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Do Associations Support Authoritarian Rule? Tentative Answers from Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam

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Abstract

Whether associations help to democratise authoritarian rule or support those in power is a contested issue that so far lacks a cross-regional perspective. Drawing on relational sociology, this paper explores the impact of state power in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam on associations and vice versa. We focus on decision-making in associations and on three policy areas – welfare policy concerning HIV/AIDS, economic policy concerning small and medium-sized enterprises, policies concerning gender equality and the rights of women and sexual minorities – to assess the relations between associations and the state's infrastructural and discursive power. Most associations interviewed by us in the three countries accept or do not openly reject the state's and/or the state ruling party's various forms of interference in internal decision-making processes. Whereas associations in Algeria and Vietnam help to maintain the state's control through welfare provision, associations in Mozambique can weaken this form of infrastructural state power. Moreover, business and professionals' associations in all three countries help maintain the state's control through limited participation, i.e. another form of infrastructural state power. Finally, associations in all three countries support the state's discourse and policies in the area of gender equality and women's rights, though in all three countries at least some NGOs help weaken this form of state power.

Keywords: civil society, associations, state, Algeria, Mozambique, Vietnam

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Article Outline

1 Introduction

What associations are and whether they help to democratise authoritarian rule or support those in power is the subject of a long-standing and controversial debate.[1] The roles that associations play are of utmost importance for those interested in democratic change in autocracies, who pin their hopes on associations as harbingers of democracy. This paper explores the roles of associations in countries under authoritarian rule, drawing on experiences from

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Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam. These three "post-socialist" countries are located in world regions exhibiting a high density of authoritarian rule: North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia. Despite many differences, the three countries are rather similar in a number of respects. All three had given up rather traditional Marxist-Leninist and socialist ideals by the late 1980s. Moreover, the three countries have become market-oriented economies but have not developed into Western-style democracies. Rather, the political systems in the three nations are structured in one way or another in an authoritarian manner. Finally, in all three countries the state has remained influential or in a strong position vis-à-vis associations. Under such conditions, can associations contribute to democratisation?

One school of thought would answer this question in the affirmative. Starting with the French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), 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: 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-organisational 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: 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 (ibid.). Social movement activists in Egypt similarly critiqued the behaviour of associations there during the 2011 uprising. Their criticisms, which basically said that these organisations were imposing restrictions on themselves in terms of their activities, if not aligning themselves with the regime, echoed comments on the worldwide "NGOization" of associations (Carroll and Sapinski 2015: 3-4). Since the 1980s, the latter critique goes, many associations (especially NGOs) have developed into specialised policy consultancies and/or service providers. While such organisations formerly denounced conservative societies and authoritarian rule, their increasing closeness to the state and to national and international donors has been accompanied by a decline or an outright loss of their critical impetus (Bebbington 2008; Glasius and Ishkanian 2014).[2] Arguably, then, the "dark side" of associationalism – as demonstrated, for example, by the elitist behaviour of middle-class associations spearheading people's power putsches in Thailand and the Philippines in the early part of this century – cannot be easily disentangled from their "bright side," which includes the development of civic virtues (see Giersdorf and Croissant 2011: 5).

Divergent assessments of associations also exist in the scholarly literature on Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam. On the one hand, scholars claim that Vietnamese associations,

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2 Despite such strong criticism, empirical analyses (see, for example, Glasius and Ishkanian 2014) show that not only in Egypt but also in many other places, the members of associations, street activists, and social movement members in fact form what Glasius and Ishkanian call a "surreptitious symbiosis."

especially local NGOs working as service providers, are "apolitical" and closely connected to, if not befriended with, the state (Thayer 2009; Wischermann et al. 2015: 28). With respect to Algeria, Liverani (2008) even portrays middle-class secular associations there as supporters of the authoritarian regime. His research provides support for Jamal's (2007) argument, echoing Witkorowicz (2000), that in the Arab World associations should be seen as a pillar which voluntarily or involuntarily reinforces authoritarianism. Turning to Mozambique, Pereira portrays associations there as weak, overstretched, capital-centric, and ill-equipped to be a serious challenger to the ruling party (Pereira 2011: 2). Moreover, where the state invites Mozambican associations to provide expertise and to participate in policy-formulation processes, they are co-opted and captured through pseudo-democratic procedures, with their actors left disillusioned in the end (Fiege 2014: 132).

On the other hand, Bui Hai Thiem (2013) sees Vietnamese associations as contesting 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" (ibid.: 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 organisations might "be the building blocks of a new type of activism that can emancipate itself from the subordination which it suffers at the moment" (ibid.: 7). According to him, scholars should focus on groups and associations which may now seem marginal and powerless, but will in the near future "be the ones that will force broader political change" (ibid.: 9). Finally, Fiege (2014) sees Mozambican associations as beginning, against all odds, to have an impact on the government in terms of opposing corruption, the sale of land, and the exploitation of resources. According to Fiege (ibid.: 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 and 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 2006: 266). Cavatorta (ibid.: 3) also suggests conceptualising the relationship between an authoritarian state and society as interdependent and exploring associations and their activities in relational ways. In a similar way, Froissart (2014: 220) emphasises "an interactive and relational conception of state power to demonstrate not only how popular protests are being 'absorbed' by authoritarian states […] but also more fundamentally how the very modes of wielding power are being reconfigured." She argues that "authoritarian regimes last in parts *thanks to* certain forms of discontent" and "the way they are expressed is an integral part of authoritarian governance" (ibid.: 219, italics in the original). Cavatorta and Froissart realise that whereas political environments can influence associations, these organisations are also part of this en-

vironment, which they in turn influence. Relational thinking thus helps to avoid tautologies when examining state–association relationships. In our analysis of associations and the state in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam we take such a relational perspective.

In the following we first present the theoretical framework of the research project from which the data presented in this paper derive and also address some methodological issues. Thereafter we present the most important empirical findings. In the penultimate section we discuss what these findings imply concerning the question of whether associations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam help to maintain and/or weaken authoritarian state power. In the conclusion we summarise the main findings.

2   Theoretical Foundations and Methodological Issues

Our understanding of authoritarianism follows Stenner (2005: 16-20), who argues that authoritarianism repudiates individual 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 organisational 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 prioritisation of the group over the individual as well as of group interests over those of 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 prioritisation of the group over the individual as well as group interests over those of the individual. Such structures and mechanisms are accepted because they help to achieve uniformity, or are even actively supported because they are viewed as prudent principles for guiding social and political development. (Stenner 2005: 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: 62). Accordingly, in the area of intra-organisational decision-making and the three policy fields we focus on (see below) we explore whether associations, in a general sense, support the development of citizens' individual and collective 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: 142-205).

Turning to our understanding of associations, we understand such organisations from a theoretical perspective as part of the whole societal-political complex and of societal conflicts, all of which constitute the state. Associations are thus themselves the site of societal conflicts, are part of specific practices of state power exertion, and 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 per se is characterised by compromise" (Sauer 2011: 134, our translation).

In our research we use the term "associations" generically, referring to a wide array of societal organisations that include (a) mass organisations (e.g. the Vietnam Women's Union), (b) professionals' organisations (e.g. the Conseil National de l'Enseignant du Supérieur, an association of higher education personnel in Algeria), (c) business organisations (e.g. the Confederação de Associações Económicas in Mozambique or the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industries [VCCI] in Vietnam), (d) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Solidarité AIDS in Algeria or the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment [ISEE] in Vietnam), and (e) faith-based organisations (e.g. the Conselho Cristão de Moçambique or the Mai Linh Shelter in Vietnam).

We use the term "associations" instead of "civil society organisations" because, first, the former term does not imply any assumptions concerning their civil-society-like characteristics and/or whether and which associations have civil-society-action-like qualities (for such an approach see Wischermann 2010; 2011). In fact, whether the term civil society organisations should be applied to certain societal organisations (e.g. to mass organisations in Algeria or Vietnam) is very much contested. By using the term "association" we avoid taking sides in this discussion. Second, the term "association" has neither a "democratic" nor any other connotation, and since our approach is fundamentally open to various outcomes – associations can be supporters of democracy and/or autocracies – using this term seems more appropriate. Third, from a research-pragmatic perspective, the term "association" is politically neutral and thus facilitates empirical research on this topic in countries under authoritarian rule.

Our basic assumption, stemming not only from functionalist theoretical approaches and concepts but also from the fundamentals of relational sociology, is that associations can be bulwarks of democracy, supporters of autocracies, and even both at the same time. Associations are "polyvalent" (Kößler 1994). In the empirical sections of this paper we show what impact the state – as the most important conditioning factor – has on associations and what impact associations have on the state. More precisely, we examine what impact two forms of state power have on associations and what impact associations have on these forms of state power. The first form of state power we address is infrastructural power, which denotes the "logistics of political control" (Mann 1984: 192). It includes two specific forms of such control – namely, "control through welfare provision" and "control through limited participation" (see below). The second form of state power we are concerned with is discursive power – that is, the "power employed by agents of the state through/on discourse" (Göbel 2011: 188, fn. 7). Discursive power denotes the state's control of societal discourse and the shaping of understandings of political issues, historical events, etc.

In our research we analyse the interdependent and reciprocal relations between associations and forms of state power with respect to one specific issue and in three policy fields: First, we focus on intra-organisational decision-making. Assuming that the state wants to exert control over the society in general and over associations in particular, it might seek to influence the latter's decision-making processes regarding, for example, their activities and the selection of leading personnel. However, associations may seek to deny the state influence in their intra-organisational decision-making.

Second, we focus on welfare policy. We assume that the state aims to exert control over the society by providing welfare services and that it utilises associations in this regard. Associations can be instrumental in reaching specific groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged people living in "problem areas." At the same time, the state aims to maintain a very significant role in this policy field. Therefore, we examine the role of the state in this field and associations' position vis-à-vis this role. We explore whether associations support state policies and practices in this policy field and/or whether they offer criticism. In other words, we explore whether and to what extent the state exerts "control through welfare provision," and how associations react to these attempts. In concrete terms, we concentrate on HIV/AIDS prevention and the care of people living with HIV/AIDS. This life-threatening disease became a pandemic in the early part of this century, no longer confined to marginal(ised) social groups. Even authoritarian rulers decided that something had to be done against the further spread of HIV/AIDS and they gave associations a role in the fight against the disease.

Third, we focus on economic policy, especially the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In this policy field, parts of the so-called middle class are active that might be seen as a potential threat to those in power and that have close relations with, for example, state-owned or at least state-controlled enterprises. We assume that the state invites carefully selected associations to participate in policy-formulation and decision-making pro-

cesses. But these associations are kept away from those places where the "real" decisions are made and power resides. What thus takes place is "control through limited participation." We examine whether and which associations have been co-opted by the state,[3] what mechanisms have been used to reach this goal, whether and in which ways associations have defied those offers, and what has followed from the respective options actors have chosen to pursue.

Fourth, we focus on policies concerning gender equality, women's rights, and the rights of sexual minorities. The exertion of discursive power by the state in the form of a sustained influence on gender norms and gender relationships is not coincidental, because 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 institutionalisation" (Sauer 2001: 166-167, our translation). We examine whether associations support the state discourse and policies in this field and/or whether they offer criticism of and develop alternatives to this discourse.

Based on our empirical findings we seek to answer the question, in our conclusion, of whether associations help to maintain and/or weaken these 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, on the other hand, "maintained" when associations' actions negate and deny such self-determination and autonomy is denied and negated – a negation that is at the core of authoritarianism.

In an operational sense, the "maintenance" of infrastructural and discursive state power is said to take place if and when

— there is an unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian and authoritarianism-promoting state-determined political structures and rules on the associations' side;

— associations present policies which contribute to limiting and negating the individual and collective 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 said 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;

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3   "Cooptation (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" (Selznick 1949: 13).

— associations engage in practices aimed at helping 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, raise the social status, and support the recognition of women.

2.1 Methodological Issues

The research in all three countries took place in two stages. In stage one we explored the impact the state and other conditioning factors have on associations. Associations were selected using the typical case sampling method, and the research team conducted 20, 24, and 27 semi-structured interviews in Vietnam, Algeria, and Mozambique, respectively, between June and August 2014. In stage two we analysed the impact that associations have on various forms of state power. In this phase we focused on seven associations in Algeria and Mozambique and 10 in Vietnam. Wherever possible, we chose associations that had been interviewed during stage one of the research project and supplemented the sample when necessary. Interviews took place between February and April 2015. All quotations in the subsequent sections of this paper derive from the written reports of the interviewers (translated where necessary). To safeguard the interview partners, we anonymised the names of the organisations interviewed and of their representatives.[4] We confined our research to the cities of 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 be found in the capital and second-biggest cities of each of the countries concerned. In all country studies the same interview guidelines were used.

Our analysis involved a fair amount of process tracing. In the sense of "causal process observations" with dense description as the prerequisite (see Collier 2011: 823), we explored and identified the impact various forms of state power have on associations and vice versa. The qualities of associations that promote authoritarianism or that help to weaken authoritarianism – and closely connected to this, promote democracy – were identified through "pattern matching" and are based on the criteria mentioned at the beginning of this section.

3 Associations and the Infrastructural Power of the State

In all three countries the state directly or indirectly influences intra-organisational decision-making processes within associations. And in all three countries the state directly or indirectly influences the selection of associations' activities and, in particular, leading personnel.[5] In

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4   See the appendix for an anonymised list of all interviews cited in this paper.

5   In Algeria, exceptions to this rule are some professionals' organisations (syndicats autonomes) and some human rights organisations.

Mozambique and Vietnam the state is dominated by one party which exerts power through the state. Associations in all three countries tend to be hierarchically structured, something which can be traced back directly (Vietnam) or in many cases 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 do 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 organisations, professionals' organisations, and business organisations 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 a director. NGOs and Islamic associations usually show a similar concentration of power in the hands of individual leaders, and changes in the leading personnel do not take place often. Since most associations are dependent on the state in terms of money – 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 the state 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 decision-making processes and that many decision-making processes are structured in an informal way.

In Vietnam, the impact of the state on all types of associations is strong. The representatives of various mass organisations, professionals' organisations, and business organisations adhere to and apply various principles of "democratic centralism." This implies, for example, that a small group of people or even a single person makes prior decisions, that the principle

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6   Again, in Algeria some independent labour unions (syndicats autonomes) represent an exception to this rule.

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 and solidly 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 organisations, has the final say on all aspects concerning the "human resources" of the respective organisations and the activities they pursue. Even some NGOs apply certain principles related to the state's and the Communist Party's organising principle of democratic centralism. Notably, the representatives of such associations interviewed here appear to believe in the usefulness of these principles.

A difference between decision-making within the Communist Party, the state, and associations is not discernible when it comes to the application of the principle that the minority follows the opinion of the majority after a decisive vote: "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]."[7] Almost all the association representatives interviewed saw reaching consensus as the ultimate goal of decision-making processes. There are, however, "outliers" with respect to intra-organisational decision-making processes. For example, the Hanoi-based NGO 5 does not appear to succumb to the power of the Vietnamese state, the Communist Party, and the organisational principles related to state and party. The NGO experiments with an "acting director regime" and the idea and practice of "project holders" – two mechanisms that seem suited to weakening at least some forms of intra-organisational authoritarianism.

3.1 Infrastructural Power as "Control through Welfare Provision"

Our empirical 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 (although there is criticism). 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 in Mozambique, the Mozambican state's role in this policy field is de facto 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 affected people they support have more opportunities to lead a self-determined and autonomous life.

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7   This remarkable statement comes from a representative of Vietnamese NGO 4.

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 realisation of the aims the state defines. The organisations 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 organisation's representative even emphasised that the main aim of the NGO is to make PLWHIV "autonomous" in the personal, social, and financial sense of the term. NGO 1 does not, however, encourage the formation of community-based organisations and self-help groups. Rather, it supports PLHWHIV to regularly attend their treatments and take advantage of all the state-run healthcare services available to them. To help its beneficiaries become economically self-reliant, the NGO engages in micro-credit activities, most of which are ultimately financed by the state. Based on its activities and experiences, the organisation also contributes to the formulation of the state's national strategic plan on HIV/AIDS. Making PLWHIV autonomous is, however, not the main goal of all 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.

Campaigns against the spreading of the virus are supported by associations and should help, in their representatives' view, to lead infected people to the state's healthcare services and institutions/clinics. 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 again that most if not all the associations interviewed are dependent on the state for funding (*subventions annuelles*) and other forms of state support.

The findings from Mozambique suggest that at least from the perspective of Mozambican associations there is – compared to Algeria and Vietnam – less pressure from the state on associations working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and care provision for PLWHIV. They have gained more room to manoeuvre. The associations interviewed 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 seems to be much stronger than is the case in Mozambique. To a varying extent and degree, the involvement of associations in state programmes (and, thus, their dependency on state funding) impacts the activities these organi-

sations 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 NGOs and business organisations interviewed do not act against state pressure. Rather, they accept and act strictly within the authoritarian and authoritarianism-promoting state-determined political structures and rules; they do not question or criticise, at least not openly and not in interviews, the existing political structures and rules; and they do not criticise the policies the state stands for and/or has pursued. Quite the contrary, the organisations we interviewed support the state's HIV/AIDS-related welfare policies. So it is not surprising that those associations help contribute to the widespread perception of the Vietnamese state as the most important actor in this policy field and the one who pulls the strings and keeps the AIDS pandemic at bay.

In terms of welfare policies, Vietnamese associations of various types help to fill the gap that the state intentionally or unintentionally leaves. 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.

3.2 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 various 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 really been adopted by the state (e.g. through incorporation in formal 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, this organisation 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 1, the interviewee said, can make policy proposals, but taking the final decisions on laws and policies is simply not the task of an entrepreneurs' association. As 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 have been involved in its formulation as well: "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 criticising 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 a very strong personal relationship 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, usually remains in the hands of the state.

In Mozambique, professionals' and business organisations 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 dialogue, direct talks, meetings, invitations, seminars, etc.). Both types of associations 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 organisation associated with Business Organisation 1 put it: "We have been captured by the state!"

In fact, 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 give donations at particular times. The entrepreneurs who belong to Business Organisation 1 have become increasingly reluctant to speak up in internal meetings of the organisation as well as in meetings with representatives of the state, to voice concerns, and to articulate critiques because they are afraid of sanctions. Those associations that the ruling FRELIMO and state agencies do not want to listen to are excluded from consultation processes, at least in certain cases and/or temporarily.

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 organisations. Our interviews suggest that this cooperation benefits mainly, but not exclusively, the state. The interviews with representatives from Business Organisations 2 and 3 and Professionals' Association 1 show not only that these organisations 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 within those structures.

Over time, these organisations 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 organisation, Professionals' Association 1 represents, guides, and leads various organisations of business people based in Ho Chi Minh City. The state strongly supports all three organisations: It pays for the staff, offices, and cars of Business Organisations 2 and 3. In the case of Professionals' Association 1, the state pays for the headquarters and the cars, as well as providing funds to pay specialised party and managerial personnel, plus administrative staff, drivers, guards, etc.

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 and Professionals' Association 1:

> "The Party leaders' opinion is the most important." (Business Organisation 3)

> "Because the Party and the union are present within Professionals' Association 1, everything has to go through the Party and the union first. […] The Party and the union are the comprehensive leaders, so they determine the direction and orientation, both for human resources and activities." (Professionals' Association 1)

4   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 secular associations often support the state discourse and policies, in Mozambique and, even more so, in Vietnam associations both support the state discourse and the various state policies in this area and also articulate criticism. Moreover, in Vietnam some associations criticise 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 modernisation of society. They thus, albeit perhaps unintentionally, echo the official discourse of the Algerian state. These associations thus help to legitimise 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 polarisation 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 because they prefer the current authoritarian but largely secular political system over that which would exist 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 also stress the role that women played in the liberation struggle against the colonial regime. However, these associations criticise the fact that the official policy of gender equality is contradicted by (male) state representatives – for example, those who, in the proposal for the revised penal code defended paragraphs such as that stipulating the exemption of a rapist from prosecution if he married the woman in question. With respect to this code, the associations have helped to have alterations, such as the decriminalisation 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 criticise 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 criticise 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 criticise 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. The NGOs interviewed do not share Mass Organisation 3's biologistic and essentialist understanding of gender and they reject one general type of gender system. For example, NGO 5 "moves past the male–female gender binary." At the same time, NGO 5 sees "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."

5   Associations and Their Effects on State Power

In this section we discuss what our findings imply for the maintenance and weakening of various forms of state power. 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 effects.

As regards the state's infrastructural power and its links to intra-organisational decision-making processes, the associations interviewed by us 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. Thus, authoritarian and authoritarianism-promoting, state-determined structures are accepted, if not enforced. Although in different ways, to a varying extent, and with exceptions to this rule, most associations are organised hierarchically. In most associations there are also structures and mechanisms in place, which are used and accepted, that ensure the prioritisation of groups (ruling the state and/or ruling the association) and their interests over the individual (in the organisation) and their interests. Something that is most evident in Vietnamese associations but also observable in Algerian and in Mozambican associations is that there is a strong push for homogeneity and uniformity. Moreover, these organisations develop what Stenner (2005: 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.[8] 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-organisational pluralism. In other words, in most associations we observe characteristics of intra-organisational authoritarianism, in the sense that individual and collective self-determination and the autonomy of the individual are severely restricted, if not completely negated.

In terms of intra-organisational 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. But 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 organisations 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 we 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 if not all the Algerian and Vietnamese associations dealing with HIV/AIDS

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8   "But it is a groupiness that generally comes from wanting to be part of some collective, not from identification with a particular group; that originates in wanting self and others to conform to some system, not in commitment to a specific normative order […]" (Stenner 2005:18; emphasis in original).

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, and not in our interviews). Presumably this is because of the relative strength of this form of state power in this particular policy area. In both these countries the associations interviewed help foster the role of the state as the most important actor in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention. The acceptance of structures and policies and associations' contribution to codifying the predominant role of the state in terms of public welfare implies that 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."

In Algeria and Vietnam some NGOs take carefully crafted steps towards the support of PLWHIV and, at least in Vietnam, other people who are stigmatised 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 exert democracy-promoting effects – for instance, the development of virtues conducive to the development of democracy and the taking over 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 effects of such steps towards weakening this specific form of state power might be very limited, if they develop at all. In a similar way, the fact that Algerian NGOs support the state's dominant role and explicitly want to contribute to the realisation of state-defined aims in this policy field very clearly limits any effects that could potentially weaken this specific form of state power, if such effects develop at all.

In stark contrast and presumably because this form of state power in Mozambique is not as strong as it is in both other countries, Mozambican associations help 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 weaken this specific form of state power. This might imply that they contribute to creating a variety of democracy-promoting effects, 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.

As regards 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 associ-

ations' unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian and authoritarianism-promoting 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 by us in Algeria and Vietnam help legitimise 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 interviewed by us lead to some sort of weakening of this specific form of state power and, related to this, to democracy-promoting effects – that is, the representation of certain interests or resistance to planned or taken decisions – then such effects are clearly eclipsed by the authoritarianism-supporting effects that "limited participation" and co-optation produce.

With respect to the state's discursive power in the area of gender equality and women's rights, the associations interviewed 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 most associations we interviewed operate within the political structures, rules, and policies enacted therein and 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 biologistic 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 of an authoritarian nature: They show a lack of tolerance vis-à-vis those who diverge from their own and their organisation'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 plays its role within this system and helps legitimise 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 again, this happens to a varying extent and in different ways. In Algeria some NGOs 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 criticise the strong difference between the FRELIMO state's official policies as regards 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, raise the social status, and support the recognition, legal and otherwise, of women and sexual minorities.

6 Conclusions

Do associations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam support various forms of authoritarian state power? Or do some of these organisations weaken particular forms of authoritarian state power? To answer these questions we have analysed the interdependent and reciprocal relations between associations and forms of state power in the area of intra-organisational 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 and authoritarianism-promoting, state-determined structures are accepted, if not enforced. Most if not all the associations we interviewed are organised in a hierarchical, if not authoritarian, manner. Although the degree of authoritarian qualities and the ways intra-organisational power is exerted vary, in most if not all these organisations the individual and collective self-determination and autonomy of

members are restricted, if not negated. At least in terms of intra-organisational decision-making processes, most associations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam are not "schools of democracy" in a Tocquevillean sense. There are some exceptions – namely, some specific professionals' organisations in Algeria and some NGOs in Vietnam and Mozambique – but these organisations represent a minority. In terms of intra-organisational decision-making, then, the "dark sides" of associations clearly outweigh associationalism's potential "bright sides." The associations concerned "reaffirm, legitimize and reproduce elements of authoritarian structures" (Lewis 2013: 328) and can in this sense be labelled supporters of authoritarian rule.

With respect to "control through welfare provision," the first form of state infrastructural power addressed in the paper, we have found that associations in Algeria and Vietnam help maintain such power, whereas 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: 327-329, 337) is thus not easily generalisable. 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: 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: 19). Notwithstanding such criticism of donors, 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.[9]

As regards the second form of infrastructural state power addressed above, "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 organisations 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 organisations and to keep them under the state's thumb without the use of force. The cases of professionals' and business organisations in Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam illustrate the ability of the

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9   In this study we have not explored the related thesis that Mozambican (and other countries') associations' close proximity to and high dependence on donors leads these associations to compromise their grass-roots orientation, innovativeness, accountability, autonomy, and legitimacy (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Banks and Hulmes 2012: 11).

authoritarian state in this respect. Certainly, the pacifying effects of various forms of co-optation are not confined to democracies. Co-optation can help depoliticise 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 stabilise autocracies (Gerschewski 2013; Wiktorowicz 2000). 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 (2013: 4) argue.

With respect to the discursive power of the state, our findings show that 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. And it is in this policy field that we find associations which are both supporters of a specific form of state power *and* forces which help to weaken specific forms of state power. 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: 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: 166-167, our translation). Further 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 this form of authoritarian state power (in comparison to forms of infrastructural power), or both.

In more general terms, our findings suggest that there is not one particular type of association which, without further qualification, helps weaken authoritarian state power. Nor do all types of associations help maintain all forms of authoritarian state power. Our research also demonstrates that studies of associations should not start from the assumption that such organisations 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.

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Appendix

List of Associations Cited and Interview Dates

Algeria

Business Organisation 1: An Algiers-based umbrella organisation of entrepreneurs that operates nationwide and advocates economic liberalisation and the promotion of private enterprise. 11 and 31 March 2015, Algiers.

Business Organisation 2: An Algiers-based women entrepreneurs' association that operates nationwide and promotes women's entrepreneurship. 15 July 2014, Oran; 17 September 2014 and 31 March 2015, Algiers.

NGO 1: An Algiers-based NGO working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention, public-awareness raising, and care provision for people living with HIV/AIDS that operates in several regions of the country. 10 March 2015, Algiers.

NGO 2: An Oran-based NGO working in, among others, the fields of HIV/AIDS prevention, public-awareness raising, and youth empowerment that operates in Oran. 14 June 2014 and 26 March 2015, Oran.

NGO 3: An Oran-based NGO working in the field of women's rights and conducting advocacy for gender equality, operating mainly in Oran. 2 and 7 July 2014; 26 March 2015, Oran.

Mozambique

Business Organisation 1: An umbrella group of business organisations that operates nationwide. 18 March 2015, Maputo; 20 March 2015, Beira.

Vietnam

Mass Organisation 3: Headquarters of a Hanoi-based mass organisation addressing women's rights, gender issues, and family affairs. 12 August 2014 and 27 April 2015, Hanoi.

Business Organisation 2: Local chapter of a Ho Chi Minh City-based nationwide business organisation promoting (among other things) support for SMEs. 18 June 2014, Ho Chi Minh City.

Business Organisation 3a: Headquarters of a nationwide business organisation promoting (among other things) support for SMEs. 1 July 2014, Hanoi.

Business Organisation 3b: Legal department of a nationwide business organisation promoting (among other things) support for SMEs. 4 and 5 March 2015, Hanoi.

Professionals' Organisation 1: A Ho Chi Minh City-based umbrella organisation of business people. 11 July 2014 and 24 April 2015, Ho Chi Minh City.

NGO 1: A Ho Chi Minh City-based NGO working in the field of HIV/Aids prevention and care provision for PLWHIV. 4 July 2014 and 3 April 2015, Ho Chi Minh City.

NGO 2: A Ho Chi Minh City-based NGO working in the field of prevention and care provision for PLWHIV. 20 July 2014 and 30 March 2015, Ho Chi Minh City.

NGO 4: A Hanoi-based NGO working in the field of gender issues, women's rights, and family affairs. 4 July 2014 and 24 April 2015, Hanoi.

NGO 5: A Hanoi-based NGO engaged in the field of gender issues and sexual and ethnic minority rights. 10 February 2015, Hanoi.

Faith-based Organisation 1: A Ho Chi Minh City-based shelter for young pregnant women. 5 July 2014, Ho Chi Minh City.

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