

Political Socialization and Collective Memory in Algeria: The Senior Generation (1945 - 1960) and the Legacy of Independence in the Context of the Hirak.

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Cette thèse est dédiée à mon épouse, Fatima.

I also dedicate this thesis to those whom I have neglected for too long, starting with my children,
and to those who supported me all along the journey, my parents Veli and Şengül.

This thesis is dedicated to every conscientious individual who strives for social change,
even at the cost of risking their own lives for the hope of a better world.
It is for States' red-headed stepchildren, those unafraid of being marginalized...

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Abstract

Cette thèse examine les manifestations du Hirak de 2019/2020 en Algérie afin d'explorer pourquoi certains retraités s'engagent dans des mouvements sociaux alors que d'autres ne le font pas. Les manifestations du Hirak constituent une étude de cas importante pour analyser la participation et la non-participation des personnes âgées dans le contexte d'un régime autoritaire. Puisque la génération ayant vécu la guerre de libération de 1954 à 1962 est toujours vivante, le Hirak offre une perspective unique sur l'action collective contemporaine et donc une opportunité exceptionnelle d'analyse des générations en lien avec la participation aux mouvements sociaux.

Les manifestations du Hirak ont émergé en réponse à la proposition du président Bouteflika de briguer un cinquième mandat, dégénérant en manifestations régionales et nationales généralisées et en occupations de rue hebdomadaires dans tout le pays pendant plus d'un an. Ces manifestations ont marqué une mobilisation d'une ampleur et d'une diversité sans précédent, impliquant des personnes de tous âges et de tous horizons, y compris des hommes, des femmes, des travailleurs et des chômeurs. Cependant, la littérature des mouvements sociaux a largement négligé l'implication des personnes retraitées, soulevant des questions essentielles sur les facteurs sociaux et politiques influençant la participation et la non-participation chez les générations plus âgées.

Cette recherche utilise des entretiens semi-structurés avec 35 retraités de Tizi-Ouzou, Alger et Mostaganem pour analyser les dynamiques sociales et politiques distinguant les activistes des non-activistes. En intégrant les concepts de génération et d'habitus comme cadres structurels pour les réseaux d'acteurs, l'étude suggère que les différentes couches de classe sociale peuvent soit inhiber ou permettre la participation. Il cherche à savoir si les attitudes des personnes âgées, lorsqu'elles sont considérées collectivement, indiquent une identité générationnelle discernable. La recherche se penche sur la façon dont les réseaux d'activistes âgés se forment et se maintiennent, en se concentrant sur leurs processus de socialisation et leurs appartenances de classe. De plus, il explore

les réseaux sociaux des non-participants, en évaluant comment ces structures contribuent à l'émergence et à la persistance de la non-participation au niveau individuel.

Les principaux résultats de la recherche sont les suivantes : La guerre d'indépendance algérienne est en effet un événement fondateur pour la génération étudiée née dans les années 1950. Cette guerre et ses symboles apparaissent comme le schisme politique le plus important pour les Algériens âgés, si ce n'est pour tous. La socialisation secondaire a un impact plus important sur l'activisme politique des personnes âgées que la socialisation primaire. Les militants algériens ont tendance à s'engager politiquement principalement avec leurs pairs de leur propre génération.

Le fait de ne pas être politisé, de ne pas avoir été recruté à un jeune âge, de ne pas connaître les militants et l'absence d'une solide expérience de participation à des événements de protestation et à des mouvements sociaux constituent des obstacles importants à l'activisme des personnes âgées. De plus, le fait d'être employé par le gouvernement, de s'affilier à des organisations civiles qui n'ont pas d'autonomie par rapport au contrôle gouvernemental et d'avoir des membres de la famille employés par le gouvernement diminuent la probabilité de maintenir l'activisme comme une entreprise de toute une vie. La perpétuation de la souveraineté financière et intellectuelle, qui se manifeste principalement au sein d'une élite marginalisée, constitue le principal moteur de l'engagement politique durable d'un individu.

This thesis examines the 2019/2020 Hirak protests in Algeria to explore why some retired individuals engage in social movements while others do not. The Hirak protests provide a compelling case study for analyzing participation and non-participation within the context of an authoritarian regime. Algeria, which gained independence in 1962, still has individuals who lived through the war of liberation from 1954 to 1962, offering a unique perspective on contemporary collective action and social movement analysis.

The Hirak protests emerged as a response to President Bouteflika's proposed fifth term, escalating into widespread regional and national demonstrations and continuous street occupations across the country for over a year. These protests marked an unprecedented scale and diversity of mobilization, involving people of all ages and backgrounds, including men, women, workers, and the unemployed. However, scholarly research has largely overlooked the involvement of the elderly, prompting essential questions about the social and political factors influencing participation and non-participation among older generations.

This research utilizes semi-structured interviews with 35 retired individuals from Tizi-Ouzou, Algiers, and Mostaganem to analyze the social and political dynamics distinguishing activists from non-activists. By integrating the concepts of generation and habitus as structural frameworks for actor networks, the study suggests that social class can both inhibit and enable participation. It investigates whether the attitudes of the elderly, when viewed collectively, point to a discernible generational identity. The research delves into how elderly activist networks are formed and maintained, focusing on their socialization processes and class affiliations. Additionally, it explores the social networks of non-participants, assessing how these structures contribute to the emergence and persistence of non-participation at the individual level.

The main findings of the research suggest that it is indeed possible to assert the existence of a war generation in Algeria. The Algerian War of Independence is indeed a foundational event for the studied generation born during the 1950s. This war and its symbols emerge as the most significant political schism for elderly Algerians, if not for all. Secondary socialization has a greater impact on the political activism of elderly individuals than primary socialization. Algerian activists tend to engage politically predominantly with peers of their own generation.

Not being politicized, not being recruited at a young age, not knowing activists, and the lack of a solid background of participation in protest events and social movements constitute strong barriers to elderly activism. Moreover, being employed by the government, affiliating with civil organizations that lack autonomy from governmental control, and having family members in government employment diminish the probability of sustaining activism as a lifelong endeavor. The preservation of financial and intellectual sovereignty, especially found within a marginalized elite, is the key driver of an individual's lifelong political commitment.

Acknowledgements

The Matrix is my favorite movie, and one scene resonates with me more than any other. When Neo, on the brink of defeat, is confronted by agent Smith, who demands to know why he continues to fight despite the certainty of failure, Neo simply replies, “because I choose to”. This line has stayed with me throughout my life, symbolizing the belief that humans do make tough choices when confronted with difficult situations. While human beings do make choices, those choices often unfold within the constraints of political, historical, economic, and social forces. Indeed, much of life happens beyond our control, leaving only a small space for truly independent decisions.

I came to Canada as a child, led by my parents’ choices through specific circumstances. Back in my home country, I spent countless days with my grandfather, cherishing every moment with him. Our financial situation made it impossible to visit him often, so when I did, I recorded his voice to preserve our connection, knowing that one day I might not be able to see him again. This habit grew; I started recording and videotaping every opportunity I had to be with the elders in my family, prompting them to share their stories. They delighted in recounting their memories, and I listened intently, feeling the weight of preserving these moments as keepsakes for the future.

Today, my PhD thesis represents a culmination of this childhood passion - listening to and recording the stories of older generations. It serves as a testament to the idea that while we may make some choices, life often directs us in ways we only understand in retrospect. This work embodies the interplay of intention and destiny, illustrating that sometimes, we are set on paths that fulfill purposes we only realize much later.

Writing a research paper or thesis requires energy, motivation, and conviction. It is an endeavour that is seldom achieved alone. Writing a thesis during a pandemic is even harder because energy, motivation, and conviction are deeply affected by the circumstances forcing us to stay home henceforth changing many of our daily habits and routines. However, when we get encouragement and support from our surroundings, we stay resilient and pursue our goal with determination. Hence, I want to thank my supervisor, Frederic Vairel, who guided me during this process. He opened my eyes on a lot of things concerning the research project, and he always responded to my questions. I am very happy to have made his acquaintance as a person and as a supervisor. I thank him for his patience as well as his empathy and guidance.

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(Introduction) Senior political involvement

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the incumbent president of Algeria came to power in 2019 at the age of 74 and was re-elected for another 5-year term at the age of 79. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Tebboune's predecessor was 82 years old when he unwillingly left office. Joe Biden, elected at the age of 80 as the president of the United States of America withdrew his candidacy from 2024 presidential election to cede his place to Kamal Harris, a younger candidate. Donald Trump was 74 years old when he left office, and he is re-elected for president at the age of 78. The president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, is 72 years old and it appears that he will hold power for years to come. The president of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is now 71 years old, and he intends to reiterate his candidacy for another 5-year term. Xi Jinping is also 71 years old, and he wishes to rule China for many years, just like many other presidents and prime ministers around the world. This short list shows how the political leaders of many states in the world are made of older adults who have passed beyond the legal age of retirement in their respective countries. For instance, many political leaders and statesman around the globe, especially in the African continent are elderly people. On the one hand Africa is considered to be the youngest continent in the world, but on the other hand, it has the oldest leaders (Brookings Report, 2019). The African continent might be an eye-catching case, but all around the world, old people are resilient to attain certain political positions even during the last quarter of their lives.

It is understandable to see people put endless effort to achieve gratifying goals such as money, power and institutional promotions. However, how is it possible to understand people like Mr. Ahmed, 73 years old, who participates in meetings and protest activities against the military regime in Algeria? How to explain Mr. Edward Charles and Christopher Cornford's commitment to social

change through various social movements, even after their 70s¹? How to justify Mr. Erdal's participation in Gezi protests in Turkey at the age of 66²? Those examples and instances might be multiplied but they are enough to notice that elderly people are part of political dynamics even after the age of retirement, all around the world regardless of their political environment.

Indeed, older adults are much more present in the political sphere than we could think of. Instead of leaving everything behind due to their old age for the sake of serenity and tranquility, older adults pursue political goals and work hard not always to become important political figures but be part of social change either for justice and progress or for the preservation of ideologies they hold dear. Whereas many seniors impatiently wait for their retirement so they can take vacations, travel around the world, spend time with their families and so on, many others continue to be active whether through the institutional apparatus of the state, or non-institutional channels.

Whether they are on the conventional track of doing politics or on the unconventional one, people persist on the pursuit of their objectives. There are elderly leaders on the one side, but there are also elderly protesters, activists and social movement participants who strenuously engage against either some policies of their countries or the regime itself.

This research is concerned with the people who stand against the regime and work hard to achieve their goals despite their old age. This research is thus interested, not in older adults who serve in the institutional apparatus of the state, but the ones who wish to instill change through unconventional and non-institutional channels. There are reasons why people, even in their later years, persist in working hard to achieve certain goals, even if their obstinacy or stubbornness might have startling consequences. Unconventional political participation of seniors merits our attention and needs to be looked at thoroughly.

¹ The examples of England are taken from (Andrews, 1991).

² Mr. Ahmed and Mr. Erdal are pseudonyms used for people I know in their respective countries.

The rest of this introductory chapter will first embark on an exploration of the dynamics of activism through the lens of social movements literature. Then it will delve into the peculiarities of the Hirak as a case study. Finally, it will delve into the peculiarities of this research which focuses on the analysis of elderly participation to social movements within authoritarian regimes. The interplay between individual life course, socialization, and generation are considered as a set of influencing factors. Anchored in the context of the Arab Spring and Algeria's Hirak movement, the chapter emphasizes the often-overlooked participation of elderly individuals in high-risk activism.

Commitment to Social Change through the Arab Spring

It is said that political behaviour of actors in a system is shaped by its institutional framework (Brownlee, 2007. p. 10). Furthermore, political participation is not just a matter of formal electoral processes, but also of civil society organizations and social movements (Calhoun et al. 2022. p. 10). This broader view of political participation highlights how individuals often turn to alternative avenues to express dissent and demand change, especially when traditional mechanisms fail to address their grievances. An instance where people clearly showed their rejection of established autocratic institutions was that of the Arab Spring. The institutional limits and constraints experienced by people over the years in authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) led to the popular protests of 2011. The massive upheavals of the Arab Spring happened for multiple reasons, and its repercussions are still present in the region.

Although it experienced protests, Algeria was somewhat spared from the Arab Spring in 2011 (Chena, 2011, Achy 2012; Entelis 2011; Zoubir 2011). Indeed, several factors act as barriers to mobilization and the realization of demands. Among these, the fear of a return to violence plays a significant role in limiting collective action (Chena, 2011). This apprehension is deeply rooted in Algeria's traumatic history, notably the civil war that began in 1991, which claimed nearly 200,000

lives, resulted in 20,000 disappearances, and displaced 1.5 million people (Gèze et Mellah, 2008). Additionally, the “Black Spring” of 2001 in Kabylia, which led to the deaths of 132 individuals, further reinforces this cautious stance. These events have unfolded under the dominance of a military-backed regime that has maintained control since Algeria’s independence in 1962.

In February 2019, Algeria took a distinct path compared to 2011. The Algerian people stood firmly against Bouteflika’s 5th candidacy and the corrupt leadership governing the country. Just like other anti-regime movements in the Middle East, the protests were held under authoritarian rule, and people of all factions were ready to directly oppose regime forces in order to have the change and progress they longed for. Although most of the literature on the Arab Spring focuses on youth discontent vis-à-vis old presidents and obsolete systems, it is a fact that multiple factions of society have participated in the uprisings from Morocco to Syria. Men and women, employees and retired, workers and unemployed, young and seniors, all have simultaneously contributed to various degrees and tones to protest activities in their respective countries.

Activists are heterogeneous (McAdam 1992; Wiltfang & McAdam 1991) and there are plenty of roads leading to mobilization. Scholars are now eager to analyse micro-structures of social relations, as well as the biographical resources available to a person defining the scope of his agency in order to understand individual paths to mobilization. Multiple studies have focused on family background and schooling (Coles, 1986; Braungart & Braungart, 1990). Some others have focused on social networks and microstructures (McAdam, 1986; Crossley, 2008). Numerous studies confirmed the thesis that prior embeddedness in network clusters or enclaves facilitate individuals’ participation in protest (della Porta, 1988; Diani, 1995; Fernandez & McAdam, 1988; Gould, 1995; Kriesi, 1988; McAdam, 1988; Melucci, 1989; Mische, 2003; Passy, 2003). Once initiated, activists become part of movement organizations, forming commitments that could not

easily be reversed (Keniston, 1968; Newfield, 1966; Maidenberg & Meyer, 1970; Horowitz & Friedland, 1970). Pre-existing trustworthy networks are especially critical for mobilisation into high-risk types of collective action, because a high level of trust helps counterbalance the selective disincentives to engage in dangerous activities (della Porta 1988; Loveman 1998; McAdam 1986; Morris 1984).

The researchers of the Arab Spring considered the commitment and agency of many categories of people such as the youth, women, labor unions, and social media users, but the commitments, agency, and collective behavior of older adults are left aside. One important window of opportunity to study that category of people is presently accessible. The massive protests in Algeria that started in February 2019 as small discontent in various cities, took the shape of a large-scale social movement spreading all over the country. Older adults were also taking the streets and screaming slogans with the rest of the protesters. It is crucial to remember that one of the main slogans during the uprisings was “al-Sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam - the people want to bring down the regime” which shows that the protests concern not only the youth but all factions of the population. Thus, Algeria in 2019 and after offers a good example to study older adults’ participation, and repertoires of action in the context of a social movement carried under authoritarian context.

The Hirak as a case study

Revolutionary mobilizations are influenced by preceding movements and are only partially independent of the political and social conditions of their origin. Simultaneously, they bring about incomplete and temporary transformations in the emerging context (Camau, Vairel, 2014). In the case of Algeria, the scheduled elections on April 18, 2019, in which Bouteflika³ was a candidate

³ Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1937 - 2021) held the presidency for nearly two decades, from 1999 to 2019. His ability to govern came into question when he suffered a stroke during his third term in 2013, rendering him widely regarded as unfit for office (LaPresse, 10 février 2019).

for a fifth term, served as the catalyst for the Hirak movement (Benderra et al., 2020). Aside from Bouteflika's candidacy and the prevailing authoritarian context, the year 2018 witnessed an escalation in the arrests of bloggers and journalists, alongside an increasing presence of Harragas⁴ (Sidi Boumedine, 2019).

On February 9th, 2019, the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) party held a meeting in Algiers to introduce their candidate for the upcoming presidential election on April 18th. The candidate was none other than the incumbent president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in power since 1999, who had largely vanished from public view after a debilitating stroke in 2013, a year before securing his fourth term. Unable to attend in person, a portrait of a much younger Bouteflika was displayed to his supporters, a move that only deepened the contempt of those who had long been oppressed by a corrupt and clientelist regime (Hachemaoui, 2016). Since his fourth term, Bouteflika was considered as an illegitimate leader who had neither control on his body nor on the country anymore (Aït Braham, 2020). Local protests quickly broke out, starting in cities east of Algiers. Demonstrations began on February 15th in Bordj Bou Arreridj and continued on February 16th in Kherrata, where hundreds took to the streets. By February 19, the protests had reached Khenchela, where a massive portrait of Bouteflika was torn down from the Town Hall. This scene was repeated on February 21st in Annaba (Martinez and Boserup, 2024). The following day, February 22nd, saw a surge of anger as a crowd, mainly young men from working-class backgrounds, poured into the streets of the capital and several major cities like Tizi Ouzou, Béjaïa, Boumerdès, and Algiers, spurred by anonymous calls on social media.

To mitigate the damage and ease societal tensions, on March 11th, 2019, Bouteflika formally and officially withdrew his candidacy for the presidency. In his place, another figure from the regime

⁴ Mainly young men who attempt to leave their country without a passport or visa, risking their lives on boats (Souiah, 2012).

was put forward. However, supporters of the Hirak quickly moved from their initial call for Bouteflika to step back, to an increasingly revolutionary call for a total systemic overhaul (Fabbiano, 2019). It should be noted that the slogans at the beginning were “Bouteflika, dégage!” and “Non au cinquième mandat” but gradually evolved to “FLN, dégage!” and “Système dégage!”. Eventually, it became “Yetna7aou Ga3” (“Qu’ils dégagent tous!”) (Sidi Boumedine, 2019). Despite the continuing protests, Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected through hasty elections in December 2019, and the regime went back to business as usual without any serious concussion. Algeria had once again succeeded in effectively preserving its authoritarian structure by adapting the electoral aspect of globalized democracy (Camau, 2005).

The first eye-catching fact about the movement known as the Hirak is its longevity. The movement officially started on February 22nd, 2019, and continued during 56 consecutive weeks until March 13th, 2020⁵. Hirak protesters decided to suspend the weekly demonstrations due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Benderra, 2020). The second significant feature is the diverse participation across generations, with protesters ranging from those born in the 1950s to younger individuals born in the 1980s and 2000s. The third feature making the Hirak an interesting case study is the use of slogans related to the war of liberation in 1954. People chanted “*un seul héros le peuple*” and at other instances *Assam ’u assam ’u Yâ nâs, Abane Ramdane khalla uçaya, dawla madaniya mashi askariyyah* (Listen listen people, Abane Ramdane⁶ left a will, Civil state, not military). The Hirak’s main slogan remained “*dawla madaniyyah mashi askariyyah*” which can be translated as “a civil

⁵ On February 19th, 2021, protesters took to the streets to mark the Hirak’s anniversary and continue their call for regime change. However, the regime responded with harsh repression, crushing the movement by May 2021. Among those targeted was Sami Derrouni, an activist from Tipaza near Algiers, who was sentenced to two years in prison for incitement to gathering, undermining national unity, and endangering national security (AFP, May 2021)

⁶ Abane Ramdane (1920 - 1957), quickly rose to a key leadership role within the FLN, coordinated and facilitated the rallying of other political parties to the liberation cause. Despite his pivotal role in shaping the FLN as a political entity, his austere demeanor, intellectualism, and Kabyle background fostered tensions and made him a polarizing figure among his peers (McDougall, 2017).

state not a military regime”. The slogans used by the Hirak movement challenge the core narratives of Algeria’s official history, making the historical memory of its participants a vital subject of study. The objective of the Hirak as a social movement was to oust all representatives of the present military regime and hold legitimate democratic elections in order to have a representative government, and a democratic regime. Protesters’ main claim was the establishment of a democratic regime, and the dismissal of all members of the present establishment. Videos and images of seniors actively participating in the movement by screaming slogans and waving Algerian flags are widely spread over the internet and social media⁷. Older adults, just like other categories of individuals, participated in the weekly protests by taking the streets and facing repression.

Just as old leaders who struggle to instigate change through institutional political channels, old activists do the same through non-institutional ones. The question arising from that fact is: Why and how do older adults participate in social movements under authoritarian regimes? The why question is not only related to motivations and interests during a protest, but also, and even more, about the long-term factors that lead older adults to become or remain activists. Sub-questions related to the overarching question logically follows: What leads older adults to engage in collective initiatives, rather than to remain passive? What kind of resources are available to them, whether social or material, for social mobilization? What kind of networks are they involved in? How does their web of social relationships affect their stances in terms of activism? And to what extent do they vary in their life course unfolding under an authoritarian regime, thereby shaping both the forms and levels of social participation? These are the key questions explored in this study.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YjMiSxhlZ8> (Other videos are available as well on YouTube)

The questions guiding this research are fundamentally linked to the concept of socialization. To explore these issues, the study adopts a life course perspective with a focus on networks and resources, aiming to contribute to the existing scholarship on activism and social movement participation. Given the broad scope of socialization, the concepts of habitus and generation are incorporated to better understand older activists who experienced their formative years in specific historical and social contexts. A life-course approach is employed to bridge the analysis of life trajectories with the dynamics of generation and habitus. This approach is particularly suited for examining elderly political participation in authoritarian settings, offering valuable insights into how various factors shape activism over the life course.

Studying activism through life course

It is easier to follow and trace back the life course of a political actor who climbed the echelons of a state's institutional apparatus than to decipher the trials and tribulations of an activist who thrived outside those institutions. Although it is important to both trace the trajectories of institutional and non-institutional political paths and careers, I believe that it is crucial to decipher how the experiences in life trajectories within a specific generation reflect into elderly activism. Therefore, I will examine the factors motivating elderly individuals to engage in social movements within an authoritarian regime, with a focus on their social resources, networks, and unique generational peculiarities. The prospect of the research is firstly, to explore the contextual, social and personal life trajectories that underlie the commitments of seniors in social movements, secondly, explore the importance and meaning of commitment to the lives of seniors; and thirdly, identify what it means to participate in social movements for senior members of a society. My analysis delves deep in microlevel variation in participation processes and mechanisms. It has the potential to improve our understanding of the causes, consequences, and motivations behind senior mobilization.

Conducting a life course study might have its load of cliches and repetition of hackneyed occurrences. As human beings, we are born in certain settings whether temporal, spatial, and structural. Like other animal species, humans have a typical life course consisting of successive stages of growth, each stage having a different set of physical, psychological and behavioral characteristics. These phases are prenatal life, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (including old age) (Bornstein & Miller, 2020). Our lives are shaped within the long tunnel of nature and nurture. The immensity of various stimuli influencing our thoughts and behaviours all along our lives makes of us merely predictable beings. Indeed, it is very difficult to foresee a person's reaction in a specific circumstance because there are infinite possibilities. However, human behaviour contains regularities and patterns that enables it to be studied and understood. The life course approach is what offers a comprehensive framework for exploring these regularities and patterns. This perspective not only highlights the predictable aspects of human existence but also acknowledges the diversity and complexity of individual trajectories, offering valuable insights into both shared and unique aspects of the human experience.

Although all humans share a large number of biological and psychological properties, a person's developmental stage, gender, social class, and ethnicity add unique features that render those sharing all four classifications different from others (Kagan, 2020). Adding historical era, culture, and religion as variables make the study of social phenomena a daunting task. Hence the need to delimit the scope of the research by choosing specific variables, specific cases, and specific units of analysis.

The units of analysis in this research are retired senior activists aged 60 and over. Although multiple variables are important to consider, a focus on generation and socialization in terms of

resources and networks delimits the scope of the research. The studied case is the “ongoing”⁸ social movement in Algeria, an authoritarian state controlled by a military regime. This trivet defines the horizons of the research.

In this research, the terms elderly, seniors, and older adults are used interchangeably to refer to a socially constructed category of which it is possible to analyze the formation and the transformations of their existence through their socialization process (Galland, 2011). It also represents a stakeholder in the structure of society, a period of experimentation that comes under social experience (Mannheim, 1952; Dubet, 1994). Framing aging in this way allows me to reject state-imposed classifications rooted in economic productivity and instead highlight the agency and complexity of older adults’ social roles.

This research places biographical development at the center of its explanatory framework and recognizes historical location as the context or framework within which socialization occurs. Networks and resources are locked within the confluence of biography and historical location. This research views activism as the outcome of a dynamic relationship between individual life course and historical location. By situating social movements within this interplay, it highlights how norms, values, ideologies, and ideas not only shape collective action but also emerge as powerful forces driving social and political change.

[The research project](#)

The primary goal of this study is to examine elderly people’s participation and non-participation in large-scale anti-regime protests, and to explain why they chose to participate (or not) in the way they did. The objective was achieved through thirty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews with

⁸ I maintain that the movement persists due to the enduring spirit that fuels it. Nevertheless, the implementation of COVID-19 measures (Lockdown from March 2020 to June 2020, and borders closed from March 2020 to June 2021) significantly subdued its momentum, inadvertently serving the state’s interests. Nonetheless, activists remain steadfast in their determination to rejuvenate the movement at the earliest opportunity.

retired older adults. There were two categories of people under scrutiny; retired older adults who identified as “activists” prior to the case study and participated to the Hirak; and retired individuals who took little or no part in it whether they were sympathetic to the movement or not. During the interviews I conducted, I did not encounter any situation of radicalization from the part of elderly people who were previously inactive. It appears that the process of engagement and radicalisation are inexistant during the old age. Given the importance of these topics to themes of activism, social movements and modern repertoires of collective action, it is hoped that this study may be useful to researchers interested in the field. To reformulate and synthesize the previous questions, this research focuses around three particular questions, each of which will be dealt with in their own chapter:

1. Of the overall elderly population, who is more likely to participate, and why?
2. What were the paths and barriers to participation?
3. How do individual life course and generational location coincide when it comes to activism?

The research gathers its data from a cross-sectional study where a small number of people were surveyed through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviewed people were all at an advanced stage in their life cycle development, and they were passed the retirement age in Algeria. Their socialization process took place in their native country during the Algerian War of Liberation (1954–1962) and the subsequent post-war period. The study provides insight into the combined effects of overarching generation and individual life course on activism. This way, it is possible to see similarities and differences in the life course effect and the generational effect on individuals willing or not to participate in social movements under authoritarian regimes.

The study’s limitations concern its overall purpose. First of all, there is no statistical analysis on the participation rate of older adults due to the nature of the research design and the collected data.

The research does not seek to offer analysis as to why the Hirak failed to change the regime, or whether this was even a realistic possibility. The effects and outcomes of the pandemic as well as the tactics of the regime are not part of the objectives of this research.

The focus of this research is participation and mobilisation of elderly people. References to the pandemic and the regime are made in order to better grasp the context of the Hirak, but there will not be proper analysis as to the effects of the pandemic on both the regime and the protesters' strategies of action. This research's pretention is to add a humble drop of knowledge to the literature on the Arab Spring, activism, and social movement participation.

The structure of the thesis

This research aligns with the growing trend of reintroducing sociological analysis into social movement studies by investigating the pioneering area of how life course circumstances impact individuals on a personal and biographical level - specifically, the effects on participants' life trajectories that are, at least in part, a result of their involvement in these activities (Fillieule, 2013).

In an attempt to answer the questions I have asked above, and to verify their validity, I will first review the literature on the Arab Spring, and social movement activism. I will then expand on my theoretical framework, and the methodology I have used. Lastly, I will discuss the results and findings of the fieldwork. More specifically, the main body of this thesis comprises six chapters, accompanied by the customary introductory and concluding chapters.

Chapter one sets the foundation for this research by critically examining the existing literature on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa. The main argument of the chapter is that the academic discourse on the engagement of elderly individuals (Campbell & Strate, 1981; Jennings, 1987; Nygard & Jacobsson, 2013; Campbell, 2015; Serrat et al., 2022; 2023) has primarily centered on their involvement in civic engagement within democratic settings, rather than exploring their participation in high-risk activism within authoritarian regimes. While studies

on social movements during the Arab Spring focused on the authoritarian backdrop, media, and youth activism, they often overlooked the roles and claims of elderly individuals. Conversely, research on elder movements has predominantly been situated within developed countries and liberal democracies. The literature review centers on the different categories of actors examined to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of mobilization and collective action in social movements. It highlights a significant gap in the analysis, specifically the absence of attention to elderly participants and their demands as retired individuals.

Chapter two lays out the theoretical framework and methodological foundations of the study, presented together to reflect their mutual reinforcement. At the core of the theoretical approach is the argument that elderly political activism does not emerge spontaneously in later life but is rooted in early processes of socialization. Social positions, as argued by Nash (2003), significantly influence the formation of individual dispositions, which in turn shape long-term political orientations. This insight supports the central hypothesis: individuals who did not acquire activist dispositions during this critical window are less likely to become politically active in old age. Consequently, the concepts of generation, socialization, habitus, and life course are mobilized to understand the long-term trajectories leading to or away from activism. In terms of research design, the study tests the theoretical propositions by exploring the life trajectories of retired individuals aged sixty and above. Drawing on fieldwork conducted across several Algerian cities, it relies on in-depth semi-structured interviews to uncover how early socialization, generational experience, and class background influence political engagement - or apathy - in later life.

Chapter three delves into the characteristics of research participants, individuals born in the 1950s in Algeria, examining how their experiences were shaped by the Algerian War of Independence. Drawing on Mannheim's concept of generations, the chapter argues that this period produced three

distinct generational cohorts. Each group, with its own unique perspective and identity, experienced and interpreted the war and the subsequent founding of the Algerian state differently. A key question explored is whether a cohesive “war generation” emerged in Algeria, and if so, what defined its collective identity. This analysis highlights the complexities of generational identity within the context of Algeria’s tumultuous history. By demonstrating how shared memories, experiences, ideologies, and attitudes towards the regime unites these individuals, the chapter establishes that they indeed constitute a generation. This macro-level analysis emphasizes the profound impact of historical events on the formation of generational consciousness.

Chapter four provides a detailed microanalysis of the population under study by examining the pathways and trajectories of participation and non-participation within the context of the life course. It focuses on the concept of political socialization to uncover what distinguishes participants from non-participants. The chapter argues that secondary socialization - experiences occurring later in life - plays a more significant role than primary socialization in shaping individuals’ activist or non-activist trajectories. By tracing participants’ life courses, the chapter analyzes key transitions, turning points, and life events from childhood to adulthood, establishing connections between these experiences and their decisions to join the Hirak or abstain from activism. It investigates the influences of family, neighborhoods, peers, educational institutions, associations, and political organizations on their socialization process. Through this analysis, the chapter seeks to answer critical questions about the pathways to activism, as well as the barriers that may prevent engagement over the course of an individual’s life. This chapter compellingly argues that activism, if not ignited during a critical window in youth, rarely takes root later in life, making it exceedingly unlikely for the elderly to embark on such a path.

Chapter five delves into the unique position of the elderly in Algeria, focusing on senior activists' involvement in the Hirak movement. It examines their motivations, experiences of aging and retirement, and aspirations for the future, aiming to answer key questions: How activism is sustained as a lifelong endeavor, how do the elderly contribute to the movement, and what are their specific claims and concerns as retired individuals? The focus is about their present situation as retired elderly individuals. The analysis reveals that lifelong activists among the elderly are not driven by personal gain, as they already belong to the more privileged segment of the middle class in Algeria. Instead, their activism centers on broader issues, with a strong focus on advocating for political freedom and democracy.

The dissertation concludes with a critical reflection on the research, evaluating its strengths and limitations while addressing the key challenges and successes encountered in its methodology, theoretical framework, findings, and implications for future scholarship. To bring the discussion full circle and connect the themes of socialization, generation, and class, I argue that while some individuals maintain long-term engagement in social movements and others participate only briefly, sustaining activism as a lifelong commitment fundamentally depends on both cognitive and financial independence. These forms of independence are often rooted in privilege, particularly access to financial resources, relevant education, and class-based advantages. By leveraging diverse data sources - including books, articles, and interviews - and employing qualitative analysis of intensive interviews with a purposive sample of Hirak participants, I illuminate the evolving nature of elderly participation in social movements. This approach enables a nuanced examination of the historical, biographical, and social factors influencing why individuals join social movements and how their participation evolves over the life course.

Chapter 1: Political Participation under Authoritarian Regimes. A review of Literature

Civic engagement for political change in authoritarian settings has its peculiarities compared to democratic ones. Although mechanisms of mobilization might be similar, the risk factor is generally much higher. For instance, Algeria is a centralised state where decision-making is within the hands of the president and the army, and where the interest of the ruling elite overrides any type of conflict that could endanger the military power apparatus (Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2018). The country's relative peace and the regime's longevity reflect "the capacity of elites to dispense political and economic resources in a controlled manner" (p. 1). State-society relations are still characterized by the detachment of the state authorities from their people. Any kind of activism that could have the potential to "tickle" or brush against the regime's red lines are high-risk/cost activism (McAdam, 1986) that may result in fines, jail, torture, and even death (Amnesty International report, 2019; Haouati, 2020; Freedom House report, 2020).

The Algerian regime has gradually shifted from a "military defense" of its system, as evidenced by the military intervention in January 1992, towards a "politico-institutional defense" of its system, as evidenced by the new measures aimed at preventing any repetition of the scenario that saw a radical Islamist party come to the brink of power, a situation that only the army could handle at that time (Aït-Aoudia, 2015, p. 296). Throughout the civil war and until now, the Algerian state managed to uphold its administrative functions and security structures. However, the Black Decade left a lasting impact on Algerian society (Martinez, 2019). Algerians emerged traumatized from these years of violence, bearing the heavy cost of the collapse of the national community. The end of national unity, and social cohesion obsessively observed by the FLN paved the way for intense questioning about Algerian history and identity (Martinez, 2019). Since Algeria's independence in 1962, changes in the country's political power structure have been driven more

by internal power struggles among various segments of the state elite than by the people electing their representatives (Ouaissa, 2005; Werenfels, 2007).

Despite all the obstacles, most regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been confronted with contingent mobilizations whether local, regional, or nation-wide. Algeria has experienced some upheavals, associative life, and anti-regime protests as well (Kadri, 2019; Jazra, 2022). Through cycles of turbulence and resistance, the Algerian regime has remained firmly in power, upheld by a set of entrenched mechanisms: systematic co-optation of the opposition, deliberate fragmentation of civil society, strategic use of rent distribution, patronage and corruption, and repression as the ultimate tool to silence dissent and maintain control (Ghanem, 2022). The latest nation-wide upheaval that occurred in Algeria is the Hirak⁹ (February 22nd, 2019 - March 13th, 2020)¹⁰, an anti-regime social movement which needs to be studied in order to shed light on how the movement took shape, but also on older adults contributed.

A social movement, as viewed through a sociological lens, represents a collective endeavor conducted by multiple individuals simultaneously, with a deliberate and concerted approach (Dormagen, Mouchard, 2019). Social movement actors are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts, with the aim to promote or oppose social change either at the systemic or non-systemic level (Diani, 1992). In our specific context, this collective endeavor manifests as sustained challenges directed at an established system or structure of authority (Snow, 2007). Based on these definitions, I adopt Snow's characterisation of social movements as

“Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group,

⁹ The movement had to pause due to COVID-19 measures imposed by State authorities on March 13th, 2020.

¹⁰ The nationwide protest officially commenced on February 22nd due to its leap on the city of Algiers; widespread dissatisfaction had already begun in the cities of Kherrata and Khenchala on 16th and 19th February respectively (Aït Braham, 2020)

organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part.” (Snow et al. 2018, p. 10).

The Hirak aligns with the definition of a social movement due to its continuous and coordinated street demonstrations challenging the Algerian regime, facilitated by a diverse yet interconnected set of collective identities united by at least one common objective: political reforms.

The perpetuity of movements is contingent upon the continuous mobilization of resources and participants (Staggenborg and Ramos, 2016; 2023). A decline in momentum and involvement poses a significant risk to the sustainability of the movement. The Hirak sustained its long-term momentum through its capacity to unite various factions of the Algerian population across social classes and generational divides. It is well known that multiple and diversified groups such as women (Al-Malki, 2012; Heideman and Youssef 2012; Khamis 2011, 2013; Radsch 2011, 2012; Radsch and Khamis 2013), civil society organizations (Cavatorta, 2013; Gibril, 2018; Cakmak and Cakmak, 2016), and the youth (Gana, 2013; Lynch, 2014) mobilized during the Arab Spring and the Hirak (Benamar, 2020; Benderra, 2020; Desrues et Gobe, 2019) for various reasons.

The context of the Hirak which occurs in authoritarian and repressive¹¹ settings raise an intriguing question: among all these social categories already present on the ground, what motivates older adults to contribute their time, financial resources, and skills to the cause of the Hirak as a social movement? Why would they participate in weekly marches on the streets and show their discontent towards the regime and its military apparatus in a context where the prohibition of unauthorized demonstrations persists?

¹¹ The Algerian government has imprisoned over 300 Hirak participants, including protesters who carried the Amazigh flag and those who opposed the presidential elections. Activists face charges related to terrorism, endangering national interests, and incitement to unarmed gatherings. Even after their release, detainees often endure unjust travel restrictions (Amnesty International, 2021). Despite the president’s pardons and clemency for thousands of prisoners, over 200 Hirak participants remain imprisoned (Amnesty International, 2024).

This question is pertinent when considering the repressive nature of the State. Article 9 of the *Official Gazette of the Algerian Republic*, enacted since 1989, restricts and regulates protests by prohibiting any actions that undermine the symbols of the November 1st, 1954, Revolution. These symbols include the national anthem, the national flag, and the historical texts and documents of the republic. Furthermore, public order, and public morality must not be disrupted during any gathering or demonstration (Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne, 1990). Since 2001, all demonstrations are prohibited in the national capital, and obtaining authorization from the authorities to protest in other areas remains extremely challenging, laborious and perilous (FIDH report, 2023). Since 2011, the Algerian government has introduced a series of restrictive new laws aimed at suppressing opposition and deeming activism as a criminal offense (FIDH report, 2023). In political environments characterized by state repression, engaging in collective action and participating in social movements are indeed risky endeavors.

Social movement studies on the Arab Spring have predominantly focused on the authoritarian context, media dynamics, and the roles played by key actors, including women, workers, social movement organizations, and youth activists. However, these analyses have largely overlooked the agency of elders within these movements. In contrast, scholarly attention to the political engagement of elders has been primarily confined to the context of developed countries and liberal democracies (Campbell & Strate, 1981; Campbell, 2015; Fisher, 2020; Jennings, 1987; Nygard & Jacobsson, 2013), leaving a critical gap in understanding their contributions within authoritarian settings. This oversight calls for a re-evaluation of the role of elders in social movements, particularly in regions marked by systemic repression. The current body of literature on the Hirak movement also overlooks the role played by the elderly population, instead primarily focusing on the involvement of younger actors (Ouaras, 2020; Safir, 2020).

In the realm of social sciences, while there is an abundance of research on the causes and consequences of revolutions¹² in the framework of the Arab Spring, there has been a noticeable dearth of attention to the paths taken by elderly and retired participants, their individual characteristics, and the processes that drive them towards unconventional political participation. Political repression, economic circumstances, neoliberal policies, and the influence of social media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are commonly cited as key factors that contributed to the onset of the Arab Spring. The younger generation, comprising educated graduates facing unemployment and a modern cohort of individuals passionately advocating for democracy while actively involved with digital technologies (Bennani-Chraïbi, Fillieule, 2012), is depicted as the sole driving force behind both social and political change. Therefore, we must question the extent to which these findings are generalizable to participants in other types of categories such as the retired older adults who engage with varying degrees of intensity. Their concerns may differ significantly from those of younger individuals due to their life-stage circumstances. This assertion is particularly salient because older adults often have distinct life experiences, priorities, and modes of engagement compared to younger generations. Therefore, applying the same frameworks used to analyze youth activism to older demographics may overlook crucial nuances and motivations specific to older adults' participation in social movements like the Hirak.

Authoritarian regimes are often adept at coercing dissenters into becoming loyal collaborators, employing tactics such as manipulation, blackmail, or offering clientelist benefits (Gerschewski,

¹² The Hirak sparked the emergence of a political crisis and a revolutionary dynamic (Allal et al., 2021, p. 10). The Hirak indeed created a revolutionary situation through sustained mass mobilization and direct challenges to state authority. In terms of outcome however, it would be categorized as “politics as usual”, characterized by a largely unchanged state of affairs (Tilly, 1978) where Bouteflika were replaced by another figure benign to existing power structures. Although Bouteflika and some of his generals are dismissed, there is a continuation of the status quo, with the political system functioning smoothly and very little disruption in the authoritarian regime. Indeed, the Hirak was not strong enough to claim partial control of state apparatus, and it did not reimpose governmental control.

2013). Algeria's natural resource wealth and oil rents provide the regime with the means to engage in cooptation practices that serve to preserve its power (Horst, 2016). However, elderly activists demonstrate remarkable resilience, steadfastly resisting such inducements. Therefore, it is crucial to delve into their distinct viewpoints and motivations as retired older adults within the Algerian context, comprehending how their life-stage circumstances influence their priorities and roles in wider social and political movements. The Hirak provides a distinctive lens through which we can broaden our understanding of protest dynamics, extending beyond conventional narratives and acknowledging the diverse voices that contribute to social change.

My research involves two key aspects. First, I delve into the motivations and assertions of the elderly as a distinct group due to their structural and historical location. This initial exploration aims to shed light on their unique perspectives. Secondly, I undertake an analysis of their life trajectories through the lens of life course theory, a dimension that has been relatively underrepresented in existing literature. The seminal studies that took the biographical factors into consideration (DeMartini, 1983; Fendrich, 1977; Fillieule et al., 2019; Fendrich & Krauss, 1978; McAdam, 1986, 1989; Sherkat & Blocker, 1997) did so in terms of consequences of youth political participation and not in terms of a life course perspective¹³. These studies have typically compared individuals at two points in time (their initial involvement and the time of the study) and have not traced an individual's trajectory of participation over his life. My research shifts the focus to the unfolding of elderly individuals' life courses, not by juxtaposing their first protest movement with the present, but by exploring the continuous evolution of their activism. These surveys seek to unravel how retired older adults perceive their circumstances and steer their actions.

¹³ These studies explore the biographical impacts stemming from various episodes of student activism.

Examining the role of retired and elderly activists within the Algerian Hirak offers critical insights into the protest movement's dynamics. These activists bring a wealth of historical knowledge from past struggles, including the War of Independence and earlier upheavals, which illuminates how historical memories shape current protests. The analysis of their involvement is crucial for understanding how the Hirak maintains its momentum and engages different age groups. Analyzing the unique motivations and challenges faced by older activists reveals how various generations are mobilized and integrated into the movement. This investigation not only uncovers the specific physical, social, and political barriers they encounter but also enhances our overall comprehension of the Hirak by highlighting the interplay between generational experiences and historical context in shaping the movement's trajectory.

In the initial part of this chapter, my focus revolves around the idea that the key elements examined by scholars to comprehend the motivations behind people's involvement in activism during the Arab Spring might not translate directly to older adults. These factors encompass political oppression, socioeconomic conditions, the impact of neoliberal policies, as well as the role of social media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). While each segment will contain details specific to Algeria, I will explore, in the last section of this part, the background of the Hirak movement and delineate the relevant issues currently in focus.

In the second part of this chapter, the emphasis will be put on the importance of studying older individuals as a unique segment within social movements. It delves into the existing literature on elderly activism within democratic nations. Additionally, it delves into the nuances of democratic and authoritarian regimes, emphasizing that authoritarian systems are not uniform and should be examined with attention to their specific contexts, much like the diverse spectrum of democratic systems. This nuanced approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of

elderly activism across different political contexts. In light of Passeron's argument (1991), it is essential for social sciences to carefully consider the unique context of each phenomenon studied to ensure that future comparisons are both meaningful and feasible.

Transitioning to the third and last part of the chapter, I advance the viewpoint that the conventional network and identity perspectives on participation in social movements tend to analyze participation as a static and one-time occurrence, whereas it should be approached with a more dynamic lens. I maintain that networks and identities are not fixed and predetermined; rather, they evolve and undergo transformation over time, thus influencing an individual's life priorities based on their structural positioning. While static network analysis (Farine, 2018) provides insights, it is essential to acknowledge that it may not be sufficient; exploring social mechanisms and relational dynamics, particularly those related to political socialization that ultimately drive mobilization, can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of elderly activism.

Acknowledging the highly dynamic nature of the field, marked by constant evolution and exploration, my literature review delves into a diverse range of empirical research aimed at understanding the factors driving participation in the Arab uprisings and more broadly, involvement in social movements within authoritarian contexts. Through this comprehensive examination of empirical findings and theoretical approaches, the goal is to identify elderly activists' grievances and claims, then to see how social movement theories have shaped the research approaches utilized in the study of activism and social movement participation. It is crucial to emphasize that this review does not seek to establish a specific framework for validation or challenge; instead, its purpose is to contextualize this study within the broader landscape of existing scholarly work.

Unraveling catalysts: Examining drivers of concerns among protesters

A component of a model for participation that appears well-suited to depict the comprehensive nature of involvement in the HIRAK and in the Arab uprisings in general is McAdam's (1986) concept of high-risk and high-cost activism. According to McAdam, an analysis of social movement processes necessitates a differentiation among various forms of participation because certain instances of activism are clearly more demanding in terms of cost and risk than others (1986). Cost, as he defines it, involves expenditures of "time, money, and energy", while risk pertains to the "anticipated dangers associated with a particular activity", including legal, social, physical, and financial aspects (1986, p. 67). Concerning the HIRAK, individuals come together to get rid of a military regime, and their participation entails substantial expenses in terms of time, energy, and money, as well as significant levels of risk, both financially and socially¹⁴. I hypothesize that an individual's involvement in a social movement varies across different life stages. Relying solely on how young people engage in social movements may overlook critical factors relevant to older generations, whose life circumstances can differ significantly.

The body of literature concerning the Arab Spring extensively addresses the causes driving the upheavals. However, the majority of work remains confined to retrodictive prediction and the pursuit of macrosociological causal patterns (Bennani-Chraïbi, Fillieule, 2012). Typically, the primary factors and recurring motifs encompass political oppression, economic circumstances, and the utilization of Internet and Telecommunication Technologies (ICT). Within this segment, I provide a detailed exposition of each of these themes and evaluate their validity as potential drivers of concerns and assertions among older adults.

¹⁴ Numerous participants experienced job loss, endured severe repression, faced persistent surveillance and harassment beyond the movement's conclusion, and grappled with family tensions (Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2022).

Political repression and grievances: the role of injustice

When social actors manage to open a debate around a certain issue and put it on the political agenda, the issue becomes a political problem (Dormagen & Mouchard, 2019). At times, political authorities overlook or underestimate societal concerns. Consequently, individuals may resort to unconventional methods to express their political desires, bypassing institutional procedures. Research has shown that feelings of grievance or deprivation can stimulate protest among the general public (Beissinger & Sasse, 2014; Quaranta, 2016). Often these motivations apply to distinct subgroups that are most affected by social or economic conditions (Almeida, 2007; Ibrahim, 2011; Silva, 2009). Many grievances, such as unemployment rates, do vary over time and may be the triggers for movement, mobilization and individual participation (Pinard, 2011).

As a first explanation of the Arab Spring, George Joffé (2011) writes that people in North Africa lost faith in the ability of political institutions to procure meaningful participation. Political participation and inclusion were key factors in the radicalisation of many groups in Algeria, Libya, and Morocco. In nearly all Arab countries, citizens had endured consistent mistreatment at the hands of police, government officials, or others who exercised unchecked authority (Goldschmidt Jr., 2020). The failure of regimes to allow proper popular participation in the process of governance might be cited as an underlying cause of mass mobilization (Joffé, 2011).

For Charles Tripp, the Arab Spring was also the product of an established system of exclusions for too long. He writes that “the very systems of exclusion through which power operates become the mechanisms for the mobilization of resistance” (Tripp, 2013, p. 313). He gives the examples of the Palestinian resistance, as well as the citizens from Morocco to the Gulf States who have participated in the uprisings of the Arab Spring. He adds that at its heart, the massive uprisings carry the conviction that the existing orders are oppressive and unjust in a fundamental way (Tripp, 2013). He writes that a movement of protest and resistance is likely to emerge from within regimes

preventing debate and adjustment for a better judicial system, and better allocation of resources. In other words, the denial of citizens' basic political rights, the clientelist regimes fostering inclusion and exclusion of specific groups, helped in sparking the unrests in the region. Authoritarian regimes prioritize stability above all else (Ferrié & Santucci, 2006). Their primary objective is simply to adjust authoritarianism in order to better preserve it. Hence, what may appear as mechanisms of democratization are, in reality, tools of authoritarian control - institutions deliberately designed by those in power to consolidate their rule. These mechanisms create an illusion of openness, satisfying demands for reform without ever truly challenging the dominance of the ruling elite (Ferrié & Santucci, 2006). As noted by Aït Hamadouche (2016), the Algerian political system blends elements of authoritarianism and democratic tools, resulting in a strategy of inclusion and exclusion. The denial of citizens' basic political rights, the clientelist regimes fostering inclusion and exclusion of specific groups, helped in sparking the massive unrests in the region¹⁵. As for the case of Tunisia, Beatrice Hibou (2011) explains that the issue of everyday corruption constitutes a significant concern for the entire population. However, the pursuit of order, security, and stability - shared by both the population and the state—contributes to the normalization of certain forms of domination. As a result, the state becomes the central institution perceived as capable of addressing essential needs, such as justice, care for the poor, basic services, social integration, and upward mobility. Hibou highlights that traditionally, domination in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes is analyzed through the lens of coercion, violence, and fear. However, it is essential not to overlook the role of economic and social practices in sustaining these systems of control (Hibou, 2011).

¹⁵ The argument of inclusion/exclusion and clientelism/corruption is present in many studies such as Allal, Geisser, 2011; Teti, Gervasio, 2011; Tourabi, Zaki, 2011; Tlemcani, 2012, Volpi, 2011; Martinez 2012; Brownlee, Masoud, Reynolds, 2015.

While the Arab Spring highlighted the exclusion of certain segments of the population from meaningful political participation, the question arises: How crucial are political representation and civic engagement for older adults nearing the end of their lives? People experience social and political order in heterogeneous ways (Simmons, 2021). Different logics of valuation and understandings of the political system produce different relationships with the state apparatus and the regime. Hence, being excluded from political mechanisms might not be that important for the elderly who might have other priorities shaped by life stage circumstances. Indeed, the existing body of social movement literature often overlooks the role of age and structural location as explanatory factors, assuming a generic participant¹⁶ in the political sphere with an emphasis on current events rather than mechanisms and trajectories.

Threats can act as powerful catalysts for mobilization as people often mobilize in response to threats (Tilly, 1978). However, repression is not the sole catalyst for such actions (Beinin & Vairel, 2013, p. 28). Individuals may view public policies and their outcomes as threats to their values, interests, and the common good. For instance, although the original Arab Spring has long ended, the underlying factors that sparked those events remain present (Ryan & Tétrault, 2020). By understanding grievances as embedded in life course contexts, we can productively engage with the ways in which the elderly articulate their claims and not simply assume the same grievances and perception of threats for every participant.

In social sciences, it is vital to understand historical events within their context (Siméant-Germanos, 2021). Contexts vary, including economic shifts, demographics, social classes, political opportunities, environmental changes, and religious beliefs, all of which can influence mobilizations in various ways. Two key aspects are essential: examining tangible conditions and

¹⁶ Gender as an explanatory variable have been studied in multiple social movement research (Barnett 1993; Klatch 1987; Lorentzen 1991; McAdam 1992; Taylor 1996).

recognizing social movements as dynamic rather than uniform entities (Siméant-Germanos, 2021). This perspective enables us to reconnect the Hirak into interconnected networks and explore the diverse strategies and collective actions shaped by contextual factors. Such an approach deepens our understanding of social movement actors' realities, acknowledges social inclusion, and enriches our comprehension of their experiences.

Socioeconomic precursors of the Arab Spring: the role of economic disparity

Social change can influence the nature of social conflict and collective action in various ways. It might enable the formation of social groups with distinct structural positions and potentially unique interests, while also diminishing the significance of pre-existing ones (della Porta, 2020). For instance, Asya El Meehy studies the cases of Bahrain, Egypt, and Tunisia in order to see the reasons behind protests, as well as the claims of protesters. She says that despite minor differences in terms of life standards, resources, and rentier revenues, the three countries have important common traits: a more or less organized labor force, and high rates of poverty and unemployment¹⁷ (El Meehy, 2013. p. 52). She writes that economic causes are not sufficient to explain the uprisings in all three cases because people's claims were not only economic in nature. Although she highlights the importance of youth, workers, and middle-class citizens' participation in all three cases, she sees that the claims are not the same. She distinguishes between economic and political claims in each context. She concludes that although economic claims were stronger in Tunisia than in the other countries, all of them rejected state violence, required political inclusion, responsibility of the government and equality of rights for all citizens (El Meehy, 2013, p. 61). As for the case of Algeria, the enduring socio-economic challenges, particularly the high unemployment rates and

¹⁷ Poverty and youth unemployment are themes that are present in multiple studies such as Murphy, 2011; Louër, 2012; Lacroix, Filiu, 2018

the absence of an alternative to the country's post-colonial social pact, created conditions for a resurgence of political challenges (Leopardi, 2022).

Luis Martinez explains the situation by stating that North African regimes failed to address the underlying issue of resource redistribution, fueling popular frustrations. The Arab Spring was, in part, a response to this economic injustice, with a growing opposition to corruption and the economic influence of political elites. Thus, the apparent stability actually masked a profound socio-economic crisis, which eventually erupted forcefully during the Arab Spring (Martinez, 2019).

For Benoit Challand, the Arab Spring happened because of the increase in prices of basic food commodities as well as the economic and political status quo that was lasting for too long. He explains that the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt or Syria were not led by traditional groups or associations such as trade unions but were the product of mass dissatisfaction and loose horizontal networks. He adds that the source of inspiration for mass uprisings were not class struggle or religious matters, but the youth itself. Well educated and unemployed youth were the key actors in the uprisings (Challand, 2011).

Guy Standing wrote in 2011 that the conditions of Millennials in developed countries such as the United States, Japan, and Western Europe is characterized by insecurity in the labor market, in employment, and in income. This fact has the effect of accumulating anger, anomie, and alienation within that generation (Standing, 2011). In my humble opinion, it is possible to extend similar results for the Middle East. For instance, Juan Cole argues that the Arab uprisings were "youth revolts" because of their higher education levels and limited economic prospects (Cole, 2015). His focus is on millennials and their use of social media in terms of organization and identity building.

Emma Murphy also points to the overeducated and underemployed youth as her object of study stating that this group constitutes the engine of the protest movement (Murphy, 2011).

For Ian Hartshorn, the period of corporatist collapse and neoliberal reforms during the 1990s and early 2000s, contributed to the reconfiguration of multiple regimes in North Africa. However, the amalgamation of constraints on workers and the imposed free-market economic model channeled the trade unions to protest in both Egypt and Tunisia. The author asserts that it is reductionist to claim that the uprisings in North Africa were workers' revolution. It would make injustice to all the groups who participated in the revolutions to claim the revolutions as only workers mobilization. He argues that although many oppressed groups such as Islamists, liberals, the middle classes, the youth, communists, socialists, civil rights campaigners, artists, and internet activists joined the revolutionary coalition, workers mobilization were vital to the revolution (Hartshorn, 2019).

The Algerian regime faces a disconcerting reality: an excessive reliance on oil, severely weakened institutions, nepotism, a failing education system, widespread youth unemployment, corruption, and terrorism. For instance, the 2011 uprisings were driven by grievances about rising cost of food, inflation, and unemployment as well as the pervasive corruption (Paczyńska, 2020). These underlying issues pose significant challenges to national unity and social cohesion. Consequently, it is imperative for the state to utilize all available resources and strategies to address these pressing concerns and foster a more resilient and inclusive society (Martinez, 2019).

The sale of hydrocarbons, a crucial pillar of the Algerian economy, experienced a decline, adding pressure to the overall state economy. In 1997, the hydrocarbon sector played a significant role in the economy, representing nearly 30% of GDP, contributing to 95% of export receipts, and making up 60% of budgetary revenues (IMF report, 1999). Subsequently, from 2008 to 2020, there was a

consistent decline in hydrocarbon sales concerning budgetary revenues, with hydrocarbon sales constituting approximately 35% of budgetary revenues from 2015 to 2020 (IMF report, 2023). The macroeconomic outlook continues to be greatly influenced by oil and gas prices, underscoring the urgent need for economic diversification, as emphasized in multiple reports of the International Monetary Fund (IMF reports, 1999; 2015; 2023).

The intricate connection between economic and social decline throughout the 1980s, coupled with the financial crisis that paved the path for the October 1988 protests, highlights the complex interplay between the hydrocarbons industry, economic hurdles, and their far-reaching socio-political consequences in Algeria. The fragility of the economy and its dependence on hydrocarbons make it a rentier state (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Machin Alvarez, 2010). Additionally, revenue from oil has served as a distinct and significant source of investment funds for Algeria (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). Overreliance on hydrocarbons also leaves Algeria vulnerable to fluctuations in international energy markets, which have had dramatic consequences for the country (Farrand, 2022). Today, the effectiveness of the Algerian social security system is hindered by two primary challenges: the arduous task of collecting contributions and reliance on oil prices (Perret, 2012; Merouani et al., 2023).

In Algeria, highly educated young people face significant challenges in securing jobs that align with their skills, as opportunities for such positions are extremely limited (Saidi & Prasad, 2018). Youth often face high levels of unemployment, which can drive them to participate in social protests, whether to demand jobs, housing, and income or to advocate for cultural reforms and greater freedoms. (Mako & Moghadam, 2021).

Unemployment might not be the foremost worry for elderly retirees, given their reliance on a diverse array of support systems to sustain their livelihoods. These encompass official retirement

pensions, alongside moujahideen pensions where eligible, as well as additional aid from informal and community-based initiatives like zakat (Islamic charity) and various forms of communal assistance (Merouani et al., 2023). Despite the scarcity of data regarding the extent of coverage provided by such social protection mechanisms specifically for the elderly, indications suggest that the formal coverage rates remain notably inadequate (ILO, 2023).

The literature underscores the pivotal role of socioeconomic factors in driving uprisings. However, the socioeconomic realities and concerns of older adults differ significantly from those of younger generations. Recognizing these differences is essential to understanding the root causes of protests and the specific grievances voiced by older adults in Algeria. It is also significant to ascertain the type of reforms that the citizens in countries witnessing large-scale uprisings deem sufficient. Are older generations satisfied with modest reforms and economic changes, or do they aspire to see extensive political transformations and the ousting of the current Algerian regime?

Neoliberal reforms

Studies of the 2011 protests indicated that the widespread discontent in Arab countries was linked to the impact of neoliberalism and its crisis (Zemni & Bogaert, 2011). The reduction in public spending, the decline in public services, and the resulting increase in inequality and poverty were identified as the root causes of grievances and, consequently, the protests. Among the authors who studied the Arab Uprisings of 2011, Dina Bishara (2018) has found that the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms that started in the 2000s, and the increased government interference in trade union affairs were the sufficient ingredients for a wave of workers mobilization. For her, workers and trade unions are key actors of the Egyptian revolution. She has noticed that Egyptians wish for more representation because they have created many independent trade unions after the fall of Mubarak in 2011 (Bishara, 2018).

While analyzing the case of Jordan, Pascal Debruyne and Christopher Parker find that “the problem was not so much the abuse of state power as such, but the consequences of its privatization” (Debruyne & Parker, 2015, p. 438). Their main argument is that protesters’ grievances focused on neoliberal economic reforms as well as the increasing intrusion of the state’s security and surveillance apparatus into everyday social and economic life. The population clearly saw that the monarchy and its entourage were benefiting from privatization schemes made under neoliberal reforms (Debruyne & Parker, 2015). For the authors, the implementation of neoliberal reforms is as much important as the context in which they are deployed. They can have very harmful effects if wickedly used by an authoritarian regime. Marc Lynch also points to the same issue by asserting how neoliberalism disproportionately disadvantaged youth generations and impeded their prosperity in the MENA region in general (Lynch, 2014, p. 10). He adds that although multiple actors participated in the uprisings, it was the youth activists and labor movements who were the key agents of the uprisings. In the Algerian case, it is possible to observe increased youth mobilization as well, whether they are students, in the labor force, or unemployed (Benamar, 2020). The participants in the Hirak movement are typically young, urban, educated individuals who possess certain skills but often face unemployment (Moussaoui, 2023).

It is true that workers and youth are both affected by neoliberal reforms¹⁸, by the privatization of the state, and by lack of decent work. However, applying these arguments to older adults in retirement necessitates careful consideration, given that their economic and social interests have shifted due to their elderly status. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the elderly, much like their younger counterparts, are intricately woven into the fabric of society. Beyond personal

¹⁸ The 1980-1984 reform program in Algeria, led by President Chadli Benjedid, failed to address the nation’s major social and economic problems, leading to heightened social tensions. Meanwhile, during the early 1980s, a post-independence generation faced rising unemployment and a housing crisis, marking a turning point in the Algerian crisis (Leopardi, 2022). The young people who encountered those reforms have now become the older generation.

concerns, their motivations for participation in movements should be scrutinized. This involves delving into whether their mobilization is not solely driven by self-interest but also stems from broader societal ideals instilled in them. By doing so, I question the simplistic notion that older individuals are solely motivated by personal gain and offer a more comprehensive understanding of their involvement in societal transformations. My research then shifts focus from causal mechanisms to procedural or process-oriented approaches.

The implementation of neoliberal policies in Algeria has resulted in a noticeable surge in informal labor since the mid-1990s (Said Saadi, 2022). Urban unemployment rates were already increasing in the 1980s and reached close to 20% (Moghadam, 1994). In 2012, almost 47% of individuals aged 60 and above lacked coverage under the retirement system (Mendil, 2014). By 2018, the coverage rates for the elderly population remained persistently low, staying below 50% (Golaz and Sajoux, 2019). This pattern potentially sheds light on the restricted coverage of official retirement pensions for elderly retirees. It also underscores the influence of patronage, clientelism, as well as class and cultural affiliations, in shaping the allocation of public goods and services (Ruiz de Elvira et al., 2018).

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

All the technological development ultimately affects lives and daily practices of populations around the world. In fact, several scholars have highlighted modern communication technologies, particularly social media platforms like short messaging services (SMS), social-networking sites, and blogs, as a collectively significant resource for effectively organizing and executing social movements (e.g., Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Langman, 2005; O'Lear, 1999; Wasserman, 2007). Indeed, new technologies such as the internet which is available especially to the new generation and the well-educated people, made political engagement easier all around the globe. This is the basic finding of Anduiza and his colleagues (2012) who analysed the link between internet usage

and political engagement. They analyzed multiple countries around the globe regardless of political regime and found that the internet is an arena where people learn new things about politics and their political curiosity increases (Anduiza, Jensen, & Jorba, 2012).

Micheal Xenos and his colleagues conducted similar research in advanced democracies such as the USA, Australia, and the UK. They found that there is indeed a strong and positive relationship between social media use and political engagement among young people (Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014). Youth are thus getting politically active by being submerged into social media. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) also points to the importance of social media by asserting that it complements physical collective action by creating new social connections through various platforms.

Another interesting study conducted by Nele Lenze and her colleagues show that social media also acted as two-way windows, “allowing certain groups, especially those who were traditionally marginalized, such as women and underprivileged minorities, to see the rest of the world, while being seen by the rest of the world simultaneously for the first time” (Lenze et al. 2017, p. 4). This was a unique opportunity which they were not offered in the past because especially social media acted as amplifiers for the calls for reform as well as avenues for civic engagement, popular participation, and grassroots mobilization (Lenze et al. 2017, p. 6).

Many scholars have highlighted the role of the internet to explain the coordination of mobilizations. Romain Lecomte (2011) argues that while the internet played a role in raising global awareness of the Tunisian Revolution in 2011, its influence within Tunisia was more limited and complex. He suggests that social media’s impact was not as pivotal as often claimed and only became significant in the final stages of the uprising. According to Lecomte, the revolution was primarily driven by the actions of Tunisia’s organized civil society, with cyberactivism acting as

a supplementary, rather than central, force. Zeynep Tufekci and Cristopher Wilson end up with similar results in their study of social media use in the Egyptian protests of 2011. They find that despite widespread media use, half of the people they have surveyed, which is mostly youth and middle-aged people, had first heard about the Tahrir Square demonstrations through face-to-face communication. The other half have used various social media platforms but have also relied on their existing network (Tufekci, Wilson, 2012). What they see however is that the increasing use of ICT lower the costs of collective action and permits citizens living under authoritarian regimes to express their desire for social change. The use of social media is thus a central theme in social movement activism, and it is found that the youth is the main user of internet resources.

As of 2017, 72% of the Algerian population lived in urban areas, with 44% having internet access and the same percentage being active on social media. By 2020, urbanization increased to 73%, while internet access and social media usage rose to 52% and 51%, respectively (Datareportal reports 2017; 2020). The smartphone continues to be the paramount device for internet users, serving as a fundamental and indispensable tool for accessing online content, communication, and various digital services (Datareportal report, 2023). Florian Dauphin (2012) emphasizes that the younger generations seem to undergo changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) more swiftly and with greater intensity compared to other age demographics.

The statistics from Facebook indicate that in Algeria, there were 21 million active Facebook accounts in 2018, with 90% of them accessing the platform through mobile devices (smartphones and others) (Thieux, 2020). Additionally, more than 100 Facebook pages in Algeria have over one million followers (Internet World Stats, 2018). A survey conducted by Freres-Mentouri University in Constantine, indicated that 98% of students communicate solely through Facebook, with 35% spending more than 20 hours per week on the internet (Djekhar, 2019).

Regarding the Hirak movement, social media played a pivotal role in initiating and coordinating the spread of protests to the capital city and subsequently to all other cities. Basic messages and comments, advocating for a nationwide protest on February 22nd across all provinces, were anonymously shared on social media on the evening of February 10th, capturing the attention of tens of thousands of online users (Thieux, 2020). However, it is important to note that online censorship persists in Algeria, with the judiciary targeting activists and shutting down news sites deemed too independent (Tchemedie, 2020). While it is relatively straightforward to locate statistics on internet usage among younger demographics, data for the elderly is notably inexistent. Once more, research about ICT primarily focuses on the youth and middle-aged demographics, while neglecting the elderly population. It is important to determine whether older individuals adopt new technologies in their activism or continue to depend on traditional methods for both information gathering and mobilization. The level of scrutiny given to trends in analyzing the contentious behaviors of different groups has, upon reflection, been somewhat insufficient. This is particularly evident in the case of the elusive social category of older adults.

What are the peculiarities of the Algerian Hirak?

Between February 2019 and March 2020, Algeria experienced its most significant popular uprising since independence in 1962 (Chena, Benanteur, & Hamadouche, 2024). While the country grappled with ongoing socio-economic challenges, the spark for mobilization was not primarily economic but rather a political development: President Bouteflika's candidacy for the 2019 presidential elections (Volpi, 2019). In Algiers and beyond, a diverse coalition emerged, with Islamists, Berberists, leftists, and women's rights activists standing together, demanding the removal of Bouteflika and the entrenched Algerian elite, known as "le pouvoir" (Willis, 2023, p. 406). Despite their massive scale and diverse ideologies, these protests were notably non-violent, a testament to the collective memory of the violent Black decade.

The repression against the Hirak movement intensified, notably with General Ahmed Gaïd Salah's targeting of the Amazigh emblem on June 19, 2019, employing a divisive strategy (Cherbi, 2022). By the 117th Friday protest march, over 600 individuals, including numerous journalists, were arbitrarily detained as law enforcement cracked down on demonstrators (Le Quotidien Algerie, May 2021; Amnesty International, June 2022). Additionally, political dissident Karim Tabbou was convicted on March 24, 2020, for undermining national unity, while journalist Khaled Drareni faced similar charges on September 15, 2020, for questioning the new president's legitimacy. Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior's statement on May 20, 2021, emphasized the need for prior authorization to protest under law n°91-19 of December 2, 1991, effectively halting the previously tolerated Friday demonstrations (Cherbi, 2022).

The Hirak began with a focused goal: thwarting Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term, a goal pivotal in its early success (Ghanem, 2022). However, once achieved, the movement faced an existential crisis, with participants gradually disengaging until its eventual dissolution. The peak of the Hirak on Friday, March 15, 2019, saw over 20 million demonstrators across forty wilayas (administrative divisions), representing nearly half the population (Mellah, 2020). Following the arrests of Bouteflika's regime members and the announcement of elections for December 12th, protest numbers dwindled to around 5 million, then further to hundreds of thousands until its disappearance (Benderra et al., 2020). The enduring cohort advocating for a change in regime predominantly consisted of individuals leaning towards leftist ideologies, possessing multilingual skills, and residing in urban areas (El-Naggar, 2022).

The Hirak can be incorporated into a sequence of events that encompasses the series of popular protests in Kabylie (1980 and 2001), the protracted endeavors of the Amazigh cultural movement, the intermittent occurrences of October 1988, the turmoil of the Dark Decade and terrorism, and

finally the 2011 protests (Belguidoum, 2020). Despite variations in triggering events, the consistent dynamic remains the confrontation between an authoritarian regime and a populace yearning for democratic rights. As an example, the pursuit of truth and justice for the families affected by the civil war in the 1990s continued to be a focal point in the Hirak demonstrations (Benderra et al., 2020).

What sets the Hirak apart was not just its peaceful nature but also its structure; lacking a central figure or unified ideology, it fostered inclusivity and resilience but became susceptible to fragmentation (Belakhdar, 2019; Volpi, 2019). The neutrality of the military, the key Algerian political institution, further contributed to its distinctiveness. Revolutionary situations often destabilize traditional alliances and loyalties, particularly among elites, paving the way for unpredictable political realignments that can drive revolutionary change (Dobry, 1986). Unlike other uprisings where the military supported the regime, in the Hirak, it remained largely neutral, allowing protests to continue. The outcome of the Hirak was thus dependent on structural conditions but also on the complex interplay of institutional, contextual, and individual factors. In the end, the COVID-19 pandemic was the nail that sealed the coffin for the Hirak, further hampering its ability to sustain momentum and organize collective action.

The Hirak movement has garnered significant attention in the literature, with various authors delving into different aspects of the phenomenon. Giulia Fabbiano (2019) delves into its historical context, while Benderra et al. (2020) and Belguidoum (2020) explore facets of the Algerian regime but also the movement. Others have examined the role played by the diaspora (Begag, 2019; Matref, 2020), reasons driving the protests (Belakhdar, 2019; Kedidir, 2020), the used symbols and rhetoric (Ali Bencherif, 2019; Souiah, 2020), and specific actors within the movement, such as Islamists (Lounnas, 2020; Larroque, 2021) women (Benamar, 2020), the youth (Oussedik,

2020), and the diaspora (Birouche & Hammoud, 2023). Nevertheless, while the contribution of elderly individuals in weekly marches is recognized in numerous studies on the Hirak (Benderra et al., 2020; Belakhdar, 2019; Sidi Boumedine, 2019; Moussaoui, 2023), their roles, their grievances and claims, and their perspectives are consistently overlooked.

The Hirak's peaceful nature, diverse coalition, and initial success were remarkable. However, its decentralized structure, lack of a broader vision, and increasing repression ultimately led to its decline. This complex story that ends with a worldwide pandemic offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by elderly Algerians in the pursuit of change.

What to conclude about the literature?

It is worth noting that social movement literature primarily focuses on the younger and middle-aged population, leaving a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the specificities of older adults. Basically, the literature failed to explore how differences in structural location among the participants might lead to differences in motivational priorities and contentious practices. Indeed, elderly participants' underlying motives for joining a social movement are left unexamined. In Western democracies, it seems that older adults prioritize aspects such as retirement income, housing and accommodation, community care, residential care, health services and their administration, as well as family and personal affairs (Griffiths & Roberts, 1990). In contrast, the priorities of the youth exhibit a distinct set of interests and considerations, including job opportunities, affordable education, housing affordability, climate change policies, and access to technology (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002). This generational disparity underscores the shifting landscape of age-related priorities.

The core premise of this literature review is that there is a need to look at how activism and social movement participation mechanisms work not only among young participants but also among older adults. I do not suggest that the mechanisms at work in each of these categories are bounded,

separate, or contained. Rather, in the context of involvement in activism and participation in social movements, the mechanisms for engagement are diverse and intersect, contingent upon one's structural position and historical location.

While early scholars like Buechler (1993) and others, including McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), have called for greater scholarly focus on the micro-level factors influencing collective action, social movements research has predominantly centered on macro processes and social movement organizations (Fillieule, Neveu, 2019).

McAdam and his colleagues (1996) contend that opportunities and threats should not be regarded as objective, fixed structures. Instead, they should be seen as subject to interpretation and attribution, emphasizing the significance of activists' perceptions in this regard. (McAdam et al., 2001). Today, the literature categorizes movements into activity levels spanning from everyday forms of resistance to transnational social movements (Almeida, 2019). However, the focus on the micro-level of political and social life stays fundamental for comprehending the roots of collective action (Oliver, 2015; Almeida, 2019). The studied dimensions of individual participation include "biographical availability, ideological/political beliefs, social networks, membership in organizations, collective identities, past participation experience, and new social media technologies" (Almeida, 2019, p. 105). Adding to micro-level analyses, social movement scholars want to move from aggregative to relational conceptions of social and political structure (Diani, 2015). This underscores the imperative to meticulously scrutinize movements within the distinctive contexts that shape and define them.

This research aligns with the prevailing academic direction, adopting a micro and meso-level approach to delve into the individual socialization processes, current events, and motivations of participants. I propose an approach to political unrest by focusing on a specific category of actors.

Comprehensive consideration is given to the political and social conditions that shape the context of the Hirak movement and influence the life experiences of the elderly involved. This analytical undertaking serves as a crucial initial phase in understanding the motivations and activist experiences of elderly individuals. Notably, there exists a notable gap in evidence regarding the nuanced perspectives of those actively participating, necessitating a deeper exploration of the meaning and significance of their involvement. The incorporation of additional substantive insights is warranted to address this gap comprehensively.

Why study another actor?

A straightforward response to this question is that it represents one of the avenues through which the field of literature progressed and developed. As a matter of fact, the social sciences have seen “a proliferation of actors in the international system above, below, beside and within the state” (Hwang et al., 2019, p. 6). Certainly, there has been a broadening of the analytical scope to include actors beyond social movement organizations in social movements literature. This shift moves away from a structuralist and movement-centric approach, demonstrating a renewed interest in the micro foundations of collective action (Fillieule, Neveu, 2019).

The practice of examining distinct groups of actors in isolation facilitated a more comprehensive grasp of human behavior, societal interactions, and intricate social systems (within-group norms, relationships, and social practices). This approach enabled scholars uncover the many faces of actors and their activities in a diversity of contexts (Hwang et al., 2019) offering the field more detailed and all-encompassing investigations, ultimately enhancing the quality of research and fostering a more profound comprehension of the world in which we reside.

As acknowledged by the literature, different categories of actors, such as women, civil society organizations, and political entities, have their own unique perspectives, goals, and motivations. Various group clusters had distinct priorities that specifically addressed their collective concerns,

such as those related to ethnicity or gender issues. Analyzing these groups independently enabled researchers to delve more profoundly into the particular factors that shaped their conduct (Meyer, 2000; Tsutsui & Wotipka, 2004, Chandler & Hwang, 2015; Powell & Rerup, 2017)). Grasping their unique roles and contributions is essential for comprehending the inner workings of social movement participation as well as the longer movement functioning.

Like other protest movements, the Algerian Hirak is not immune to the issue of identity-based demands. Furthermore, it is important to note that the participants in the Arab uprisings displayed significant heterogeneity in terms of their backgrounds, motivations, and objectives. Examining the case of Algeria in 2011, Layla Baamara posits that a new entity emerged at the outset of the uprisings. The Coordination nationale pour le changement et la démocratie (CNCD) brought together trade unions, various associations, social movement organizations, and political parties. Despite their alignment in terms of values and strategies, these entities grappled with deep-seated divisions concerning their objectives, motivations, leadership, and preferred courses of action. Baamara contends that many organizations and their members vied for control of the legitimate oppositional entity, which substantially hindered the protest movements (Baamara, 2012, p. 6). The diversity of actors, objectives, and motivations prevented the emergence of a sustainable and unified mobilization dynamic. Hence, the dissolution of the protests in 2011 was not solely attributed to the repressive measures implemented by the authoritarian regime but also to the internal divisions and factions within the opposition movement itself. Her findings are reinforced by another study in which she uncovers shifts in the perspectives of activists over time. According to the activists she interviewed, individuals who did not participate in the 2011 uprisings became actively involved in 2019, while others chose to remain on the periphery (Baamara, 2020). Instead of offering shared reasons for taking action, the interactions between protesters and opposition

leaders in the Algerian context compel us to redirect our focus towards the dynamics of the mobilization process itself. Hence the need to examine categories of actors not in isolation but in relation to others and within the larger framework of the political, social, and historical context in which they operate. This approach is crucial for gaining a more insightful understanding of each cluster individually.

Contextualizing Elderly Political Engagement

As my main argument contends, even though the elderly are not conventionally seen as active participants in the Arab Spring, scholars have explored their presence in various contexts, indicating that their existence is not entirely overlooked. For example, in the Algerian Hirak, although they do not make up the majority of participants, older adults born in the 1950s and 1960s do take part in the protests (Moussaoui, 2023). Research on the elderly typically revolves around their institutionalized political participation or addresses generational differences in attitudes toward specific events among different age groups (Jirovec and Erich, 1992; Goerres, 2009; Jiang, Dong, Guo, 2024; Solevid & Scheiber Gyllenspetz, 2022). This section will provide insights into scholars' focus on elderly participation in social movements.

Elderly Activism in democratic societies

Similar to the literature focused on authoritarian regimes, the contemporary research landscape in democratic contexts offers an analytical framework that sheds light on the enduring impact of prior activism on the elderly. For instance, Kent Jennings (1987) studied the political attitudes of cohorts of young protesters in the United States of America in 1965, 1973, and 1982. He concluded that elders who participated in social movements in their young age, continue to hold such beliefs and keep being politically active. James M. Fendrich reiterates this argument and finds that when they become older, activists pursue careers and political commitments “consistent with the political consciousness developed as student activists” (Fendrich, 1974. p. 103). In another study, he draws

the same conclusion and asserts that “adults who sustain commitments to a political movement must develop such commitments in their youth” (Fendrich, 1977, p. 155). Other studies analysing student activism and generational continuity confirm this argument as well (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988, McAdam, 1988). As showed by numerous research, political participation among older adults generally remains robust until very late in life, typically beyond the traditional retirement age. However, a notable decline in political engagement becomes evident after the age of 80, likely due to health limitations, reduced mobility, and decline in capabilities (Solevid & Scheiber Gyllenspetz, 2022).

Daniel J.B Mitchell argues that the Ham and Eggs movement that happened in the 1930s by the elders in California because of their pension plans could resurface for the boomer’s generation who are to retire in large numbers (Mitchell, 2015). He says that the income distribution will be an issue for the elders who cannot provide labor force due to their diminished capacities. He also points to the importance of the radio as the main mean of communication for activists. The sociologist Manuel Jimenez-Sanchez confirms seniors’ concerns for retirement income while relating the movement of the retired people in Spain in 2018 (Jimenez-Sanchez, 2018). Retired people took the streets in order to contest decreasing retirement pensions in a context of increased poverty.

According to various studies conducted for decades, the two variables positively affecting political participation are education and income (Verba & Nie, 1972; Almond & Verba, 1963; Milbrath & Goel; 1977). For instance, Andrea Louise Campbell argues that Social Security policy in the United States provided important resources such as income and free time to the older population, so they acquired the agency to participate more actively in terms of voting, engagement, and mobilization (Campbell, 2015).

Elderly individuals seem to have distinct grievances, resources, and interests that they are willing to defend as a collective force. This highlights the need to recognize the elderly not just as passive bystanders but as active participants, deeply invested in influencing political and economic outcomes, even within authoritarian regimes. Understanding their role is crucial for fully grasping the dynamics of societal change and the potential impact of this group on broader political movements.

Regulating collective action through democratic and authoritarian rule

It is crucial to emphasize the significance of cultural, historical, and political contexts in comprehending the dynamics of contention (Taylor, 2017). The rules governing political engagement vary widely across democratic polities, shaping the opportunities available to activists advocating for a cause (Meyer, 2021). Despite these variations, liberal democracies share a commonality: they grant most causes easy access to protest tools. Democracies facilitate participation through various means, allowing organizations to establish permanent offices, raise funds, contribute to campaigns, and lobby elected officials. Most importantly, they provide the opportunity for freedom of expression and the right to organize.

Demonstrations, marches, and rallies have become customary in liberal democratic polities, with organizers negotiating with authorities beforehand on parade routes, expected crowd sizes, sound levels, and the provision of portable facilities. Police typically monitor the demonstration boundaries, maintaining distance between protesters and opponents, and apprehending those who violate negotiated protocols. Even civil disobedience can be orchestrated through carefully choreographed, ritualized performances, allowing for the negotiation of arrest details such as time, place, and manner in advance (Earl et al., 2003; Meyer, 2021). Protests have become normalized and institutionalized in democracies, evolving into recognized and even celebrated acts of self-assertion. These actions are regulated by law, prompting state intervention when rules are broken.

However, as Olivier Fillieule (1997) notes, this normalization has weakened the impact of protests. Over time, this diminishing effectiveness could lead to more radical and violent forms of expression. In response, democracies have developed specific frameworks to maintain order during protests, balancing flexibility and rigidity, where the law is often applied with discretion rather than strict adherence (Fillieule, Jobard, 2020). This multifaceted engagement illustrates the depth and complexity of democratic activism within a framework of negotiated norms and opportunities.

In democracies, characterized by political pluralism, competition, and the protection of rights, a meaningful degree of political diversity is upheld - an inherent feature absent in non-democratic systems (Tilly, 2006). Democratic regimes demonstrate a notable capacity to manage protests by employing nonviolent methods of coercive control and integrating dissent into policymaking, thereby maintaining social stability while accommodating political contention (Tarrow, 1994; 2022).

Authoritarian regimes, in addition to displaying varying tendencies to repress movements, employ an array of tactics to monitor, undermine, or neutralize opposition groups (Tilly, 2006). These methods encompass both subtle and more overt strategies, including surveillance, censorship, legal persecution, resource deprivation, and selective neglect of social movement claims (Moss, 2014; Bishara, 2015). Internet and social media censorship by authoritarian regimes further demonstrates their efforts to control channels crucial to contemporary mobilization (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Authoritarian regimes lack such a nuanced repertoire for addressing political dissent. Their approach is rigid and repressive, limited to endorsing only regime-sanctioned activities, tolerating minimal opposition, and outright banning the majority of protests (Tarrow, 1994; 2022). This

inability to adapt to contentious politics underscores the fundamental weakness of authoritarian systems in managing societal demands for change.

Contrary to a monolithic approach, authoritarian regimes exhibit diverse characteristics, employing various tactics to manage and suppress collective action. In Algeria, the military and the secret services, constituting the core of an extensive security apparatus, are widely regarded as the primary decision-makers. Furthermore, the secret services are known for their adeptness in infiltrating a diverse array of state and civil institutions, further solidifying their influence and control (Garçon, 2020). A complex network of alliances spans multiple stages, strategically designed to ensure the regime's survival and continuity. This intricate system involves political parties, influential private entrepreneurs, press organizations, and governmental organizations, all playing a role in legitimizing the regime through security and religious legitimacy. The rentier economy and a culture of political violence serve as powerful deterrents against any potential political upheaval or change (Hamadouche, 2018).

In most Middle Eastern societies, government ministries tend to prioritize serving individuals with personal connections and influential networks (King, 2020). In rentier systems, intermediaries play a critical role in expanding and diversifying the regime's clientele while simultaneously inhibiting their engagement in collective action (Hertog, 2010). These brokers, often individuals with privileged access, act as gatekeepers, mediating access to state resources for those lacking direct connections. This creates a layered system where individuals rely on brokers, diminishing their sense of agency and collective identity. The rentier system's reliance on intermediaries and its inherently fragmented access to resources create a distinct environment for collective action compared to democracies. This necessitates different strategies from activists within each setting,

highlighting the critical impact of political structures on the nature and effectiveness of social movements.

The Algerian case exemplifies a neo-patrimonial state marked by a complex interplay of bureaucracy and clientelism, meticulously orchestrating the distribution of positions and privileges across the economic spectrum (Belguidoum, 2020). This intricate framework not only perpetuates substantial informal sectors but also serves as a breeding ground for unregulated capitalism to thrive unchecked (Bouyacoub, 2012; Hammouda, 2006). Within this dynamic, we witness a fluctuating economic terrain oscillating between widespread laissez-faire practices, notably evident in sectors such as distribution and retail, and the pervasive presence of bureaucracy, fostering a culture of dependence on clientelism (Addi, 1990; Henni, 2009). This complex web of governance and economic behavior presents a compelling narrative of the Algerian socio-political landscape, highlighting the intricate challenges and paradoxes inherent within its structures. In this context, protesters face a double challenge: the political repression typical of authoritarian regimes, coupled with the economic uncertainty and manipulation that undermine their capacity to organize and mobilize effectively.

Overall, the approach of authoritarian regimes towards social movements and mass dissent fundamentally differs from that of democratic regimes, particularly in their strategies for handling such phenomena. Democratic governments tend to operate under a framework that allows for a tolerance of dissent, permitting social movements to exist within predetermined rules that are applied with flexibility depending on the social movement's operations. In contrast, authoritarian regimes are more likely to employ tactics aimed at repressing and undermining movements, viewing them as threats to the established order. Ultimately, these differing approaches highlight

the broader ideological divide between democracies, which foster civic participation, and authoritarian regimes, which enforce political apathy through repression.

Network, Identity and Participation

This section of the literature argues that, until the late 1990s, much of the research on social movements predominantly approached their analyses from a movement-level perspective (Sawicki, Simeant, 2009). While exploring the three perspectives on social movements - Political Process, Resource Mobilization, and Framing - there has been a notable consensus on crucial variables for predicting the emergence and outcomes of these movements (Lichbach, Zuckerman, 2009). However, despite the growing body of research on individual commitment and its influencing factors, particularly within the revived interest in biographical analysis and life course studies (Fillieule, Mayer, 2001), there remains a lack of agreement regarding the dynamics of contention. A deeper understanding of contention necessitates a more focused effort on clearly defining the mechanisms and processes propelling it (Lichbach & Zuckerman, 2009, p. 265). This implies that while movement-level perspectives have shed light on certain aspects, a thorough understanding of social movements requires a detailed examination of both collective trajectories and individual commitments, underscoring the intricate interplay between these factors.

In line with numerous scholars in the field, I argue that the formation of collective identity is a relational process (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2009). The prevailing movement-level approach tends to overlook or neglect the exploration of individual-level variations among activists, ultimately presenting a static view of the phenomenon. This static analysis fails to delve into the dynamic processes of identity-construction and network-building as part of a socialization process imbuing someone with specific resources, proclivities, and dispositions (Stets, 2000). It is crucial to emphasize that the sustained focus on individual motivations for commitment should not overshadow the fact that commitment patterns often align with collective trajectories and rarely

occur without some form of encouragement from existing groups or organizations (Sawicki, Simeant, 2009). This underscores the interconnected nature of individual motivations and collective paths, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding that embraces both dimensions in the study of social movements.

The limitation of the movement-level approach is that it obscures a comprehensive understanding of why individuals decide to become part of a movement, what unique experiences they encounter throughout their participation, and how the interplay between their individual characteristics and the evolving dynamics of events shape their political involvement as activists. By failing to examine these processes in a dynamic manner, existing literature overlooks the intricate relationship between identity formation, network development, and their influence on the choices and impacts of activists within social movements (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). Thus, there is a need for a more nuanced and process-oriented approach to comprehensively assess the intricate interplay of age and socialization in the context of social movements.

Networks: a significant variable in social movements

One solidly established fact in social movement research is “the frequency with which people involved in collective action are connected to other activists either through personal ties or joint involvement in activities” (della Porta and Diani, 2020. p. 117). A number of empirical studies have effectively demonstrated the importance of established organizations and pre-existing networks for mobilizing social action at the micro level (Gould 1993,1995; Klandermans & Oegama 1987; McAdam 1986; McAdam & Paulson 1993; Snow, Zurcher, & Eckland-Olson 1980). Social networks make people more available for recruitment, more inclined to join (particularly if friends and family are already members), and easily accessible targets of recruitment (Della Porta, Diani, 2006). Hence, interpersonal ties are an incentive for participation.

At times however, it is the position one occupies within a network which matters, rather than the mere fact of being involved in some kind of network (Della Porta, Diani, 2006).

Being integrated within social networks is significant not just for the recruitment process but also functions as a deterrent against leaving and as a source of support for ongoing participation. Della Porta and Diani conclude that “the more costly and dangerous the collective action, the stronger and more numerous the ties required for individuals to participate” (Della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 119). Sharing common characteristics such as class, location, gender, nationality, or religious beliefs serves as a foundation for recognizing and forming identities. However, it is the communication and interaction within social networks that enable the mobilization of resources and the emergence of collective actors (Tilly, 1978). In many authoritarian contexts in Third World countries, where formal organizations are co-opted or suppressed, dissent against the state often manifests through informal and ostensibly apolitical groups. These groups not only alleviate individual and societal stress during periods of socio-economic upheaval but also serve as potent channels for political mobilization against the regime (Denoeux, 1993; 2018).

Regarding the MENA region, the structure of existing networks seems to play a crucial role. Being part of shared educational institutions, sports clubs, or social and professional associations within the community establishes close connections with activists who may then approach potential recruits for their cause (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2003). On a general level, authors analyzing the Arab Spring highlight the growing prevalence of horizontally organized popular mobilization around informal structures as a mode of contesting political power (Blaydes et al., 2022). For Frederic Volpi and Janine A. Clark, “it is this interlinkage between longer-term dynamics and short-term processes (or social relations and interactions in Diani and Mische’s terminology) that needs to be understood better in the contemporary debate” (Volpi & Clark, 2019. p. 5).

A very interesting finding in the literature is that of Holger Albrecht who found “substantial evidence to support the claim that the formation of opposition groups resembles, to a high degree, the formation of the authoritarian state” (Albrecht, 2010, p. 8). He alludes to the clientelist and paternalistic organization structures of many opposition groups, including political parties, human rights organizations, and religious movements, which literally imitates the organization of the state they oppose. He looks into various organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and discovers that the control of the organizations is very restrained to few people only, and that the network in which they are embedded defines the people they will try to assist or not. The point to highlight then is that there are, in the opposition camp, clusters of individuals who are embedded in totally different networks which impedes communication and cooperation between various associations and organizations.

Complex historical processes, heavily influenced by political regimes, have contributed to the emergence of social and political identity divides¹⁹ (Berriane, Duboc, 2019). Since gaining independence, Algeria’s population has been deeply divided by strong ethnic and ideological differences, leading people to operate within close-knit network clusters. Despite these deep divisions in Algeria, efforts to bridge social, regional, and ideological gaps have taken shape in various social spaces. Notably, coalitions have played a significant role in the modern history of the MENA region (Chalcraft, 2016). Social ties have been identified as a key factor favoring the emergence of coalitions, facilitating the exchange of information and resources among organizations and actors. Although coalition-building has been a strategic action taken by multiple

¹⁹ To strengthen its control over Algeria, French colonial policy exacerbated the division between the Kabyles of Greater Kabylia and the rest of the population. By encouraging the migration of Berbers to France as laborers and promoting the idea that they were of European descent, the colonizers created a deep and lasting schism. However, Kabylie has given rise to two opposing factions; on one side, there are radical Islamists; on the other, there is a fierce resistance to Islamism, which many view as a threat to the Amazigh cultural and linguistic cause. This dichotomy illustrates the deep internal conflict within Kabylie, where the struggle between Islamic radicalism and the defense of Amazigh identity reflects broader tensions within the region (Layachi, 2004).

social movement organizations during nation-wide uprisings, they have all been short-lived and ephemeral, sometimes contributing to social divides by reinforcing existing differences and even creating new ones (Berriane, Duboc, 2019).

Simply put, network-based approaches to mobilization suggest that being part of a network that encourages participation boosts the likelihood of an individual getting involved because the social connections in that network support the person's sense of self and their willingness to participate. However, having network connections that promote mobilization does not ensure that the individual will embrace the participation identity endorsed by others in the network. Empirical data does not consistently endorse the idea of a connection between networks and collective action. In fact, a number of studies have identified a limited correlation between the two (Luker, 1984; Mullins, 1987; Jasper & Poulsen, 1993). This has prompted certain critics to downplay the significance of networks, considering them merely one of several available resources (Jasper, 1997). One method sociologists have attempted to correct for this problem is by situating analyses of mobilization within social psychological theories of identity-based mobilization processes (Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994; McAdam, 2000; Stryker et al., 2000). To be moved to mobilization, social psychological theories state that individuals must first develop a salient participation identity, and that actors strategically revise their relations (Takács, Janky, & Flache, 2008).

Choosing a Life Course Approach rather than Identity Theory

It is widely acknowledged that individuals often engage in political conflicts rooted in their shared collective identities (Tilly, 2017; Tarrow, 2011; 2022). Scholars repeatedly find that social movement participation has long-term transformative effects for individuals. Individuals who join social movements tend to continue to engage in political organizations and remain consistent in their ideology over time (Klatch 1999; McAdam 1988). Consequently, within the realm of

collective action, the cultivation of a shared identity and a sense of solidarity assumes paramount importance.

Collective identity research has been conducted by considering identity as a fairly static condition rather than a process (Melucci, 1996; Pizzorno, 1978; Polletta & Jasper, 2001, McGarry & Jasper, 2015). However, it is today widely accepted that identity is neither of a thing one can own nor a property of actors, but “the process through which individual and or collective actors, in interaction with other social actors, attribute a specific meaning to the trades. Their life occurrences and the systems of social relations in which they are embedded” (della Porta, 2020, p. 93).

In a constructivist perspective, identities and interests are not given once and for all, regardless of the activities of the actors. On the contrary, politics, defined as a producer of collective identities, constantly defines, and redefines the interests of citizens (Birnbaum, Leca, 1991). Individual identities are thus socially constructed. Grasping the nuanced yet deep ways in which our personal lives are shaped by the broader context of our social experiences is central to this research.

I have chosen life course perspective over social identity theory because I am interested in understanding how individuals’ lives unfold over time, influenced by social structures, historical events, and personal decisions. Just like Brubaker and Cooper, I believe that the concept of identity tends to mean too much, too little, or nothing at all (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). The concept of identity as an analytical tool is very difficult to make use of because of its multiple and varying facets. The theory’s focus on individual psychological processes may neglect significant sociological and contextual factors, which is particularly crucial in my study aimed at understanding the activism of elderly individuals through an examination of their life course trajectories.

My objective is not to report the reasons older adults participate in terms of psychological matters by contrasting oppressor and oppressed or insider and outsider. My goal is rather to explore the link between the life experiences of a person to his activism at an old age. A diachronic analysis is necessary, and social identity approach is too limited to respond to research needs. By adopting the life course approach, I do not want to miss the diachronic aspect of the research which is of crucial importance. My analysis necessitates both a diachronic aspect, focused on the successive stages of activism as a career, as well as a synchronic aspect, eager to grasp the impact of later life stage on social movement participation.

To summarize, current studies of micromobilization processes are so focused on network and identity groups that they tend to treat all movement participants and non-participants as homogenous groups (Saunders et al., 2012). They seek out general trends in mobilizing factors across all participants. Limited are the research investigating whether and how different life trajectories may combine together in unique ways to create multiple pathways to the same participation outcome (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). To clearly understand the various and distinct pathways the elders have followed to high risk/cost activism requires a method that more closely approximates the theoretical conception of mobilization as an outcome of specific socialization processes giving birth to specific dispositions among the elders. Social movement research must not only take into account group-level variations, but it must also acknowledge the individual cumulative effect of identity construction over time leading one to acquire dispositions and moving on to activism.

Looking beyond Network and Identity

Existing research suggests that to truly grasp why individuals get involved in activism, we need to consider multi-level factors. These include the societal and political environment they are in, their perceived threats, their grievances and claims, their biographical circumstances, and their political

beliefs. All of these aspects set the stage for their activism. However, the literature tends to see both networks and identity in static and substantialist terms (Mische, 2003). In the upcoming chapter, this study will explain how it examines activism among elderly individuals in authoritarian regimes. This unique approach tries to fill in the gap between the network and identity-based approaches by having recourse to life course theory which considers both personal stories and historical context. This study aims to make a distinctive contribution to existing literature by centering on the comprehension of activism as a tangible and lived experience (Auyero, 2003). It pays attention to how retired seniors develop a commitment to making social changes and emphasizes the importance of political awareness and personal choice.

Researchers increasingly recognize that individuals navigate a web of social ties, some of which drive participation, while others inhibit it (Kitts, 2000). McAdam and Paulsen (1993) investigated the most influential aspects of these ties in shaping participation decisions. Their findings challenge the assumption that organizational links or strong ties to active participants alone predict activism. Instead, they highlight that the most crucial factor is a strong commitment to a particular identity, reinforced by social connections, whether through organizations or personal relationships. This interplay between identity and social ties is deeply intertwined and warrants further exploration.

The dynamic processes of identity construction and network building manifest as fluid and interactive phenomena inherently embedded in social structures. These processes not only shape relationships but also endow individuals with resources and dispositions within and across various life stages. The diverse network formations, coupled with the integration of identity, an aspect integral to the socialization process, constitute pivotal features significantly contributing to the inception and vitality of activism and social movement participation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the elderly were often overlooked as active participants in the Arab Spring, despite having played significant roles themselves. For instance, the story of Aunt Zahiya, a 64-year-old lady who protested with her broomstick in the streets of Algiers, and who became a mascot in her neighborhood has been reported by *Al Jazeera* channel in 2019.

I have argued that risk factors, threat perceptions, and biographical circumstances valid for the youth are not seamlessly valid and transferable for retired older adults. I have also argued that networks and identities alone did not provide a comprehensive explanation for their involvement in social movements. Additionally, the existing literature tended to portray the factors leading to popular uprisings as static occurrences rather than as part of an ongoing and evolving process.

As Michel Camau (2012) points out, one's preferences and dispositions are not fixed; they can evolve with time, influenced by their structural position. In an authoritarian setting, the circumstances that drive individuals aspiring for change to openly oppose the regime differ from person to person. These variations are determined by how each individual perceives the potential costs and benefits associated with their actions, and they are contingent upon the number of people openly opposing the regime.

In 2003, Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Olivier Fillieule have pointed out to the scarcity of social movement research related to the Middle East and North Africa (Bennani-Chraïbi, Fillieule, 2003). They showed that although researchers have enlarged their areas of investigation to other contexts than western democracies for approximately a decade, social movements are still assessed and reassessed in democratic contexts. This is the reason why social movements were not tackled as opposition movements to a regime, but rather as an expression of political pluralism which is part of democratic expression (Bennani-Chraïbi, Fillieule, 2003). In 2019, the inventory did not really change if we consider the statistics given by Erik Neveu who exposed that 65% of social movement

research is about developed countries. He also advocates for an exit of ethnocentric studies in order to open up to new cultural and social areas that could give us hints on how various geographies shape activist identities and mobilization potentials (Neveu, 2019). Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel shared the same views about social movement studies by asserting that it has developed mainly without reference to the cases of the Middle East and North Africa (Beinin, Vairel, 2011, p. 2). While there have been notable advances in scholarly articles shedding light on the dynamics of contention in the region (Beinin & Vairel, 2013; Camau & Vairel, 2014; Cavatorta & Clark, 2022; Djabi, 2019; Larroque, 2019; Volpi, 2017; Volpi & Clark, 2019), much remains to be unveiled, emphasizing the ongoing need for ethnographic and fieldwork studies in contextualized environments to include a variety of perspectives concerning the dynamics of social movements in Middle Eastern and North African societies.

My study seeks to address the existing gap in research literature and make a contribution to the field of social movement studies, with a particular emphasis on the MENA region. It aims to delve into the distinct context of authoritarian regimes, which contrasts with the extensively studied frameworks of democratic politics. To achieve this, my method considers the dynamic interplay of factors such as socialization, history, biography, and situational contexts specific to each respondent. Life course trajectories shed light on the specific set of global conditions prevailing during identity formation and other pivotal stages in an individual's life, as well as how different social forces, institutions, and circumstances interact in diverse ways, accounting for the substantial variation in individual political engagement. By delving into the intricate interaction between the subjective perceptions of elders and their objective conditions, my research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics shaping their involvement in activism.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Research Design

Human beings are constantly influenced by infinite factors surrounding them that affect their inner self. When it comes to the Middle East, it is known that the informal structures of family and social networks are of particular importance (Schwedler, 2020; Denoeux, 1993; Beinín & Vairel, 2011). As Youssef El Chazli writes it clearly, the place where people meet each other [the streets where protests are being conducted] become a place where different experiences are shared, values and political views are shaped, and the incentive to continue to mobilize increases because of the strengthening of beliefs (El Chazli, 2012). Political loyalties are thus influenced through specific social networks and shared spaces.

Just as Goodin and Tilly argue, I agree that the way things happen vary significantly in form as a function of their locations in time and space (Goodin & Tilly, 2006). And just like Corcuff, I agree that interactions are at the center of social studies where interests and identities are constantly evolving through interactive relations and the construction of realities (Corcuff, 2007).

I argue that socialization is the essential mechanism behind the construction of an activist career. Early life exposure to activist networks leads to greater identification with them, creates a specific political consciousness, and disposes one to become a life-long activist. Nevertheless, I assume that one's socialization is intimately connected to one's generation and milieu that will imbue specific proclivities in terms of actions and thoughts. In other words, the social resources and networks are determined by the agents of socialization of one's milieu which is determined by one's generational location. I contend that understanding the role of older adults as activists and social movement contributors requires acknowledging the baggage they carry from their past experiences, as it shapes their current perspectives and approaches.

Having the social movements literature in mind as well as the important factors enabling activism, I use the life course theory to study elderly activism, and life course interviews to verify the

veracity of my argument. There are multiple ways to analyse an individual's life course, and multiple variables to consider always depending on the purpose of the research. I have chosen to focus on age, socialization, and generational effect because I want to decipher the mechanisms behind social movement participation at an older age by members of a specific generation. Analyzing these features will allow me to comprehend the available resources to participants as well as their political experiences.

I frame the life course approach with Mannheim's theory of generations (1928) and Bourdieu's concept of habitus which constitute my assumptions. I believe that life course is experienced within a specific generation and with a specific entourage in which humans develop an intrinsic activist habitus that is acquired in their youth and will persist till their death. Through socialization, people acquire a certain consciousness, a certain worldview that is malleable during the youth but becomes stiffer after a period of a generation which is around 25 to 30 years (Mannheim, 1952). The life course approach is well suited to be used with Mannheim's theory of generation and Bourdieu's concept of habitus because all three theories address the ways in which social structures and past experiences shape individual behavior and attitudes over time. This integration allows the study to capture multi-level insights, shifting from macro and meso perspectives to micro-level analysis for a comprehensive understanding.

The main objective of this research is to relate the effect of biographical trajectories on senior activism. I aim to describe, in the most suitable way, the age group of seniors who participate, desist, or stay away from activism in their current situations. By exploring the ways of participation, and the ways of desisting, or not participating at all, I will be able to draw some typologies in terms of activism at an old age. Life course perspective will be very efficient to help me achieve the expected objectives because it emphasizes the importance of time, context, process,

and meaning on human development. It is concerned not only with personal biography but also with socio-historical time of individuals which ultimately involves both a micro and macrosocial levels of analysis (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Elder, 1977, Mills, 1959).

Building upon the framework I have established; the rest of this chapter will delve into a comprehensive exploration of pivotal elements. These elements encompass the multifaceted concept of habitus, informed by Bourdieu's insights, alongside the intricate dynamics of socialization and political socialization. Additionally, a focused investigation into the paradigm of generation, drawing from Mannheim's perspective, will be conducted. This discussion sets the stage for an analysis of the life course theory, beginning with an exposition of pertinent terminologies, further buttressing its applicability within this study's context. Guided by the theoretical framework, the second section describes the qualitative, cross-sectional case study design to investigate elderly activism in the Algerian Hirak. The use of in-depth life course interviews uncovers the biographical and social factors shaping participation.

Combining socialization, habitus, and generation

As Vincent Caradec (2008) asserts, it is crucial to take into consideration the context of the studied unit of analysis in order to come up with sociological conclusions. Sociological statements depend on the studied population, and the period of the research (Caradec, 2008). It is difficult and even impossible to assess the concepts of habitus, socialization, and generation separately because they ultimately overlap and are intermingled in the life course. As noted by William Jackson, ageing may be grounded in biology, but it is strongly influenced by social conditions²⁰ (Jackson, 1994). The perception and experience of ageing has specific cultural characteristics and is continued through socialization (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990). It is therefore the processes of

²⁰ Age is a significant factor determining one's condition (social status) in Algeria. Women are more affected by their age than men because of societal expectations and their statuses (young/old, married/widow) (Yacine-Titout, 1993).

socialization that makes the individual, and it is precisely, their strength, continuity and multiplicity that create the individual singularity (Darmon, 2016, p. 125).

This section undertakes an analytical examination of the fundamental notions of socialization and political socialization. This inquiry is conducted with the primary aim of evaluating the theoretical construct of habitus as formulated by Bourdieu, which demonstrates a profound interrelationship with the aforementioned concepts. Subsequently, the discourse delves into the notion of social class, with particular emphasis on the middle class, a focus determined by the prevailing state of scholarly literature. The concluding segment of this section expounds upon Mannheim's theoretical construct of generation and skillfully interrelates all the aforesaid concepts, thereby yielding a comprehensive and integrated assessment of the phenomenon of elderly activism.

Socialization

Simply put, socialization is the process through which “people learn how to act and interact within their society” (Jorgensen & Savla, 2010, p. 467). Elaborately explained, socialization is the process where a certain way of life or culture is acquired, then it is integrated into one's personality through experiences and networks and then adapted to his specific social environment (Rocher, 1992). In other words, socialization is a complex set of processes through which a person acquires and internalizes the values, beliefs, and norms of society, as well as the socially situated skills and behaviors necessary to function within it (Darmon, 2016).

The socialization process is constructed by what are called agents of socialization including parents, family members, educational and religious institutions (teachers and religious leaders), social networks, and media figures (Jennings & Niemi, 1974). An important point is that every political regime “seeks to instill in young people values, beliefs, and behaviors consistent with the continuance of its own political order” (Greenberg, 2017, p. 4). Hence, changing identities are influenced by the political regime and the governmental policies of a state (Amenta, 2008). It is

now well known that people are part of multiple realities and influenced by a variety of factors, including family, community, and location in which they live; education, schools, and peers; gender; religious elements; and media (Habashi 2017, p. 18). There is now a consensus in the literature that socialization is a process by which a newborn develops into a social creature through access to various interaction systems where he internalizes values and beliefs, standards, and norms, as well as action patterns (Malewska-Peyre et al., 1991, p. 8). Muriel Darmon synthesizes the definition of socialization as “the way society forms and transforms individuals” (Darmon, 2016. p. 9).

Socialization is defined as the process by which social reality is constructed through interactions (Pennec, 2004). Social interactions are the means by which individuals communicate and interact with each other, and they play a critical role in shaping socialization. Social interactions help people learn the values, norms, and beliefs of their culture (Giddens, 1991, 2018). Distinct social interactions give way to various entourages in different social worlds. The entourage is defined as the set of social networks bringing together the bonds of alliance, friendship, co-residence, and lineages (Lelièvre, 1997). This process is part of a networked world that includes family, friends, and work and in which the individual is action-oriented through reciprocal exchanges (Caillé, 2004). The experiences gained through participation in these various networks would be crucial for the post-retirement period (Ulysse & Lesemann, 1997) and some of them would raise awareness of the importance of rights defence (Charpentier et al, 2004; Fréchette, 2000, Quéniart & Jacques, 2002).

Sociologists have distinguished primary socialization from secondary socialization (Durkheim, 1922; Dubar, 2015; Darmon, 2016). The former is constituted of the family, the early childhood education, and the early social conditions. It is bequeathed with the role of forming the individual.

Scholars of the field concur that the family unit exerts a significant influence on the behavioral and psychological development of minors and adolescents (Dornbusch 1989, Whitbeck 1999). The latter starts when one's life starts to be experienced in the larger society, interacting beyond family and school relations. It has the role to reform the individual without the ability to erase the traces of the primary socialization. Pierre Bourdieu (1980) has classified primary and secondary habitus in the same manner. For instance, school is a place for encountering new acquaintances, it has a strong socializing function in contemporary societies where all individuals are obliged to frequent such institutions and interact with multiple teachers, students, friends, and professional workers (Little, 2016). The neighborhood is also a place where secondary socialization occurs (Darmon, 2016). The nature of these interactions, whether communal or societal, often depends on the geographic proximity between the individual's home and school.

The content taught in schools, including information about political and economic systems such as democracy, capitalism, and socialism, can be influenced by governments (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011). This can have an impact on the attitudes and beliefs of the general population towards these systems. As for Algeria, the established historical narrative is conveniently taught in educational institutions, media platforms, and even in places of worship like mosques. Those institutions ultimately serve as an alibi for those in power (Benzenine, 2020). Socialising institutions such as schools, universities, the army, trade unions, and political parties are subordinated to the interests and concerns of the ruling elite (Madoui, 2014, p. 252). Karima Direche (2020) claims that since 1962, the discipline of history in Algeria has served the interests of the political regime, functioning as a tool to legitimize the ruling authority, with support from the officials responsible for crafting the official historical narrative. This assertion finds endorsement among all the activists, who express their agreement through diverse articulations. Historians can freely access

sources to study the pre-1962 period, but the post-1962 era presents significant challenges (Chenoufi, Direche-Slimani, 2020). Scholars must depend heavily on oral testimonies from eyewitnesses, making interviews an essential methodological tool for uncovering and preserving historical accounts. Algerian culture is based on oral tradition which through legends, anecdotes and proverbs deeply structure the social attitudes of people (Salhi, 2014).

Political Socialization

The transmission of political orientations across generations in a given society constitutes a vital aspect of political socialization, encompassing a range of values, attitudes, and beliefs that permeate individual perspectives on politics and government (Easton & Dennis, 1967; Easton, Dennis & Greenberg, 1970). From a theoretical standpoint, political socialization can be conceptualized as a dynamic process whereby individuals acquire the political culture that surrounds them. The cumulative impact of political socialization becomes manifest in the formation of adult opinions, which are often the result of early political experiences and play an instrumental role in shaping the workings of a nation's government and political life (Greenberg, 2017).

Socializing agents play a pivotal role in shaping the political attitudes and actions of young people. These agents not only impart political knowledge to children, but also function as mobilizers by influencing, encouraging, or discouraging their political preferences and behaviors (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). As such, an in-depth understanding of political socialization is essential for grasping the complex interplay between political culture and societal norms, and for illuminating the mechanisms that give rise to individual political preferences and behaviors. The substantial influence wielded by the social milieu serves to reinforce the paradigm of contextual and situational engagement, particularly when it comes to activism and participation in social movements.

Political socialization describes “the process by which citizens crystalize political identities, values and behavior that remain relatively persistent throughout later life” (Neundorf and Smets, 2017, p.

1). One of the founders of the subject Herbert Hyman clearly defines this process by stating that

“Regularities in the political behavior of adult individuals [...] suggests that the individual has been modified in the course of his development in such a way that he is likely to exhibit certain persistent behavior apart from transient stimulation in his contemporary environment. One is naturally directed to the area of learning; more specifically to the socialization of the individual, his learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society” (Hyman, 1969, p. 25).

Political socialization is in fact a dynamic process and its impact through the life course might be long lasting depending on the source and agent of socialization. Olivier Fillieule identifies three aspects of political socialization: firstly, the development of an ideological perspective or worldview; secondly, the acquisition of skills and personal attributes that serve as resources for political engagement; and thirdly, the reorganization of social networks that are connected to the formation of individual and collective identities (Fillieule, 2012, p. 44). This last aspect specifically relates to how social networks impact the construction of identities in a political context. Karel Yon (2005) explains that an activist habitus consists of dispositions that already exist in other social contexts and are then adapted to the political sphere.

With the multiple and heterogenous factors involved in the process of socialization, it is possible to conclude that political socialization is the sum of processes that shape the values and political orientations of individuals including early family factors²¹, adult experiences²² and current circumstances. These values shape the way individuals make judgments about the distribution of

²¹ In 1954, almost 80% of Algerian population is rural (Quemeneur, 2022). Today, only 20% still live in rural areas (WorldBank, 2023).

²² In the mid-70s, the working-age population represents 37% of the population, which eventually led to mass unemployment (Quemeneur, 2022).

social power, or the acceptability of certain policies advocated by the state (Halman 2007; Weakliem, 1992). Importantly, socialization is a lifelong process that starts as early as birth, and, although later socialization impact might be less significant, the phenomenon does not end till death (Erikson, 1993, Elder & Johnson, 2002).

Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu elaborates the concept of habitus²³ and writes that “the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produces a habitus, a system of acquired, permanent, durable, transposable and generative dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 88). A disposition is a tendency or leaning linked to socialization, which is imposed on the individual often in a non-conscious manner (Tap, 1991). Those dispositions that shape our actions and our perception constitutes our habitus which is always acquired through the same process: the incorporation, through repeated experiences, of dispositions specific to the corresponding social positions (Grange, 2009). Actual preferences “are determined in the relationship between the space of possibilities and impossibilities offered and the system of dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 230). Any change in the space of possibilities creates a change in preferences that are subordinate to the logic of habitus. In other words, a habitus is a way of being or a way of perceiving the world that is acquired through past experiences. Living in a specific social class²⁴,

²³ The concept is already introduced by Emile Durkheim in early 1900s, and Bourdieu is inspired by the works of Norbert Elias and Marcel Mauss (Reed-Danahay, 2020) while he elaborates the concept through his observation of the Kabyle population in Algeria. Bourdieu was also influenced by Erwin Panofsky (Bourdieu, 1985a), an art historian who argued that architecture was influenced by unconsciously or semi-consciously acquired “mental habits” (Panofsky, 1951). Bourdieu’s sociological perspective is deeply rooted in his studies of Algeria (Lahouari, 2002). During the 1950s, when he observed rural Algeria and examined aspects such as honor, ancestral customs, family bonds, and authority, Bourdieu observed that there was a limited variety in habituses, except for distinctions related to gender (Wacquant, 2016; Reed-Danahay, 2020).

²⁴ The middle classes are often declared as carriers of projects of democratic transformation (Koo, 1991; Pickel, 2012). In Algeria however, the middle class is the “regime’s base” due to rent access (Ouaissa, 2018). One of the research objectives is to determine whether the activist habitus develops within a specific social class where people share similar conditions of existence or some kind of consciousness.

experiencing specific conditions of existence, produce the structures of the habitus which delimits the perception and appreciation of any subsequent experience (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 90-1).

Habitus is the product of history. It produces “individual and collective practices, acquired through socialization, in accordance with the patterns generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which are deposited in each organism in the form of chains of perception, thought, and action, and tend, more surely than all formal rules and explicit norms, to guarantee the conformity of practices and their constancy over time” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 91). In other words, what Bourdieu calls habitus is precisely that range of prospects for future action arising from the arrangement of specific experiences acquired in the past. The possibilities of action in older age are thus constrained by the early ageing process. For instance, every habitus of class stands out from another not only by tastes and dislikes (Bourdieu 1979), but also by practical or explicit positions towards the social world and, more specifically, by dispositions for the future, a “sense of the possible” and a “sense of limits” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 559). The “homogeneity of habitus observed within the limits of a given set of living conditions and social conditioning is what makes practices and works immediately intelligible and predictable and therefore perceived as obvious and natural” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 97).

Habitus is an “infinite capacity to generate, in complete freedom (though controlled), products such as thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions, which are always limited by the historically and socially situated conditions of their production” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 92). Simply put, habitus is the result of long-term socialization. Habitus is not innate or predetermined, but rather shaped by an individual’s social, economic, and cultural environment. Consequently, the inherent dispositions of a learned habitus are not automatically activated or operational in all circumstances. They are contingent upon a particular field of activity, which can be seen as a

dynamic situation where specific types of social relationships are structured, and where individuals adopt specific positions and social roles within that field. As a result, the skills and capabilities acquired by individuals possess distinct interpretations and worth in each distinct social space. In terms of activism, the militant habitus is a system of political dispositions, of mental and behavioral patterns of perception that determine the way to orient oneself in the world in terms of agency and action (Bucco, 2005).

Basil Bernstein (1971) emphasized how social class greatly influences the ways of socialization. Being part of a certain class creates socializations that may not be identical but are more alike to each other than to those in other social classes. If living conditions are common to a whole set of people in the same socio-economic situation, then these people partly have the same habitus. This allows Pierre Bourdieu to speak of class habitus (worker habitus or bourgeois habitus, for example). Economic and political dispositions cannot be understood without the economic and social context in which one's individual development occurs (Bourdieu, 1977). The living space, as well as the temporal and spatial context which determines the conditions of existence of an individual defines his habitus. However, since each has its own personal trajectory and occupies a specific position in its class, the habitus also has an individual dimension, which means that each specific practice is considered a variation of the collective habitus. Habitus is therefore not a rigid structure, it is in constant restructuring, integrating new experiences, adjusting to new situations. It is the product of our past and recent experiences, but where the past conditions the present.

Concerning collective action, Bourdieu says that "Collective mobilization enterprises cannot succeed without a minimum of concordance between the habitus of the mobilizing agents and the dispositions of those who recognize themselves in their practice or their words" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 99). In other words, organizers of protest events and social movements must share a minimum

set of values, feelings, and practices in order to act together. Furthermore, one does not enter a social field²⁵ by an instantaneous decision of the will, but only by birth or by a slow process of co-optation and initiation (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 114). Hence, entering the social space of activism and social movements is not the result of an instantaneous decision, but a process of long-term socialization.

The Middle Class in Algeria

Membership in a given social class results in socializations that, if not entirely uniform, are at least more comparable among individuals within the same class than with those in different social classes (Darmon, 2016, p. 23). A class habitus is incorporated through class conditions where agents live in homogenous conditions of existence, imposing upon them homogenous socializations, and engendering homogenous systems of dispositions which results in homogenous practices (p. 112). Furthermore, class is a universal principle of explanation and classification generating similar practices, and defining the rank occupied in all possible fields (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 127). For instance, the resource mobilization approach to social movement studies has argued that access to resources (e.g., moral, cultural, social–organizational, human, and material) enhances the likelihood of individuals’ mobilization (Della Porta, 2019). However, every economy generates a particular distribution of income, supplies people with more or less economic security, and supports programs and policies that provide workers and retirees with more or less autonomy.

²⁵ A social field is a structured microcosm in the overall social space having its own social and political dynamics (Lafaye, 2011). Each field encapsulates, in a way, a habitus that guides the participants in the “game” (Bourdieu, 1980). People stay in a specific social field because they attribute a certain value to it, and they see a certain purpose in it which pushes them to invest in that particular social field either with their money, their time, or whatever resources they have. As for the Algerian protest movement, it drew its strength from decentralized networks of citizen mobilization, operating without a predetermined hierarchical structure at the national level (Volpi, 2019). During the 1970s and 1980s, state-controlled organizations exerted significant influence, severely limiting the freedom of association. Consequently, clandestine networks emerged covertly, eventually leading to the eruption of riots in 1988 (Northey, 2018).

Each of these factors is constitutive of the capabilities that feed into the levels of activism a person is likely to experience.

The social ecology of Algeria was formed by the conflict between French colonialism and Algerian nationalism (Eichler, 1977). In the Algerian social structure, it has been identified that there are four distinct classes: the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie (middle class), and the bourgeoisie (elite) (Lazreg, 1976, p. 122). As for my sample, the snowball sampling method made me encounter people of the upper middle class²⁶ (13), the middle class (17), and the economically precarious people (5).

The working class in Algeria of the 1950s and 1960s was predominantly made up of rural residents who lived in poverty and faced harsh working conditions, including forced labor. They also had limited access to education, healthcare, and other essential services, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation under French colonial rule. However, following Algeria's independence, the government implemented socialist policies designed to address the economic and social disparities that existed due to the colonial legacy. These policies included nationalizing key industries and introducing land reforms, which aimed to distribute wealth and resources more equitably. As a result of these measures, a new middle class emerged in Algeria, which included professionals, civil servants, and entrepreneurs who benefited from the government's state-led economic development initiatives²⁷. That new middle class however, unlike the agrarian and rural

²⁶ Those people had better intellectual and economic means, they were mostly professors, businessman, high-skilled workers (Engineers, Lawyers, Architects) or white collars. They had many similarities with the elite in terms of living standards and political knowledge.

²⁷ The petty-bourgeois (middle class) bureaucrats are primarily concerned with maintaining their current positions, rather than pursuing a new model of socio-economic organization. The state apparatus serves as a meeting ground for various classes and factions, and all groups who have access make use of the state apparatus as a means of perpetuating their existing conditions of existence (Lazreg, 1976). Even today, Algeria's middle classes remain the cornerstone of the regime, playing a crucial role in preserving the political status quo (Bennoune 1998; Ouaisa, 2018).

middle classes of the 1950s and 1960s, was more dependent on the economic strategies of the state, i.e., on rent (Ouaissa 2018, p. 133).

Historically, the Algerian middle classes are prisoners of two specific structural conditions: colonialism and rent (Ouaissa, 2018, p. 126). In Algeria, the colonial state was “clearly defined, dense and simultaneously coercive and exclusive” (McDougall, 2011, p. 53). Algeria was a matter of French “internal sovereignty” over which the UN had no recognized jurisdiction (McDougall, 2011, p. 65). Following independence, providing social assistance was essential for a post-colonial regime like Algeria’s to obtain support from the middle class, labourers, and peasants at a time when the state was fighting both the colonial powers and its own former ruling classes. For the benefit of the people, the state worked as the driving force behind economic and social progress (Bayat, 2002).

The rentier economy has turned the Algerian people into subjects and customers. The sharp rise in oil prices allowed during the 1970s, the strengthening of the loyalty of the middle classes to the Regime. The government has imposed itself into the process of promoting the middle class by allowing them to profit from rent (Abdi, 1985, p. 100). Thanks to significant government investments in education, health and housing, the regime succeeded in patronizing the middle classes. With a total of 2 million workers, the state remains the largest employer in Algeria (Boserup, 2016. p. 16). The middle classes of the 1970s gained their economic status through the employment, housing, and education policies of the welfare state. The suggestion put forth is that the Algerian middle class is still a strong base of the government and play a crucial role in preserving the current state of affairs.

Algeria’s middle class is far from homogenous; it encompasses diverse socioeconomic groups with varying degrees of stability and privilege. The upper middle class includes high-ranking public

officials, liberal professionals such as lawyers, doctors, professors, and engineers, as well as entrepreneurs and urban or rural landowners (Musette, 2013). In contrast, the lower middle class comprises small traders, mid-level public servants, and farmers (Musette, 2013). Notably, the middle class constitutes approximately 75% of Algeria's population, yet a significant portion of these households teeters on the brink of poverty, vulnerable to slipping into more precarious categories. In fact, approximately 30% of the middle class enjoys a relatively stable and secure income (Algeria-Watch, 2013). Among the middle classes, uncertainties about the future are significantly greater for private-sector employees than for those in the public sector (Goux & Morin, 2012). Unlike upper-class families, they usually have no financial or social assets to directly pass on to their children. This stark disparity in stability and opportunity within Algeria's middle classes underscores the fragility of its socioeconomic structure.

Generation

It is possible to talk about generation when considering members of the same cohort, having developed an age-group consciousness with a distinct set of attitudes and behavior at odds with those of other age groups in society (Braungart & Braungart 1985a). In brief, people who share the same location and are part of similar political, economic, and historical circumstances tend to develop similar modes of behavior, experience, and thought. To form a generation, these individuals must share temporal and spatial contexts that provide a common historical and sociocultural framework.

For Karl Mannheim (1952), a generation is formed exclusively during the years of youth, and it is "completed" at the edge of adulthood. A generation to take form takes approximately 25 to 30 years. The most important age bracket for the development of a specific consciousness is around that of 17 to 25. A generation is "an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66).

Mannheim (1952) argues that generational differences are the results of major social events occurring during the period of the development of the political consciousness. However, generations are not automatically shaped by people who share the same “founding events”, neither by people who share the same families or relatives, but the same socio-historical realities from the beginning of their lives. Revolutions, wars, political and economic crises are all example of important events having generational effects. These period effects are therefore major events, affecting the population as a whole, not just a certain age, regional, gender, education, or income groups (De Graaf, 1999; Norris, 2003; Cutler & Bengston, 1974). As for the generation studied in my research, the founding event is the revolutionary war that occurred between 1954 and 1962. The second significant event is the Black Spring of 1980, and the third is the Black Decade that spanned from 1988 to 1999. In terms of general political environment, they endured the Cold War period.

According to Mannheim (1952), belonging to the same generation does not necessarily entail having identical ideas or opinions, but rather sharing similar experiences that lead individuals to align themselves with certain issues, albeit possibly in varying ways. Hence, he deploys the concept of generation unit:

Within this community of people with a common destiny there can then arise particular generation-units. These are characterized by the fact that they do not merely involve a loose participation by a number of individuals in a pattern of events shared by all alike though interpreted by the different individuals differently, but an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences. Thus, within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation-units (Mannheim, 1952, p. 31).

When we speak of social generation, we ultimately understand people in a certain collectivity such as a country or a city who are of similar age, and who are considered as having the same

experiences shaping their attitudes and worldviews for the future. The temporal location of a cohort is important in terms of the opportunities, chances and resources that happen to be available to them (Edmunds & Turner, 2002). In that sense, any attempt to periodize biographical trajectories must take into account, not only variations from one society to another and from one period to another, but also from one social class to another and from one gender to another within the framework of a given society at a given time (Dubar, Nicourd, 2017).

Overall, a generation is defined by the traces left by history on its members. Generational location confines and predisposes individuals to specific behaviors, feelings, and thoughts, and promotes specific awareness. This is what we call generational consciousness. Both Mannheim and Bourdieu agree that a stability occurs in one's worldview, attitudes, and behaviour after a certain age. Mannheim's theory that distinct generational cohorts emerge from fervent youthful political involvement is substantiated by empirical research studies (Fendrich & Tarleau 1973; Jennings 1987; Marwell, Aiken, & Demerath 1987). Additionally, inquiring about the historical occurrences that had the most significant influence on their lives, American adults commonly cited events that transpired during their early adulthood (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Hence, adolescence and early adulthood are the primary phases during which individuals form their political memories tied to their generation.

As I have argued until now, a person becomes an activist through access to various resources determined by his contextual and situational socialization and is imbued with specific dispositions determined by a particular habitus. Although preceding generations have an influence on one's social position due to inherited capitals (Bourdieu, 1979), socialization occurs in a specific time-space location. Hence, the concept of generation contextualizes socialization and adds explanatory power to the causes defended by activists due to their age group. For Mannheim,

The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, Predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action (Mannheim, 1952, p. 16).

For Bourdieu, on the other hand:

L'histoire structurale d'un champ (qu'il s'agisse du champ des classes sociales ou de tout autre champ) périodise la biographie des agents qui s'y trouvent engagés (en sorte que l'histoire individuelle de chaque agent enferme l'histoire du groupe auquel il appartient) ; par suite, on ne peut découper dans une population des générations (par opposition à de simples classes d'âge arbitraires) que sur la base d'une connaissance de l'histoire spécifique du champ concerné : en effet, seuls les changements structuraux qui affectent ce champ possèdent le pouvoir de déterminer la production de générations différentes en transformant les modes de génération et en déterminant l'organisation des biographies individuelles et l'agrégation de ces biographies en classes de biographies orchestrées et rythmées selon le même tempo. (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 529)

It is clear that both Mannheim and Bourdieu share similar lines of thought regarding the influence of social and historical factors on individuals and their experiences. They both highlight the importance of belonging to certain social categories, such as classes or age groups, in shaping individuals' perceptions, thoughts, and actions. Both sociologists highlight the interplay between individual and collective histories in understanding social phenomena and the formation of distinct groups and generations. Both trace the trajectories or path-dependent evolution of their subject matter. Hence, it is impossible to talk about socialization without considering time-space location. Belonging to specific social categories or being situated within specific historical contexts influences the way individuals perceive the world and engage with it. In that sense, Gerard Mauger (2011) refers to generation habitus. He highlights that in both cases, whether class or generation, it involves analyzing "the conditions and forms of the transition from ethos to logos, from experience to expression" (Mauger, 2011, p. 147).

As for this research, the generation under study was born in the 1950s coinciding with the final stages of the liberation war and at the beginning of independence. Coinciding with fast paced urbanisation²⁸, this generation benefited from the great educational opportunities offered by the national government after independence (Lekehal, 2003). They then entered the city while they were still young, or perhaps were born there, which made them more familiar with city life compared to the previous generation that continued to be hostile towards the city, its values, and its behaviors (Djabi, 2012). This generation experienced its youth during the 1970s and 1980s where the Communists wielded significant influence over the working class, trade unions, and some educated urban middle classes. Their power was most pronounced during the clandestine and single-party phases under the reign of Houari Boumediène (1965 to 1978) (Djabi, 2012). That generation remains the first consumer and the first producer of written media in Algeria such as newspapers with a sharp interest in political matters (Djabi, 2012). Lastly, the generation under study experienced the rapid growth of urban and rural middle classes due to advancements in industrialization and education, resulting in an expansion of their social and economic standing²⁹. This period witnessed the state's commitment to fostering the material and social progress of the population (Rebah, 2012).

The Life Course Perspective

As a concept, a life course is defined as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (Giele & Elder 1998, p. 22). A life course perspective teaches us that a person is not simply a particular creature categorized in a certain way, but an individual who has

²⁸ In the 1950s, Algeria was an overwhelmingly rural society. The urban population increased a few years after independence reaching 31.4% in 1966, 40% in 1977, and 50% in 1987 (Lekehal, 2003).

²⁹ Since the early 1990s, many economic reforms have been undertaken under the constraints of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) (Kichou, 2010). Structural adjustment programs have slashed social sector budgets, severely undermining education. As public funding for school infrastructure and resources declines, households are forced to shoulder a growing share of education costs, including textbooks and supplies.

a baggage of experience that affects his thoughts and behaviours, and when found in a particular situation, reacts depending on multiple factors that were involved in the development of his individuality. As the studies show, people are not born activists (Fillieule, Mayer 2001), but they become one through their lifetime. The main objective behind the use of a Life Course approach in this research is to discover “traces of social mechanisms and processes” (Bertaux, 2016, p. 89) generating specific practices in terms of activism.

Life Course Theory or Sociological Biography focuses on the analysis of human behaviour from birth to death. It tries to understand the intricacies of individual decision-making by considering complex narratives (Dubar, Nicourd, 2017). What life course perspective tells us is that human behaviour is not a linear evolution from point A to point B where each and every individual have the same reactions to various stimuli. Life course journey is a “moving spiral with both continuity and change, marked by both predictable and unpredictable twists and turns” (Hutchison, 2019, p. 27).

The life course perspective recognizes patterns in human behavior related to biological age, psychological age, and social age norms as well as the interaction of historical processes, social changes, cultural changes, and biographical configurations and transitions (Kurt, 2018). Finally, the life course perspective recognizes the “unique life stories of individuals - the unique configuration of specific life events and person - environment transactions over time” (Hutchison, 2019, p. 27). According to life course theory, human development and aging are lifelong processes (Elder and Johnson 2002). Supporting the theory, Jennings and Niemi found support a model of life-long openness to change in attitudes in their analysis of parents and children’s political allegiances. (Jennings & Niemi, 1981). Because of the constant absence of absolute stability and

equilibrium in one's life, the life course perspective elaborates the importance of time, context, process, and meaning on human development and family life (Bengtson & Allen, 1993).

As Glen Elder (1975, 1978) defines it, the life course encompasses the pathways by which individuals fulfill different roles over their lives, sequentially or simultaneously. In measuring the movement of individuals and families from one role or status to the next, or the simultaneous balancing of roles, the life course concerns itself with the process of transitions under different historical conditions. Life course theory calls attention to how historical time, social location, and culture affect the individual experience of each life stage. The human response to various situation, events, and stimuli are considered important in earlier stages of his life because it might affect future responses when confronted to similar environment. Whether one is a political leader, a victim of trauma, or someone who has been involved in conflict, each has a life story within which they interpret and attribute meaning to life events (Hewer, Lyons, 2018).

The main concepts found in life course theory are relatively easy to comprehend, but not always easy to operationalise due to subjective meaning of life experiences and the associated implications. These concepts include transitions, trajectories, life events, and turning points (Morgan & Kunkel 2016). It is noteworthy that transitions and turning points have generally been confused in the literature, and there is an overlap in the way individuals remember and assess these types of change related events (Enz & Talarico, 2015).

Transitions

A person's life trajectory includes many transitions, and those transitions differ in time and space from one individual to another. Simply put, transitions are changes in roles and statuses that are different from previous roles and statuses and that endure over a certain time (Morgan & Kunkel, 2016). According to Rutter (1996), unlike turning points, transitions do not necessarily promote long-term change. The prominent examples in many scholarly works are starting school, entering

puberty, leaving school, getting a first job, leaving home, migrating, retiring, and so on (Morgan & Kunkel, 2016). Many transitions relate to family life: marriages, births, divorces, remarriages, and deaths of loved ones³⁰. Transitions from a social class to another might also be of significant importance. Transitions are specific elements of a person's life that change family statuses and roles and are generally accompanied by family members' exits and entrances (Hutchison, 2019). According to Alwin, transitions are part of a larger trajectory which involves relatively stable long-term processes and patterns of life (Alwin, 2012). As for my sample, all the participants were married except one woman. They all had children, and seven of them experienced widowhood.

Turning Points

A turning point also known as defining moment is a time when a major change occurs in the life course trajectory (Hewer, Lyons, 2018). Life turning points are referred in the life story as events which individuals view as salient and especially important to them. In general, turning points typically have implications that change people's life trajectories (Moen & Wethington 1999). According to Andrew Abbott (2009), trajectories have the capacity to support small scale variations and still keep a certain regularity. Turning points however have important consequences on trajectories because they change the direction of the trajectory or embark on a new one in a definite manner (Bessin, Bidart & Grossetti, 2009). It is therefore clear that a turning point has a structural character, and it is not just a simple anecdotal change. Andrew Abbott (2009) points out that turning points are characterized by unpredictability: changes with consequences that reorient a process. Changes in parental and professional responsibilities are frequently listed as major life

³⁰ After Algeria gained independence, the initial census showed that women typically got married at around 18 years old, while men married at over 23 years old. However, over time, the age at first marriage has been steadily increasing. Nowadays, women are getting married at nearly 30 years old, and men are even older when they marry (Kateb, 2010).

events that constitute turning points, aligning with gendered societal roles³¹ (Clausen 1995). This means that significant events such as getting married, having a baby, or starting a new job are viewed as pivotal moments or turning points (Clausen 1995; Moen & Wethington, 1999).

Life Events

Another important concept is a life event which is a significant occurrence in a person's life that may produce serious and long-lasting effects. Life events are "significant events occurring across the life span that mark transitions from one life cycle stage (or state) to another that are accompanied by changes in roles, expectations, responsibilities, and behaviors. These events are typically, but not always, age graded, or age differentiated" (Alwin, 2012, p. 208). The important idea to retain here is that life events signal transitions. It is important to differentiate it from other concepts because it refers to a happening per se and not to the transitions that occur because of it. For instance, a life event will most likely spur a transition in one's life, but it might not always be the case. Death of a loved one is always a life event in one's life, but it might not spur a change in roles and statuses depending on the degree of closeness to his family circle. Historians have classified three types of events³² that have varying degrees of impact on the social order, thereby affecting biographical trajectories and redefining socialization configurations: revolutions, wars, and political crises (Mauger, 2013). On the one hand those events have significant and lasting effects on those who have experienced them, leading to the formation of a generation. On the other

³¹ Traditionally and still today men are responsible for managing public affairs and women, primarily entrusted with the vital function of reproduction, are confined to managing domestic affairs (Yacine-Titouh, 1993). The popular saying, "A woman only leaves her house twice in her lifetime; once in her marriage, and the second time in her death", continues to be widely spoken in Algeria, highlighting the significant impact of marriage on women, far more than on men. With urbanization, women's economic dependence increased, and their social sphere narrowed (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's remark is valid for my sample, but there is a need for further investigation for the new generations.

³² Any attempt to divide or categorize a person's life trajectory into periods must consider two distinct yet interdependent types of events: biographical events and social events (Mauger, 2015). Biographical events refer to significant occurrences or milestones that mark the different paths or trajectories individuals take in their lives. Historical events refer to occurrences that possess a wider-ranging societal influence.

hand, however, these events reinforce pre-existing dispositions that leads to the formation of “generation units” within the same generation that are in opposition to each other (Mauger, 2013, p. 122). It is important to clarify that life events and turning points are not synonymous. For example, experiences such as getting married or starting a new job may qualify as both life events and turning points, but their classification ultimately hinges on the significance and impact they have on an individual’s life trajectory.

The first section of this chapter showed that a Life Course approach encompasses a dynamic interplay between generational time and events, historical time and events, as well as biographical time and events that permits the researcher to analyze the complex interactions between societal structures, individual dispositions, and contextual factors. Whether causing transitions or turning points, life events occur within three dimensions of time; ontogenetic, generational, and historical (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). These events have implications for change in the behavior of individuals and their social relationships over time; they also have varying subjective meanings depending on the life stage of every individual. Just like life events, socialization is also contextual and might exert different influences depending on the individual's developmental stage, cultural background, and the sociohistorical moment in which it occurs, thereby reinforcing or challenging existing dispositions and shaping future patterns of action

Research Design

In this section, I will extensively explore the employed research design and methodology. I will begin by providing a thorough explanation of the rationale behind the chosen methodology, offering insights into the sampling strategies, access arrangements, recruitment procedures, and ethical considerations. Following this, I will delve into a detailed evaluation of the data collection process, highlighting its procedural intricacies such as the chosen cities, the implications of my identity as a researcher, and challenges encountered. Lastly, the chapter will culminate in a critical

analysis of the method's efficacy, emphasizing both its strengths, such as validity and reliability, and its limitations, including issues of generalizability and potential biases. This comprehensive examination aims to offer readers a clear and transparent understanding of how the chosen methodology influences the study's findings and contributes to the broader field of research.

This qualitative research, in which the units of analysis are retired activists and non-activists aged at least sixty, is based on three pillars: a single case-study, semi-structured interviews, and observations in open settings and overt role (Bryman & Bell, 2019) conducted during fieldwork in Algeria. The extensive literature on the constituents of my research project has not only guided me through my research, but it helped me contribute to existing knowledge and develop the understanding of activism and social movement participation. The interviews related to my case study involves elderly participants and non-participants in the Algerian Hirak which offers researchers of the field a context in which specific actors operate for a specific goal.

My single case-study is cross-sectional which makes it an exploratory study. Cross-sectional studies are characterized by the collection of relevant information (data) at a given point in time (Kesmodel, 2018, p. 388). Unlike longitudinal studies, they lack a time dimension, as all data collection occurs simultaneously and typically reflects conditions or information from the period during which the data is gathered. It is thus an initial analysis of elderly activism that will need to be systematically explored in other studies that would most likely require longitudinal research methods. However, a cross-sectional case study approach is efficient to comprehend elders' social movement participation in both their complexity and 'natural' context (Bouchard & Cyr, 1998). Cross-sectional designs are widely used in various fields for assessing the prevalence of specific traits, attitudes, or knowledge within a population, validating measurement instruments, or

examining reliability across studies, making them a practical and relevant methodology for exploratory research.

A case study, for present purposes, is an intensive study of a single case (the Algerian Hirak) that attempts to shed light on a larger population of cases (participation to social movements under authoritarian regimes) (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016). Evidence used in case studies is generally observational, as the researcher cannot manipulate the causal factors directly. The uniqueness of case study research is highlighted by concepts like process tracing (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; George & Bennett, 2005) and causal-process observations (Brady, 2004). As a widely utilized research method in empirical social science, case studies have long been valued for their ability to generate hypotheses and develop theories (Eckstein, 1975; George & Bennett, 2005; Lijphart, 1971). Their detailed nature allows researchers to map the sequence of variables, identify interactions among them, and determine the direction of causality (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). Moreover, incorporating the temporal dimension of social processes into causal accounts allows theorists to more accurately explain a complex social world (Mahoney, 2006; Bennett, 2001; Bennett & Elman, 2006).

I opted for a case study approach because of its effectiveness in both exploration and explanation. Case studies offer researchers the opportunity to delve deeply into the complexities of particular political systems, comprehend the underlying causal mechanisms, and take into account the historical and social contexts that influence these systems (Ragin, Becker, 1992). Centering on the Hirak as a significant social uprising evolving in Algeria, my study aims to illuminate the intricate social dynamics and interpersonal factors that impact the choices of elderly individuals regarding their involvement in activism.

The Data - Interviewing older adults

The main source of data for this study is a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with eighteen non-activists and seventeen activists. All along the fieldwork³³, I have conducted individual interviews with men and women from various cities, having diverse political views and socioeconomic backgrounds. The youngest interviewee was born in 1960 and the eldest was born in 1945. The majority of the interviewed individuals were born in 1952. As per the nature of the data collection method, I had a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered (an interview canvas³⁴), but I was flexible with the interviewees depending on their answers. Sometimes, questions did not follow the exact order in the guide, and some questions on my list were added or removed in order to follow the logic of the interviewee's responses. In semi-structured interviews, the process is about bringing out how the interviewees themselves interpret and make sense of issues and events (Longhurst, 2009). That is why I have added or eliminated or even reformulated some questions in order to put the interviewee at ease and take the right direction to fulfil the needs of my research.

The duration of life course interviews varied considerably from interviewee to interviewee, but it usually took one session lasting from 30 to 120 minutes each. My "role" in the fieldwork was one of "participant-as-observer" because I have applied one-visit interview method (Gold, 1958, p. 220). I have scheduled meetings with interviewees and accommodated them at their preferred locations and times. Interviews have taken place in various settings, including cars, residences,

³³ The fieldwork was conducted rigorously in accordance with strict ethical guidelines provided by the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa. All interviewees and potential participants to the study were approached and given all required information about the ethical procedures, as well as the right to remain anonymous.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (1995) distinguishes between an "interview guide" (*guide d'entretien*) and an "interview canvas" (*canevas d'entretien*) based on their structure and flexibility. While I had specific topics to address, I chose to use the canvas for its greater flexibility, allowing more freedom for interviewees.

and street corners. Due to their apprehensions and considerations, individuals usually declined meeting at mosques and coffee shops due to the proximity of other people.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews had three purposes: to obtain objective landmark on the life course trajectory of the interviewee, to gain access to the different subjective worlds of one's activist career, and to allow an interpretation of one's progress linking life course trajectory and mechanisms related to Hirak participation. The interviews were therefore a tool for collecting qualitative data in order to shed light on the interactions between the trajectory, activist career and progress of the study units (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The questionnaire that I have prepared contained four sections; family life and past memories; social network and available resources; the Hirak; and the present. While preparing and conducting the interviews, I always had the overall purpose of my research in mind which is to find variables that might explain the activism of some and the non-activism of others while being part of the same generation. The primary concern of the research is the networks of interviewees because I share the view of Alan Zuckerman who writes "endogenous relationships characterize many, perhaps all, of social, economic, and political life" (Lichbach, Zuckerman, 2009, p. 94). The other emphasis is on that of generation as understood by Mannheim (1952).

Selection Criteria and Sampling Method

Given the politically sensitive and repressive environment in Algeria, snowball sampling emerged as the most viable method for both reaching participants and ensuring their safety. This technique allowed for the organic surfacing of social networks and facilitated access to individuals through trusted intermediaries - crucial in a context where fear of surveillance and repression is widespread. Snowball sampling fulfilled three objectives: it gave me easier access to people willing to divulge information or views through a viable contact, it also helped me to identify others who may be willing to provide information on the topic of the study, and it helped me delve into the network

variable which is of utmost importance for the research. Snowball sampling is particularly effective for studying embedded social networks because it captures not only individual perspectives but also the relational structures in which they are situated (Noy, 2008).

Nonetheless, the use of snowball sampling came with challenges. Despite being introduced through trusted contacts, many potential participants declined to speak, citing fears of state retribution or social repercussions. Recurrent warnings like “Ne répétez pas ça ailleurs!” (Don’t repeat this elsewhere!) and “Tout ça va rester confidentiel, n’est-ce pas?” (All this will remain confidential, right?) reflected the high levels of suspicion and anxiety surrounding political discussions. In many instances, potential participants refused to engage solely because I was a foreigner. While some non-participants were open—often expressing admiration for Turkey and engaging with me as a fellow Muslim - mentioning my affiliation with a Canadian university sometimes heightened their mistrust.

To mitigate this, I tailored my approach to each situation. I emphasized my Turkish identity and, when appropriate, used religious terminology to foster familiarity and reduce ideological distance. These efforts helped build rapport and encouraged participation, especially among those who may have otherwise been reluctant to engage. Nevertheless, several interviewees likely participated only because of shared cultural or religious ties, underlining the importance of contextual sensitivity in conducting fieldwork in authoritarian environments.

In terms of selection criteria, the primary requirement was that interviewees be at least 60 years old. This age threshold was essential for ensuring that participants had either directly experienced Algeria’s war of independence or had been socialized in its immediate aftermath. This generational lens allowed for the exploration of long-term political and social trajectories shaped by key historical events.

Participants were divided into two broad categories: activists and non-activists. Activists were defined as individuals who consistently took part in the Hirak movement, particularly in the Friday or Tuesday protests held from February 22, 2019, to May 1, 2021. Continuous participation after the contested election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune on December 12, 2019, was a distinguishing marker of anti-regime activism. Many such participants self-identified as *Hirakistes* or *militants de gauche*, simplifying their classification.

Non-activists, on the other hand, included those who either never participated in the protests or who disengaged after limited involvement. This group encompassed a wide spectrum, from movement sympathizers who supported the Hirak but chose not to participate, to individuals who were indifferent or even opposed to the movement. For example, some had taken part in the demonstrations against President Bouteflika's fifth term but withdrew from political engagement after his resignation, showing support to the regime.

Ultimately, the combination of age-based selection and snowball sampling enabled the formation of a robust and contextually sensitive sample. It reflected both the political diversity and the nuanced social dynamics of a generation shaped by Algeria's post-independence political trajectory.

Sample Size and Recruitment Procedure

The fieldwork began with preparatory steps taken in Montreal, where several Algerian friends who had recently traveled to Algeria helped lay the groundwork. While building a solid theoretical and empirical foundation through bibliographic research, documentaries, and online resources (Beaud & Weber, 2010), I also established preliminary contacts. I initially had seven individuals based in various Algerian cities who agreed to assist me by introducing potential interviewees from their networks. However, as is often the case in qualitative fieldwork, the process quickly shifted from careful planning to navigating uncertainty and contingency (Kapiszewski et al., 2015). One of my

initial contacts completely withdrew upon my arrival, and only later confessed that he had been too afraid of potential repression should anything go wrong. Others provided only limited support, reminding me of the adage: “You are never better served than by yourself.”

Relying on these early connections, I turned to snowball sampling to access more participants. While these initial contacts were not themselves activists, they facilitated my eventual integration into socialist activist networks. Many activists remained hesitant or unwilling to participate, often citing political fears. This resistance, however, highlighted the value of snowball sampling in reaching otherwise hard-to-access populations (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Initially expecting to access Islamist networks, I believed my religious background would foster trust. Surprisingly, the research trajectory veered toward leftist groups. Through strong interpersonal ties with well-connected individuals, I gained access to circles organized around groups like the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS), the Syndicat National Autonome des Personnels de l’Administration Publique³⁵ (SNAPAP), and the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme³⁶ (LADDH). This shift revealed the deep interconnectivity within socialist networks and, conversely, a marked mistrust between Algeria’s divergent political factions, which ultimately constrained the ideological diversity of the sample.

A significant limitation of my research on Algeria’s Hirak movement is the lack of interviewees affiliated with Islamist collectives or organizations, despite their documented role in the movement’s push for political reform alongside secular groups (Emerald, 2021; Martinez, 2019).

³⁵ The SNAPAP, the oldest of Algeria’s independent unions, was established in 1990 and gradually emerged as the main competitor to the UGTA. In 2011, the SNAPAP, along with other unions and organizations, played a key role in the creation of the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD) alongside the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) and several opposition parties. These unions have since positioned themselves at the forefront of all major protests (Beddoubia, 2019).

³⁶ The LADDH has consistently championed calls for authentic democratic reforms, the establishment of the rule of law, and the dismantling of authoritarian governance in the country. Throughout various protests, the LADDH played a crucial role in documenting human rights violations and advocating for the release of detained activists and demonstrators (Entretien avec Abdenmour A., Addi, L., 2004).

None of the participants in my sample³⁷ identified as Islamist activists, which constrains the study's ability to reflect the full spectrum of perspectives within the Hirak, particularly those influenced by Islamist ideologies. This gap, likely due to challenges in accessing such groups in a politically sensitive context, highlights a critical need for future studies to adopt targeted approaches to include Islamist voices. Recognizing this gap is essential, not only as a matter of transparency, but also as a call for future research to develop more deliberate strategies for accessing elderly Islamist participants.

From the very first interview, it became clear that the questionnaire was effective in eliciting detailed responses. I structured interviews to begin with participants' sociological backgrounds - covering their life histories, education, and working conditions - before transitioning to political questions. This structure helped build rapport and avoided overwhelming participants with sensitive topics at the outset.

Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality was essential. Although some participants expressed no concern about being identified, most insisted on discretion. As a precaution, all identifying data were excluded, and only verbal consent was obtained to avoid creating written records that could later raise concerns. This approach respected participants' vulnerabilities and fostered trust throughout the interview process.

In total, I conducted 35 interviews: 17 with activists and 18 with non-activists. I decided to halt data collection for two main reasons. First, repeated concerns about being perceived as a spy placed my safety at risk. Second, I reached a point of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where additional interviews yielded no new themes or insights. The final three interviews, in particular, confirmed the redundancy of the information collected. My initial goal was to conduct

³⁷ See Appendix C on page 342 for the full list of research participants.

between 30 and 60 interviews, and the 35 completed interviews provided enough consistency and depth to capture the dynamics I aimed to study.

Existing literature supports the adequacy of this sample size. Guest et al. (2006) found that a sample of twelve is often sufficient to identify major themes in a relatively homogeneous group. Hennink et al. (2017) suggest that while 9 interviews may reveal a wide range of issues, 16 to 24 are needed for deeper understanding. Small (2009) further argues that sequential case-based logic can result in saturation with as few as 10 to 12 interviews. While some participants declined to participate - possibly skewing the sample toward those more open to discussing their views - this limitation is inherent in many studies of politically sensitive topics.

Ultimately, the sample allowed for a comparative exploration of the life trajectories, social environments, and political attitudes of older Algerians. The fieldwork's challenges underscore the delicate balance between researcher access, participant trust, and methodological rigor in studying activism in authoritarian contexts.

Navigating Challenges in Language, Mobility, Recruitment, and Data Analysis

Conducting fieldwork in Algeria, a vast and diverse nation spanning 2.38 million km² with a population exceeding 45 million, presented unique challenges and opportunities. Data was collected over a three-month period between November 29th, 2021, and February 23rd, 2022. This relatively short timeframe was not a choice but a legal constraint, as Algerian law (Law n°08-11, June 25th, 2008; Instruction n°25, October 20th, 2019) prohibits any extension of visas for foreign nationals regardless of the visa type. As a result, I had to conduct the entirety of my fieldwork under tight temporal pressure. Rapid planning, efficient mobility, and immediate network activation were essential. Every day mattered, and the persistent constraint of time dictated the speed and sequencing of interviews, outreach, and data collection.

The timing of the fieldwork coincided with a particularly tense political and public health context. First, the lingering effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic posed both practical and ethical challenges, especially in interviewing older adults - my core demographic - who were especially vulnerable. Many interviews were postponed or canceled due to health-related concerns, and participants were understandably cautious about interacting with strangers.

Second, and perhaps more critically, the political climate had shifted toward heightened repression. Months after his controversial election on December 12th, 2019, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune signaled a clear break with the Hirak movement. While he initially acknowledged its role in ending the Bouteflika era - stating on June 3rd, 2021, that "The only Hirak I believe in is the Authentic and Blessed Hirak" - he later declared on November 5th, 2021, "The Hirak is over, I am the Hirak now" (APS, 2021; *Der Spiegel*, November 9th, 2021). These statements effectively marked the closure of the space for dissent. From that point on, anti-regime activism was treated with hostility, and the state ramped up its surveillance and control over public and private life. Intelligence officers, plainclothes police, and digital monitoring became common fixtures of the political landscape, contributing to a general atmosphere of fear and suspicion.

In this environment, recruiting participants proved immensely difficult. Despite my full transparency, repeated reassurances, and ethical precautions, suspicions about my intentions lingered. The fact that I was a foreign researcher - Turkish by origin and conducting research for a Canadian university - became a barrier for many. Some suspected I was gathering intelligence; others feared I might be working for a foreign government. A few agreed to begin interviews but abruptly terminated them mid-conversation. Even some of my most trusted local contacts began to express doubt, including one friend in Algiers who, after initially assisting me with navigating the city, eventually accused me of being a spy and withdrew his support entirely.

Interview data collection, completed by February 2022, involved 35 participants - 14 Arabs and 21 Berbers, predominantly Kabyles - across Algiers³⁸, Mostaganem³⁹, and Tizi Ouzou⁴⁰. These cities were chosen for their distinct socio-political and cultural landscapes: Algiers as the bustling capital and protest hub, Mostaganem for its quieter coastal setting, and Tizi Ouzou as a center of Amazigh activism. Despite linguistic barriers, as I lacked knowledge of colloquial Algerian Darrija and relied on French, interviews proceeded smoothly due to participants' fluency from their formative years under French influence.

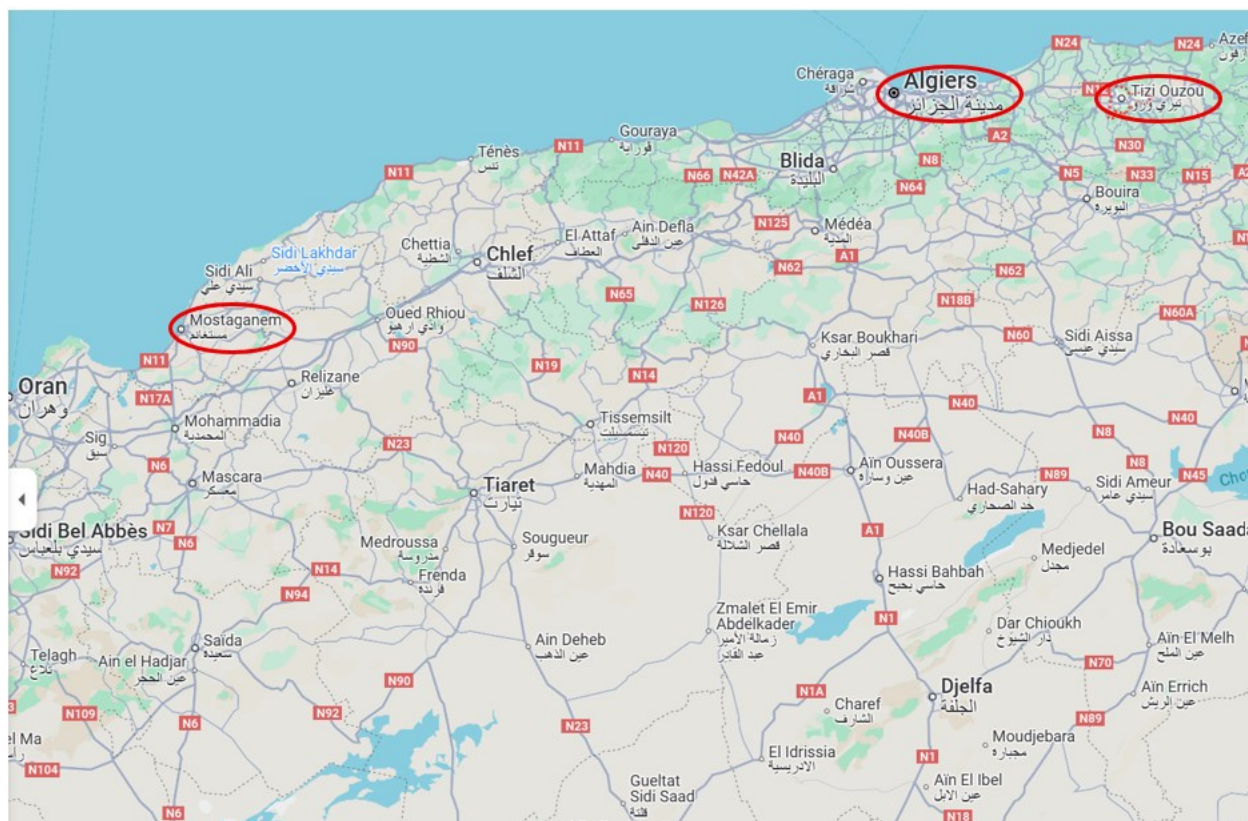


Figure 1 - Map of Northern Algeria - Visited Wilayas

³⁸ I began in Algiers, the country's political and economic center, where state institutions are concentrated and anti-regime protests gain symbolic force through proximity to power. As Baamara (2016) notes, capital cities offer direct confrontation with authority and are thus strategic sites for both protest and fieldwork.

³⁹ Mostaganem, a smaller and quieter city in northwestern Algeria near Oran, was chosen for its distance from Algiers, its relative calm, and its more limited population size.

⁴⁰ Tizi Ouzou, located in Kabylia and predominantly inhabited by Amazigh communities, was selected for its distinct political culture and deep-rooted history of activism, notably the 1980 Berber Spring. The city remains a key cultural and political center for the Kabyle population (Doumane, 2011).

It is noteworthy that more than 63% of Algerians live in the North (4% of the area), while the South (83%) only accommodates 9% of the population (Saidi, 2023). However, this demographic concentration did not necessarily translate into easy access, as social mistrust, fear of surveillance, and political sensitivities continued to shape the research environment. The most challenging group to access were the Hirak organizers. Non-participants, by contrast, were the most willing to engage - many confidently stating they had “nothing to reproach themselves for.” Activists were more hesitant, but the organizers were virtually inaccessible. I was consistently told that being seen speaking to a foreigner could lead to accusations of collaborating with hostile interests. Even when contact was established, the risk involved was often too high for the individual to justify participation. The fear was not exaggerated; in a state where journalists and protesters are routinely prosecuted, such caution is both rational and expected.

The limited representation of women over 60 in my sample stemmed from challenges in accessing this demographic, a constraint shaped by intersecting social factors. This issue, while not unexpected, reflects established ethnographic insights on how gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, and personality influence fieldwork dynamics and access (Whitehead & Conaway, 1986; Okely & Callaway, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 1997, 2021). As a young, foreign, male researcher operating in a conservative and politically sensitive setting, I encountered predictable barriers to engaging elderly women. Gendered norms often restricted cross-gender referrals outside familial networks, limiting opportunities for dialogue. Additionally, research on aging and gender highlights that older women in traditional societies may face heightened social constraints, rooted in norms of age, gender, and propriety, which discourage open interaction with male outsiders (McKeganey & Bloor, 1997; Sokolovsky, 2009). These factors collectively curtailed my ability to include this group, underscoring the need for tailored strategies to navigate such barriers in future research.

Despite these setbacks, interview fieldwork was completed as scheduled. Transcription began during the field period to accommodate for the lack of audio recordings - most participants declined to be recorded - and to adapt the interview schedule in real-time based on recurring themes. Demographic and thematic data were organized in Word documents, classified by city and political position. Full transcripts were then annotated and analyzed at two levels: the first involved clarifying references to events and actors using academic and journalistic sources; the second centered on identifying key themes such as family background, political socialization, retirement experiences, and intergenerational memory. This multi-layered approach enabled a careful synthesis of personal narratives within broader sociohistorical frameworks.

In sum, conducting fieldwork in Algeria required constant negotiation - not just of logistics and access, but of trust, suspicion, and fear. While the constraints imposed by time, law, and authoritarianism limited the scope of the study in certain ways, they also deepened my understanding of the political climate and sharpened the focus of my research. Each interview collected was not just a data point but a small act of courage by individuals navigating complex social and political terrains. Their voices, cautious but determined, remain central to the spirit of this research.

Bridging Theory, Method, and Purpose

This research draws its strength from the intersection of theory and method. By employing biographical and life-course interviews, I have sought to understand elderly political activism not as a sudden act, but as a long process rooted in personal trajectories, socialization, and historical context. These interviews offered a unique lens to examine how activism emerges, evolves, or disappears over time. It scrutinizes how it is triggered by specific events, sustained across decades, or abandoned altogether. Through this approach, I was able to investigate not only the individual

experiences of political engagement, but also the broader mechanisms and processes that shape them.

Life history and biographical methods helped me produce rich narrative analyses about the stories activists tell about themselves and their activism (Nolas et al. 2017). According to Bertaux (2005), the life story method allows a retrospective analysis of individual paths. Therefore, I, as the researcher was able to grasp an understanding of the internal and temporal dimensions of the participants' paths. While previous literature on political participation has often sidelined these biographical dimensions (Barassi, 2017), my research seeks to fill that gap - particularly in the context of authoritarianism in Algeria, where the stakes of dissent are high and the cost of engagement can be costly.

This research has two main objectives. First, to understand elderly political activism within an authoritarian context, paying close attention to the roles of age, generation, and social networks. Second, to explore the specific events, processes, and mechanisms that either foster or inhibit political engagement. The study is rooted in an inductive logic: rather than seeking to impose general laws, it aims to build a thick, idiographic description grounded in participants' own perceptions and meanings.

The collected data offers a foundation for the development of a substantive theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) of elderly activism under authoritarianism. While this case study is limited in scale, its depth provides valuable context-dependent knowledge that can serve as a powerful exemplar (Flyvbjerg, 2005; Gerring, 2004) for understanding activism among older adults more broadly. Ultimately, this research not only documents the life-course contexts of elderly participants and non-participants in the Hirak, but also contributes to rethinking how political subjectivity is formed, transformed, and sustained in later life under repressive political conditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the conceptual and methodological foundations of the study, rooted in the life course perspective and operationalized through qualitative fieldwork in Algeria. Drawing on the foundational insights of Karl Mannheim and Pierre Bourdieu, the theoretical framework highlights how individual trajectories are forged at the crossroads of historical upheavals, generational belonging, and class position. Society, therefore, comprises two interdependent forms of membership: the biological, represented by human beings, and the cultural, encompassing social norms and shared practices. The renewal of one is inherently tied to the renewal of the other (Ryder, 1965, p. 860).

By anchoring the research in the lived realities of older Algerians, the study captures how long-term political socialization, social structures, and social networks influence individual dispositions toward activism or withdrawal. This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of how macro-level transformations - such as decolonization, post-independence nation-building, and cycles of political repression - are filtered through and reshaped by individuals' everyday experiences and their embeddedness within specific class structures.

Methodologically, the research employed a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with thirty-five participants aged 60 and above. The sample was selected through snowball sampling, a strategy that proved not only practical but essential in navigating the restrictive and surveillance-heavy political environment of post-Hirak Algeria. Data collection was conducted under pandemic and authoritarian constraints, which deeply influenced the research process but also revealed the stakes of speaking and remaining silent under repressive regimes. Interviews were transcribed, thematically coded, and triangulated with external sources to ensure both rigor and contextual sensitivity.

This study offers a clear and effective framework for exploring aging, memory, and political subjectivity in contemporary Algeria. Using a life course perspective, it shows how personal experiences are closely tied to broader historical and political changes. By connecting individual biographies with key moments in Algeria's past, the study highlights how people make sense of, and respond to, political events over time. The research design supports this approach by ensuring a careful, ethical, and well-grounded investigation of how individuals live through and engage with the country's complex political history. Together, these choices offer a strong foundation for understanding how political agency is shaped across a lifetime.

Chapter 3: Unveiling the War Generation in Algeria's path to Independence.

At the San Francisco conference on June 26th, 1945, the United Nations Charter explicitly affirmed the principle of peoples' right to self-determination in Chapter IX (UN report, 1981). This new international organization⁴¹ recognized the right of colonized nations to self-governance and served as a platform for anti-colonial efforts. In 1960, Resolution 1514 formally acknowledged that colonialism was illegitimate, and in 1961, Resolution 1654 led to the creation of the decolonization committee (Mittelman, 1976). Consequently, self-determination emerged as a key mechanism for decolonization through the United Nations.

In North Africa, Algeria is the last country to have earned its independence from a colonial power in 1962. All colonized countries have their own contexts of independence, and decolonization dynamics are crucial for comprehending the political culture of a country, as they not only involve the remnants of control exerted by the colonizer across various institutions but also encompass the intricate interplay of ideological, religious and cultural forces that shape the nation's post-colonial identity. For France, Algeria was not simply a territory to excavate resources from, it was part of France just like Paris and Lyon (Thénault, 2012). The complete integration of Algerian territory and parts of its population into the French Republic resulted in an especially violent and traumatic path for Algeria (Cooper, 2014).

Although Algeria was considered an internal issue for France rather than a colonial one, the legal repression involving emergency laws and swift procedures against Algerians often violated fundamental human rights principles. Officials frequently served as instruments of colonial repression, enforcing these measures (Thénault, 2004). Violence was a routinized and normalized

⁴¹ The United Nations succeeded the League of Nations (1920-1946) due to the League's failure to uphold peace and security. The UN aimed to rectify the shortcomings of its predecessor, which had been revealed by numerous legitimacy challenges over the previous two decades (Walter, 2014).

part of colonial rule in Algeria. This everyday violence, justified as essential for maintaining order and protecting the French presence, was not only physical but also institutional and psychological (Thénault, 2012). Colonial authorities often disregarded the ethical and legal implications of their actions.

The war of independence is a crucial historical event for Algerians due to the end of an occupying force⁴². At the same time, it is a crucial turning point in people's lives due to a change in political organization, the loss of family members, and the profound generational rifts it engendered. Most importantly, it remains a vivid memory within the collective consciousness of a generation, as all living elderly adults remember those events either through their parents' stories or their own experiences. In the context of my research, it serves as a founding event that binds together the studied sample. Subsequent historical-social circumstances, political and social structures including the social and intellectual trends or currents shaping the collective impulses and formative principles⁴³ of the epoch are also crucial and serve as importance reference points to determine the generational aspect of the sample under study.

According to Karl Mannheim, each generation has a unique set of experiences and challenges, which give rise to a distinctive worldview. He argued that this common experience creates a sense of solidarity among members of the same generation, and that this solidarity is an important factor in shaping social and political attitudes and behaviors (Mannheim, 1952). Albeit closely connected to historical circumstances, ideas shape, mould, facilitate and constrain the activities of activists and revolutionaries. The history in which actors evolve are of utmost importance if we are to

⁴² While the symbolic significance of the memory of the War of Independence may be diminished, particularly among younger generations, it remains an obligatory reference for educators in Algeria, regardless of whether new curricula are introduced or not (Dirèche, 2021).

⁴³ Mannheim (1958) uses the terms *trend entelechy* and *generation entelechy* specifying that trend entelechy precedes and transcends generation entelechy.

understand their struggles and their worldviews. As stated by Mannheim “any biological rhythm must work itself out through the medium of social events” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 11) and these events must be examined to understand the effects they could have on the individual.

This chapter’s objective is to inform the reader about Algeria’s history by relaying significant events that led to the independence of Algeria. Generation as a concept cannot be understood without the knowledge of significant events and flourishing political and economic ideas. Hence, this chapter endeavors to answer to the following questions: What were the shared experiences associated with the historical emergence and subsequent development of the Algerian generation under study? What were the ideas, and ideological currents that prevailed during the 1950s and 1970s in Algeria? In other words, what were the shared first impressions and childhood experiences that designed the natural view of the world of the generation under study, and did these experiences impinge upon its members a similarly *stratified consciousness* (Mannheim, 1958, p. 23).

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to go back to the colonial period and the years of independence. Colonialism serves as the distinctive process through which Algeria experienced a gradual assimilation into the nation-state system, shaping its unique identity influenced by the presence and impact of colonizers (El Tayeb, 1986). Moreover, this integration played a pivotal role in activating dynamic forces that engendered profound alterations in the social, economic, and political structures of the traditional society (Ravenel, 2003). The political environment in which an individual participates influences their subsequent conduct in social movement involvement. Thus, first experiences of engagement in specific political contexts will have different propensities to persist over time (Mannheim, 1952).

In this chapter, my initial focus is to cover the macro-level analysis of the research by first delving into the tumultuous history of Algeria, placing specific emphasis on the social and historical circumstances that paved the way for the nation's independence. Rather than dwelling on the intricacies of the independence war, the primary objective is to elucidate the generation units that emerged from this era. This will involve dissecting the variations within these generation units by scrutinizing the fundamental ideologies that prevailed during that period. The chapter will conclude by outlining the shared characteristics defining the generation born in the 1950s, with particular attention to how their life experiences have influenced their later engagement in social movements against the ruling regime. In essence, this chapter is concerned with shared historical events, socio-political conditions, and ideological influences that shaped the collective identity of the generation under study.

The rest of the chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section is about a brief history of Algeria's road to independence with emphasis on the war of independence, which is a founding event, and that is remembered by all participants. The second section explores the dominant ideologies that influenced the generation who grew up during the colonization and independence periods. The third section focuses on the generation-units that emerged from the war of independence. The concluding section analyzes the political climate in post-independence Algeria, providing insights into the evolving landscape since that time, based on testimonies from research participants, and illuminating the shifting dynamics of the period. It also highlights the challenges in applying and operationalizing Mannheim's sociological concept of generations. All sections converge in their aim to comprehend the socio-historical realities in which research participants born in the 1950s evolved as individuals of their era, and identifying the key factors that define this cohort as a distinct generation.

The depth and volume of interview data necessitate a focused approach to avoid overwhelming the analytical clarity of this study. Drawing on Creswell and Creswell (2023), Guest et al. (2012), and Wolcott (1994), I employ a deliberate and selective strategy for data presentation. Rather than including all participant utterances, I carefully "winnow" the data to highlight transcript excerpts that best align with each chapter's thematic focus. These selections are chosen not only for their relevance but also for their ability to reflect recurring patterns and dominant narratives across the sample, ensuring both analytical depth and representativeness of the broader population's perspectives.

Historical context: Algeria's road to independence

Algeria has a rich history where the traces of the ancient empires and superpowers are still present not only in its architecture as vestiges and ruins but also in society as values and culture. In the largest chunk of its history, North Africa is part of various Muslim empires. The last Muslim empire to occupy Algerian territory was the Ottomans who ruled from 1570 to 1830 (Smiley, 2022). From that date, a long period of colonialism that will last for more than 130 years starts with the French empire. Indeed, Algeria was under French occupation from 1830 to 1962. Algeria gained its independence at the end of the war of liberation that started in 1954 and lasted for approximately eight years.

This initial section aims to provide an overview of Algeria's history and outline the political landscape that shaped the formative experiences of the generation under study. It addresses the themes of colonization and the war of independence to capture the political environment during the subjects' childhood years. Additionally, it examines the political and armed struggle for independence to contextualize the emergence of this generation.

The political struggle under French Colonialism

Albeit an awful memory for all participants in my sample, the modernization of Algeria started with colonization (Harbi, Stora, 2004). Even though amenities were built for Europeans, railroads, roads, mines, banks, schools⁴⁴, and modern hospitals also benefited Algerians and disseminated new customs and values (p. 37). News of external events arrived in Algeria since the first world war, and ideas of national sovereignty developed strongly after Woodrow Wilson's proclamations of people's right to self determination as well as the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (Stora, 2004). While a multiplicity of ideologies and concepts were carried from one geography to another, technology was simultaneously introduced to Algeria mainly by the colonial power itself. Modernization in Algeria also brought a new political system that put an end to law proclamations without legislative approval. The Algerian Assembly was created by the law of September 20, 1947, in order to revive the legislative system of Algeria and put an end to the system of decrees. As democracy already existed in France for a long time, the Algerian national movement in the 1950s was characterized by a true multi-party system (Nagy, 1990).

In the struggle for independence, many parties were established to direct the people to an orderly and systematic work. One of them, the nationalist and reformist organization "Young Algeria" (Jeune-Algérien), founded in 1920, demanded the abolition of the law usurping the rights of the natives, the recognition of the right to vote, and the participation of Algerian representatives in the French parliament. The Jeune-Algérien movement emerged from an educated elite influenced by the prevailing ideas of modernization and reform. This select group, comprising around fifty prominent figures, a hundred active members, and slightly over a thousand politically aware

⁴⁴ 90.5% of Algeria's population sent only 11.4% of students to various levels of education in 1953-1954, while the European minority, which made up only 10% of the population, accounted for more than 80% of the students (Kadri, 2019).

individuals, played a crucial role in the genesis of Algerian nationalism, marking a significant stage in the political and social awakening of Algerians (Ageron, 2005).

Under the leadership of the nationalist Messali Hadj⁴⁵, the Communist Party of Algeria (PCA) was founded in 1936, and in 1937 The Algerian People's Party (PPA), a Muslim party was born from the Étoile Nord-Africaine⁴⁶. After the apprehension, imprisonment, and demise of notable political figures like Messali Hadj in 1937, Ferhat Abbas⁴⁷ in 1940, and Ahmed Ben Bella⁴⁸ in 1946, the members of parties such as the PPA, the MNA, and various Islamic movements, clandestinely carried out their activities (Aissaoui, 2012). As the subsequent sections of the chapter will demonstrate, engaging in covert activism stands out as a distinctive feature of the generation under study.

In the typology of political regimes and movements within the Muslim world since the 19th century, it is essential to recognize that they generally took shape following two main structures: nationalist or pan-Islamist, the latter aiming to restore the caliphate (Fall, 2014). These two frameworks were tailored to meet the demands of the context. On one hand, there was the need for liberation from Western colonialism; on the other, there was a push for broad reforms. Notably, these movements adopted reformist strategies rather than strict doctrinal Islamist approaches. In Algeria, two distinct models of resistance emerged during this period as well. One group, French-

⁴⁵ Messali Hadj (1898 - 1974) is often referred to as the 'father' of Algerian nationalism (Sidi Moussa, 2019). He endeavored to mobilize the popular masses, particularly urban workers and peasants, emphasizing the necessity of a mass struggle to attain Algeria's independence. In his speeches, he categorically rejected any form of compromise with French colonialism, asserting that only a determined struggle could lead to Algeria's liberation from foreign occupation (Sidi Moussa, 2019).

⁴⁶ The Etoile Nord Africaine (ENA) originated in Paris as a political movement, gaining significant support among Algerian workers (Ageron, 2005). The PPA (Parti du Peuple Algérien) shifted the movement's focal point to Algiers, transforming into a swiftly advancing party that garnered widespread popularity, particularly among the Algerian youth (Ageron, 2005).

⁴⁷ Ferhat Abbas (1899–1985), son of a colonial official and French-educated, played a key role in Algeria's independence and became the first President of the National Assembly.

⁴⁸ Ahmed Ben Bella (1916–2012) joined Messali Hadj's Algerian People's Party (PPA) at 17, later co-founded the FLN in 1954, and became Algeria's first president in 1963. He was overthrown in a coup led by Boumediène on June 19, 1965.

speaking and aligned with the institutions, laws, and legitimacy of the Republic, pursued legal and institutional paths, albeit unsuccessfully. The other group, Arabic-speaking and educated in the Middle East or Tunisia, believed that salvation lay in a return to foundational principles (Islam, Arab identity, and Algerian identity), while still valuing the achievements of modern science (Chitour, 2019).

From the 1930s to 1950s, nationalism grew in strength, eventually becoming the dominant political force during World War II (Harbi, Stora, 2004). It is important to note that two interrelated conflicts grew during that epoch: the conflict between Algerian nationalism and French colonialism on the one hand and struggles and rivalries within the national movement on the other. The nationalist movement, not being a homogeneous group, was beset by internecine intra-elite conflict (Aissaoui, 2012). Multiple factions already existed both overtly in the assembly and clandestinely as revolutionary committees and armed groups (McDougall, 2017). Although most of them wanted independence from France, they differed in their methods as well as the type of outcome pursued in the new established state of Algeria. The revolutionaries of national liberation movement (FLN) took up arms as opposed to reformists who promoted independence through gradual campaigns of leaders and influential figures of parties (p. 58). Mr. Bilal⁴⁹ remembers and narrates the events as follow:

La lutte pour le pouvoir avait commencé très tôt. Dès le début de la guerre de libération, les clans rivaux se sont constitués, on a fini par se marginaliser et s'éliminer mutuellement et impitoyablement, non pas parce qu'ils portaient les projets de société différents et concurrents, mais parce qu'ils étaient de clans antagonistes. Une fois le colon chassé, le plus frais, le mieux équipé et puissant avait neutralisé les autres. Il a instauré un État sans droit, sans justice sociale, sans économie performante, sans consensus et rassemblement. Les sauveurs, c'était eux seuls.

⁴⁹ Mr. Bilal, 66 years old, is a lifelong activist with Islamist leanings, but he is also a socialist. He contributed to the interviews by sharing his story on February 14th, 2022, at my place in Tizi Ouzou.

The Armed struggle against French Colonialism

The slow progress made by the political parties favorable to the independence of Algeria encouraged the National Liberation Front (FLN), founded in October 1954, to resort to violence. On the night of October 31st to November 1st, 1954, about 70 attacks were carried out, causing eight deaths (Harbi, Stora, 2004). The FLN manifesto, which constitutes a call for a war of national liberation, is also made public. Their way of thinking, forged within the Special Organization⁵⁰ (OS), was marked by the conviction that only a fierce armed struggle would lead to independence. They were hostile towards the political parties created in the colonial framework because they saw them as slow and ineffective serving the interests of the colonial power.

In March 1954, ancient PPA-MTLD members clandestinely formed the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action (CRUA), and by June, a meeting of 22 founders decided to launch an insurrection (Arezki, 2022). On October 23rd, 1954, old militants of the Special Organization, members of the CRUA, laid the groundwork for the creation of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its armed wing, the National Liberation Army (ALN), under the leadership of Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, Mohammed Boudiaf, Mourad Didouche, and Belkacem Krim, Hocine Aït Ahmed, Ahmed Ben Bella, and Mohammed Khider. These leaders⁵¹ organized around 1,000 poorly armed men who launched attacks on the night of October 31, 1954 (Bouchène et al., 2014).

Developing a messianic vision and a deliberately religious discourse to mobilize the working classes, the FLN was the bearer of a populist nationalist ideology (Stora, 2001). By brutally posing the fundamental questions of the revolutionary struggle before Algerian political parties on

⁵⁰ The congress of the PPA-MTLD, held on February 15 and 16, 1947, decided on the principle of armed struggle by all means, including armed combat. Hocine Aït Ahmed was responsible for Kabylia, Mohamed Boudiaf in Constantine, and Ahmed Ben Bella in Oran. The OS would be uncovered by French services in 1950 and dismantled to make way for the FLN (APS, 2022).

⁵¹ Officers of the ANP mostly come from medium-sized towns or villages rather than large cities. Their social backgrounds are diverse, with a higher representation of middle and upper classes compared to the general population. Whether they are the sons of peasants or landowners, illiterate or university-educated, all have become ALN officers, each following different paths to achieve this status (Arezki, 2022).

November 1st, 1954, the insurgents showed their hunger for independence and favored the path of revolution to gradual reforms. The organization with its armed wing, The National Liberation Army (ALN), triumphed over others and succeeded to impose itself as the only revolutionary leader (Connelly, 2001). In May 1958, outside the FLN, there was hardly any opinion left to express itself: the colonized population no longer had newspapers, dissenting voices had been silenced, including by their integration into the FLN (Rahal, 2010). The FLN took control of the Algerian territory through the control of its population. The insurgent group perceived other political forces not as equal partners but rather as subordinate allies. They assumed a dominant role in the collective struggle against colonial power.

Since independence, Algerian politics have been driven by personal relations, alliances, and rivalries among a small group of wartime leaders. The competition for power among various groups and clans has significantly influenced the country's political landscape (Ottaway, 1970). In this context, the emergence and mobilization of so many political and armed groups exemplify Tilly's argument that state making often resemble organized crime, as factions consolidate power and resources through coercion and violence (Tilly, 1985).

The GPRA and the military: Diverging paths to independence

Several nationalist political factions organized in the early 1950s, including the Congrès National Algérien (CNA), the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (MTLD), and the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA). Additionally, the Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action (CRUA) formed during this period. As the military action escalated, the representatives of the rebellion⁵² in Tunisia and Egypt formed the Provisional Government of the Algerian

⁵² The representatives of the rebellion are also known as the Committee of Six which refers to the six founding members of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria; Mohamed Boudiaf, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Mustapha Ben Boulaïd, Krim Belkacem, Didouche Mourad and Rabah Bitat (Stora, 2004). The men who launched and led the rebellion in 1954 and 1955 were almost all from what could be called a petite bourgeoisie, or from a generally poor peasantry, or from the urban proletariat (Le Tourneau, 1968, p. 153).

Republic (GPRA) in 1958. The main motive for the creation of the GPRA in 1958 was the unification of the leadership of the Revolution in order to have one body to speak on behalf of the Algerian people during negotiations with France (Meynier, 2006). The proclamation of the GPRA⁵³ not only provided the FLN with a legitimate representative to engage France in peace negotiations, but more importantly, it sought to internationalize the Algerian issue by framing it as a conflict between states (Abada, 2014). There was significant overlap between the armed forces of the FLN, the GPRA, and the CNRA, with high-ranking members vying for influence to assert control over these entities, but also over the future state to be formed.

All of the existing political entities played a role in the struggle for independence, and they had different supporters among the population. Their main common trait is that they all attempted to act as a unifying body among different nationalist groups. The conflict between political and armed factions was, at its core, a struggle for hegemony (Rahal, 2014), a struggle ultimately resolved when the FLN's political branch asserted its dominance and led the independence movement through its own distinct methods. It is important to mention that the FLN does not represent solely the working class; instead, it encompasses all social classes, with the rural population serving as the primary force propelling the revolution (Simon, 2018).

With the creation of the GPRA, Algerian nationalists stepped up their cause towards international diplomatic actions (Meynier, 2006). Tunis has become the official headquarters of the GPRA, which gave numerous press conferences to awaken world opinion. The French delegation continued talks with the GPRA who became the main interlocutor of the colonial power. From the first year of the rebellion, the countries of the Arab world affirmed their solidarity with the Algerian cause and severely criticized French colonialism (Brown, 2018). A little later, Iraq and

⁵³ Members of the GPRA were high members of the FLN such as Ferhat Abbas (President), Krim Belkacem, Ahmed Ben Bella, and Hocine Aït Ahmed among others.

Egypt offered to send volunteers to fight alongside the fellaghas⁵⁴ and even agreed to partially finance the war in Algeria. Whereas the FLN prepared the Algerians for a war both ideologically and militarily, the GPRA operated on the political level by being France's main interlocutor negotiating secession agreements (Brown, 2018).

Differences of opinion between Ahmed Ben Bella⁵⁵ in Cairo, who was in charge of international coordination, and Abane Ramdane⁵⁶, who was in charge of the internal coordination in Algeria, have led to clashes within the FLN (Roberts, 1982). The clashes divided the Front into two groups: the first one, composed of the ALN, the political bureau⁵⁷, and the Wilayas, was characterized by a focus on military strategy, centralized command, and a more radical approach to achieving independence. This group was mainly composed of military leaders like Colonel Houari Boumediène, political figures such as Mohamed Khider, and regional commanders like Krim Belkacem, who advocated for military campaigns as the sole path to independence. Their social origins varied, including both urban proletariat and rural poor, and their political positioning was generally leftist and nationalist, emphasizing the importance of armed struggle and revolutionary principles (Mohand Amer, 2014).

The second group, composed of moderates and diplomats like Ferhat Abbas, emphasized political strategy, international diplomacy, and negotiations. This faction included members of the educated middle class and bourgeoisie, with a more moderate, pragmatic approach to independence, aiming for negotiated solutions and emphasizing the role of civilian leadership in post-independence

⁵⁴ The term "fellagha" referred to Algerian insurgents or fighters who rejected, through various "criminal" and "terrorist" acts, the legitimate authority of the colonial empire (Pervillé, 1978)

⁵⁵ Ahmed Ben Bella, born to Moroccan farmers near the Algerian-Moroccan border, is identified as Arab and became aware of colonial issues while studying in Tlemcen (Carlier, 2012).

⁵⁶ Due to internecine conflicts between leaders of the FLN and the GPRA, Abane Ramdane, like other leading Kabyles, were killed in order to be replaced by men from other regions of Algeria such as Constantine (Roberts, 1982)

⁵⁷ The political bureau was established by Boumediène in collaboration with Ben Bella, along with Khider and Bitat, as a competing entity and rival to the GPRA (Metz, 1993).

governance (Amer, 2014). The FLN movement had few peasant or intellectual leaders, but most were better educated and informed than the average Algerian, with many having attended French schools and completed elementary education (Stora, 2004).

To resolve these disputes, a congress was held on August 20, 1956, in the village of Igbal in the mountainous Kabyle region, near the Soummam Valley in Béjaïa. Albeit the final outcome right after independence turns out very different, the Soummam Congress put forward the superiority of politics over the military, in their speeches and their practices (Abada, 2014).

Islamic Heritage

Before French colonization, Algeria was under Ottoman rule, during which Islam deeply influenced the country's society from the 7th to the 19th century. Islam shaped Algerian mentalities and behaviors, embedding itself as a religion of the masses (Harbi, 2004). The Ottoman connection remained strong among Algerian intellectuals. For instance, the historic leader of the FLN Larbi Ben M'hidi often referred to the past of Andalusia, even if this past had not been strictly speaking Algerian (Meynier, 2006).

Islam played a key role in Algeria's resistance against French rule, starting with the struggle led by Emir Abdelkader⁵⁸ (1807-1883), who used religious unity to mobilize Algerians. Later, the Association of Ulemas⁵⁹, the Messalist movement⁶⁰ (1927-1962), and the FLN, which launched the war of liberation in 1954, all relied on Islam as a central component of their nationalist agenda.

⁵⁸ Emir Abdelkader is a central figure in the resistance against French colonization in Algeria. His leadership and ability to unite various tribes were crucial in mounting a significant opposition to the French forces. His efforts were pivotal in shaping modern Algerian national identity, laying the foundation for the country's independence and Islamic national consciousness (El Hassani and Cheref, 2019)

⁵⁹ Founded in 1931, the association aimed to revitalize Arab and Muslim culture while promoting education and cultural renewal. In January 1954, the association publicly endorses the FLN (Courreya, 2020).

⁶⁰ The Messalist movement, encompassing groups such as the Étoile Nord-Africaine, the Parti du Peuple Algérien, the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (MTLD), and later the MNA, represents a series of organizations led by Messali Hadj (1898-1974). He sought to establish an independent Algeria, free from colonial rule, where democratic liberties would triumph. Each of these movements reflected his evolving strategy to achieve national sovereignty, focusing on anti-colonial resistance and the defense of Algerian identity (Sidi Moussa, 2029).

In 1931, the Association of Algerian Ulemas, founded by Abd El-Hamid Ben Badis⁶¹, emphasized the importance of Islamic reform (islah). Concerned with a perceived religious dispossession under colonial rule, they called for Algerians to reclaim Islam. In the 1940s, the secessionist party PPA-MTLD defined the Algerian identity strictly as Arab and Muslim. While the MTLD allowed for limited inclusion of a Berber heritage alongside Islam, the FLN later solidified the Arab-Muslim identity as the core, almost sacred, identity of the nation (Meynier, 2006). By 1956, the majority of the ulema had aligned themselves with and endorsed the FLN's cause. Indeed, the radical pro independence movement drew its strength from the fact that it was located at the intersection of two major projects, that of the socialist movement and that of the Islamic tradition (Stora, 2004, p. 65). This convergence provided a potent ideological framework, energizing the movement with both social justice aspirations and deep-rooted cultural identity.

French colonial authorities were instrumental in molding Muslim identity within their territories (Achi, 2020). They employed legal frameworks to meticulously define and control the status of Muslims, creating distinct categories to manage and dominate these populations. In response, Muslim communities engaged in a variety of resistance, negotiation, and adaptation strategies to these imposed classifications (Achi, 2020). This active resistance was not only an assertion of agency but also a crucial effort to safeguard their identities and autonomy against the forces of colonial domination.

⁶¹ Abdelhamid Ben Badis was a prominent Algerian Islamic scholar, reformer, and nationalist leader in the early 20th century. His efforts to revive Algerian culture, language, and Islamic education significantly impacted the country's nationalist movement and resistance to French colonial rule. In 1931, he founded the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, dedicated to religious education and reform. Ben Badis's work laid the foundation for Algeria's cultural revival and inspired future generations to pursue independence.

July 5th, 1962 signifies the conclusion of both French dominance and a seven-year-long conflict that resulted in the loss of 18000 French and 1 million Algerian lives (Goldschmidt, 2020)⁶². Few days earlier, the people voted in favor of the Algerian independence through a referendum. The new state is baptised the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Islam is the religion of the state, and Arabic, the official and national language (Constitution of Algeria, 1963). Although the treaty of Evian was signed by the GPRA, and the clauses of independence written, sources of tension continued among the leaders of various groups who have contributed to the war. Political clans clashed over the future of the country, but the armed leg of the FLN literally destroyed its rivals. All the structures and authorities resulting from the Algerian revolution (UDMA, PCA, MTLD, GPRA, CNRA...) were devoured by the armed wing of the FLN, led by the Oujda clan composed of Boumediène, Ben Bella and Bouteflika (McDougall, 2017).

Their victory consecrates the rise of military power. The creation of political associations was banned on August 14th, 1963. The 1965 coup d'État, which established Boumediène as a political and military leader, marked the birth of the current Algerian system (Addi, 2020, p. 2). For instance, the Algerian Army continues to be one of the leading actors in domestic politics due to the traditional role it has assumed in domestic politics since the war of independence. Today, Algeria has the largest military⁶³ budget in Africa, and it is supported by large segments of the population.

⁶² The official Algerian government reports estimate the death toll at approximately 1.5 million. However, figures from other sources vary significantly, ranging from 300,000 (Yacono, 1982; Meynier, 2002) to 1 million (Horne, 1978; Stora, 1991). Rather than providing a definitive number, scholars typically present estimates within ranges: Horne (1977) and Stora (1991) suggest between 500,000 and 1 million deaths, while Meynier (2002) and Ageron cite a lower range of 300,000 to 500,000.

⁶³ According to The World Bank, Algeria's military expenditure has risen significantly over the years. In 1991, it accounted for 1.2% of the country's GDP, but by 2020, it had surged to 6.7%. Additionally, in 2022, Algeria's military spending per capita reached \$201.7, placing it second in Africa, just behind Botswana (Statista, 2023).

Among the official Algerian beliefs, it is necessary to mention the memory of the jihad led by the FLN to make Algeria a Muslim land again, the myth of a single hero; the people, the culture of war linked to the myth of independence exclusively achieved and regained through arms (downplaying the importance of political and diplomatic struggle), and above all, the monist memory denying the cultural mixing of the Algerian nation (Alcaraz, 2021).

Perspectives of the elderly on the War

The war of independence constitutes the most prominent political schism among elderly Algerians because of their interpretation of the War of Independence that gives them a rigid stance vis-à-vis the regime. Activists contend that the hard-fought independence was seized and confiscated by an armed faction, representing a deviation from the envisioned path. From their perspective, the struggle for autonomy was overtaken by a group whose actions did not align with the original democratic aspirations. In contrast, non-activists perceive the military establishment as a revered institution, attributing the attainment of independence to its efforts. They view the armed forces as instrumental in achieving and safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, finding a sense of pride and legitimacy in their role. Indeed, revolutionary legitimacy is still present among the majority of the elderly population. This dichotomy in perspectives highlights an apparent and irreconcilable dialogue within the elderly Algerian population, reflecting divergent narratives surrounding a pivotal historical event. Mr. Malawi⁶⁴ briefly summarizes the situation with the following words:

Depuis le tout début de la république, on est soit dans le système soit contre. Il y a les vrais révolutionnaires qui veulent d'une Algérie libre et démocratique, et ceux qui se sont accaparés de la révolution pour transformer l'État algérien en un État autoritaire. Déjà tout a commencé avec un coup d'État donc les militaires ont

⁶⁴ Mr. Malawi, 67 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He has protested on many occasions since his youth. He has strong attachment to communism. The interview took place in his car on January 17th, 2022.

pris la place des moujahidines⁶⁵. Les moujahidines ont combattu, les militaires ont simplement confisqué le pouvoir pour régner à leur façon qui est le parti unique. Les promesses de la guerre de libération n'ont pas été tenues. Voilà objectivement ce qui a constitué le socle de tous les mécontentements en Algérie.

On the non-activist side, Mr. Chabane⁶⁶, who perceives politics as a clear division between good and evil, summarises the prevailing thought as follows:

Les Français nous ont confisqué des terres, ils ont violé nos femmes. Les Français c'était l'ennemi et ça reste encore l'ennemi. Ils veulent détruire notre unité. Alors oui notre armée c'est le cœur de l'Algérie. Il faut qu'il soit très fort pour que l'Algérie reste en bonne santé. Notre pays est très cher pour nous, on ne peut pas laisser n'importe lequel des traîtres le gouverner. L'Algérie, c'est rempli de traîtres, il faut donc protéger notre pays qui nous appartient à nous, les vrais Algériens. Les seuls à sauver de la gabegie ce pays sont les militaires. Ils l'ont fait en 1962, 1965, 1989, 2011, 2019. La neutralisation de l'armée est une œuvre de Al-Maghribia. Ce que je veux dire au final c'est que ce sont les militaires qui ont sauvé le pays, il est normal que ce soit les militaires qui dirigent. Je n'ai aucun problème avec ça.

There is also Mr. Said⁶⁷ who supports the regime but has participated in three Friday marches of the Hirak. His version of the situation is good to know:

J'ai fait partie du Hirak de février 2019. Celui qui n'avait aucune couleur politique, au contraire il représentait une conscience collective. On ne voulait plus de Bouteflika. Cela avait duré jusqu'à la démission du président. Il faut souligner que nous scandions « Armée et peuple frères » car nous sommes très attachés à notre armée et nos services de sécurité. Tebboune a été élu le plus démocratiquement le 12/12/2019 avec un taux de participation qui reflétait le réel vote. L'Algérie ne l'a pas cette culture du vote comme les pays occidentaux. Donc à mes yeux, l'abstention n'a aucune valeur. Alors il faut arrêter de faire de la

⁶⁵ A moujahid (plural: moujahideen) is a Muslim fighter who actively participated in the struggle for Algeria's liberation from French colonial rule by taking up arms. The term derived from the Arabic word "jihad" carries the connotation of a religious struggle against French colonial rule.

⁶⁶ Mr. Chabane, 70 years old, is a non-activist. He has never been involved in social movements. Although he is Kabyle, he is a strong supporter of the army and the regime. The interview was conducted in his house on February 1st, 2022.

⁶⁷ Mr. Said is a staunch supporter of the regime. He participated only in the beginning of the Hirak because he was against corruption. He has no prior protest experience, but the huge number of participants as well as the proximity of marches pushed him to walk with protesters. He supports the current regime and assesses it as a democracy. The interview took place in his house on December 9th, 2021.

démagogie. Nous avons notre propre modèle de démocratie, pourquoi chercher à faire du papier collé ? L'Algérie est un pays jeune et il a sa propre spécificité qui se construit. Par contre, le Hirak de la Place de la République c'est une grossière manipulation propre à la France et ne nous concerne aucunement ici en Algérie. Alors cessez de faire dans la désinformation. Les peuples ne sont pas dupes. Vive Tebboune, Vive Notre armée et Vive Notre Nation!

Interviews reveal that the Algerian regime employs a discourse centered on four key elements to prevent unrest: ethnic tensions between Arabs and Amazighs, the perceived threat of foreign interference, particularly from France, the symbolic legacy of independence embodied by the *moujahid* and martyr, and the fear of a resurgence of violence reminiscent of the Black Decade. These narratives are strategically used to preserve social stability and curb opposition.

This initial section reveals that the generation under study was born during a time of political and military struggle. They grew up in an era of state-building and nation-building, where nationalism, anti-colonialism, Islam, and socialism were the key identities that unified the Algerian populace. However, beneath this veneer of unity, deep-seated power struggles simmered. The 1962 Tripoli Congress, rather than ushering in a period of stability, exposed the FLN's internal fractures. Ahmed Ben Bella, through a decisive maneuver, ousted the legitimate government, the GPRA, led by Ben Youssef Ben Khedda. In the aftermath of the war of independence, there was not a single member from the GPRA in the government (Stora, 2004).

Dominant ideologies accessible to the examined generation

This section aims to reveal the predominant ideologies that influenced the generation under examination, providing a deeper understanding of the diverse and occasionally conflicting worldviews that shaped their upbringing.

What stems from the interviews is that the general political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s are well imprinted in the people born in the 1950s. Socialism and communitarian values emerged as a key contextual factor framing the values of participants' engagement. Activists and non-activists

alike developed specific Islamic dispositions towards right and wrong modes of behaviour. To comprehend elderly activists participating in the Hirak as a social movement, it is essential to reintegrate their stories into their cultural and intellectual contexts.

Ideological foundations: the impact of Socialism on National Liberation

From 1946 to 1960, new countries declared independence, including eighteen in 1960 alone (Hahn, 2005). First, many of the movements tended toward a leftist political orientation, because Marxism-Leninism attributed Third World poverty to capitalist exploitation, offered a model for rapid industrialization, and vaguely promised liberation from foreign control (Hahn, 2005). The independence of Algeria occurred during the second wave of democratization which began after the world war and continued till the 1970s (Huntington, 1991). Ideas of democracy were not foreign to Algerians. The war occurred in the midst of the Cold War that shaped political, economic, and even cultural life in much of the world.

The development of the liberation movement did not take place in a vacuum. Means of transportation and telecommunication were rapidly developing and put in the service of the population (Blin, 1990). Upon gaining independence, Algeria inherited a transportation network designed primarily to serve French colonial interests. The densely populated northern and coastal region had a well-developed road network, including express highways around Algiers. By the late 20th century, efficient and frequent rail service connected the major cities of Oran, Algiers, and Constantine (Stora, 2004). Globalization had started long ago, and Algeria was not excluded from such developments. For instance, the doctrines of Muslim renewal of Djamal Eddine El Afghani⁶⁸

⁶⁸ A notable Islamic political activist and thinker in the late 19th century, El Afghani (1838-1897) was a key leader in the Pan-Islamism movement, promoting the unity of Muslims globally to oppose Western colonialism.

and Cheikh Mohamed Abdou⁶⁹, the pan-Arab ideas of Chekib Arslan and Gamal Abdel Nasser, and socialist ideas of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara have had repercussions in Algeria (Harbi, Stora, 2004). These currents of thought, as well as the struggles for freedom, progress throughout the world and the economic and social conditions of Algeria, have helped to assert the national ideology.

In the twentieth century, Marxists played a key role in launching revolutionary and nationalist wars in China, Vietnam, Africa, and Cuba. Political power was seized, and new economic systems were put in place following military defeat of their class opponents (O'Brien and Williams, 2020, p. 343). Leftist ideologies have thrived and drove various movements, but they have lost their appeals since the collapse of the USSR.

Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973), a prominent figure in the African revolution, famously referred to Algeria as “the Mecca of revolutionaries”. There was indeed a period when Algeria was widely regarded as a beacon of revolution and a sanctuary for anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist activists from around the globe. Alger as a city was not a simple receptacle of socialist ideas, it was a vibrant epicenter of revolutionary movements shaping the post-colonial era. It served as a meeting ground for iconic figures of the anti-colonial struggle, such as Frantz Fanon, whose intellectual influence was profound. Beyond Algeria’s struggle for independence, the city became a convergence point for civil rights activists in the United States, revolutionaries from Latin America, and other liberation movements globally (Mokhtefi, 2017).

In fact, generation effects arise from the fact that successive generations face new challenges that previous generations did not experience (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Thus, as O’Toole, Lister,

⁶⁹ Cheikh Mohamed Abdou (1849-1905) advocated for the notion that reforming Islam and Muslim society had become a pressing issue. Central to his philosophy was the belief that Islam is a rational religion, in contrast to Christianity, which he saw as based on miracles. He sought to prove that Islam is fully compatible with modernity (Solé, 2017).

Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh (2003) argue, “the political issues and arenas familiar to other, older, generations as foci and sites of political activity may well have little relevance to young people” (p. 48). From a sociological perspective, it can be argued that participation in concrete leftist groups allowed today’s elderly to experience the special bonds that all social movements aim to cultivate among their members: a collective identity, a strong sense of solidarity, and a shared communal awareness (see Melucci, 1980; Hirsch, 1989; Friedman & McAdam, 1992; Klandermans, 1992).

It is possible to notice the socialist ideology or an era of socialism not only through the policies of the FLN, but also through the characteristics of opposition parties. After independence, a socialist, state-controlled, planned, and centralized economy was set up, in which the public sector, with large monopolies, was omnipresent (Adel and Guendouz, 2015). This model of industrializing industries was essentially based on social development rather than economic growth. Born in 1962, the party of the Socialist Revolution (PRS) was the first opposition party. Following its prohibition by the FLN, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) took the lead of the opposition. Later, in 1966 the Socialist Vanguard Party (PAGS) was born out of the ashes of the Algerian Communist Party that was banned in 1962. All the parties operated clandestinely, and as their names suggest, they were all tainted with socialism. It was the epoch of socialism as most interviewees told.

It would not be an exaggeration to assert that all the political parties and organizations had socialism in their minds as the best social and economic organization to be established in Algeria.

Among the interviewees, the activists were close to the circles of the FFS⁷⁰, a socialist political party. As Mrs. Yamina⁷¹ told :

C'était l'époque du socialisme, je me retrouvais dans les actions de volontariat en direction des jeunes Algériens qui étaient dans le besoin. On amassait des fonds soit pour les étudiants, soit pour leurs familles dans le besoin. A l'époque, on parlait de villages socialistes, aujourd'hui tout ça, c'est terminé.

Among the active supporters of the Hirak, numbering 17, all of them were identifying as secular, socialist, and democrat. Although this fact is aligned with Mannheim's concept of stratified consciousness⁷² contending that individuals carry cognitive frameworks across contexts, shaping perceptions and actions in line with their behavioral predispositions, it is important to acknowledge a methodological limitation stemming from the use of snowball sampling, which naturally confined the research to a particular social and ideological network. As a result, the group of 17 active Hirak supporters who participated in this study appeared relatively homogenous in their political orientation. In contrast, non-activists largely identified as Muslim and were generally resistant to counter-hegemonic ideas, especially those that challenged dominant historical narratives or traditional norms and values entrenched in Islam and patriarchy⁷³.

⁷⁰ Founded in 1963 by Hocine Aït Ahmed as a challenge to Ben Bella's government, the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS) is one of Algeria's oldest opposition parties. From the outset, it embraced a social-democratic agenda centered on political pluralism, human rights, and democratic governance, while also advocating for decentralized authority and regional autonomy. Although the FFS initially presented itself as a national party—rather than a strictly regionalist or Berberist movement—it began incorporating identity-based issues into its platform in the late 1970s. This shift helped it build a strong electoral base in Kabylia, but ultimately contributed to its evolution into a more regionally confined party, diminishing its broader national influence (Ilikoud, 2006).

⁷¹ Mrs. Yamina, 73 years old, has protested on many occasions since her youth. She identifies as a Muslim, and she has strong attachment to socialist and leftist values. The interview took place at her house on January 12th, 2022.

⁷² Rather than using stratified consciousness, scholars refer to identity salience - serving as frames of information and meaning that shape how we interpret our experiences. These identities function as organizing frameworks, shaping how individuals interpret their experiences and the world around them. As a result, people are more likely to behave in ways that express the identity that is most salient in a given moment (Evans, 1979; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Stryker et al., 2000).

⁷³ The traditional Algerian family is an extended and patriarchal family (Bourdieu, 1974; Boutefnouchet, 1984). The authority of the father is absolute. The mother plays an important role, but informally, due to the male domination over all family decisions. Marriage is endogamous, but there is a weak trend towards extra-family marriage. As for the modern nuclear family, although it has begun to change the distribution of roles, it remains attached to traditional values, customs, and social norms (Arezki, 2004).

The integral role of National Identity

Each participant in the study considered Algerian citizenship as their primary identity, surpassing any other affiliations. While some expressed the sentiment of "*Nous sommes tous Algériens*"⁷⁴, others articulated a nuanced perspective, stating, "*En Algérie nous sommes tous Algériens, mais je suis du groupe ethnique Kabyle*"⁷⁵. Some participants were more direct, emphasizing, "*Avant d'être Kabyle nous sommes Algériens. Les Kabyles disent qu'ils sont Amazighs, mais il reste que tu es Algérien. Ton pays c'est l'Algérie. Ta nationalité est algérienne. Algérien Kabyle, Algérien Chaoui, Algérien Oranais, on reste d'abord et avant tout Algériens*"⁷⁶.

Despite having diverse ideological perspectives, leaning towards nationalism and socialism, research participants strongly identified with Islam. The activists in particular had strong attachment to various colors of socialism. Let's remember that to the new rulers of Algeria, the Algerian nation is simply, as already defined by the Algerian nationalist movement, an Arab and Muslim nation. The constitution of 2016 recognized Tamazight as a national and official language, but Arabic remains the official language of the State. The second article of the current constitution (2020) stipulates that Islam is the religion of the State. It is worth mentioning that Algeria's first three presidents - Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumedienne, and Chadli Benjedid - developed national identities built around three main characteristics - Islam, Arabism, and socialism (Hill, 2009, p. 4).

It is clear that the available alternative forms of knowledge and the social forces and institutions that support them are engaged with state structures in a battle for alternative forms of government that would reorient the way the society operates. General ideas and individual knowledge play a central role in the evolution of one's position vis-à-vis the regime. Worldviews and ideologies

⁷⁴ Out of 35 participants, 15 adhered to this view.

⁷⁵ Out of 35 participants, 16 adhered to this view.

⁷⁶ Out of 35 participants, 4 adhered to this view.

guide how people react to developments and influence the actions they take. Recognizing the lasting impact of early-acquired worldviews and ideologies is essential for understanding social movement participation.

Mannheim (1952) distinguishes between two concepts: trend entelechy and generation entelechy⁷⁷ (p. 29). He argues that social and intellectual trends primarily shape entelechies, with trend entelechy emerging first and creating the conditions for generation entelechy to develop. However, not every trend leads to the formation of a new generation entelechy, and these generational dynamics do not occur in every historical context. In my research, the generation under study experienced trend entelechies but not a generation entelechy. All the ideologies (Nationalism, Islamism, Anti-colonialism, Socialism) that influenced the development of their identities existed way before their birth. No specific entelechy has arisen from within this generation in particular. However, the characteristics of the participants in the interviews reflect the influence of various historical events (such as the War of Independence, Boumediène era, October 1988 and the Black Decade) and sociological factors (educational reforms - universalization of education accompanied with Arabization policy - , urbanization, role of religion in society) that converge within the backdrop of significant similarities in value systems, attitudes, and social and political behaviors.

The interplay of generation-units in post-independence Algeria

The preceding sections analyzed the location of the generation under study in the social and historical processes it experienced. As highlighted earlier, a spectrum of ideologies and concepts of freedom, self-determination, and democracy infiltrated Algerian society, originating from both

⁷⁷ Generation entelechy reflects the unique style, identity, and behavior of a particular generation as it develops into a significant social force. This process arises from the dynamic interactions among generational units and their relationships with contemporaries from other cohorts. A generation entelechy takes shape when shared impulses and formative principles coalesce into a collective identity that is both original and uniquely suited to the specific historical and social conditions of that generation. However, not every trend within a given period will necessarily result in the formation of a new generation entelechy.

the colonial regime and France's modernization endeavors. The Algerian War of Independence also gave way to multiple political and armed factions that fought for various goals.

Regarding the impact of the War of Liberation and the lasting impressions on its members, the group under study indeed forms a generation. Their collective memories are intertwined, particularly concerning the war of independence and its aftermath. They share common recollections of social conditions and hold clear stance vis-a-vis the war and its end result. Their assessment of the war becomes their first criteria in terms of defending the regime or not. Two significant events deeply impacted this generation: primarily the War of Independence, and secondly the Civil War of the 1990s. Despite their vivid memories, they all had a similar attitude not to dwell on these events and instead wished to move on to other topics by giving shallow information on the general circumstances of that time.

This segment is dedicated to exploring the generation units born out of the independence war, acknowledging it as a crucial milestone in Algeria's political history that continues to resonate in the collective memories of the generation under examination.

During the war, multiple networks acted in support of the FLN combatants, to supply them, accommodate them, take care of them, and inform them. Those networks also helped bring the war to the city through sabotage, raise funds, structure the militants, and supervise the population (Harbi, Stora, 2004, p. 78). The entire Muslim population over the age of eighteen was affected by the FLN's mandatory contributions and taxes, calculated according to each person's means (Colin-Janvoine et Derozier, 2008). It is hard to know whether people contributed voluntarily to war due to patriotic feelings or due to fear of repression from members of the FLN. Some might have contributed because of self-interest, expecting to have key positions after independence (Colin-Janvoine et Derozier, 2008). It was reported by many interviewees that moujahideen cards are still

distributed to regime clients. Knowing that the population in its entirety was relatively poor and already burdened by French authorities, collaboration with the FLN might not have been that benign and voluntary as expected (Janvoine et Derozier, 2008).

Among the 35 interviewees, all of their parents contributed to war efforts in terms of monetary contribution. To be more precise, among the 18 non-activists, 8 were sons of moujahid, 2 were son of shaheed (martyr) and 3 had their parents help the FLN in various ways either by offering shelter or carrying arms, and the rest (5) only contributed with part of their revenue or wealth. Among the 17 activists, one's father served as fund collector, 12 of them referred to their fathers as revolutionaries (they preferred this term instead of moujahid), and the other's parents (12) contributed in terms of money or wealth. Most of the interviewees had relatives who died or disappeared during the war.

According to collected data and the literature, everybody had to contribute in a way or another to the war of independence. Whereas some inhabitants directly participated to the insurrection by taking up arms, some others secretly helped insurrectionists by offering them shelter and hiding places, and some others supplied them with various supplies such as arms, bullets, and food. The minimal thing that one ought to do was to contribute to the financial needs of the revolution by giving an amount of revenue. Once the war ended, the FLN continued to rely on people's monetary contribution to erect strong state institutions. An anecdote told by Mr. Othmane⁷⁸ is worth relaying concerning his personal situation:

A l'époque, ma mère apparemment elle a donné ses bijoux lors de la construction du pays. Des militaires passaient pour ramasser des dons de toute la population pour le pays. Un jour, elle a vu la femme d'un des hauts dirigeants

⁷⁸ Mr. Othmane was born in 1952. His father, a moujahid, observed the corruption within the FLN and declined an honor medal in protest. His mother also harbored resentment towards the FLN after she discovered her jewelry was stolen. The influences of his parents, his Kabyle heritage, and his university experiences all played pivotal roles in shaping his lifelong career as an activist.

porter ses bijoux. Elle était furieuse et elle me racontait ça toujours jusqu'à sa mort. Donc depuis que je suis tout petit je sais que le FLN c'est corrompu. Mais en même temps, je respecte tous les chouhadas qui ont donné leur vie pour la patrie. C'est sûr qu'il y a toujours des pommes moins bonnes, mais normalement on devait les écarter avec le temps. Malheureusement, ce n'est jamais arrivé en Algérie.

It is crucial to notice how the vocabulary and discourse of activists and non-activists differ in terms of ideology; whereas activists often employ a communist/socialist vocabulary, non-activists adhere more to the official national discourse. For instance, non-activists prefer the term “moujahid” for war combatants, activists of my sample prefer the term “révolutionnaire”. While activists embrace democratic and liberal expressions, individuals who are not actively involved in such movements tend to draw upon traditional values and underscore the significance of religion. For instance, non-activists tend to use Islamic vocabulary such as “In sha Allah” and “Alhamdulillah” much more than the activists who had leftist and liberal stances. Non-activists typically refer to the State as “Etat”, whereas activists are more likely to use the term “regime”. In their youth, activists not only embraced communist and socialist ideologies but also developed a strong aversion to the political establishment.

All the interviewees share patriotic feelings, but they differ in terms of ideologies, historical assessment, and regime assessment. For instance, the pervasive influence of nationalism, socialism, and Islam was palpable among all participants, yet the unique nuances of these ideologies manifested distinct impacts on each individual. These distinctions were evident in their personal narratives, discourse, and life decisions. The intricate interplay of these belief systems intricately shaped and molded the perspectives of those involved, fostering diverse responses and interpretations within the context of their personal experiences.

Generation-units and their characteristics

Karl Mannheim asserts that “within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated antagonistic generation-units” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 31). Generation-units are characterized by “an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences” (p. 31). The collectivities involved in the independence war and what followed responded differently to the historical and social progress. They have developed their own consciousness and sense of belonging. The main trait distinguishing between generation units is “the data making up the consciousness of its members” (p. 30). “Mental data” have socializing effect through the formative nature of events and the interpretive nature of shared experiences (p. 30). In other words, attitudes and proclivities are acquired through specific socialization that could imbue the people with opposite stances towards a significant event. The groups that individuals belong to in a society not only construct their field of thought but also direct their actions. Mannheim briefly resumes the idea as follows:

To become really assimilated into a group involves more than the mere acceptance of its characteristic values-it involves the ability to see things from its particular ‘aspect’, to endow concepts with its particular shade of meaning, and to experience psychological and intellectual impulses in the configuration characteristic of the group. It means further, to absorb those interpretive formative principles which enable the individual to deal with new impressions and events in a fashion pre-determined by the group (Mannheim, 1952, p. 30).

In essence, within the flow of inexorable events, memories are shaped as a collective rather than an individual occurrence. Nonetheless, it would be fallacious to assume the existence of a singular collective memory for an entire society (Tint, 2010). The multitude of collective experiences within a society contributes to varied historical memories. It is through this diversity of memories that we can reveal active forces that shape social cohesion and the underlying societal tensions.

If we categorize the people I have interviewed, we can identify three generation-units that trace their roots back to the independence war and to the establishment of the new Algerian state.

Following independence, the country underwent a division among three distinct groups: (1) Those who identified strongly with the Islamic faith and maintained a conservative Arab cultural identity, (2) individuals who aligned with the secular, leftist, and modernist (counter-hegemonic) tendencies, and (3) proponents of the Amazigh cultural movement, which staunchly opposed the state's Islamization and Arabization agenda. The categories that stand out are shaped by the existence of concrete groups who shared a certain affinity in the way they responded to the independence context. The main object of the analysis of generation-units lies in the agreements between actors on the qualification of historical events, agreements which are accessible to the researcher primarily through interviews.

Advocates of FLN and backers of the army

The first group is that of the people who have accepted the legitimacy of the FLN, accepted the heroism of the martyrs and combatants, and approved the identity of the state. They nurture grudge against France and all the imperial powers, and nearly nothing can shake their faith towards the regime. Descendants of moujahideen and martyrs were usually the fiercest against rebellions and riots. They have huge respect for their ancestors who gave their lives for the independence of Algeria. However, being a son or daughter of moujahid⁷⁹ is not synonymous of loyalty to the regime. It is true that families of moujahideen are notably more inclined to support the government than other societal factions, but there are activists who are sons and daughters of moujahideen as

⁷⁹ The moujahideen benefit from significant pensions and material advantages (reserved positions in the administration, tax exemptions, scholarships to study abroad). Moujahideen have easy access to bank loans, licenses for acquiring cars or working as taxi drivers. They also have the right to open bars and nightclubs. Additionally, they receive discounts on all transportation, as well as their pensions and retirement homes (Algeria-Watch, 2017). In Algeria, the budget of the Ministry of Moujahideen ranks third after those of Education and Defense (Direche, 2020).

well. An example of someone who staunchly defends the current state of affairs is Mr. Yaser⁸⁰, a loyal supporter of the regime, who summarizes the situation as follows:

Nos parents, nos grands parents se sont battus pour que le peuple algérien soit libre et que tout le monde ait le droit de vivre librement. Toutes formes d'activités obscurantistes est la mort de tout un peuple. Vive l'Algérie uni et indivisible. Que dieu bénisse le peuple inchallah. Malgré le massacre indigne comploté par la France, le peuple est debout en mémoire de nos combattants, nos moudjahidines. Merci à eux de nous avoir permis de nous émanciper, de nous avoir laissé un héritage d'un peuple libre et digne. En mémoire de mon père qui s'est battu pour une indépendance où chacun a le droit de vivre libre et dans le respect de tous à chacun.

Mr. Yaser, like others, adopted the state's official narrative. Typically, individuals like him lacked formal education, were not politically socialized, and viewed this narrative as a way to avoid self-reflection. They preferred to let authorities govern while focusing on their personal lives, showing little interest in political engagement or challenging the status quo.

There are also individuals who dislike the regime but prefer not to disrupt the status quo. For instance, Mr. Omar⁸¹, who holds politics in contempt and leans towards political apathy, states that he prefers to stay disengaged from political matters.

Depuis le tout début, je suis contre ce régime. Depuis le tout début, ils sont tous corrompus. Ils n'agissent pas avec justice. Il n'y a aucune justice dans leurs actions. Il n'y a aucune logique, aucun raisonnement qui explique ce qu'ils font. Ceux qui étaient à l'abri durant la guerre d'Indépendance ont maintenant les postes clés au sein du FLN. Ce ne sont pas de héros, ce sont des menteurs et des traîtres. De l'autre côté, je ne supporte pas ce mouvement qu'on appelle le Hirak puisque rien ne va changer. J'ai voulu changer les choses une seule fois ; je suis allé voter à l'époque du FIS, et jamais depuis. J'ai voté en essayant de changer les choses et

⁸⁰ Mr. Yaser, 70 years old, is a staunch defender of the regime, and he glorifies the army giving them the only legitimacy to rule. Mr. Yaser is a non-activist who never engaged in political activities. He accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee and the interview took place at his house on January 6th, 2022.

⁸¹ Mr. Omar, born in 1950, has lived a life of constant uncertainty. With basic formal education, he has always relied on informal work, helping friends and family. His uncle, a martyr and a moujahid, holds a place of honor in the family. Mr. Omar pays rent to his aunt, who supports them financially. His sons struggle to find stable, well-paying jobs, and he hopes they can find a way to leave the country for a better future.

on a vu ce qui est arrivé. Ce n'est plus la peine maintenant puisque c'est le même régime qui est retourné encore plus fort. Si on essaye d'une autre façon, ça va être pire. Je préfère la stabilité depuis assez longtemps maintenant.

The views of Mr. Rachid⁸², the eldest of the sample also reflects the thoughts of non-activists, mostly with regards to the martyrs and the colonizer:

J'ai vu défiler durant la guerre de libération nationale tous les corps d'armée de cette armée criminelle française et vu les exactions et crimes qu'elle commettait tout comme ceux commis par cette organisation criminelle et fasciste qu'était l'OAS⁸³. Si bien que 62 ans après notre indépendance mes cauchemars récurrent me font revivre ces événements tragiques où l'armée française criminelle tient le haut du pavé. Allah yarham chouhadas [Que Dieu bénisse nos martyrs].

In most cases, descendants of moujahideen, and those who identify as Arab Muslims do align with the regime, viewing it as a protector of national unity and the legacy of the independence struggle. However, others, such as Mr. Omar, express deep disillusionment with the regime's corruption and injustice but prefer stability over change, having lost faith in the possibility of meaningful reform. This dichotomy illustrates that loyalty to the regime is not merely a function of identity and heritage; personal experiences, political socialization, and disillusionment with both the state and opposition movements like the Hirak play a significant role in shaping individual attitudes.

Proponents of a democratic governance system and vehement critics of the regime

The second group is that of the people who disagree with the events happened during and after the independence war. They want the primacy of the civil over the military as it was originally stated by the GPRA and some members of the FLN, and they say that the independence was confiscated

⁸² Mr. Rachid, a Muslim Kabyle born in 1945, spent his entire life working as a merchant. He has eight sons, with three employed in government positions, while the others reside in France. His support for the regime is shaped by personal experiences, including memories of being assaulted by the French army during his childhood. Mr. Rachid belongs to the upper middle class, and the interview was conducted in his car on December 5th, 2021.

⁸³ The OAS was a terrorist organization who carried out both mass and targeted killings against specific categories of Muslims. It operated from March 1961 to April 1962 in the name of keeping Algeria under French sovereignty (Ageron, 2005).

by the military. Hence, for them, the independence is yet to occur because democratization has not yet occurred. The most repeated event among the activists was the Soummam Conference that posed the primacy of the civil over the military as the true base of the new Algerian state. Fourteen out of seventeen activists told relatively the same story. They all narrated the events of the Soummam and the heroes they named differed with that of non-activists. Whereas non-activists named Ahmed Ben Bella, Boumediène, Bouteflika, and Amirouche Aït Hamouda⁸⁴ as war heroes, activists repeated the names of Mohamed Larbi Ben M'hidi⁸⁵, Abane Ramdane, Hocine Aït Ahmed⁸⁶, Mohamed Boudiaf⁸⁷. According to activists, the war heroes they named were defenders of true democracy, but they were somehow betrayed by their brothers of arms. As Mr. Kaddour⁸⁸ explains,

C'est vers la fin du lycée que j'ai remarqué qu'il y avait un décalage entre les héros et les dictateurs. Parmi les héros il y en a qui ont eu des postes, d'autres ont été tués, d'autres écartés, il y avait une contradiction sur l'histoire et notre propre vécu. C'est sûr qu'il y avait des histoires de comptes personnelles. Tous les postes étaient à combler lors de l'Indépendance, alors tout le monde était prêt à se battre pour obtenir ce qu'il voulait.

⁸⁴ All had significant roles within the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its armed wing, the National Liberation Army (ALN). They were respectively the Founding member of the FLN and First President of independent Algeria, Chief of Staff of the ALN, later President of Algeria, Member of the FLN, later President of Algeria, and Commander in the ALN.

⁸⁵ Mohamed Larbi Ben M'hidi (1923 - 1957) was among the six key leaders of the FLN. He was captured by the French army in 1957 and subsequently assassinated.

⁸⁶ Hocine Aït Ahmed (1926 - 2015) emerged as one of the prominent figures within the FLN leadership, wielding significant influence. However, he found himself in opposition to the rule of Ben Bella and subsequently went into exile until 1989.

⁸⁷ Mohamed Boudiaf (1919–1992) was a key figure in organizing the attacks of 1954, playing a pivotal role in Algeria's struggle for independence. Tragically, he was assassinated in 1992 during a brief period of political reform in the country. His mission was to dismantle the mafias, neutralize Islamist extremists, and democratize Algeria. However, after his death, his successors abandoned all of these projects, leaving his vision for a transformed Algeria unfulfilled (Bennoune, 1998).

⁸⁸ Mr. Kaddour, 66 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He has protested on many occasions since his youth. He has strong attachment to communism. He is a close friend of Mr. Malawi for more than 20 years. The interview took place in his car on December 16th, 2021.

Mr. Malek⁸⁹ also says :

*Depuis que notre pays a obtenu son indépendance, un seul parti, le FLN, les militaires, la Issaba, la bande, appelle-les comme tu veux. Ce parti unique a limité les espoirs de la société entière. Le GPRA fut un premier gouvernement Algérien créé par des visionnaires, tous lâchement assassinés. La route a été semée d'embûches. En 1962, pendant une crise politique, l'état-major général a pris le contrôle peu à peu en utilisant la force et des tactiques surnoises. Ils ont établi un système injuste qui persiste encore aujourd'hui grâce à la répression, le clientélisme et la corruption. L'armée, leurs familles et leurs proches vivent la grande vie et le peuple crève et grandit dans la haine du Maroc.*⁹⁰

Activists in general challenge the dominant narrative of the independence struggle and its aftermath. These individuals argue that true independence has yet to be achieved, as the ideals of democratization and civilian rule, championed by figures like those at the Soummam Conference, have been overshadowed by military dominance. For them, the military's grip on power since 1962 has stifled the hopes of the entire society, perpetuating a system built on repression, corruption, and clientelism.

The left behind

The third group is formed of people who were discontent with the identity the state adopted right after independence. Despite their profound sacrifices for the independence war - enduring the loss of family members and contributing their resources - they felt alienated and betrayed, as the newly established state failed to acknowledge their Amazigh identity. Instead, their identity was suppressed and denied under the guise of national unity, which was defined narrowly as exclusively Arab and Muslim. Although research indicates that the internal conflicts among armed

⁸⁹ Mr. Malek, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He identifies as a secular Muslim democrat. The interview took place at his house on January 18th, 2022.

⁹⁰ The reference to Morocco is about the Sand war of 1963 that had a significant impact on Algerian-Moroccan relations, leaving a lasting mistrust between the two nations. It also influenced internal politics in Algeria, consolidating the power of the military in the country. For Algeria, the Sand War served as a catalyst for national unity (Ottaway, 1970).

groups did not target any specific ethnic group (Courreya, 2020), many people from the Kabyle community believe that Kabyle leaders were particularly singled out and eliminated during the war of independence and its aftermath. The Kabyles were by no means the only victims of certain ALN leaders' actions, which caused thousands of deaths in the maquis. These leaders carried out brutal purges for reasons ranging from accusations of "counter-revolutionary activity" to minor offenses like the "purchase of tobacco or wine", and even "unnatural behavior" (Ruscio, 2019, p. 330). For instance, the killings of communists were politically justified, with explicit orders for summary executions (Ruscio, 2019).

Although this group was relatively small and neglectable compared to others because of the weight of nationalism, it appears that Amazigh identity (especially Kabyle) gained in importance due to the oppressive state policies towards Berber language and culture. Once a neglected issue by state officials, today it has become the first issue to deal with for the Algerian state. On December 5th, 2022, the Chief of Staff of the National Army declared that the fight for independence and the one against terrorism were successfully achieved. However, the new danger is that of that of "preserving our national identity and staying upright in an unstable world" (Saïd Chanegriha, 5 December 2022, TSA). This statement shows that Berber nationalism has effectively blossomed from the independence generation to the present one. Mr. Youssef⁹¹ summarized his views in those words:

Tu sais ce qu'on dit par chez nous ? On dit : la France est sortie l'Algérie est entrée. Oui parce que l'Algérie c'est elle qui a assassiné les berbéristes en 48. L'Algérie c'est elle qui nous a privé de ce que nous sommes en 62. L'Algérie c'est elle qui a mis fin à la vie de 500 moujahidines kabyles en 63. C'est encore cette Algérie qui a violé et tabassé nos étudiantes et étudiants à l'université de Tizi

⁹¹ Mr. Youssef, 67 years old, is an activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He has protested on many occasions since his youth. He has strong attachment to his Berber identity, and to Socialism. The interview took place in an empty cafe on January 28th, 2022.

Ouzou⁹². C'est encore cette Algérie qui a assassiné Massinissa et les 128 autres jeunes kabyles⁹³. C'est encore la même Algérie qui a brûlé nos montagnes et nos bébés. En final, l'Algérie c'est toujours elle qui œuvre pour effacer les Kabyles pour enterrer nos racines non et non et non l'Algérie n'a jamais été grande et assurément elle ne peut être ni unie ni encore plurielle.

Although there were no pure Islamist in my sample, I am aware that political Islam was indeed present in pre- and post-independent Algeria. Prominent political figures like Abdelhamid Ben Badis and Messali Hadj held significant roles within the political and cultural milieu of 1930s Algeria. They were influential in confronting challenges related to French colonialism, the preservation of Algerian culture, and the development of a distinct national identity. The intellectual and ideological groundwork they laid served as a strong foundation for the Algerian War of Independence. The regime has indeed constructed its discourse around the defense of Islam and the Arabic language⁹⁴ (Chougui, 2019). Algerian authorities rapidly appropriated the famed refrain of 20th century Islamic reformist Abdelhamid Ben Badis “Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, and Algeria is my country” (Sakthivel, 2017). Subsequently, a conflictual relationship took over when the Ulemas upheld traditional beliefs and diverted from the FLN’s social views (Chougui, 2019).

The construction of a specific historical narrative not only legitimizes one’s stance towards the authoritarian regime but also serves as a pivotal determinant in deciding whether one will actively engage in the Hirak or not. Among the interviewees, the first group do not support any kind of mutiny because they want security and stability before anything else. Their primary objective is to

⁹² Reference to the Berber Spring of 1980, when youth took to the streets to demand recognition for the Berber language and culture (see Dahmani, 2020).

⁹³ Reference to the Berber Spring of 2001, which erupted after a high school student was killed in the gendarmerie, sparking widespread protests (see Merhab, 2018).

⁹⁴ According to Bourdieu (1958) the practice of Islam, especially its social aspects, serves as a means of preserving personal identity in the colonial context. It acts as a sign, symbolizing both alliance and exclusion. This dynamic partly explains the increasing adherence to Islam following the conquest and a resurgence of religious practice since 1955 (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 145).

have a serene life and even take advantage of state resources. They are preponderantly devoted and loyal to the status quo. The second and third group are most likely to participate to the Hirak because of historical assessment. Within the third group, Kabyles are the biggest politically active community for the defense of Berber culture and identity. Albeit their differences, all three groups have strong feelings to Algerian national identity, they are all Muslims, and they have affinities towards conservative family values.

While retired Algerian activists and non-activists may have undergone distinct experiences in their early lives and pursued different paths in work or education, there exist commonalities in their narratives and memoirs concerning political events and ideologies of their time. Even if they differ in their perceptions and interpretation of events, they relate common topics such as the colonial period, the war of independence, poverty, urbanization, the departure of Europeans, and socialism. The real issue among research participants is that they carry different, not to say incompatible readings of all these events. Individually, each person employs their personal stories as a framework to convey their identity and the reasons behind their beliefs. They consistently refer back to earlier experiences as pivotal moments that shaped their perspectives. It is undeniable that Algeria lacks a clear consensus on democratic principles, the foundational rules of political engagement, and shared values, as well as the collective identity of its political community (Leca, 1991).

Because the transition from generation to generation is a continuous process and that cultural heritage is transmitted from one to another, these identical rifts that stemmed from the war of

independence continue up to this day. The Hirak, for many, is indeed rooted in the war of independence. As Mrs. Nafisa⁹⁵ says:

Le Hirak c'est un mouvement civil qui existe depuis 1962, mais malheureusement il est endormi. Il est endormi par ce régime qui réussit à coopter tout le monde. Si on veut, tout le monde y trouve son compte. Tout le monde a des connaissances dans le régime, mais ce n'est pas la voie qu'on a choisie. Je préfère être honnête et demander une vraie démocratie que de me laisser bafouer avec une démocratie de façade.

The war of independence and its aftermath, marked by deep-seated conflicts, stand as significant milestones that have left enduring divisions among different segments of the population. Mannheim's theory of generation-units offers valuable insights into understanding how the memories and experiences of the war continue to influence the dynamics of contemporary Algerian society. Indeed, the war of independence served as a pivotal turning point, setting the stage for the formation of distinct generations, each carrying its own perceptions, grievances, and aspirations. The memories of this tumultuous period remain vivid in the minds of Algerians, particularly among those who directly lived through it, contributing to the formation of new generational rifts. These generational divides are not merely historical artifacts but continue to shape political, social, and cultural dynamics in Algeria. They influence attitudes towards governance, national identity, and the legacy of the independence struggle. Moreover, they contribute to ongoing debates and conflicts within Algerian society, reflecting divergent interpretations of the past and competing visions for the future. In essence, the war of independence and its aftermath have become central to the collective consciousness of Algerians, fueling generational tensions that reverberate through the present day.

⁹⁵ Mrs. Nafisa, 64 years old, is a lifelong activist who describes herself as feminist and secular. Her parents played a significant role in shaping and developing her cognitive awareness. Her university years forged her convictions into socialism.

Constricted horizons: The political sphere in post-independence Algeria

The principal cause of social change in post-independence Algeria was the exodus of the European population (Ottaway, 1970, p. 39) The city of Algiers only was left to the Algerians by the 350,000 French who lived there (Ottaway, 1970). In the months following independence, Algerians, along with government officials, rushed to seize the lands, homes, businesses, vehicles, bank accounts, and jobs abandoned by Europeans (Metz, 1993). With the March Decrees of 1963, Ben Bella officially declared all agricultural, industrial, and commercial properties formerly owned by Europeans as vacant, legitimizing their confiscation by the state (Metz, 1993).

As I have shown throughout the preceding sections, the quest for power and personal gain by conflicting armed and political factions shattered the unity forged by the national revolution pact. The generation under study grew up in a world where political cohesion was broken, and trust was deeply damaged. The continuing clan wars in post-independence Algeria exacerbated the repressive atmosphere of the newly established state.

It is crucial to recognize that the constraints imposed on political entities did not conclude with the departure of French colonialism. Instead, the state, serving as the exclusive source of authority, refrained from permitting any truly autonomous organizational forms, signaling the continuation of a constrained political atmosphere. The 1962 to 1978 era disrupted all kinds of organizations because the regime dissolved dozens of associations or prevented them from launching in the first place (Ghanem, 2022). The most important thing was that, as the sole source of authority, the state could not allow any form of organization that was truly autonomous. Depoliticization by prohibition, it should be remembered, is inherent to the authoritarian syndrome (Camau, Geisser, 2003. p. 354).

Restrictive organizational dynamics

Sovereign Algeria is not as wonderful as some would like it to be. Ahmed Dahmani (2020)

summarizes the overall situation as follows:

La société est étouffée par le monopole du parti unique, la fermeture de tous les espaces d'expression et la répression tous azimuts de toute velléité d'opposition. Un véritable système de terreur est institué dès l'indépendance et perdurera longtemps après avec des variantes : kidnappings, disparitions, emprisonnements sans jugement, exécutions sommaires, assassinats, y compris d'anciens collaborateurs de Boumediène, etc. Les oppositions sont neutralisées, agissant dans l'exil et, le plus souvent, sans ancrage social. La police politique, dont l'appellation évolue – Sécurité militaire (SM), Département du renseignement et de la sécurité (DRS) – est au cœur de ce pouvoir autoritaire et constitue un rouage essentiel de sa puissance et de sa domination (Dahmani, 2020, p. 106).

From 1962 to 1978, mass organizations and professional unions acted as conduits for the single-party state and its systems of supervision and societal control. Their primary role was to suppress grievances and dissenting voices. Until the mid-1980s, the official representation of civil society was entrusted to FLN mass organizations that represented various social segments (Ghanem, 2022). The FLN not only claimed to represent various social segments but primarily served to organize and control these groups. This corporatization of society, where the state tightly managed social organizations, followed a model similar to that found in other Arab republics, such as Tunisia, Syria, Libya, and Egypt. While these efforts were only partially effective in some cases, they nonetheless marked a significant step toward integrating local populations into increasingly bureaucratic state structures, with the corporatization process succeeding to differing extents and intensities (Anderson, 1986).

As for the case of Algeria, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) represented professions, the General Union of Algerian Students (UGEA) represented education, the National Union of Algerian Youth (UNJA) represented youth, the General Union of Algerian Women

(UGFA) pretended to address women's interests, and the National Federation of Health Workers (FNTS) covered the health sector (Turshen, 2002). Their overarching goal was to propagate the official discourse of the ruling party and mobilize Algerians while exercising control over society. Everything was made for the sake of "national unity with the charms of a discreet Leviathan" (Leca, 1990, p. 17). Mr. Smail⁹⁶ recounts as many others:

A l'époque il n'y avait que l'UNEA et l'UGTA. Après, la Sécurité Militaire (SM) a été très dure envers nous les militants. Ils étaient durs envers tout le monde mais il y avait encore moins de tolérance pour les gauchistes. Souvent ils montaient les islamistes contre nous et nous accusaient de kouffars⁹⁷, ce qui n'est nullement le cas bien sûr. Durant les années 70-80 on s'organisait clandestinement. Il n'y avait pas de droit d'association ou des trucs comme ça. Tout devait être attaché et redevable au parti unique. Aucune entité n'était indépendante du FLN. A l'époque, nous étions les jeunes de 20 ans et aujourd'hui il y a des jeunes de 20 ans. Le nom a changé mais ce sont les mêmes services et la même répression. Au début, on se battait pour une idéologie et on était forts parce qu'on avait vaincu la France. Mais aujourd'hui la Issaba est très forte.

The associative movement in Algeria has lived in conflict with the ruling regime since 1962 (Dahak, 2022). During the 1980s, the most prevalent organizations consisted of cultural Berber grassroots groups, women's associations, and Islamic charitable organizations. Among these, the Islamic charities emerged as the most significant segment within the associative movement. There were 187 religious associations in Algiers alone in 1980 (Dahak, 2022). Their mission revolved around constructing mosques, providing religious education, giving aid to the impoverished, and organizing the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The application of the constitution has often been uncertain in Algeria, which saw its constitution suspended for eleven years under the mandate of President Boumediène (Moreau, 2013). During

⁹⁶ Mr. Smail, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He has protested on many occasions since his youth. He has strong attachment to socialism. The interview took place in his car on February 4th, 2022.

⁹⁷ In Arabic, "Kafir" (plural Kouffar) refers to a non-believer or one who denies the truth of Islam.

this period (1965-1976), Boumediène's political rule quashed democratic standards, marginalizing public participation and relegating citizens to passive observers rather than empowering them to actively shape the course of public life (Hamouchene, 2012). Bendjedid's administration displayed greater tolerance towards Islamist organizations in contrast to the governments led by Ben Bella and Boumediène that came before him. (Lamchichi, 1992: 95–96; Leca & Vatin, 1975: 308). Indeed, Houari Boumediène's death on December 27, 1978, after years of authoritarian rule, posed a major challenge to the regime that had governed Algeria since its independence in 1962. (Lacheraf, 1965, p. 313).

Undercover instincts: A disposition for clandestine pursuits

According to Bourdieu (1979), economic conditions and social structures shape how individuals perceive and relate to realities and fictions. These experiences are deeply influenced by social positions within the social space and are embedded in the habitus characteristic of different classes and class fractions. As for Algerian conditions, the prolonged struggle against colonial power, followed by the squash of opposition movements by the authoritarian regime, created specific conditions for acquiring specific dispositions, thereby cultivating cultural competencies of clandestinity among Algerian activists.

As their predecessors in pre-independence period, activists and militants have developed dispositions towards clandestine activity due to the repressive context during the 1960s to the 1980s. Their distrust towards the regime, the potential interception of secret services, and the repressive state context pushed them to act in secrecy with meticulous attention to anonymity and trust relationships. This might explain why the majority of potential interviewees categorically refused to participate in the research. Their disposition towards secrecy and their distrust of people out of their trusted circle hindered their participation to the research. Benjamin Stora (2001) asserts that Algerian political society has a culture of secrecy as its mode of operation.

The authoritarian regime not only curtailed democratic liberties but also hindered the possibility of significant civic involvement, depriving the population of their legitimate opportunity to influence the course of their country's future. My fieldwork experience validates this claim, especially within the demographic of older adults who experienced the 1970s and 1980s. This validation is underscored by the narratives shared by all activists I interviewed. Mr. Youssef⁹⁸, encapsulated the collective sentiment and summarized the situation alluded to by all in a way or another with the following words:

Je parle de mes années de jeunesse (1970-80). On s'organisait clandestinement entre amis de classe, d'école et de quartier. On élargit notre cercle du mieux qu'on peut et on mène des actions limitées. On s'échange des tracts, des livres, des journaux. Les débats étaient francs, houleux. La sécurité militaire était présente partout. Avec Boumediène il n'y avait pas de pardon. C'était soit la prison, la mort ou l'exil, même pour une petite phrase d'opposition. C'était très difficile et la confiance est nécessaire. Le courrier est ouvert, tout était surveillé. En 1990, c'était déjà permis de faire de la politique. C'était le début de la fausse ouverture. L'ouverture a conduit à une prise de conscience auprès de la population. Mais c'était une période où tout est permis pour la sécurité militaire. C'était le début de la corruption, ensuite le mensonge, et il perdure à ciel ouvert où même le président ne fait que mentir à ciel ouvert et devant les médias. Les années 70 et 80, c'était une autre époque où on avait d'autres mœurs.

On the non-activist side, there is also a demeanor to hide information or not divulge much information. Mr. Mohand⁹⁹ explains the situation through these words:

Un Algérien ne te dira jamais tout. Par exemple, pendant la guerre d'indépendance, les Français nous demandaient où étaient un tel ou un tel, et nous on répondait qu'il était parti travailler en France, mais en réalité il était combattant au maquis. On ne sait pas qui est harki, qui est le vrai combattant,

⁹⁸ Mr. Youssef, who defines himself as a socialist Muslim, is a lifelong activist who started his activist career through a group of friends he met in his early 20s. He was already influenced by a teacher in high school, but specific people he met pushed him in the activist path.

⁹⁹ Mr. Mohand, 69 years old, is a non-activist who served as state worker for most of his life. His uncle is a mujahid, and he has a university degree in Computer Science. The interview occurred on February 12th at his house. He supports the regime, and he dislikes Communists.

alors on cache. En 90 c'était la même chose, on ne savait pas qui tue qui alors on se tait et on ne dit rien. Maintenant non plus, on ne sait pas qui supporte la France et qui supporte l'Algérie. Alors on ne dit rien et on attend.

In Algeria, a culture of secrecy took root before, during, and after the war. It was renewed during the Black decade as well. The elderly are generally hesitant to engage in political discussions with strangers, often steering clear of such topics when others are around. This reluctance is fueled by fears of being reported to state authorities or encountering secret services agents. Consequently, political conversations are frequently avoided in social settings. Many people I have spoken with pointed out that Algerians were once known for their hospitality and warmth, but the events of the 1990s shattered the bonds of trust within society.

Transformative ideologies: A glimpse into shifting horizons

Although concrete socialist groups existed during the war, the economic situation during the 1980s exacerbated the ideological rift between Islamists and Socialists (Mortimer, 1991). Other ideological or cultural conflicts, relatively latent throughout the sixties and seventies, broke out in various forms during different periods depending on the contextual conditions of the era. The existence of those categories is not exclusive, and nothing is cast in concrete in terms of identity and ideological belonging. Changes in ideological, social and class memberships may occur all along the life course. However, the way people think about the world in which they progress influences their action. At the least, it can be stated that specific groups play a significant role in spreading information, generating public support, and expressing dissent and protest. Ignoring their role would make activism incomprehensible.

It is noteworthy that between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, the Italian and French Communist parties, alongside leftist intellectuals, underwent a significant transition from wielding considerable influence in political spheres – a zenith reached around the mid-1970s – to gradually

experiencing marginalization (Di Maggio, 2020). Throughout the 1980s, this trend manifested in various forms and timelines, highlighting the ideology's incapacity, despite its historical significance, to stem the erosion of political and cultural sway over the working classes. This phenomenon underscores the complex interplay between one's historical time, biographical time, and political dynamics in shaping one's life course.

An interesting fact supporting Mannheim's theory is that most of the interviewees complained that the youth were not adhering to their cause or ideologies anymore, and that they had much difficulty to recruit young members to their organisations. One example is Mr. Malek¹⁰⁰ who says:

Force est de constater que les initiateurs du mouvement de 1980 sont actuellement dans leur phase crépusculaire, et la relève ne semble pas venir. Comment viendra-t-elle sachant que peu de gens de la jeune génération s'intéressent positivement à la chose kabyle-même? Combien parmi les jeunes consomment-ils les biens culturels Kabyles de haute valeur? Combien sont-ils, par exemple, à lire les livres édités la plupart du temps par des militants qui consentent de gros sacrifices financiers? Je n'ose pas même parler de ce qui se fait dans d'autres parlers berbères. Il faut se rendre à l'évidence, la culture kabyle est en panne! Reste les gesticulations qui reviennent rituellement le 20 avril de chaque année. Qu'on se le dise: ce n'est pas la gloire!

Another example is Mr. Malawi¹⁰¹, who says with sorrow:

Présentement ce qui me fait peur c'est que quand on organise une activité ce sont toujours les vieux de 50 ou 60 ans et plus qui prennent plus de responsabilités. On a de la difficulté à attirer les jeunes vers les mouvements organisationnels. On a de la difficulté à convaincre les gens à adhérer à notre cause. Ils préfèrent rester loin de la politique par peur de répression. D'autres ont des membres de la famille qui travaillent pour l'État. Chacun a ses raisons, mais il

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Malek, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He identifies as a secular Muslim democrat. While he opposes autonomy for Greater Kabylia, he advocates strongly for equal rights. The interview took place at his house on January 18th, 2022.

¹⁰¹ Mr. Malawi, born in 1955, has been a lifelong activist, beginning with his university entrance exams. He first rallied with many friends against changes to the examination system. Since then, he has taken part in protests across the country, advocating for social issues and regime change. Throughout his activism, he has endured incarceration and torture, with his determination only intensifying over the years. The interview was conducted in his car, on January 17th, 2022.

faut que la lutte continue. Et j'ai peur que la lutte s'éteigne une fois que les gens de ma génération disparaissent.

Mrs. Yamina¹⁰² complains about the same issue with these words:

Durant une cinquantaine d'années, nos prédécesseurs et mes compatriotes avons regroupé et formé les cadres et militants pour assurer la relève. Mais j'ai l'impression que nous avons échoué sur ce plan. Les jeunes n'adhèrent pas à notre cause. Ils ne partagent pas notre vision des choses. On leur explique l'échec du mouvement national et de la victoire des masses contre le colonialisme, mais les jeunes ne sont plus intéressés par les associations ou les mouvements de masses. Ils préfèrent plutôt s'évader et pensent à leurs propres individualités.

The decline of communism and socialism as dominant ideologies has significantly weakened the influence and appeal of leftist groups. As the number of adherents to these ideologies has dwindled, encountering individuals who actively identify with them has become increasingly rare. In contrast, ethnic nationalism has surged in prominence and continues to flourish. For example, Kabyle nationalism has steadily gained traction over time. The likelihood of encountering a particular ideology often depends on its prevalence and the size of its following, which shift with historical developments. Amid this pervasive rise of nationalism, religion has increasingly overshadowed socialism in the wake of the dark decade (Tamzali, 2007), further reshaping the ideological landscape.

Another notable example is the dominance of Islamists in the political landscape during the 1980s. The influx of Muslim Brotherhood members as teachers in primary and secondary schools during the 1970s, followed by the rise of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), and their visible presence in mosques and on university campuses significantly increased their visibility and interactions with

¹⁰² Mrs. Yamina, 73 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. She has protested on many occasions since her youth. She identifies as a Muslim, and she has strong attachment to socialist and leftist values. The interview took place at her house on January 12th, 2022.

the public. However, these interactions sharply declined after the Black Decade, when acts of terrorism by Islamist groups and the violence of this period undeniably reduced their influence and appeal. The next generation of activists will be affected by the availability of such concrete and virtual resources.

In this research, even if participants aged and lived their youth in a totally different era, their staunch allegiance to communism remains evident, showcasing how generations are shaped by historical circumstances, particularly impacting the youth who are believed to retain strong impressions from specific situations (Mannheim, 1952). These pivotal moments not only leave lasting imprints on young generations but also mold their values and life trajectories, fostering a propensity for acquired ideological dispositions. In other words, ideological tendencies are absorbed during formative years and carried forward over time. It is important to have in mind that the majority of interviewed people were born in the 1950s. They have not experienced the independence war in their 20s or 30s. A person born in 1955 for instance will be around 7 in 1962, 17 in 1972, and 27 in 1982. Their present mental data indeed reflects their first impressions shaped by state violence and the dissemination of prevailing ideologies and values during their formative years. This fact underscores how historical contexts leave enduring marks on individual and collective worldviews.

In Algeria, young people no longer share the same historical references or political attitudes with their parents (Kouaouci, 2006). Youth population is concerned with problems related to unemployment which is a factor in the postponement of their marriage age, and economic inequality preventing them from establishing their own household at an appropriate age. The elders, however, are preoccupied with healthcare access, general housing and living conditions, as well as general stability of affairs (Kouaouci, 2013). It is crucial to recognize that gerontology

constitutes a vast and significant field, warranting extensive research efforts within the context of Algeria.

A common trait observed among both activists and non-activists is their inclination to reminisce about past times. Despite being aware of the political climate, they idealize their youth, portraying it as an era of abnegation and sacrifice - values they believe have vanished in contemporary times.

An illustrative instance of this phenomenon can be found in the remarks of Mr. Omar:

L'algérien à l'époque était travailleur, bien élevé, respectueux, sociable, pacifique et civilisé. Maintenant les gens n'ont plus le sens du devoir, ils ne savent plus ce qu'est la patrie, ils sont boudeurs. Regarde tous ces jeunes qui ne veulent pas travailler. On récolte ce que l'on sème ; la génération de novembre a été courageuse et ambitieuse, libérer le pays de la colonisation et bâtir un État, mais la jeunesse aujourd'hui elle ne comprend rien à tout ça. Ils veulent que l'État donne tout. Mais il faut travailler pour s'enrichir, c'est normal.

Throughout interviews, participants frequently referred to their era by saying “à l'époque”, with most pinpointing the 1970s as the focal period, while some also mentioned the 1980s. This inclination suggests that they self-appropriate a time location that belongs to them. This timeframe interestingly coincides with their 20s for most and also the 30s for few others. This self-appropriation of a timeframe is also an indicator of people who have experienced the same historical location. According to Mannheim's theory of generations, this nostalgic idealization highlights a distinct generational identity shaped by shared historical experiences. They argue that these values, which once unified their cohort, have largely disappeared in today's society, underscoring a significant shift in collective attitudes and priorities. In a certain way, participants delimit their generation and the factors that make them belong to a generation. When discussing their place in history, they often emphasize values, customs, and societal norms over the political environment of their time. They underscore the significance of friendship, respect, family unity, and other enduring principles that shaped their generation.

According to Mannheim's theory of generations, the years from 1972 to 1980 should be the years where one gets the generational imprint that bestows him with a specific generational unit's characteristics. This is where his concept of "fresh contact" (Mannheim, 1952. p. 18) plays a crucial role in the development of one's consciousness by being subjugated to the accumulated heritage that is made available to him. Fresh contacts play an important part in the life of the individual when he is forced by events to leave his own social group and enter a new one (Mannheim, 1952. p. 18). It is well known that major life changes such as leaving home after marriage, migrating to another city or country, changing workplace, integrating a new environment (field) – trigger quite visible and striking transformation of the consciousness of the individual. This transformation is not limited to the content of experience but extends to the individual's mental and spiritual adjustment to events. In other words, fresh contact is an event that is compatible with a turning point in one's individual biography.

We are not born with the characters of men and women who are for or against the regime, we are not born with ideologies and worldviews, but these social categories already exist. Collectivities holding opposing ideologies and worldviews are often well carved. Hence, the youth become the new bearers of a worldview, an ideology, or a social movement, but they also reinterpret the guiding attitudes and intellectual trends of that worldview, ideology, or social movement. While one's inclination to participate in social movement groups is not solely linked to ideology, it is evident that political ideology plays a significant role in paving the way for involvement in social movements. The sample of activists I have interviewed are all defenders of socialism and democracy. Rachid Sidi Boumedine alludes to generational changes and briefly resumes Mannheim's theory with the following allegory:

Nous sommes comme ces vieux fumeurs qui ont, un jour, rompu avec la cigarette, qui ne fument plus qui sont très fiers de leur exploit. Nous nous félicitons de ce que le

Hirak nous a permis de montrer. Nous avons cessé d'être soumis et dociles. Mais comme le fumeur dont les poumons sont délabrés, à des degrés divers, nos cerveaux, nos manières de fonctionner socialement, nos esprits formatés, tout ce qui fait que nous sommes, chacun de nous, devenus sectaires, intolérants, staliniens, dogmatiques. Nous ne sommes pas compétents pour penser le jeu démocratique que nous devons apprendre, nous ne sommes pas compétents pour vivre cette démocratie...

C'est pour cela d'ailleurs, comme dans l'image du fumeur, ce sont les jeunes qui, pour le moment ont été le moins longtemps exposés aux effets sournois du système clientéliste et corrupteur, avec lequel nous avons appris à interagir et ruser, dont nous savons contourner les règles et les édits, qui sont les plus aptes à apprendre un nouveau mode de fonctionnement. Ce nouveau mode de fonctionnement dont nous rêvons... (Sidi Boumedine, 2019, p. 227).

This insight also resonates with my conversations with Algerian activists and non-activists, many of whom noted that the FIS mirrored the FLN because it had no alternative political model to emulate. If Algeria's formative experiences had included genuine democratic institutions, the trajectory of its political movements might have been much different. Ultimately, it is our formative experiences that shape our next steps, defining the possibilities for transformation and renewal.

Barriers to solving the Sociological Problem of Generations

Through the interactions with research participants, it becomes clear that they share common historical and political memories, language, national identity, as well as religious and political identities. These shared elements align with their temporal and spatial contexts, shaped by historical events and collective impulses. The sample indicates that individuals often self-identify with a specific time period, sometimes idealizing it as superior because it was their own. Analyzing a generation reveals these similarities quite straightforwardly.

The primary challenge in studying generational dynamics lies in analyzing the junctures, shifts, and breaking points between generations. Although impactful events like the War of Independence and the Black Decade are highlighted as significant by the sample, they did not hinder individuals from helping each other, trusting one another, and maintaining a hopeful worldview. This

resilience indicates that shared experiences might have various impacts. However, measuring the nature and intensity of these impacts proves challenging - both during the events themselves, as time must pass to gauge their full effect, and afterward, when they become distant memories and lose their immediacy in terms of personal life timelines. Furthermore, “mental data” or the collective mindset can be shaped through self-education and specific instances of socialization, complicating the delineation of generational boundaries.

Mannheim’s (1952) concept of generation-units provides a valuable framework for understanding generational differences and the formative experiences that shape individual worldviews. Central to this is the idea of “stratified consciousness” (p. 22), which refers to the varying layers of awareness within a generation that influence how individuals perceive and engage with the world. This concept is significant because it emphasizes how members of the same generation can develop divergent perspectives and responses to societal conditions, shaped by their distinct social positions and formative experiences. However, its abstract nature poses substantial challenges for measurement and operationalization, limiting its practical application in empirical studies. Despite these difficulties, the concept remains essential for exploring the interplay between collective historical forces and individual ideological development.

Although Mannheim’s concept of generations incorporates indices such as mental data, entelechy, and the influence of social and historical contexts on shaping individual perspectives, operationalizing these concepts presents a significant challenge. These abstract ideas are difficult to capture using quantitative methods. Instead, qualitative approaches seem more suited for exploring the intricate mental structures that drive individuals toward activism, as they allow for deeper interpretation and understanding of the subjective experiences involved. However, due to

the complexity and variability of these personal and contextual factors, standardizing and generalizing findings from qualitative research remains a challenge.

Conclusion:

This chapter has demonstrated that the group under study - elderly individuals born in Algeria during the 1950s who came of age in the aftermath of the War of Independence - constitutes a distinct generation shaped by unique socio-historical forces. Through a macro-analysis of the broader political and social context surrounding the war, it becomes clear that shared memories, collective narratives, and common experiences have forged a cohesive generational identity. These individuals were shaped by pivotal events, technologies, and socio-political dynamics that defined their era, resulting in deeply ingrained “mental data” that continues to influence their worldviews and actions.

The independence war and the establishment of a new Algerian state not only created multiple generation-units but also produced enduring ideological divides. The initial conflicts between the GPRA and FLN, coupled with the identity framework imposed on the Algerian state, laid the foundation for these divisions, which remain visible today. Research participants’ antagonistic historical assessments reflect the significant role of this mental framework, enabling them to coherently explain their stances vis-à-vis the Hirak movement. Those who back the Algerian regime draw upon a particular narrative of the independence war to justify their support, while activists challenging the regime are motivated by a contrasting interpretation of history.

Mannheim’s framework highlights the intricate interplay between collective mental frameworks and socio-political actions, shedding light on how historical consciousness becomes a crucial factor in legitimizing diverse political engagements. The mental data of individuals, shaped by their perceptions of history, operates as a significant legitimator influencing their actions in either supporting the Algerian regime or actively participating in activism against it. Activists, in contrast

to non-activists, possess a unique mental framework, demonstrating a higher degree of politicization and an elevated awareness of historical nuances. The behavioral patterns, worldviews, and norms of older adults were shaped and internalized within a particular historical context, aligning with the prevailing entelechy of their time. Their adoption of communitarian and Islamic values underscores the authenticity of their reflections as they echo the dominant ideologies of the era in which they originated. The significance of their various identities also influences their engagement in activism, depending on whether they prioritize their identity as Muslims or socialists.

This chapter traced the outline of the generation under study, and it showed the significant role that a founding event, historical-location, and entelechies played in shaping their perception of issues. However, merely possessing mental data, political consciousness, and a particular moral compass is insufficient to fully comprehend activism. In our case, the cultivation of an activist career with a socialist perspective cannot be solely attributed to historical circumstances in isolation; additional factors are integral to its development. While such factors are important, they do not entirely account for why older adults participate in social movements. Political consciousness and mental data are not innate but acquired and shaped over time. Therefore, it is essential to explore the life course in greater depth, focusing on the key experiences and turning points that steer individuals toward - or away from - activism. The following chapter will explore participants' life experiences, focusing on their socialization, key life events, and broader influences shaping their political engagement.

Chapter 4: Mobilization through socialization and the life course

“A l’époque [1980] j’étais à Alger, j’étais interne en médecine, c’était ma première expérience dans l’engagement pour la cause amazigh. On s’était réuni dans un grand amphithéâtre pour voter une motion de soutien au soulèvement de Kabylie. Ce n’était pas facile de l’obtenir mais on l’a obtenue. C’était l’événement de ma vie qui a fait en sorte que je me suis engagée de force par la suite”. Mrs. Nafisa¹⁰³

“Mes premières expériences, c’était lorsque j’étais un jeune commerçant à 30-35 ans. Je voyais les injustices depuis mon tout jeune âge. Mais quand on est jeune, on ne comprend pas trop ce qui se passe. On pense que c’est normal. D’ailleurs il y en a beaucoup autour de moi qui n’ont pas grandi parce que pour eux tout est normal”. M. Mourad¹⁰⁴

“Ma trajectoire en fait on peut dire que ça commence à l’école, au lycée plus précisément. Une trajectoire de militant ce sont des instantanés, des moments, des événements précis qui renforcent nos convictions. Par exemple à la prison j’ai rencontré d’autres militants avec qui on parlait. Il y a aussi le fait que j’ai étudié en France. J’ai vu la démocratie, j’ai goûté à la liberté totale. Je veux donc importer ce que j’ai vu de bien dans mon pays c’est aussi simple que ça”. M. Slimane¹⁰⁵

As highlighted by these statements, the main argument of this chapter is that secondary socialization has significantly greater impact on activism than primary socialization. While primary socialization may play a role and individuals can become active at various stages of their lives, the university years, typically between the ages of 17 and 25, remain the most critical period for political engagement.

As the stories of activists reveal, their paths to activism are shaped by a variety of social influences, including parental guidance, the influence of their neighborhood and school, encounters with key figures in a movement or supportive friends, and the prevailing historical circumstances and institutional conditions. Under these conditions, the prominence of secondary socialization becomes evident. The interconnection of networks, spaces, and generative events serves to shed light on the phenomenon where certain individuals either ignore specific crucial locations and

¹⁰³ Mrs. Nafisa, born in 1958, is a lifelong activist who participated in a lot of protest activities since the 1980s. She was a pharmacist and people still come see her for advice and treatment. Her father is a mujahid, and she is a socialist Muslim. The interview took place at the office of a bookstore on February 12th, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Mr. Mourad, born in 1948, is a socialist Muslim. He was a businessman textile industry. He also has his own boutique that he left too his sons to take care of. The interview took place in his car on January 20th, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Mr. Slimane, born in 1953, was a high school teacher. He is a socialist Muslim. The interview took place at his house on December 13th, 2021.

moments or simply traverse them without active engagement, while others are directly affected. In other words, the dynamics of events, networks and resources have uneven influence and impact on one's political participation.

This chapter delves into the intricate mechanisms behind the development of an activist career, aiming to unravel the transformative journey of activists in Algeria. It scrutinizes the processes through which individuals become politicized, gain consciousness, and make their initial commitments to activism. Central to this exploration is the examination of past experiences and their role in motivating present participation, with a particular emphasis on the significance of biography and socialization in shaping motivational priorities. While the notion of generation allowed the research to address macro and mesosociological concerns, the inclusion of the life course approach in this chapter will facilitate an exploration of microsociological nuances in both engagement and non-engagement within social movements.

This chapter's overarching objective is twofold. First, it seeks to unravel the transformative process that leads young people to become public activists, shedding light on how this transformation endures over time. Second, it aims to examine the life course of activists and non-activists, with a particular focus on the motivators and obstacles that shape participation in social movements. Two primary drivers of mobilization are highlighted: childhood and adulthood socialization, and state policies exacerbating societal divisions. Socialization throughout the life course reveals diverse trajectories of involvement in various forms of activism, while state policies unveil their intricate impact on social dynamics, shaping lines of division and prompting responses that lead individuals towards activism. By analyzing these dynamics through interview data, the chapter aims to shed light on the complex interactions between personal experiences, state actions, and societal forces that inspire and sustain lifelong activism.

The first section of the chapter will explore the factors that contribute to the socialization of individuals. I have aggregated the interview data into a small number of themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) such as family dynamics, ideological and political convictions, social networks, involvement in various organizations, marital status, and past participation experiences. The levels of education and professional occupation are also taken into account to establish a correlation with activism. Biographical narratives will allow to gauge between individual agency and structural factors (Chamberlayne & King, 2000).

The second section of the chapter analyses the peculiarities of Kabyle activism as it has an ethnic dimension. Significant historical events and governmental policies such as Arabization policy and the Berber springs (1980 and 2001) are assessed in order to better grasp Amazigh population's motivations in comparison to other Hirak participants.

Exploring distinctions between activists and non-activists

Most of the people I have interviewed were born in the early 1950s, they were around the age of 10 at the end of the independence war. Their childhood and youth were experienced in a post-war period where Arab nationalism, socialism, and political Islam had strong influence in Algeria. They lived the most part of their youth under the rule of Houari Boumediène (1965 - 1978) who had no tolerance towards pluralism. They were surrounded by a certain level of technology¹⁰⁶, specific means of transportation (bicycle, car, tractor), and specific artifacts (household items or schoolbooks) that may no longer be common (old radio) or might not even produced anymore (incandescent television, woven wall tapestry). They have experienced authoritarian and repressive governments since their birth. For those who went to school, their education was mostly

¹⁰⁶ The Internet was introduced in Algeria in the late 1980s through universities. It was only in 1999 that the management was democratized to include private and foreign operators (Bouabdellah, 2018). As of December 2020, Algeria's internet penetration rate was 88.16%, with a population of approximately 44 million (ARPCE, 2020). Most people access the internet via mobile phones.

in French language. For those who did not, it appears that they used French language in their daily affairs.

The life trajectories and commitments of the men and women I met are strongly marked by the era in which they evolved. This era is notably defined by the impact of family and religion on their lives, the restricted options they faced - occasionally stemming from poverty or adherence to family customs - and the numerous challenges they had to overcome to establish their presence in both the workforce and public sphere. In this first section, I will analyse the life course events that mattered in participants' activism by alluding to the multiple transitions and turning points they have experienced. The life course circumstances of non-activists will also be examined to highlight the contrasts in the comparisons of the sub-groups present in the research sample.

Exploring early socialization (parents and relatives)

In Algeria, the main spaces of child socialization are the immediate and larger family, and the life in a “commune”¹⁰⁷ which is a town with multiple amenities such as mosques, schools, convenience stores (markets), cafes, and APC (Assemblée populaire communale). The neighborhood is a very important place because houses are very close to each other, and in smaller towns, people know each other for very long times. Community is thus a very important concept for senior Algerians. The early childhood till early adulthood is experienced very locally. Albeit a slowly declining cultural attribute, living in large families is common for Algerians¹⁰⁸. The extended family in Algeria continued to be a significant institution until the 1990s (Guetta, 1991). The state, through its redistribution policies and managed economy, reinforced the extended family structure without

¹⁰⁷ Although “municipality” translates to “baladiyya” in Arabic, all the participants used the term “commune”, indicating their preference for French over Arabic when referring to certain official terms.

¹⁰⁸ Already in late 1950s, Bourdieu noticed that the extended family gives way to the household; the communities of the ancient society disperse at the same time as the traditions they upheld and that upheld them (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 171).

fostering its evolution toward the nuclear family (Addi, 2005). Despite the Algerian family increasingly shifting towards a nuclear structure, patriarchal authority still prevails within Algerian households (Lallem, 2021). These were the general conditions that shaped research participants' upbringing and the foundations upon which they built their own families.

The nuclear family, and specifically parents, are the first agents of socialization. The interviews show that the role of parents in instigating activism is more ambivalent than decisive. High-risk or high-cost participation in activism appears to be only marginally influenced by growing up in a politicized household. While the presence of elder activists may encourage involvement, these familial ties do not seem to be the primary drivers. This points to the conclusion that being raised in a politicized environment alone is insufficient to produce activists; broader social contexts, and other socializing agents such as friends and peers play a more pivotal role.

The role of parents in my sample is ambivalent in the sense that activism may or may not be passed down from father or mother to a child, but they might also have no effect in terms of preventing their children's activism even with strict religious and conservative way of life. Moreover, no activists recall their parents forcing them to be part of their cause. Activists usually developed their career without having a pedigree of political engagement in their ancestors. This underscores the significant role of activist networks composed of their peers, whose shared commitment to the cause often has a far greater influence than that of their parents. In fact, activists' contemporaries are much more prominent in their narratives, with their influence being more noticeable than that of their parents.

The key point is that socialization cannot simply be reduced to an accumulation of knowledge, nor is there a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship between childhood dispositions and adult behaviors (Percheron, 1987). Parental socialization plays a crucial role in shaping values and

political awareness within the family, but its influence can either strengthen or diminish over time, depending on the social networks individuals develop later in life. Parental socialization is often challenged by other powerful forces, particularly the educational system, which can alter the values instilled by parents (Robineau, 2022). Parental socialization is not a uniform process but is shaped by deeper social contexts and modes of expression that go beyond visible political choices (Bourdieu, 1979).

Among the seventeen activists, three of them had their fathers directly involved in political activities (party members¹⁰⁹) and were highly influenced and purposefully trained by their fathers.

For instance, Mr. Ansar asserts that:

Je ne peux nier l'éducation et l'instruction transmises par mon père. Il a inculqué, à moi et à mes sœurs, des valeurs universelles, des valeurs humaines, des valeurs d'égalité et de fraternité. C'est lui qui m'amenait aux réunions et aux manifestations. Mais, une fois que j'ai grandi, il ne m'a jamais forcé à participer à ses activités avec ses camarades. Le militantisme ce n'est pas une affaire de force, mais plutôt de conviction, et mon père, ça il le savait très bien.

Five of them had an older relative (uncle or aunt) who inserted them into exclusive circles in their early youth which gave them the opportunity to be socialized in specific activist networks. One example is Mr. Hassen¹¹⁰, who explains that while both his father and uncle were politically active to varying extents, it was his uncle who played a key role in introducing him to leftist activism, as his father sought to keep him away from risky political involvement.

¹⁰⁹ The Front of Socialist Forces (FFS), initially a clandestine opposition movement, has opposed the regime it deems illegitimate since 1962. Legally recognized since 1989, it has organized mass demonstrations in Algiers, establishing itself as the leading non-Islamist opposition party. The FFS remains a staunch advocate for democracy, human rights, systemic restructuring, and the formation of a Constituent Assembly.

¹¹⁰ Born in 1955, Mr. Hassen became an activist during his final years of high school. While his political awakening was influenced by his uncle, it was his university education in France and the friendships he formed during that time that served as a pivotal moment, reinforcing his commitment and providing him with the intellectual tools to persuade his peers of the need for systemic change in Algeria. He opposes the mujahid caste's exploitation of state resources and is a staunch advocate for Kabyle culture and language. The interview was conducted at his home on January 16th, 2022.

J'étais tout petit, 10, 12 ans à peine, quand j'écoutais mon père et mon oncle débattre jusqu'au bout de la nuit. Leurs voix montaient, les mots fusaient. Vers 16 ans, les idées de mon oncle me séduisaient. Mon père, lui, c'était un homme sérieux qui parlait toujours de politique. Il était aussi militant, mais il ne voulait pas que je me mêle de politique. Ce qu'il ne savait pas c'est que j'étais déjà conquis. À 16-17 ans, je me retrouvais dans les manifs avec mon oncle. Mais je vais te dire une chose, les jeunes, avec leurs nouvelles idées, ont parfois du mal à trouver leur place auprès des anciens. Mon oncle, c'était un homme de la vieille école, il avait connu la colonisation. Alors, petit à petit, j'ai rencontré d'autres jeunes, on a formé notre groupe. A mesure que le temps passe, il y a une tension qui s'installe entre les générations. Il y a les plus vieux qui nous demandent toujours d'être patients et d'attendre le bon moment, et de l'autre nous qui voulions des actions concrètes et détruire tout sur notre passage. Ils avaient leurs raisons et nous avions les nôtres.

Nine of them had non-politicized families, and their parents even prevented them to get involved with “dangerous” activities. Mr. Smail's¹¹¹ story highlights how a chance encounter on his first day at university led him to Marxist activism, when a stranger sat next to him in class and recruited him to the cause.

Aucun de mes parents, ni ma mère, ni mon père, ni ma famille élargie, ni me sœurs, ni mes frères, personne autour de moi ne connaissait la politique. Le point marquant de ma jeunesse c'est lorsque j'ai commencé l'université. Ma toute première journée, mon tout premier cours. C'était un cours de science. Je me suis assis comme ça sur une chaise et un inconnu s'est assis à côté de moi en me saluant. J'étais surpris parce qu'il y avait d'autres places de libres. Mais il a choisi de s'asseoir à côté de moi et m'a salué. On s'est serré la main, on a fait connaissance, et on a tout de suite accroché. Après on est devenu des copains comme ça [showing his fist]. On a passé toutes nos années universitaires ensemble. À la fac, il est devenu un vrai militant. Il m'a entraîné avec lui dans les associations étudiantes et le militantisme. Un jour, il était président d'une association marxiste et il m'a dit : “J'ai besoin de toi, on va changer le monde”. C'est grâce à lui que je me suis engagé dans le militantisme de gauche. Sans cette rencontre, je serais resté un simple spectateur de l'histoire. Des fois je me dis que si cet ami ne s'était pas assis à côté de moi à cette époque-là, tout aurait pu se dérouler autrement. Aujourd'hui je lui rappelle cet événement et ça lui fait rire.

¹¹¹ Mr. Smail, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He is a close friend of Mr. Kaddour since university years. Mr. Smail's university studies in France marked a pivotal moment in his life, leading him to become a frequent protester from a young age. He holds a deep commitment to socialism. The interview was conducted in his car on February 4th, 2022.

I have also encountered a young man whose father is a senator¹¹², and they are in conflict with each other due to ideological reasons. I did not conduct a formal interview with that person, but he told me that many of his friends have issues with their parents when it comes to political matters in Algeria.

In my sample, activists who were introduced to political engagement through their older family members or relatives specified that there were not aware of their relatives' involvement until they attained the ages of twelve or thirteen. For example, Mr. Malawi, Mr. Slimane, and Mr. Othmane, Mr. Ansar were introduced to activist circles through their parents or elder relatives. They all recalled being around twelve or thirteen years old when they began to comprehend the situation, noticing their parents receiving letters, holding private meetings, and going out late at night. Mr. Ansar¹¹³ who attended meetings with his father never understood the reason behind the gatherings before his early teenage years as well. However, he adds explanation to his perspective:

Au début, on accompagne son père parce qu'on veut passer du temps avec lui, c'est un lien affectif. Plus tard, on pense qu'on comprend, mais plus on grandit et plus on remarque qu'on n'a pas vraiment compris leurs luttes. A mon âge, je pense que je comprends mieux maintenant, mais je suis sûr qu'il me reste encore beaucoup de choses à comprendre. On vit submergé dans un système et je comprends aussi les gens qui trouvent que tout est normal, mais je me suis réveillé alors je lutte.

None of the interviewees recalled participating in protest activities during their childhood, nor did they have significant memories or experiences from that time which could explain their later engagement in activism. This lack of early childhood experiences suggests that other factors beyond childhood socialization may play a more critical role in motivating activism later in life.

¹¹² Out of the 144 members of the Senate, 58 are appointed by the President of the Republic, and 116 are indirectly elected from among the elected representatives at the levels of the Popular Assemblies of the wilayas (departments) for a term of six years.

¹¹³ Mr. Ansar, 73 years old, became involved in clandestine activities because of his father. His father's participation in secret meetings and large assemblies are vivid memories. His father encouraged him to pursue a path advocating for democracy and justice in Algeria. The interview took place in his car on December 12th, 2021.

The influence of early childhood socialization on shaping predispositions toward activism is challenging to pinpoint, as much of it may occur unconsciously and thus elude direct observation by researchers. Moreover, a particularly critical problem for socialization researchers has been the measurement of parenting behavior (Grusec, 2002, p. 149). Specific parenting approaches shaping children's values and a wide variety of variables including features of the child, of the parent, and of the situation in which socialization occurs complicates research interpretations, creating ambiguity and a need for further research (Gecas, 2001, Grusec, 2002).

According to my sample, what stands out is that parents are easily able to transmit cultural values, but when it comes to ideological ones, the image becomes blurry. When asked about the heritage of parents the recurring answer was (cultural) education. For all the interviewees parents have a special place in terms of emotional attachment. However, participants do not always agree with their parents' teachings in terms of religious or ideological worldviews. Whereas activists tend to challenge traditional norms, non-activists share the traditional values of their parents, and they mostly identify as Arab and Muslim without socialism as a prevalent identity trait¹¹⁴.

The influence of parents as socializing agents is more effective in shaping political attitudes than in fostering political involvement. While children often adopt their parents' political views, parental participation in political activities does not have a direct impact on their own level of engagement. In other words, while parents may pass down political opinions (ideologies, worldviews), their actions do not necessarily inspire their children to become actively involved in activism. This distinction underscores the ambivalent role parents play in driving political participation. Furthermore, recent socialization research recognizes that, in addition to parental

¹¹⁴ Because of the snow-ball sampling, all the activists I interviewed were part of leftist circles. They were Muslims, but they were against Islamism. Women specifically were against the traditional place of women in the Algerian society.

and school influences, a broader range of factors shape socialization experiences. These include voluntary associations, peer groups, informal interactions, professional environment and the mass media (Kawata, 1987; Szabó 1989; Hooghe, 2004).

A key factor that moderates the influence of parental socialization is the observation, highlighted in the interviews, that in most cases, activism is embraced by only one, sometimes two, members of a family. This suggests that political engagement often develops independently within the family unit, rather than being collectively passed down. Even when a parent is actively involved in political causes, it is rare for more than one child to follow in their footsteps. Among the activists, only two of them talked about their brothers and sisters being involved with them in their activities. Whether the parent is politically engaged or not, only one family member pursued an activist career, and the rest were either slightly or not concerned at all. Mr. Kaddour for instance has 10 siblings, his parents were not politicized, and he is the only one in his family to be a life-long activist. Brothers and sisters could be involved to serve a certain purpose from time to time (receiving delivery or relaying a message), but they do not get involved into social movement organizations or activities.

The case of Mr. Kaddour, along with others, demonstrates that activism is often an individual endeavor, rarely engaging the full support or involvement of family members. Even when parents disapprove of their children's political activities, they have little ability to stop them once they are committed. This highlights the significant influence of secondary socialization and the broader environment in shaping one's political engagement, often outweighing the impact of family upbringing.

The cultivation of individual, ethical, or political dedications pushing individuals to participate in social movements is often influenced more significantly by pre-established personal relationships

connecting individuals to others who share similar convictions, rather than solely by the influence of having politically active parents or family members. The cases of Mr. Malek, Mr. Mouloud and Mrs. Salama who had not politicized families, and no political discussion at home are illustrative in that sense. All of them were simply convinced through their studies, through their teachers, but mostly through their close friends to be part of social change. Mr. Mouloud¹¹⁵ narrates his situation as follows:

Mes parents n'étaient pas politisés. Je dirais même que je suis le seul politisé de toute la famille. Mes sœurs se sont mariées et l'une d'entre elles s'est installée en France. Mes frères (4) travaillaient dans le privé pour la plupart, mais il y en a un qui est médecin. Parmi tous les frères, on est juste deux qui ont fait des études universitaires. J'ai donc développé mes relations à l'Université, mais j'avais déjà connaissance des injustices et de la corruption. Un enseignant français avec qui on s'entendait bien au lycée me racontait pleins d'histoires et je voulais que ces histoires se réalisent en Algérie. Mais ce sont toujours les relations qui perdurent qui nous gardent dans l'action.

Gaining access to exclusive circles is thus possible through various paths. While few entered through family members or relatives, the majority, particularly those from unpoliticized families, developed their commitment through memorable encounters with specific individuals. For Mr. Hassen¹¹⁶, this pivotal connection was a friend he met in France during his undergraduate studies.

Durant mes études universitaires en France, j'ai rencontré un tas de gens. J'ai rencontré des Algériens qu'il me serait impossible de rencontrer si j'étais resté dans ma ville natale. J'ai un ami de longue date que j'ai rencontré. Il s'appelait Bachir. Je l'ai rencontré pour la première fois à Paris en octobre 1980, j'avais 23 ans. Bachir avait une formation marxiste, un militant de lutte de classes qui avait

¹¹⁵ Mr. Mouloud, born in 1952, has had an intriguing journey that began on his family's farm in Tlemcen, took him to Oran for his university education, and eventually led him to the serene coastal city of Mostaganem. His path to activism was shaped by the development of close friendships, especially with Mr. Slimane. He identifies as a secular democrat. The interview took place on December 19th, 2021, in his car.

¹¹⁶ Born in 1955, Mr. Hassen became an activist during his final years of high school. While his political awakening was influenced by his uncle, it was his university education in France and the friendships he formed during that time that served as a pivotal moment, reinforcing his commitment and providing him with the intellectual tools to persuade his peers of the need for systemic change in Algeria. He opposes the moujahid caste's exploitation of state resources and is a staunch advocate for Kabyle culture and language. The interview was conducted at his home on January 16th, 2022.

pour objectif ultime de changer le système en Algérie. Il voulait un épanouissement total pour le peuple algérien. A notre retour, on a toujours milité ensemble, mais il n'est plus des nôtres à présent, ça fait quelques années déjà.

When individuals are introduced to activism by an older mentor, such as a parent or uncle, their continued involvement with the elder figure in activism tends to be limited. Instead, they often gravitate towards peers within the movement, initiating their own projects and initiatives alongside those of similar age. This swift and seemingly inevitable detachment from the older generation underscores the tendency for activism to be pursued predominantly among one's generational peers. The passage from elderly circle to contemporary ones is explained by Mr. Ansar¹¹⁷ whose father was involved both clandestinely and politically.

Mon père, il a toujours voulu que je suive ses pas. Il m'emménait avec lui dans des rencontres avec ses amis depuis l'âge de 10 ans, peut-être même avant mais je n'ai pas de souvenirs assez clairs. Il y avait aussi d'autres personnes qui emmenaient leurs enfants pour les initier au mouvement socialiste. Quand on était petit, on jouait ensemble et quand on a grandi, on a milité ensemble. Mais le passage se fait naturellement, au début on ne s'entend plus avec son père et automatiquement on crée notre propre cercle d'amis.

The dynamics of interactions always play a pivotal role in social movements (Bartley and Schneiberg 2002; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2017). However, when it comes to the endurance and persistence of an activist trajectory, these interactions predominantly occur among individuals of the same age group who become members of similar organizations and participate in multiple social movements together over an extended period of time. For instance, Mr. Smail and Mr. Kaddour know each other for more than 35 years. The same is valid for many other participants.

¹¹⁷ Mr. Ansar, born in 1949, stressed that he is a leftist socialist rather than a centrist socialist. In addition to his university years in France, his wife's unwavering support significantly bolstered his activist efforts. He made numerous attempts to establish new organizations but was consistently thwarted by FLN bureaucracy. The interview was conducted in his car on December 12th, 2021.

The political awareness of one's parents, regardless of whether they are politically active or not, does not appear to be a significant factor. The rapidly growing effect of parental education during early adolescence suggests "it is through other educational conditions, such as school choice, choice of peers, and choice of subjects, that parental education exerts its effect on political engagement" (Janmaat and Hoskins, 2022, p. 247). The observation that not all children adopt the political views of their older generations underscores the necessity to examine additional forms of socialization. As shown by the sample, "political legacies never work as a carbon copy" (Jennings & Niemi, 1968, p. 184): transmission varies depending on relations to the activist past, family organization, and professional situations. It also varies depending on the diverse ways parents maintain their political positioning as much as how their children appropriate these legacies (Dinas, 2014; Hatemi and Ojeda, 2021).

It appears that the role and place of young people are strongly and durably dependent on the fathers' social status, but this dependence is more an economic dependence than a moral basis. The horizon of the child is traced by the available resources of the parents. Activists often hail from backgrounds where their parents are more educated and financially secure compared to those who do not engage in activism. Typically, activists' parents possess higher levels of education and socioeconomic status than non-activists. This observation emphasizes that activists, overall, originate from well-off or affluent socio-professional backgrounds and experience higher economic standings.

I have already mentioned that extended families were once a key feature of Algerian society, though their prominence has significantly diminished since the 1990s. While some families continue this tradition, it has become less common due to socio-economic changes and urbanization (Addi, 2016). I have noticed that extended families live together not always out of

attachment, but because of economic needs as well. Many interviewees talked about the poor situation of their children because they could not find work even after a good education. With higher revenues and urbanization, lifestyles are constantly changing and there is a general trend towards the nuclear family and individualization. For instance, Mr. Ahmed¹¹⁸ explains his situation as follows:

On vit en famille beaucoup ici. La famille aide les autres. Dans une famille, il y en a toujours 2 qui travaillent et 3 qui ne travaillent pas. Moi, par exemple, j'ai mon revenu de retraite. J'aide mes enfants. Mes enfants s'aident entre eux. Aujourd'hui, avoir un logement ça coûte cher. Le gouvernement ne subventionne plus comme avant. Même les familles les plus pauvres, il faut qu'ils paient pour avoir une maison.

Mr. Smail¹¹⁹ is aware of the changes around him when he says:

Avant les familles élargies étaient beaucoup plus présentes. Maintenant, c'est plutôt la famille immédiate. C'est vrai que la société a évolué mais pas le système. Si on était dans une démocratie, le système aurait évolué en harmonie avec la société, mais ce n'est pas le cas.

Most of the interviewees had parents with limited or no formal education. However, the parents of activists tended to be in more advantageous educational and economic positions. The interviewed activists held well-paid jobs that provided them with both substantial income and high social status. As elaborated in the next chapter, activists are predominantly found within the upper middle class, with a smaller number in the middle class as well. While no specific socioeconomic pattern is evident among non-activists, it seems that a certain level of economic well-being is necessary to

¹¹⁸ Mr. Ahmed, born in 1948, is a non-activist who never got involved into politics. He had to work his whole life since the age of 10 due to poor living conditions. At the age of 45, he found work in the government through relatives' connections. The interview took place outside of his house, in his garden.

¹¹⁹ Mr. Smail, born in 1953, has dedicated his life to activism, having enjoyed a comfortable upbringing. His father, a well-paid hydraulic technician, ensured the family had good living standards. Mr. Smail's university studies in France marked a pivotal moment in his life, leading him to become a frequent protester from a young age. He holds a deep commitment to socialism. The interview was conducted in his car on February 4th, 2022.

sustain activism. It underscores a substantial affluence within the protesting community, drawing attention to the correlation between socio-economic advantages and the possibility of active involvement in social movements.

It is crucial to remember that between April and September 1962, close to one million Europeans departed Algeria for France (Johnson, 2016). This sudden departure also resulted in the loss of a significant portion of professionals, skilled workers, and organizational structures, leaving the newly independent Algeria in a state of crisis and urgent need for trained personnel across all sectors of society (p. 194). When the settlers abandoned Algeria, there was a rush among the natives to grab one of the empty flats made available to them. Mr. Yaser¹²⁰ recalls the general atmosphere as follow:

J'ai vu de mes propres yeux des voisins qui ont cassé les appartements luxueux de la cité Diar el Mahçoul et occupé les logements. Certains ont trouvé des logements avec meubles, du linge dans les armoires et toute la vaisselle dans la cuisine, même, selon des copains, des couverts sur la table de la salle à manger, sûrement à cause d'un départ précipité. Tout ça pour te dire que les familles proches du FLN à l'époque, ils avaient déjà pris les belles villas et les belles maisons qui étaient délaissées par les pieds-noirs et par les soldats français. Nous, on était en retard il ne restait que les F2 ou F3 en état insalubre. Donc déjà là il fallait être proche des cercles politiques. Mon père comme je te l'ai dit, il avait des principes. Il ne voulait pas piétiner sur les droits de quelqu'un d'autre. Ça c'est un héritage qu'il m'a laissé.

Activists usually did not need to get one of those because they had already enough wealth not to need those apartments. For instance, Mr. Kaddour whose father was reticent in taking an empty apartment, told him that they did not need it and just to leave it to needy people.

¹²⁰ Mr. Yaser, born in 1952, is a fervent supporter of the regime and believes that only the army has the legitimate right to govern. His parents are both moujahid, and he is convinced that democracies do not experience the level of freedom found in Algeria. He is unfamiliar with any activists and strongly opposes any form of disagreement with the authorities. The interview took place at his house on January 6th, 2022.

Activists usually attended private schools from an early age because their parents prioritized French education to enhance their opportunities. This option, driven by a desire for greater prospects, was largely unavailable or unwanted by non-activists depending on their situation. Activists generally had better access to educational opportunities and more favorable economic conditions both in their youth and adulthood, setting them apart from non-activists.

Chronology of Activism: Neighborhoods, Peers, and High School

In my sample, 5 activists experienced their first protest activities towards the end of high school years. All of the activists talked about one or two people with whom they spent their youth. This fact demonstrates the importance of one's contemporaries in terms of development and sustainability of activism. Being members of the same generation seems to be a uniting factor in itself to start and maintain an activist career. Maintaining continuous communication with one's peers who are politically engaged is the most significant factor when it comes to becoming and staying committed to a political or social cause.

For the interviewees, their peers played a crucial role in broadening their understanding of oppression, making them more aware of its pervasive presence in their own lives and in the lives of their identity groups in general. Activists, in general, and Kabyles in particular, were not unfamiliar with oppressive conditions such as discrimination and being excluded; high school and the neighborhood had already introduced them thoroughly to these challenging aspects of life. A striking example is that of Mrs. Salama¹²¹ who felt that talking her mother tongue was disturbing even in her hometown.

¹²¹ Mrs. Salama, born in 1956, began engaging with Kabyle movements and organizations in 1979 after sensing the oppression of the Kabyle language and culture. A friend's invitation to Mouloud Mammeri's conference, which was subsequently canceled by the authorities, marked a turning point for her. Since then, she has dedicated herself to persuading Kabyles to join the movement and assert their right to practice and promote Amazigh culture. The interview took place on February 8th, 2022, at her workplace office.

Je ne me rendais pas compte mais dès que j'allais à l'école, inconsciemment j'évitais de parler ma langue maternelle. Jusqu'aux années 1990, et même encore aujourd'hui dans certaines villes, dès qu'on parle kabyle c'est bizarre, il faut faire attention. Depuis que je suis toute petite, le kabyle pour les Arabes c'est des montagnards, des ignorants, tu vois. À l'époque, il y avait une grande violence. Heureusement, ce n'est plus le cas maintenant. A l'époque, il y avait des étudiantes qui se sont faites arrêter juste parce qu'elles voulaient parler leur langue maternelle. Des filles ont été condamnées à un an de prison ferme. En Algérie, la culture policière ne pardonne pas. Il y a du viol, de la maltraitance, etc. Un an de prison pour des jeunes filles de 16-17 ans, c'est terrible. C'est dans ce climat-là qu'on a décidé de lutter pour nos droits.

Mr. Slimane¹²², who is a practicing Muslim, expresses his feelings with this statement:

Dans les années 70/80 même à Tizi [Tizi Ouzou] ou Bejaia, dans les brigades de gendarmerie et les commissariats, dans les bureaux gouvernementaux, ils ont toujours essayé d'imposer la langue arabe. Le terme discriminé est un doux euphémisme comparé à ce qu'on a vécu. Le régime n'a jamais cessé de faire la discrimination, en faisant la distinction entre les berbérophones et les arabophones. Aujourd'hui, j'ai 70 ans et bientôt je vais rejoindre mon créateur. Ce que je peux dire avec certitude c'est que depuis ma naissance je me suis toujours senti étranger.

What participants had not been previously exposed to, was the idea of challenging these conditions through collective action, alongside other communists who also could no longer tolerate their continuation. This, to a large extent, was what their peers enlightened them about: that they had the ability to change these conditions if they chose to, regardless of the differences in authority and status between themselves and those in power. Mr. Hakim's¹²³ experience is illustrative of such a situation:

¹²² Mr. Slimane, born in 1953, comes from a family of state workers, with his father serving as a police officer who was killed by an Islamist armed group in 1989. His aunt, the only literate member of the family, taught him extensively. He pursued his studies in France, participated to many protest activities both locally and abroad. Although he is Arab, he stands firmly against ethnic discrimination and inequality. The interview occurred at his house, on December 13th, 2021.

¹²³ Born in 1948, Mr. Hakim became involved in protest activities and social movement organizations shortly after finishing high school, inspired by a close friend. When questioned about his name, he chose not to reveal it, as his friend now plays a prominent role in the Hirak movement. The interview was conducted at his residence on January 13th, 2022.

Ma vision des choses a changé lorsqu'un de mes bons amis est revenu de son voyage de la France. Il était allé lui pour faire des études supérieures, moi j'ai arrêté au lycée pour travailler. Quand il est revenu, il n'arrêtait pas de me raconter ses expériences. Il parlait souvent d'injustice, de démocratie, de lutte des classes et de valeurs universelles. C'est lui le tout premier qui a rassemblé ses amis pour commencer à s'organiser et changer le quartier. Jusqu'à son retour, moi je pensais que tout le monde était pareil. Mais lui, à chaque fois il disait; ce n'est pas comme ça en France. Il le disait tellement de fois que ça me fâchait. Pendant que mon ami était à l'étranger, j'avais un entourage avec qui on parlait, on discutait de ce qui n'allait pas. Mais ça n'allait pas plus loin qu'une discussion dans le café ou quelques petites plaintes par ci par là. Mon ami lorsqu'il est revenu de France. Il nous parlait d'associations, d'Algériens qui s'organisent, qui s'entraident. Alors il a décidé d'apporter cette connaissance et ces manières de faire chez nous. A l'époque, on l'appelait el-moujahid [le combattant], il n'aimait pas ça mais c'est devenu son surnom. Il a fait beaucoup d'efforts pour organiser le quartier. Pas nécessairement contre le régime, mais il organisait des activités scolaires, des activités familiales. Moi, c'était mon meilleur ami donc je le suivais.

The origin of first protest experiences, in most cases, are local. They are linked to discontent expressed following some measures taken by the government. For instance, people went to protest against the way social housing were distributed, the sporadic and incomprehensible water cuts and gas shortages, but mostly, student protests in universities. The first riots are also experienced at the end of high school which coincides with the age of 16 or 17. When asked for age, people mostly pointed to the years from 20 to 25 to explain their first experiences of social movement participation or becoming member of an organization.

Jocelyn Viterna's 2013 research on women in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) during the Salvadoran Civil War revealed a common trend: the majority of women who joined the organization during the 1980s were young adults between the ages of 16 and 25. While some women may have had prior exposure to the militia, it was during these formative years that they actively chose to become involved. This age group proved particularly susceptible to FMLN recruitment, with many women motivated by personal experiences, social pressures, or a desire to survive the conflict. Olivier Filleule and Erik Neveu (2019) shares similar views arguing that the

ages of 15 to 25 are critical for shaping adult dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors, suggesting that early learning may have a limited impact on political behavior in adulthood.

From the interviews, I deduct that the neighborhood is important for friendship development and mutual aid relationships, but not an activism inducing foyer. Mr. Hakim¹²⁴ describes the situation as follows:

Un frère du quartier, un ami du quartier. Un quartier c'est un ensemble de copains. L'un a vu grandir l'autre. On est lié sentimentalement par des années de pauvreté, de peine, d'humiliation. Les gens vivent dehors, il y a une promiscuité. Il y a une chose propre à l'Algérie. Le quartier c'est la famille, le clan, la tribu. Les salaires sont très bas. On se débrouille d'une certaine façon. On s'entraide. Ce n'est plus comme avant, tout a changé, mais on se respecte.

Even if one grows up since childhood in a politicized environment within activist circles, he does not engage in any activities till he attains a certain age. The earliest activist experiences one had was at the age of thirteen because the person was inserted into specific circles through an elder's initiative. For most of the activists, it started towards the end of high-school years, and mostly in university circles.

It appears that neighborhood is important for mutual aid and support, but activism is something that is carried secretly with trustworthy friends. The neighborhood becomes an extension of what has already been established in schools, universities and social movement organizations. Hence, there must be closeness and trust before being inserted into activist networks. It implies that existing specific connections and friendships are essential for being selected by movement

¹²⁴ Mr. Hakim, aged 73, is a dedicated lifelong activist and the son of a mujahid. Both he and his parents have consistently rejected any privileges associated with the mujahideen institution. His journey into activism began through a close friend who pursued university studies in France. Mr. Hakim proudly identifies as a nationalist Muslim. The interview was conducted at his residence in Algiers on January 13th, 2022.

recruiters. The story of Mr. Mohand¹²⁵, a Kabyle who supports the regime, is striking in that sense when he recalls her first and only protest experience.

Lorsque j'étais étudiant en informatique, je ne me mêlais pas trop de politique, moi. Mais un jour, je vois qu'il y a une manif étudiante. C'était encore une histoire de Kabylie, comme d'habitude. Je me suis dit : « Allez, je vais voir ça de plus près ». Je me suis retrouvé tout seul au milieu de la foule, à marcher avec les autres. On s'est arrêté devant le rectorat pour faire du bruit. Ce que je voulais, c'est qu'on vienne me parler, qu'on m'explique ce qui se passait. Je voyais les autres, ils discutaient entre eux, ils se connaissaient déjà. Moi, j'étais un peu timide, mais j'avais envie de faire partie d'un groupe et faire de nouvelles connaissances. J'attendais qu'on vienne me chercher, pour peut-être rejoindre une association ou quelque chose comme ça. Mais personne n'a daigné me regarder. C'est là que j'ai compris : pour être dans le coup, il faut déjà connaître du monde, peu importe ton avis. Après j'ai commencé à travailler pour l'État et j'ai vu que c'est plein de Kabyles, donc je me suis dit que les Kabyles qui manifestent à tout bout de champ ne comprennent pas la situation de l'Algérie.

As illustrated by the case of Mr. Mohand, informal social connections, like those among friends, family, and neighbors, can be powerful catalysts for collective action. These networks often possess strong social capital and a shared sense of identity, making them well-suited to mobilize individuals for a common cause. For example, in the civil rights movement, local networks centered around Black churches played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing communities (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; 2004).

Activist networks are generally built during the university years where people are around the age of 20 to 25. The importance of high school and student unionism in their political careers is noteworthy. In fact, secondary school and university are key sites for political learning in the Arab world, and student movements play a central role in the organisation and leadership of the protests

¹²⁵ Mr. Mohand, 69 years old, is a non-activist who served as state worker for most of his life. His uncle is a moujahid, and he has a university degree in Computer Science. Enjoying a comfortable retirement, Mr. Mohand is a supporter of the current government and has a negative view of Communist ideology. The interview occurred on February 12th, 2022, at his house. He supports the regime, and he dislikes Communists.

(Geisser, Karam, Vairel, 2006). In that sense, secondary socialization seems to weigh heavier on the acquisition of activist proclivities than primary socialization. The age and composition of one's social circle significantly affect an individual's activist journey.

Contacts established in youth often persist, although they may evolve over time. Conviction in a shared cause often supersedes the bonds of friendship. Benjamin Shepard (2015) while highlighting the importance of pre-existing networks of trustworthy people, writes that rebel friendship is a key factor in the formation and maintenance of outsider networks. Indeed, friendships provide a foundation for trust, support, and mutual encouragement. For the author, social movements are far better positioned when motivations include love, care, and connection with others, as opposed to guilt or anger (p. 206). The interviews clearly demonstrate that individuals often enter activist circles through friendships and trusted relationships, where shared values and experiences foster a sense of solidarity. Additionally, common experiences of discrimination and marginalization serve as powerful catalysts for political engagement, driving individuals to seek change through collective action. In contrast, the absence of a supportive network or the lack of personal experiences with injustice may lead to apathy or even disdain towards participation in social movements, as these individuals fail to perceive a compelling need for activism. Thus, both social connections and lived experiences of oppression play critical roles in shaping one's involvement in activism.

Examining the life stories of activists, it becomes evident that a crucial initial step in their journey to becoming activists was forming connections with their elders and their peers actively involved in addressing political and social injustices. Mr. Malawi¹²⁶ explains the Algerian context as follow:

¹²⁶ Mr. Malawi, 67 years old, is a lifelong activist who protested on many occasions since his youth. He did not attend university as he started his activist career by protesting against the changes made for the university entrance exams. He has strong attachment to communism. The interview took place in his car on January 17th, 2022.

Il y a une corruption, un patronage, un clientélisme qui n'en finit plus. Dans ce bled, si t'as pas de piston ou si t'es pas prêt à graisser la patte, oublie de te faire soigner correctement! Que ce soit à l'hôpital, à la mairie, ou dans n'importe quel bureau, c'est toujours la même histoire : le favoritisme et la corruption, ça règne en maître. Le plus flagrant c'est le changement de notes de certains étudiants par pur favoritisme. Le président a une tête, les autres ce sont des organes qui obéissent. Même les partis politiques sont loyaux au pouvoir. Il n'y a aucun espoir de changement tant et aussi longtemps que ce système perdure. La solution c'est le Hirak.

Their personal stories frequently mention these individuals, like fellow idealistic role models with whom they built friendships and felt a sense of support and belonging in each other's company.

Mr. Hassen¹²⁷ recalls his story as follows:

A l'époque, il y avait mon cher ami Bachir, avec lui il y avait Mustapha et Abderrahmane. Ils ont constitué le noyau à l'origine de notre travail collectif. Un noyau qui est resté fidèle aux principes car ils n'ont jamais oublié les principales leçons concernant la nature des pays dictatoriaux. Je dirais que j'ai plus appris de mon expérience avec mon groupe d'amis avec qui j'ai partagé une cause que dans mes cours à l'Université. Les fronts populaires, le stalinisme, l'impérialisme, tout ça on en parlait avec mes amis. Nos discussions s'enflammaient parfois et on avait des visions divergentes aussi. Mais au final on partageait une cause, et ça je trouve que c'est ce qui lie vraiment une population. Il nous faut une cause qu'on partage tous en tant que peuple algérien. [...] Mon cher ami Bachir, celui qui m'a tout montré, celui qui m'a ouvert les yeux. Il est mort l'année dernière à l'âge de 72 ans je crois. S'il était vivant il continuerait de lutter ça c'est sûr. Moi je continue ce que j'ai entamé avec lui.

All the activists clearly remember the people with whom they have protested in their first times.

All the activists named at least one person with whom they have shared their youth with. Besides their significant other, they sometimes named a teacher, sometimes a preacher, and some other times, people who played a role in influencing their worldviews.

¹²⁷ Mr. Hassen, born in 1955, became politically active in his late high school years. Coming from a middle-class background, his initial exposure to political life came through his uncle's connections. However, the most significant turning point in his activism was the transformative journey he experienced alongside his closest friends, which cemented his commitment to the cause. The interview was conducted at his home on January 16th, 2022.

Activist network acquisition and development in the 1970s and 1980s happens in neighborhoods and schools. Most of the activists developed strong relations with people who they connected with in terms of ideology and worldviews rather than simple friendship bond. There were also significant places for meetings such as the Cinemathèque, cinema VOX and cinema Bousquet as well as various cafés¹²⁸ in Algiers and Tizi-Ouzou where university students used to gather to watch movies and discuss political matters right after. In Mostaganem, multiple cafés at La Salamandre¹²⁹ were significant places to discuss while enjoying the view of the beach. Each city has significant meeting spaces which carries a symbolic value in the hearts of activists. Those places might change over time, but during the 70s and 80s, cinemas and movie clubs have played a pivotal role in raising awareness, sparking debates, encouraging critical thinking, and promoting political engagement across various countries in Algeria (Dridi and Benmerad, 2008). This sentiment resonates with accounts like that of Mrs. Yamina, who said:

Mes années folles, c'était l'époque où la jeunesse algérienne rêvait grand. On se retrouvait à la Cinémathèque, on débattait au Novelty, et on manifestait pour nos droits. On croyait en un avenir meilleur, plus juste. Mais la décennie noire a tout balayé, emportant avec elle nos espoirs. La religion s'est imposée, le socialisme a disparu, et nous, on a été réduits au silence. Heureusement, le Hirak est venu, aussi bref soit-il, rassasier cette soif de liberté.

In 1986, Algeria boasted approximately 400 operational cinemas, but by 2004, this number had dwindled to just ten. During the same period, annual audience attendance plummeted from 40 million to a mere 50,000 (Dwyer and Tazi, 10). This sharp decline was fueled by state condemnation of cinema as a forbidden and impure activity in 1988, coupled with targeted attacks on cinemas by armed Algerian-Islamist groups (Shafik, 2007).

¹²⁸ A recurring café for the city of Algiers was Brasserie des Facultés.

¹²⁹ La Corniche de la Salamandre is a seaside promenade that stretches along the coast of Mostaganem for several kilometers. Its wide, open space offers a peaceful setting for walks and private conversations, with the sound of the waves providing a natural backdrop of confidentiality.

University as a catalyst for political engagement: a sharp turning-point

The university years are the most crucial years in Algeria, as in many other countries of the MENA region, in terms of developing a political consciousness and a network of activists. It appears that university is the most important social space to develop trustworthy and long-lasting relationships. In fact, it appears that networks of friends are formed at the university, but these are small groups that are built on affinity and informal bases. Nick Crossley (2008) underscores that the politicizing effect of campus life is not merely incidental but deeply tied to the social fabric of university experiences, where activism thrives through connections and collaboration. Crossley's work highlights that university life is not just about formal education but also serves as a catalyst for political and social engagement. The network structures inherent in campus settings, such as student unions and multiple associations, provide the social space necessary for these interactions to flourish.

All the activists who studied university in Algeria were members of unrecognized and informal associations. They were against the establishment of a unique student association that was in service of the FLN. Mr. Mohammad¹³⁰ explicitly recognizes the university as the catalyst for his activist career:

Moi je suis un militant politique de longue date, je suis le produit de la grève générale de 1980. J'étais étudiant à l'époque, je faisais partie de la coordination des étudiants qui ont conduit ce mouvement de l'époque. C'est comme ça que j'ai commencé à faire de la politique. En février 2019, on a commencé à nous rencontrer avec nos vieux amis et on a débattu des stratégies pour faire avancer la cause. On marche les vendredis et on se rencontre chaque semaine pour préparer des tracts et des pancartes.

As suggested by Prisuta (2004), education seems to be the primary factor influencing social participation. As for activism, this is not only due to the enhancement of intellectual abilities and

¹³⁰ Mr. Mohammad, born in 1955, has studied Law and journalism. He is a middle-class citizen who participated in multiple protest events since his youth. The interview took place at his house on December 18th, 2021.

overall knowledge but also because sharing a same environment raises the likelihood of connecting with fellow students who are dedicated to a specific cause and have the power to influence others. For eleven activists of my sample, the formative years of activism occurred throughout the university years. Their backgrounds included fields such as pharmacy, medicine, and engineering, alongside journalism, law, and academia. This diversity of academic backgrounds suggests that individuals trained in the natural sciences were as likely to engage in activism as those with social science credentials.

People who participated in student associations were more likely to become long-term activists. Social networks enhance people's availability for recruitment, increase their willingness to join (especially if friends and family are already involved), and make them prime targets for recruitment efforts (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Volpi and Clark, 2018). While recruitment does not occur simply because of structural availability, personal relationships play a crucial role in extending invitations to participate. These connections help to reduce uncertainties and hesitations associated with mobilization (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993). However, it is important to note that interpersonal ties within families (siblings) and among same generation peers have different effects. Whereas the former could have no effect at all, the latter is a significant factor for activism and social movement participation. Also, it is among members of the same network that solidarity is most forcefully manifested.

What stands out from the sample is that when it comes to comprehending democracy and democratic values, people who studied in democratic countries such as the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, and the United States had an "advantage" over people who stayed in their own country or those who visited authoritarian states. This is due to the fact that students who studied in democratic nations were exposed to the procedures of democratic systems

and had the chance to watch and take part in democratic practices. All the activists who studied in liberal democracies engaged in student associations and participated to various protest events. Their attitudes were in general more tolerant to opposed ideas than other activists who did not experience true democracy. They saw themselves as supporters of modernization and have pointed out on many occasions the advantages of Europe and the need to take the West as an example to follow in terms of social justice and democratic rights. Mr. Ansar shares his point of view with these words:

J'ai voyagé dans plusieurs pays mais la France reste mon favori. La France c'est elle qui montre le chemin aux Algériens. La France est un exemple pour beaucoup de pays, mais les gens préfèrent l'endoctrinement. Parce qu'il est plus facile de jouer aux abrutis que de se servir de sa tête. Dans ces pays-là, il y a du respect, de la dignité, les gens peuvent s'épanouir comme bon leur semble. Je ne dis pas qu'on ne devrait pas conserver notre culture, mais je dis qu'on a le droit de prendre ce qui est bon de nos voisins.

Traveling abroad to democratic nations, especially for educational purposes, appears to have a notable influence on individuals' political perspectives. However, traveling abroad for work does not seem to have the same effect. Interestingly, travelling to authoritarian countries reinforces the belief that all states worldwide share similarities, as demonstrated by interviewees' experiences with the USSR and the Arab world. This is how Mr. Radwane¹³¹ summarizes his overall perspective:

Aujourd'hui il n'y a plus de FLN, c'est le pouvoir. Tout le monde est inclus dans ce pouvoir alors pourquoi changer de système? On est déjà libre de faire ce qu'on veut. Ce qui est important pour moi, c'est la justice, l'unité nationale. La démocratie ça divise. J'ai voyagé en Égypte, en Arabie Saoudite, au Maroc, je suis même allé vers l'Union Soviétique et c'est partout pareil. Les gens trouvent leurs comptes de toute manière. Il n'y a rien à se plaindre. Il faut que les Algériens comprennent que nous vivons dans les plus belles terres du monde. Les pays impérialistes comme la France, les Etats-Unis et l'Angleterre sont jaloux de

¹³¹ Mr. Radwane is a non-activist who studied until 5th grade. He has no activist in his circle of friends, he is no member of any association. One of his children has a position as a blue collar, and the other one took over his uncle's shoe shop. The interview took place at their shop on February 3rd, 2022.

l'Algérie. Alors ils nous empêchent de nous développer. Les Zitout¹³², les Tabbou¹³³, Assoul¹³⁴ et compagnie ni vote ni élection, le peuple algérien est rationnel. Ils suivront le président Tebboune. Le Hirak ne représente personne à part les Harkis et les Marocains.

I interviewed six non-activists who have travelled to authoritarian states such as the USSR, Saudi Arabia, and Libya for study or leisure purposes. In all cases, their beliefs that the entire world was ruled by dictators were reinforced. Despite their exposure to different cultures, the authoritarian regimes made them believe that the world was largely the same and that there is therefore no need to mobilize to reform or change the Algerian political regime.

As a matter of fact, when the records of individuals who fled to Europe are examined, it is seen that most of these people have nothing to do with activism, and they do not deal much with any kind of political opposition¹³⁵ (Labdelaoui, 2012). Huge networks of Algerian workers existed in France, but they never dealt with anti-regime activism. Their central goal was to sustain their lives and support their families. Hence, transnational experience might trigger changes in worldviews, but it is not in itself a proper mechanism to ignite activism and social movement participation. It

¹³² Mohamed Larbi Zitout, born in 1964, established the political movement Rachad in 2007 and currently resides in exile in Britain. The Algerian government claims that Rachad comprises former members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Zitout is sought by authorities on charges of managing and financing a terrorist organization, along with allegations of forgery and money laundering.

¹³³ Pro-democracy activist Karim Tabbou, born in 1973, led the FFS from 2007 to 2011. In 2019, as the Hirak movement emerged, he quickly became one of its most notable figures. Shortly after the initial protests, Tabbou was targeted by the repressive regime and faced charges of “undermining the morale of the army” and “attacking national unity”.

¹³⁴ Zoubida Assoul (1956 -), the president and founder of the Union for Change and Progress (UCP) party, is a lawyer who gained recognition during the Hirak movement for defending political and opinion detainees. She has repeatedly declared her intention to run for the presidency.

¹³⁵ Between 1968 and 1975, France experienced significant strikes and social movements led by Algerian specialized workers in the rapidly growing industrial sectors. These workers demanded better working conditions, professional recognition, and salary increases, expressing their dissatisfaction with the government's economic and social policies (Pitti, 2006).

appears that transnational experience must be accompanied with an appropriate network of politically engaged people in appropriate circumstances¹³⁶ that gives way to political involvement. Universities, both domestic and international, remain key centers for sparking and nurturing activism, with greater opportunities emerging in more liberal environments.

All university graduates were not activists, but most of the activists I met were university graduates. I have encountered activists who did not attend university, but their entourage were well-educated and heavily politicized. Despite the challenges they faced under Boumediène's regime, activists from 1970s Algeria recall universities as vibrant spaces for intellectual exchange, where open discussions and spirited debates flourished. Like many others, Mr. Kaddour¹³⁷ mourns his time by saying « *A notre époque il y avait beaucoup de débats au sein des universités. Maintenant ce n'est plus le cas, même en France* ».

It is possible to assert that university marks the most significant turning point in terms of development of a specific political consciousness, and it is the most significant life-event having the potential to influence one's behaviour in terms of activism. The data I have gathered indicates an increasing political awareness, with individuals developing a consistent and stable political consciousness during their university years. Activists' heightened involvement in social activities and political engagement during their university years significantly contributed to the evolution of their consciousness and the strengthening of their political views.

¹³⁶ Appropriate circumstances for political involvement arise from specific triggers within the broader political context. This could be a shared moment of crisis, a pivotal event like an uprising (Berber Spring), or shifts in the political landscape that motivate collective action (October 1988). Such conditions create opportunities for mobilization when people see the potential for meaningful change, making timing and context crucial factors in political engagement.

¹³⁷ Mr. Kaddour, born in 1955, continues to face legal battles, charged with terrorism and passing information to foreign powers. He and his wife are currently out on provisional release, while their friend remains under judicial supervision, required to check in at the local police station every two weeks. In spite of his situation, Mr. Kaddour was the least hesitant to participate in the research project. The interview took place in my hotel room on December 16th, 2021.

Balancing personal, professional, and activist lives

It is already known that married individuals are no less likely to engage in high-risk activism than single people (Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991). However, married life tends to reduce the level of commitment (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). The stability and routine provided by full-time employment in democratic settings often lead to a greater sense of commitment and responsibility, which can translate into increased engagement in various voluntary initiatives, including those that carry significant risks (Nepstad & Smith, 1999; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991). However, an individual's life choices and the structural realities they face can influence their level of commitment in different ways. For instance, men who are actively involved in activism often seek out partners who share similar ideological perspectives, making it a more time-consuming process to find a compatible wife (Dunham, Bengtson, 1994). Entering into marriage often requires newlyweds to prioritize the needs and values of their spouse over other social connections. (Stout, Kretschmer, and Ruppanner, 2017). Conversely, female activists tend to either steer clear of marriage or patiently wait for a partner who respects and aligns with their ideological and societal beliefs. In both cases, marriage is postponed for the sake of personal beliefs and political commitment to abide by. For instance, Palestinian women engaged in activism often give up their personal lives, particularly as imprisonment becomes part of their activist path (Latte Abdallah, 2022). This connection between female activism and celibacy has also been observed in less violent settings (Loiseau, 1996).

The concepts of “hemophilia” and “assortative mating” propose that individuals tend to seek partners who align with and validate their core beliefs and values (Jennings and Stoker, 2009). While this observation is notable in my research, it should be noted that more extensive interviews and analysis are needed to solidify this trend. For instance, there is a stark contrast between Mr.

Ahmed and Mr. Kaddour who had totally different paths for marriage. Mr. Ahmed¹³⁸ explained his marriage as follows:

Moi je ne suis pas allé à l'école. J'ai commencé à travailler très jeune. Après, quand on commence à faire de l'argent, il faut se marier. Ma femme, je l'ai connue parce que j'ai travaillé avec son frère dans une charcuterie. Nous, à l'époque on n'avait pas le droit de parler avec la fille qu'on veut épouser. Il fallait que ce soient les parents qui décident pour nous. Ils ont accepté et on s'est mariés. A l'époque, j'avais 21 ans et elle en avait 17. On ne pouvait même pas se regarder dans les yeux tellement on était timides et respectueux.

Mr. Kaddour tells his story by relating how much his activist career affected his marriage life.

J'ai connu mon épouse en France à Toulouse, elle était aussi étudiante et on s'est retrouvés à Toulouse. Je me suis marié en 1987 (32 ans), je voulais absolument connaître une personne qui partageait ma passion pour le socialisme et les droits humains. Ma femme était aussi socialiste et elle faisait du journalisme. Elle était prête à prendre des risques et non seulement elle me comprenait dans mes décisions, mais elle me soutenait aussi. Elle-même s'est faite arrêter à Oran pour une nouvelle qu'elle voulait publier. Un membre de sa famille est intervenu, elle avait un membre de sa famille bien placé à l'époque dans la Direction de la sécurité nationale à Alger. Quand tu milites, tu as besoin d'arrières solides parfois. Sinon on se fait vite éliminer par le pouvoir.

Mr. Kaddour underscores a crucial point: the need for strong support to sustain one's commitment, especially in a repressive political context like Algeria. It also shows that the resources available to activists are not always entirely separate from the regime. Activists are not isolated within rigid networks but instead have access to a variety of social resources, both within their own circles and sometimes from those aligned with the regime. However, resorting to resources tied to the regime is rare and only done in very specific situations - driven not by choice, but by necessity. Activists seek the most immediate and reliable allies in their cause, often finding them in their spouses.

¹³⁸ Mr. Ahmed, 73 years old, firmly opposes any form of rebellion in the country. He views the state as a paternal figure, providing for society to the best of its abilities. Despite his support for the current regime, he recognizes the high prices and the elevated cost of living. He harbors a deep resentment towards France, blaming it for all of Algeria's problems. Mr. Ahmed is not a member of any organization and stands against such affiliations. This interview took place in his garden on January 9th, 2022.

Mannheim (1952) says that it would take a very strong personality to maintain one's own dispositions in face of antagonistic mental attitudes. I saw that women who I interviewed had very strong personalities because they stood up against well entrenched traditional values vis-à-vis women. For men, I did not notice the necessity to have certain type of personality, but for women, it takes individual self-assertion, self-confidence, and a lot of courage to make the first steps towards activism. The difficulty lies much more into traditional values than protest participation. All the women I have interviewed (8), and a few men (4) as well told me the adage "*In Algeria, women leave her home only twice in her lifetime: the first occasion being for her wedding, and the second being upon her passing*".

The Algerian family is closely tied to the traditional roles of mother and housewife, with any deviation from these roles seen as a challenge to the family's stability and, by extension, the broader cultural fabric. Women's pursuit of roles outside these confines, particularly in the workforce, is often viewed as a threat. This perception is further reinforced by limited employment opportunities, which amplify fears that women's social advancement jeopardizes the family as an institution (Lazreg, 2019).

Numerous studies on the factors influencing participation in social movements consistently highlight the significance of individual perceptions as strong predictors of engagement (Klandermans, 1984; Macy, 1991; Marwell and Oliver, 1993; Opp, 2012). As for this research, women who perceive themselves as victims of gender-based injustice - those who feel oppressed by male figures such as fathers, brothers, or husbands - are more likely to become active in social movements. In contrast, women who do not recognize societal inequalities or perceive gender relations as unfair are less inclined to engage in activism. This underscores the critical role of

personal awareness and perception of injustice in motivating individuals to participate in collective action.

The Middle East and North Africa is the region of the world where women's participation in the labour market is the lowest. According to the World Bank, in 2023 the employment rate of women in Algeria is 19% compared to a global average of 51% (ILO, 2023). The informal sector alone does not explain this weakness, and other dimensions contribute to this exclusion. While religion should not be overestimated, contrary to what some studies postulate (Shami & Akirav, 2021), it is undeniable that access to the labour market also depends on social representations and pressures (Boutaleb, Vannetzel, Allal, 2018). Mrs Salama¹³⁹, who joined activist circles as early as 15 years old, briefly summarized her situation by saying:

C'étaient les chants patriotiques que j'entendais à la Casbah, les tracts que j'avais lus qui me poussaient à militer. Seulement après que mes enfants ont grandi que j'ai pu sortir librement, avant mon mari était jaloux et mes frères s'imposaient. Jusqu'en 1980 environ je ne sortais pas. J'ai commencé à sortir avec l'accord de mon mari et de mes frères, mais toujours accompagnée. Puis petit à petit je suis sortie librement. Maintenant mon mari est vieux et fatigué, il me laisse sortir librement, il me dit : « Si tu veux travailler, vas-y ». Mais que puis-je faire après 60 ans?

After Algeria gained independence, discriminatory practices quickly surfaced, particularly in education and employment. It was within the family that legal discrimination was institutionalized. For the first two decades following independence, Algerian women largely remained silent about the abuses and inequalities they endured (Helie-Lucas, 1998). This silence reflects both the societal pressure to conform and the limited avenues available for women to challenge the systemic oppression they faced. For Wassyla Tamzali (2007), a lawyer and feminist activist, the Algerian revolution is marked by a deep betrayal of women. She denounces the revolutionary movement

¹³⁹ Mrs. Salama, 73 years old, is a lifelong activist who identifies as Amazigh, secular, and Muslim. She was introduced to activist circles through her friends in high school. Nevertheless, she harbors a lasting regret due to the limitations imposed by her family since her childhood.

for its disregard and exclusion of women, highlighting how their rights and contributions were systematically ignored or undermined.

All the women shared stories of facing various obstacles and social limitations, whether in their personal lives or political engagements. Mrs. Nafisa for instance was very assertive and said « *La femme algérienne n'a pas d'autres issues que l'enseignement et l'éducation. La femme se doit de s'éduquer pour avoir plus de liberté et de s'affranchir du joug de l'homme* ». It is true that the experiences of women and the challenges they face vary widely across the Arab world. Overcoming both interpersonal and individual challenges is necessary for them to stay committed to contributing to social change (Shalaby & Moghadam, 2016). The narratives of these women offer valuable material for analysis, providing insights into how certain individuals manage to develop and sustain their dedication to social activism over the course of their lives.

An intriguing gender-related distinction comes to light: while a strong personality seems to be an important factor for women's engagement in activism, it does not hold the same level of significance for men. Women often exhibit a tendency to follow their husbands' lead in matters of activism, although further research is required to establish this trend conclusively¹⁴⁰. Ms. Yamina¹⁴¹ summarizes her situation as follows:

Je ne me suis jamais mariée, mais j'ai adopté deux enfants. Je ne voulais plus me marier après mes études universitaires parce que tous les hommes veulent des femmes soumises. Et moi je ne voulais pas perpétuer ce modèle de société. Je voulais m'émanciper. Ce qui a changé ma vision des choses ce sont vraiment mes études à l'Université.

¹⁴⁰ It appears that Bourdieu's sociological analysis is valid for the generation under study. He writes « Le mariage ne libère la femme de l'autorité absolue de son père que pour la livrer à l'entière domination de son mari ou plus exactement du groupe de son mari et notamment de sa belle-mère (Bourdieu, 1958, p. 17).

¹⁴¹ Mrs. Yamina, born in 1949, has devoted her life to activism, with her greatest wish being to see regime change in her lifetime. Her illiterate and impoverished parents sacrificed everything to ensure she could attend university. Witnessing societal, academic, and bureaucratic injustices drove her to join social movements and champion the cause of justice.

The relationship between personal life choices, gender, and activism underscores the unique challenges of sustained engagement in high-risk activism, particularly in regions like the Middle East and North Africa. Activism impacts men and women differently, with each facing distinct forms of sacrifice. While men may move past certain limitations after their involvement, women often carry these burdens long before, during, and after their political engagement. The weight of these sacrifices is more profound for women, whose lives are deeply shaped by the constraints of patriarchal societies. For them, balancing personal and political commitments frequently demands significant compromises, such as delaying marriage or navigating rigid social barriers.

[The role of associations in mobilizing activists](#)

In relation to associative life, my research findings closely align with those of Doug McAdam's (1986, 1988) study on high-risk activism. Among the independent variables, a person's connections with other activists, has the most significant relationship with participation. As already known, prior contact with a recruiting agent is the strongest variable related with activism (Briet, Klandermans, and Kroon 1987; Gerlach and Hine, 1970; Heirich, 1977; Eschen et al., 1971; Zurcher and Kirkpatrick, 1976). The presence of relational embeddedness and personal bonds not only facilitate participation in protest action but also discourage disengagement. McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic (1992) emphasize that a high proportion of ties to members of other organizational members sustains participation.

Algeria is home to over 110,000 civic associations spread across the country, yet the associative sector has not yet reached a stage of active awareness, mobilization, or organization (Derras, 2007). In his study of 446 associations across 24 wilayas, Omar Derras (2007) found that volunteering is only loosely integrated into the mindset of those involved in associations, with national participation rates below 5%. Moreover, commitment to associations often stems from personal

motives, as many view the associative sector as an avenue for career advancement and professional integration.

Regarding organizational membership, it is crucial to recognize two primary categories of organizations. The organization's affiliation is clearly stated in its official title. If the organization's name includes "national", it aligns with governmental policies and benefits from subsidies. Conversely, if "autonomous" is present in the name, it signifies an organization aiming to distance itself from the government and establish its own sphere of operation¹⁴². Activists predominantly gravitate towards the latter type of organizations for their associative engagements. However, as Mr. Kaddour explained,

Chez nous, en Algérie, les infiltrations de tous les milieux sont la raison d'être des services secrets. Tu constitues une association que tu crois autonome, mais les services secrets sont déjà là sans même que tu t'en rendes compte.

All the activists complain that it is very hard to operate an autonomous association because the bureaucratic procedures are very heavy and even dissuasive. Then, once the association is made official, it is easily infiltrated and monitored by secret services. The army engages in the political sphere through Military Security, which is tasked with monitoring all potential political actors, including parties, unions, associations, newspapers, and universities. At times, it even infiltrates protest movements to undermine their legitimacy (Addi, 2006). In such settings, the truly autonomous aspect of associations remains their names.

In my sample, most activists were affiliated with at least one organization, and many were involved in multiple organizations. Even those who were not formal members maintained strong connections - either officially or informally - with individuals active in social movement

¹⁴² The union sector is the most prominent. For instance, we can mention the National Autonomous Council of Secondary and Technical Education Teachers (CNAPESTE) and the National Autonomous Union of Secondary and Technical Education Teachers (SNAPEST).

organizations. Among the non-activists, a few were passive union members due to their status, but most of them had no strong ties with activists, and they were not involved in any kind of organization. Education and participation in associations outside Algeria seem to have a substantial impact on an individual's propensity to become an activist. Studying abroad and joining associations contribute to a heightened political consciousness and an increased likelihood of engaging in activism. Individuals often join associations after participating in a movement and establishing contact with someone at the core.

A particularity of activists is their lasting mistrust of party politics and legal associations. They constantly repeated that *"There is no official opposition in Algeria; all parties and organizations follow the directives of the authorities. The opposition has never existed; it is only a façade opposition, and it has no weight in the political arena"*¹⁴³. Just one member of the sample has ever officially run for election, and always at local government level. He did not want to but his fellows in the party encouraged him to do so in the political opening period. He stated that people who organized into parties were already organized clandestinely, but the political opening served the state as to know the underground operators.

As recalled by many activists, pluralism before the 1990s was completely illegal in Algeria, but it seems that it was either tolerated to a certain extent, or the number of associations were too numerous to be fully controlled by the regime forces. It appears that women's groups, Berber grassroots organizations, and Islamic charities were officially prohibited but were often tolerated if they were harmless. They existed in a "juridical limbo" where their existence depended on the attitude of the authorities until gradually this attitude changed (Liverani, 2008, p. 18). However,

¹⁴³ All activists share this perspective, consistently highlighting it during their interviews. None believe in the freedom of association, as they assert that the state has the authority to dissolve any organization it perceives as deviating from its prescribed social activities.

the circumscribed period followed by the new constitution of 1989 was a period of democratization and liberalization. Existing clandestine groups turned into parties, associations, organizations of all kinds, and unions as well. It was, the “golden age” of liberties, and particularly that of the free press (Benderra et al., 2020, p. 158). The democratic opening process was abruptly stopped by the regime forces who committed a coup d’État on January 11th, 1992. Mr. Malawi summarizes what all the activists said with the following words:

En Algérie, à l’heure où on se parle il y a peut-être plus de 100 mille organisations civiles. A quoi elles servent? Je ne sais pas. Est-ce qu’elles ont les ressources? Je ne crois pas. Est-ce qu’elles ont peur de la répression? Sans aucun doute. Avec le pluralisme de façade il y avait des organisations islamistes, libérales, amazighes, nationalistes et socialistes aussi qui sont apparues. Les gens ont créé des organismes, des unions, des syndicats et plusieurs mouvements ont pris forme. Mais les événements de la décennie rouge ont effacé tous les gains. La méfiance, la peur, la répression ont pris le dessus.

It is important to highlight that being physically present in a social setting does not automatically imply a significant socializing impact (Lahire, 2005; Darmon, 2016). For instance, individuals often mention or discuss their social circle, including influential figures from various spheres such as school, neighborhood, and academic institutions including friends and mentors. However, the compulsory military service¹⁴⁴ did not sway activists in terms of their ideology or their position regarding the regime. All the activists share a common view when it comes to military service: it has no effect in terms of political ideology and regime assessment. Mr. Bilal’s¹⁴⁵ words summarize very well their thoughts:

¹⁴⁴ In 1968, the High Command of the People’s National Army (ANP) established mandatory national service for all young citizens meeting the criteria of physical and mental fitness (law no 68-82, April 1968). In April 1969, the first contingent of national service personnel headed to training centers (Al Watan, 2008). The law no. 74-103 of November 15, 1974, stipulates that every man, upon reaching the age of 19, must serve in the army for a period of 24 months.

¹⁴⁵ Mr. Bilal, born in 1956, has a history of involvement with both Islamist and Socialist movements. Initially, he identified as an Islamist until the 1990s, when he shifted towards socialism, influenced by his existing friends. A strong advocate for democracy, he supports the idea of Islamists governing, provided they adhere to democratic principles. Mr. Bilal completed high school and worked in various sectors until his retirement. The interview was conducted in my hotel room on February 14th, 2022.

Le service militaire, c'est une perte de temps! Durant le service militaire, il y avait les commissaires politiques qui venaient et ils donnaient leurs visions de l'histoire de l'Algérie. Ils essayaient de nous convaincre, de nous laver le cerveau. Mais on avait déjà appris la vérité, et une fois qu'on connaît la vérité, il n'y a pas de retour en arrière. Au bout de 2 ans de service, on ressort avec plus de détermination pour rattraper le temps perdu.

While there is a sense of pride in fulfilling their national obligation, it does not extend to embracing or internalizing the principles of the regime. Overall, the military service had no effect in their political socialization. The topic is not given much importance by any of the participants.

All the activists I interviewed were of leftist ideology. It would be ridiculous to suggest that the leftists were the soul of most activism in Algeria over the past 30 years, but it is reasonable to suggest that they have reinvested their skills and energy in a broad variety of social movements for the sake of regime change.

Dynamics and outcomes of protest events and social movements participation

Today's activists of the Hirak are those who gathered clandestinely during the 1970s and 1980s at various places in order to protest the regime. Their activism started in university classes, extended to their neighborhoods, and became a web of close ties with trustworthy people. The circle was slowly enlarged with trust bonds. Associations, organizations and unions were developed in secret ways among trustworthy friends, students, and people sharing similar convictions¹⁴⁶. As Ms. Yamina, a 73 years old human rights activist says, « *En Algérie, on se fait recruter depuis toujours par des réseaux d'interconnaissances. On ne va pas voir les inconnus* ». Hence, the importance of close friends and trustworthy network of relationships. While Mrs. Yamina's perspective is shared by all, and even non-activists, Mr. Mohammad adds some details:

On peut dire en effet que la lutte nous pousse à connaître de nouvelles personnes. On n'a pas qu'une seule lutte, à chaque fois qu'on participe à une

¹⁴⁶ Some striking examples are the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS) founded in 1963, the Parti Algérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PADS) founded in 1966, the Association pour l'Egalité founded in 1985, and the Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste (PAGS) founded in 1966.

manifestation, qu'on organise un événement, on fait la connaissance de nouvelles personnes. On a des cercles d'amis mais aussi des cercles de personnes avec qui on partage une cause, des convictions et des principes. Et je passe toujours plus de temps avec ceux et celles avec qui on partage des convictions. A l'Université, j'étais représentant des étudiants. J'avais beaucoup de connaissances, c'est là que j'ai agrandi mon réseau. A long terme, on garde nos amis mais on reste avec les militants. La réciprocité militante l'emporte sur les liens d'amitié.

On the one hand, individuals tend to remain within their existing networks. On the other hand, the activist community encourages connecting with new people who share similar views. This dynamic also applies to non-activists who leverage their connections to seek assistance in securing state jobs. Relationships often endure, and the circle of friends expands through existing networks, which in turn reinforces one's association with a particular group.

Early exposure to protests and participation in social movements have played a significant role in shaping the perspectives and activism of today's individuals engaged in social and political causes. One key factor contributing to involvement in social movements is the experience of being drawn into a protest event by sheer happenstance. This phenomenon is exemplified by the experience of Mrs. Nafisa¹⁴⁷ in Tizi Ouzou, who, at the age of 22, found herself unexpectedly immersed in the events of the Berber Spring of 1980. At the time, she had no prior experience with protests and no affiliations with any political organizations. While attending a student congress, which she initially knew little about, she noticed a friend in the crowd and decided to join the event. This marked the initiation of her lifelong commitment to activism. In her own words, she conveyed:

L'avantage ou l'inconvénient de Tizi Ouzou selon ta manière de voir les choses, c'est que c'est une ville en plein cœur de tous les événements. Alors il est plus difficile de rester loin de la politique. Tizi Ouzou, c'est une wilaya très politisée et les gens sont mieux éduqués que les autres régions de l'Algérie. C'est ce que je crois et ce que je constate lorsque je sors pour rendre visite dans d'autres wilayas. Cela ne veut pas dire que je n'aime pas les autres, nous sommes tous Algériens

¹⁴⁷ Mrs. Nafisa, born in 1958, is the eldest sibling in her family, with four younger brothers. Her uncle was instrumental in introducing her to socialist circles when she was around 13 years old. From an early age, she observed significant differences in how women were treated within her family and became aware of gender inequalities. She identifies as a socialist Muslim. The interview took place at a bookstore office on February 12th, 2022.

d'abord, mais j'aimerais bien que le peuple soit éduqué. La solution, ça passe toujours par l'éducation.

It is imperative to acknowledge the significant correlation between engaging in protest activities and being a member of political organizations. While it is indeed accurate that organizational affiliation enhances the likelihood of pursuing an activist path (McAdam, 1986), it is worth noting that merely attending a protest event can also serve as a catalyst if one is introduced to the cause by a person who serves as a recruiter such as a close friend. For an individual who participates in protest activities only a few times, the lack of a well-established network may lead to discontinuation. In contrast, someone who holds membership in a political organization is more likely to persist due to the support and resources available to them. This is what stands out from the interviews I conducted, and it is also maintained by the literature documenting the significance of preexisting links and organizational ties among activists (Freeman, 1979, 1983; McAdam, 1986; Mische 1998; Osa, 2001; Diani and McAdam, 2003).

What prevents activism?

Among the non-activists numbering eighteen, two of them had their fathers involved in politics, seven of them said their fathers were Moudjahideen, three of them had martyrs (shouhadas) relatives, and the rest did not have any direct relative involved in political circles. Research participants who did not participate in the Hirak were asked if there were any obstacles to their participation. Most of them responded that they were unable to participate for one or more of four popular reasons: they did not know activists and were suspicious of their goals, they thought it was a foreign meddling (mostly France) to destroy Algerian unity, they wanted calm, serenity, and family time (apolitical and unpoliticized), or most commonly, they simply supported the current regime and wanted no trouble. Many of their reasons for not participating appear to be personal concerns of the present, however, when examining their socialization process, they are either not

politicized, they do not know any activists, and/or they prefer to avoid problems. For those who are politicized and well aware of regime clientelism and corruption, they lack a trustworthy circle of activists, and a solid background of participation in protest events and social movements.

None of the research participants I encountered withdrew from their activist endeavors or renounced their commitment to their cause. Nevertheless, activists confided in me about comrades who had abandoned their principles in exchange for personal benefits. Some of these individuals secured lucrative positions within government institutions, while others leveraged their connections to secure prestigious opportunities for their children.

According to activists, when their comrades disengage from opposition movements, their initial inclination is to distance themselves from their activist circles and withdraw from their existing networks, often opting out of further participation in opposition-related endeavors. This fact shows that the elderly with weak ties to activist networks refrained from participating through a dynamic process, ultimately revealing a stronger attachment to networks that discouraged involvement.

The behavior recounted consistently by activists who have lost friends along this journey underscores the crucial role of networks in sustaining one's commitment to activism. While non-activists did not explicitly acknowledge this phenomenon, the data analysis shows that the allure of well-paying jobs within state structures or familial ties to government officials serves as a significant deterrent to outright opposition involvement.

I have determined that retiring from an activist career is feasible at any stage of life. However, initiating involvement in activism appears to be increasingly challenging after reaching middle age. Just like Joseph Hivert (2013), I believe that the probability of defection is significantly shaped by differing activist dispositions, which determine an individual's ability to confront and withstand contextual obstacles. Factors such as social acceptance, the strength of attachment to the

group, the erosion of core beliefs, and regime's response to protest activities, all play crucial roles in this dynamic (Hivert, 2013). A deeper attachment to the group and strong beliefs can enhance resilience against repression, while diminished beliefs and weak connections may increase the likelihood of defection.

In general, being employed by the government, affiliating with civil organizations that lack autonomy from governmental control and having family members in government employment diminish the probability of sustaining activism as a lifelong endeavor. Mr. Yaser explains his situation as follows:

En ce moment j'habite une belle villa comme tu peux t'en apercevoir, dans le meilleur quartier d'Alger (Vieux-Kouba). J'ai travaillé durant plus de 40 ans à la CNAS (Caisse Nationales des Assurances Sociales) comme cadre. J'en étais même le directeur général à une certaine époque. Je suis en retraite depuis un peu plus de 4 ans maintenant. Donc par rapport à tout ce monde qui disent que l'Algérie est pauvre et qui trouvent impossible de réussir, regardez-moi. J'ai réussi et mes enfants aussi ont réussi. Ils ont des postes de direction en ce moment. Il faut arrêter de croire tout ce que disent ces laïcocommunistes et les berberobaathistes qui ne servaient de relais exécutifs des forces étrangères. L'Algérie est libre et démocratique, il faut juste être travaillant.

Being in a financially disadvantaged position and lacking involvement in specific social circles similarly reduces the likelihood of embracing activism. For individuals in poverty, their primary preoccupation invariably centers on meeting basic economic needs and securing decent living conditions. Mr. Omar¹⁴⁸, for instance, told me:

J'ai travaillé toute ma vie. Depuis l'âge de 12-13 ans je travaille. Depuis que je suis tout jeune je ne suis jamais sorti de cette situation. Je m'inquiète toujours à propos de tout et j'ai de la difficulté à boucler les fins de mois. J'ai arrêté l'école après la 7ième année parce que de toute façon ça ne servait à rien de vouloir continuer. Il fallait avoir des connaissances et des moyens pour aller plus loin. Mon fils vient de terminer ses études en ingénierie mais son seul espoir est de quitter ce pays. [...] Je n'ai pas le temps de participer à ce genre de chose

¹⁴⁸ Mr. Omar, 72, is a devout man who attends the mosque nearly every day. He has no connections to either political activists or regime members. Throughout his life, he has held various menial jobs and now feels the physical limitations brought on by aging. The interview took place on January 7th, 2022, in the mosque's garden.

(Hirak) puisque je ne pense qu'à remplir mon estomac. Je suis toujours dans une inquiétude à savoir si je vais rassasier ma faim aujourd'hui. [...] Il n'y a pas de liberté ici, on ne fait pas ce qu'on veut. Il y a de la pauvreté partout. Les citoyens sont misérables. Les gens ici sont devenus des animaux. La seule chose qu'ils veulent c'est se nourrir, se vêtir et se loger. Plus personne ne réfléchit. Avec un peuple pareil on ne fait pas de révolution. Et moi de toute façon je n'ai jamais été intéressé par la politique. Au bout du compte je pense toujours à mon estomac. [...] Avec qui tu veux t'associer dans un pays comme ça? Les gens sont malhonnêtes. Les gens sont endormis. Les gens ne pensent qu'à passer la journée d'une façon ou d'une autre. Jamais je ne vais m'associer avec quelqu'un ou entrer dans une organisation. Ici les gens font tout pour leurs propres intérêts. En Algérie, c'est chacun pour soi.

The situations concerning children, particularly in the realms of employment and education, are pivotal in shaping the interactions of non-activists with the government. Non-activists regularly liaise with authorities regarding labor-related issues and may attempt to secure advantageous opportunities for their family members. As for the activists, although they may have connections within the government and hold influence within the regime, they tend to refrain from leveraging their social resources for personal gain within their network.

I have already showed that activism often thrives within generational boundaries, as individuals tend to mobilize peers from similar age groups. At the university level for instance, recruitment is primarily driven by students persuading others in their immediate environment to join a certain cause. However, as previously highlighted, even older generations recognize the importance of involving youth in social movements. Recruitment efforts typically target younger individuals, making it far less common for older adults to be approached or encouraged to participate in such initiatives. These dynamics highlight the crucial role of youth as a vital window for launching an activist career - an opportunity that, if missed, significantly reduces the likelihood of future involvement.

To conclude the first section of this chapter, it is thus possible to assert that there are two distinct paths to activism: experience of a significant event or gradual political engagement. First, some

individuals become activists due to a significant event in their lives. This event can take the form of a journey to a democratic country for educational purposes, being involved in a protest event, being approached by recruiters. For those who studied abroad, exposure to democratic values and civil liberties mixed with the experience of political change through mobilization can inspire them to become involved in activism upon returning to their home country. The experience serves as a powerful catalyst for their commitment to social and political causes.

The simple fact of being present at the right time and right place might also serve as a catalyst to lifelong activism. Being physically present in the midst of a large-scale, collective action might provide participants with an immersive experience of solidarity, political expression, and empowerment. Such experiences are pivotal for the process of socialization into activism. This process of socialization is not only about learning the tactics and strategies of protest but also about internalizing a belief in the possibility of change and the importance of continued engagement in civic life. In a nutshell, the more activists remain in a social space in which their comrades are both present and socially significant, the more unlikely complete abandonment of any commitment becomes.

In line with my observation, Éric Agrikoliansky and Olivier Fillieule (2019) summarize participation patterns by summarizing key findings in literature. They assert that engagement within a movement is considered a two-phase process. In the first phase, commitment is based on an ideological convergence between the individual and the movement, involving an alignment with the proposed goals and strategies. In the second phase, effective participation requires the availability of personal resources (time, skills) and the opportunity to become actively involved. These two steps are always shaped by a variety of factors, including ideological beliefs, cognitive liberation, the availability of resources, biographical availability, social ties and the relationship

between individual and collective identity, contextual variations linked to transformative events, and the existence of free spaces (p. 206). These elements, acting interdependently, influence the nature and the intensity of individual engagement.

Second, individuals who have previously engaged in political activities or have been part of political circles possess a certain level of political awareness and understanding. They have an existing network within these circles. In this context, their prior involvement equips them with the knowledge and connections to reinvigorate their engagement when they decide to advocate for a particular cause (Taylor, 1989). This reactivation of their political network can be instrumental in advancing their chosen agenda, as they can leverage these connections to mobilize support, collaborate with like-minded individuals, and effect change. While the impact of an event can yield immediate results and prompt lifelong engagement, the establishment and growth of a network typically occur gradually over time. Nonetheless, the presence and development of a network remain critically significant in all scenarios. Consequently, individuals' selection of their political network is not merely a pragmatic step but is also rooted in their generational identity and ingrained habitus. This interplay underscores the lasting impact of early political engagement and the critical role of networks in sustaining activism and effecting change over time.

In my sample, the ages from 20 to 25 appears significant when it comes to developing long lasting relations and consistent ideology. All of my interview respondents remained consistent in their political ideology over time. As Mr. Mourad, a 73-year-old strong leftist active in multiple organizations he withheld for himself, explains "*Je reste impliqué dans toutes les idées, les projets et les questions sociales qui m'intéressaient il y a 35 ou 40 ans*". Just like Mr. Mourad, all the individuals I interviewed maintained their ideological commitments over the life-course and all the activists remained active in movements and organizations. In line with other studies (Cheynis,

2013) the interviewed activists and non-activists insist on the permanence of their convictions. Elderly individuals with limited or no connections to activist networks showed non-participation largely due to a lack of conviction and encouragement, representing a form of withdrawal and seclusion. Mr. Omar, for instance, tells his situation as follow:

À mon époque, l'été, on allait à la plage, c'était simple. D'autres fois on cherchait des champignons, mais il fallait connaître les bons. Ce qui se passe maintenant, ce Hiraq, c'est louche. Je pense qu'il y a des étrangers derrière, peut-être les Français ou des gens qui veulent profiter de nous. Moi, je préfère éviter les ennuis et rester chez moi. Je suis contre le 5ème mandat et contre la corruption. Si tu es vieux tu pars. Tu vas mourir dans quelques jours alors va te repentir et faire tes prières au lieu de rester à vouloir régler les problèmes du pays. Il faut laisser le drapeau au prochain. Mais ça sert à quoi de marcher pour rien. Il y avait déjà beaucoup trop de monde dehors, c'était suffisant.

The ideologies and values shaped by the age of 35 tend to solidify and become integral to one's identity, making significant changes increasingly difficult. As Bourdieu argues (1979), this process of cultivating a habitus, principles of differences not only in the skills acquired, but also in the ways they are applied during contextual situations. The multiple and different acquisition conditions - social positions, practices, relationships, and class conditions - procure distinct predispositions that are to be exercised all along the life course. In the context of activism and social movement participation, the activist habitus becomes deeply ingrained, reinforcing a specific worldview and commitment to certain causes. Once this activist habitus is established, individuals exhibit a strong resistance to alternative perspectives, as their social identity and actions are tightly bound to these acquired dispositions. This rigidity reflects the enduring influence of social structures and personal experiences, which shape and constrain one's ability to adapt or shift ideologies.

Of being Kabyle... or lines of divisions in the Algerian society

Changing identities are influenced by the political regime and the governmental policies of a state (Amenta et al., 2010). Since the acquisition of independence, the Algerian state has insisted on defining itself as Arab and Muslim¹⁴⁹. The imposed identity for both the state and the society created long lasting rifts within the society and grievances for the Kabyles who proudly contributed to the war of liberation just like other Algerians.

This section will discuss policies and events that strengthened societal divisions so that the roots of Kabyle activism is better understood. I have described in the previous chapter the Kabyles as the people who felt alienated by the newly established Arab state. This section focuses on Kabyle activism, emphasizing their unique identity claims that set them apart from other Hirak activists. While the previously discussed aspects of an activist trajectory apply to Kabyles as well, their distinct identity shapes their specific demands and actions within the Hirak movement.

Arabization policy

Starting in 1963, the regime under President Ahmed ben Bella, imposed Arabic as the sole language of instruction. Henceforth, there was a need to accelerate and make the instruction of Arabic language widespread all over the country. Because of a huge lack of Arabic language teachers, Algeria made use of instructors and teachers who came from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen. Those teachers were mostly members of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and they did not have the pedagogic skills to teach languages (Stora & Ellyas, 1999). Most of them were instructors of the Holy Quran in their own countries. Arabic courses were implemented gradually starting in primary schools and high schools in the early 1960s. It was then implemented in universities in the mid-1970s. The teaching quality was mediocre, but it appears

¹⁴⁹ L'islam est la religion de l'État. La République garantit à chacun le respect de ses opinions et de ses croyances, et le libre exercice des cultes. La langue arabe est la langue nationale et officielle de l'État. (Article 4 and 5 of the Algerian constitution, December 10th, 1963).

that besides reducing potential conflicts between different Algerian ethnic groups and promote equality through monolingualism, one of the goals was also to bring back religion in the public sphere (Benrabah, 2004).

Arabization in Algeria emerged as a robust response to French cultural and linguistic imperialism (Daoudi, 2018). Leaders of the War of Independence (1954–62) and subsequent governments dedicated themselves to revitalizing the Arabic language and Islamic cultural values as core elements of Algerian identity. Their goal was to reclaim their ancestral language and integrate more closely with the broader Arab region, encompassing the Middle East and North Africa. The Arabization policy, however, began by marginalizing the Berbers, and alienating many Algerians who were educated in French. Despite this, French remained the official language for some time before being recast by revolutionary political rhetoric as the language of the enemy, which needed to be eradicated. In the 1980s, the lack of genuine opportunities for Arabic-educated graduates, the perception of enduring French dominance, and the unfavorable political and socio-economic conditions for the majority of the population fueled the riots in Kabylia during the 1980s and the subsequent civil war in the 1990s (Daoudi, 2018).

During the 1980s, French language courses were removed from many university faculties, and eventually social sciences were taught only in Arabic language (Aziz, 2015). According to many interviewees, during the 1970s, there was a political battle between Arabic speakers and French speakers who disdained each other. Each faction sought key political positions in the system in order to impose their own linguistic agenda. On the one hand, French speakers were well-equipped for governmental positions already operating in that language, on the other hand, Arabic speakers saw themselves as being authentic Algerians. Arabisation was thus an event creating societal schism during the 1970s. All activists unanimously agree that Arabization policy was coupled with

an Islamization policy. Indeed, Arabization policy profoundly reshaped Algeria's social landscape, embedding Islamic ideology into the foundation of the new constitution and the socio-political system (Bernales, 1989). This forced assimilation not only threatened Berbers' linguistic and cultural heritage but also deepened societal divisions, as Arabization was perceived as monopolistic, undermining Algeria's diverse identity.

Suppressing Kabyle heritage: Cultural repression in Algeria

In May 1979, the performance in Kabyle of the play *La guerre de 2000 ans* by Kateb Yacine was banned from the University of Tizi Ouzou¹⁵⁰. In March 1980, a conference was scheduled for March 10th with Mouloud Mammeri so that he could present his latest book, *Poèmes kabyles anciens*. The conference was banned and Mouloud Mammeri was ordered to return home to Algiers. In less than a year, these illustrious writers, symbols of intellectual ethics and political commitment, were forbidden to express themselves. In 1994, Abdelkader Alloula¹⁵¹ was assassinated by extremist groups during the Algerian Civil War, which marked a period of violent attacks on intellectuals, journalists, and artists who were seen as representing secular or modernist ideas. All of them suffered from the anathema and the insult of the propaganda apparatuses of power (Dahmani, 2020, p. 102). Mr. Youssef¹⁵² shares his feelings with the following statements:

Tous ceux qui ont lutté n'étaient pas reconnus dans leurs entités. Les années 1970, on a vécu ça. Dès qu'on parlait kabyle, c'était bizarre, il fallait faire attention. Il y avait une grande violence. Le printemps 1980 a été une première grande révolte d'Algériens post-indépendance qui a brisé le monolithisme du pouvoir et qui a posé la question identitaire, et de fait la question démocratique. La question identitaire c'est de savoir si j'ai le droit de parler ma langue. Et c'est

¹⁵⁰ The play, which premiered in 1971, sharply criticized the post-independence Algerian government, highlighting issues such as corruption, authoritarianism, and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals (Ziani, 2023).

¹⁵¹ Abdelkader Alloula (1939-1994) was a renowned Algerian playwright and director known for his efforts to modernize Algerian theater. Alloula's plays addressed issues such as colonialism, corruption, and the struggles of the working class in Algeria.

¹⁵² Mr. Youssef, born in 1952, is a lifelong activist who has stopped his studies at high school level due to his father's choice. However, his entourage is full of university graduates. He loves to read books about history and politics. He reads newspapers every day and tries to be up to date concerning political matters in the Middle East and North Africa. The interview took place in an empty café on January 28th, 2022.

un droit démocratique. C'est pour ça que la question identitaire est intimement liée au Hirak. A partir de 2001, on passait à la démarche pacifique. Le Hirak, c'est une continuité de 1980, de 2001 et de 2011.

On April 20th, students went on strike and occupied the University of Tizi-Ouzou. Mostly in Kabylia, but also in the capital city of Algiers, students demonstrated for the recognition of the Berber language and culture¹⁵³ (Dahmani, 2020). Faced with a military operation aimed at dislodging them, the Berbers called a general strike and set up barricades everywhere in Kabylia. The government isolated the region from the rest of the country and crushed the uprisings after four days of violent clashes making a death toll of 32 and hundreds of arrests (Aït-Larbi, 2021). In 2001, the detention and death of a young high school student in the police station of Beni Douala, a municipality of Tizi Ouzou, was the spark that ignited the protest movements in Greater Kabylia, and the rest of the country as well. Although protests lasted for months, it was heavily repressed by the regime forces leaving behind 126 dead and more than 5,000 injured (Aït-Larbi, 2021). Another aspect that all activists agree, and that non-activists express in their feelings when talking about other identity groups is the unreconcilable societal divisions. Mr. Kaddour summarizes the situation as follows:

A l'époque, l'ennemi c'était les socialistes, il y avait beaucoup de violence. Le pouvoir a instrumentalisé le clivage islamiste et laïque pour jouer au maître du pays. Il existait déjà une polarisation, mais après les élections de 1990, le tissu social de la société algérienne a été complètement déchiré. La culture berbère était opposée à la culture arabe, la société laïque contre le mouvement islamiste, le sentiment arabiste contre la tradition francophone. Il y a toujours des jugements de valeurs sous-jacents à l'utilisation des langues française ou arabe. Dès qu'il y a une manifestation, le pouvoir va brandir le drapeau de l'unité nationale et de la manipulation des forces étrangères. La violence ne sert pas la population, elle sert le pouvoir. Le pouvoir a toujours divisé pour mieux régner. Toujours un tel groupe

¹⁵³ The call for Berber cultural recognition coincided with the development and imposition of Arab-Islamism as the official ideology of the Algerian nationalist movement and later the independent state. Early nationalists who opposed Arab-Islamism and its cultural exclusivity advocated for an Algerian identity that embraced all societal components (Mahé, 2001).

contre un autre. Il légitime sa position en montrant du doigt tous les dangers potentiels qui pourraient survenir.

During my fieldwork, it became evident how pervasive prejudice remains toward different ethnic groups. The interviews reveal deep-seated divisions within Algerian society, as nearly every individual expressed disdain or concern toward others based on ethnicity, ideological beliefs, or language. Tensions between Kabyles and Arabs persist beneath the surface, with questions of identity holding particular significance for Kabyles who support the Hirak movement.

Kabyle Activism

In Tizi Ouzou, the Kabyle identity stands out prominently, and there is an unabashed pride among its people in identifying as Kabyle. Individuals in this region openly and confidently declare their Kabyle heritage without reservation. Kabyles, apart from wanting a regime change, want recognition from the government. They want freedom of expression and transmission of knowledge in their own language. It appears that the year 1980 where the Berber Spring occurred served as a turning point for the Amazigh movement in Algeria. For instance, Mr. Othmane¹⁵⁴ explained the situation as follows:

Les promesses de la guerre de libération n'ont pas été tenues. Voilà objectivement ce qui a constitué le socle du printemps berbère. La grande révolution du printemps berbère c'est une revendication de l'identité Amazighe. Il y a d'autres revendications mais elles convergeaient vers la démocratisation de la société. Le printemps berbère c'est les peuples qui ont pris à bras le corps la revendication identitaire. Aujourd'hui ce n'est pas un cadeau des princes ou des rois, ce sont des acquis du combat de plusieurs générations de militants. Le combat pour l'amazighité est inséparable de celui pour la démocratie, la justice sociale et les droits de l'homme.

¹⁵⁴ Mr. Othmane, a 70-year-old computer engineer, spent his career working for various private companies. Although he enjoys a comfortable lifestyle, he remains ever ready to protest against the regime whenever the chance arises. The interview was conducted in his car on February 13th, 2022.

Mr. Smail¹⁵⁵ gives his perspective with these words:

Moi, j'étais actif durant les années 70 surtout. Il y avait une radio à Paris qui dénonçait le régime algérien. C'est une radio qui nous a éveillé sur la conscience politique. Après les années 60, on constate chez les Algériens que tout le monde a accepté la légitimité du FLN. Personne n'a remis en cause l'autorité des gens qui sont venus au pouvoir. Moi j'étais jeune, mon militantisme c'était durant les années 70. En 73, j'ai rencontré des jeunes Kabyles et on parlait en Amazighe. On est des gens qui ont développé à Alger. On a vu que dès qu'on parle Kabyle on dérange. Il y a aussi les événements de 70 ou 71, la fête des cerises, le printemps berbère. Il y avait une fête qui devait avoir lieu, mais tout ce qui concernait les Kabyles dérangeait le pouvoir. C'est surtout la chaîne 2 qui diffusait en Kabyle. On avait 2 heures par jour et le plus souvent c'était des émissions de tarbiyyah diniyyah¹⁵⁶. Les Kabyles n'étaient pas les bienvenus dans la Nouvelle Algérie.

Lastly, Mrs. Salama¹⁵⁷ said;

En tant que Kabyle, on a acquis des choses. Aujourd'hui on peut parler en Kabyle sans se faire déranger par quelqu'un. Les choses ont évolué, mais ça ne s'est pas fait naturellement. On a lutté, on a combattu et on a participé activement dans des mouvements très diversifiés. Les Algériens ont compris qu'il faut avancer avec une réalité qu'on ne peut nier. Les Amazighs sont en Afrique du Nord! Il faut se respecter avec nos différences. On a une langue, on a une culture, on l'assume. Si on a fait tout ce qu'on a fait c'est parce qu'on aime l'Algérie. Notre amour a fait en sorte qu'on a arrêté la violence. L'élite a compris qu'il faut avancer avec la question Amazighe. L'Afrique du Nord est amazighe, nous sommes Amazighes. Il faut s'accepter et se respecter dans nos différences.

As evident from the testimonies, it is clear that the identity question is very vivid in Tizi Ouzou and among Kabyles in general. However, being Kabyle does not inherently make someone

¹⁵⁵ Mr. Smail, born in 1953, was a high school teacher who endeavored to instill socialist views in his students. Unfortunately, the civil war hindered his efforts. Despite losing his job multiple times, he remained steadfast in his beliefs. The interview took place in his car on February 4th, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Arabic term meaning religious education.

¹⁵⁷ Mrs. Salama, 66, is a passionate advocate for Kabyle identity, language, and culture. She opposes the use of the Arabic language in her daily life and ensures that her parents' culture is passed down to her children. Although she champions women's rights, she identifies as a secular socialist rather than a feminist. The interview was conducted at her workplace office on February 8th, 2022.

oppositional to the regime or more inclined to protest than others. As illustrated by the words of Mr. Chabane, a Kabyle citizen, political socialization plays a crucial role in shaping one's stance:

Durant les années 80 il y a eu les événements qu'ils ont appelés le printemps berbère, mais tout ça c'était orchestré par les séparatistes. Moi j'étais là durant les marches, je me trouvais là-bas près de l'université. Mais je n'ai pas fréquenté l'université moi, j'ai fréquenté le lycée et après je me suis mis au travail. J'ai vu les étudiants qui sortaient dehors ou des gens qui faisaient la grève ou d'autres qui criaient contre les forces de l'ordre. Moi je n'ai pas supporté ce mouvement parce que c'était séparatiste. C'était un mouvement manipulé par des partis politiques et des organisations inconnus pour diviser les Algériens. Ça n'a pas duré longtemps d'ailleurs.

This account highlights how individual perspectives on activism are shaped more by personal experiences and socialization than by ethnic identity alone. While some Kabyles actively participated in the movement, individuals like Mr. Chabane observed from a distance, maintaining their skepticism and prejudice toward both the movement and its participants. Similarly, in the context of the Hirak, participants from diverse factions and ethnic groups joined the weekly marches, each driven by distinct personal stakes - ranging from demands for gender equality and ethnic identity recognition to calls for integrity in governance. Some viewed the movement as an illegitimate effort, believing it to be orchestrated by foreign powers or manipulated by state authorities as part of a larger political game.

Conclusion

This chapter achieves two key objectives. First, it sheds light on the variety of challenges and opportunities faced by activists and non-activists throughout their formative years, particularly focusing on the role of long-term socialization. Second, it expands existing literature on social movement participation by highlighting the gradual process of becoming an activist, emphasizing how personal and ideological networks shape the depth and continuity of involvement over time. I explored the question: "How does one make the leap to political activism?". I argued that

commitment is best understood as a combination of the context of secondary socialization and life course circumstances during youth. Building on the literature, I identified two factors that influence an individual's dedication to a movement: identity formation through social networks (socialization), and the influence of changing life course circumstances (contingencies such as involvement in protest events, travel, conscription, incarceration).

In this chapter, I have delved into the mechanisms that are of significance in equipping young individuals to partake in activism. As Bourdieu wrote “We understand that one does not enter this magical circle through an instant act of will but only through birth or through a slow process of co-optation and initiation, which is equivalent to a second birth” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 114). In the case of Algeria, an authoritarian regime, the slow process to enter activism and take part in social movements and protest activities depends heavily on social networks since one's childhood. The importance of secondary socialization is evident when observing that having family members within the regime or having apolitical parents or siblings does not impede activism.

Two pivotal experiences can ignite the spark of activism. Firstly, direct immersion in significant events can be a powerful catalyst for change. Secondly, studying abroad, particularly when coupled with active participation in social and political activities within the host university, can significantly foster an activist mindset. While the transformative potential of university life is undeniable, experiencing this within a liberal democratic framework significantly enhances the likelihood of an individual embarking on an activist path. Crucially, singular, transformative experiences (turning points), rather than a series of minor transitions, are more likely to fundamentally alter an individual's life trajectory towards an activist career.

This chapter reveals that lifelong activism emerges through the gradual learning and adoption of specific practices, shaped by sustained engagement with activists, participation in pivotal events,

and the continuous evolution of these experiences over the course of a lifetime. Entering the sphere of activism during formative years is not always intentional as shown by the case of Mrs. Nafisa, and not always of our own will as shown by the case of Mr. Mohand. While participation in social movements and protests at a young age can be influenced by external factors, building a long-term activist career requires deliberate effort and personal will. Later decisions to engage in activism are consciously aligned with one's political convictions. The decision to join a larger movement is not always entirely within one's control, highlighting the interplay between personal agency and external circumstances in shaping activist trajectories.

Interpersonal relationships are crucial in costly forms of activism that increase the level of difficulty and sacrifice required for contentious collective action (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). From the interviews, it appears that a consciousness is acquired sometimes through parents, sometimes through teachers, sometimes through people in the neighborhood, but it is stiffened mostly through peers studying in the same school or university. All the activists named either an organization, a collectivity or a formal or informal group they are part of. Some of them reinforced their beliefs in prison through the contact of other activists. However, the most significant factor in initiating and sustaining activism appears to be the influence of one's generational peers.

Activists typically come from households with higher incomes, are more likely to be educated, and tend to postpone marriage compared to those not involved in activism. Although these findings are in line with existing literature (Filleule and Neveu, 2019; McAdam, 1986; Corrigan-Brown, 2012; Tarrow, 2022), it is also important to acknowledge the significant role of psychological factors in understanding women's participation in social movements. Activist women often face immense personal and social challenges, including overcoming familial and societal barriers that can lead to strained relationships and social ostracization. In some cases, women may even choose

to forgo marriage entirely to dedicate themselves fully to their activism, highlighting the immense personal sacrifices often required for social justice.

While both conscription and imprisonment remove individuals from their existing social networks, imprisonment uniquely has the potential to either dampen or intensify political engagement. Interestingly, contrary to regime expectations, military service does not significantly change one's political views or affect their participation in protest activities. However, it is crucial to remember that there is always a potential for individuals, even for the most experienced and resilient ones, to be swayed by the regime, as many activists have abandoned their political goals after becoming integrated into the system.

Overall, this chapter contributes to the literature by linking personal experiences of activists with broader socio-political dynamics, demonstrating how solidarity and participation are shaped by both individual convictions and collective grievances. By focusing on the Algerian Hirak, it also provides empirical insights into the role of socialization in sustaining activism even under repressive conditions, thus reinforcing the idea that social movements are not only about mobilization but also about long-term identity construction and political consciousness. Elderly activism is not just shaped by current struggles, but by the weight of past experiences and the enduring impact of a lifetime of socialization. This adds a historical and biographical dimension to existing theories of social movement participation, illustrating how activists' lives are deeply intertwined with the movements they support.

Chapter 5: Practical Logic and Current Dynamics of Elderly Activism

The previous chapters' findings indicate that experiences influencing different participation patterns are not straightforward or caused by a single factor. Instead, they are dynamic, interconnected, intricate, branching, and rooted in individual life stories that are vividly experienced within a historical location. Therefore, participation is not just an individual action; it is a relational practice involving members of a community or society living together within a specific time-space constrained environment.

Participation comes about through the interplay between one's historical location and socialization, evolving through a series of arrangements between structures and individual actions over time. This process brings attention to the active involvement of elderly people in their lives and activities in public spaces. The idea of participation biographies offers an alternative to the common negative perspective on elderly people, shifting away from a limited and institutionalized model of elderly involvement (Walsh, Sharf & Keating, 2017). Instead, it explores how activities and experiences in public spaces become personally meaningful, resulting in various forms of engagement or participation styles, even if not officially acknowledged.

The preceding chapter demonstrated that the political beliefs and behaviors of older adults are acquired through formative experiences during their youth, encompassing influences from home, the local community, and school, with a particular emphasis on higher education and the experience of associative life in liberal democratic countries. In other words, "contentious politics are neither driven by structural necessities nor embedded in individual minds but are the result of concatenation of social mechanisms" (Tarrow, 2022, p. 21). Olivier Fillieule (2001) suggests that people join a movement not only out of motivation but also because their structural position enables mobilization.

Social movement studies propose that engaging in protests demands a certain level of biographical availability, which may be more prevalent among young individuals (McAdam, 1986, 1989). Biographical availability refers to the “absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” (McAdam, 1986, p. 70). Empirical research has not yet found consistent effects of biographical availability indicators, such as age, marriage, parenthood, and employment, on social activism (Beyerlein and Bergstrand, 2016, 2022; Nepstad and Smith, 1999; Schussman and Soule, 2005). Interestingly, retirement represents a phase in which individuals are both mobilizable and exhibit high biographical availability. Retirement often brings more free time and flexibility in one’s schedule. This newfound time can be channeled into various activities, as retirees may have more capacity to attend meetings, participate in interest groups, or engage in social and political activities.

This chapter illustrates that simply being biographically available, and freed from work, does not automatically equate to a shift in political engagement, especially in the absence of prior political socialization, mental data, a history of active involvement, a supportive network, and financial resources. It highlights rather a continuation in individuals’ life trajectories concerning their beliefs, perspectives, and political orientations. The sustained availability of resources, often tied to one’s lifelong social class membership, plays a crucial role in this context. The disposition of older adults to actively participate in the Hirak is developed through the intersection of prior political socialization, historical location, and available resources (health, wealth, network). If this disposition is not already developed during formative years, an older adult will not have any eagerness to be involved in risky social movements at his retirement stage.

Drawing from Bourdieu's practical logic and the concept of habitus, it becomes evident that elderly political engagement stems from a complex interplay of personal history, social context, and practical considerations, rather than just temporary circumstances or newfound availability. According to Bourdieu, indicators such as education level and social origin - and especially the interplay between them - highlight how a cultivated habitus is formed. This habitus shapes not only the skills acquired but also how they are utilized. Consequently, distinct habitus arise within different social class and education matrices, significantly impacting collective action dynamics and social movement participation (Bourdieu, 1979).

This chapter is divided into two main parts, each focusing on distinct aspects of elderly activism in Algeria. The first part centers on my research findings related to older adults' involvement in the Hirak movement. I explore their concerns, motivations, and the steadfast dedication that drives their political activism. I also delve into their roles within the Hirak, their health conditions, and how they continue to champion their causes. By studying how their roles evolve and what factors influence them, I provide valuable insights into the changing landscape of elderly participation in social movements. The first section shows the continuity in one's life trajectory in terms of practices, convictions, and network acquired throughout the youth stage. The second part of the chapter delves into theoretical concepts like habitus, practical logic, and social class to understand their relevance in the context of activism and social movements. I examine the experiences of ageing and retirement in terms of social status and financial security. By applying Bourdieu's framework to the Algerian socio-political scene, I aim to unravel the underlying forces that shape collective action in such context. Through this exploration, I hope to provide a clearer understanding of the complexities involved in elderly activism, particularly in an authoritarian context.

Aging Warriors: The Unwavering Dedication of Elder Activists

The first part of this chapter covers elderly activists' concerns, worries, and claims through the Hirak movement. It will also cover their health and mobility conditions as well as the challenges they face as activists. In other words, this chapter continues to cover life-course circumstances of elderly activists, with a focus on the sustainability of lifelong activism.

Among the individual attributes that are most frequently cited as producing activism is a strong attitudinal affinity with the goals of the movement or a well-articulated set of grievances consistent with the movement's ideology (McAdam, 1986, p. 65). Older adults engage in collective action because they share certain norms and values with the objectives of the Hirak. Those norms and values were acquired in their historical location where some ideas and events were prominent to build their identities.

Bourdieu just like Mannheim suggests that the effects of socialization have less impact during the last stages of life compared to the youth period. Therefore, elderliness is a period in which a way of thinking and of acting defines the limits of behavior, and there is no personal motivation of going out of the well-established comfort zone. Pierre Bourdieu (1980) writes that

Les anticipations de l'habitus, sortes d'hypothèses pratiques fondées sur l'expérience passée, confèrent un poids démesurée aux premières expériences [...] Produit de l'histoire, l'habitus produit des pratiques individuelles et collectives, donc de l'histoire, conformément aux schèmes engendrés par l'histoire ; il assure la présence active des expériences passées qui déposées en chaque organisme sous la forme de schèmes de perception, de pensée et d'action, tendent, plus sûrement que toutes les règles formelles et toutes les normes explicites, à garantir la conformité des pratiques et leur constance à travers le temps (p. 90-91).

It is obvious that both activists and non-activists are eager to go towards what is known to them, and they are reluctant to approach what is unknown. A recurring theme among non-activists was that the forces behind the Hirak were unknown and they would rather stick with the legacy of war

heroes rather than take on the side of unknown forces of the Hirak. Mr. Ahmed shares his thoughts as follow:

Pour le Hirak, il faut connaître le meneur. Il y a des gens derrière le Hirak. Je ne les connais pas ces gens-là. C'est peut-être les Juifs, les Français. Il y en a qui sont allés marcher pour se défouler, d'autres pour draguer. Mais il y a des gens qui savent ce qu'ils font. Et ces gens-là on n'a pas le temps de connaître leur objectif. On ne sait même pas comment il est arrivé ce Hirak, donc c'est louche. Pendant la révolution on vous dit. On dit Ben Bella il est au Maroc par exemple, on vous dit Amirouche, on vous dit Aït Ahmed. Ces gens-là on les connaît. Mais le meneur du Hirak personne ne le connaît.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) famously argued that non-participation is likely to be the result of one of the three factors: 'because they cannot; because they do not want to or because nobody asked' (p. 269). Although it might hold true in the formative years, once the last stages of life are attained, it becomes more complicated due to the burden of one's past. It appears that the elderly do not drastically change their lifestyles, behaviors, or identities once they are freed from work and less reliant on a salary. They make specific choices to maintain consistency in terms of consciousness, mental data, and relationships, procuring them stability in their identities developed through socialization. Previous studies support this argument (Atchley 1971, 1982, 1989).

When questioned about their ongoing involvement, all activists articulated, "*Ma conscience ne me laisse pas tranquille*"¹⁵⁸. This implies the acquisition of a distinct consciousness throughout one's lifetime, and it seems irreversible. Once this form of awareness is attained, there is no retreat; what is understood cannot be erased, and revelations to one's perception cannot be concealed once exposed. Mr. Mouloud¹⁵⁹ particularly told me :

Le militantisme c'est comme un virus ou même un cancer, une fois que tu es infecté il n'y a plus de guérison, ça nous habite, ça nous ronge de partout. On

¹⁵⁸ Every activist mentioned their conscience at some point during the interview, describing it as a powerful motivating force behind their lifelong dedication to activism.

¹⁵⁹ Mr. Mouloud, 70 years old, is a lifelong activist who contributed to the research by participating in the interviews. His parents were farmers, and he is the only one among 7 siblings who went to university to become an engineer. Mr. Mouloud identifies as a socialist Muslim. The interview took place in his car on December 21st, 2021.

ne peut lutter contre sa conscience. On a une cause à défendre et même si parfois on veut se retirer, la conscience ne nous laisse jamais tranquille face aux injustices qu'on voit.

I posit that the established linear correlation between involvement in activism and age (Fillieule, Tartakowsky, 2013) can be attributed to the degree of consciousness acquired in this process. Whereas the youth sequence implies adjustments of behavior and thought due to the acquiring and selection of dispositions developed through the life course, “the old age sequence leads people to become what they are and to be content for what they have due to the stabilization of dispositions, and crystallization of their habitus” (Mauger, 2015. p. 23). The achievement of a specific consciousness goes hand in hand with the development of mental data that shapes one’s dispositions. Activists persist in leading lives imbued with a distinct and powerful sense of purpose, and their resilience remains unbroken. As Mr. Slimane¹⁶⁰ explains:

Mes convictions se sont forgées à travers le temps, à travers les événements, à travers des rencontres avec d’autres militants. J’ai des amis, des enseignants qui ont éveillé ma conscience graduellement au cours des années. Parfois, j’aimerais pouvoir tout accepter et m’occuper de ma famille et de mes enfants. Mais il y a cette chose qui me gruge à l’intérieur de moi-même.

It is true that elderly activists possess a distinct awareness in contrast to non-activists. While I was conducting the interviews, I noticed that activists tend to discuss the broader societal context and desire positive change for the entire society. Non-activists, however, often focus on their personal circumstances. Non-activists express grievances about their individual situations without displaying the same concern for the wider societal issues. This distinction underscores how participation in activism can shape individuals’ outlook, encouraging a shift from self-oriented concerns to a collective and societal focus.

¹⁶⁰ Mr. Slimane, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who reluctantly participated in the interviews because he had doubts about my identity. He was politicized through his father, he studied university in France, where he read Karl Marx and was influenced by socialist ideas. The interview took place at his house on December 13th, 2021.

Concerns and claims of elderly activists

Among the sample of activists I have interviewed, a distinct resolve is evident in the widespread call for a complete departure from the current military regime. Although elderly activists vividly recall the challenges of the 1990s, they consistently advocate for a profound regime overhaul. Regarding the elections that led to civil war, opinions vary among the interviewees. While some acknowledge Islamists' legitimate victory in the 1990s and argue for their democratic right to rule, others perceive them as potentially restrictive, akin to the current military regime, or even more so. This diversity of perspectives highlights the nuanced discussions surrounding Algeria's political landscape. Mr. Mohammad¹⁶¹, a lifelong activist who never voted states that:

Ce que je sais par exemple, c'est qu'une fois on est allé à l'APC pour demander une autorisation aux membres du FIS qui avaient gagné à l'époque, ils nous ont demandé une carte de membre pour que notre demande soit approuvée. On a vite vu que le FIS allait simplement remplacer le FLN sous une autre forme. Il n'y avait donc pas de passage à la démocratie. Mais c'est normal parce que c'est la vision du peuple qui a grandi dans un tel système. Après autant d'années de répression et d'autoritarisme, c'est le seul horizon qu'on a. Des fois je me dis que celui qui viendra va commettre les mêmes erreurs que le FLN et les généraux. Mais je garde espoir.

It is indeed true that elderly activists advocate for regime change. Nevertheless, they exhibit hesitancy towards the possible electoral victory of an Islamist party whose officials have limited political horizons in terms of freedom and democracy. While activists endorse the idea of transparent and fair elections, their condition is that the ruling party adheres to democratic principles. Their apprehension primarily revolves around the possibility of the Islamist party evolving into an Islamist iteration of the FLN. This concern is legitimate when thinking about the

¹⁶¹ Mr. Mohammad, born in 1955 in Tlemcen, has studied Law and Journalism. His father was a teacher, and he pushed all his children to get higher education. He has distant relatives in the military. The interview took place at his house on December 18th, 2021.

behavior of Islamists who adopted clientelist and patronage mechanisms when they won the elections in December 1991. Mr. Zidane¹⁶² explained the general situation as follows:

Et la viennent les années 1990, moi personnellement j'étais contre le FIS. Ce parti et tous ses membres faisaient peur aux gens. A l'époque, ils changeaient déjà les noms des communes. Dans les communes où ils étaient majoritaires, ils ajoutaient « islamiyyah ». Mais dans les autres communes ils gardaient le nom normal. Comme si les autres communes étaient kuffars. A l'époque, le FIS devait être arrêté et c'est ce qui est arrivé. La seule chose qui allait arriver c'est un remplacement du FLN avec une division du peuple entre musulmans et non-musulmans. Le seul problème c'est que si vous n'êtes pas comme eux en apparence, vous n'êtes pas musulman.

Activists are staunch advocates for the thorough democratization of their nation, but their aspirations extend beyond a mere fleeting opportunity. Their paramount concern lies in establishing a sustainable framework for free and fair elections that endure across successive years. Their vision encompasses not just a singular instance of democratic transition, but rather the establishment of enduring democratic norms and practices that persistently uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the electoral process (Schmitter, 1991). This ensures that the fruits of democracy are not ephemeral but become ingrained in the fabric of their society, fostering long-term stability and progress.

A noticeable difference between activists and non-activists is that non-activists equate “electoralism” with democracy, but activists are well aware that elections, as conducted in Algeria, do not guarantee true democratic governance. Activists understand that meaningful democracy requires more than just the act of voting; it demands robust institutions, transparency, and genuine political competition (Schmitter, 1991).

¹⁶² Mr. Zidane, a non-activist, holds the viewpoint that the commemoration of martyrs, independence war heroes, and mujahideen is crucial for fostering national unity. His emphasis lies on the significance of national unity and the stability of the regime.

Although the brief political opening in 1989 might constitute an exception for some, activists generally abstain from voting, while non-activists are more inclined to vote in elections. Both groups, however, share a significant concern about the potential resurgence of an Islamist party dominating the nation during the democratic transition. This fear is pervasive among all research participants, influencing discussions and debates. A sharp decline in the Hirak participation rates after Bouteflika and his inner circle departed highlights this phenomenon¹⁶³. Although citizens were concerned about Bouteflika's potential fifth term and widespread corruption, their main focus was not on a regime overhaul. Instead, participation rates suggest that the regime enjoys a sturdy base, with people favoring the status quo over revolution. Also, activists abstain from voting not merely out of fear of Islamist influence but as a deliberate rejection of legitimizing the regime. Casting a vote, in their view, would contradict their principles and reinforce a system they fundamentally oppose. By refusing to participate, they assert their disapproval of a regime they see as incompatible with their values and vision for a just society.

Elderly activists consider the future of their children within the scope of their activism. While they ponder the overall state of the country, their aspirations extend to creating a superior political and economic environment for their offspring. Importantly, they do not compel their children to adopt their beliefs. While their actions may not be entirely altruistic, they go beyond personal goals of self-improvement. Mr. Malek¹⁶⁴ explains his views as follows:

Je continue par conviction, pour laisser un meilleur avenir à mes enfants. Je veux que mes enfants se sentent bien dans leur propre pays. Je ne veux pas qu'ils se sentent obligés de partir ailleurs pour le simple fait de s'émanciper. En Algérie on a absolument tout ce qu'il nous faut. Le problème, c'est qu'il y a une minorité qui en profite et les autres ne font qu'obéir et fermer les yeux. Sinon tout le monde

¹⁶³ The participation rate in the demonstrations decreases drastically, particularly after Tebboune's election and the presidential speeches taking up some of the Hirak's demands (Oukaci, 2024)

¹⁶⁴ Mr. Malek, born in 1953, is part of the upper-middle class. He identifies as a Muslim democrat. The interview took place at his house on January 18th, 2022.

le sait que ce système est corrompu. Ce système n'a aucune avenue. Il n'y a aucune issue sauf la révolution.

Mrs. Salama¹⁶⁵ is on the same page, affirming:

Chaque vendredi. Je ne le fais pas pour moi uniquement. Je le fais aussi pour ma fille et pour les générations futures. Pour qu'elles aient un avenir. Je considère que l'Algérie vit actuellement un tournant historique, c'est un devoir pour moi de sortir et manifester.

Similar to Mr. Malek and Mrs. Salama, every activist aspires to pass on a fair and thriving environment to their children. It could be argued that non-activists share the same desire, as it is a universal wish for any individual regarding their children. However, non-activists may either enjoy existing privileges from the regime or simply seek stability, trusting that improvements will naturally unfold with the passage of time.

Elderly activists advocate for a comprehensive vision that encompasses not only democratization and the rule of law but also extends to securing equality of opportunities and eradicating the entrenched practices of patronage and clientelism. They ardently strive for a societal framework where every individual has fair and equitable access to opportunities, free from the influence of patronage networks and favoritism. Their aspirations resonate with a deep-rooted commitment to fostering a meritocratic society where talent and hard work prevail over nepotism and undue influence. In their pursuit, they envisage a future Algeria where the principles of justice, fairness, and equal opportunity form the bedrock of social and political interactions, ensuring a prosperous and inclusive society for all its citizens. Mr. Youssef¹⁶⁶ envisions the future of Algeria with these words:

¹⁶⁵ Mrs. Salama, born in 1956, is a lifelong activist who is part of the upper-middle class. She counts herself lucky because her husband supports her activist endeavors. The interview was conducted at her workplace office on February 8th, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Mr. Youssef, who defines himself as a Socialist Muslim, is a lifelong activist who started his activist career through a group of friends he met in his early 20s. He was already influenced by a teacher in high school, but specific people

Le Hirak, son objectif c'est quoi? Le Hirak veut un État de droit, un État où tous les citoyens sont égaux. On a présentement un régime en panne de projet pour la société. Le régime risque tout pour assurer sa propre perpétuité, c'est tout. Le Hirak demande l'ouverture du champ politique afin que le peuple puisse avoir de vrais partis politiques indépendants et élire de véritables représentants du peuple. Si la volonté du peuple va envers les islamistes, ce sera les islamistes, mais il faut qu'eux aussi adhèrent au jeu politique et acceptent la défaite lorsque ça arrive. Tous les autres problèmes se régleront plus tard. En dehors de la démocratie tout n'est que du blabla.

Ultimately, elderly activists stand as a testament to the enduring power of convictions shaped in youth. Age does not erode the dispositions acquired during youth; instead, these dispositions are safeguarded by habitus, which molds their perceptions, actions, and aspirations over a lifetime. The resilience and convictions of elderly activists in Algeria demonstrate how deeply ingrained values and experiences drive sustained commitment to societal change. Their activism is not merely reactive but deeply principled, shaped by decades of reflection, struggle, and hope. By maintaining their resolve for democratization and justice, they embody the lasting influence of formative experiences and the transformative potential of long-term dedication to a cause.

Preserving Cognitive Legacy

In 1962, Algeria was predominantly rural, with widespread illiteracy and limited access to education. Before independence, 85% of Algerians were illiterate, with rates reaching 98% for women in some regions (Ibrahimi, 1995), and over 80% of school-age children (ages 6–15) did not attend school (Sadeg, 2014). Since gaining independence, Algeria has prioritized education, transforming its societal landscape. School enrollment surged from 70% in 1977 to 79.9% in 1987, while illiteracy dropped from 61% to 43.6% over the same period (Sadeg, 2014). Today, Algeria is highly urbanized, with rural areas losing their former dominance. Over 60% of the population

he met pushed him in the activist path. He has strong attachment to his Berber identity, and to Socialism. The interview took place in an empty cafe on January 28th, 2022.

is under 30, and schooling rates have reached impressive levels (Safir, 2012). This dramatic shift in education and urbanization has fundamentally reshaped Algerian society, creating a dynamic, modern environment that contrasts sharply with the past.

In earlier times, societal expectations dictated distinct roles for men and women, with men working outside the home while women assumed the responsibility of caring for the family within the household (Kpadonou, 2019). In conventional family structures, daughters-in-law typically reside in the households of their husbands' parents and assume the role of caregivers when the elderly parents-in-law require assistance. However, the landscape has evolved significantly with the rapid pace of urbanization, leading to a shift towards nuclear family structures (Mouhoun, 2010). In the contemporary setting, young women are now engaged in professional pursuits outside their homes, challenging the traditional societal norms that once confined them to domestic roles¹⁶⁷. Women are increasingly pursuing education, establishing independent households separate from their in-laws, and engaging in professional employment outside the confines of their homes (Slackman 2007, Kaci & Starks, 2013). This transformation has resulted in a lifestyle that no longer aligns seamlessly with the conventional expectations placed on women and families. Furthermore, the current generation of young women faces the added complexity of juggling work responsibilities, a dimension not as prominent in the lives of their predecessors (Mouhoun, 2010). In contrast to previous generations, contemporary young women face the challenges and anxieties related to pursuing employment and careers beyond traditional domestic roles.

¹⁶⁷ Recently, there has been a significant increase in the participation of women in the labor market, particularly among those who are more educated and remain single, influenced by the rising age of first marriage (around 30 years). In 2016, women constituted 20.4% of the total active workforce. Moreover, singlehood has become a defining feature of female employment and unemployment, reflecting the broader difficulties women encounter in accessing and sustaining roles within the labor market (Oufriha, 2019).

The elderly thus find themselves in a completely different local and global environment and their perspectives might be different than what they used to believe. However, it appears that life-long activists defend the same causes they defended 30 or 40 years ago. Mr. Hassen¹⁶⁸ explicitly says:

J'ai commencé à lutter à partir des années 1980 et je continue de lutter aujourd'hui. Mes convictions se sont bien ancrées à 25-30 ans et je continue de vivre avec ces mêmes logiques. Je veux la justice, la démocratie, la liberté d'expression totale. Je continuerai de lutter jusqu'à la mort, ça il n'y a aucun doute.

Mr. Hakim¹⁶⁹ said:

Il faut toujours lutter dans la vie. C'est ce que mon expérience de vie m'a apprise. C'est seulement quand on s'acharne qu'on est vainqueur. Il faut donc s'acharner jusqu'au bout, jusqu'à ce qu'on transforme quelque chose. On ne peut pas transformer le monde, mais on doit transformer quelque chose dans le monde. Chaque être humain doit le faire. C'est ce que je fais depuis ma jeunesse.

Mr. Malawi's¹⁷⁰ experience has affected me specifically because he said:

Je suis fier d'avoir lutté pour cette cause. Même si aujourd'hui le socialisme n'est que du passé en Algérie, je suis fier d'avoir joué un rôle dans les multiples manifestations et grèves qui ont quand même affecté le sort des choses. Malheureusement, mes proches amis sont tous morts à présent. Mais ils ont lutté jusqu'à leurs derniers souffles. De mon côté, je continue à avoir les mêmes convictions que j'avais il y a très longtemps, mais ce n'est pas la même chose lorsqu'on continue un combat en étant seul.

What could have contributed to the continuity in research participants' worldviews is that there has not been a substantial evolution in the political climate in Algeria. Also, memory transmission occurred almost exclusively within families, as the regime made internal massacres a taboo topic, not discussed publicly or taught in schools (Kilavuz, 2023). This phenomenon potentially

¹⁶⁸ Mr. Hassen, born in 1955, is part of the middle class. The interview took place at his house on January 16th, 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Mr. Hakim, born in 1950, is part of the middle class. He has relatives in the FLN administration, and he avoids them. The interview took place at his house on January 13th, 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Mr. Malawi, born in 1955, is part of the upper middle class. He identifies as a communist. The interview took place in his car on January 17th, 2022.

contributed to the sustained nature of Algerians' political positions. However, a noticeable shift has occurred in their living environments. Mrs. Yamina¹⁷¹ explains the situation as follows:

Actuellement, je vis à Alger, mais toute l'Algérie a radicalement changé, physiquement, l'environnement n'a jamais été aussi laid, défiguré, un béton hideux a pris la place des immenses vergers de la Mitidja, un urbanisme sauvage s'est rapidement développé, encouragé par la corruption à tous les niveaux. Si vous avez affaire avec l'État, c'est soit des connaissances, soit les pots de vin. N'importe qui qui fait face à l'État se rend vite compte que rien n'est simple pour régler les affaires des citoyens. Même avec les procédures les plus simples, on est confronté à des affaires de pots de vin et de clientélisme. On frappe toujours le mur du patronage, du clientélisme, du pistonnage. Depuis que je suis toute petite, c'est ce que je vis.

The compelling testimonials and extensive interviews conducted underscore a notable continuity in the beliefs and convictions of both activists and non-activists over the past three to four decades. These individuals steadfastly adhere to their political perspectives, exhibiting a remarkable consistency that remains virtually unaltered. Notably, the interviews revealed a noteworthy trend in ideological development, with individuals undergoing shifts that eventually stabilized at various ages. For some, this stabilization occurred as early as 10 years old, signifying a rapid establishment of enduring beliefs. In contrast, respondents with higher levels of education demonstrated greater flexibility in their convictions, experiencing changes that persisted until the age of 35. A key factor behind this phenomenon is that individuals exposed to change through education, diversity of networks, and travel tend to experience the crystallization of their habitus later in life. In contrast, those who remain in the same neighborhood, lack formal education, and have limited experiences outside their immediate environment often hold tightly to the beliefs and worldviews they acquired early on. This steadfastness not only highlights the enduring nature of their convictions but also

¹⁷¹ Mrs Yamina, born in 1949 is a lifelong activist who decided to never get married for the sake of her convictions. She is a middle-class woman who adopted 2 children and raised them as socialist Muslims. The interview took place at her house on January 12th, 2022.

lends credibility to the assertion that their political viewpoints have remained remarkably resilient over time. About this topic, Mr. Kaddour¹⁷² says:

Notre doctrine n'est pas un dogme mais une règle pour l'action. Pour les socialistes comme moi, c'est l'action qui compte. Je n'aime pas les gens qui parlent sans arrêt, ils nous disent comment les choses devraient changer mais quand vient le temps de militer ils ne sont plus là. Avec les militants de gauche comme moi, on s'attend à un engagement total. On ne veut pas de peureux ou de gens qui sont faibles d'esprit. Si on veut combattre pour une cause il faut être convaincu de sa véracité. Sinon, comment va-t-on la défendre?

Activists persist in championing the same causes since their youth, while non-activists continue to adhere to their unchanged political stances as well. Not only their political views are the same, but also their network, and most importantly their neighborhood. All interviewed people lived in their present neighborhood for more than 15 years, some of them surpassing 30 years. Stability occurs not only in terms of ideologies and worldviews but also in terms of social mobility and community ties.

Regardless of their involvement in the Hirak movement, my study of both participants and non-participants has revealed a striking consistency in people's lives over the past 20 to 30 years. They have not only continued to express the political beliefs they held in the 1970s but have also actively pursued actions aligned with those values. Both activists and non-activists today act upon the mental data they have acquired through their socialization in their years of youth.

In his seminal study, Philip Converse (1964) demonstrates that comprehensive and highly integrated belief systems, and their behavioral consequences, are largely confined to the elite. This is because the elite maintain more consistent and robust attitudes compared to the fragmented and inconsistent beliefs of the general public. Similarly, lifelong activists exhibit a commitment to a cause - be it human rights, communitarian values, or anti-capitalism - that drives their sustained

¹⁷² Mr. Kaddour, born in 1955, is part of the upper middle class. He identifies as a secular communist and he has very little attachment to religion. The interview took place in my hotel room on December 16th, 2021.

political engagement. This attachment to a cause grants activists the same consistency in behavior and belief systems that the elite enjoy.

It is possible to assert that because of this consistency, activists represent a dominated fraction of the elite. Unlike state-elites who wield power through regime clientelism, activists often rebuke direct access to these resources. Their influence stems from moral authority and dedication rather than material dominance, positioning them in a paradoxical space. Despite their ideological consistency, strong educational background, and relatively elevated income levels, these individuals remain marginalized, lacking both power and influence over societal structures. This distinction underscores the unique position of activists: they challenge the power structures of the elite while also embodying their coherence and dedication to a belief system. Their exclusion highlights a disconnect between their potential to contribute and their limited access to decision-making and societal control.

Retirement as Transition

For all participants, retirement was perceived as a transition rather than a significant turning point.

In Algeria, retirement does not signify disengagement but rather a recommitment to new goals that are directed towards religious and family duties. Retirees look forward to an active future with fewer constraints (Mimouni, 2016). Despite having more flexibility in their daily routines, research participants did not notice substantial changes in their life trajectories.

Retirement alone does not naturally lead to political engagement. Without prior exposure to political ideas, a cultivated awareness, and active involvement in activism during youth years, transitioning into an activist role post-retirement seems unlikely. Mr. Chabane¹⁷³ explains his

¹⁷³ Mr. Chabane, 77 years old, is a non-activist who wants stability in his life. He has no prior political engagement experience, and he never met any activist. Mr. Chabane lives in a precarious situation since his youth as he worked in informal jobs. There is a lot of solidarity among his family members. The interview was conducted in his house on February 1st, 2022.

uninvolvement through socio-economic situation and dependency to children describes his change of status as follows:

Aujourd'hui je veux une vie paisible et calme. Je veux passer du temps avec mes enfants, mes amis, ma famille. On a trop souffert avec la pauvreté des années après l'Indépendance. On a vécu la guerre civile. Alors maintenant, on a besoin de solidarité, de confiance, de travail. On doit supporter nos confrères et nos consœurs. Comme je te l'ai dit, l'Algérie a besoin de stabilité. Les Algériens doivent continuer à travailler ensemble pour améliorer la situation du pays en entier. Il ne faut pas diviser les gens.

For Mr. Kaddour, his situation is as follows:

Aujourd'hui, quand je bricole, quand je bouge, je sens que je suis vieux, j'ai l'âge de mes articulations que puis-je dire de plus? J'ai 66 ans et je suis à la retraite. C'est sûr que je ne suis pas aussi actif que durant ma jeunesse. A certains moments, on songe à se retirer et à d'autres on veut continuer. De toute façon, même si vous voulez rester à l'écart, les gens vous sollicitent. On a pris un chemin et on reste sur ce chemin.

In the retirement phase, both activists and non-activists find themselves with more time for personal pursuits. However, this shift does not necessarily bring about significant alterations in terms of political engagement. Activists, upon retiring, do not experience a notable upswing in their activist endeavors, nor do they completely detach themselves from political participation and their activist networks. On the flip side, for non-activists, retirement signifies an increase in personal leisure time. Nevertheless, it does not instigate a sudden inclination towards activism or heightened political engagement. The period simply allows for more personal time without prompting a notable shift in political involvement. Non-activist retirees often engage in religious activities, such as frequent mosque visits or spending time in mosque courtyards. For non-activists especially, these practices help alleviate the stress and anxiety related to aging and the approach of the end of life.

Elderly social movement participation reported in this research reflects a keen sense of duty among elders in general, which in turn can be traced back to their political socialization. As all the participants acknowledge, for activism to happen in the elderly period, it must be apparent during the youth period. Mr. Hassen¹⁷⁴ explains his situation as follows:

J'ai passé mon enfance à Bordj avec de petites grèves peut être insignifiantes pour moi. Mais j'ai passé ma jeunesse avec des socialistes acharnés qui avaient une cause. Je me suis donc approprié cette cause et je continue de lutter à présent.

To engage fully in the Hirak movement, a retired person must possess a consciousness nurtured since youth, cultivated through interactions with activists or politicized individuals, a reliable and trustworthy social network, and previous involvement in protest events and social movements. It appears very unlikely for a retiree to gravitate towards political involvement simply due to newfound free time and government benefits without prior socialization, the buildup of mental data, the support of a network, and prior involvement in political activities.

Activists in retirement experience a unique form of freedom, as state authorities do not threaten to revoke their pensions. While these individuals may have faced job loss or the revocation of work permits during their active years - particularly in industries like import and export - the security of their retirement pensions remains intact, even in the event of incarceration. This financial stability allows retired activists to maintain a level of autonomy that is often denied to those still in the workforce, enabling them to continue advocating for their causes without the fear of losing their primary source of income. Thus, retirement can serve as a protective barrier, ensuring that their voices remain heard even amidst state repression.

¹⁷⁴ Mr. Hassen, born in 1955, has been an activist since his final years of high school. He is a middle-class citizen who intensively worked for the recognition of Kabyle identity in Algeria. The interview was conducted at his home on January 16th, 2022.

Fostering change through stable networks

I have previously asserted that one's network of connections typically expands through existing members, maintaining the stability of the social milieu. This mechanism hinders sudden changes in one's network, compelling individuals to remain in a relatively unchanged environment for an extended period. One's network throughout the life course is a determining factor in shaping opportunities for political involvement and engagement. The nature and circumstances of network building is pivotal for access to information, resources, and social capital, which can either promote engagement in clientelism with the regime or foster resistance against benefiting from the regime.

As mentioned earlier, in terms of overall social relations, activists and non-activists alike spend time with their same-generation peers first. Despite the frequent encounters with new individuals facilitated by protest events and social movement organizations, activists often exhibit a strong preference for engaging in activism within their existing social circles. Mr. Malek¹⁷⁵ explains the situation as follows:

C'est à 24 ans que j'ai épousé une idée, celle d'être vrai, d'être moi-même, un Kabyle, un Amazigh. Quand ils ont annulé la conférence de Mouloud en 1980, le 14 avril, ça m'a réveillé, ça m'a ouvert les yeux. Depuis, je suis là, au travail, dans les débats, je dis ce que je pense, je suis moi. Et parfois, je réussis à convaincre les autres de la justesse de notre combat. [...] Pour continuer cette lutte, il faut être là, avec les anciens, les vrais amis. Moi, je suis avec mes vieux camarades, des hommes solides. Pas comme cette jeunesse d'aujourd'hui, qui veut tout, tout de suite, sans rien faire.

As mentioned by Nan Lin (1995), as people get old, interactions typically conform to the principle of homophily, suggesting that the probability of interactions rises with individuals sharing a greater number of common psychological and social traits. Activists, in contrast to non-activists, display

¹⁷⁵ Mr. Malek, 69 years old, is a lifelong activist who accepted to participate in the research as an interviewee. He identifies as a secular Muslim democrat. The interview took place at his house on January 18th, 2022.

a greater propensity for involvement in various social circles. Not only their social connections are more extensive, but they also boast a higher level of diversity.

Non-activists often find themselves withdrawing from active participation in society, leading to a limited and relatively homogenous circle of friends. This distinction highlights how activists actively cultivate diverse social networks, while non-activists may experience a more constrained and homogeneous social landscape. Non-activists' social interactions tend to be more homophilic compared to activists, meaning that non-activists' social circles are less diversified. It is however crucial to mention that activists are encountered through strong references or common circles of friends. The principle of homophily is forced upon activists due to an atmosphere of continuous threat of denunciation. As Mr. Ansar¹⁷⁶ highlights with great sorrow:

Il est difficile d'agrandir nos cercles puisqu'on ne sait pas si la personne va nous dénoncer. C'est comme ça en Algérie. Parfois, il y a des membres de la famille qui ne veulent pas avoir de problèmes, donc ils dénoncent. On se tient toujours entre amis de confiance, entre militants avec des objectifs communs.

In comparing Mr. Malek's and Mr. Ansar's views, it becomes evident that while activists generally expand their social networks through active engagement in political and social causes, these networks remain guarded and challenging to penetrate. The fear of infiltration or denunciation creates a protective barrier around activist circles. Nevertheless, activists' involvement in various movements and events does lead to a wider range of acquaintances than those of non-activists, fostering a more diverse social network despite the risks associated with activism.

Generally, elderly individuals often experience a shrinking social circle. However, activists typically maintain larger and more diverse networks due to their political engagement. Although there is a tendency to stay with one's own social circle, it is apparent that activists have much more

¹⁷⁶ Mr. Ansar, 73 years old, is a middle-class citizen who identifies as leftist Socialist. The interview was conducted in his car on December 12th, 2021.

acquaintances and relationships compared to non-activists. As far as it concerns the sample, from the age of 40 onward, socialization agents tend to become more homogeneous, leading to a decline in the number of these agents and a reduced likelihood of change in one's beliefs and worldviews. While activists tend to narrow their social networks in favor of bonds with fellow cause members, non-activists also experience a reduction in their social circles. In both cases, social mobility and interactions diminish over time. Additionally, activists' repertoires of contention become more limited and shift toward less confrontational forms of engagement.

This shrinking of the social space occurs because individuals do not move randomly within social space (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 125). This is partly because the forces that structure this space impose themselves upon them (through, for example, objective mechanisms of elimination and orientation), and partly because their properties, their acquired dispositions constitutive of the habitus tend to guide individuals toward familiar environments, creating a reluctance to venture beyond what is known (Bourdieu, 1979). This property of habitus is defined by Bourdieu (1980) as follows:

Par le « choix » systématique qu'il opère entre les lieux, les événements, les personnes susceptibles d'être fréquentées, l'habitus tend à se mettre à l'abri des crises et des mises en question critiques en s'assurant un milieu auquel il est aussi préadapté que possible, c'est-à-dire un univers relativement constant de situations propres à renforcer ses dispositions en offrant le marché le plus favorable à ses produits (p. 102).

Participation in formal or informal organizations and maintaining contact with fellow activists helps reinforce one's convictions. The roles activists play within social movement organizations vary depending on age, economic situation, and education level¹⁷⁷. These changes are often not

¹⁷⁷ Activists noted shifts in their roles, describing a natural progression from following directions to giving instructions, ultimately leading them to establish their own association when in conflict with other activists.

intentional but rather automatic responses to shifts in circumstances and available resources. As Mr. Hakim¹⁷⁸ aptly states, “*Oui on participe, mais pas comme avant!*”

The common social issue that both activists and non-activists pointed out is the lack of social capital in the Algerian population in general. However, activists recognized, from their own experiences, that Islamists are noted for having the most resilient relationships. These ties remained robust during the 1990s and under the Bouteflika regime as well (Labat, 2011).

The networks, skills, and legitimacy gained in protest politics and grassroots commitments are a resource of increasing importance in sustained political activism. Hence, there must be constant interaction with an activist network to sustain activism. Activist circles, maintained over many years, provide the support and continuity necessary for long-term activism.

Social network analysis is a rigorous sociological method for modeling relational structures, most often in an inductive manner (Lazega, 2014, p. 116). I did not explicitly ask research participants whether they were part of specific networks. However, I inquired about their social circles and organizational memberships. I observed that activists, in particular, were all embedded in networks with varying levels of relational density. In formal terms, the social fabric is made up of roles and networks, though these concepts actually reflect a highly dynamic reality (Broadbent, 2003). Networks refer to the various types of relationships that connect nodes, which can be individuals, organizations, states, or other entities. Meanwhile, roles describe the position and function of these nodes within the broader, evolving network structure, whether central, peripheral, broker, or otherwise (Heiss, 1990). Hence, roles are defined by the strength and densities of social ties. The literature seems clear on the point that strong ties are more powerful than weak ones in instigating

¹⁷⁸ Mr. Hakim, born in 1950, is a dedicated lifelong activist and the son of a moujahid. He is a middle-class citizen, and he proudly identifies as a nationalist Muslim. The interview was conducted at his residence in Algiers on January 13th, 2022.

and maintaining activism (Gould 1991; McAdam & Paulsen 1993; Broadbent 2003). It is true that organizations contribute to the formation and maintenance of networks (Curtis and Zurcher 1973; Rucht 1989; Diani 1995; 2003), but it is ultimately individuals who sustain social ties. The case is illustrated by Mrs. Yamina who tell about the role of networks and organizations:

Le SNAPAP c'est un syndicat qui est totalement différent de l'UGTA parce qu'au sein du SNAPAP vous avez des gens courageux. L'UGTA a été conçu pour protéger les intérêts de l'État. Le SNAPAP a été érigé en 1990 pour tous les travailleurs. On n'avait plus aucune attente de la part du pouvoir. Bien avant le Hirak, nous avons tissé des liens directs avec les quelques associations, de femmes, de jeunes et professionnelles non encore domestiquées ou alliées avec le pouvoir, pour des objectifs bien précis autour de la protestation massive dans la rue. Contre la loi sur l'information, la loi du 2 janvier 2012 sur les associations, la loi sur les hydrocarbures, contre le Code du travail également. C'est autour de ces grands thèmes rassembleurs que petit à petit nous avons recruté des petits groupes d'activistes. Le SNAPAP a aidé à la création de syndicats autonomes à partir des séminaires de formations syndicales dans le secteur économique, dans les banques à caractères administratifs. Leurs séminaires et leurs réunions se déroulaient en grande partie à la maison des syndicalistes appartenant au SNAPAP. D'ailleurs il y a eu une vague d'arrestations et de poursuites judiciaires, planifiée contre les cadres et militants syndicalistes à travers tout le pays. Est-ce que l'UGTA a été touchée? Je vous laisse deviner.

The statements by Mrs. Yamina highlight the crucial role of personal connections and trust in activist movements. While organizational membership¹⁷⁹, such as being part of SNAPAP, appears significant, the effectiveness of activism often relies more on strong personal networks. Social movement organizations and autonomous unions play a crucial role by providing training and meeting spaces, which further underscores the significance of close-knit social networks. The fact that many meetings took place in specific private homes indicates the level of trust and strong social bonds needed for such risky activities, especially in the face of state repression, as evidenced by the wave of arrests targeting union activists across the country. Whereas existing personal ties

¹⁷⁹ Most recurring organizations are la coordination des sections de la Confédération nationale de l'enseignement supérieur (CNES), le Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique (SNAPAP), le Syndicat autonome des travailleurs de l'éducation et de la formation (SATEF) as well as la Ligue algérienne de défense des droits de l'homme (LADDH).

to individuals provide trust and a sense of security, being backed by an organization gives recruiters and movement leaders the credibility of having material and social resources to sustain their activities whether it be a protest event, a rally, a street demonstration or a social movement. The critical role of informal, trust-based networks in challenging the status quo is once again underlined as not all members of the organization have the same involvement in its endeavors.

What I induced from the interviews is that some participants, like Mr. Kaddour, Mr. Malawi, and Mrs. Yamina, served as central figures or nodes within their networks, playing key roles in connecting others. Their centrality was evident in the fact that they referred the highest number of participants, who were also the quickest to agree to take part in the research project, thanks to well-established trust relationships.

On the other hand, individuals such as Mr. Hassen, Mr. Slimane, and Mr. Othmane occupied more peripheral positions, with fewer referrals, sometimes only one. Their engagement with organizations was also limited; they only attended meetings or events when personally invited by close friends. Although they were members of organizations, their levels of commitment were less obvious than central actors.

Activists often find themselves embedded in private, largely informal circles over extended periods, where their political identities are shaped and reinforced. These exclusive networks are instrumental in cultivating a collective identity of resistance, framing their involvement as a rejection of engagement with an authoritarian regime. By aligning themselves with these spaces, activists develop a shared political consciousness rooted in contestation, standing as a deliberate opposition to the state's authority.

Hirak Practices: How elderly activists protest?

In terms of practices, the common answer of the interviewees is summarized by Mrs. Yamina who highlights a key aspect of grassroots activism: diverse contributions strengthen the collective effort.

Dans les mouvements comme le Hirak, tout le monde contribue selon ses talents et ses capacités. Il y en a qui ont de l'argent, d'autre le savoir, d'autres des connections personnelles etc... Donc, on contribue selon les ressources que nous possédons.

Although all activists participated in the weekly marches, the level of their involvement differed. Mrs. Salama, Mr. Smail, and Mr. Youssef admitted that their physical stamina had declined, making it difficult for them to walk as far as they once could. They often had to stop and rest. For them, actively joining the demonstrations by chanting slogans became a meaningful way to contribute.

Mr. Kaddour, an engineer with a master's degree, illustrates another dimension of activism: coordination and strategic planning. He played a crucial role in drafting the Coordination nationale pour le changement et la démocratie¹⁸⁰ (CNCD) declaration in 2011, explaining that communication and coordination was far more challenging during his youth compared to the present due to the absence of modern communication tools like smartphones and the internet.

A l'époque le fait de s'organiser n'était pas aussi facile qu'aujourd'hui. Parfois je me demande même comment on a réussi tout ce travail sans téléphone ni internet. Il fallait avoir une coordination avec tout le monde et c'était une affaire de confiance aussi. Ma mission en ce moment c'est de rassembler. Je commence par appeler tout le monde pour coordonner. Avec les téléphones, et les locaux ça tient mieux. Je fais beaucoup de travail de coordination. Par exemple, la déclaration de la CNCD en 2011, j'ai contribué à l'écriture du premier communiqué. Ça s'est déroulé à Alger et à Oran. On a entendu que tout le monde

¹⁸⁰ The CNCD is a coalition formed by the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH), independent unions (Snapap, Satef, Cnes, Cla), youth organizations (Algérie Pacifique, Mouvement des Jeunes Algériens) and various associations such as SOS disparus and the National Collective for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC) (Derradji, 2012).

allait sortir. Le vendredi je sors avec mon épouse et mon fils, je retrouve tous les membres de la ligue. Sans qu'on se le dise tout le monde est sorti. On ne s'attendait pas à une grande participation, mais c'est ce qui est arrivé.

While Mr. Kaddour did not anticipate a large turnout during the 2011 protests, he was pleased to see so many people join the demonstrations. It is then crucial to recognize that activist organizations have limited members and can only exert influence over their members and their networks to a certain degree. For social movements to endure and grow, they must engage the broader population and continually recruit new supporters.

The few research participants equipped with smartphones often go live on Facebook or WhatsApp to broadcast the intensity of the demonstrations, providing real-time footage of the marches to their peers. These live streams not only document the collective energy but also serve as a powerful tool for mobilization, encouraging others to join as they witness the unified chants and demands. Additionally, the live videos are intended to facilitate coordination across different wilayas, enabling protesters in various locations to synchronize their slogans and actions by watching each other's feeds.

Elderly activists demonstrate steadfast commitment by actively participating in the weekly marches, raising their voices, chanting, signing petitions, and encouraging those around them to join - just like their younger peers. However, they draw a clear line when it comes to acts of vandalism or violence, refraining from behaviors such as graffiti or throwing objects at the police. Instead, they prioritize maintaining a peaceful and orderly environment, often taking steps to ensure the demonstrations proceed in a calm and respectful atmosphere by encouraging those around them to remain composed.

Health and Mobility of Elderly Activists

All individuals interviewed exhibited robust health without any reported health issues, consistently maintaining good physical well-being. None voiced complaints about specific illnesses, but they all talked about the challenges of being old. Remarkably, the perception of feeling young or old does not affect one's persistent commitment to political engagement. Activists' enduring involvement in protest activities and associative life remain resilient, unaffected by the conventional notions associated with the aging process.

In modern Algeria, seniors are increasingly aware of the new potential available to them. Nobody in my sample simply waited for death to come. I have never heard anybody saying that he or she has nothing else left to accomplish in this world. On the contrary seniors consider that the time they have left should not be wasted but fully lived. More and more studies show that seniors are fully engaged and active, especially women in liberal democracies (Whitbourne, 2005; Nyqvist, Forsman, 2015; Ciafone, 2021).

Access to social contacts and activities is a crucial health resource for older people, with its importance growing as they age and face increased health risks (O'Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Cattani et al., 2011). The World Health Organization emphasizes that the social environment significantly impacts active aging, highlighting the need for community resources. Active aging involves social inclusion, participation, trust, and engagement, which are beneficial for health and well-being. Activists note that while they were more active in their youth through student and labor unions, the lack of associations for the elderly limits their ability to build diverse networks.

Another crucial point is that during their youth, activists crisscrossed the entire nation, fervently participating in protest activities and political events. They used to travel from one end of the country to the other when they heard about protest activities. However, with the passage of time,

their sphere of activism has undergone a discernible evolution. Presently, their commitment is more concentrated, pivoting towards their own home cities. For instance, Mr. Mohammad summarizes the situation as follows:

Je suis, plus que jamais, désolé que ma santé me joue des tours et que je doive réfléchir chaque fois non pas à ce que je veux faire mais à ce que je peux. Il suffit que le taux d'humidité s'élève, et que la chaleur aussi, pour que ma respiration devienne difficile. Comment marcher ou même stationner deux heures, si au bout de cinquante mètres je me mets à haleter. Les longs trajets, les voyages, les bagarres, c'est fini pour moi. Je lis les journaux et consulte le net, comme jamais. Parce qu'au fond, même si le corps ralentit, la tête, elle, veut toujours comprendre.

This transformation signifies a deliberate shift from the broad, nationwide endeavors of their youth to a more localized and community-centric approach in their activism. This nuanced adjustment not only underscores the adaptability of their commitment over time but also emphasizes a strategic and impactful focus on their immediate surroundings. The limitations imposed by their age prevent them from engaging in the activities they once pursued with youthful vigor and strength. Consequently, there is a palpable sense of physical fragility that acts as a constraint on their current range of activities. Whereas long journeys from one city to another was made very easily during their youth, this endeavor became harder to realize due to their body getting tired easily and not supporting long trips.

The use of one piece from the repertoire of action rather than another, in a given universe of constraints, responds both to tactical and strategic considerations, and to a framing activity deployed by the protesters to impose the meaning of their movement (Fillieule, Tartakowsky, 2013, p. 189). Activists boldly undertook decisive actions to safeguard their cause and propel its progress forward. Mr. Smail¹⁸¹ adeptly articulates the prevailing circumstances of his youth,

¹⁸¹ Mr. Smail, born in 1953, has strong attachment to socialism. He is a middle-class citizen who inherited some wealth from his father. The interview took place in his car on February 4th, 2022.

demonstrating a profound understanding of his environment, the political landscape, and the overall atmosphere.

A l'époque, on a commencé à publier des pamphlets. On demandait aux gens de ne pas tout gober ce que le gouvernement disait. On avait même demandé de prendre les armes. Avec Boumediène il n'y avait pas d'autre choix que ça parce que tout était surveillé. En janvier 1976, on a posé des bombes. Il y a eu des militants qui se sont fait arrêter à al Harash. Il y avait des étudiants qui se sont fait arrêter. Il y en a parmi eux qui ont eu des sentences très dures. Ils ont été emprisonnés pour plusieurs mois. De notre côté, on a été contacter les parents et on se cachait. C'est dans ce climat-là qu'on a décidé ce qu'on a décidé de faire. L'idée c'était de faire de la provocation, pas de blesser les gens. On voulait dire au pouvoir que quoique ça force est importante, il y aura toujours des personnes qui vont militer pour changer et améliorer les choses. Si c'était à recommencer, j'aurais peut-être agi autrement, mais ce sont toujours les circonstances qui nous poussent à choisir un cours d'action. Aujourd'hui, on ne vit plus la même réalité.

Overall, both individuals who actively advocate for causes and those who do not engage in activism demonstrate a keen awareness of the current state of the world and the changes happening within society. Repertoires of contention for older adults become more limited first because of reduced mobility and energy, but more significantly because of a retrospection that is conducted, and lessons are learnt from their youth.

I conclude that activists' repertoires of contention are affected, not only because they show an awareness of their circumstances, but also because of their age and health conditions. For instance, during their youth, some activists have thrown rocks or even bombs to disturb police forces and the general environment and had the ability to run without looking backward. However, these options are no longer viable as all of them stated that they do not have the physical strength and capabilities to take such risks anymore.

Elderly activists do not participate in strikes anymore as they are not employed, their repertoires of contention have diminished and became less diversified from strikes, rock throwing, cocktail Molotov (small bombs) throwing, to marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins. In that sense, their

repertoire became less violent, less disruptive, and more conventional. Sydney Tarrow writes that “repertoire changes depend on major fluctuations in interests, opportunities and organization” (1994; 2022, p. 26). I would add that it changes also depending on age and health condition as well.

Sustaining activism over multiple years

During the interviews, I had a specific question concerning the sustained involvement in activism over the course of several years. Activism, as observed, commences at various life stages, ranging from as early as thirteen to around thirty-five years old. Regardless of the starting age, a consistent trend is the enduring commitment to activism beyond the conventional retirement age. According to my sample, embarking on activism beyond the age of 35 or 40 seems challenging, as the likelihood of becoming politically engaged and developing a distinct consciousness significantly diminishes. This decline is attributed to the reduced diversity of interactions, leading to a homophilic environment that hampers the initiation of activism. Francois Héran (1988) comes to similar conclusions when he writes that one does not accumulate friends over the life course: at best, they renew themselves; at worst, they get lost. He finds that after the age of 40, the variety in relationships diminishes extensively, beyond age 60, children and their families come to make up the majority of one’s interactions. Activist engagement often fosters strong, enduring bonds among fellow activists, which can surpass the strength of relationships cultivated outside the activist sphere. This observation is repeated by multiple interviewees like Mrs. Yamina who says:

Mon entourage a beaucoup changé depuis l’âge de 40 ans. Nos cercles d’amis et de connaissances se rétrécissent. Mais j’ai quand même une amie que je côtoie depuis notre jeunesse. On a passé notre jeunesse à militer ensemble.

In numerous instances, participants have turned to audio instruments as a means to maintain emotional continuity in their activism. They find solace and motivation in listening to the Algerian national anthem and specific songs that evoke memories of past activism with friends. Certain songs evoke powerful emotions that serve as a driving force, motivating them to persist in their

pursuit of political objectives. Among the most cited artists were Slimane Azem, Djamel Allam, Brahim Izri, Idir Hamidouche, and Farid Ferragui.

In essence, it is evident that both politicization and mental data are indispensable elements of activism. Nevertheless, the development of consciousness requires sustained nurturing over time to attain a vivid and impactful state. The activists I have met voluntarily nurture their habitus by participating in various social movements and protest events, by staying in touch with other activists, by listening to emotionally charged songs that evoke deep feelings, by being members of organizations, and for some, regularly immersing themselves in thought-provoking literature¹⁸². Through these mechanisms, they build enduring commitments to high-risk activism and forge strong bonds that foster solidarity and trust (Neveu, 2019).

One of the primary driving forces behind these sustaining activities is the enduring sense of hope. Hope serves as a vital emotional anchor for these activists, providing the sustenance they need to persevere in their endeavors. Their unwavering belief in the possibility of change and the enhancement of their nation's well-being is what fuels their ongoing commitment to activism. As Mr. Malawi says:

Ce sont les petites sources qui font les rivières et chaque lutte alimente l'autre. Aujourd'hui, on a un peuple algérien qui veut s'exprimer et qui veut s'épanouir. Tôt ou tard, ce régime changera. Par contre, nous sommes responsables de la transmission des idées et des valeurs à la prochaine génération de militants. Il faut jeter les ponts au-delà des frontières locales.

Mr. Bilal¹⁸³ talked about the future generations and said:

J'ai l'espoir que la génération du Hirak ne fera pas les mêmes erreurs que la génération précédente. Qu'elle saura métamorphoser l'Algérie sans violence. Il faut que l'armée de la lutte pour l'indépendance du peuple algérien admette qu'elle

¹⁸² The most frequently referenced works were *Le Fils du Pauvre* and *Le Pain* by Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Laboureur et ses enfants* by Jean de La Fontaine, *La Liberté* by Paul Éluard, *Tu seras un homme*, *Mon Fils* by Rudyard Kipling, and *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo.

¹⁸³ Mr. Bilal, born in 1956, is a socialist Muslim. He is a middle class citizen. The interview was conducted in a hotel room on February 14th, 2022.

a fait le job et qu'il est grand temps de passer le flambeau à la société civile. Il faut une armée forte et organisée sans corruption du système. Une armée, c'est pour la défense de la souveraineté et la liberté de son peuple.

While the activists' narratives reflected fluctuations between despair and hope, it was evident to me that their resilience stemmed from an unwavering grip on hope, which served as the bedrock of their activism. This hope, however, is not spontaneous; it is nurtured by small events and moments they regard as milestones on the path toward their ultimate goal; the end of dictatorship. In stark contrast, non-activists often resorted to repetitive phrases such as "*tout est normal*" or "*on n'a pas à se plaindre*" or "*c'est partout pareil*" highlighting a passive acceptance of the status quo. One of the non-activists told me some interesting information about the general situation of Algeria and I think it is noteworthy to write it here:

Les gens ici ont perdu espoir pour la plupart, alors ils se tournent vers Dieu pour qu'ils puissent au moins sauver leurs Akhirah [l'au-delà]. Les gens sont pauvres, sans espoir, sans objectifs précis. Il y a beaucoup de problèmes, mais d'un autre côté il y a la barakah à travers l'entraide, à travers les sadaqas [aumônes]. Donc on survit ici, mais on ne veut pas manquer notre chance d'aller au Paradis in sha Allah. On passe une vie sans réflexion en fait. Il faut réfléchir et méditer sur notre situation, mais après on explique tout par le destin et tout est compliqué.

Navigating Challenges: The Singular Barrier to Activism

Elderly activists continue to hold strong beliefs and convictions about their political views and historical assessments. They are not ready to stop anytime soon, and they perceive institutional ways as blocked. Mr. Malawi¹⁸⁴ says:

En ce moment et surtout depuis 2011, la seule réponse possible au pouvoir c'est la rue. La seule issue de la répression, la persécution, le clientélisme, le patronage, les pots-de-vin ça reste uniquement la rue parce que toutes les voies institutionnelles sont bloquées par le pouvoir.

¹⁸⁴ Mr. Malawi, born in 1955, is part of the upper middle class. He identifies as a communist. The interview took place in his car on January 17th, 2022.

Activists continue to participate in protests whenever they can, and they continue to organize with their activist network. However, they all complain about one specific hindrance that disturbs them profoundly. Mrs. Nafisa¹⁸⁵ says:

La prison! si c'est seulement vous qui payez ça ce n'est pas un problème! Mais lorsque c'est votre famille, c'est ça la difficulté. Personne ne veut que ses proches souffrent. Nous, en tant que militant et militantes, souffrir ça ne veut rien dire, mais c'est notre entourage qui souffre, c'est nos familles et nos amis. Alors on se pose des questions. Moi par exemple, on m'a empêché de travailler, on a mis des gendarmes devant ma maison. J'ai voulu quitter le pays, mais ce n'est pas possible non plus parce que s'ils ne me trouvent pas, ils trouveront ma famille.

Mrs. Salama¹⁸⁶ has the same line of thought saying:

On ne décide pas de militer sans payer. On ne décide pas de militer sous une dictature sans recevoir des coups. Mais lorsque c'est votre entourage qui paie à votre place, lorsque ce sont eux qui reçoivent des coups, on se sent coupable et on se demande si on devrait continuer.

Mr. Ansar¹⁸⁷ also said :

Qu'ils me jettent en prison je n'ai aucun problème! C'est sûr que je suis plus utile à l'extérieur qu'à l'intérieur, et c'est sûr que je n'aimerais pas passer mes derniers jours en prison vu mon âge. Mais ils ne vont pas m'attaquer directement. Ils vont menacer ma famille et mes amis. C'est ça qui freine les militants.

Moral considerations play a significant role in shaping their decisions regarding activist engagement. While their primary goal is to instigate change, the unsettling realization that their loved ones endure hardships due to their activism gives them pause, causing a hesitancy to persist in their battle. As they age and settle into retirement, emotions tend to have a stronger impact. The awareness that their activism may cause difficulties for their loved ones becomes more prominent,

¹⁸⁵ Mrs. Nafisa, born in 1958, is a lifelong activist who participated in a lot of protest activities since the 1980s. She is part of the upper middle class. She spent 3 months in prison in 1987. The interview took place at the office of a bookstore on February 12th, 2021.

¹⁸⁶ Mrs. Salama, born in 1956, is a lifelong activist who identifies as Amazigh, secular, and Muslim. She is a middle-class citizen. She spent 1 year in prison in 1981. The interview took place on February 8th, 2022, at her workplace office.

¹⁸⁷ Mr. Ansar, 73 years old, is a middle-class citizen who identifies as leftist socialist. He went 9 times to prison being tortured on some occasions. The interview was conducted in his car on December 12th, 2021.

leading to increased hesitation in continuing their efforts. Despite these internal conflicts, none of them have completely abandoned their cause. While there have been phases of relative calm, they consistently remain involved in political events and protest activities aligned with their steadfast political agenda. This resilience underscores their commitment to their ideals, even in the face of personal and emotional challenges.

Imprisonment, far from being a mere individual penal sanction, serves as a potent tool of political repression that profoundly shapes the dynamics of social movements and activism (Cunningham, 2003; Geisser, Karam, Vairel 2006). While incarceration can indeed act as a deterrent, discouraging potential activists and disrupting the organizational structures of a movement, it also has paradoxical effects that can ultimately strengthen resistance (Cunningham, 2003). The experience of imprisonment often deepens the political convictions of detainees, leading to radicalization and the adoption of more aggressive strategies (Geisser, Karam, Vairel, 2006). Moreover, it can trigger waves of solidarity that boost internal cohesion, as activists and supporters rally in response to perceived injustices (Fillieule, 1997). The image of political prisoners as martyrs further legitimizes the cause, enhancing the movement's moral authority and attracting broader support (Cunningham, 2003). Thus, imprisonment operates as a double-edged sword - while it seeks to suppress dissent, it can also fuel mobilization, radicalization, and legitimation, inadvertently amplifying the very movements it aims to weaken (Cunningham, 2003; Geisser, Karam, Vairel, 2006; Charbit & Ricordeau, 2020).

As for my sample, imprisonment is not seen as a deterrent by lifelong activists themselves. Out of 12 activists who experienced incarceration, 5 endured tortures. What is particularly intriguing is that they view this ordeal with pride, considering it a sacrifice they willingly made for their cause. As I have mentioned, while I have not encountered anyone who abandoned their militant career,

several activists did mention losing friends along the way, with two participants citing imprisonment as a contributing factor. Regarding their involvement in the Hirak, two of the research participants were imprisoned and later released under specific conditions.

When it comes to gender issues, it is possible to talk about other obstacles for women to sustain an activist trajectory. In Algeria, the internalization of the gendered hierarchy is rooted in and nourished by multiple socialization agents such as the family, religious discourses, and the media (Mebtouche, 2010). It seems, however, that advancing age marks a pivotal juncture for women as they emancipate themselves from the control of their husbands. Yet, there is a lament about the belated realization of this newfound freedom. The evolution of their role as activists further underscores this transformation. Mrs. Linda explains her situation as follows :

Aujourd'hui les choses sont très différentes par rapport à mon époque. Durant les années 70 on était bien, mais après il y a eu une dégradation très grave de la situation en général. Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui vivent assez bien quand même. Moi je n'ai rien vécu de tout cela (les cellulaires, les sorties, les clubs). Ce que j'ai vécu c'est une jeunesse sans vie. À 25 ans la montée du FIS et 30 ans c'est le terrorisme pendant 10 ans. Super pour la génération née en 1960 n'est-ce pas? Alors imaginez la jeunesse que j'ai vécue. J'étais à la maison, et je suis restée à la maison. J'ai fait des études qui n'ont servi absolument à rien puisque je n'ai jamais pratiqué la profession. J'ai toujours été femme à la maison à cause de mon mari. Je ne regrette rien bien sûr, mais les choses auraient pu tourner autrement si on n'avait pas vécu toute cette histoire de terrorisme.

Mme. Mina ¹⁸⁸says:

Malheureusement quand on est une femme il n'y a personne qui demande notre avis sur quoi que ce soit. On ne fait que manger, boire, faire nos besoins, faire nos prières et la routine continue. C'est pour ça qu'il ne faut jamais cesser de se battre pour que toutes les femmes puissent étudier et être libérées de l'oppression qu'elles subissent de la part des hommes.

¹⁸⁸ Mrs. Mina is a housewife who tried to work on multiple occasions. She has very little work experience and it is all in informal forms. Although she is not an activist and never engaged in social movements, she regrets her narrow experience as a woman in Algeria. She expresses regret due to missing a lot of opportunities. She wants to rectify the situation by pushing her daughters to study the most they can. Mrs. Mina is part of the lower middle class. The interview took place at her house on December 23rd, 2021.

Both women engaged in activism and those who were not actively involved demonstrate an awareness of their family and societal circumstances. Non-activist women expressed contentment during their youth and showed a more tolerant attitude toward traditions and cultural practices. Despite the activists' desire to reshape women's roles in society, their efforts remained constrained. Unfortunately, the limited number of female research participants prevented me from identifying any distinct repertoire of contention unique to women activists, as compared to their male counterparts.

Understanding non-activist perspectives

I have already mentioned that politicization and mental data are crucial features to consider when it comes to activism. People who have accepted the legitimacy of the FLN, accepted the heroism of the martyrs and combatants, and approved the identity of the state are unlikely to participate in protest events. Moreover, the non-activists responded that they were reluctant to participate because they did not know activists and were suspicious of their goals and/or they thought it was a foreign meddling (mostly France) to destroy Algerian unity. Additionally, being employed by the government, affiliating with civil organizations that lack autonomy from governmental control and having family members in government employment diminish the probability of sustaining activism as a lifelong endeavor.

It is true that non-activists did not participate in the Hirak. However, they shared their perspectives, and some of them are enlightening as to what prevents them from supporting the movement and participating. Mr. Larbi's¹⁸⁹ perspective is as follows :

Avec le pouvoir qui sert à tous, pourquoi vouloir changer? Je ne comprends pas les gens qui demandent le départ de tous. Mais vous voulez faire quoi

¹⁸⁹ Mr. Larbi, born in 1952, is a middle-class individual whose father was both a moujahid and shaheed. He spent the majority of his life working in formal employment as a cement specialist in the construction industry. He is apolitical, showing little interest in politics, and has never taken part in any protests. Typically, he supports the regime and prefers to steer clear of political discussions. The interview was conducted in a quiet café on February 4th, 2022.

exactement? Vous voulez que les impérialistes reviennent en Algérie? Mais non il faut protéger ce système, il faut protéger l'ANP et il faut protéger le peuple algérien. Nous sommes tous d'abord et avant tout des citoyens algériens. Ce qu'il faut, c'est un régime qui est juste. Oui parfois il y a des dérives, parfois il y a des gens malhonnêtes. Mais si on regarde l'ensemble, le système fonctionne. L'habitation est subventionnée, l'instruction est gratuite, la nourriture n'est pas chère. Mais qu'est-ce qu'ils demandent de plus ces gens-là?

Mr. Radwane¹⁹⁰ relies on history to keep his position against the Hirak:

Nous les Algériens on a été victime de l'impérialisme colonial pendant plus de 100 ans. Pendant 100 ans ils nous ont écrabouillés, ils nous ont maltraités, ils nous ont massacrés. De tout ça c'est le FLN qui nous a sauvés et maintenant tous ces jeunes qui ne connaissent pas l'histoire, qui ne savent pas ce qu'est le respect, qui ne savent pas c'est quoi la guerre, ils ont tous tourné le dos aux vrais héros de notre histoire. Le FLN doit rester pour continuer à protéger le peuple. Aussi il ne faut jamais oublier que la révolution algérienne a été globale et menée du Nord au Sud, de l'Est à l'Ouest et même au-delà des frontières par un peuple anonyme! Le FLN gardait l'anonymat, l'organisation devait rester secrète. Alors ces gens-là ils ont fait des efforts pour construire le pays. Ils ont combattu dans les montagnes, dans les villages. Des fois, ils n'avaient rien à manger ou à s'habiller. Mais ils ont fini par gagner la guerre parce qu'ils étaient déterminés à gagner la guerre et déclarer l'Indépendance.

Mr. Slimane¹⁹¹ :

Le Hirak je ne veux pas en parler parce que je ne crois pas au Hirak. Je ne les connais pas ces gens-là. Il y a des séparatistes qui veulent séparer l'Algérie. Il y a des harkis qui veulent le retour des Français. Il y a des Islamistes qui veulent terroriser le pays. On est déjà tous musulmans, on va à la prière, on fait le Carême, mais pourquoi ils veulent la charia je ne comprends pas? La charia ça se pratique à la maison, on ne peut pas obliger tout le monde à être pareil. L'Algérie est déjà un pays libre, il faut lui laisser le temps de se développer. Il faut que la nouvelle génération prenne la relève avec plus d'ardeurs. Mais la jeunesse, je n'ai pas d'espoir moi pour elle.

¹⁹⁰ Mr. Radwane, born in 1952, is a middle-class individual who completed only primary school before leaving to enter the business world with his older brothers. When they reached adulthood, they departed from their uncle's shoe store to establish their own clothing business. Mr. Radwane supports the regime and prefers to avoid anything unfamiliar. The interview was held at a café on February 3rd, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Mr. Slimane, born in 1948, is a non-activist who supports the regime, taking pride in his heritage as the son of a mujahid. Although he is apolitical, he perceives threats everywhere, viewing France, Harkis, and any form of foreign interference as adversaries. He considers Algeria to be a free and democratic nation. While he belongs to the middle class, he has held various informal jobs and worked as a taxi driver for over 25 years. The interview was conducted at my home on February 2nd, 2022.

Mrs. Amira¹⁹² :

C'est un mouvement pacifiste, un mouvement qui est contre la violence, un mouvement qui veut l'approbation de toute la population algérienne. Par contre je ne supporte pas les néo-hirakistes qui veulent tout détruire sur leurs passages, ceux et celles qui veulent la séparation de la Kabylie, ceux et celles qui mènent un combat pour la laïcité. La laïcité, c'est le taghout [tyrant, oppressor]. Ce sont des ignorants, des kouffars. Comment une personne peut-elle être laïque et musulman en même temps? C'est impossible. C'est tout à fait impossible et inacceptable.

Mr. Chabane¹⁹³

Le hirak a été une manipulation comme en 1988. Il a même été béni par Tebboune. Le Hirak a été la création des services secrets. Comme à chaque fois qu'ils veulent faire quelque chose de moche, ils commencent par créer les conditions de sa justification. Pour le Hirak c'était pour se débarrasser de Bouteflika, qui leur a tenu la dragée haute. C'était le seul président, quoi qu'on en dise, à être vraiment indépendant de la junte militaro-mafieuse. Ceci dit, une bonne frange de la société y a cru naïvement. Donc, oui, le Hirak a été la création des services secrets. Les Algériens s'en sont approprié, croyant naïvement, abattre un despote grabataire, qui n'avait rien de despote, comparativement à ce qu'on voit maintenant. Le peuple s'est fait duper comme en 88, en 99 et maintenant avec le Hirak. Voilà! La boucle est bouclée et on continue comme si de rien n'était.

The perspectives shared by Mr. Larbi, Mr. Radwane, Mr. Slimane, and Mrs. Amira illustrate some of the main reasons why certain Algerians did not support the Hirak movement of 2019. Their views reveal concerns about maintaining stability, historical reverence, and the preservation of national unity. Mr. Larbi emphasizes the perceived benefits of the current system, like subsidized

¹⁹² Mrs. Amira, born in 1951, has a deep connection to Islam shaped by her upbringing. She opposes any form of rebellion, as her parents were killed during the war for independence. While she takes pride in her parents and the achievement of independence, she desires a peaceful life without disruption. Although she is apolitical, she acknowledges the FLN as the sole legitimate governing authority. The interview was conducted at her home on January 13th, 2022.

¹⁹³ Mr. Chabane, born in 1952, is a non-activist who has never participated in social movements or any organizations. He is a firm supporter of both the army and the regime. The interview took place at his home on February 1st, 2022. He lives in a precarious situation due to informal menial work throughout his life.

housing and free education, suggesting that the risks of change outweigh the potential gains. Mr. Radwane's stance is rooted in historical memory, with loyalty to the FLN and the sacrifices of the liberation struggle, portraying the Hirak as a challenge to the legacy of independence. Mr. Slimane expresses distrust towards the movement, associating it with divisive elements, such as Berber secessionists and Islamists, while doubting the readiness of the younger generation to lead. Mrs. Amira supports peaceful protests but draws a firm line against secularism and separatism, viewing them as incompatible with Algerian Islamic values. Mr. Chabane's assertion that the Hirak was manipulated by the regime further illustrates a broader skepticism towards protest as a means for genuine change, suggesting that past experiences of co-optation or disillusionment with reforms fuel a sense of fatalism among some Algerians.

Those who believe that the Algerian regime or foreign powers are in complete control of the movement often grant these entities an exaggerated level of influence, perceiving them as all-powerful and infallible. This mindset can lead to a reliance on conspiracy theories, which introduces cognitive dissonance and distorts their understanding of the movement's complexities. Moreover, fears of foreign interference and a perceived lack of credible alternatives to the existing regime further reinforced their reluctance to engage in protest.

The data suggests that a significant portion of the population remains satisfied with the status quo, particularly regarding the government's provision of basic services. Collectively, these perspectives highlight a fear of instability, skepticism about the movement's intentions, and a strong attachment to the established order. While the Hirak movement mobilized a substantial segment of Algerian society, the perspectives of non-participants highlight the enduring appeal of the nationalist narrative, and the challenges faced by those seeking to promote alternative visions for the country.

Practical Logic and Social Class

In the first section of this chapter, I have shown that activism is maintained through the continuity of an activist trajectory, guided by a habitus that structures actions and choices. This habitus shapes specific preferences while delineating the boundaries of what is perceived as possible or impossible, reflecting the dispositions internalized through past experiences. This section underscores the profound connection between habitus and social class. The way habitus responds to specific situations is deeply influenced by one's educational and economic capital, which not only define social class but also shape and constrain the individual's social trajectory (Bourdieu, 1979).

A social class is inherently tied to the formation of habitus. As such, discussing habitus without considering social class is impossible. Bourdieu (1980) encapsulates the essence of a class with this statement:

Les conditionnements associés à une classe particulière de conditions d'existence produisent des habitus, systèmes de disposition durable et transposable, structures structurées prédisposées à fonctionner comme structure structurante [...] (p.88). La classe sociale (en soi) est inséparablement une classe d'individus biologique dotée du même habitus comme système de disposition commun à tous les produits des mêmes conditionnements (p.100).

The boundaries of habitus are always shaped by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production (Bourdieu, 1980). Within this framework, the situations agents encounter naturally provoke a spontaneous alignment of their dispositions, reflecting the internal logic of their shared conditioning. Consequently, distinct conditions lead to the development of specific systems of dispositions, particularly in relation to the authoritarian regime and military power. These systems of dispositions shape how individuals respond to and navigate the structures of power, deeply influencing their actions, beliefs, and practices within such a political environment.

Bourdieu (1980) argues that the transmission of various forms of capital - economic, social, cultural, and symbolic - across generations plays a critical role in maintaining social inequalities. Families, led by the head of the household, strategically manage this inheritance to secure their place in the social hierarchy. Marital choices, work decisions, and the handling of inheritance are all part of deliberate or unconscious strategies to preserve or elevate their status. As a result, individuals are not only confined to a particular historical location but often remain trapped in a social class for their entire lifetime, with their position deeply rooted in historical and familial legacy. This perpetuates a rigid social structure, where mobility is severely limited. The transmission of generational knowledge encompasses more than just memories; it also includes the conveyance of associated values, emotions, and beliefs (Tint, 2010).

Social class shapes one's perspectives, opportunities, and motivations, thereby significantly influencing the likelihood of sustaining activism as a lifelong endeavor. While past experiences do contribute to shaping one's worldview and actions, the enduring impact of social class conditions - such as access to resources, social networks, and a sense of shared identity - profoundly affects the propensity to engage in social movements. This underscores the importance of considering the structural and class-based factors that drive social and political participation.

[The sociological problem of class in Algeria](#)

Scholars usually identify four distinct classes in the Algerian class structure: the peasantry, the proletariat (working class), the petty bourgeoisie (middle class), and the bourgeoisie (elite) (Bourdieu, 1963; Galissot, 1969; Lazreg, 1976). Hence, Algerian seniors do not form a homogeneous group and can be categorized into four distinct groups (Mimouni, 2013). The first consists of the privileged and affluent, those who own productive assets or receive substantial pensions. The second group benefits from family support; though their financial resources may be limited, their basic needs are met. The third category faces hardship, either due to extreme poverty,

social isolation, or economic instability. The final group is in severe distress, including the homeless, wanderers, and those suffering from untreated illnesses (Mimouni, 2013, p. 8).

In Europe, the middle class has primarily economic roots, while in Algeria, its origins are more political. Unlike the profit-oriented middle classes in Europe, Algeria's middle class revolves around securing state-provided benefits (Ouaïssa, 2018). The state sector has played a pivotal role in fostering the rise of the middle classes, utilizing rent either directly or indirectly through the private sector (Abdi, 1985).

The oil boom of the 1970s significantly strengthened the middle class's loyalty to the regime, as the rentier economy turned Algerians into clients and subjects of the state. The middle class of the 1970s had secured its economic status through state policies on employment, housing, and education, while ideologically, it was shaped by a nationalism that combined pan-Arabist (sometimes Baathist) and developmentalist modernist ideals (Ouaïssa, 2018). However, the clientelist relationship between the middle class and the state began to weaken when oil prices fell, causing Algeria's oil revenues to decrease by nearly half between 1980 and 1992 (Ouaïssa, 2018). With Bouteflika's ascent to power, coinciding with another surge in international oil prices, the middle class shifted firmly in support of the regime, becoming its main base.

In contrast to more economically developed societies, Algeria's limited industrialization has hindered the middle class and the proletariat from assuming a dominant role within the social structure. This lack of industrial advancement diminishes their functional significance and weakens their influence in class dynamics (Galissot, 1969). Regardless of the significance the middle classes may attain in a dependent society such that of Algeria, their fundamental characteristic remains one of complete subordination - both in terms of their social reality and their function (Abdi, 1985). They are perpetually entangled in relationships of dependency that shape

their very existence, leaving them inherently weak and reliant on state policies for their survival and influence.

According to Galissot (1969), a “proletarian intelligentsia” (p. 218), a specific fringe of the educated working class, who has a form of political and intellectual consciousness are distinguished from the rest of the working class by their ability to articulate the demands of the working class while playing an intermediary role between them and the political or economic elites. Although they experience a latent conflict with the petty bourgeoisie due to issues of gentrification and privilege, this intelligentsia remains open to revolutionary narratives advocated by the middle classes. There is therefore potential for collaboration between the upper segments of the working class and the middle class in demanding both economic and political reforms.

In the Third World, the influence of a caste (the bourgeoisie) is particularly evident within the public sector, where civil servants often form a cohesive group seeking to assert its collective identity (Abdi, 1985). In the Algerian context, this elite not only embodies these practices but also reinforces patron-client relationships with state authorities, ensuring their privileged position while maintaining their influence within the sociopolitical hierarchy. This group demonstrates a pronounced respect for state institutions and traditional values, coupled with a strong desire for stability and continuity.

According to Muhammad Saib Musette (2013), Algeria’s upper-middle class (superior segment of the petty bourgeoisie) occupies a significant position within the social hierarchy. This class includes individuals in high-ranking public administration roles, members of liberal professions such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, and engineers, as well as entrepreneurs, and both urban and rural landowners. Pierre Bourdieu (1979) refers to this group as the “petite bourgeoisie nouvelle” characterized by its distinct cultural and social practices.

Within this class, those with substantial cultural capital often display refined tastes and interests, such as a passion for cinema, signaling their aspirations toward cultural distinction. Women in the upper-middle class frequently challenge traditional norms, prioritizing effective considerations over conventional expectations (Bourdieu, 1979). In doing so, they assert both aesthetic ambitions and a desire to appear “liberated” from the ethical taboos historically imposed on their gender (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 62).

The middle class (*petty bourgeoisie*) is thus marked by internal divisions that reflect broader social stratifications. On one side are artisans and small merchants, whose positions are primarily sustained by economic capital often underpinned by state support. On the other side are the more privileged members of this class, who share significant similarities with the elite in terms of education, income, and cultural capital. This group often contrasts sharply with those aligned with traditional political organizations, illustrating the intricate and layered nature of Algeria’s social hierarchy.

As for this research, a compelling observation emerges from the contrast in class backgrounds: while non-activists come from diverse social strata, activists consistently hail from Algeria’s *petty bourgeoisie*, and more specifically the upper-middle class. Predominantly well instructed and highly educated, lifelong activists are secularly oriented middle-class citizens aimed to change the Algerian state-society relations. While excluded from decision-making power dominated by the state-elite, activists possess significant assets - financial resources, credible and well-argued critical perspectives, and strong connections with civic organizations. Often drawn from the upper segments of the middle class, they value professional autonomy and place particular emphasis on maintaining their independence both cognitive and financial.

Building on social class sociology in Algeria, and by adding my sample analysis, I conclude that it is essential to recognize the existence of a “marginalized elite” which finds itself in a state of latent conflict with the state elite. While it resembles the elite in terms of education and status, it critiques elite privileges and the clientelist system. The ideologies advanced by the marginalized elite, represented in the upper middle class, can be pivotal in mobilizing lower class populations. This dominated fraction of the elite is marginalized by the state-elite due to their occidentalized elitism and intellectualism. While the “proletarian intelligentsia” can align its political efforts with the middle classes, the “marginalized elite” refuses to collaborate with the state-elite. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the complexities of political action and social change in Algeria. Understanding how these class divisions operate allows for a more nuanced analysis of the factors driving societal transformation and political engagement in the country.

According to Prisuta (2004), awareness of inequalities as well as the fact that older people have more financial resources can motivate them to participate. The interviews support this finding because the activists pursue societal goals rather than individual ones, and they are usually more educated and wealthier than non-activists. According to Barrett (2005), Americans aged fifty and over who are highly engaged have higher annual incomes than their less socially engaged counterparts in their local community. The interviews support the idea for Algerians as well, first because of higher retirement allocations for activists in general, and second because of already accumulated wealth during their workforce period.

Elderly political activists typically enjoy greater autonomy over their financial resources compared to non-activists who might depend on their family members. This economic independence provides activists with the flexibility to be less dependent on their children and grandchildren, allowing them to sustain their commitment and involvement in their cause without requiring the

approval of their offspring. Often, relatives urge them to retire from political activities and focus on personal leisure time. Yet, owning their own home, cars, and having financial stability empowers them as independent citizens.

The participation dynamics within social movements in Algeria can be understood through a socioeconomic lens, revealing distinct patterns among different strata of society. At the lower end of the economic spectrum, individuals facing poverty often find themselves ensnared in a web of dependency upon state provisions and familial support networks. This reliance fosters a sense of entrapment, wherein individuals lack the autonomy necessary to engage in collective action. Mrs. Karima¹⁹⁴ is an illustrative example for her whole life:

Je me souviens de la fois où j'ai dit à mon père que je voulais continuer l'école. Mon père m'a regardée avec mépris et m'a dit que ma place était à la maison. Ce sont les garçons qui pouvaient s'éduquer. Les filles devaient servir la famille et attendre le mariage. Les années 60, on habitait à Ghardaïa, c'était très religieux, très traditionnel. Je me suis mariée à l'âge de 16 ans. Mon mari m'a emmené ici à Tizi Ouzou. Avant je servais mes parents et après je servais mon mari. Lui il travaillait, parfois il allait même travailler dans d'autres wilayas et je restais seule à la maison pendant des semaines. C'est lui qui décidait de tout et moi je l'écoutais parce qu'à mes yeux il était un homme bien. Après on a eu des enfants, j'avais 20 ans quand j'ai eu mon premier garçon. [...] Dès que je partage une idée, je me fais critiquer, alors en tant que femme on apprend à se taire. Je te dirais que c'est la même chose pour toutes les femmes ici. Par exemple, je voulais sortir marcher quand j'ai vu tout le monde sortir, mais mes garçons m'ont empêché et m'ont dit de ne pas me mêler de ces affaires. Je vous laisse deviner ma jeunesse.

Moreover, a pervasive lack of trust towards broader societal structures further inhibits their willingness to participate, as they fear abandonment should they venture beyond the safety net of familial and governmental support. Their uncertain outlook on the future and their day-to-day existence prevents members of the poor classes from making any long-term plans or investments.

¹⁹⁴ Mrs. Karima, born in 1952, openly shared much of her personal life, feeling a strong need to express her thoughts to someone who would truly listen. She is apolitical and has never had a life beyond her family relationships. She feels regret about her past, as she sacrificed her own dreams to satisfy her parents, husband, and children. Currently, she belongs to the lower middle class and relies on her children for support since her husband passed away six years ago. The interview was conducted at her home on January 25th, 2022.

This lack of stability and resources significantly hinders their ability to achieve lasting independence and pursue sustainable political activities. Moreover, while members of the marginalized elite perceive the state as an entity that must evolve to better serve society, those in the lower strata often attribute excessive power to it, undermining their own agency and stifling their potential for change. This disparity in perception creates a critical divide: the marginalized elite advocate for regime change, recognizing the state's flaws and potential for transformation, whereas the lower classes, overwhelmed by the state's perceived dominance, feel disempowered and hesitant to challenge the status quo, sometimes falling into conspiracy theories.

Dependency on family members can hinder activism just as much as state control. Still today, it is socially expected and valued that the elderly live under the same roof as their children (Negab and Ouadah, 2020). However, family members often urge lifelong activists to abandon their political pursuits and prioritize personal matters, creating a significant obstacle for those dedicated to their cause. This pressure from family can be as restrictive as any external constraint, making it difficult for activists to continue their work. Mr. Malawi tells about his situation:

Pour mes enfants je suis vieux, pour ma femme je suis aussi vieux, donc je devrais arrêter de me mêler de politique et rester à la maison. Mais moi, j'ai encore beaucoup de choses à donner à cette cause, je ne peux pas me dire ça y'est je suis vieux présentement et tout arrêter. Ce serait vraiment absurde de faire une telle chose. Avant les enfants me disaient d'abandonner tout et prendre soin de ma santé et de mon bien-être. Mais m'éloigner du militantisme, c'est ça qui nuit à ma santé et ça les jeunes ne le comprennent pas.

The wealthiest members of society (state-elite) often eschew involvement in social movements due to their entrenched positions within the clientelist networks of the ruling regime. Leveraging their connections, they navigate governmental spheres with ease, accelerating their business endeavors through preferential treatment and access to lucrative resources. Their familial ties to positions of power further cement their allegiance to the status quo, as they reap the benefits of a

system designed to cater to their interests (Hachemoui, 2013; 2016; Addi, 2020; Boumezrag, 2023).

The marginalized elite finds itself uniquely positioned within this socio-political landscape. Neither reliant upon state provisions, like the middle class or the proletariat, nor entrenched within the elite circles of power, they face the brunt of systemic injustices on a daily basis. However, their relative financial stability¹⁹⁵ and cognitive sovereignty affords them the agency to disentangle themselves from familial and state dependencies, thereby enabling greater autonomy in their decision-making processes. It is noteworthy that certain activists, despite having opportunities to exploit the system, have chosen to refrain from association with a corrupt clientelist regime, electing instead to engage in acts of protest and dissent.

In essence, the participation dynamics within social movements are heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors, with the poorest and wealthiest segments of society often rendered inert by their respective constraints, dependencies, and privileges. It is the upper middle class, untethered by the shackles of dependency yet keenly aware of systemic injustices, which emerges as the driving force behind transformative social change. Activists possess the qualifications to join the ruling elite or potentially improve their living conditions if they were in a democratic environment as they already possess wealth that could be invested. However, they reject being part of a regime they deem illegitimate.

The most distinctive feature observed among the activists I have conversed with, is their inclination to abstain from involvement in state bureaucracy, refrain from employment within governmental institutions, and eschew leveraging clientelist opportunities that could increase their reliance towards the regime. They avoid contact with state authorities and even distance themselves from

¹⁹⁵ Having held well-paying formal jobs for most of their lives, particularly in legal professions within the private sector and entrepreneurship, they can maintain their living standards through higher retirement pensions.

family members aligned with the regime. This preference stems from their perception of the regime as lacking legitimacy but also their fear of being co-opted by the regime. Mr. Mourad¹⁹⁶ explains this behaviour with the following words:

Le militantisme exige de faire des sacrifices au nom de la loyauté envers ses propres valeurs et de la quête de l'harmonie intérieure. Si le régime est illégitime à mes yeux, je ne vote pas, je ne lui rends pas service et je veille à ce qu'il change de fond en comble. Si j'agis contre mes valeurs et mes convictions, j'opprime mon esprit.

Although many engage in protests, strikes, or social movements, it is the marginalized elite that has the means to sustain activism as a lifelong commitment.

Unlike traditional Marxist interpretations where class conflict hinges on control over the means of production, the Algerian scenario showcases a unique configuration. Social conflicts in Algeria often revolved around issues of resource distribution and access to state-controlled benefits, rather than purely economic production relations (Bennoune, 1988). The legacy of colonial policies, combined with post-independence economic strategies, shaped a class structure where the traditional working class, peasantry, and emerging middle class had different experiences and forms of political consciousness (Bennoune, 1988). The marginalized elite, while not necessarily in direct conflict with other classes in terms of ownership, finds itself at the forefront of dissent due to its aspirations for political reform, social justice, and democratic principles. Consequently, understanding the Algerian opposition requires a nuanced lens that appreciates the interplay between class dynamics, political structures, and socio-economic aspirations within the context of authoritarian rule.

¹⁹⁶ Mr. Mourad, born in 1948, is a socialist Muslim. He is a middle-class citizen who faced many injustices in his career as a businessman because he claims that he is not a member of a certain elite who controls the import-export industry. The interview took place in his car on January 20th, 2022.

Conclusion:

This chapter initially demonstrated that retirement, despite offering increased biographical availability, does not necessarily foster activism if individuals did not acquire political socialization and robust networks during their youth. Social dispositions of activism are indeed deeply ingrained within different classes and class fractions. These dispositions, formed early in life, often resist change and perpetuate established patterns of behavior and political beliefs, making it difficult to break free from the comfort zones and networks that reinforce them. It is not that older adults are incapable of learning or changing, but their continued engagement in the same social circles, environments, and geographical areas, as well as their location in social and economic structures, significantly diminishes the likelihood of altering their political and social behaviors. This persistence in familiar milieus restricts their exposure to new ideas and affects their participation in activism.

One prominent theory guiding the examination of participation in social movements argues that the fundamental process through which individuals become involved in and support a specific movement is essentially a socially constructed one (Klandermans, 1992). Once individuals have been integrated into formal or informal networks, “they find themselves in an interactive structure that enables them to define and redefine their interpretive frames, facilitates the process of identity-building and identity strengthening, and creates or solidifies political consciousness towards a given protest issue” (Passy, 2003, p. 24). In simpler terms, people join social movements through actively creating meaning, communicating, negotiating, and making decisions on their own and with others. Equally crucial, scholars emphasize, are the emotional, moral, and cultural aspects they bring along with them (Jasper, 1997).

This chapter focused on the class variable and showed that low income, job instability, and financial loss, as well as excessive wealth that ties individuals to the regime, significantly hinder

participation in social movements. Middle class citizens, especially the marginalized elite who have the resources and knowledge to engage with the state, are the most likely to participate in anti-regime activism. These individuals can effectively challenge the status quo due to their relative economic stability and access to crucial information and networks. The middle class also facilitates engagement with peers of the same social standing, fostering a supportive network that further empowers their activism.

Bourdieu (1979) asserts that *“l’inconscient de classe inculqué par les conditions d’existence est un principe de production de jugements et d’opinions plus stable que les principes politiques explicitement constitués, parce que, précisément, il est relativement indépendant de la conscience”* (p. 540). In other words, the ingrained habits, dispositions, and ways of thinking that come from one’s social class and life conditions - is more stable and enduring than explicitly taught political beliefs. This is because the class unconscious operates beneath the level of conscious awareness, influencing judgments and opinions more deeply and consistently than consciously held political principles, which can change more easily. In essence, Bourdieu highlights the powerful and lasting influence of our social backgrounds and conditions on our thoughts and behaviors, often more so than the ideas and beliefs we consciously adopt.

For both activists and non-activists, their personal goals, whether political or social, have remained consistent, yet they have evolved to include their offspring in the equation, aspiring to create an environment where the younger generation can flourish and lead prosperous lives. During the elderly stage, factors such as gender, ethnicity, and class persist in significantly shaping individuals’ experiences, much like they have throughout various stages of the life cycle. Although women seem to experience more freedom and respect, their old age prevents them from fully taking advantage of their new status.

All the respondents have observed considerable transformations in their lifetimes, and despite Algeria not progressing as rapidly toward full democracy as it seemed in the late 1980s, activists maintain confidence that change will occur sooner or later. Their optimism for substantial changes endures. This unwavering belief, perhaps more than any other factor, explains the persistence of their dedication. Many of them are now in their seventh decade of life and no longer anticipate witnessing a democratic Algeria in their lifetime. However, this does not diminish their commitment, as they believe future generations will eventually enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Unlike many others of their age who feel they no longer belong to society, activists continue to have a strong purpose in life, a reason for living. They have sustained their commitment to socialism, and their commitment, in turn, has sustained them. However, non-activists had no hope or no eagerness to change the political situation.

Activists in general persist in their efforts for political and societal causes, refraining from withdrawing from society, and maintaining their ongoing commitment. One could argue that elderly activists actively contribute to and derive benefits from social capital, which encompasses the connections and relationships among individuals in various networks and communities. This continuous participation not only strengthens the collective resolve but also ensures the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience, which is indispensable for the resilience and adaptability of activist movements.

“Let me warn you, Icarus, to take the middle way, in case the moisture weighs down your wings, if you fly too low, or if you go too high, the sun scorches them. Travel between the extremes. And I order you not to aim towards Bootes, the Herdsman, or Helice, the Great Bear, or towards the drawn sword of Orion: take the course I show you!”
Ovid, VIII.183-235

Conclusion

Since independence, Algerians have endured repeated cycles of deprivation - political repression, insecurity, and even shortages of basic necessities. While these conditions triggered scattered protests over the years, they never coalesced into a nationwide movement - until the Hirak (Dris-Ait Hamadouche, 2021). What made this moment different was not simply the accumulation of grievances, but the intolerable fusion of humiliation and injustice. Like the Arab Spring uprisings across the region, the Hirak was fueled by a profound demand for dignity, justice, and freedom - universal ideals that transcend time and geography (Dris-Ait Hamadouche, 2021).

The Hirak laid bare a structural failure of Algeria’s political system. A regime responsible for organizing political, economic, and social life had instead grown detached from the people it claimed to serve. Under Bouteflika’s fourth term, the ruling elite no longer saw Algerians as citizens, but as clients - consumers of state patronage rather than participants in public life (Peyroulou, 2020). While a narrow elite thrived on privilege and influence, the vast majority faced marginalization, humiliation, and systemic exclusion (Dris-Ait Hamadouche, 2021).

While the Arab world erupted in uprisings during 2010–2011, Algeria appeared to remain on the sidelines, seemingly immune to the wave of change (Allal et al., 2021). To shield itself from the wave of unrest, the Algerian regime relied on its immense financial reserves (nearly \$200 billion) to fund temporary appeasement. Public sector salaries were doubled with five years of retroactive pay, and social programs were expanded (Peyroulou, 2020). But these monetary concessions failed to address the deeper, existential demands of the people. Algerians did not merely want higher wages, they wanted recognition, voice, and dignity.

By 2019, the Hirak emerged as the powerful expression of a long-suppressed desire to reclaim political agency and human dignity. Echoing the broader demands of the Arab Uprisings, Algerians called not only for meaningful political and economic reforms, but also for legitimate leadership. In this sense, the Algerian Hirak reflects what Achcar (2013) has termed a “long-term revolutionary process” that began with the Arab uprisings but continues to evolve in various local forms across the region. The Hirak does not mark the end of an era but rather confirms Algeria’s place within an ongoing “era of social revolution”, (Achcar, 2013, p. 8) where societies across the region are collectively renegotiating the meaning of citizenship, power, and legitimacy.

Within this broader revolutionary context, the present study turned its focus to the factors influencing senior individuals’ decision to participate or abstain from involvement in the Hirak. Unraveling the answers to these inquiries contributes significantly to our comprehension of general social movement participation and, more particularly, shed light on the role of the elderly as another category of actors driven by particular motivations in this movement. Given the unexplored dynamics of elderly participation in social movements, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach to vividly illuminate the unique motivations and experiences driving their involvement in the Hirak.

As Mucchielli (2004, p. 77) asserts, while case studies may not offer broad generalization, their true power lies in exposing complex, underexplored phenomena that larger-scale methods often overlook. Their strength is not in statistical representativeness but in their ability to dissect the intricate dynamics of a given context, uncovering hidden mechanisms and causal relationships. Rather than a limitation, this methodological precision makes case studies essential for understanding deeply embedded social processes. By capturing nuance, tracing developments over

time, and revealing the interplay of structural and individual factors, they provide critical insights that more expansive approaches often fail to grasp.

The combined use of generation and habitus offers a powerful lens for examining elderly participation in social movements under authoritarian regimes. These concepts clarify how lifelong socialization, historical memory, and structural conditions shape political engagement. However, relying on them alone risks oversimplification - generation may assume cohort uniformity, while habitus can overstate structural determinism (Mauger, 2011, 2023). Integrating life course theory mitigates these limitations by highlighting how individual trajectories and critical life events influence political behavior. This integration balances the structural emphasis of generation and habitus with a greater focus on individual agency. It enables an analysis of how elderly individuals actively navigate between their historically shaped dispositions and contemporary political opportunities, rather than being passively shaped by past experiences. By refining this theoretical framework, I maintain critical insights regarding the influence of historical memory and embodied dispositions while avoiding overly deterministic conclusions. This approach highlights elderly participation in social movements as a dynamic process - one where historical conditioning interacts with active political agency, a particularly crucial consideration in authoritarian contexts where activism carries significant risks and moral weight.

Life Course Theory (LCT) provides a broad and interdisciplinary framework that integrates individual experiences with political structures, historical developments, and social influences. Life course thinking is an integration of advances in multiple disciplines over the past century in understanding the interconnections, interdependence, and dynamic interactions across time and space of persons and their environments (Verbiest, 2018).

The breadcrumb trail in the literature helped me choosing the theoretical framework that would guide me in my research. The findings that are constantly recurring by social movement scholars show that the relationship between activism and age is typically linear (Fillieule, Tartakowsky, 2013, p. 69), that the propensity to protest regularly increases with age (p. 134), that members of political parties, trade unions and associations are more likely to participate than others (p. 69), that social movements are heterogeneous network structures (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Snow, Zurcher and Eckland-Olson, 1980; Diani and McAdam 2003), and that core political attitudes (party identification and ideological leanings) tend to remain stable all along the life course (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991; Jennings & Niemi, 2014). The literature exposes a golden thread towards a sociology of social movement participation in which continuity, rather than rupture and spontaneity is keyword.

My initial hypothesis stemmed from the notion that shifting political worldviews among the elderly would present a formidable challenge, given the typically linear relationship between activism and age, coupled with the documented stability in core political attitudes. The profound impact and weight of one's generational formative years, with the stabilization and crystallization of the habitus would ultimately keep a person in a certain trajectory of activism or not depending on secondary socialization.

In this concluding chapter I will simply connect the dots of preceding chapters by summarizing my arguments, highlighting core results, and addressing challenges and contributions to research. I will also connect the research to social movements literature so that its broader significance in terms of findings and contribution to the field are clearly exposed and their relevance to advancing knowledge in this area acknowledged. The main findings of this research are concerned with the political views of the generation-units that stemmed from the Independence war (chapter three),

patterns of participation and non-participation (chapter four); paths and barriers that might enable or preclude elderly mobilization (chapter four); understand how lifelong activism is sustained (chapter five), and illustrate how the status of retirement and social class affect elderly activism (chapter five).

Summary of findings

My research aimed to answer the question: “What motivates and enables elderly individuals to engage in social movements in an authoritarian context?” To obtain credible answers for the research inquiry, I have collected valuable data through semi-structured interviews, from December 2021 to February 2022, with thirty-five elderly retired Algerians who decided to either participate in the Hirak movement, or not. This study of retired men and women who experienced either the Independence War, postwar period or both in Algeria during their youth, resulted in a number of suggestive findings.

Generation-Units resulting from the war of independence.

Following independence, the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria split into three groups: (1) those with a strong Islamic and conservative Arab identity, (2) secular, leftist, modernist (counter-hegemonic) individuals, and (3) proponents of the Amazigh cultural movement opposing the state’s Islamization and Arabization. These divisions, rooted in the war and its aftermath, have left enduring tensions in Algerian society. Historical assessments that are not independent of one’s mental data and stratified consciousness significantly influenced participants’ actions, whether in supporting the regime or engaging in activism against it. For instance, whereas Arab Muslims were more likely to support the actual state of affairs, Amazigh and seculars were more likely to support opposition movements. I have concluded that there is indeed a generation that is under the influence of the war of independence as a determining formative experience, determining if its members will take the path towards activism or not.

Algerian institutions took their present shape during the predominantly Arab-nationalist and socialist era of the 1950s and 1960s. The Arab-Islamic identity that defined the newly established republic strongly influenced the political orientations of post-independence generation-units. This foundational State identity shaped the framework within which individuals aligned themselves politically, either embracing or resisting the prevailing cultural ethos. The generation-units formed in the 1960s, rooted in the war of independence, have sustained their identities over time, maintaining continuity through generational transmission.

The societal division of Algerians in terms of ethnic identity and ideological perspectives is not new to literature. Multiple authors have highlighted the tensions and disagreements among various factions of Algeria (Bouchène, 2014; Eddine Chitour, 2022; Stora, 2004; Baamara, 2012). For instance, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou (2020) highlights how it is still difficult to have a critical view of the Algerian war and divert from official history. In my view, identities stiffened, and conflict lines became rigid right after the establishment of the Algerian state. That is the reason why it is a critical turning point for both the State and society.

As of 2022, power in Algeria remains firmly under the control of the military, with oligarchs having carved out their position within this structure. The practices of patronage and clientelism have long infiltrated military institutions, the political elite, and segments of the middle class, reinforcing networks of influence and loyalty. While political Islam no longer holds the dominant position it enjoyed in 1988, it continues to play a significant role in the socio-political landscape (Madoui, 2007).

Algeria, like many countries in the Arab world, is still characterized by traditional values combined with survival values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2023). Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, family, and national pride, while survival values prioritize economic and physical security

over self-expression and quality of life. This positioning reflects a society where traditional cultural norms are maintained and where there is a strong focus on stability and security, rather than on individual autonomy and self-expression. Agency is a big challenge for any movement given structural impediments to citizen participation and a political culture that encourages apathy, quiescence, passivity, and cynicism (Buechler, 2016, p. 152).

Research on 1960s American activists shows that many broke away from dominant social norms, often delaying or foregoing marriage, experiencing higher divorce rates, and having fewer children (Whalen & Flacks, 1982). My findings resonate with this broader pattern of divergence: Algerian activists also tend to distance themselves from dominant cultural expectations, particularly from rigid interpretations of Islam, instead embracing more secular and libertarian lifestyles. In contrast, non-activists largely conform to prevailing norms, which reinforces political passivity and sustains the status quo. This divide underscores that activism in Algeria is largely driven by a small, ideologically distinct minority whose choices reflect broader critiques of social and institutional structures.

While delayed marriage appears to be a defining trait among today's activist generation, this pattern may not persist across future cohorts. Structural barriers such as high unemployment and restrictive housing policies have made it increasingly difficult for young people to form independent households and families (Hadj-Moussa, 2017). These conditions are not just reshaping individual life choices but redefining the social pathways to adulthood - altering the very foundation on which activism and dissent may emerge.

The Algerian society is now characterized by generational shifts in which war heroes, martyrs, and terror might have lost their former efficacy because the youth did not experience any of the significant political events their predecessors did. However, all state institutions are carefully

designed so that the entrance and gradual advance of citizens to civic and political life entails a corresponding increase both in control over thought and behavior through the distribution of rent and subsidies, through education and media propaganda, thus helping to forge new and stronger ties between the individual and the regime. In other words, the state functions as a powerful center of gravity, capable of drawing individuals into its orbit or pushing them away with such force that they are left to collide with the consequences.

Patterns of participation and non-participation

My research indicates that people start understanding their political environment and develop political awareness around the ages of twelve and thirteen. This aligns with existing literature, which shows that by early adolescence, individuals begin to think more ideologically, reason in abstract terms, and view societies and political systems as cohesive entities rather than a collection of isolated groups or individuals (Metzger & Smetana, 2010; Amnå, E., & Zetterberg, 2010). Overall, literature findings indicate that early adolescence might be a key developmental period for the internal dimensions of youth political engagement (Osman, 2020).

Existing literature highlights parental influence on political beliefs and attitudes, yet this influence is neither straightforward nor absolute (Urbatsch, 2014; Johnson, Dawes, 2016; Dotti Sani, Quaranta, 2015). My findings reveal that secondary socialization has a greater impact on elderly individuals' political activism than primary socialization. While family background contributes to political engagement, it is the experiences outside the family - particularly the friendships and social bonds formed during university years - that play a more decisive role. These interactions shape their political involvement, which is largely conducted within their own generational cohort. At the micro level, networks of family and friends influence participation. Where once personal social networks are heavily politicized, chances are high that one also will become politically active. Networks continue to play a crucial role even after formative years because they keep

someone in the loop and gives him the force to continue the same path. Non-activists who lack these social pathways, were more likely to see the costs and risks of participation (fear of sanctions from police forces and secret services) rather than the benefits (democratization, social justice, and freedom of speech). They were also more inclined to accept state propaganda concerning history and the significance of national unity.

Path and barriers to elderly mobilization

An individual's mental data and stratified consciousness emerge as a potent predictor of their inclination towards social movement participation, particularly when supported by adequate resources such as health, wealth, and a robust social network. My investigation further explored the impact of experiences like incarceration and mandatory military service on one's worldview and propensity for activism. Interestingly, while imprisonment may either inhibit or reinforce an individual's ideological stance, I found no clear impact of mandatory military service on later involvement in social movements or even on patriotic sentiments. This could be because activism is a voluntary pursuit, and individuals accept imprisonment as part of their journey. Military service, however, is compulsory, and since individuals do not choose to participate on their own, it might have less influence on their political behavior. Finding oneself in a social space through coercion and through choice certainly makes a difference.

The elderly who abstain from participating in the Hirak movement do so because they are unfamiliar with its activists and distrustful of their objectives, often suspecting foreign interference - particularly from France - aimed at destabilizing Algerian unity. They prioritize peace, tranquility, and family time, believing that personal effort is futile since they doubt any meaningful change will occur. Moreover, most simply support the current regime and wish to avoid any disruptions. As noted by research participants and supported by documented evidence, the majority of individuals born in the 1950s tend to support Algeria's current regime (Moussaoui, 2023).

Extensive research has consistently highlighted that having a personal connection with someone already engaged in social movement activities is one of the most reliable indicators of recruitment into such movements (Gerlach and Hine, 1970; Heirich, 1977; McAdam, 1986; Snow, 1976; Snow et al., 1980; Eschen et al., 1971; Bolton, 1972). As for my research, I conclude that not being politicized, not knowing activists, and the lack of a solid background of participation in protest events and social movements constitute strong barriers to elderly activism. My findings follow this pattern of engagement where knowing activists is indeed a crucial variable.

Not being recruited during one's youth, being employed by the government, affiliating with civil society organizations that lack autonomy from governmental control and having family members in government employment diminish the probability of sustaining activism as a lifelong endeavor. Moreover, being in a financially disadvantaged position and lacking involvement in specific social circles similarly reduces the likelihood of embracing activism.

Religion, in the case of Algeria, a Muslim country, serves as an inhibitor to activism because people are less likely to protest against leaders who permits them to live their religion freely¹⁹⁷.

How is lifelong activism sustained?

Participation in social movements typically commences with a crucial phase of acquainting oneself with political issues and establishing identity, a process referred to by McAdam and Paulsen (1993) as "initial dispositions to participate" (p. 647). During this initial stage, the influence of socialization agents is paramount. These dispositions are both gained and activated through exposure to various protest events and social movements, as well as through the maintenance of specific social networks. In a similar line of thought to Mannheim and Bourdieu, I find that the

¹⁹⁷ The interviews indicate that most Muslims do not desire an Islamic state and are not inclined to protest for increased Islamism, as they practice their faith in their own way. This perspective may differ in other countries, particularly given Algeria's experience during the Black Decade, which influences the viewpoints of those interviewed. Since my sample did not include Islamists, I cannot fully grasp their reasons for advocating for more Islamization in the state.

timing of exposures and experiences during critical periods of development influence life trajectories.

There are unique periods in human growth where social interventions may be particularly sensitive to political activism. As for this research the age bracket of 17 to 25 is crucial. However, dispositions are acquired till the age of 35 as shown in the experiences of Mr. Mourad who faced injustices in his adulthood. There is thus a limited window of time when individuals establish their relationship with ruling authorities. If this opportunity is missed because of lack of resources and network support, then the possibility of embarking in a journey of lifelong activism is lost.

It is evident that both political awareness (politicization) and mental data are indispensable elements of activism. Nevertheless, the development of political attitudes, perception schemes, and behaviors requires sustained nurturing over time to attain a vivid and impactful state. While individuals may undergo changes over their lifetime, the acquired dispositions, persistence of the same social network, affinity within one's circle, and limited physical mobility collectively diminish the likelihood of significant shifts in ideologies, worldviews, and mental data. Belonging to an organization that maintains a degree of independence and autonomy from the state, like the SNAPAP or the SATEF, plays a crucial role in sustaining activism. While activists tend to join autonomous organizations, non-activists are either not eager to join any, or sometimes (although rarely) involved in civic organizations primarily for patronage or clientelist benefits, often seeking support through connections.

Activists' tendency to steer clear of clientelist relationships and reject rent-based systems demonstrates the psychological resilience required to maintain their commitment to activism. Although psychological strength is important for both men and women, personality traits such as courage and assertiveness seem more important especially for women who share a distinct social

reality compared to men. The patriarchal family and state structures in Algeria pose a significant barrier to women activists, as these systems demand they defy deeply entrenched societal norms in their pursuit of radical changes to their roles and status.

Lastly, for lifelong activism to be sustainable throughout an individual's life course, activists must maintain both financial and cognitive sovereignty from powerful external sources, such as the state, and family members. The key determinant in this regard appears to be social class, as those in higher socioeconomic classes are more likely to have access to better income, reducing their reliance on state support or family assistance for survival.

Financial sovereignty is crucial for sustaining long-term activist engagement without compromising one's autonomy or political goals. Financial sovereignty most likely provides the opportunity to the individual to develop and sustain cognitive sovereignty as well. The importance of cognitive and financial sovereignty is most evident in the experiences of women who must resolve to defy their fathers or husbands. For example, a woman who is financially dependent on her partner is more likely to follow his direction rather than engage in political opposition. This is why women, more than men, often seek marriages that align with their values and goals. Additionally, they prioritize working, as financial independence provides the necessary resources to maintain autonomy and pursue their objectives.

What are the effects of retirement?

Although political learning and socialization are lifelong processes (Jennings et al., 2009; Neundorf & Smets, 2017), several factors significantly limit the potential for change. These factors include sharing a social class for long years (sometimes a lifetime), reduced physical mobility, a strong interest in remaining within the same social circles, the influence of established norms and behaviors, and the authoritarian institutions. This alignment with stable social environments and limited exposure to diverse perspectives is what Bourdieu truly means by habitus. Indeed, both the

activists and the non-activists show a high degree of absolute continuity in their post-retirement political behavior.

Whereas activists continue to be highly active in both institutional and protest politics, non-activists do not make the leap to political engagement without prior political socialization and politicization. The dwindling opportunity for older individuals to connect with recruiters further hinders this potential transition, as recruiters, regardless of their own age, overwhelmingly prioritize recruiting younger individuals, effectively excluding older people from the process and reinforcing their political marginalization.

For individuals who are not already activist, simply belonging to the same socioeconomic class, or becoming biographically available, do not automatically spark activism unless they have transitioned from being a civil society member to an opposing activist during their formative years. The fundamental pillars of elderly activism appear to be grounded in prior political socialization and the creation of robust activist connections. Once these cornerstones are established, elements like health, wealth and biographical availability play significant roles. While transitioning from activism back to passive citizen is feasible at any life stage, adopting activism in later life stages appears highly improbable.

Although my sample size is relatively small, no member has been initiated to activism and social movements after the age of 35. As for non-activists, if the leap from civil society member to opposing activist is not made during formative years, being part of the upper-middle class is not enough to ignite activism. Prior political socialization and existing activist networks appear to be the sine-qua-none of elderly activism. Once prior political socialization occurred during formative years, the continuity of the acquired network, health, and wealth become indispensable factors to sustain activism and actively participate in social movements.

Contribution to Knowledge

Certainly, I must acknowledge that my primary objective was exploratory in nature, emphasizing the pursuit of connections across various concepts rather than the validation of specific hypotheses. Furthermore, the empirical investigation has been centered on the elderly demographic, individuals who came of age during a pivotal historical epoch marked by numerous crises and profound societal transformations. By juxtaposing senior activists with their non-activist counterparts on an individual level, I was able to contextualize their trajectories within the wider spectrum of their age group.

My primary contribution to knowledge lies in dissecting a novel category of actor: elderly participants and non-participants in social movements within the context of an authoritarian regime. This demographic serves as the focal point of my analysis, promising significant insights for future research endeavors due to their distinct claims, concerns, and life trajectories. My second contribution explores the factors that ignite or hinder the development of an activist trajectory. My final contribution examines the presence of a marginalized elite in authoritarian regimes, persistently advocating for social justice in their societies.

Mechanisms of Engagement

The literature commonly highlights that activists are typically more engaged in political processes, including voting and active participation in elections (Milbrath, 1965; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). However, my research reveals a contrasting pattern in authoritarian contexts: activists are less likely to vote compared to non-activists, who may be more inclined to participate in elections. Indeed, distrust in the government and political dealignment contribute to a reluctance to participate in voting (Putnam, 2000). Whereas activists do not trust the electoral procedures in the Algerian context, non-activists tend to view electoralism as democracy. Political institutions and individuals' perceptions of the political environment play a significant role in shaping their

willingness to engage in protest (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Demetriou, K. N., & Demetriou, K. N., 2013; Vráblíková, 2014; Gaidytė, 2015).

A pivotal factor in political engagement is the nature of one's travel experience abroad. Those who traveled for tourism or work generally remained detached from political involvement. In contrast, individuals who studied abroad in a democratic country were more likely to become politically active, often through significant experience in student unions, protest events, and the formation of activist networks. The purpose of travel and the regime type of the chosen country significantly influenced the depth and nature of these political experiences.

One's structural position in relation to a protest is just as crucial as the political event itself. For example, students who actively participated in the 1980s protests often developed perspectives and political trajectories distinct from those who were employed or observed the movement from a distance. Direct engagement shapes not only an individual's stance but also their long-term relationship with activism and political change. This highlights the need to analyze not just the events themselves, but also how an individual's social position influences their interpretation and response to collective action.

I have demonstrated that psychological factors play a decisive role as much as sociological factors in shaping women's activism. To stand their ground, they must be assertive and make difficult choices in terms of employment, education, and marriage. These choices are not just personal but strategic, ensuring their cognitive and financial independence - both essential for sustaining their lifelong fight for justice.

The research highlights a significant disparity in the repertoire of contention between elderly activists and their younger selves. Specifically, it suggests that elderly activists tend to favor more conventional modes of action, in contrast to their earlier years when they exhibited greater

aggression and impulsiveness. Older activists often engage in activism through attending group meetings, signing petitions, and peacefully demonstrating in the streets with chants and applause. In contrast, when they were younger, these activists were more confrontational, resorting to actions like throwing bombs and clashing with police forces.

As for their claims, it is the same since their youth; the reign of social justice, and the establishment of a fair and transparent government that serves the interests of all citizens. Not to forget that all activists are still fervent defenders of state-socialism. It is essential to note that none of the participants cited their retirement pension as a motivation for their political involvement. Their focus lies on advocating for broader political and societal issues rather than personal interests.

Entering the social space of activism in an authoritarian context is most feasible during youth but becomes increasingly difficult with age. However, transitioning from an activist to a more passive citizen is possible at any stage of life.

Social Class

When we examine the strong correlation between an individual's life trajectory and social class, and their level of social movement participation, it is largely due to the intrinsic link between the social groups they belong to and their adherence to specific worldviews. According to the analyses of Jean-Yves Dormagen and Daniel Mouchard (2007; 2019), Guy Michelat and Michel Simon (1977) propose a hypothesis that resonates closely with Mannheim's mental data and stratified consciousness; the deeper someone is embedded within a group, sharing its mindset, culture, and values - referred to as a "symbolic system" - the more likely they are to adopt the prevailing attitudes and behaviors within that group. If we observe a strong link between individuals' origin and social status on one side, and their political engagement on the other, it is primarily because there is a close connection between the groups individuals are a part of, and the likelihood that they have embraced a particular symbolic system (Dormagen and Mouchard, 2019, p. 193).

What can be inferred from this research as a whole is that sustaining activism requires a degree of socio-political autonomy, which is grounded in cognitive sovereignty, network integrity, and social class positioning (financial sovereignty). Rather than aggrieved people, it is those who possess political skills and resources who are more likely to protest, independent of their level of grievances (Stekelenburg, & Klandermans, 2024, p. 66).

Income experiences are indeed a socialization process: people align their attitudes with those around them, and “the longer they are in the same income position, the more aligned are their attitudes with their peers” (Helgason and Rehm, 2023, p.279). A social class is always supported by class organizations, associations, unions, and parties, through a project (Touraine, 1969). Citizens from a lower socio-economic background develop a rather distant social and cultural relationship with politics and political institutions (Laurison, 2015). Hence, “there is no class without class consciousness” (Dubet, 2012, p.259).

Activists maintain their cognitive and financial sovereignty by deliberately steering clear of government employment and clientelist ties. In other words, they consciously limit their interactions and connections with the State to minimize their reliance on it. This decision prevents the regime from imposing institutional and economic constraints and ideological indoctrination, allowing activists to retain a critical perspective on the regime’s policies and actions. By not engaging in government employment, activists ensure their thoughts and actions remain free from the regime’s influence, fostering an unbiased understanding of the socio-political landscape. This cognitive sovereignty is crucial for maintaining their ability to effectively critique and oppose the regime. Consequently, activists reject the official state institutional history and its interpretation of the war of independence.

Furthermore, activists strategically maintain the integrity of their networks by refraining from engaging in clientelist relationships with the regime. As Passy and Monsch (2014) describe, “networks intervene in modifying an individual’s cognitive toolkit” (p. 29). This mutual preservation of ties among activists prevents co-optation for personal or political gain within the regime’s framework. By prioritizing collective goals over individual advancements, activists preserve the integrity and independence of their networks. This non-clientelist networking fosters a community of like-minded individuals committed to systemic change, strengthening the cohesion and effectiveness of the activist movement. Staying within activist networks ensures a consistent mindset, unaltered and preserved mental data regarding the regime’s legitimacy and historical events.

The socio-economic positioning of activists, primarily within the marginalized elite, plays a crucial role in sustaining their activism. Unlike the poor, who may lack the resources and time for activism due to pressing concerns such as food and shelter, the wealthy, who may avoid activism due to beneficial clientelist relations with the regime, and a part of middle-class citizens who take advantage of rent and clientelism, the marginalized elite occupy a unique position. They possess the economic stability to engage in activism and the social status to have the potential to be confronted with injustices and corruption within the regime. This social class positioning enables middle class activists to maintain their socio-political autonomy and effectively challenge the regime.

This deliberate distancing enables activists to sustain their activism and uphold their principles, akin to maintaining a form of potential energy. Just as potential energy in physics represents stored energy based on an object’s position, activists’ sovereignty allows them to harness the necessary social position to oppose the regime effectively. Activists must maintain a “potential distance”

from the regime: too close, and they risk cooptation, losing their critical edge and stored potential; too distant, and they become unrecognized and unnoticed¹⁹⁸, dissipating their potential influence. By staying at this strategic potential distance, activists can engage in a conflictual yet productive relationship with the regime through the maintenance of their cognitive independence, activist network, and social class positioning. Interestingly, social movements themselves must have a kind of autonomy from the state (Dickovick and Eastwood, 2019), their participants must then be within a viable distance from the state as well so they can sustain their activities.

Charles Tilly (1978), while analyzing political opposition in democracies, writes about “challengers” who confront the political establishment through contentious actions, as they attempt to change their position within the power structure. However, he adds that challengers’ main objective is to enter the polity which is the power center of decision making. Activists in authoritarian regimes do not want to be swallowed by the regime, they want to change it, and they do not necessarily strive for political positions within the new democratic system if established. They want to open the path to the youth.

Bourdieu’s concept of “distinction” somehow captures this reality¹⁹⁹. The deliberate maintenance of socio-political autonomy through cognitive sovereignty, network integrity, and social class positioning (financial sovereignty) is crucial for the sustainability of activism. This strategic separation allows activists to retain their independence, integrity, and ideological purity, which are essential for their credibility and effectiveness. By avoiding government jobs, eschewing clientelist networks, and leveraging their middle-class position, activists can continue to challenge the regime

¹⁹⁸ In Algeria, repeated protests over water shortages in underprivileged neighborhoods often go unnoticed or are systematically ignored. Meanwhile, it seems that wealthier areas experience fewer interruptions or are better equipped with resources such as water storage systems to mitigate the effects (RANE, 2016; Fanack, 2019).

¹⁹⁹ Bourdieu writes that « Cette distinction s’impose avec évidence dans tous les cas où des individus issus de la même fraction ou de la même famille, donc soumis à des inculcations morales, religieuses ou politiques que l’on peut supposer identiques » (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 127).

and advocate for meaningful change. This approach not only protects activists from being co-opted but also ensures the longevity and impact of their movements.

Implications and Limitations

The literature teaches us that qualitative methods working with small sample sizes have well known limitations in terms of generalizability (Leung, 2015; Staggenborg, 2016). However, case studies can reveal deep insights that larger-scale studies might overlook (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Although the interviews were conducted with a relatively small sample size, I am confident in the broader applicability of the findings - not necessarily to an entire population, but to understanding patterns of lifelong activism within authoritarian contexts. These interviews have allowed me to develop a theory of lifelong activism that holds significance beyond the specific cases studied. The evidence suggests that, in authoritarian political contexts, it is not the general middle classes that drive sustained activism such as in democracies, but rather the marginalized elite. This segment represents a dominated faction of the elite, excluded from state power and structures. Their exclusion, and reluctance to be included, fuels their pivotal role in dissent and activism, providing key insights into how opposition movements are shaped under authoritarian regimes. These findings are potentially transferable to other samples and settings due to the full descriptions provided of the participants and their actions throughout the preceding chapters (Miles et al., 2014).

My method has great strengths, allowing me to explore identity and activism with a degree of depth that would be difficult to contemplate using quantitative methods, and to formulate precise questions such as that about historical and individual experiences for future research. The snowball sampling gave me access to hard-to-reach populations that could otherwise be much difficult to connect to. Once initial participants were identified, they helped me recruit others quickly, which can be more time- and cost-efficient than other sampling methods, especially in exploratory

research. Participants who referred others helped me establish trust and credibility with new recruits, making them more likely to participate and provide honest responses. I visited three geographically distant cities to diversify the sample, which allowed me to access a broader range of perspectives than if I had limited my research to just one location. Overall, my method is valuable for its exploratory endeavor where future research can already identify key characteristics of the elderly population in terms of political engagement.

My research has employed a rigorous analysis protocol that goes beyond merely recounting biographical details in a linear fashion. Instead, I have chosen to synthesize various elements of the social context (generation location, social class, and life course circumstances), integrating them into a comprehensive analysis. This method allowed me to uncover deeper patterns like the role of generation and habitus in activism, and insights that might not be evident through a straightforward recounting of individual life stories. By situating participants' life trajectories within their broader context, I had the opportunity to accurately interpret the dynamics at play and produce more meaningful and relevant findings.

The life-course perspective underscores the importance of thinking about how activism relate to biographical experience across the individual life-course. It considers the age effect, the period effect, and the historical context in which individuals evolve. It brings attention to social and structural factors and their contributions to generational situations but is still inclusive of individual-level factors. The focus on structural factors is particularly important, given that legal retirement status is reflective of a system of stratification that positions the elderly within a hierarchy of relative access to financial resources that are not available for other citizens.

The crucial limitation of the research might be that interviews were conducted over a brief period from December 2021 to February 2022 in the context of a pandemic. This limited timeframe may

not capture the evolving nature of political activism and attitudes, which can change in response to ongoing political developments. For instance, the timeframe I was conducting the fieldtrip was a period where tolerance towards the Hirak by the regime was literally ended, and the political crackdown had begun.

The study relies on participants' recollections of their life trajectories and experiences, which may be subject to recall bias just like any other method that relies on a person's words. Memories of past events, especially those from decades ago, can be inaccurate or influenced by subsequent experiences. For example, participants who believe they have always been as they are now may have overlooked the changes they have undergone and mistakenly assume that their current identity has remained constant, even if that is not the case. This remains unverifiable of course because there would be a need for longitudinal study following the path of a person all along his life span.

The limitations of the research findings demonstrate the essential need for additional studies on the relationships among social political history, biographical history, and elderly political engagement in authoritarian contexts. This study is a much needed first step. Recognizing these constraints and limitations, my objective is to pave the way for future comparative research that considers the unique generational dynamics across various cohorts, extending beyond the borders of Algeria.

A single case study can offer valuable, in-depth insights into a particular campaign or social movement. However, it is only through comparison that we can identify typical patterns, regularities, as well as unique specifics and outliers (Caramani, 2020). Delving into detailed examinations of both mono-generational and multi-generational social movements, alongside exploring the impacts of new generations entering the fray with fresh waves of protests, offers an

opportunity to explore pertinent dynamics at the intermediate levels. This approach, as advocated by scholars like Bosi and Della Porta (2012), holds promise for uncovering nuanced insights into the evolving landscape of activism across different generations and societal contexts.

Future research direction

Sociological statements are inherently contextual, shaped by the specific population under study and the temporal context. The findings of sociological research are not static truths but are contingent on the particular circumstances and characteristics of the group being examined and the period during which the data is collected (Dubar, Nicourd, 2017). This contextual dependence underscores the importance of considering the socio-historical backdrop when interpreting sociological data.

This dissertation research represents a beginning and has been broad in its attempt to evaluate several empirical findings and explanations. Now the need is to: (1) continue tracking the models for following generations, (2) search for other variables that are better able to account for generational differences in social movement participation and political activism, and (3) attempt to identify some of the underlying dynamics and processes involved in the relationship between social location, mental data, social class, and political response in authoritarian regimes.

To strengthen our understanding of senior activists' engagement and representation, future research should prioritize a longitudinal approach, closely tracking the dynamic, nuanced shifts in their activism over time. This method would yield two key benefits: first, it would provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of activism in old age, capturing its micro-transformations in real time; second, it would enable the validation and potential adaptation of these findings to other authoritarian contexts, testing the transferability of effective strategies. Such an approach would not only refine our understanding but also amplify the impact of senior activism globally.

The broad area of elderly political participation in authoritarian contexts still needs to be explored. However, several compelling questions emerged while I was conducting my fieldwork in Algeria. These include the presence and effects of ageism within social movement organizations, the role of family strategies in sustaining political engagement across generations, and the forms of solidarity extended to families of incarcerated activists. These areas remain underexplored and deserve focused attention, as they reveal the often-invisible dynamics that shape participation, exclusion, and continuity within movements. Investigating them could provide critical insights into how social movements reproduce themselves socially, manage generational tensions, and navigate the emotional and material costs of repression.

Conclusion

I align with Benedetto Croce's view that "man is a microcosm, not in the natural sense, but in the historical sense, a compendium of universal history" (Croce, 1941, p.20). This perspective resonates with Mannheim's theory and underscores the significance of life course interviews in uncovering how personal histories intersect with broader socio-political developments. Croce emphasizes that "however remote in time events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate" (Croce, 1941, p.19). In this light, the concepts of generation and habitus become essential tools for understanding political engagement, helping to explain how past experiences continue to shape individuals' present-day actions and attitudes.

Understanding the mechanisms of political socialization, the role of collective memory, and the intricacy of generational transmission is crucial for comprehending the endurance or decline of movements under authoritarian rule. By focusing on the agency of elderly activists, researchers gain deeper insights into how resistance adapts, survives, or is reshaped in response to shifting political landscapes and ageing circumstances.

This thesis compellingly argues that the study of political participation is fundamentally incomplete without immersing ourselves in the rich, lived experiences of those molded by their historical contexts, revealing a vibrant mosaic where each generation's battles, victories, and ingrained social structures weave a legacy that pulses through today's political arenas. The analysis of life course interviews reveals a dynamic tapestry where each generation's struggles, triumphs, and social structures forge a legacy that reverberates into contemporary political landscapes. By embracing Croce's historical microcosm, we recognize that the echoes of past events are not mere relics but active forces, driving today's activism and resistance, particularly among those whose life courses span significant socio-political shifts.

This work culminates in a resounding affirmation: activism is not the exclusive domain of youth. Political commitment, deeply rooted in the life course and fortified by memory, relationships, and unyielding moral conviction, can not only persist but flourish with age. In an era marked by escalating political instability and widening generational divides, the role of elderly activists emerges as both timely and indispensable. Their lives stand as a testament that political agency does not fade with time; rather, it is tempered through decades, tested by hardship, and at its most potent, sustained throughout a lifetime.

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Appendix A: Ethics approval notice

08/07/2021

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-01-21-6412

Titre du projet / Project Title

Senior activism under
authoritarian regimes:
Commitment to political change
through the Algerian hirak

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

08/07/2021

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

07/07/2022

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher Affiliation

Role

Salih AKPINAR

École d'études politiques / School of Political Studies Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator

Frédéric VAIREL

École d'études politiques / School of Political Studies Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Kim THOMPSON

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix B: Interview canvas

Antécédents familiaux, y compris la classe sociale

1. Quel est votre nom?
2. Où êtes-vous né ? Quel âge avez-vous ?
3. Parlez-moi de votre enfance, de quoi vous-rappelez-vous ? La religion était-elle importante dans votre famille ?
4. Qui sont vos parents ? Où ont-ils grandi ? Comment décririez-vous vos parents (statut économique, valeurs, origine ethnique et culturelle) ?
5. Qu'ont fait vos parents quand vous étiez enfant ? Quels sont les niveaux d'éducation ?
6. Vous souvenez-vous des histoires de vos parents ou grands-parents sur la guerre d'indépendance ou sur leurs vies en générale?
7. Vous souvenez-vous de la période de la guerre d'indépendance ? Avez-vous participé d'une manière ou d'une autre ?
8. Pouvez-vous décrire le quartier dans lequel vous avez grandi ?
9. Combien de frères et sœurs avez-vous et où vous situez-vous dans votre famille ?
10. Vivez-vous dans votre ville natale ou avez-vous déménagé ?
11. Êtes-vous allé à l'école ? Jusqu'où êtes-vous allé avec votre éducation formelle ?
12. Vous associez-vous à une religion ou à une pratique spirituelle ?

Réseaux sociaux et ressources sociales

1. Êtes-vous ou avez-vous déjà été marié ?
2. Avez-vous des enfants ? Que font-ils pour vivre ? Quel genre d'emplois exercent-ils ?
3. Quel est votre métier et pourquoi ?
4. Quels sont les métiers de vos frères et sœurs ? Quel est leur statut économique ?
5. Quel a été l'événement historique le plus important auquel vous avez participé ?
6. Pouvez-vous parler de votre entourage depuis votre jeunesse ? Et maintenant ?
7. Êtes-vous ou étiez-vous membre de tout type d'organisation civique ou professionnelle (clubs, église, mosquée, ONG, etc.) que ce soit politique ou non ? Pourquoi ?
8. Comment votre organisation vous a-t-elle touché ?
9. Est-ce que vous ou vous, parents et amis avez une relation quelconque avec le gouvernement ?
10. Avez-vous des amis qui travaillent pour le gouvernement ? Connaissez-vous des gens qui font partie du régime ? Comment se porte votre relation avec eux ?
11. Avez-vous déjà été impliqué dans la politique ou une cause politique ?
12. Si vous assistez à des services religieux, où assistez-vous ? Pourquoi choisissez-vous le culte avec cette congrégation ou communauté particulière ?
13. Avez-vous un certain rôle ou statut dans votre communauté ?
14. Avez-vous servi dans l'armée ? Qu'avez-vous fait et quel genre d'expérience a-t-il vécu ?

Le Hirak

1. Qui soutenez-vous et pourquoi ?
2. Quand avez-vous entendu parler pour la première fois du Hirak? Quelle a été votre réaction ?
3. Qu'est-ce qui vous a attiré vers cette cause ? Pourquoi continuez-vous à le soutenir (ou non)
4. Quel est l'impact des inégalités, de l'insécurité et de la politique dans votre position vis-à-vis du Hirak ?
5. Comment vous organisez-vous ? Quel genre de rôle assumez-vous ?
6. Utilisez-vous les médias sociaux ? Comment préférez-vous communiquer avec les autres participants ?
7. Avez-vous participé d'une manière ou d'une autre à des mouvements sociaux ? Guerre d'indépendance (1962)? Guerre Civile (1988)? Toute sorte de protestation (2001)? Quel rôle avez-vous joué ?
8. Avez-vous participé d'une manière ou d'une autre au Printemps kabyle de 1980 ? Quels sont vos souvenirs ?
9. Qui a influencé votre participation au Hirak ? Qui a essayé de l'entraver ? pourquoi ?
10. Que voulez-vous changer ? Quel genre de gouvernement souhaitez-vous ?
11. Avez-vous perdu des membres de votre famille, des parents ou des amis pendant le décennal noir ?
12. Avez-vous voté ? Dans quelles circonstances et pourquoi ?

Le présent (être un senior)

1. Avez-vous l'impression d'être vieux ?
2. Quelles étaient les valeurs les plus importantes que vous vouliez enseigner à votre famille ?
3. Quels sont vos rêves pour l'avenir ?
4. Êtes-vous mieux lotis maintenant que votre famille ne l'était quand vous étiez un petit enfant ?
5. Comment s'est passée votre départ à la retraite ? Âge lorsqu'il est arrêté de pouvoir travailler ; changements de circonstances ; santé
6. Que pensez-vous de votre vie maintenant que vous êtes à la retraite ?
7. Que faites-vous de votre temps maintenant ?
8. Quelles transitions ou tournants avez-vous vécus à l'adolescence ou à l'âge adulte ?
9. Quels moments clés vous souvenez-vous de votre jeunesse et de vos années de travailleur ?
10. Le présent est-il meilleur ou pire que lorsque vous étiez plus jeune ?
11. Avez-vous des choses à ajouter ou à clarifier pour terminer l'entrevue ?

Appendix C: List of research participants

ALGIERS

	NAME	Date of Birth	STATUS	MARITAL STATUS	SOCIAL CLASS*	EDUCATION	ETHNIC GROUP	IDEOLOGY/ RELIGION	PREVIOUS OCCUPANCY	PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION	RELATIONSHIP WITH MOUJAHID OR MILITARY	POLITICIZED PARENTS
1	Mrs. Yamina	1949	Activist	Never Married	Middle Class	University	Chaoui	Socialist	Social Worker	Multiple since 1972	military cousins	No
2	Mr. Hakim	1950	Activist	Married	Middle Class	Lycée	Arab	Socialist	Private sector	Multiple since 1975	Relatives in FLN administration	No
3	Mr. Hassen	1955	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Socialist	Private sector	Multiple since 1980	None	Uncle
4	Mr. Malawi	1955	Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	Lycée	Kabyle	Socialist	Private sector	Multiple since 1972	None	Father
5	Mr. Malek	1953	Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Muslim Democrat	State Accountant	Multiple since 1987	None	No
6	Mr. Mourad	1948	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Arab	Socialist	Merchant	Multiple since 1971	Relatives in FLN administration	Uncle

7	Mr. Zidane	1953	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Leftist	Family Consultant	Once in 1996	None	No
8	Mrs. Amira	1951	Non-Activist	Married	Lower Middle Class	Primary	Arab	Muslim	Housewife	None	Father Moujahid	No
9	Mr. Abderrezzak	1959	Non-Activist	Married	Lower Middle Class	Primary	Arab	Muslim	State Worker	None	None	No
10	Mr. Ahmed	1948	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	None	Kabyle	Muslim	State worker	None	None	No
11	Mr. Omar	1950	Non-Activist	Widow	Precarious Situation	None	Arab	Muslim	Informal only	None	Uncle Moujahid	No
12	Mr. Rachid	1945	Non-Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	Primary	Kabyle	Muslim	Merchant	None	None	No
13	Mr. Yaser	1952	Non-Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	Lycee	Arab	Leftist	State Worker	Once in 1996	Father Moujahid	Yes

MOSTAGANEM

	NAME	Date of Birth	STATUS	MARITAL STATUS	SOCIAL CLASS	EDUCATION	ETHNIC GROUP	IDEOLOGY/ RELIGION	PREVIOUS OCCUPANCY	PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION	RELATIONSHIP WITH MOUJAHID OR MILITARY	POLITICIZED PARENTS
1	Mr. Ansar	1949	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Arab	Socialist	Private Sector	Multiple since 1971	None	Father
2	Mr. Kaddour	1955	Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	Master's	Arab	Communist	University Administration	Multiple since 1971	Father Moujahid	No
3	Mr. Mouhammad	1955	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Arab	Socialist	Family Consultant	Multiple since 1988	Far relatives are military	No
4	Mr. Mouloud	1952	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Arab	Socialist	Private sector engineer	Multiple since 1971	None	No
5	Mr. Slimane	1953	Activist	Widow	Middle Class	University	Arab	Socialist	High School Teacher	Multiple since 1983	None	Uncle
6	Mr. Said	1955	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Arab	Leftist	State Worker	None	None	Yes
7	Ms. Linda	1956	Non-Activist	Widow	Middle Class	University	Arab	Muslim	Housewife	None	Father Moujahid	No
8	Mrs. Mina	1950	Non-Activist	Married	Lower Middle Class	Lycee	Arab	Muslim	Dressmaker	None	None	No
9	Mrs. Yasmine	1952	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	Primary	Arab	Muslim	Housewife	None	None	No
10	Mr. Farid	1953	Non-Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	University	Arab	Leftist	Doctor	None	Father Moujahid	No

TIZI OUZOU

	NAME	Date of Birth	STATUS	MARITAL STATUS	SOCIAL CLASS	EDUCATION	ETHNIC GROUP	IDEOLOGY/ RELIGION	PREVIOUS OCCUPANCY	PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION	RELATIONSHIP WITH MOUJAHID OR MILITARY	POLITICIZED PARENTS
1	Mrs. Nafisa	1958	Activist	Widow	Upper Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Socialist	Pharmacist	Multiple since 1980	Father Moujahid	Uncle
2	Mrs. Salama	1956	Activist	Married	Middle Class	Lycée	Kabyle	Socialist	Secretary in Private sector	Multiple since 1980	None	No
3	Mr. Bilal	1956	Activist	Married	Middle Class	Lycée	Kabyle	Socialist	Private sector	Multiple since 1988	None	Uncle
4	Mr. Othmane	1952	Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Socialist	Computer Engineer	Multiple since 1980	Father Moujahid	Father
5	Mr. Smail	1953	Activist	Married	Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Communist	High School Teacher	Multiple since 1980	None	No
6	Mr. Youssef	1952	Activist	Widow	Middle Class	Lycée	Kabyle	Socialist	Private sector	Multiple since 1980	None	No
7	Mr. Larbi	1952	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	Lycee	Arab	Muslim	Construction worker	None	Father Moujahid	No
8	Mr. Radwane	1952	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	Primary	Kabyle	Muslim	Merchant	None	Uncle Moujahid	No
9	Mr. Slimane	1948	Non-Activist	Married	Middle Class	Lycee	Kabyle	Leftist	Taxi Driver	Once in 1988	None	Yes
10	Mr. Chabane	1952	Non-Activist	Widow	Precarious Situation	Lycee	Kabyle	Muslim	Informal Work	None	None	No
11	Mr. Mohand	1953	Non-Activist	Married	Upper Middle Class	University	Kabyle	Muslim	State Worker	None	Uncle Moujahid	No
12	Mrs. Karima	1952	Non-Activist	Widow	Lower Middle Class	None	Kabyle	Muslim	Housewife	None	Has military relatives	No

Appendix D : Interview Excerpts

Politicized Non-Activist :

Lors du déclenchement de la guerre j'avais 9 ans, lors de l'Indépendance j'avais 16 ans. Mon père était balayeur, il travaillait pour la ville. On était 5 enfants et on habitait une seule chambre. A l'époque on n'avait pas le droit d'avoir des grands appartements. Les Algériens n'avaient pas le droit à la dignité, à l'honneur, au travail, à la scolarisation etc. On n'était que des esclaves. Nous sommes allés à l'école mais pour le primaire seulement. Les gens qui dépassaient le niveau primaire avaient des postes aux côtés des Français.

Mon père, par la misère de ses parents, il est venu à Alger pour trouver du travail. Il est décédé en 1980. Moi j'ai fait juste le primaire, l'éducation était totalement en Français. En ce moment je ne sais pas lire en Arabe. L'arabe c'était interdit. C'était le Français ou rien. A notre époque, l'enseignement en Arabe ça n'existait pas, c'était le Français. Les enseignants c'était des Français.

Un jour les soldats Français m'ont pris, ils ont attaché des chiffons a mes genoux et mes mains. Ils ont sali le plancher d'une salle de classe et m'ont fait essuyer tout. Ils ont fait ça a un enfant de 11 ans. Les Français ont fait des choses atroces. Ils ont tué hommes, femmes, enfants, vieillards, animaux, ils ont tues les Algériens sans raison. Tuer un Algérien n'avait aucune conséquence à l'époque. On bombardait les villages et les villes. La France, dès qu'elle percevait un danger elle éliminait tout ce qui était autour.

Mes parents n'ont pas participé à la guerre, ils ont travaillé. A Alger il y avait moins de répression à cause de la présence d'autres ambassades. La France tuait les combattants devant toute la population. On voulait faire peur aux gens. Les gens avaient plus de haine pour la France, ils avaient peur mais la haine grandissait dans leurs cœurs.

Tous les Algériens cotisaient, chaque famille donnait une partie de son revenu pour aider les combattants. Par contre le papa de ma femme était un shahid. Il est mort au maquis avec les armes. Il a été tué au cours d'un combat entre les Algérien et les Français. A ce jour, on ne connaît pas sa tombe.

Les premiers combattants, les moudjahidines sont tous morts. Ils n'avaient pas de quoi manger, de quoi se loger, les moujahidines n'ont pas survécu soit à cause de la guerre, soit à cause de la faim, soit à cause de blessures.

En 1996 Mohammed Boudiaf a été assassiné en direct à la Télévision, durant son discours à Annaba dans une salle de conférence. Tout s'est passe en direct à la télévision. Un homme a sorti juste derrière avec son kalashnikov et a vidé son chargeur sur le président. Le tireur s'est fait arrêter et a dit qu'il était membre du FIS mais aussi membre de la sécurité personnel du président. Le FIS a pris attache avec des gens de la sécurité présidentiel.

Il y avait des familles qui était forme de militaire et de membre du FIS, ils demandaient donc au frère de tuer son frère sans quoi ils vont tuer toute la famille. Le membre n'a pas d'autre choix que de tuer son frère pour sauver leurs familles. Les gens tuaient leurs voisins, leurs amis, sous les ordres de leurs supérieurs

Activist :

J'ai grandi dans un quartier populaire à Oran. Mon père était docker à Oran donc il travaillait pour l'État. Il a toujours voulu que tous ses enfants étudient. Il en avait les moyens, donc il a fait les efforts pour qu'on puisse tous être des intellectuels en quelque sorte.

J'ai étudié le primaire, le secondaire et le lycée à Oran. Il y avait certains enseignants qui m'ont marqué dans mes pensées, mais c'étaient des instantanés. Parfois les enseignants disaient des mots ou des phrases qui me poussaient à réfléchir. Un enseignant a laissé des traces avec ses paroles, un autre avec son comportement. Après le primaire, j'ai passé au secondaire et mes enseignants étaient surtout des enseignants français. Alors ils nous parlaient de la liberté de la femme, de l'égalité entre les sexes, etc. J'avais donc une idée d'un monde différent qui était possible quelque part.

J'avais par exemple un enseignant palestinien en recherche en Israël qui nous expliquait les différentes formes d'agressions qu'ils subissaient en Palestine. Il nous parlait souvent de justice et d'égalité entre tous. Alors je me suis posé des questions. Je me pose toujours des questions, mais mes questions ont commencé à un jeune âge. Probablement au lycée le plus.

J'aime lire certains auteurs qui répondent à mes questions. Ce sont des réflexions qui viennent de loin. Par exemple, il y a Abdellatif Laâbi, un Marocain qui dit que les sociétés passent toutes par une phase religieuse, une phase nationaliste et une phase socialiste-progressiste. Des fois je me dis qu'il aurait fallu laisser le temps arranger les choses, mais ma conscience ne me laisse pas tranquille.

Durant ma vie de militant, j'ai eu certaines rencontres qui ne duraient pas, d'autres rencontres plus longues, ce sont des gens qui m'ont marqué, qui ont changé ma façon de voir les choses. Mais je n'ai pas de personne clé qui a complètement changé ma perception du monde. Ce sont plutôt l'addition de multiples personnes, événements, occasions, rencontres. Comme je l'ai dit, ce sont des instantanés qui nous conduisent là où nous sommes présentement.

C'est à l'université que j'ai eu mes premières expériences. J'ai étudié à l'université d'Oran. C'est là que j'ai rencontré d'autres jeunes qui pensaient un peu comme moi. On a refusé de suivre le principe du parti unique. À l'époque, il n'y avait qu'une seule possibilité pour toute association ou institution politique. L'Union jeunesse unique, le parti unique, le syndicat unique, etc. Alors tout était sous le contrôle de l'État qui créait des coquilles vides pour que les gens pensent qu'ils sont en train d'accomplir quelque chose. Mais au final, la décision revenait au président.

Ma famille n'est pas politisée. Je suis même le seul militant. C'est pour ça que je me pose bien la question du pourquoi j'en suis arrivé là où je suis. Mon frère ou mes sœurs ne se mêlent pas de ce que je fais. Je n'essaie pas non plus de les convaincre. Chacun a sa cause à défendre.

Mon père est mort en 2018, ma mère en 2017.

C'est vers la fin du lycée que j'ai remarqué qu'il y avait un décalage entre les héros et les dictateurs. Parmi les héros, il y en a qui ont eu des postes, d'autres ont été tués, d'autres écartés, il y avait une contradiction sur l'histoire et notre propre vécu. C'est sûr qu'il y avait des histoires de comptes personnels. Tous les postes étaient à combler lors de l'indépendance, alors tout le monde était prêt à se battre pour obtenir ce qu'il voulait.