the guys and tend to stick to them. Once you know them there's not much else to know because often the association is nothing but them.⁴²³

In an interview in *El Watan*, the European MP Yasmine Boudjemah criticised donors' practices in allocating funds to associations in these terms: "there are some associations in Algeria that don't have access to these subsidies because they don't know the right channels, the right people".⁴²⁴ As shown by the representative of a reputed association, this is a story well known in Algeria, and one at the root of some resentment:

I do not understand how associations that do not even have an office can be given [MEDA] funds for the restructuring of the Qsur.⁴²⁵ Until yesterday the man in Bechar was simply an architect, his association does not even have an office, and apparently they already had the money for the project anyway. And now they even made him 'an associative trainer', he's supposed to teach us to draft project proposals and fill in the requests for money. Surely he must be good at it. They told us we were all at the same level in this. It seems that if we were all together in this, apparently some are more 'together' than the rest.⁴²⁶

If the impression of discrimination in aid funding puzzles also those associations widely reputed domestically and abroad, like SOS Femmes en Détresse, it is not refuted by the EU. Here are the motivations adduced by the officer charged with the MEDA associations support programme for the methods used in identifying beneficiaries.

Officially, there are around 60,000 associations in Algeria. Can you imagine if we advertised the programme with a call for proposals? We'd receive thousands of applications: it would take months to examine them all. So we have decided to follow a different path: partly basing our judgement on our knowledge of the associative movement and partly through contacts with the authorities we have established a preliminary group of associations that will be asked to submit projects' proposals. That's why we selected only 40 associations, so that we know who we're dealing with. And after all this is the group of associations that is really active: one in a thousand

⁴²³ Gregory Slotta, 1st Counsellor, US Embassy, Algiers, 29 January 2002

⁴²⁴ 'La Cooperation vue par des députés aux origines algériennes', *El Watan*, 15 June 2000.

⁴²⁵ Qsur is the plural of qsar, meaning a village consisting generally of attached houses, often sharing collective barn and other structures (mosque, bath, oven, shops), typical of the oasis areas of North Africa.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Maryam Bellala, President, SOS Femme en Détresse, Algiers, 7 October 2002

makes it, the others remain at the level of ideas in head of their president, until even they forget about them.⁴²⁷

Beside the need to focus on the good core of the burgeoning associative sector, the scant publicity given to associational life-support projects is also conducive to other aims. As a UN official put it:

it's a story well known since Machiavelli. The Prince places men of limited capacity abroad, to gather information. As they need to do their job, these small men rely on whatever opportunity comes up. In Algeria it's the same thing. The interest around the associative movement is to be understood in the logic of geopolitical, financial and geostrategic positioning of both individuals and governments.⁴²⁸

As typified by Dr. Khiati's relationship with the foreign community (also described in chapter 6), donors find in associative representatives the purveyors of important and otherwise inaccessible information and contacts. This was particularly true during the 1990s, when the Algerian government was affected by a 'siege' syndrome, and the foreign community was cautious about appearing to be establishing too close a relationship with an undemocratic regime backed by a military junta. In this sense, associative representatives play a similar function to that performed by administrative officials in the post-colonial period in connecting the capital to the countryside [Etienne, 1977b]. They broker information between the government and the foreign community. Those associations that cannot perform this function are often cut out from access to foreign funds:

It's true that Bengana⁴²⁹ and Khiati get all the contracts. They have people who know how to write a project working for them, and yes, they belong to the same side of the FLN...what are we supposed to do...we have to deal with the government.⁴³⁰

The fact that the associative sphere finds in the international community alternative sources of financing is sometimes believed to be conducive to its independence from the government [Bennefissa, 2004:10]. Despite donors' stated aims (see above the goals of the EU evaluation mission), in Algeria this does not seem to be the case: although reticently, donors admit their failure to favour 'independence' over 'connections'. In addition to the

⁴²⁷ Arab Izarouken, Head of Programme, Programme Management Unit, Oran, 16 September 2001

⁴²⁸ Interview with Laila Tadj, UNDP Programme Coordinator, Algiers, 17 January 2002

⁴²⁹ Head of Conseil National d'Entraide pour la Jeunesse et l'Enfance (CNEJE), an Algiers-based association with representative status at the UN.

⁴³⁰ Interview with M. Kies, EU Delegation Staff, Algiers, 29 January 2002.

guarded attitude of the authorities, donors' behaviour stems from the relationships they entertain with each other:

No, there is no coordination amongst [other] donors. Sure we meet regularly, but I wouldn't talk of coordination, or of coherence. There's an ambiguity, perhaps, between coordination and competition. Some think that we [the EU Commission] consider civil society under our sphere of influence. Obviously it's not true. But [Ambassador] Guerrato is a realist: he knows that it is either us or the others, that there's an issue of influence over this sector. But this ambiguity exists, particularly between the US and the Commission. The US doesn't share information, and the Commission certainly does not take the initiative to do so. They have a lot to gain in terms of image: what do we have to gain?⁴³¹

Besides the need to 'establish' contacts, donors' ambiguous competition in supporting the associative sphere also ends up making a statement concerning the political choices the authorities make. According to Craig and Porter, "the need to build legitimacy [...] has seen a new urgency on the part of [donors] in the engagement of civil society groups, which offer a surrogate political participation, and tend if excluded to be primary agents of dissent" [2003:62]. The launch of the 'European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights'⁴³² in Algeria provides an example:

This a novelty for Algeria, the Middle East, and the [EU] Commission too. Chris Patten qualified it as "subversive assistance". It certainly involves risks. The Commission doesn't want it to be seen as an award of 'good conduct' for the authorities, nor a sanctioning mechanism. In the first long list there were two proposals which dealt with the victims of terrorism. In the end the projects selected are not too politically sensitive: they mostly deal with gender, the handicapped, and children. The only exception is a project by an association that deals with human rights.⁴³³ And here too we had to be careful: their project proposal was way too critical [of the authorities]. It would have not gone down well with [Ambassador] Guerrato and, certainly not with the authorities. So we asked [the association] to make some amendments.⁴³⁴

What makes the operation of vetting project proposals and striking a balance between 'well connected', 'neutral' and 'dissenting' associations difficult is that its results are

⁴³¹ Interview with Gregory Kehailia, Algiers' EU Delegation Staff, Algiers, 1 December 2004

⁴³² http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/index_en.htm

⁴³³ The association is the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LAADH) Information provided by Redouane Boudjema, LADDH Treasurer, Private Communication Algiers, December 2004.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Gregory Kehailia, Algiers' EU Delegation Staff, Algiers, 1 December 2004

interpreted by the authorities as a signal of donors' attitudes. Therefore, when certain issues are particularly sensitive, donors take an even more drastic approach, such as avoiding any type of intervention. In choosing to favour 'democratic demand' (civil society support) over 'supply' (parliament, elections, the rule of law), the donor community has entirely neglected the trade union movement. During the first years of the crisis, the number of strikes in Algeria followed a decreasing curve: from 2290 in 1989 to 441 in 1996, a tendency accompanied by a decrease in the number of economic sectors concerned by strikes. The decrease in violence has reversed this trend. But the violence is not the only fact explaining the tame rate of industrial strikes. Part of the reason lies in the way the organisation of the trade unions sector is orchestrated by the regime.

The 1989 constitution introduced the right to strike and to form independent unions. These principles were further articulated in the law 90-14 of June 1990 as well as the law of 21 December 1991, (which recognise the right of salaried workers in the private and public sectors to constitute themselves into autonomous unions distinct from political parties) and then reaffirmed in the 1996 constitution. Although the Algerian authorities have reaffirmed the implementation of these rights in various international forums,⁴³⁵ the reality in the country is different. Following the promulgation of these laws, a number of autonomous trade unions were created. Their activities remained almost inexistent during the worst years of the violence, only to explode with the relaxation of the security situation. Most of these unions, and particularly those representing public sector workers, started a vocal opposition to the economic liberalisation policies implemented since the mid-1990s, which have led to a rapid erosion of salaries and decline in living standards as well as increasing prospects of public sector layoffs.

Over the years, organisations such as the Autonomous National Union of Public Administration Staff (SNAPAP), the National Union of Higher Education (*Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur*, SNES) and the Autonomous Union of Education and Training Workers (*Syndicat Autonome des Travailleurs de l'Education et de la Formation*, SATEF) have grown to boast hundreds of thousands of members which engage, almost on a weekly basis, in vocal demonstrations. As a result, without formally suppressing independent unions' rights, the authorities have engaged in an unremitting

⁴³⁵ In a report on the state of civil liberties to the UN Human Rights Committee related to the international pact on civil and political rights, the Algerian authorities stated that "if collective negotiations fail, the utilisation of strike is a legal right, which if exercised in the framework of the law, benefits from constitutional protection. The utilisation of this right is ongoing and applied to all sectors of activity, including the administration, the public sector and other state structures". *Deuxièmes rapports périodiques que les Etats parties devaient présenter en 1995: Algeria*. 18 May 1998. CCPR/C/101/Add.1

campaign to muzzle them. Besides refusing to include the unions in the tripartite dialogue between the government, business and labour, which remains exclusively represented by the UGTA since the days of the single party, this campaign has ranged from forbidding meetings and demonstrations, to preventing the creation of new trade unions and their structuring in confederations, including practices such as blackmailing and police harassment of activists.⁴³⁶

The rationale for democracy promotion policies has been linked by some authors to donors' perception that social turmoil in authoritarian states undermined their interests, whilst low-intensity democracy could potentially provide a more legitimate and thus more effective means of disciplining labour [Robinson, 1996; Youngs, 2005:14]. If we consider the choices made by donors in their relationship to the country's associative sphere, this argument could well apply to Algeria. Donors including Germany, the World Bank and the United Nations Agency for Industrial Development all run programmes to strengthen the plethora of business associations which are formally active in the country, devising ways to make them work together, and organising meetings with their western counterparts. Yet, despite the independent unions' calls to the international community concerning the infringement of their rights, no donor has ever taken up the issue of their place in Algeria's democratisation process. The repeated appeals made by several of them to the International Labour Organisation have been consistently ignored for years.⁴³⁷ The ILO representative in Algiers put things this way:

Quite straightforwardly, the only union we work with is the UGTA. For us it's the only representative union. We tend to focus more on business associations. And in the end it's not up to us, it's [the ILO Headquarters in] Geneva that decides.⁴³⁸

Adding some depth to this statement, a representative of a different international organisation said:

The truth is that nobody wants to raise the issue [of the unions] here. We all have to play by the rules. Saying that they follow the inputs from Geneva is only half of the story. Who's in charge of the dossier in Geneva? An Algerian of course. And who put it

⁴³⁶ See the report by the International Federation of Human Rights 'Algérie. Mission d'enquête sur les libertés syndicales' Mission Internationale d'Enquête n.349 December 2002.

⁴³⁷ Only in 2005, the ILO has begun analysing the appeals made by the SNAPAP against the Algerian government, ruling in favour of the former. See ILO rulings: Case No(s). 2153, Reports No. 327,329, 333 and 336 (Algeria): Complaint against the Algerian Government filed by the Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique (SNAPAP). 12 November 2005.

⁴³⁸ Interview with M. Reda, ILO Programme Officer, Algiers, 24 November 2004

there? The Algerian government of course. The orders don't come from Geneva, but from Algiers.⁴³⁹

In the enterprise of democracy promotion through civil society support, Algeria's international partners have decided not to take a position with regard to the government's view of which sectors of the associative movement are worthy of encouragement, neglect or repression. As it is often the case, not taking a position in the end amounts to taking one.

Conclusions

In an international system where democracy is an unquestioned value, authoritarianism has external costs. These accrue not only to increasingly isolated authoritarian governments, but also to uncomfortable democratic governments that for economic, geopolitical and strategic considerations need to keep engaging with authoritarian governments irrespective of their democratic record, thus facing the malaise of their public opinions at home. This chapter has tried to show how donors' undertaking of democracy promotion through civil society support can help alleviate some of these costs. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the international community has found in Algeria's associative sector ways to understand, portray and relate to a country ravaged by relentless violence and spiralling back into a military autocracy. This image was constructed through media, academic and donors' portrayals converging in a discourse which equated civil society organisations to 'social antibodies' to the violence and the best hope for Algeria's democratic future. This discourse was in turn reinforced by those elements in Algerian society and the Algerian state most interested in reaching out to the international arena to provide their version of the events, concerning the country's democratic progress, the dynamics of the conflict and the potential threat to the West.

As Algeria's violence progressively exited Western TV screens, and newspapers columns forgot about the doubts concerning the role of the military in the violence, the associative sphere emerged as one of donors' privileged channel for conducting official relations with Algeria. From an opportunity for foreign donors to stimulate political change in the country, the associative sector emerged as a sphere where resources, information and trust could be exchanged, albeit indirectly, between donors and government. Cloaked in

⁴³⁹ Interview with Leila Tadj, UNDP Programme Officer, Algiers, 27 December 2004

donors' goals of promoting democratisation from the bottom up, this often translated into an understanding and consolidation of the choices coming from the top.

Instead of limiting state sovereignty, the country's associative sphere contributed to breaking the isolation of the Algerian regime, and bringing it back as a full member of the international community. In this sense, far from being an accessory element of interpretation, the attention paid by the international community to the development of Algeria's associations lies at the core of the prime hypothesis put forward by this book concerning the role played by the associative sphere in the country's political development. Domestically, the associative sector was central to the survival of the Algerian state through a progressive 'pluralisation without democratisation' of its political system. Abroad, Algeria's partners consolidated this process by providing it with an international façade.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

I believe I have demonstrated the risks of crediting Algeria's associational life with a boundless democratising potential, and the dangers of limiting the analysis of its political impact to the issue of democratic change. Yet, recognising that the emergence of the associative sphere has so far failed to significantly contribute to the country's democratisation does not necessarily equate to dismissing it as dysfunctional. In exposing the place taken by the associative sphere in the establishment of Algeria's liberalised autocracy, I have tried to frame the functions it performs as part of a broader Hobbesian project, consisting of an articulated attempt by a weak state to reacquire legitimacy and reinforce its capacity to expect voluntary compliance to its rule, without resorting to coercion. These functions include the articulation of consent and the insulation from dissent; the preservation of a corporatist order based on rent distribution and patron-client networks; the co-optation of loyalty from core support groups located especially in and around the public sector; the management of a form of political pluralism which limits the role of parties and its institutional expression – the legislature; and the restoration of the country's international position through repeated appeals coming from within and outside Algeria to the regime's civic legitimacy.

The perspective followed has placed this work in the path of that contemporary strand of empirically grounded research that, after scores of mainly theoretically based studies, which for nearly two decades have attributed democratising virtues to the multiplication of non governmental organisations in the South, is today casting a new light on their true impact on political development. Besides adding some further considerations to my main findings, this last section lays out some suggestions for taking this perspective forward through future research avenues, within and beyond the realm of Algerian studies.

Institutional cloaking versus political change

One of the suggestions put forward by this study is that, rather than a transformation of the main institutional arrangements lying at the heart of the state-society relationship, Algeria's burgeoning associative sector has contributed to maintaining some of these arrangements whilst veiling them under brand new clothes. This is clear if one considers how the associative sphere - in becoming a central element of the institutionalisation of Algeria's liberalised autocracy - has replicated some of the functions played by the FLN during the single party times, such as popular mobilisation, the conduct of external relations [Roberts, 1996] and the cooptation of individuals and groups through a patronage-based system. In this sense,

although the associative sphere has helped to keep Algeria's weak state afloat, it has not allowed for the transformation of its fundamentals, nor has it brought a lasting contribution to the legitimacy crisis affecting it.

In this light, some of the issues that future research on associations' role in Algeria's liberalised autocracy will need to address include the investigation of a) the extent to which the associative sphere will keep performing the functions examined above in the long term; and b) whether – and how - the associative sphere can turn from being mainly an element of institutional conservation into a driver of political change - where for political change I intend the substantial strengthening of the Algerian state through a process of institutional renewal, rather than through makeshift arrangements that do not address the main causes of state weakness.

The answer to both questions lies in the degree to which actors at state level will continue to show an interest in the associative field, and their ability to keep the latter on a tight leash. Algeria's associational life as we know it was born out of an ostensibly democratising reform project started by a regime struggling with a gaping legitimacy deficit. Rather than true democratisation, such a project aimed at altering the institutional apparel of the single party-state by shedding the first part of its equation, the party of the FLN, in order to reaffirm the centrality of the presidency and the executive. As we have seen, nearly 20 years down the line, the associative sphere has clearly succeeded in this task. In line with Chadli's reformers original design, so far, rather than "keeping the state in check", the rise of associational life has seconded the centralisation of power in the executive branch and the presidentialisation of the Algerian political system. The issue here is to what extent Algeria's future political developments will allow the associative sphere to maintain this role.

Shifts in the balance of power between army, presidency and parliament will be a deciding factor. President Bouteflika's success in bringing about his national reconciliation initiatives has allowed him to score important points in the struggle between the presidency and the army that has long shaped Algerian politics. In his efforts to push the army to retreat from the political sphere, Bouteflika has repeatedly chosen to present himself to the electorate as a candidate with no particular partisan attachment - hence his reliance on the associative field as electoral and consensus building machine. This might change if the supremacy of the presidency over the army in civilian affairs is confirmed beyond Bouteflika's second mandate. The country's progressive emancipation from the army's interference in politics is a precondition for a more effective role of political parties. If this were to happen, it would be reasonable to expect more limited interest in direct and overt involvement in electoral politics

by the associative sphere than that required so far by the big political players. Far from leading to a depoliticisation of the associative field, this could open the way to the type of mutually supportive and yet separate role characterising the relationship between parties and associations in liberal democracies. This will however necessitate important changes in the regulatory framework. The law on freedom of association limits party-associations' links and the maintenance of the emergency law in force since 1992 endows the administration with extraordinary discretionary powers to control and limit associations' activities.

In addition to state actors' shifting incentives in controlling the associative sphere, its future will depend on the regard that the population will have for it. The reality of political development shows that liberal theory's unquestioned assumption about the legitimacy of 'civil society' is misleading. The Algerian case demonstrates that popular support for associational life is intimately linked to how well it performs its functions, but not necessarily in a direct way. Indeed, in the political economy of Algeria's liberalised autocracy, the associations that better perform the role assigned to them by the state are often the ones that end up with their credibility shattered in the eyes of Algerians.

Again, it can be useful to compare the associative sphere with the fate of the FLN before political liberalisation. At the end of the 1980s, while interpreting the fresh formation of associations as the emergence of an Algerian civil society, Bourenane [1989:111] noted that the crisis of the FLN was due to widespread perceptions that it was "nothing but a tool in the hands of a privileged minority using it as a means to progress through the hierarchy, to take up certain positions of power and/or have access to certain rare goods, in order to ensure a bargaining power or a way of quick self-enrichment by gaining access to a building lot, a property, a small business". Today these same words could easily be applied to the associative sphere itself. They echo the daily attacks waged from realms as varied as the press, academia and the private sector on the way associations have become a source of enrichment for certain individuals and groups.

The progressive transformation of associations into conduits for the distribution of the hydrocarbon rent provides an example of how the foundations of Algeria's liberalised autocracy rest on shaky ground. Far from changing the institutional structure of the state, the associative sphere has erected an institutional scaffolding that helps maintain previous arrangements and adapt them to new conditions, but always in a precarious equilibrium. As the expression of an imported juridical and political concept, 'associations' have grafted themselves - in Bertrand Badie's sense [2000]- onto Algeria's system of rent distribution actually widening its reach, despite the fact that during most of the period when associational

life developed the oil and gas rent was actually stagnating. The extent to which the associative sphere will be able to keep performing this function will depend not so much on the fluctuations in the availability of the hydrocarbon rent itself, but on the sanctions inflicted by those excluded from the material benefits it dispenses.

The better associations perform their role in the eyes of the state, the more they become subject to criticism from those outside the associative sphere. This same dynamic stems not only from the patronage liaisons pervading the associative sphere, but also from the other functions performed by associations, such as their electoral activism. Associations' overt involvement in politics subjects them to ordinary Algerians' aversion for 'everything political' and taints them with the same discredit affecting political parties. The same applies when the associative sphere is used to insulate the state from its service delivery shortcomings, with government officials passing the buck of state failure to the 'inexistent, inefficient associative movement'. Here one can see how the associative sphere's actual rationale intrinsically engenders its own demise. If the role of the associations keeps on generating the type and amount of discontent it has in the past, its value for the state will decay, or rather it will be inverted. Actors within the presidency and the executive could decide to move from using associations as a legitimacy tool to joining the bandwagon of popular discontent, as happened in the 1980s with the smear campaign launched by the Chadli presidency against the FLN. As we have seen, this process has already started, nurtured by sectors of the government itself, first and foremost the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁴⁰ If this were to happen, the fate and future role of the associative sphere will be left in the hands of those individuals and groups mainly responsible for creating associations, to which I now turn.

Sheltered grassroots, Faustian pacts?

One other question for future research concerns possible changes in the social bases of associational life and more importantly in these groups' stance vis-à-vis the state. In attempting to make sense of the multiplication of associations, I have tried to avoid positing their relationship to the state purely according to a top-down instrumentalist perspective, whereby the associative sphere essentially remains a tool of state control. In revealing the conflictual nature of associational life, I have shown that associations serve not only the state's survival strategies, but also those of individuals. I have highlighted the fact that, as

⁴⁴⁰ See Zahir M: 'Enquete sure les finances des Associations : Zerhouni demande des comptes' *L'Expression*, 23 June 2005

associations' internal politics yield winners and losers, at the aggregate level certain groups and professional categories – mainly revolving around the public sector – are outnumbering other social groups, both in providing the membership to, and acquiring the benefits of, associational life. This has led me to suggest that associational life constitutes a sphere where a political settlement is concluded between the state and members of the state middle class, in which side payments accrue to the latter as a form of compensation for its progressive decline in an era of economic reform.

In this sense, the associative sphere has been a realm where a tacit political pact has been struck that helps the state retain a form of loyalty and discourage collective defection within its main support group: a pact therefore not intended to lead to a transition to democracy in the sense of O'Donnell and Schmitter [1986] but to a reinstating of the configuration preceding political reforms. Rather than a transition pact, associational life provides the bases for a restoration pact. Whether this equation can be reversed – whether the associative sphere will end up contributing to democratic change - depends on the set of opportunities and constraints shaping the outlook of the groups that today and tomorrow will populate the associative realm. In at least one important way, this question bears more significance fifteen years after those noticing the emergence of Algeria's 'civil society' first asked it.

The mistake made by the literature on Algeria's associational life in evoking Tocquevillian notions of civil society is that these respond to post-Hobbesian concerns: they apply when security is guaranteed and a national community is established. But the actual development of Algeria's associative sphere unfolded as the country was breaking apart. It had, therefore, security concerns at its core - not only the material security of the disgraced public sector strata examined above, but also, and more importantly, the ideological and physical security of those groups menaced by the rise of the Islamist populism.

This is why, if we exclude the sector of religious associations, it would be wrong to conceive the violence in the 1990s simply as a hindrance to the development of associational life. The violence did in fact provide a rationale for the activity of associations. As I have shown, at different stages of the battle against Islamism, various sections of the associative movement joined forces with the state. This has been part of a broader collusive alliance between the authorities and those very groups that before the ascent of the Islamist threat constituted a thorn in the state's side [Garon, 1998]. If at the end of the 1980s the birth of freedom of association reflected the central generational conflict between representatives of the new and old orders, the multiplication of associations through a decade of violence provided one of the

fields where this conflict was, if not solved, at least tamed, thanks to a temporary truce aimed at defeating the Islamist threat.

It is in this sense that it is worth questioning the commonsensical view that the conflict has deterred associations' independence from the state. The eruption of political violence enormously increased the weight of those sectors of the associative movement capable of influencing the perceptions conveyed into -and coming from - the international arena. The relationship between the state and the grassroots in this sense can be seen as reflecting a broader bargaining game between the army and secularist/bourgeois/ public sector groups – and particularly their internationally connected vanguards. This can be explained through different perceptions of threat. For the associational field the threat came from the guerrillas in the national periphery, while for the state it came from the official sanctioning of the international community. The former needed the latter to obtain protection from a pre-Hobbesian threat. The latter needed the former to recover international legitimacy. In the violence, a cosy affair was established.

In this light, can we say that Algerian civil society has struck a Faustian pact with the army, in which both profited from the conflict? In the analysis above I have tried to avoid attributing rational intentions to the actors involved. Conspiracy theories occasionally bear some validity, but Algeria is so awash with them that another one would probably not be very relevant [Silverman, 2000]. Rather than exposing a cynical liaison devised by actors “too close for comfort” [Edwards and Hulme, 1997] I have tried to highlight a set of opportunities and constraints which has entangled segments of the state and segments of associational life. The violence ignited a bargaining game between the state and these groups. Shelter from the Islamist threat on the one hand, and supporting legitimacy on the other, have been the commodities bartered in this trade.

This brings us back to our initial question: will the groups responsible for the ascent of Algeria's associative field during the 1990s remain prominent in its future development? If the conflict has been a major source of the shaping and reproduction of the state – associations relationship, how will this relationship evolve once the violence has been eradicated? The answer lies in the battle for values that Algeria will have to go through in the years to come. Such a battle will inevitably pervade the associative field. Predicting a decline in the political weight of the associative movement,⁴⁴¹ at a time when the creation of religious associations is again on the rise following the multiplication of private mosque-building initiatives, in an

⁴⁴¹ A. Benchabane : ‘L’Algérie associative en net déclin : le raisons d’une faillite programmée’, *El Watan*, 14 January 2006.

extraordinary repetition of the dynamic which was unfolding in the 1980s,⁴⁴² seems if not implausible, at least premature.

Transformational diplomacy

One of the main omissions of this study has been the acknowledgment of the positive contribution that a variety of associations provide to Algeria's social, political and economic landscape. It is not my intention to seek the opportunity here for a belated and fleeting attempt to correct this shortcoming. Since the beginning my aim has been to assess the impact that the associative field, as a realm of resources, practices and discourse, has had on the country's political development. It is in this light that I have tried to show that, even when motivated by the best of intentions, associations cannot escape the structural constraints and the incentive system that shape their relationship with the state, and push them to perform their "legitimacy maintenance" functions.

This bears some significance for donors supporting civil society organisations, in Algeria and elsewhere. Although in recent years the academic euphoria around civil society has started to wane, this is far from being the case in donors' quarters, where civil society support is increasingly intertwined with the rising attention that the foreign policy and donor community is giving to failing states. In describing the consequences of the State Department's recent adoption of 'transformational diplomacy' for the US development strategy, Andrew Natsios - USAID's former administrator - stated "I can think of no text greater than de Tocqueville's to inform us of the social foundations of healthy democracies and how local government and associational life are essential to democratic development" [2006: 138].

The Algerian case has policy implications for donors' unbound faith in the benefits of operating through associative actors. It shows that donors' efforts could benefit from ceasing to ascribe an unquestioned democratising role to the associative sphere. This applies even when the associative actors that donor support show clear democratic credentials, and degrees of autonomy and independence from the state: associations can function as drivers of conservation as much as drivers of change - depending on the environment in which they operate, and the actual aims of those supporting them, including the state, and the donors

⁴⁴² Adlene Meddi : ' Mosquées, salles de prière, bien wakfs: les dinars de la foi', *El Watan*, 16 March 2006.

themselves. In contexts where – as in Algeria - the international community's calls for democratisation are ultimately watered down by concerns about political stability, donors should also be wary of implementing civil society support activities carrying supposedly change oriented goals, which instead soon subject the donor community itself to the collusive dynamics of the state-associations. This is not only because in environments where the associative sphere is subject to wide popular discredit, engaging in civil society support activities can turn out to be a bad PR move for the donors. It is also because, in contexts where associational life is (accused of being) primarily driven by the quest for material benefits, donor support to associations – often intended to bring associations together - ends up being an element making for further attrition and division within the associative field, and an additional dent in the reputation of the associative sphere in the eyes of domestic public opinion.

Far from being intended as a warning against donors' active role in supporting Algerian associations in the future, these points are a simple call for a less dogmatic and ambiguous stance. Algeria's associative sphere is in its initial phases of development, but has already gone through a lot. It has played an important role in taking the country through a decade of violent conflict and political turmoil, coming out of it in ragged shape, particularly in terms of its standing in the eyes of ordinary Algerians.

At the time these words are put to paper, the incentives for a different role of the associative sphere are still to take shape. Yet, as I tried to point out in this last section, this does not mean that in the future the functions played by the associative sphere will not change. For change to happen, the ruptures driving the development of liberalised autocracy in the country will need to heal: in one way or another, the future of Algeria's associational life will remain linked to the quest for the legitimacy of the Algerian state.

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Annex A. List of persons interviewed⁴⁴³

1. Aatatfa, Maamar, advisor to the Minister of Social Action and National solidarity, former director of the Associative Movement inside MASSN, Founder and Member of the Board of Directors of Touiza
2. Abidat, Abdelkrim President National Confederation for the Consultation of the Associative Movement
3. Addad, Hakim, President Rassemblement Action Jeunesse (RAJ)
4. Aït Larbi, Arezky, Journalist, Figaro
5. Aït Zaï, Nadia, lawyer, Secretary general of the Aït Menguellet Association
6. Al Ghani, Kolli, IT professional, ACB member
7. Ali F., Musician, Member of SOS Bab El Oued
8. Alilat, Sadek, Direct of Algerian Bank for Development
9. Amarni, Kamel, National Union of Journalists
10. Amin, Rotaract Member
11. Amouri, Zohra, Programme Leader Friedrich Ebert Foundation, form CISP employee
12. Angeloni, Lorenzo, First Counsellor, Italian Embassy, 1998-2001
13. Askli, Gasmî, School Inspector
14. Belkacem, President of SOS Culture Bab El Oued, Algiers
15. Bellala, Maryam, Secretary General of SOS Femmes en Détresse
16. Bellala, Zoubir, vice President of Association for the Safeguard of the Mzab valley
17. Bellalou, Zoubir, Association pour l'Hygiène, la Santé et la protection de l'environnement
18. Ben Lakhdar, Aïssa President Al – Irhad Al-Islah
19. Benbraham, Nourddine, RND member and MP, President of the Algerian Muslim Scouts,
20. Bencherif, Osman, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Algeria to the United States, January 1995-June 1996
21. Bengana, Belgacem, President of Conseil National d'Entraide pour la Jeunesse et l'Enfance (CNEJE)
22. Boillon, Boris – 2nd Counsellor, French Embassy
23. Boualem, Mrakesh, President of Algerian Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Confederation Algérienne du Patronat – CAP)
24. Boudiaf, M. , Wali of Ghardaïa,
25. Boudjemaa, Mouna, Member of the Boucebcî Foundation
26. Boudjemaa, Redouane, Former Journalist El Youm, LADDH Treasurer
27. Bouroubi, Chemseddine, President of the Islamic Charity Association
28. Brahimi, Amira, commercial agent for Pfizer pharmaceuticals and Rotaract member
29. Brahimi, Dr Hamid, President of Rotary Club Alger La Blanche
30. Chawki, Ourida, President Tharwa Fatma'n'Soumer
31. Chellal, Mr, Secretary General of *Ahd '54*
32. Chenine, Slimane, former member of *Jam'iyat al-Irshad wa 'l-Islah*, Head of Communication MSP
33. Chevalier, Eveline, CISP Project Officer
34. Christian P. Freelance Journalist
35. De Varennes, Chantal, First Counsellor at the Canadian Embassy and Canadian Consul
36. Derras, Omar, Sociologist
37. Djabi, Nacer, University Professor
38. Djaffar, Nouara, MP, RND member, President of Women's Rights Association
39. Djamila S. Assistant to Yazid Saïdi MASSN Director of Communication, Algiers 24 January 2002
40. Djelfaoui, Abderahmane, Writer
41. Djerbal, Dajo, historian
42. Ebert, Mr, SME Project Leader, German Development Cooperation (GTZ)
43. El Bey, Abderrahmane, Association Clairvoyance
44. Fadli, Yacine, CAP Treasurer and Head of Communication
45. Gacemi, Baya, Freelance journalist
46. Giansanti, Luca, First Counsellor, Italian Embassy
47. Gonzalez, Denis, Caritas, Algiers
48. Guerrato, Lucio, Head of EU Delegation to Algeria

⁴⁴³ The list omits individuals who accepted to be interviewed under anonymity requirements

49. Hamiani, Reda, FORUM member, businessman, former minister of SMEs
50. Hamitouche, Rabah, Formateur Associatif
51. Harhad, Ouardia, former secretary-general of RACHDA, Rassemblement Algerien contre la Hogra et pour la Démocratie
52. Harhad, Ouardia, President of the Association Indépendante pour le Triomphe des Droits des Femmes AITDF
53. Harraz, Mehadj, UNIDO Staff, Algiers Office
54. I.K., Journalist
55. Izarouken, Arab, Head of European Commission Project Management Unit, and former member of Family Planning Association
56. Kabeili, Fatima, UN Information Coordinator
57. Kehailia, Gregory, Algiers' EU Delegation Staff
58. Khatal, Mr, GTZ Consultant
59. Khelladi, Insaf, International Finance Corporation, Algiers Office
60. Khiati, Mohammed., President, FOREM
61. KIES, M., EU MEDA Programme team leader
62. Kouti, Zoubida, President Association Petit Lecteur
63. Larbaoui, Journalist at *Liberté*
64. Lardjane, Omar, Association AAddress
65. Malaoui, Rachid, SNAPAP president
66. Mecheri, Selim, SNAPAP Secretary General
67. Meghenine, Nacer, Secretary General (and later President) SOS Culture Bab El Oued
68. Mekhzani, Nabil acting Director, Maison des Associon of Bologhine
69. Menafra, Arcangelo, Head of Handicap International, Algiers Operation
70. Merabet, Nawal , World Bank Staff, Algiers Office
71. Messaoudi, Khalida, President of *Rassemblement Algérien Contre la Hogra et la Trahison* (Algerian Rally Against Contempt and Treason – RACHDA) and Minister of Communication
72. Mohamed B.
73. Mouffouk, Omar, Secretary General, Imedyazen
74. Mouffouk, Rania, Journalist
75. Mouloud, Moha 'Géomètre Expert, Tizi Ouzou
76. Mourad M. Member, RAJ
77. Nasim B. RAJ Member
78. Ouathek, B. , Khalifa Airways Steward
79. Oubagha, Hamid, President Imedyazen Association
80. Ouzegane, Fettouma, moudjahidate, former feminist activist.
81. Parlatore, Sandro, Head of UNIDO Algeria operations
82. Perricone, Giuseppe, Assistant to the UN Resident Representative
83. Ramazzotti, Marco, Head of Algerian operations of 'Comitato Italiano di Solidarietà tra i Popoli
84. Rebaine, Ali-Fawzi, President of *Ahd '54*
85. Reda, M. , ILO Programme Officer
86. Remaoune, Malika, President AFEPEC
87. Rovera, Donatella, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Amnesty International Secretariat
88. Sahli, Zoubir, vice-president Touiza, chargé du développement solidaire and advisor to Minister of Social Action and National Solidarity
89. Saïda, 34 ans, Former Secretary at Sports Federation
90. Saïdani, Malika, President of 'Actions Solidarité Femmes d'Alger'
91. Saïdi, Yazid – Head of Communication, Algerian Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity
92. Sator, Badia, President of Sidi M'hamed APC, RACHDA vice-president, member of Rassemblement for Culture and Democracy (RCD), General Practitioner
93. Sid Ali, photographer, Collectif d'Associations pour l'Aide à l'Emploi (CAPE) employee
94. Skalweit, Peter, Director, Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Algeria
95. Slotta, Gregory, 1st Counsellor, US Embassy in Algiers
96. Spinola, Vittorio, Entrepreneur, Member of the Italo – Algerian Entrepreneurs Association
97. Tadj, Leila, UNDP Programme Officer
98. Taïbi, M. CNEC Member
99. Takarlie, Annie, Cultural Cooperation, French Embassy in Algiers
100. Tariq S., Member, RAJ
101. Touafek, Head of the Direction for the Associative Movement, MSANS
102. Varotto, Riccardo, Italian Embassy's intern

103. Yazid, Islah Supporter

104. Zaïdi, Mr, Lawyer

105. Zervudacky, Mme Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGCID), French Ministry of
Foreign Affairs

106. Zitoune, Mlle, Minister of Interior and Local Government

Annex B. Associations registered at the Maison des Associations in Bologhine, with cases of homonymy

Name of the Association	Cases of Homonymy	
	Inside the Association's Bureau	Among normal members
Ass. pour la Continuité Culturelle	none	none
Ass. pour la Sauvegarde et Valorisation du Paysage	none	none
Ass. Solidarité', Espoir, Travail	2 nd vice president share name with president	n/a
Ass. Culturelle Mezghana	3 members have same name	n/a
Ass. Contre les Myopathies	4 members have the same name as the president	2 members with presidents' name
Ass. Ennour des Immunodéficients	n/a	n/a
Ass. Asthmatiques	none	n/a
Ass. Yacht Club d'Alger	none	none
Ass. Ouled el Houma	none	none
Ass. Culturelle et Sportive El Sahel	n/a	n/a
Ass. Alg. pour le Développement de la recherche en Sciences Sociales	none	none
Ass. des Handicapés Moteurs 'Ihsene'	none	3 members share family name
Ass. Trait d'Union (Section - Solidarité')	n/a	n/a
Ass. El Fedjr d'aide aux personnes atteinte de Cancer	n/a	n/a
Ass. Culturelle Patrimoine – Artisanat	none	none
Ass. Lakhdar pour l'union des amis et parents avec les inaptes mentaux	none	none
Ass. Marah	none	n/a
Ass. d'aide aux malades cardiaques	none	none
Ass. Ennadjat d'aide aux demunies et sans domicile fixe	n/a	n/a
Org. Nationale des Victimes du Terrorisme et des Ayant droits	n/a	n/a
Ass. Nour Es-Salam	none	none
Ass. pour le Développement de la Culture de l'Enfant	Vice president has same name as president	n/a
Ass. Nationale de la Continuité entre les Générations	none	none
Ass. Bahja	none	none
Ass. des Échecs de Bologhine	n/a	n/a
Ass. Espoir Alger Capitale	Sec.Gen. & Treasurer have same name as President	n/a
Ass. Culturelle et Artistique pour la Réintégration des Jeunes	Treasurer's same name as Presidt	4 members share name with Presdt
Ass. Culture et Loisirs	Sec. Gen. Has same name as Presidt	1 member shares name with Presdt
Ass. Nationale d'Echanges entre les Jeunes	none	n/a
Ass. Mezghana Musique Andalouse	Treasurer has same name as presdt	One share name with Presdt
Ass. Kinder Rayan	none	n/a
Ass. En Nour pour la Culture et l'Art	none	n/a
Ass. Artistique Cinéma – Lumière	none	none
Ass. El Amel Loisirs pour l'Enfance	none	none
Ass. Regards et Lumière	none	none
Ass. Algérienne des Hémophiles	Treasurer has same name as presdt	none
Ass. pour les Echanges entre Jeunes Handicapés Moteurs	none	none
Ass. pour la Promotion de la Capitale	none	2 members share name with Presdt
Ass. Jeunes et Nouvelles Générations	n/a	n/a
Ass. El Hayat pour les jeunes isolés et chômeurs	n/a	n/a
Ass. 'El Foussane'	Two bureau members have same name	3 other members share same name
Ass. de la Promotion de Travailleurs et Cadres de la Jeunesse	Treasurer Adjoint has same name as Presdt	none
Ass. 'Emraude' Écologie	none	2 members share name
Ass. de la Jeunesse pour la sauvegarde de l'enfance	n/a	1 member share name with Presdt
Ass. pour la promotion de la jeunesse et l'enfance 'Écho'	none	n/a
Ass. 'Nour' pour Handicapés moteurs	none	none
Ass. Scientifique d'Informatique et de Sciences Médicales	none	n/a
Ass. Espoir d'Avenir	none	n/a
Ass. National du Produit algérien	none	n/a
Ass. pour les Travaux Culturels et Artisanaux 'El Manar'	Sec.Gen. & Presdt share same name	n/a
Ass. Algérienne des Malades Cardiaques	none	none
Ass. Essalam Hammamet	none	none
Ass. 'Wafa' Culture et Loisirs	none	Two members share same name
Ass. 'Djazira'	none	n/a
Ass. Amicale de Solidarité Juvénile	n/a	n/a
Ass. des Familles Expulsées du Logement (A.F.E.L.)	Treas. Share name with Presdt	n/a
Ass. Solidarité' aux Handicapés	none	none
Ass. 'La Volonté'	n/a	n/a
Ass. 'El Amel'	none	n/a
Ass. Jeunesse Espoir et Solidarité'	none	none
Ass. 'La Vie'	n/a	n/a
Ass. 'Trait d'Union'	none	none
Ass. 'El Marifa'	none	none
Ass. 'EL Azam El Kheir' pour les Handicapés Moteurs	none	none
Ass. 'As-Safir'	none	n/a

Ass. Union Parents d'Élèves de la Wilaya d'Alger	n/a	n/a
Ass. Zahra	none	none
Ass. de Solidarité' aux Malades de SIDA	Sec. Gen. & Presdt share same name	none
Ass. 'El Kheria' Avenir de la Jeunesse	Sec. Gen. & Vice Presdt share same name	none
Ass. 'Bessma' pour les Malades d'Hémophilie	none	none
Club d'Alger des Arts Martiaux	Sec. Gen. & Presdt share same name	none
Ass. Nationale 'Espoir' pour la promotion de la cité	none	none

Notes: When the research was conducted, 150 associations were based at the MAB. Because of restrictions imposed by the management of the MAB it was only possible to review only half of the associations' dossiers. In numerous dossiers, members have not stated their family name, thus making the analysis of the presence of family members inside associations more problematic.