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INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE
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THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANISATIONS APPLIED TO NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS

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É T U D E S



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BIOGRAPHY

Alix LE MOIGN is a doctoral student of political science at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). The topic of her thesis focuses on the organisational structure of non-state armed groups, taking into consideration their internal functioning, their exploitation (or lack thereof) of the territory surrounding them, the degree of internalisation of their external support and the relationship they maintain with the official political authorities, if they are still in power.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of violence as a weapon of war is not due to the state structure alone, to which it is often attributed. Just like the state, non-state organisations invent, develop and practice violence, going far beyond a simple emotional and irrational response. Armed violence is therefore a full-fledged tool, used by the group to achieve its objectives. While this “violence” is not the core aim of this paper, we will focus on the entity that seizes on it and forms a structure to implement it.

However, in order to address the phenomenon of armed organisations, it is of primary importance that we understand what is meant by the term “organisation”, offer a precise definition and most importantly one that is not bound by the common use of the term generically. An initial answer may be found in the sociology of organisations, the concepts of which – while often developed by observing the world of work and business – can be adapted to other entities considered in different contexts. Here, we shall refer to a text by Philippe Bernoux, in which he relates a detailed presentation of this branch of sociology to specific case studies¹. An organisation, defined as a “human construct”, is envisaged from the angle of “strategic analysis by the actor”. Individuals, no longer considered as individuals but as actors (carrying out an “action”), while interacting and being interdependent, pursue a strategy that is their own and which they carry out while reconciling the group’s objectives. Lastly, although the organisation reacts and adapts to the variations and constraints of its environment, under no circumstances should it be considered a simple response to that environment; it is an autonomous construct with a unique operating method.

According to Bernoux, this type of organisation has five general characteristics that follow a general model, which we shall mention briefly here. The first two, “task sharing” and the “distribution of roles”, may seem synonymous but are in fact complementary. Task sharing refers to the fact that each individual is given a specific role that is amply defined so there is no duplication of roles. The distribution of roles indicates that individuals are not simply executing the given task mechanically and that they have some leeway in its execution and completion; it is how they take on their own roles. The organisation is also founded on systems of “authority”, “communication” and “contribution and retribution”. The system of authority adapts the actors’ attitudes to the orientations set out by the leaders and in line with the group’s pursued objectives. Communication refers to establishing relationships between the individuals and sharing information, which may be formally or informally. The contribution-retribution system refers to the transaction that takes place between the individual and the group, i.e. what the individual brings and takes away. The author justifiably remarks that this last organisational characteristic does not factor in the individual’s own motivations for joining the organisation or the reasons for his/her recruitment.

We believe it is particularly important to use this literature to study non-state armed organisations², as has been done by authors such as Chad C. Serena and Abdulkader Sinno³, who agree that in the case of the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies, there is a close relationship between the type of structure

¹ Philippe Bernoux, *La sociologie des organisations. Initiation théorique suivie de douze cas pratiques*, Seuil, 2009.

² We would like to point out that this study is part of a thesis on non-state armed organisations, their construction, how they appropriate the surrounding territory, the strategies put in place to mobilise the resources and the relationships they maintain with the official political authorities. Due to this specific trait of “our” organisations (political-military structures and the use of armed violence in an exceptional conflictual context), and at the current stage of research, we shall not seek to cover all of the elements that form an organisation; the aim is to provide elements for reflection and to open avenues while focusing on certain aspects.

³ Chad C. Serena, *It Takes More than a Network. The Iraqi Insurgency and Organizational Adaptation*, Stanford University Press, 2014; Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*, Cornell University Press, 2008; Abdulkader H. Sinno, “[Armed Groups’ Organizational Structure and their Strategic Options](#)”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 93:882, June 2011, p. 311-332.

established and the effective capacity of a group to conduct armed combat, maintain this combat and fulfil the objectives that they had previously set out to achieve.

In this study, we shall focus on armed groups that formed and expanded during the Algerian civil war (1992-1998), with a brief reminder of the context. In October 1988, the riots that began in the popular neighbourhood of Bab el Oued⁴ in Algiers occurred during a decade of extreme social unrest in Algeria. Violently repressed, they forced the Algerian regime to make pledges to the opposition, namely by allowing political pluralism to be established. A new constitution was passed and came into effect in 1989, and it authorised the formation of “associations of a political nature” (Article 40)⁵. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was thereby formed, headed by two main leaders, Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj. The outbreak of civil war in 1992 was the result of a ruptured electoral process, in which this young party obtained high scores in the municipal elections of June 1990 and in the first round of the legislatives in December 1991. Feeling threatened in an extremely tense social climate (strikes, protests, etc.), the regime suspended the second round and declared a state of emergency in February 1992. The FIS was officially disbanded in March of the same year, and its two leaders, Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, imprisoned in June 1991. Islamist violence, which had previously been limited to social unrest and the state’s call to order, shifted radically to an armed struggle.

There appeared to have been a latent period before the suspended electoral process, during which neither of the two sides wanted to “officially” radicalise the situation; the Algerian state was still fragile from the end of the 1980s and the October riots, and the Islamists were aware that they had made significant advances with the first pluralist elections. However, a large Islamist movement began to take shape – or had already taken shape, as we shall see further on – and firmly opposed being barred from participating in the country’s politics, which it believed infiltrated by an illegitimate regime and acting in a constitutional framework it deemed apostate⁶. The attitude of the FIS, who agreed to comply with the authorities, was therefore criticised by those who wanted to overhaul the political system, and who eventually chose the path of armed resistance. In the early stages of the conflict, these actors of violence appeared as armed groups that seemed to form almost spontaneously, reacting instinctively to the conflict⁷, like the Sworn Faithful (*Al bâqûn ‘ala al ‘ahd*), the Day of Redemption (*Youn el Hissab*), etc. Some groups had only a few combatants, perhaps ten or twenty, under the orders of a leader. Some had no political guidance, others claimed to follow specific movements and appeared quite complex, such as the very small Excommunication and Hégire (*Al takfir-wa-al- Hijra*) group, described by Abderrahmande Moussaoui as both an armed group and a school of thought, based on the model of the Egyptian organisation of the same name created by Mustapha Choukri in the 1970s and which he claimed to follow⁸, They are also referred to as “hejirists”. This radical movement was made up of several categories of fighters, in particular the “Afghans”, volunteers from various Arab countries who joined the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and who expanded to form different Algerian armed groups. A legend began to form around these fighters, who had initially been enforcers of order during the FIS marches and protests before breaking away in 1991. Their commando uniform, marching style and presentation contributed to the fascination around them. While their numbers must not be overestimated according to Séverine Labat (perhaps 300-400 men, and even less were true combatants), she does

⁴ For the geographical location of the various places mentioned in this paper, refer to the map included in the appendices (Appendix n°2).

⁵ Didier Le Saout and Marguerite Rollinde (ed.), *Émeutes et mouvements sociaux au Maghreb, Perspective comparée*, Karthala, 1999.

⁶ In particular, Article 35 of the Algerian constitution which guaranteed freedoms of conscience and faith was deemed unacceptable.

⁷ Among the many groups and groupuscules mentioned by the authors consulted, others included the Algerian Hezbollah, the Jerusalem Brigades (*Kataeb el Qods*), the Prophet Muhammad’s Army (*Djaysh arrasûl Muhammad*), the Islamic Jihad (*Al djihâd al islâmî*), Djihad 54, the Global Islamic Forces of Allah’s Fighters, the Unified Council for Islamic Action, the Organisation of Muslim Officers, etc.

⁸ Abderrahmane Moussaoui, *La violence en Algérie. Les lois du chaos*, Actes Sud, 2006.

believe they had significant ideological influence, in particular in defining the strategy followed by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)⁹, One of the leaders of *Al takfir-wa-al-Hijra*, Ahmed Bouamra (known as "Ahmed the Pakistani") was an "Afghan" and also one of Mansouri Meliani's deputy leaders who would form the original core of the GIA with other "Afghans"¹⁰.

The difficulty at this stage of research is to understand the operating mechanisms at work in this "nebulous" and comprehend the different components despite its obscurity which appears to escape all specific and overall logic. In the same way that the FIS declares itself to be a "front" rather than a real political party, seeking primarily to align several religious authorities, the constellation of armed groups is also streaked with numerous movements, with some claiming to be part of the Muslim Brotherhood, others following Malek Bennabi's jaz'arism¹¹, Salafists, hegirists, etc.¹². As well as this political diversity, there was a vast array of profiles and backgrounds amongst the members and fighters, who were of varying degrees of religious and political beliefs, and whose ambitions were just as diverse (criminals, society's marginalised, idle youths, university graduates, students, struck-off and AWOL service members, etc.).

In order to grasp this/these complex concept(s), it is perhaps necessary to accept the idea of an initial lack of coherence, or a reality that escapes us. We must remember that the boundaries between the armed groups were especially flexible, and combatants moved freely from one entity to another. Defectors and renegades were not isolated phenomena, such as Abderazaq Rajjam and Youssef Boubras, two senior members of the FIS who represented the minority Jaz'ara school that struggled to impose their views in the decision-making processes of the front. After spending time in the ranks of the GIA in 1994¹³, they eventually returned to the bosom of the Islamic Salvation Army, the "armed wing" of the FIS. Based on this notion, we shall now take three examples that illustrate the close connections between political trends, armed groups and combatant movements.

⁹ "[...] the core elements of the GIA welcomed former fighters from the Afghan *maquis*. They would form the *djama'a's* "staff" and provide its ideological guidelines. [...] Having studied under Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian Islamic law professor who headed the recruitment office for Arab volunteers until his assassination in Peshawar in 1989, and whose books were sold outside mosques, these "Afghans" were the first to produce a theory on the duty of jihad against the "ungodly" state. Influenced by the work of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, they pronounced an irrevocable anathema on the regime, and through the writings of Abdessalam Farag (who inspired Sadate's assassination), to the extent that the "murder of governants" became a religious obligation, and they saw jihad as a "permanent war" borne by a "faithful minority" entrusted with a missionary and military duty." Séverine Labat, *Les islamistes algériens. Entre les urnes et le maquis*, Seuil, 1995, p. 238. Citation translated from the French.

¹⁰ After the arrest of Meliani, Bouamra is said to have briefly replaced him in the imara in July 1992, before being arrested shortly after. (*Imara refers to the group leader or emir's scope of responsibility).

¹¹ Jaz'arism refers to an Algerian movement formed by a small group of students from the central faculty of Algiers, under the influence of Malek Bennabi (1905-1973). Originally, the terme "jaz'ara" was a pejorative neologism given by Mahfoudh Nahnah (the founder of Algerian Hamas) after distancing himself from Bennabi's group to join the Muslim Brotherhood's movement, denigrating those who refused to follow him. Jaz'arists are generally pragmatic in politics, and within the FIS they represented a moderate and nationalist orientation, in particular in comparison to the virulence of the Salafists such as Ali Benhadj, partisans of an internationalist Islam.

¹² Abderrahmane Moussaoui discusses this diversity of Islamism, saying that all these movements claim to be of the "Salafi" movement, a reformism derived from the traditions of the elders (from *salaf*, meaning ancient or ancestor). Within the Salafi movement, there is an essential difference between "moderate" Salafism which chooses politics as a way forward and "combatant" Salafism that opts for an armed movement. "These different designations and the many names the groups give themselves have often made understanding their structural logic difficult. For a clearer view, let us return to the matrix of reference for all the *Jama'at al-Jihad* groupuscules present in the landscape of violence that has existed since the rise of Islamism in Algeria. From the most moderate to the most radical, all of these groups claim to be Salafist." Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹³ We shall return to this topic further on.

The mini-group “Sworn Faithful”, mentioned earlier and which was formed early in this conflict, was directed by Osama Madani and Kamreddine Kharbane. The first is none other than the son of the imprisoned FIS leader, Abassi Madani. We will come across Kharbane later as vice-president of the FIS foreign branch, directed by Rabah Kebir in exile in Germany, and which was officially created in 1994¹⁴.

The group Youm el Hissab is also worthy of mention. According to Ammar Belhimer¹⁵, it was members of *Al takfir-wa-al-Hijra* once more who formed this group. Among the group's leaders were Azzedine Baa, who went on to become one of Abdelkader Chebouti's senior lieutenants in the Islamic Armed Movement (MIA) and Abdelkader Hattab, the cousin of Hassan Hattab¹⁶, future influential emir of the GIA who broke away in 1998 to form the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a group that would consequently swear loyalty to Al Qaeda.

To conclude, Hassan Hattab's trajectory is particularly interesting. During the 1990s, he brushed shoulders with all active armed groups on the Algerian stage, and his four brothers all died during the civil war. He was initially introduced to the armed struggle by his cousin, a former member of Moustapha Bouyali's original MIA¹⁷. He then joined the Movement for an Islamic State (MEI) under Said Makhloufi, before moving to the GIA, and finally creating his own group, the GSPC.

We must therefore ask ourselves why all of these organisations are so complicated to address. Abderrahmane Moussaoui, an Algerian anthropologist who taught at the University of Oran during the civil war and who studied the violence he saw taking place, offers the beginnings of an answer¹⁸. In his opinion, the initial objective embodied by the armed struggle focused on the structural organisation and senior officers. He compares them to the Lebanese Hezbollah, which first emerged as an entity before forming an organised structure. *“Similar to the beginnings of this Shiite party, Islamism in Algeria initially focused on the objective over the structure. It therefore presented itself not as a party, but as a front (FIS) aiming to subsume all movements that were leading the same combat, towards an inescapable victory. [...] For the FIS, the aim was not to satisfy organisational clauses, but rather to accomplish the noble mission of glorification of the divine word.”*¹⁹ Whereas Moussaoui is specifically referring here to the FIS as a political party, it is entirely possible to apply this trend to the armed groups that would appear on the Algerian scene in 1991-1992. The suspension of the political process combined with several elements that we shall mention below pushed the FIS to develop and strengthen its hierarchical framework. *“It [the Islamist movement] is determined to strive for a structured, centralised organisation; just like Hezbollah, the FIS ended up with a harmonised leadership and accredited spokespersons.”*²⁰ Moussaoui also observes a merging of groups in the armed struggle and in the use of violence which transcended the various groups and movements present, evoking jihad as a “common denominator”²¹. *“The strategic alliance is founded on armed violence. The desire for jihad and its action seem to be more determining as factors than political beliefs. While the leaders of Islamist parties have trouble engaging in dialogue, the armed groups can apparently co-organise operations as sensitive as an attack on a barracks.”*²²

¹⁴ Ammar Belhimer, “Les groupes armés de l’opposition islamique”, *Les Cahiers de l’Orient*, 36-37, 1st quarter of 1995, p. 61-92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ There is conflict among authors on whether or not Abdelkader Hattab and Mouloud Hattab are two cousins or the same person. Here, this is especially indicative of the vast complexity of the reality under study.

¹⁷ We will come back to this later.

¹⁸ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*; for a study addressing the notion of the researcher working in a field of violence, we also recommend reading Abderrahmane Moussaoui, “[Du danger et du terrain en Algérie](#)”, *Ethnologie française*, 31:1, 2001, p. 51-59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²² Abderrahmane Moussaoui, “[De la violence au djihâd](#)”, *Annales, ESC*, 6, 1994, p. 1315-1333, p. 1328.

We have decided to divide this paper into two separate sections.

The first aims to be quite theoretical and seeks to present certain notions taken from the sociology of organisations and their relevance to the study of armed organisations. We shall therefore question the various shapes that these organisations may take and their influence on the group's action strategy. Next we shall look at the issue of power, a key element in an armed organisation. Lastly, we shall discuss the relationships between the armed groups, the territory and the pre-existing social structures to their formation.

The second section will discuss the Algerian case. We have decided to centre our study on the two or three groups that appear to be the focus of the armed struggle: the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA), the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Throughout the few aspects that we shall discuss, a recurring element stands out – and which is regularly mentioned in the literature when dealing with the issue of Algerian armed groups – which is that of the competition to acquire the “monopoly on jihad”²³, in the sense that the various groups are constantly in competition to lead their fight. While we shall not enter into great detail on this topic, it does serve as a guiding theme for our argument.

We shall therefore give a brief introduction to the forces present. Next, we shall describe the joint organisation processes of the AIS and the GIA and the impression that there is a sense of “emulation” in their structures. Lastly we shall address the relationship that these armed groups maintain with their environment, considered as both a recruitment pool and the territorial seat of their armed struggle.

²³ This expression was coined by Luis Martinez, *La guerre civile en Algérie: 1990-1998*, Karthala, 1998.

THE STUDY OF (ARMED) ORGANISATIONS

Organisational Structures and Their Strategic Impact

The “organisational structure” is the conceptual framework within which we find a variety of formations; it is this diversity that is of interest to us at present. In short, centralised organisations can be distinguished from decentralised organisations depending on the hierarchical level where decision-making takes place. In a centralised structure, decisions concerning the whole organisation mainly come from top management, while the lower hierarchical levels simply implement them. In a decentralised structure, decisions are made by the persons closest to the situation concerned, which requires a large diversity of levels and a potentially large number of decision-makers. Of course, this duality is not rigid and there are a vast array of situations and contexts. As highlighted by Mary Jo Hatch, an organisation might be decentralised when specific issues are to be dealt with, but centralised concerning the definition of its major strategic directions²⁴. In Henry Mintzberg’s typology of organisational structures, he suggests there is a combination of parameters that give us not just one form of decentralisation, but several, depending on the configuration and where the power stems from (strategic apex, middle line, operational core, etc.)²⁵.

Abdulkader Sinno prefers the term “*non-centralized*” to decentralised, as this category encompasses more forms and includes decentralised organisational structures as well as those based on the patron-client relationship or “patronage” and networked organisations²⁶. In an article where he studies the relationship between the organisational structure of armed groups and their effective capacity to either implement or counter an operational strategy, Sinno attempts to go further than the centralisation/decentralisation duality and seeks a more exhaustive typology. He draws up a classification system that references both individual organisations and groups of organisations, undoubtedly inviting us here to factor in the many and various contingent interactions and arrangements that are prevalent in the organisations’ functioning method, as the groups considered in a conflict situation are constantly subject to changes in their environment and somewhat forced cooperation that may or may not last. As well as centralised and decentralised forms, he also advances entrepreneurial, patron-client, multiple and fragmented organisational models. The first is an *ad hoc* structure, generally formed with a specific objective (to strengthen personal power, for example); the patron-client or patronage form is a relationship between a patron who provides a resource (financial, material, etc.) and a client who promises assistance and loyalty in exchange. According to Sinno, it is a very flexible relationship – almost like a simple contract – that the patron and client can extract themselves from easily. Lastly, the multiple and fragmented models are combinations of organisations; the difference between them is the number of groups they encompass – a multiple organisational structure has two to four groups and a fragmented structure has over five.

While Sinno appears to rapidly dismiss the reticular organisational model from his typology – tending to associate it with a decentralised structure – Chad Serena highlights the interesting elements that can be found in this type of structure²⁷. According to this idea, the network – even if it is a flexible structure – must absolutely not be considered a “non-structure” or the result of a lack of organisational form. This is a structural adaptation to the requirements imposed by conflict and a response to the environmental context. Sinno defines a network as “autonomous fluid units without

²⁴ Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory. Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

²⁵ Henry Mintzberg, “[Structure in 5’s: A Synthesis of the Research on Organization Design](#)”, *Management Science*, 26:3, March 1980, p. 322-341.

²⁶ Sinno, 2008, *op. cit.*; Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Serena, *op. cit.*

a hierarchical structure”²⁸. Serena adds to this definition, particularly stressing the vast flexibility of this type of structure, which can rapidly adapt to external constraints and their own internal structural needs²⁹. It is this extremely multifaceted nature that characterises the Iraqi insurgency, according to Serena, in particular when he observes the development of hybrid organisations that are partially hierarchical and partially reticular.

It is these structural features that give the network its strengths and weaknesses. The fluidity of its boundaries and its capacity to move and change shape make the organisational structure evasive and hard to predict for its adversaries. The network also has great freedom in operations, and acts generally according to a given situation rather than according to rules of procedure and dense and restrictive hierarchies, as is the case in some centralised structures. However, this ability to constantly change configuration is also the source of many of its key weaknesses, such as the high turnover and the fickleness of its members and the occasional difficulties in recruiting new combatants. This is particularly due to the fact that the network is constantly seeking balance to ensure its survival, between a sufficient level of protection (covert network, the need to protect its members and operations and not be infiltrated by hostile elements, etc.) and essential openness (overt network, collect and share information, integrate new combatants, etc.). Other difficulties specific to the network may also be cited, such as the often limited communication and coordination between its members, especially when the networks formed are highly secretive; and internal conflict, often difficult to curb due to the lack of centralised command and an authority that struggles to impose its power against highly autonomous elements.

The work of Serena and Sinno are consistent on the idea of interdependence between the group’s structural type and its ability to efficiently execute an armed struggle. As such, Sinno uses the typology that he advanced and poses two questions. He firstly wants to know, according to its organisational structure, how capable (or incapable) an armed group is of setting mechanisms in motion to mobilise the group and ensure its effectiveness in operations. He mentions several factors of the organisational structure, such as the ability to mobilise resources or obtain external assistance, ensuring good coordination within the structure, maintaining control and discipline in the operational chain, etc. Depending on their structure, the organisations do not have the same requirements or the same assets, and will encounter a certain level of difficulty carrying out the process. Without going into detail on these influences, we shall mention for example that centralised organisational structures seem particularly suited to these processes when they have a safe haven; in the absence of such a space, the patron-client structure appears best suited³⁰.

The second area for questioning is: Depending on the organisational structure of the armed group, what is its effective capacity to implement a specific operational strategy? And what is its effective capacity to resist and counter these same operational strategies that they oppose? Here, Sinno takes four action strategies as examples. The first is more evident in a context of conflict: compromise must either be reached by negotiation (accommodation) or more or less direct confrontation, in a war of attrition or open warfare. The second strategy is "divide and conquer". This means creating differences or exacerbating tensions within a group so that they cannot unite their strength and stand against the ruling power. The third strategy is to “conquer hearts and minds” and requires a high capacity to gather, deliver and centralise information; it aims to find within a given population the destabilising individuals and isolate them from the rest of the group to demoralise them and cut

²⁸ Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

²⁹ “[...] many different definitions [...]. Generally, networks consist of interlinked individuals or groups of individuals that oftentimes develop out of a preference for social interaction with similar others. They can be fairly simple or complex, large or small, and are in the main inherently adaptive systems. In a network each individual has an effect on the whole, and vice versa. Networks are enabled or formed based upon shared values, norms, and trust, and along shared interests in goal accomplishment”, in: Serena, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁰ We shall focus on this parameter in greater detail further on, in the section "Organisation, territory and social structures".

them off from all insurgent support. The final strategy is the co-option or co-optation, referring to the approach of a powerful organisation which, in order to guarantee its supremacy and restabilise a potentially unstable situation, integrates within its ranks elements of other organisations that may represent a threat. Again, we shall not go into detail on Sinno's conclusions in full (summarised in the table inserted in Appendix 1), we shall simply mention that when different strategies must be implemented, the centralised form is particularly appropriate in this situation, though it does not appear to be the most resilient, much like the patron-client model, when resistance is required.

Power, Domination and Authority

In this section, we will focus in particular on certain authors who consider power to be the core element of the organisational structure. Amitai Etzioni's classification of the different types of structure is based on the organisation's "power structure"³¹. In the same way that he makes a distinction between physical, material and symbolic power, he also tends to classify organisations that are coercive (prison-like systems, etc.), from those that are remunerative and utilitarian (businesses etc.) or producers of norms (churches, etc.). Abdulkader Sinno considers organisational structure essentially in terms of "distribution of power" both "within and among" organisations³².

The definitions of power are consistent, considering it to be the capacity of an actor (individual, group, etc.) to establish power over one or several others in order to obtain something that the subordinates would not have done without request, and both definitions stress that it is not necessarily related to a hierarchical position. When studying the actor's independence, emphasis is placed on the fact that power is first and foremost a "relationship"³³, in that the person receiving the order can carry it out in different ways and to varying degrees of enthusiasm for example – and even negotiate or state the conditions of how it will be carried out. It is nonetheless an "unbalanced" and unequal relationship, as the subordinate generally does not control as much information as his/her superior (objectives, context, strategies, etc.). Referring to the typology advanced by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg³⁴, Philippe Bernoux distinguishes between power sources and power resources in his work. There are four sources of power that can be "secreted" by the organisation: the ability to provide the organisation with a skill that is difficult to replace; managing the structure's relationship with its environment (with other organisations for example); managing internal communication (the direction in which information is transmitted, depending on whether the information content is whole or fragmented, etc.); and lastly, knowing the operating rules at the core of the organisation, which can be perceived as both a restrictive framework (limiting behaviours, governing the functions of each person) but also in a positive sense (protecting individuals and which can be used as a basis for developing action strategies once these rules are assimilated and understood).

Bernoux considers that there are two power resources that the holder draws on in order to ensure the decisions made are applied: legitimacy and pressure. Pressure is the use of force across a range of contexts (coercion may be administrative, material, physical, etc.). Legitimacy is tied to power because it is the superior's ability to obtain relatively active participation of his/her subordinates, the desired outcome being their "adhesion" or at the very least their "acquiescence", in Bernoux's

³¹ Amitai Etzioni, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations. On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates*, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

³² Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

³³ Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, "Le pouvoir comme fondement de l'action organisée", in Charles Benabou and Harry Abravanel (dir.), *Le comportement des individus et des groupes dans l'organisation*, Gaëtan Morin, 1986, p. 351-369.

³⁴ Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, *L'acteur et le système, les contraintes de l'action collective*, Seuil, 1977, p. 82-90.

terms³⁵. There is therefore a notion of acceptance of “domination”, which can take three forms, according to Max Weber, depending on the “specific nature of motivation which commands obedience”³⁶ and which can be interwoven: they are rational, traditional and charismatic domination. The first is also known as “rational-legal”, and is typically the form of domination most often found in contemporary societies; individuals obey because they believe, or in any case accept, the legality of the given order (execution of an administrative decision, for example). The custodians of traditional domination, however, are empowered by the notion of an older heritage, a “sacred” trait that goes above individual persons. Lastly, charismatic domination also suggests the idea of “sacredness”, but which is embodied in the aura of a single person. As such, Weber’s suggestions when he mentions the problems that arise when an individual embodying charismatic domination disappears are particularly interesting. He identifies different mechanisms to convey this charismatic domination and thereby ensure the group’s longevity, such as the appointment of a successor by the members close to the former leader or the transformation of hereditary domination to traditional domination by calling on heredity, for example, in the handover of power. To use Raymond Aron’s expression, it is the “institutionalisation of the exceptional”³⁷.

In the case of an armed group active in a civil war – with an organisational structure that would therefore be considered in an “extraordinary” context – Abderrahmane Moussaoui constructs another dimension to the notion of power. He does not speak in terms of power, but in terms of “authority”³⁸, a distinction Bernoux also makes; authority therefore evokes a set of qualities that inspire “trust” and by which one individual gains the upper hand over the others. Furthermore, Aron mentions that Weber also used the term *autorität* in this sense, to “designate the natural or social qualities that the master possesses”³⁹.

In reality, according to the authors studied, authority is also defined as one of the sources of power and is closely linked to the position held in the hierarchy by the individual in the organisation. Chester I. Barnard only sees authority as such “within an organised system”, making a distinction between “authority of position” (position in the hierarchy) and “authority of leadership” (specific skills held by the individual); ideally, these two aspects would be joined⁴⁰.

Moussaoui seeks to find out what makes people obey a leader, deeming unsatisfactory the explanation of a blindly executed order. Bernoux also confirms this theory when he evokes the relative freedom of actors that take part in an organisational structure and cannot accept to be simple executors. In his study of the use of violence during the 1990s in Algeria⁴¹, Moussaoui identifies the leader as the charismatic figure that transcends the group. We can summarise his theory by saying the leader is both a uniter of people, a model and a reference. It is the leader who firstly gives the group its motivation, making them feel that their objectives can be obtained – “transform utopia into an attainable goal” –⁴². Secondly, this stimulation is only possible because he himself is personally convinced of the legitimacy of this action and its successful implementation. He galvanises the group by showing them the way. Lastly, the leader is a reference that provides security to the group’s members by taking full responsibility for the project undertaken: “*The subordinate*

³⁵ Bernoux, *op. cit.*, p. 182-183.

³⁶ Raymond Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, Monstesquieu, Comte, Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber, Gallimard, 1967, p. 556. Citation translated from the French.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 560-561.

³⁸ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³⁹ Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 556. Citation translated from the French.

⁴⁰ Chester I. Barnard, “La théorie de l’autorité”, in *L’analyse des organisations, une anthologie sociologique*, tome 2 : *Les composantes de l’organisation*, textes choisis et présentés par Jean-François Chanlat, Francine Séguin, Gaëtan Morin éditeur, 1987, p. 359-376. Original title: “The Theory of Authority”, in *The Functions of the Executive*, Harvard University Press, p. 161-184.

⁴¹ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 166. Citation translated from the French.

puts his/her heart more fully into the task when the leader is ready to publicly take on the moral responsibility"⁴³. He adds that "in the ranks of armed groups, it is not just unity at work but total harmony between the role of leader and the person who embodies it."⁴⁴ We will however make a remark about this notion of the "person". If we take the example of the Armed Islamic Groups (GIA) – which we shall focus on in greater detail in the second part of the study – the local and national emirs are interchangeable; aside from the exceptional longevity of Antar Zouabri (six years!), all take leadership for only a few months. There is therefore great management mobility and sometimes a new emir barely has the time to take on his new role before a successor has replaced him, who is not necessarily known to the masses of fighters. The GIA are indeed a constellation of small groups, all independent of each other and we must determine to what extent the changes that affect the national *imâra* have an impact on the secondary levels. However, these groups claim to act under the GIA's banner, and therefore there would appear to be a sort of centralised organisational structure. Concerning Abderrahmane Moussaoui's theories and in this example, we are tempted to say that it is not the person alone who becomes a leader and mobilises the groups. We are suggesting here that there is another dimension in the "power/authority/charisma" prism which could correspond to the "charisma reserve" defined by Weber and cited by Etzioni, from which the next generations of an organisation select their leaders⁴⁵. It is the notion that while the leader must prove he has certain qualities and be preceded by a certain reputation (military feats, religiousness in the Algerian case), he must also be the custodian of a sort of "legend" that surrounds the role independently and which causes the masses of fighters to swear their allegiance to him.

Organisation, Territory and Social Structures

The main question here is to comprehend the ties between an armed organisation and its social and territorial environment. Several authors highlight this necessary anchoring for an armed group to attain its objectives. This is because, in a context of conflict, armed groups are constantly seeking to restore the balance of power (against a central authority or adversary group, etc.), and as such, societal networks appear as a way to offset the surrounding insecurity by providing assistance, resources, combatants, etc. Abdulkader Sinno, whom we have mentioned several times, also discusses this pre-existing element that an armed organisation attaches itself to, or uses for support. This formation is facilitated in this context, because there is no new "imported" frame of reference that is completely foreign to the rules that prevailed. The organisation that is formed thus follows the traditional functioning structures (although this does not mean there is no adapting or reappropriating of those traditional structures), as this way there is less risk of friction with local peoples⁴⁶.

While we have chosen an approach from this angle specifically, we shall keep in mind that the prior existence of social structures is not an obligatory constant and that there are several founding truths. This is true for organisations that are very withdrawn, in particular when there is an unstable social environment, or lack thereof, where the organisation can replace it, even going so far as to isolate the individuals that have any connection to previous structures. On this point, we shall focus on the research carried out by Olivier Fillieule on "militant disengagement", an especially difficult process depending on " [...] *the sacrifices made to enter the group (initiation rites, tests, hierarchisation and isolation of groups), the degree of socialisation within the group, which usually results in a strengthening of emotional attachment and which varies according to the degree of renunciation of social relations outside the group (families and friends), rules governing defection, sometimes made*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁵ Amitai Etzioni, *Modern Organizations*, Gembloux, Duculot, 1971. We refer here to Chapter V: "Bureaucracies: Structure and legitimacy", p. 95-107.

⁴⁶ Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*

impossible due to material dependency or the threat of being hunted as a traitor.”⁴⁷ Fillieule’s citation is based on the research of Rosabeth Kanter⁴⁸ on the mechanisms of the individual’s attachment to the group and which are extremely pertinent here. Based on the study of several American utopian communities, she classifies the various processes that provide structure to and maintain attachment. She identifies the degrees of “sacrifice” and “investment” made by the individual in order to join the group; the development of internal “cohesion” (rituals, ceremonies, the development of a strong feeling of belonging, often opposing the “us” to the “others”); and the established “inspection” and self-regulation processes (shaming practices, “mortification” and the negation of the self-identity which is deferred to the group identity, etc.).

We shall also mention the studies carried out by Paul Staniland, analysing the ties between the organisational structure of an armed group and its roots (or lack thereof) in pre-existing social foundations. His starting point is the literature that focuses on the ties between an armed group’s resources and their influence on the construction and consolidation of this group, or inversely on the collapse of its framework, discipline and successful attaining of its original political-military objectives. We should specify that the “resources” here are to be understood in a wide sense, including the armed organisation’s funding by a diaspora or foreign state, and the income from criminal activities, trafficking and counterfeiting. Some authors agree that the resources mobilised are a powerful catalyst in the construction of a solid and well-organised group, enabling its politicisation, acquisition of arms and full devotion of its forces to the armed struggle. Staniland cites as examples the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the Free Aceh Movement on the Indonesian island of Sumatra⁴⁹, the Hezbollah⁵⁰, etc. However, another part of the literature seems, on the contrary, to agree on the fact that the influx of resources directly contributes to the group’s collapse and the depoliticising of its members, who end up adopting predator strategies to accumulate more wealth. Several authors support this argument, such as Jeremy Weinstein⁵¹, who studies Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), Kyle Beardsley and Brian McQuinn⁵², as well as David Keen⁵³.

Given that no satisfactory consensus has emerged from this debate, and basing his study on the armed groups active in Kashmir between 1988 and 2003⁵⁴, Staniland advances the inclusion of a third parameter to this armed group resources/development duality and incorporates the issue of pre-existing social structures that armed groups base their formation on (or not). He argues that when an

⁴⁷ Extract of: Olivier Fillieule and Mounia Bennabi-Chraïbi, “[Exit, voice, loyalty et bien d’autres choses encore...](#)”, in Olivier Fillieule and Mounia Bennabi-Chraïbi, *Résistances et protestations dans les sociétés musulmanes*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003, p. 123 and cited by Olivier Fillieule in: Olivier Fillieule (dir.), *Le désengagement militant*, Belin, 2005, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Rosabeth M. Kanter, “[Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities](#)”, *American Sociological Review*, 33, 1968, p. 499-517; *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*, Harvard University Press, 1972.

⁴⁹ Studied in particular by: Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh*, Stanford University Press, 2009; Shane Joshua Barter, “[Resources, Religion, Rebellion: The Sources and Lessons of Acehnese Separatism](#)”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 19:1, March 2008, p. 39-61.

⁵⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁵¹ Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁵² Kyle Beardsley and Brian McQuinn, “[Rebel Groups as Predatory Organizations: The Political Effects of the 2004 Tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka](#)”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53:4, August 2009, p. 624-645; Staniland also recommends: Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “[Greed and Grievance in Civil War](#)”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56:4, October 2004, p. 563-595.

⁵³ David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁵⁴ Paul Staniland compares six key groups which all received material support from Pakistan between 1980 and 1990: Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Hizbul Mujahideen (Hizb), the Muslim Janbaz Force, Ilkhwan-ul Muslimeen, al-Umar Mujahideen, Al Jihad. The JKLF and the Hizb are a particular focus of his study, as they are the most representative organisations. Paul Staniland, “[Organizing Insurgency, Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia](#)”, *International Security*, 37:1, Summer 2012, p. 142-177.

armed group is properly integrated and built on stable, pre-structure social foundations, it can form more quickly – in particular in a conflict situation where rapid response is an essential parameter – and have more convincing resources to establish the organisation and its cohesion.

A group that is integrated – in local structures – would have better mechanisms for coordination, discipline and the integration of new combatants, and would be less subjected to internal dissent. As for the use of resources, when there is an influx, the former social frameworks partly “absorb” these flows and ensure the combatants are not distracted from their primary fight: “[...] *they flow along robust lines of both social and organizational loyalty and monitoring, thus disciplining and mitigating the lures of material gain*”⁵⁵. Inversely, according to Staniland, a fragmented group might run the risk of being “corrupted” by the provision of external resources and the collapse of its organisational structure, policies and its military would reflect the fragility of local structures, upon which it is more or less founded.

Based on this hypothesis, Staniland compares the trajectories of the Jammu Kashmir (JKLF) and the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (Hizb) Liberation Fronts, both supported in their struggle by Pakistan. He points out that even with this military support, the JKLF, which also has great support from the people, never managed to establish an efficient organisational structure, whereas the Hizb, even though it rallies less supporters, was able to take advantage of Pakistani endowments to set up a relatively stable and coherent organisation. According to Staniland, this is due to several factors which stem from the infamous original social base, which is too weak in the case of the JKLF. To begin, there appears to be a divide and lack of communication (and culture) between the leaders of the urbanised organisation and combatants in the local factions that come from small towns or rural areas. On top of this, these small structures that have joined together do not share much more in common than their convergence in the armed struggle. The fact that the group does not have a socially homogenous resource pool causes it to incorporate within its ranks a variety of combatant profiles, whose heterogeneity is not sufficiently compensated for by the political and military training received upon joining the group.

The Hizb appears to be structured in a completely different way. Created in 1989, its structure was built around a central hub and with a network built up over time by Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), originally a non-violent association founded in 1940 which appeared to function in harmony with religious tradition, the local economy, school network and interaction between its members (marriages, meetings, etc.). The Hizb used this foundation as a launchpad: “*The Jamaat-e-Islami was not an original sponsor of this group, but the Hizb’s founders included several JI members and affiliates [...]*”⁵⁶. According to Staniland, this structure is what gives the group its efficiency in operations.

The idea of a “social root” seems to be closely linked to the issue of whether or not the armed groups have control over and use their environment. The territory offers several research avenues, such as the relationship with the local populations – who may or may not be likely to contribute to the armed struggle; the recruitment of potential fighters; transport and security of men and equipment; mobilizing certain resources and establishing a war economy (counterfeit goods, trafficking, etc.).

Abdulkader Sinno considers the control of a safe haven to be an essential parameter in an armed group's strategy. He stresses the importance of this refuge being situated within the territory claimed by one or several armed groups, whether each group is individually fighting for it or in their joint struggle against an official political authority. The safe haven should not be outside the territory, as this would have long-term negative effects on the group pursuing its objectives (difficulty reconciling its presence with that of other authorities on a foreign territory, manipulation and diversion of the group’s original goals, etc.). According to the different organisational structures mentioned earlier, the structure that Sinno believes to depend most on this safe haven is unquestionably the centralised organisation. This is because it is intrinsically dependent on communication between the leaders and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

the operational levels, which is made extremely difficult by the absence of a secure territory to establish and enable this coordination. The group therefore becomes extremely vulnerable and cannot properly function and pursue its objectives. On the contrary, the non-centralised organisations (decentralised, reticular, multiple and patron-client) tend to survive longer in the absence of a safe haven, as their ranks are more independent and ready to act. Information is no less essential but it does not need to be sent from the apex of the organisation. Sinno also suggests that these types of organisation are more sensitive to local configurations; we therefore return to the initial notion of the social “root”: “[...] an advantage to non-centralized organizations enmeshed in intricate social structures”⁵⁷.

Now that we have identified these elements, we shall now focus on a specific case study with the Algerian civil war.

⁵⁷ Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

DEFINING THE ORGANISATION'S STRUCTURE: A CASE STUDY OF ALGERIAN ARMED GROUPS (1992-1998)

MIA, AIS, GIA: Introductory Elements

Before studying aspects of organisational structures, we shall briefly introduce the three groups that we have chosen to focus on. In other words, before approaching their structure, we must first explain their origins and how they were formed.

During the first years of the Algerian conflict (1991-1993), the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) held the greatest appeal for those seeking to engage in armed violence, and a large number of fighters for the future AIS and GIA could be found in its ranks. It is one of the rare groups that existed before the civil war broke out. MIA was founded by Mustapha Bouyali, who is remembered in Algeria as the first among the Islamist opposition to have chosen the path of arms to fight the regime. Bouyali, a former mujtahid and FLN militant, had worked for the national electricity company (SONELEC) before founding the Algerian Islamic Movement in 1979, renamed the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) in 1980. This appears to be the result of a long and meticulous process, because it was three years before the group took action. According to Moussaoui, the aim was to establish an Islamic state, first in Algeria, then a cross-border state with Mecca as its capital⁵⁸. With this strategy, MIA would then take over from the General Directorate for National Security (DGSN)⁵⁹. During the 1980s, the MIA carried out several large-scale operations that helped the group obtain weapons and capital⁶⁰. This material independence would be necessary for the group's resurrection between the 1980s and 1990s. By avoiding carrying out raids and attacks on military barracks that the other groups were forced to undertake in order to find resources, MIA escaped the counterinsurgency repression of the security forces and the group continued its activities.

The end of the "first" MIA came in 1987 with the death of Bouyali, who was killed in an altercation with gendarmes in the Algiers suburbs. The rest of the group split up and the remaining Bouyalists were put in prison. After the riots in October 1988, the Algerian government and President Chadli Bendjedid, in a goodwill gesture to the opposition, granted presidential pardon to a group of political opponents in 1989. Among those pardoned were around fifteen of these Bouyalists, including key figures of Algerian Islamism in the following decade, such as Ali Benhadj (leader of the FIS), Mansouri Meliani (one of the core founders of the GIA) and Abdelkader Chebouti. Certain authors, such as Moussaoui, noticed a fresh outbreak of violence after the fifteen men were released, which they analysed as an outcry over the participation of FIS in the elections, leading to the creation of a multitude of offshoot groups⁶¹, which we have already mentioned. It was therefore partly the ex-Bouyalists who revived the armed struggle. The MIA was reformed under the leadership of Chebouti – of whom we know very little – until his death in 1992 in unclear circumstances. In the literature consulted up to this point, the second MIA is sometimes presented as an "offshoot" of the FIS or

⁵⁸ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁵⁹ Belhimer, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶⁰ In 1982 the group stole 160 kg of explosives and in 1987 attacked a police barracks to steal weapons and munitions.

⁶¹ "Most of these groups were formed from 1990 on. Paradoxically, this was the time when the political situation was clearly in support of the Islamist movement. The FIS had just achieved a spectacular victory in the recent communal elections in June 1990. It is precisely this reason that partly explains the turn of events that followed. The FIS was accused of wanting to share power, instead of changing it. The strategic differences between the various groups were revived by the recently freed MIA leaders. This led to an explosion of a multitude of offshoot groups whose only common denominators were their faith and their organisation method." Moussaoui, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 1326. Citation translated from the French.

original core of the future Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), for example by Ammar Belhimer⁶² who believes Chebouti was handling the military front of the party while the FIS leaders in exile abroad were the political strategists. Luis Martinez, however, seems to see more of a distinction between the two organisations, although he does highlight their similarities and ties, in particular concerning the strategy on the ground (criticism of the predatory approach and extortion committed by the GIA, strict^{ly} military action, etc.) and common references (the shared model with the ALN). We shall retain that there are close ties between the two groups. Chebouti never took part in the FIS and remained very sceptical as to the group's participation in the elections, although he did remain somewhat supportive of them. And despite the fact that he appeared to foresee the situation worsening, following discussions with the Front's leaders, he accepted to remain in the background and allow the events to develop⁶³.

The Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), meanwhile, claimed to be the "armed wing of the FIS" and was officially created in 1994. In reality, it would appear to have formed prior to that date but took time to rise due to the strong disaccord across the front. When the civil war broke out, the FIS was paralysed by the various movements within it, struggling to agree on how to react to its dissolution in 1992. One group refused to use violence and sought to keep a strictly political agenda; meanwhile, faced with the breakdown of the electoral process and in the absence of any legalist system, another group encouraged members to take up arms. For both parties, it was essential that they held onto their powerful position in the public eye – they must not "dilapidate the electoral capital", to use the expression of Luis Martinez – acquired in the preceding years of militancy.

Lastly, the Islamic Armed Group (GIA)⁶⁴ appears at this point to have been the most complex "group", or entity, and rather resembles a "cluster within a cluster". There is a tendency to compare it to a network, as defined by Serena⁶⁵ when he mentions hybrid structures with a reticular part and a centralised part. The GIA would fit this typecast, as it is made up of both a national *imara* with area emirs and a national emir, and established on a base of multiple small groups and cells that all function independently of each other. In one article in particular, Luis Martinez makes a clear distinction between "the GIA" and "the GIA(s)"⁶⁶. While there is no definite date as to when the GIA was formed, it appears to have been launched with Mansouri Meliani, one of the fifteen amnestied Bouyalists. In the very early 1990s, a group of "Afghans" looking for a leader contacted Chebouti and Meliani to lead their group. As we mentioned above, Chebouti was waiting on the results of the election and declined the offer, while Meliani, who struggled to bow to Chebouti's authority, accepted. The original core of the GIA appeared and the group's first press releases date to 1992-1993⁶⁷. His first exploit was an attack on a border post at Guemmar, on the Tunisian border, carried out by Tayeb Al-Afghani just before the first round of the legislatives in December 1991⁶⁸. This was a cause of great embarrassment to the FIS, who wanted to be respected and could not afford to be mixed up with such an action in the unstable situation it had found itself in.

In the mid-1990s, the binary nature of the GIA-AIS took centre stage. We shall now discuss certain aspects of their structure during this period.

⁶² Belhimer, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Luis Martinez and Séverine Labat agree on this point. Labat, 1995, *op. cit.* and Martinez, 1998, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Which are often referred to as GIA (from the French acronym for Islamic Armed Group).

⁶⁵ See the first section of this paper.

⁶⁶ Luis Martinez, "[Les groupes islamistes entre guérilla et négoce : Vers une consolidation du régime algérien ?](#)", *Les Etudes du CERI*, 3, August 1995.

⁶⁷ The date of the first press release is unknown. The second was on 14 January 1993, signed by Abdelhak Layada (Abu Adlene), the national emir of the GIA from October 1992 to June 1993.

⁶⁸ The attack allegedly took place on 28 November 1991, on the anniversary of the death of Abdallah Azzam (on this topic, see footnote n°9 of this study), Labat, 1995, *op. cit.*

Structuring Process: GIA-AIS Emulation

From the first months of the conflict, the forces present were aware of the need for organisation in their armed struggle, especially as the groups were facing a state which would also change shape over those initial years⁶⁹. Here, we can say that concerning the “MIA-AIS” and the GIA, it appears that there was a simultaneous restructuring of these two entities which would polarise the armed struggle and that the AIS, once it saw the GIA’s influence begin to rise, took action to unify its ranks.

For the first few months, there were several attempts to unify the armed groups under Abdelkader Chebouti, whose charisma established his leadership in the eyes of the combatants. Several meetings were held in the region of Zbarbar, near Bouira, southeast of Algiers; this region seems to have been the safe haven for several “Afghans”, to such an extent the region is sometimes nicknamed “Zbarbaristan”⁷⁰. Séverine Labat mentions several attempts (July 1991, August 1991) that were aborted due to internal rivalries common in the various groups. Mansouri Meliani in particular was unable to accept Chebouti’s command, as they were rivals.

A new attempt to find an agreement occurred in April 1992 in Zbarbar, once more under Chebouti’s patronage. Alongside Meliani and other leaders of armed groups, several leading personalities were present, such as Moh Leveille, one of the first emirs of the GIA, who took over from Meliani after his death; Hocine Abderrahim⁷¹, a former chief of staff for Abassi Madani and a lieutenant for Chebouti; and Saïd Makhloufi, founder of the Movement for an Islamic State (MEI)⁷². Makhloufi, a former officer of the People’s National Army (ANP) dismissed in 1987, chief editor of the FIS press agency *Al-Munqidh*⁷³ called for the radicalisation of the movement very early on. According to Moussaoui, it was Makhloufi who was behind the call for “civil disobedience” launched by Madani and Benhadj in 1991⁷⁴. He had a strong ideological influence on the GIA strategy, which followed his absolutist example, namely in classing all of society between supporters of jihad and enemies of Islam, with no hesitation over directing their armed activity and terror at civilians, including Muslims. This meeting resulted in the creation of a national executive office and designated Abdelkader Chebouti as *liwa* (general). There appeared to be a cell structure in the centre of the country, under the direction of Hocine Abderrahim, in order to better organise the relationship between the various existing entities. This initial cohesion did not hold, however, namely because Mansouri Meliani could not accept Chebouti’s authority.

The fourth attempt at unification took place in Tamesguida (south of Algiers, near Medea), on the night of 31 August and 1st September 1992. At least two factors made the outcome of the meeting more favourable to unification. The arrest of Meliani (which had occurred in the meantime) firstly helped alleviate internal rivalry and most importantly, the meeting took place just after the attack on

⁶⁹ In 1993-1994 the worn-out Algerian regime was granted an adjustment in its debt repayment schedule, and signed a Structural Adjustment Programme with the FMI. This plan provided for the liberalisation of the economy, the privatisation of public companies, the devaluation of the dinar, etc. This series of measures, together with the income from oil (an industry that was little affected by the civil war and guerrilla extortion), allowed the state to rebuild itself and establish its counterinsurgency policy.

⁷⁰ Labat, 1995, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Hocine Abderrahim was born in 1948 in Casablanca. He joined Bouyali’s group in the 1980s, was arrested in 1986 and freed in 1989 when he joined the FIS, followed by the MIA after the ruptured electoral process. Abderrahim coordinated the attack on Houari Boumediene airport (see the next paragraph), for which he was rapidly arrested, condemned to death and executed in 1993.

⁷² Makhloufi’s Movement for an Islamic State (MEI) remains quite a mysterious armed group and the literature available about it differs. Certain authors, such as Luis Martinez, believe that the MEI was created from a split with the MIA, as Makhloufi did not agree with Chebouti about the strategy to adopt. Other authors, such as François Burgat or Séverine Labat, tend to closely associate and even mix up the MIA with the MEI.

⁷³ “The saviour”, a bimonthly newspaper in Arabic.

⁷⁴ In 1991, Makhloufi wrote a twenty-two point opusculé entitled “Civil disobedience, founding principles and goals, methods and resources”.

Houari Boumediene airport, at the end of August 1992, in which 9 people were killed and hundreds injured. Chebouti was allegedly unaware of the plan, even though it was coordinated by one of his lieutenants, Hocine Abderrahim, and he condemned the attacks on civilians. This event reveals with greater clarity the differences in strategy among the partisans of the armed struggle. The FIS leaders, who had long hesitated and struggled to take sides, then decided to properly enter the armed struggle, build their structure based on this decision and equip themselves with a real strategy. In January 1993, Abderazaq Rajjam made a call for arms in a press release and Rabah Kebir countersigned Ali Benhadj's *fatwa*, in which he states that if he was not in prison, he would rally to Abdelkader Chebouti's side. "The clandestine Islamist movement then had two voices: a political wing, which aimed to preserve the 'party's reputation' and a military wing, represented by armed groups."⁷⁵

There was to be another event that would speed up the military structure of the FIS and lead to the official creation of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS). In May 1994, the GIA also sought to rally the various armed groups and held a meeting in the mountains of Larbaa, southwest of Algiers. Several groups and representatives of different movements were present, in particular Said Makhloufi and the MEI, jazarists Mohamed Saïd and Abderazaq Rajjam who claimed to represent the FIS, and the leaders of the Islamic Front for Jihad in Algeria (FIDA)⁷⁶. During this unifying congress, they all decided to fight under the GIA's banner and swore allegiance to its national emir, Cherif Gousmi, although they were hesitant and maintained their own individual objectives. While Makhloufi's rigidity was coherent with the GIA's motto⁷⁷, Moussaoui stresses that he was not an absolute supporter and he maintained a certain distance from the group. As for the rallying of the jazarists, it seems quite surprising, especially if we consider that in November 1993, the GIA published a press release accusing the jazarists (namely Rajjam and Saïd) of cooperating with government forces and threatened them with death⁷⁸. According to Séverine Labat, this "unnatural" alliance came about because they could not impose their vision within the FIS' political wing abroad⁷⁹, so they were trying to capitalise on the GIA's influence and take advantage of building a political base should the negotiations with the government power come to fruition. It was not a lasting affiliation, however, as the following year Mohamed Saïd was assassinated, allegedly by the GIA, and Abderazaq Rajjam garnered support from the AIS.

Although he had not been an emir for long (March to July 1994), Cherif Gousmi, a 26-year-old "Afghan", "succeeded in giving the GIA a framework and organisation principles"⁸⁰, which were set out in his opuscle, "The fundamental rules for the success of the GIA." In particular, it was Gousmi who initiated the allegiance ceremony (*bay'a*) – during this meeting in May 1994 – in which all combatants had to take an oath from then on during the coronation of a new emir. During this ceremony, the designated emir stated before all the members present "[...]His *abnegation to the task, stressing his readiness to cede the appointment to one more qualified than he, if the "brothers" should ask this of him. [...]This solemn appointment would from then on be a reference in the bay'a protocol. Since then, without this ritual, no emir may attempt to remain there in the eyes of the GIA members.*"⁸¹

⁷⁵ Labat, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁷⁶ According to Luis Martinez, the group was headed by physician Mohamed Brahimi (aka "Moh Lunettes") and was renowned for his assassinations of intellectuals in 1992 and 1993, Martinez 1998, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ "No reconciliation, no truce, no *dhimma* pact, no pardon and no moderation towards these apostate leaders". The "*dhimma* pact" refers to the rules governing the lives of Christian peoples living on Islamic territories. This motto is attributed to Qari Saïd.

⁷⁸ Belhimer, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Although the jazarists may have been the second political force in the FIS, they were still in the minority.

⁸⁰ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Following the congress held in May 1994, the GIA officially announced the unification in a statement, *Concerning Union, Jihad and respect for the Book and the Sunna*. In the ranks of the FIS, this text did not go down well and seemed to deeply perturb certain leaders; while the unification of the various groups was indeed one of the Front's objectives and remained unquestioned, the GIA's method, which brought under its banner the various groups even though several of their leaders were not present and had not been consulted, was deemed unacceptable. Firstly, the initiative launched by Rajjam and Said was seen as a betrayal, and secondly, the FIS, which had galvanised the masses before it was banned, could not accept being placed under the GIA's patronage, as a simple affiliate. From that point, the FIS leaders that had not fled the country and who were attempting to establish a semblance of structure on the national scale, began to quickly organise the group. In June 1994, jazarist Ahmed Benaïcha, elected deputy for the Chlef region for the FIS in 1991, announced that a military committee would be created for the west. Following the organisations of the front prior to the interrupted electoral process, he directed this committee with the mayor of Chlef since 1990, Mohammed Chennouf. Soon after, Madani Mezrag did the same for the east, announcing that a second military committee would be formed. On 18 July 1994, a joint statement by the two men confirmed the formation of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and condemned the unity declared by the GIA's statement on union. In March 1995, Mezrag became the AIS' national emir.

The unification of the various groups affiliated with the FIS in the centre of the country appeared to be more complicated, but two entities broke away: a *katiba* led by Hocine Abdellatif (the "Company of the Oath") and another led by Jamel Zibuni (the "Company of Death"). However, an article published in *Al-Wasat*, translated and annotated (in French)⁸² by François Burgat, tells us that in 1995, while the support from these groups for Mezrag was not official, there was nonetheless coordination between them.

As for the structuring of the GIA in the same period, based on elements provided by Ammar Belhimer, we have produced a "theoretical" organisational chart of the GIA leaders around 1994-1995 which we have inserted below.

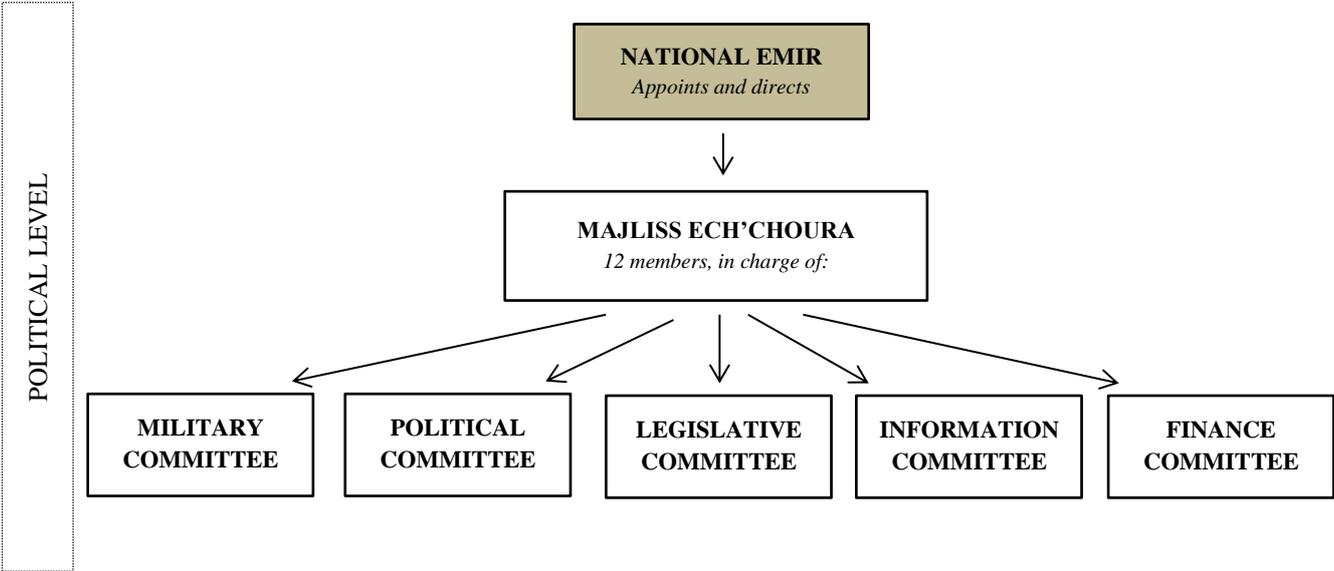


Figure 1: Theoretical Organisational Chart of The GIA⁸³.

⁸² "The Algerian *jamaa*: secret leadership and a map of party divisions", *Al-Wasat*, 173, 22 May 1995, article translated and annotated in French by François Burgat in "*Algérie : l'AIS et le GIA, itinéraires de constitution et relations*", *Maghreb-Machrek*, 149, July-September 1995, p. 105-113, p. 113.

⁸³ Chart established based on elements from the article of Belhimer, *op. cit.*

We will focus in this section on the solid core of the GIA, and based on our current research, it is impossible to know to what extent the decisions made at this level affected the cells that made up the base of the GIA, which were extremely independent, as we have seen previously. It is also impossible to verify with certainty today if this structure was effectively implemented. However, when we cross-analyse these elements with the article in *Al-Wasat*⁸⁴ that we mentioned earlier, we found some interesting similarities. According to this information, dated to May 1995, the national emir Djamel Zitouni⁸⁵ was supported by two deputies, one of whom was responsible for the military committee. Also confirmed are the presence of political and information committees (directed by Mohamed Saïd and Abderazaq Rajjam respectively, whom we mentioned earlier,) and the legal committee (directed by a man named Abdelkrîm). There would appear to have been a proper structure, and the elements indicated here appear to confirm this.

We must now complete this “political” structure by looking at how it was complemented on the ground, at the territorial level.

The Algerian Territory: Recruitment Pool, Maquis and Liberated Areas

Here, the issue of territorial occupation by Algerian armed groups is studied under two angles. The first is the “corollary” aspect, in which the environment is considered to be a supplier of combatants. All the mujahedeen that took part in this conflict were Algerian nationals – even if there was an enlistment of foreign members towards the end of the 1990s, under the impetus of the GSPC emir, Nabil Sahraoui⁸⁶. Secondly, it is the territorial occupation itself that is of interest to us, because although our information is partial at this stage, we can nonetheless mention several elements of interest.

We shall begin with the first point concerning the recruitment pool that fuelled the armed struggle. It is of note that there were several recruitment sources, sometimes completely separate depending on the group. This reveals the plurality of strategies at work behind the structures, and even the different temporalities in which they operated.

As Luis Martinez explains⁸⁷, the MIA and the AIS had a specifically military perception of the armed struggle and their reference model was the National Liberation Army (ALN). They therefore established their recruitment strategy on this model, seeking battle-hardened, professional combatants. In 1991-1992, the MIA under Abdelkader Chebouti attracted many candidates to the struggle, but the selection processes they established were long and meticulous (progressive recruitment, inquiries conducted among family and friends, etc.). While this type of process aimed to select the most loyal members and protect the group from any infiltration of government forces, another consequence was that it disheartened candidates impatient to take up arms and led to the group's decline in 1993-1994. The MIA suffered from that well-known difficulty of maintaining the “overt-covert” balance that Chad Serena addressed in his study of the elements necessary for the survival of a secret network⁸⁸. With a tendency to be too protective, the group lacked openness and was unable to last.

The many jihad hopefuls rejected by Chebouti's group had to settle for the urban armed gangs who were attached to the GIA and welcomed with open arms young fighters impatient to join its ranks. Ahead of military action or clear political aims, these groups were mainly active in criminal circles

⁸⁴ *Al-Wasat, op. cit.*; Belhimer, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁸⁵ Allegedly the national emir of the GIA until his assassination (by the GIA?) in July 1996.

⁸⁶ Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Martinez, 1998, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ See the first section of this paper.

(racketeering local businesses and citizens, etc.). Luis Martinez makes a clear distinction between these gangs – who were active in the greater Algiers area – and the GIA itself which, he believes, accumulated resources, strengthened its operational structures and increased the recruitment of its combatants as the civil war progressed. “Until 1993, beaten back by the repression, the GIA sourced some of its men from the towns around Mitidja, a transformation linked to increased professionalization of its organisation, widening its social and regional base to bring the underground fighters closer to those of the AIS.”⁸⁹

The point on the AIS recruitment pool is particularly interesting. We have already seen that the organisation was formed later and made official in 1994; it is therefore in a different temporal reality. The vast numbers of hopefuls that spontaneously volunteered to take up arms between 1992 and 1993 had already joined other organisations, so they needed to find other ways of recruiting. Among the deserters of the People’s National Army (ANP), Luis Martinez mentions the existence of a Council of the Islamic Front and Armed Jihad (CFIDA), an entity that appeared to be under the AIS's responsibility and the objective of which was namely to recruit service members of the regular armed forces⁹⁰. Most of all, as the “armed wing” of the FIS, the AIS would mainly rely on the electoral base of the dissolved front, taking advantage of the first party leaders and militants freed in 1993, having been imprisoned during the suspended electoral process in 1991, in the camps south of Algeria⁹¹. The role played by prison is highlighted by all authors consulted, both in the radicalisation process towards the armed struggle for Islamist militants, and also in shaping the future leaders of those groups⁹².

We shall now discuss the manner in which the Algerian armed organisations took over the territory that surrounded them. There is one element that appears clear: we cannot say that the groups had a safe haven as defined by Abdulkader Sinno. The various organisations were present, but to varying degrees, across the whole of the Algerian territory and mainly in the regions and towns of the north of the country. With regard to the figures demonstrating the Islamist presence, Séverine Labat drew up a map, representing groups in the form of circular diagrams depending on the areas in question⁹³. She observes that this geography corresponds to the areas where the FIS were established based on the election results from 1990 and 1991. For example, according to this map, we can see that in the north of the country, a group that covered Kabylie to the Aures mountains appeared to be more opposed to armed groups, as it had already been opposed to the FIS during the elections.

While no territory was entirely under the control of armed groups, their presence was nonetheless confirmed and visible in different ways in different places. The areas where they were present in greatest numbers were without question the former maquis of the FLN, which were used during the war of independence, located in the mountains and forests surrounding Algeria’s main cities. The urban environment was also greatly used, in particular by the many armed groups declaring to be attached to the GIA. In this context, their presence was spread out and volatile, the combatants were

⁸⁹ Martinez, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Martinez, 1998, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ Luis Martinez gives a figure between 7,000 and 20,000 imprisonments in 1991, while Ammar Belhimer evokes 17,000 political prisoners. *Ibid.*, p. 308; and Belhimer, *op. cit.*

⁹² “The internment camps, which really were like schools of management for the armed struggle, were a prime space for the radicalisation of the Islamist base and thereby exacerbated the antagonism between tenants of the political line advocated by the FIS and the partisans of armed fighting. [...] Candidates were recruited in the internment camps, offering FIS militants – whether they supported violent action or not – the opportunity to assert their convictions (the Islamist discourse gave their imprisonment meaning: “if you are here, it is because the regime is against Islam”). The liberated militants later served as core founders of the best-organised armed groups. [...] The camps of Reggane and Ouargla, the corridors of which were all named after the most popular Islamist leaders, remained engraved in memories as the prime spaces for the fomenting of armed Islamism. Most of the detained militants that were freed were later arrested or rose to the highest positions of the main violent jamaate.” Labat, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 251-252. Citation translated from the French.

⁹³ This map can be consulted in the appendix (n°3).

born in the neighbourhoods so they knew the labyrinths of streets by heart and used them for launching attacks on the security forces and escaping when they were counterattacked. The literature also indicates the existence of "liberated" areas, referring to certain places that seemed to have fallen under the control of armed combatants and where they established new ways of life and administration. Ammar Belhimer gives the example of certain villages such as Birkhadem, Saoula, Douéra and Kheraissia⁹⁴, areas south of Algiers which were under the control of the GIA at the time of Cherif Gousmi's emirate and during which he segregated public transport for men and women and closed down hair salons.

All of these areas saw conflict between the groups who fought for their control. A specific example was the MIA maquis which the GIA took over when their organisational structure weakened in 1993, and a number of central thoroughfares (the Algiers to Constantine highway; the road along the Mediterranean coast) which were strategic areas for capturing the resources necessary for the group's survival (setting up of false road blocks, racketeering road hauliers, etc.).

With regard to the territorial occupation by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), it appears that the structure implemented sought to divide the entire country into "zones"⁹⁵, There were at least five zones, because we know that Hassan Hattab, before he defected and created the GSPC, was emir of zone two, which seems to have corresponded to Kabylie⁹⁶, and Nabil Sahraoui, who became the second emir of the GSPC after Hattab was deposed in 2003, was emir of the GIA for zone five. If we consider once more the information provided by Ammar Belhimer, this occupation can be represented in the following diagram:

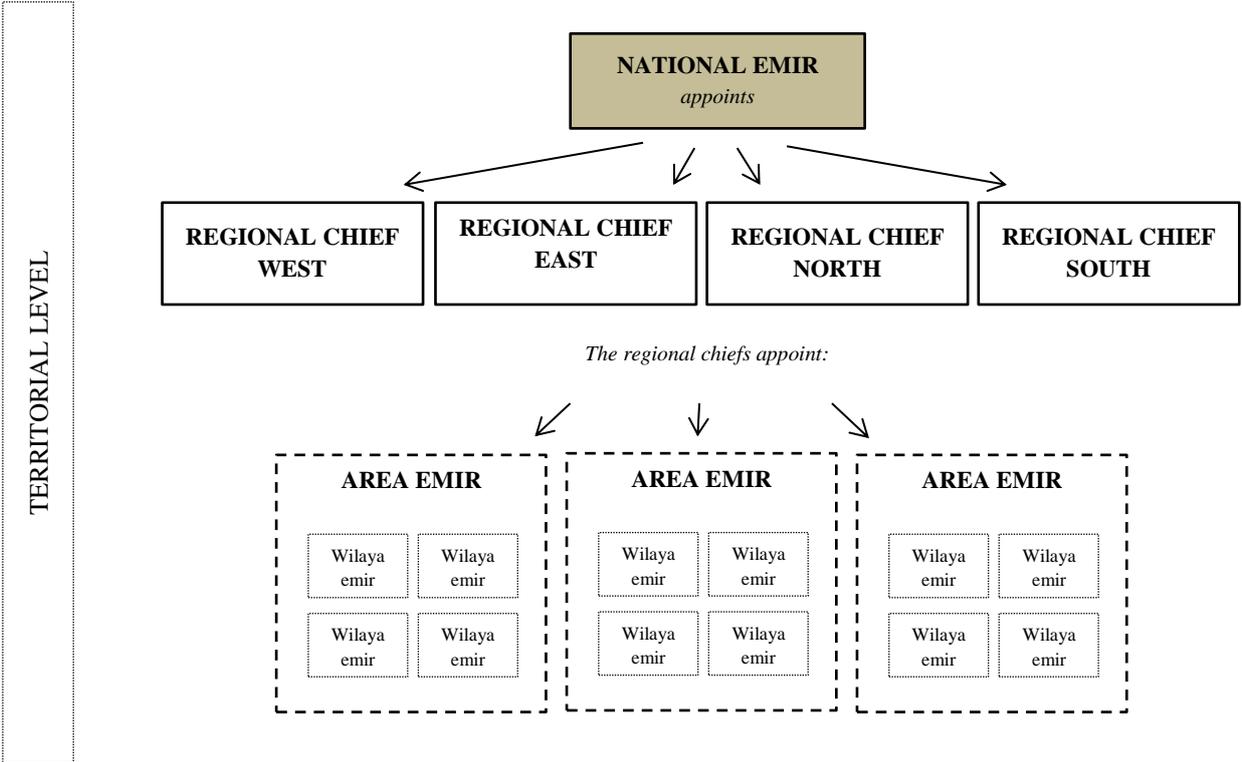


Figure 2: Theoretical Organisational Chart of The GIA⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ This would appear to correspond to Khraicia on our map (Appendix n°2).
⁹⁵ It would appear that this territorial division was also attempted by the first MIA under Mustapha Bouyali, but we do not have enough information on the topic to develop it here.
⁹⁶ According to Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*
⁹⁷ Chart established from elements of the article: Belhimer, *op. cit.*

We can therefore see at least three hierarchical levels: the national, area and *wilaya* echelons. This organisational structure is confirmed if we compare this information with research carried out by Abderrahmane Moussaoui. However, the anthropologist indicates that these different levels are not specific to the GIA and refer to the structure of all Algerian armed groups. Each echelon is composed of an *imara*, which corresponds to a “command post or headquarters” and in the case of a national *imara* (*imara wataniya*), it is closer to a "presidency". Below this level is the area *imara* (*mantiqa*), followed by the regional *imara* (*wila'i*).

We should add that a more specifically military version is based on this territorial model, and is particularly well explained by Moussaoui, with a hierarchy divided into a section, the “base echelon”, sub-company (*facilat*) and company (*katiba*) and battalion (*djund*). The mujahideen could also be organised into commandos (*zumra*) to carry out more specific tasks. To conclude, we have inserted below a model summarising this military organisational structure.

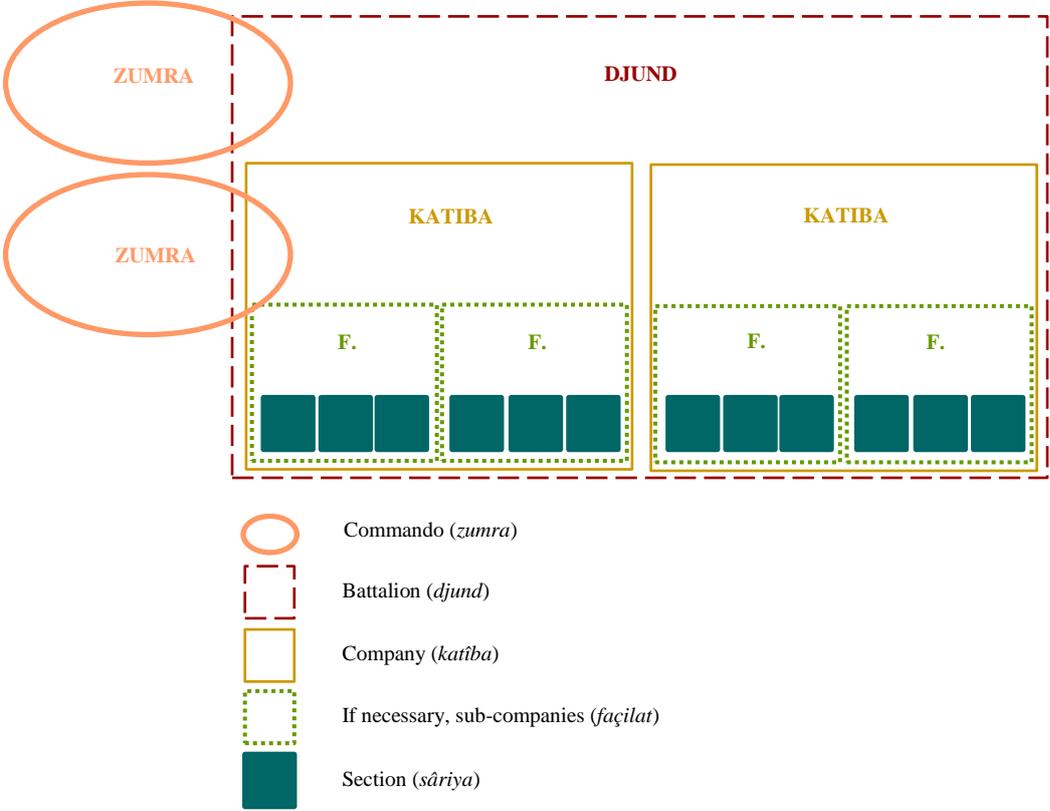


Figure 3: Structure of Algerian Armed Groups at The Military Level⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ Chart established from elements provided in: Moussaoui, 2006, *op. cit.*

CONCLUSION

In the first part of this paper, our aim was to select certain aspects in the study of organisations that seemed to play a key role, such as the influence of the organisational structure on the strategy adopted, the notion of power and authority and the social and territorial bases of an organisation.

Having set out these theoretical elements, it seemed essential that we compare our reference literature and establish to what extent it might correspond to hard examples such as the Algerian civil war. In addition to the notion that there are clearly divided levels in the structure of an armed group, according to the political temporality and maturity, in the second part there are two elements that we shall retain in particular. The first is the fact that Algerian armed groups seemed to implement their structuring and adaptation processes mainly during the conflict, gradually as it unfolded. The concept of armed groups emulating each other's structures was also of particular interest. Despite the fact that they were leading a combat against the same adversary – with different strategies – they ended up mostly competing with each other in a race to a “jihad monopoly” and their construction was the result of clean strategic decisions as well as options chosen by other armed organisations.

APPENDICES

Appendix n°1 – How structure affects the capacity of an organisation to implement and counter operational strategies, according to Abdulkader H. Sinno⁹⁹

	Fragmentation	Centralization	Multiplicity	Decentralization	Patronage
Accommodation and Confrontation	Accommodate only	Both (flexible)	Encourages confrontation	Attrition and accommodation only, low flexibility	Attrition and accommodation only
Divide and conquer	No	Yes	No	No	No
Hearts and minds	No	Yes	No	No	No
Co-optation	No	Yes	NR	Unlikely	Unlikely

↖ ABOVE: ABILITY TO EXECUTE STRATEGY

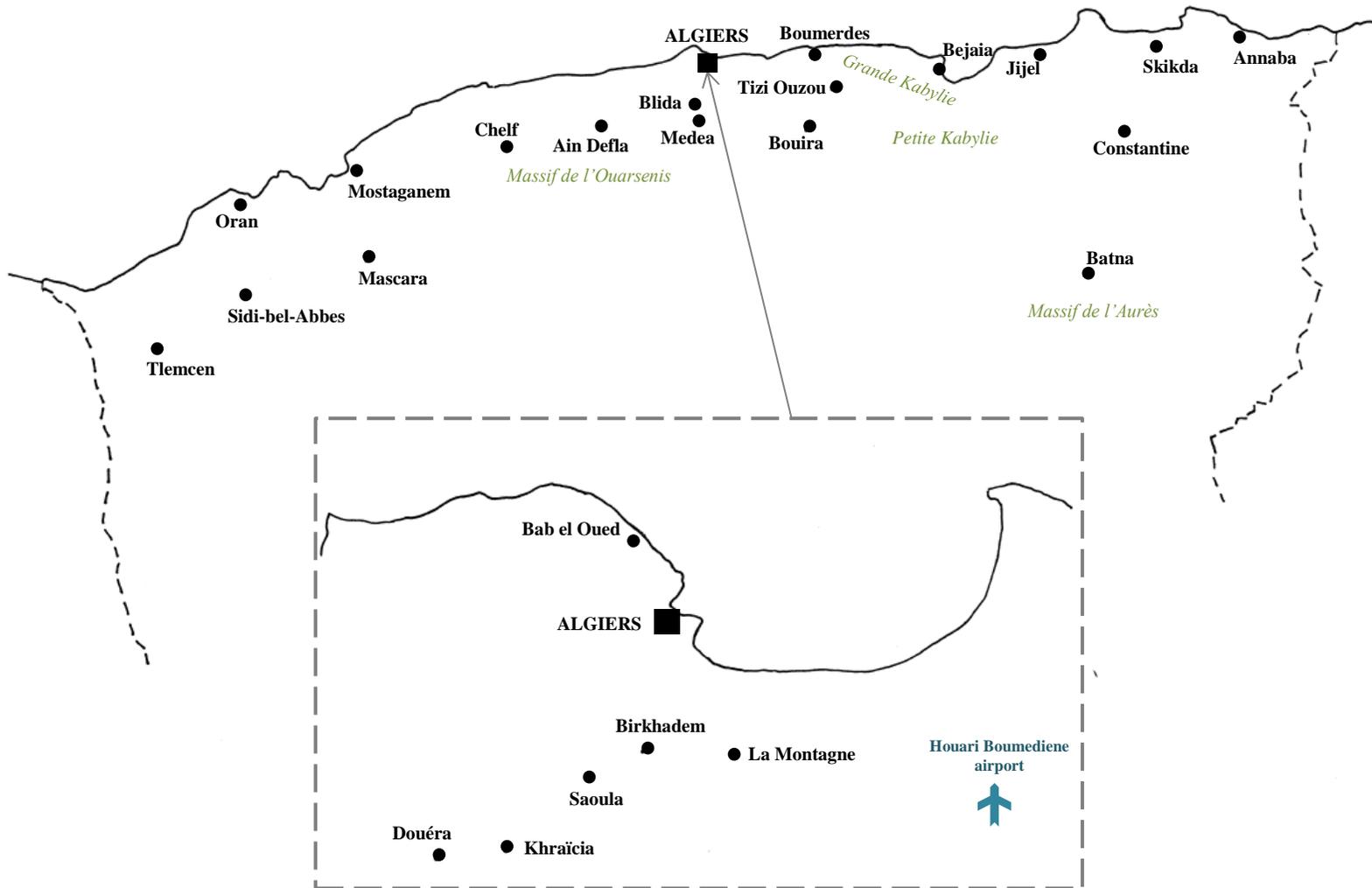
BELOW: ABILITY TO COUNTER STRATEGY ↘

Confrontation	Nil, unless induces outside intervention	Yes if has safe haven, otherwise not	Depends on availability of safe haven helpful if doesn't have one otherwise, not		
Divide and conquer	NR	Yes, strategy useless versus one centralized organization	Probably weakens ability to counter	Yes in case of widespread lockup	
Hearts and minds	NR	No	Both are better than a single centralized organization		The best
Co-optation	Vulnerable to individual co-optation	Easier to co-opt than decentralized organization	Easy to co-opt	Harder to co-opt than centralized organization	Yes

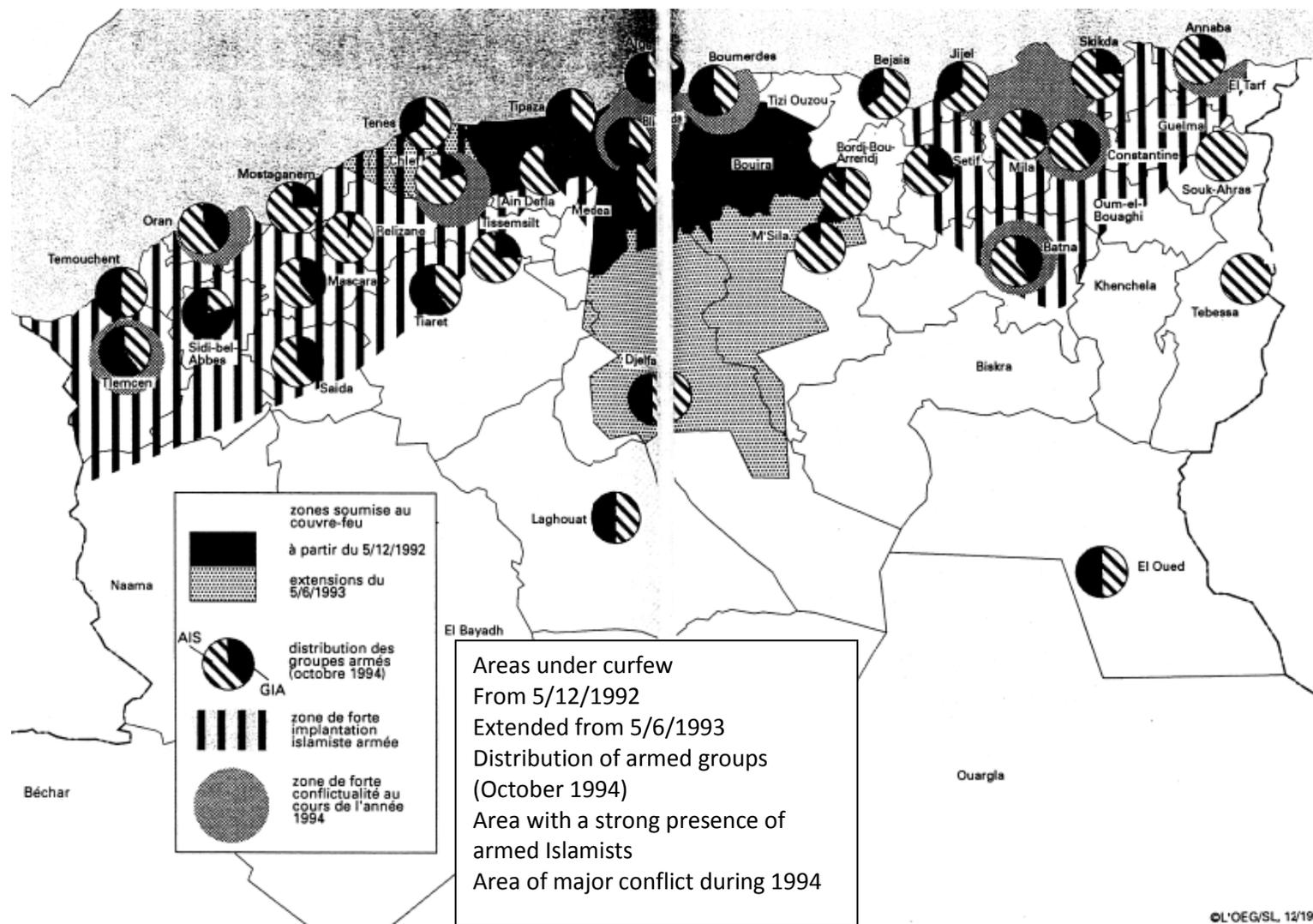
Shading code: disadvantageous advantageous No shade = Not Relevant (NR) or not clear

⁹⁹ Taken from: Sinno, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

Appendix n° 2 – Map of northern Algeria



Appendix n°3 – Map of Islamist presence, according to Séverine Labat¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰ Labat, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 308-309.

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANISATIONS APPLIED TO NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS

Alix LE MOIGN

The use of violence as a weapon of war is not due to the state structure alone, to which it is often attributed. Just like the state, non-state organisations invent, develop and practice violence, going far beyond a simple emotional and irrational response. Armed violence is therefore a full-fledged tool, used by the group to achieve its objectives.

However, in order to address the phenomenon of armed organisations, it is of primary importance that we understand what is meant by the term “organisation”, offer a precise definition and most importantly one that is not bound by the common use of the term generically. An initial answer may be found in the sociology of organisations, the concepts of which – while often developed by observing the world of work and business – can be adapted to other entities considered in different contexts.

Focusing on the example of Algeria, Alix LE MOIGN analyses the groups that appear to be at the heart of the armed struggle – the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA), the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) – their structure and their relationship with their environment.

É T U D E S