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Do associations support authoritarian rule? Evidence from Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Whether associations help to democratize authoritarian rule or support those in power is a contested issue that so far lacks a cross-regional, comparative perspective. In this article we focus on five types of associations in three post-socialist countries, situated in different world regions, that are governed by authoritarian regimes. We first explore how infrastructural and discursive state power impact such associations and vice versa. We then discuss whether these associations support the development of citizens' collective and individual self-determination and autonomy and/or whether they negate such self-determination and autonomy – a state of affairs that is at the core of authoritarianism.


Our analysis addresses decision-making in associations and three specific policy areas. We find that most of the covered associations accept or do not openly reject state/ruling party interference in their internal decision-making processes. Moreover, in most of these associations the self-determination and autonomy of members are restricted, if not negated. With respect to HIV/AIDS policy, associations in Algeria and Vietnam toe the official line, and thus contribute, unlike their counterparts in Mozambique, to negating the self-determination and autonomy of affected people and other social minorities. Looking at enterprise promotion policy, we find that the co-optation of business and professionals' associations in all three countries effectively limits democratizing impulses. Finally, in all three countries many, but not all, of the interviewed associations support state-propagated norms concerning gender and gender relationships, thus contributing to limiting the self-determination and autonomy of women in the private sphere.

KEYWORDS

Civil society; state; Algeria; Mozambique; Vietnam

Introduction

Whether associations help to democratize authoritarian rule or support those in power is the subject of a long-standing debate that, however, so far lacks a cross-regional, comparative perspective. This article explores the roles of associations in three countries under authoritarian rule: Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam. Despite many differences, the

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three countries are fairly similar with respect to the type and development of authoritarian rule: All three countries are governed by authoritarian post-socialist regimes in which ruling parties which subscribe or have subscribed in ideological terms to socialism/communism have wielded power for several decades. Moreover, all three countries are former colonies and have experienced civil war. Finally, in the early or mid-1980s, the regimes in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam initiated partial economic liberalization while political structures remained authoritarian.

Can, under such conditions, associations contribute to democratisation? One school of thought would answer this question in the affirmative. Starting with Alexis de Tocqueville, associations have many times been portrayed as ‘schools of democracy’ – where citizens learn and practise democratic ideas and acquire civic virtues – or sometimes even as ‘bulwarks of democracy’ (Hyden, 2010, p. 253). However, such propositions have also encountered a fair deal of criticism. Contemporary critics include Edwards and Foley (1996) or Roth (2004), who point to the ‘dark sides’ of associations – for example, authoritarian intra-organizational decision-making processes. Others have turned Tocqueville’s ideas upside down and claim that associations are, or at least can be, supporters of autocracies. Giersdorf and Croissant (2011, p. 5), for example, argue that associations are ‘amphibian bodies’ which link society and the state. If autocratic regimes succeed in co-opting their leaders, associations are turned from challengers into defenders of existing regimes.

Divergent assessments of associations also exist in the scholarly literature on Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam. On the one hand, scholars such as Thayer (2009) claim that Vietnamese associations, especially local NGOs working as service providers, are ‘apolitical’ and closely connected to the state. With respect to Algeria, Liverani (2008) even portrays middle-class secular associations as supporters of the authoritarian regime. Associations in Mozambique have been characterized by Pereira as weak, overstretched, capital-centric, and ill-equipped to be a serious challenger to the ruling party (Pereira, 2011, p. 2). Where the state invites associations to provide expertise and to participate in policy-formulation processes, they are co-opted and captured through pseudo-democratic procedures (Fiege, 2014, p. 132).

On the other hand, Bui Hai Thiem (2013) sees Vietnamese associations as contesting state power and representing ideas and values in governance about democratic freedoms, transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation. He argues that associations ‘serve as fundamental platforms for the changing dynamics of governance in Vietnam’ (2013, p. 93). Concerning Algeria, Cavatorta (2015) detects no sustained impact of associations on the current political system. Nevertheless, he suggests that in the near future these organizations might ‘be the building blocks of a new type of activism that can emancipate itself from the subordination which it suffers at the moment’ (2015, p. 7). Finally, Fiege (2014) sees Mozambican associations as beginning to have an impact on the government in terms of opposing corruption, the sale of land, and the exploitation of resources. According to her (2014, p. 133), Mozambican associations also constitute an important voice against the re-militarisation of societal conflicts.

Cavatorta (2013) offers a way out of the controversy surrounding associationalism. He recommends shedding teleological thinking and normative presumptions, thus joining Berman who proposes that associations ‘should not be considered an undisputed good, but a politically neutral multiplier – neither inherently ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, but dependent on the wider political environment and the values of those who control it’ (Berman,

2003, p. 266). Cavatorta (2013, p. 3) also suggests conceptualizing the relationship between an authoritarian state and society as interdependent. Whereas political environments can influence associations, these organizations are also part of this environment, which they in turn influence (see also Froissart, 2014, pp. 219–220). Relational thinking thus helps to avoid tautologies when examining state–association relationships.

In the following we first present our theoretical framework and address some methodological issues. Thereafter we present empirical findings concerning the impact of specific forms of state power on associations in authoritarian Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam and vice versa. On the basis of these findings we discuss in the penultimate section whether associations help to maintain and/or weaken state power in these three authoritarian settings. The conclusion summarizes and discusses the main findings.

Theoretical Foundations and Methodological Issues

Since our research is explorative in nature, we base our investigation on a ‘focused theory frame’ (Rueschemeyer, 2010, p. 1), which brings together, in an eclectic but purposeful way, different strands of relevant theoretical literature. Fundamentally, we build on Critical-Theory conceptions of power, class domination and the idea of the capitalist state as ‘a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions’ (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 128) in which such societal forces and ideas can temporarily achieve hegemonic positions. Against this ideational background, our first central assumption says that associations and the state are not opposites. Rather, they form an overall whole, influence and are dependent on one another, and take part, in different forms and functions, in the societal exertion of power and in power structures. From a hegemony-theoretical point of view, the state is a relatively autonomous actor in relation to associations, and follows its own interests and strategies. At the same time, the state as a discursive construct needs the interpretation of associations and individuals, out of whose interpretations it comes into being (Sauer, 2001, p. 161).

At the centre of our focused theory frame are ideas about three closely interconnected forms of state power, which relate to and contribute to the exercise of authoritarian rule and its legitimization. In concrete terms, we combine ideas and findings from Mann’s analysis of two different forms of state power, ‘despotic power’ and ‘infrastructural power’, with Lukes’ understanding of two dimensions of state power, ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ (Lukes, 1974 [2005], p. 28), which lead to the idea of a third form of state power: ‘discursive power’.¹ This combination of different forms of state power was originally developed by Göbel (2011, pp. 183–187) who used it to analyse ‘authoritarian consolidation’. We have however refined Mann’s idea of ‘infrastructural state power’, which signifies the logistics of political control (Mann, 1984, p. 192), by differentiating between ‘control through the provision of welfare’ and ‘control through limited participation’.

With respect to the infrastructural form of power that we term ‘control through welfare provision’, we start from the assumption that state’s control of society necessitates not only means related to central administration, internal security, and similar domains, but also the use of social welfare measures. The implementation of such social policy services helps the state, through improvement of the social conditions of one or several groups of citizens, to mitigate social problems and to counter possible political conflicts.

Contributions of associations within the framework of state programmes in the public health sector, especially for inhabitants of urban problem areas (including socially marginalized groups living there), can make it possible to control such areas and to pacify demands of their inhabitants.

In our research on control through welfare provision we focus for empirical reasons on the fight against HIV/Aids. In the early 2000s measures against the spread of the disease became essential for the survival of a number of authoritarian regimes including Vietnam and Mozambique. The spread of such a pandemic is a challenge for authoritarian regimes in which ruling parties claim that only their rule guarantees the nation's independence, integrity, wellbeing and economic and societal progress. Thus, the HIV/Aids pandemic became a danger not only for those infected and not yet infected, but also for the rulers themselves (on the case of Vietnam, see Wischermann, 2011, pp. 400–405).

As regards control through limited participation, we assume that the state gives preference to certain societal groups and the organizations representing them – for example associations of business people and/or other segments of the so-called middle class – in order to gain more or better control over certain groups and individuals, allowing them to participate within fixed limits in processes of policy formation, decision-making, and implementation. Essentially, the state denies the participants any significant influence on fundamental decisions. With Selznick (1949) we call such processes and this method of the state's securing its power 'co-optation'.² In all three countries, we concentrate on the respective dominant form of informal co-optation and focus on economic policies, especially support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the possible co-optation of persons and associations representing them. Such individuals and organizations can be seen as potential detractors, thus for authoritarian regimes attempts to co-opt them are essential.

We understand 'discursive state power' as a means 'to make people want what the government wants them to want' (Göbel, 2011, p. 177). It helps to secure the active participation of the objects of power in their own self-restraint (Jessop, 2008, p. 147). Thus, we understand discursive power in the sense of Lukes as 'power *to*' and, more concretely, as the 'power employed by agents of the state through/on discourse' (Göbel, 2011, p. 188, FN 7). Here, power is exerted through controlling the societal discourse and shaping the understanding of societal or political issues, historical events, and so on. We focus in this regard on the influence of the state on norms which effect both gender relationships and the understanding of gender in general, as well as the involvement of associations in the construction and maintenance of such power dynamics and the concomitant narratives. We do so because, from the perspective of hegemony-related theoretical approaches, gender is 'a central component in the field of state hegemony, since state discourses produce hegemonic masculinity and gender hierarchy. (...) Conversely, the state develops out of gender relationships. State and gender are reciprocally constitutive discursive formations with respectively specific ways of interaction and institutionalization' (Sauer, 2001, pp. 166–167, our translation).

Our second central assumption, based on our fundamental understanding of power and the capitalist state, is that associations form part of the whole societal-political complex and of societal conflicts, all of which constitute the state. Associations are themselves the site of societal conflicts, are part of specific practices of state power exertion, and thus can also contribute to the maintenance of state power. But they can also change

these practices, insofar as their actions are not one-sidedly and mechanistically determined by the economic base; because states are ‘constantly contested projects’ and because ‘a state is *per se* characterized by compromise’ (Sauer, 2011, p. 134, our translation). Historically, associations have been flexible and autonomously capable of action. They have ‘no homogeneous goal’ and are ‘fundamentally ambivalent’ vis-à-vis existing systems of power (Hallmann, 2009, pp. 29, 31, our translation). We thus assume that associations are ‘poly-valent’ (Kößler, 1994): they can be bulwarks of democracy, supporters of autocracies, and even both at the same time. This assumption stems also from the fundamentals of relational sociology as conceived by theoreticians such as Marx, Poulantzas, and Jessop. Relations and interactions are important but they themselves do not explain the mutual impact of the state and associations. Putting Donati (2011) back on his feet, in our view, society does ‘have relations’ but it is not relation.

We use the term ‘associations’ because it has neither a ‘democratic’ nor any other political connotation. Using this term seems appropriate as our approach is fundamentally open to various outcomes – associations can be supporters of democracy and/or autocracies. We use the term ‘associations’ generically, referring to a wide array of societal organizations that include five types: (a) mass organizations (e.g., the Vietnam Women’s Union), (b) professionals’ organizations (e.g., the Conseil National de l’Enseignant du Supérieur, an association of higher education personnel in Algeria), (c) business organizations (e.g., the Confederação das Associações Económicas de Moçambique), (d) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment in Vietnam), and (e) faith-based organizations (e.g., the Conselho Cristão de Moçambique).

Our understanding of authoritarianism follows Stenner (2005) who argues that authoritarianism repudiates individual and collective self-determination and autonomy and strictly negates the supremacy of the individual over a group or a system. Authoritarianism consists of an ensemble of attitudes and ways of acting that link the uncompromising denial of difference and diversity with an unconditioned demand for homogeneity and uniformity. This in turn leads to coercive action towards and suppression of people who are ‘different’. Examples of authoritarianism can be found in organizational practice and in discourses. Authoritarianism involves

- a lack of tolerance of others and of views that diverge from one’s and the group’s own, as well as a strict rejection of pluralism;
- the rejection of difference and an insistence on sameness and the prioritization of the group over the individual (‘groupiness’);
- the personal coercion of and bias against people who are (ethnically, politically, morally) ‘different’ as well as political demands for authoritative constraints on their behaviour (i.e., forms of state coercion);
- structures and mechanisms that ensure the prioritization of the group over the individual as well as group interests over those of the individual (Stenner, 2005, pp. 14–20).

Collective and individual self-determination and autonomy are also at the core of our understanding of democracy. More specifically, autonomy is the fundamental democratic ideal of a deliberative understanding of democracy and ‘describes the essential meaning of democratic self-rule. [...] Autonomy means that individuals – both individually and

collectively – hold their interests with due consideration, and are able to provide reasons for holding them’ (Warren, 2001, p. 62). Accordingly, in the area of intra-organizational decision-making and the three policy fields that we focus on, we explore whether associations support the development of citizens’ collective and individual self-determination and autonomy and/or whether they stand for the negation of such self-determination and autonomy – a state of affairs that is at the core of authoritarianism. The democracy-promoting effects of associations and their activities include developmental effects (e.g., the development of general individual political skills and attitudes such as public speaking), public-sphere effects (e.g., the exertion of influence on public opinion in various ways), and institutional effects (e.g., the representation of interests or resistance to planned or taken decisions, see Warren, 2001, pp. 142–205).

In the empirical sections of this article we seek to answer the question of whether associations help to maintain and/or weaken the above described various forms of state power. A ‘weakening’ of the infrastructural or discursive power of the authoritarian state occurs when associations’ actions support the development of citizens’ individual and collective self-determination and autonomy. Such forms of state power are ‘maintained’ when associations’ actions negate and deny such self-determination and autonomy is denied and negated. In an operational sense, the ‘maintenance’ of infrastructural and discursive state power is assumed to take place if and when

- there is an unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian state-determined political structures and rules on the associations’ side;
- associations present policies which contribute to limiting and negating the collective and individual self-determination of citizens;
- associations relinquish political forms and contents that present alternatives to the dominant politics and policies of the state;
- associations support state discourses relating to gender norms that are suitable for decreasing the power, social status, and recognition of women.

The ‘weakening’ of infrastructural and discursive state power is assumed to take place if and when

- associations aim and/or help to set up state structures and rules which are bound to promote the autonomy and self-determination of citizens;
- associations themselves engage in practices to support the development of citizens’ self-determination and autonomy;
- associations formulate counter-positions and actively engage in the political and societal discourse surrounding gender norms in ways that are apt to increase the power, social status, and the recognition of women.

Methodological Issues

Research in all three countries took place in two stages. First, we explored the impact of the state’s infrastructural and discursive power on associations. Associations were selected using the typical case sampling method, and the research team conducted semi-structured

interviews with 20, 24, and 27 associations in Vietnam, Algeria, and Mozambique, respectively, between June and August 2014. Second, we analysed the impact of associations on these forms of state power. In this phase we focused on seven associations in Algeria and Mozambique and 10 in Vietnam. Interviews took place between February and April 2015. In both stages we interviewed the leading personnel of selected associations, e.g., the chairperson or his/her deputy. Where necessary, specialists of the association responsible for specific, for example legal, issues were also consulted. In all three countries the same interview guidelines were used.³ Members of the core research team and its academic partners in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam (up to seven experts per country) collectively examined in a two-stage process all interview reports. All quotations in the subsequent sections of this article derive from our interview reports. To protect the interviewees, we anonymized the names of the organizations and of their representatives.

Notably, our results are not representative for *all* associations and their interaction with the state's infrastructural and discursive power and vice versa in all three countries. Rather, our empirical findings and the conclusions derived therefrom refer to the five specific types of associations, which exist in all three countries, and their relationships with the state's forms of power and vice versa.⁴ What we offer are empirically founded results and interpretations from semi-structured interviews with representatives from Algerian, Mozambican and Vietnamese associations, which belong to one of five types of associations mentioned above and which work in relevant policy fields. We confined our research to Algiers and Oran in Algeria, Maputo and Beira in Mozambique, and Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam because the whole spectrum of association types can only be found in the capital and second-biggest cities of these countries.

Our analysis involved process tracing. In the sense of 'causal process observations' with dense description as the prerequisite (Collier, 2011, p. 823), we first explored and identified the impact that specific forms of state power have on associations and vice versa. We then examined whether or not, in which ways, and to which extent state-associations interactions in the three countries lead to consequences, which can be identified as strengthening and/or weakening of authoritarianism. For this we relied, based on the propositions enumerated above, on methods of pattern matching and on expert judgements.

Associations and the Infrastructural Power of the State

In all three countries the state directly or indirectly influences intra-organizational decision-making processes within associations, including decisions on activities and, in particular, leading personnel.⁵ Associations in all three countries tend to be hierarchically structured, something which can be traced back directly (Vietnam) or indirectly (Algeria, Mozambique) to the impact of the state and/or the ruling party on associations.

In Algeria, the majority of business people's and professionals' associations interviewed have formal democratic regulations governing their internal decision-making. However, when they come up with positions on economic policies they often consult informally with the authorities and coordinate their decisions with the representatives of those in power beforehand. Moreover, the laws and institutions of the state heavily impact associations' internal decision-making processes. Let us take the example of the Algerian NGO 1, which works in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention. The holding of this NGO's general

assembly is required by law. During some of these general assemblies, a Ministry of Justice representative is present, ostensibly in a private capacity, to make sure that all the state's administrative requirements are met. A representative of this NGO interviewed by us did not consider this an undue form of state interference, claiming that it helped to guarantee the smooth and democratic functioning of the NGO. As he further explained, it is normally the NGO itself that invites a representative of the Ministry of Justice to its general assemblies.

In Algeria, mass organizations, professionals' organizations, and business organizations are often led by people who entertain close relationships with representatives of the state.⁶ Almost all the associations interviewed exhibit a concentration of power in the hands of the president or the director. This is also true for NGOs and Islamic associations, and changes in the leading personnel do not take place often. Since most associations depend on the state in terms of funding – mostly in the form of annual financial allocations, called '*subventions annuelles*' – and other forms of state support, they might be willing to adapt their activities according to the state's aims and purposes.

In Mozambique, personal relationships with and close ties to the ruling FRELIMO party often have a decisive impact on the election of associations' leading personnel and their choice of activities. As in Algeria, the majority of associations are hierarchically structured. Leading persons from FRELIMO and from state institutions influence associations' internal decision-making processes. Even if associations pretend to be democratically structured, upon closer inspection it becomes evident that many decisions are taken in advance of formal decision-making processes and that many decisions are taken informally.

In Vietnam, the impact of the state on all types of associations is pervasive. The representatives of various mass organizations, professionals' organizations, and business organizations adhere to and apply various principles of 'democratic centralism'. This implies that a small group of people or even a single person makes prior decisions, that the principle of 'collective leadership, individual responsibility' is abided by, and that after a vote the minority must follow the opinion of the majority. These associations are either directly or indirectly under the 'leadership of the Party' and are firmly integrated into the political-administrative system of the Party and the state. The Communist Party, or, more precisely, some key figures in the Party cells within these organizations, have the final say on all aspects concerning the personnel of the respective organizations and the activities they pursue. Even some NGOs apply certain principles related to 'democratic centralism'. The representatives of such interviewed associations appear to believe in the usefulness of these principles.

No difference between decision-making within the Communist Party, the state, and associations is discernible with respect to the application of the principle that the minority follows the opinion of the majority. As a representative of NGO 4 stated: 'Once consensus is reached, everyone must be committed to follow. If someone is not satisfied, he/she must still 'follow the masses' [the collective strength]'. There are, however, 'outliers' with respect to intra-organizational decision-making processes. For example, the Hanoi-based NGO 5 experiments with an 'acting director regime' and the idea and practice of 'project holders' – two mechanisms that seem suited to weakening intra-organizational authoritarianism.

Infrastructural Power as 'Control Through Welfare Provision'

Our evidence varies concerning the interdependencies between associations and the state in the public welfare sector – concretely, in the realm of HIV/AIDS prevention and the provision of care for people living with HIV (PLWHIV). In Algeria and Vietnam the state plays a very significant role in this policy field and, at least in Vietnam, the pressure on associations and the state's control of this segment of society is strong. Associations in Algeria and Vietnam support the state and state policies in this field and do not offer open and explicit critiques. In both countries associations help foster the role of the state as the most important actor in this policy field. Due to the international donors' financial support, the Mozambican state's role in this policy field seems less significant than in the other two cases. Nevertheless, the state claims to be spearheading the fight against HIV/AIDS. Mozambican associations active in this policy field have gained more room to manoeuvre and the people they support have more opportunities to lead a self-determined and autonomous life.

In Algeria the interviewed associations in this policy field generally support the state and state policies. They are engaged within the realm of state programmes and their aim is to contribute to the realization of the aims the state defines. The organizations conduct awareness-raising and prevention activities and one of them does so in the framework of a larger awareness-raising programme on sexual and reproductive health.

The pursuit of rights-based approaches and the aim of making PLWHIV autonomous are highly contested among associations in Algeria: NGO 1 pursues something akin to a rights-based approach. The organization's representative emphasized that the main aim of the NGO is to make PLWHIV 'autonomous' in the personal, social, and financial sense. NGO 1 does not, however, encourage the formation of community-based organizations and self-help groups. Rather, it supports PLWHIV to regularly attend their treatments, take advantage of all the state-run healthcare services available to them and leads infected people to the state's healthcare services and institutions/clinics. Making PLWHIV autonomous is, however, not the main goal of Algerian associations working in the field of HIV/AIDS. A representative of Oran-based NGO 2 stated very clearly that he did not want to follow a rights-based approach at all. Thus, Algerian associations help to foster the state's role as the most important actor in this realm of welfare policies. In this regard, it is important to note that the associations working on HIV/AIDS, which we interviewed, receive state funding (*subventions annuelles*) and other forms of state support.

The findings from Mozambique suggest that – compared to Algeria and Vietnam – there is less pressure from the state on associations working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and care provision for PLWHIV. Here, associations have more room to manoeuvre. The interviewed associations pursue a rights-based approach, though they do not use this expression. In their activities they focus mainly on awareness-raising with regard to HIV/AIDS, but they also promote self-help and support the development of networks of affected individuals and/or groups. The approaches used by associations offer individuals and groups of affected people opportunities to acquire the skills to lead a more self-determined and autonomous life. While international donors can and do provide Mozambican associations with funds without going through state channels, the state seems to have retained substantial supervisory power in this policy field.

In Vietnam the state's impact on associations working in the policy field of HIV/AIDS prevention and care provision for PLWHIV appears to be much stronger than in Mozambique. To a varying extent, the involvement of associations in state programmes (and, thus, their dependency on state funding) impacts the activities these organizations undertake, as well as the selection of the social groups these associations cater to. However, only one of the NGOs interviewed, NGO 2 based in Ho Chi Minh City, is integrated into a state-funded programme.

The associations interviewed do not act against state pressure. Rather, they accept and act strictly within the authoritarian state-determined political structures and rules; they do not question or criticize, at least not openly and not in interviews, the existing structures and rules; and they do not criticize the policies the state stands for and/or has pursued. Rather, the associations we interviewed support the state's HIV/AIDS-related welfare policies. It is thus not surprising that these associations help contribute to the widespread perception of the Vietnamese state as the most important actor in this policy field and the one who keeps the AIDS pandemic at bay. In terms of welfare policies, associations of various types help to fill the gap that the state intentionally or unintentionally leaves. Vietnamese associations provide services for people such as PLWHIV, sex workers, and men who have sex with men, whom the state is not able and/or not willing to reach and to provide services to. Thus, associations relieve the state's burden.

Some Vietnamese NGOs use rights-based approaches, pursuing the aim of self-empowerment of PLWHIV and other social minority members; support the development of citizens' individual and collective self-determination and autonomy; and help present alternatives to the dominant politics and policies. However, the NGO representatives interviewed made it clear that if they pursue such activities, this happens in an indirect way and without explicit critique of state politics and policies.

Infrastructural Power as 'Control Through Limited Participation'

In terms of interdependencies between the state and associations working in the realm of economic policies, especially the promotion of SMEs (Vietnam and Mozambique) and the promotion of private enterprises (Algeria), in all three countries the state invites certain associations to help improve the quality of the economic policies it pursues. Associations can participate in meetings with state officials in various fora, but their representatives are excluded from those places where the 'real' power resides. The representatives and associations involved enjoy various privileges. They are co-opted by the state and they support the state and state policies in this policy field.

In the case of Algeria, various types of associations are invited to provide expertise and advice to the state during law- and policymaking processes. Several of the associations interviewed were allowed to provide such input. They were, however, largely unable to single out which of their policy recommendations have been adopted by the state (e.g., through incorporation in legal documents). Furthermore, these associations had no access to those committees and venues where the decisions were ultimately taken. Notably, all the associations interviewed on this issue accepted this exclusion, stating that it was the responsibility of the state and not of associations to decide upon laws and policies. In doing so, the associations explicitly reaffirmed and legitimated the role of the state as the prime actor in law and policy decision-making processes (at least in

this policy field). According to a representative of Algerian Business Organisation 1, the organization does not strive to gain access to the decision-making committees and venues because it is 'legalistic' in its stance and therefore accepts that it is the parliament and the state executive who are the decision makers. Concurrently, Business Organisation 2's representative elaborated, even if they do not like a law or policy passed by the state, they nevertheless have to accept and apply it afterwards, not least because they had been involved in its formulation: 'I have participated in preparing the couscous, so I have to eat it, whether I like it or not'.

Algerian associations involved in economic law- and policy-formulation processes refrain from criticizing the state openly and are co-opted by various means, such as the allocation of material resources (e.g., in the form of rents), the provision of comparative advantages vis-à-vis other social actors (e.g., information advantages over other entrepreneurs), or strong personal relationships between leading personnel and leading representatives of the Algerian state. The strategy of co-opting entrepreneurs' associations appears to form part of a larger state strategy of concentrating the representation of certain social sectors in the hands of co-opted associations, which serve as exclusive channels for transmitting the demands of these social sectors to the state. The determination of which association represents a particular social sector, however, remains in the hands of the state.

In Mozambique, professionals' and business organizations are invited or allowed to participate in policymaking processes concerning SME promotion. Both types of associations are involved in formal and informal consultation processes with state representatives. These processes take a variety of forms, including official platforms (e.g., public-private dialogues, direct talks, meetings, invitations, seminars, etc.). They also appear to abstain from activities intended to create public pressure – for example, strikes.

Both types of associations have so far only been able to have a very limited number of demands included in political decision-making processes. According to a representative of Mozambican Business Organisation 1, of the 200 recommendations provided by that association to the government, only 17 had been taken up. Often associations do not receive any feedback from the state and state agencies concerning their input, and they never know to what extent their recommendations are implemented. Similarly, associations never know how and why a decision was taken. The Mozambican associations invited to participate in such processes are also not part of the final decision-making bodies. Participation in the implementation and monitoring of economic reform policies appears to be limited. There are indications that associations are simply used by FRELIMO to give the appearance that the state is allowing participation. Thus, they are co-opted. As a representative from an organization associated with Business Organisation 1 put it: 'We have been captured by the state!'

Most leaders of Business Organisation 1 are members of the ruling party. Some held government positions or have been asked to occupy government positions. Business Organisation 1 leaders have privileged access to leading government and ruling party representatives. According to the aforementioned interviewee, there are many undeclared personal interests in Business Organisation 1, which leads to clientelism and corruption. Many of the members support the ruling party's election campaigns and donate to FRELIMO at times. Those associations that the ruling FRELIMO and state agencies do not want to listen to are excluded from consultation processes.

In Vietnam, the impact that this kind of infrastructural power has on associations leads to intense cooperation between the state and certain professionals' and business organizations. Our interviews suggest that this cooperation benefits mainly the state. The interviews with representatives from Business Organisations 2 and 3 and Professionals' Association 1 show not only that these organizations accept the political structures and the state's invitation to work within those structures, but also that they are strongly engaged in helping improve the SME-promotion policies that are formulated and adopted.

Over time, these organizations have gained a favourable position in these policy-formulation processes, and the state has rewarded them in various ways for their contribution to improving policies: Business groups such as Vietnamese Business Organisations 2 and 3 and professionals' associations such as Professionals' Association 1 are involved in the final stages of decision-making processes in the National Assembly and/or in committees and councils at the city level. Since 2008, Business Organisation 3 has also been responsible for collecting the SMEs' opinions on various new laws and for transmitting them to the state. Since 2012, Business Organisation 3 has also represented the business community vis-à-vis the state when the latter is involved in negotiating trade pacts and other relevant international treaties. As an umbrella organization, Professionals' Association 1 represents, guides, and leads various organizations of business people based in Ho Chi Minh City. The state strongly supports all three organizations. To give just one example: The state pays for the staff, offices, and cars of Business Organisations 2 and 3.

Policy-formulation and decision-making processes remain under the firm control of the Communist Party. That the real power resides with the ruling party and that its members make the final decisions was made clear in interviews with representatives from Business Organisation 3: 'The Party leaders' opinion is the most important'.

Associations and the Discursive Power of the State

As regards the policy field of gender equality and women's rights, our findings vary. Whereas in Algeria in particular secular associations often support relevant state discourse and policies, in Mozambique and, even more so, in Vietnam associations both support the state discourse and state policies in this field but also articulate criticism. In Vietnam some associations also criticize the state discourse and policies regarding marriage equality (i.e., same-sex couples' right to civil marriage).

In Algeria, many secular associations working in the field of gender portray the participation of women in the political sphere as a major step towards the modernization of society. They, albeit perhaps unintentionally, echo the official gender discourse of the Algerian state. These associations thus help to legitimize the Algerian state or at least the discourses it pursues. Secondly, while many secular associations would still like to go further, the state has given in to many demands articulated by associations and has reformed several laws relating to women's rights, such as the criminal code and the family code. This allows the state to portray itself as responsive to pressure from the secular women's rights movement. Finally, many secular associations have accepted that they must work within the legal and discursive framework established by the state as far as the personal status law for women is concerned. Rather than advocating the complete abrogation of the family code, they have begun acting pragmatically and are lobbying for an amendment of the code. They are thus reinforcing the well-known 'duality' imposed

by the Algerian state with regard to women's rights: while women's participation in the public and political spheres is encouraged, women continue to be considered minors in various realms of private and family life. There are, however, a few NGOs (such as Algerian NGO 3) and other secular associations affiliated with leftist opposition forces which refuse to work within the state's legal and discursive framework and openly advocate for the complete abrogation of the family code.

Secular associations' explicit and implicit support for the state's discourse and policies in the field of gender can mostly be traced back to the existing polarization between secular and Islamist forces. While many secular associations would like to see more progress as far as the reform of many laws relating to women's rights is concerned, they still opt to cooperate with the authoritarian state. This is because they prefer the current authoritarian but largely secular political system over what they presume would be established if the Islamist opposition were to obtain power. This allows the state to use the secular middle class in general and the secular women's rights movement in particular to weaken the Islamist opposition as its political rival.

In Mozambique, associations support FRELIMO's discourse of 'equality and emancipation', which stems from the time of the one-party regime, and which is also expressed in the existing quota system for political positions within the ruling FRELIMO party. As in Algeria, Mozambican associations stress the role that women played in the liberation struggle against the colonial regime. However, these associations criticize that the official policy of gender equality is contradicted by (male) state representatives – for example, those who defended paragraphs in the proposed revised penal code, such as the one stipulating the exemption of a rapist from prosecution if he marries the woman in question. With respect to this code, the associations have helped to have alterations, such as the decriminalization of abortion, included. They have also created public pressure through marches that ultimately led to the withdrawal of some of the paragraphs that violated women's rights. Some association representatives also criticize the gap between official gender policies promoting 'equality and emancipation' and the state's acceptance of a minor role for women in private life.

In Vietnam, one segment of the associations, especially Mass Organisation 3, generally supports the state's gender equality and women's rights policies, whereas some NGOs both support *and* criticize state policies, especially those concerning marriage equality and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. NGOs support, for example, a complete ban of domestic violence and the idea that 'housework be considered an income-generating job'. Relevant legal clauses regarding both issues figure in the 2014 Marriage and Family Law. Still, associations criticize missing definitions and other clauses in the law and in other related laws (e.g., a clear definition of forced sex and sexual violence). The issue of same-sex marriage has given rise to strong principle-based differences between Mass Organisation 3 and the majority of National Assembly members and state and party representatives on the one hand, and certain NGOs on the other. The fundamentally divergent views concern the concepts and underlying understanding of gender, gender norms, and gender relations. For example, NGO 5 'moves past the male–female gender binary', seeing 'men and women, gays and lesbians, etc. as elements of a whole. And in doing so, it becomes important that, regardless of who someone is, s/he has a right to be treated equally'.

Associations and their Impact on State Power

In this section we discuss what our findings imply for the maintenance and weakening of the two forms of state power in Algeria, Vietnam and Mozambique. As noted above, the ‘weakening’ of the infrastructural and discursive power of the authoritarian state means support for the development of citizens’ individual and collective self-determination and autonomy; the ‘maintenance’ of such sources of power means that the negation of self-determination and autonomy receives support. To assess the qualities of associations, we refer to the four above-mentioned patterns of authoritarianism and to the patterns which help us to identify democracy-promoting consequences.

As regards the nexus between the state’s infrastructural power and intra-organizational decision-making processes, we find that the interviewed associations tend to succumb to this form of power in all three countries. The state’s and/or the state ruling party’s interference in internal decision-making processes is widely accepted, or at least not openly rejected. Although in different ways and with some exceptions, most associations are organized hierarchically. In most associations there are also structures and mechanisms in place that ensure the prioritization of groups (ruling the state and/or ruling the association) and their interests over the individual (in the association) and their interests. Something that is most evident in Vietnamese associations but also observable in Algerian and in Mozambican associations is a strong push for homogeneity and uniformity. Moreover, these organizations develop what Stenner (2005, p. 18) calls ‘groupiness’. A good example of what this implies is the various Vietnamese associations’ use of the ‘minority-follows-majority’ mechanism after a decision is taken. Finally, at least in the case of Vietnamese and Algerian associations, we observe a certain lack of tolerance of views that diverge from the group’s own, and at least implicitly a certain rejection of difference and intra-organizational pluralism. In other words, in most associations we observe characteristics of intra-organizational authoritarianism, in the sense that individual and collective self-determination and the autonomy of the individual are severely restricted.

In terms of intra-organizational decision-making processes, some individual skills and attitudes (e.g., public speaking), and perhaps some virtues (reciprocity, trust, and self-respect), conducive to the development of democracy might be acquired in associations in all three countries, though this occurs only to a certain extent. Associations do not teach how and when to strike a compromise and they do not aid the acquisition of critical thinking abilities, particularly the ability to deal with conflicts and criticism. This suggests that most associations are not organizations where citizens learn and practise democratic ideas and acquire virtues conducive to the development of democracy. That said, there were exceptions to this rule among the NGOs interviewed – for example, the Hanoi-based Vietnamese NGO 5.

With respect to the infrastructural power of the state in terms of control through welfare provision, most of the Algerian and Vietnamese associations dealing with HIV/AIDS issues that we interviewed not only act within the authoritarian state’s structures but also do not articulate critiques or offer alternatives to those politics and policies (at least not openly). Through the acceptance of these structures and policies, Algerian and Vietnamese associations engaged in this policy field contribute to the very substance of authoritarianism by negating the collective and individual self-determination and autonomy of PLWHIV and other ‘social minorities’. Such acceptance presumably happens

because of the relative strength of this form of state power in this particular policy area. In both countries, the associations interviewed help foster the role of the state as the most important actor in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention.

In Algeria and Vietnam some NGOs take carefully crafted steps towards the support of PLWHIV and in Vietnam also of other people who are stigmatized in politics and society (such as sex workers). Such NGOs contribute to strengthening the development of collective and individual self-determination and autonomy, core elements of processes which might weaken this form of authoritarian state power. In a related vein, they help to bring about democracy-promoting consequences – for instance, the development of virtues conducive to the development of democracy and the assumption of roles that enable the greater participation of the persons concerned. However, since the activities of such NGOs in Vietnam are undertaken based on the premise that they do not lead to any conflicts with the authorities, the consequences of such steps in terms of weakening this specific form of state power are very limited, if such consequences exist at all. In a similar way, the fact that Algerian NGOs support the state's dominant role and explicitly want to contribute to the realization of state-defined aims in this policy field very clearly limits any consequences that could potentially weaken this specific form of state power.

In contrast, and presumably also because the infrastructural power of the Mozambican state in terms of control through welfare provision is not as developed as in the two other countries, Mozambican associations are able to promote the individual and collective self-determination and autonomy of PLWHIV. They encourage alternative political forms and content to those promoted by the people in power – for example, by encouraging PLWHIV and other people to undertake various kinds of self-help and supporting self-empowerment, including the formation of networks of affected people. This helps citizens lead a more self-determined and autonomous life. Thus, Mozambican associations further weaken this specific form of state power. This suggests that they contribute to creating a variety of democracy-promoting consequences, such as the cultivation of virtues conducive to the development of democracy, carrying out roles and responsibilities that enable the increased participation of affected people and enhancing state agencies' responsiveness towards these people.

With respect to infrastructural power in terms of control through limited participation, our findings suggest that the business and professionals' associations interviewed in all three countries help maintain this specific form of state power. Of critical importance is the associations' unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian state-determined political structures and their adherence to the rules that dominate therein. Furthermore, the associations' activities signify what Selznick calls 'limited participation', which in turn leads to the co-optation of those associations taking part in policy formulation. In a general sense, the strategy of inviting professionals' and business associations can be seen as part of the state's attempt to concentrate the representation of certain social sectors in the hands of selected associations, which serve as exclusive channels for transmitting the demands of these social sectors to the state.

This strategy seems to be most pronounced and most successfully applied in Algeria and Vietnam, where hand-picked business and professionals' associations are used by the state for the controlled representation and transmission of professionals' and entrepreneurs' demands. These associations are used to alleviate pressure which might potentially emerge from these social strata. The co-opted associations leave the decisions regarding

who should be brought into policy-determining structures and who should have access to the venues where fundamental decisions on politics and policies are made to the state and/or the ruling party and their respective decision-making bodies. Thus, the business and professionals' associations interviewed in Algeria and Vietnam help legitimize decisions taken in opaque state and/or party structures. The co-opted associations in all three countries do not question the fact that the state takes the final decisions on laws and policies, and these associations' involvement in law- and policy-formulation processes often increases their acceptance of the resulting state laws and policies. If the activities of the business and professionals' associations lead to some sort of weakening of this specific form of state power and, related to this, to democracy-promoting consequences – that is, the representation of certain interests or resistance to planned or taken decisions – then such consequences are clearly eclipsed by the authoritarianism-supporting consequences that 'limited participation' and co-optation produce.

Finally, with respect to the state's discursive power in the area of gender equality and women's rights, most but not all associations in all three countries support the state's discourse and policies in this field, though such support varies. Many of these associations support specific state-propagated norms concerning gender and gender relationships. More specifically, in Algeria many of the interviewed associations operate within the political structures, rules, and policies enacted therein, which limit the individual and collective self-determination and autonomy of women in the private sphere. This is exemplified by the fact that many associations are seeking to reform the restrictive family code instead of advocating for its abrogation. In Vietnam, the representatives of Mass Organisation 3 basically have a biologicist and essentialist understanding of gender. They see women's roles as unchangeable. According to them, bodily differences mean that women are caregivers, mothers, peacekeepers in the home, etc. This clearly restricts women's self-determination and autonomy. Moreover, these representatives also reject equal rights for LGBT people. Their position vis-à-vis the LGBT community is authoritarian: They show a lack of tolerance vis-à-vis those who diverge from their own and their organization's view and a bias against people who are 'different'. They also reject the idea and practice of difference and insist on sameness. Finally, as an integral part of the Communist Party's system of rule, Mass Organisation 3 helps legitimize policies and political decisions in the policy field of gender equality, women's rights, and the rights of sexual minorities which are made by the 'party/state'.

There are, however, indications that the state's discursive power, exerted in and through the discourse on gender equality, is weakened by at least some associations in all three countries, though, this happens to varying extents. In Algeria some secular and some leftist NGOs affiliated with the opposition refuse to work within the legal and discursive framework established by the state and openly advocate for the complete abrogation of the restrictive family code. In Mozambique, representatives of associations criticize the stark difference between the state's official policies regarding gender equality and the state's acceptance of women's inferior status in private life. In Vietnam, strong principle-based differences between associations are visible with respect to the issue of same-sex marriage and the rights of sexual minorities/LGBT people. The Vietnamese NGOs interviewed by us take up positions and activities that are supportive of the collective and individual self-determination and autonomy of women and sexual minorities/LGBT people. Thus, in all three countries at least some NGOs as well as some other associations help formulate

counter-positions to the state discourse on gender. They engage in the political and societal discourse on gender norms in a way which is apt to increase the power, social status, and recognition, legal and otherwise, of women and sexual minorities.

Conclusions

Do associations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam support infrastructural and discursive forms of power of the authoritarian state? Or do some of these organizations weaken particular forms of state power? To answer these questions we analysed the interdependent and reciprocal relations between associations and these forms of state power in the area of intra-organizational decision-making and in three policy fields.

Most associations interviewed by us in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam accept, or at least do not openly reject, the state's and/or the state ruling party's various forms of interference in internal decision-making processes. Authoritarian state-determined structures are accepted, if not enforced. Most of these associations are organized in a hierarchical, if not outright authoritarian, manner. Although the degree of authoritarian qualities and the ways intra-organizational power is exerted vary, in most if not all these organizations the individual and collective self-determination and autonomy of members are restricted, if not negated. At least in terms of intra-organizational decision-making processes, most associations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam are not 'schools of democracy' à la Tocqueville. There are some exceptions – namely, some professionals' organizations in Algeria (*syndicats autonomes*) and some NGOs in Vietnam and Mozambique – but these organizations represent a minority. In terms of intra-organizational decision-making, the 'dark sides' of associations clearly outweigh their potential 'bright sides'. The associations concerned 'reaffirm, legitimize and reproduce elements of authoritarian structures' (Lewis, 2013, p. 328) and, in this sense, can be labelled supporters of authoritarian rule.

With respect to 'control through welfare provision', the first form of state infrastructural power addressed in this article, we find that the types of associations that we examined in Algeria and Vietnam help maintain such power, whereas relevant associations in Mozambique have the potential to weaken it. The widespread thesis that service-oriented associations tend to be apolitical and leaning towards if not supporting authoritarian regimes (for Vietnam see Thayer, 2009; for Algeria Liverani, 2008; see also Lewis, 2013, pp. 327–329, 337) is thus not easily generalizable. Our findings suggest that in autocracies, service-oriented associations, such as NGOs engaged in the welfare sector, play various roles with respect to existing systems of power. This implies that the relationship between the state and associations 'can range from overt and hidden tensions and active hostility to cooperation and collaboration' (Banks & Hulme, 2012, p. 6) and that their role vis-à-vis the state is a contested one. In other words, the role of associations is 'far more complex than that proposed by the liberal democratic view, and concomitantly, by those donors bent on funding NGOs in order to build a strong civil society' (Mercer, 2002, p. 19). Notwithstanding such criticism, our findings suggest that donors' funding of Mozambican associations engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention and care provision for PLWHIV has helped local associations widen their room to manoeuvre and enabled them to weaken the Mozambican state's 'control through welfare provision' in this particular policy field.

As regards the second form of infrastructural state power, ‘control through limited participation’, our conclusion is unambiguous: The professionals’ and business associations interviewed in all three countries help maintain this form of state power. This finding contradicts the expectations still held by many practitioners of international development cooperation. We suggest that the fundamental material and/or non-material interests of such organizations need to be taken more carefully into account. What also needs to be understood is that many authoritarian regimes have the means to pacify such organizations and to keep them under the state’s thumb without the use of force. The cases of professionals’ and business organizations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam illustrate the ability of the authoritarian state in this respect. Co-optation can help depoliticize potential social discontent and channel it into forms of expression that do not challenge the authoritarian nature of the state. On a broader theoretical level, our findings thus support the thesis that co-optation also helps stabilize autocracies (Gerschewski, 2013). Moreover, our findings suggest that the co-optation of associations contributes to the persistence of a variety of autocracies and not only of competitive authoritarian regimes as Giersdorf and Croissant (2011, p. 4) argue.

With respect to the discursive power of the state, our findings show that most interviewed associations in all three countries help maintain the state’s discursive power in the field of gender equality and women’s rights – though this happens in various ways and to varying extents. In all three countries at least some NGOs help weaken this form of state power. In this policy field that we find associations which are both supporters of authoritarian state power *and* forces which help to weaken it. The role of some Vietnamese NGOs in the gender-related discourse and the discourse on the rights of LGBT people serves as a case in point. That the state does not harshly repress those activities contradicts at least in part Lewis’s thesis that ‘authoritarian states have become adept at restricting NGOs to roles commensurate with self-organization, while severely restricting discursive activities’ (Lewis, 2013, p. 337). In Algeria, Vietnam, and Mozambique, association activities that are critical of the state’s discourse on gender norms, gender relations, and the rights of sexual minorities are possible. This is all the more astonishing because the exertion of discursive power by the state in the form of a sustained influence on gender norms and gender relationships is ‘a central component in the field of state hegemony, as state discourses produce hegemonic masculinity and gender hierarchy’ (Sauer, 2001, pp. 166–167, our translation). Future research should explore whether associations’ opportunities to weaken this form of state power reflect the specifics of the ‘gender’ policy field or a relative ‘weakness’ of discursive power as a specific form of state power in autocracies, or both.

Future research should also probe further into the implications of the different extents of ‘civic space’ under authoritarian rule in post-socialist Algeria, Mozambique and Vietnam. Whereas our comparative research design was based on the fundamental similarities of these three countries in terms of the type and development of authoritarian rule, our findings do indicate that associations’ room for manoeuvre effectively differs in the three settings. While such room for manoeuvre is extremely narrow in Vietnam and very narrow in Algeria, associations in Mozambique seem to enjoy some more leeway (which might be due to foreign donors’ interventions). Future research should thus explore how the varying scope of associations’ freedom of action for associations is connected to the extent of political competitiveness in these three regimes and what

differences in this regard mean for the ability of local associations to pursue their policy-oriented preferences.

In most general terms, our findings indicate that there is not one particular type of association which, without further qualification, helps weaken state power in autocracies. Nor do all types of associations help maintain infrastructural and discursive state power in such regimes. Studies of associations should thus not start from the assumption that such organizations are either supporters of democracy or supporters of authoritarian rule. It is more fruitful to see associations as fundamentally ‘polyvalent’ (Kößler, 1994). Our research demonstrates the usefulness of a theoretically grounded, power-focused, and relational perspective for empirical analyses of the roles played by associations under authoritarian rule. Using such an approach helps focus autocracy research on the state, society, and, more importantly, the complex relations and interactions between the two.

Notes

1. In our study we had to omit the impact of ‘despotic power’ on associations and vice versa as an analysis of this sensitive form of state power could have endangered the safety of our academic cooperation partners and of our interviewees.
2. For Selznick (1949, p. 13) co-optation is ‘the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence. [...] Cooptation may be formal or informal, depending on the specific problem to be solved.’
3. An anonymized list of cited associations and interview dates is available upon request from the authors. So are the guidelines for the two-stage interviews.
4. The decision on what counted as a typical association for each type was based on the collective judgement of the core research team and its academic partners in the respective country. For reasons of comparability we excluded types of associations, which do not exist in all three countries or which vary significantly in terms of their respective form, activities, number, importance, etc. (such as Community-based Organizations).
5. In Algeria, exceptions to this rule are some independent labour unions (*syndicats autonomes*) and some human rights organizations.
6. Again, in Algeria some independent labour unions represent an exception to this rule.

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