

benefactors that mostly come with strings attached, corporate contributions for philanthropic activities do not necessarily come with a purely altruistic agenda.

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Andrea Liverani, *Civil Society in Algeria: The Political Functions of Associational Life*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2008, xvi + 195 pp., references, index, £70.00

This book argues that associations in Algeria contribute to preserving the stability of the political system and its institutional arrangements, rather than challenge them.

The period from the mid-1980s to the army coup in 1992 is referred to as Algeria's "associative spring," and this is where the story starts in terms of how "the state" has engaged with the associative sphere: from repressive measures, co-optation, and creation of friendly groups, and using associational life as an opportunity to limit the political damage caused by economic reform (what the author calls "outsourcing failure") to utilizing associations for distributing rents (in the form of subsidies) and keeping patron-client networks alive at various levels. Liverani also demonstrates very skillfully how the legal framework was adjusted to fit each of these strategies.

The main contribution of the book therefore is that it takes us beyond the mainstream view that Algeria's emerging associational life represents "a striking example of associative success taking place in the most adverse circumstances" (p. 48). It convincingly argues that this view is based on misleading figures that do not reflect their true, very limited, scope of activity; and that this view ignores the associations' social bases rooted in "presidentialism" and "familism." The final chapter in particular presents a fascinating account of how the international community's focus on civil society allowed it to remain engaged with the country throughout the civil war. It also includes some very telling evidence and pertinent critique of European Union and other donor's support to "democracy promotion" in Algeria.

The book thus provides a very detailed account of state–society relations in Algeria. One chapter is devoted to analyzing the connections between associations and political parties: while they "allow individual party members an insurance against the risk of political life," the author points to the "the large-scale deployment of civic associations by the executive" during Bouteflika's 2004 re-election campaign (p. 126), an element which helped to further weaken political parties and the legislature, as well as the associations' credibility, but strengthened Algeria's "liberalized autocracy."

The main shortcoming of the book lies in its reification of the state; given that the author places much emphasis on the argument that associations in Algeria reflect the various factions within the state, it would have been helpful to map out these factions (the presidency, army, ruling party, Ministry of the Interior, civil service bureaucracy, etc., some of which are referred to as the *pouvoir*, it seems) in more

detail and spell out the linkages with the various associations. Related to this is the insistence that Algeria is a “weak state” (in the sense used by Joel Migdal) suffering from a legitimacy crisis—however, the evidence presented in this book does not necessarily lead to this conclusion; as Jean Leca points out in his Foreword citing Adam Przeworski, a state may still be legitimate as long as no other formula is “thinkable” by the majority of the population (p. xv).

A reader not familiar with Algerian history and politics may at times find it difficult to place the names of the many personalities in their proper context (the Chronology is of limited use here). Hence, this book would probably be most useful to students of Middle East and/or North African studies, although its critique of mainstream political science theories on the role of civil society and democratization makes it an engaging case study for scholars of politics more generally.

The book is based on Liverani’s doctoral research, which included eight months’ field research between July 2001 and February 2002 in various cities in Algeria, as well as some later research trips. The main strength of the predominantly qualitative approach lies in the often excellent direct quotations from interviews which really bring this book to life and also compensate for the sometimes convoluted and overly referenced style in the main text (one sentence on p. 79 contains three separate footnotes).

In sum, this book certainly achieves its stated aim, namely to fill the gap in terms of detailed knowledge about Algeria’s associational life. The concluding chapter also provides valuable directions for future research, as well as recommendations for donors ostensibly interested in strengthening civil society in the country.

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