

The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa

The fate of love and hate France-Algeria: an inextricable relationship

Jean-François Daguzan

Summary

Franco-Algerian relations, already marked from the beginning by a highly emotional component, have become more complicated since the beginning of the civil war. After some hesitation France has opted for a policy of tacit support for the Algerian authorities, but this policy has done nothing to resolve the fundamental ambiguity of the bilateral relationship, born of frustration and a lack of understanding. The different situations of cohabitation in France rendered the expression of a coherent and intelligible political line difficult up to 1999. From then on, French policy towards Algeria can be summarised as reasoned support for the Algerian authorities and a partial delegation of the subject to the level of the European Union, in order to get round the emotionalism inherent in the bilateral relationship. To some extent, by reason of the multitude of links which tie them together, France and Algeria are obliged to live together complementing each other. It is now a matter of better organising that which cannot be "normalised".

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Thirty years after independence Franco-Algerian relations remain an unidentified political object. A privileged relationship, to be sure, but what kind of relationship? A unique one, rather, in which passion, sentiment, a lack of understanding, and the need for love play a major and disruptive role in this duo which is everything except ordinary, to paraphrase President Boumediene.

It is not proposed here to cover thirty eight years of bilateral relations; a book would not suffice for that. Consequently, after having rapidly placed Franco-Algerian relations in their politico-historical framework, the intention is to analyse the recent period, which extends from the "legal" coup d'Etat of January 1992 to the visit of President Bouteflika to Paris in June 2000 which, in a way, closed a period and a century at the same time.

1962-1992: an ambiguous example

The first thirty years of relations between France and an independent Algeria were marked by pronounced symbolism on both sides.

On the French side, General De Gaulle wanted to create a symbol of a new form of exemplary post-colonial cooperation in the eyes of the world. Except during the time of Giscard d'Estaing, it was, for French governments, to some extent a question of transforming the political defeat of France in Algeria into a victory on the ground of the principles and practice of the new North-South relations. This was why the French government accepted without a murmur the non-execution of the Evian accords by the Algerians, as well as a long series of diplomatic snubs of which it was the object. The apogee of this policy was the signature of the exorbitant gas agreement of 1982 which also represented the swansong of this unusual period.

On the Algerian side, behind public utterances bitterly denouncing the former coloniser, and resentment at the slightest suspicion of interference or attacks on national sovereignty, cooperation developed in all economic, social and education sectors, reaching a volume as large as it was discreet. Moreover, the technical and civil cooperation concealed genuine military cooperation up to the middle of the 1970s whose extent has never been fully

appreciated (military advisers, training and equipment sales). An example is the recent discovery of the secret base known as "B2 Namous" situated near Beni Wenef in the Sahara, whose existence has just been revealed, where chemical weapons were tested until 1978, the date of its dismantling, when the war in the Western Sahara had begun in 1976 and in which Paris supported Rabat!

To some extent it can be said that in its post-colonial relationship France demonstrated a blindness towards honesty, which caused it piously to overlook the defects of the authoritarian and oligarchic regime which was installed under Boumediene, and which reached its peak under Chadli. During the same period the French progressive intelligentsia, lost in its theoretical designs, vaunted the Algerian industrial revolution. What is more, the fascination which the Algerian President held for Mitterrand clinched the French position. It took the crisis and the riots of 1988, when the Algerian Army fired into a crowd, to produce a salutary galvanising shock. Economic ruin and political chaos combined in violence and opened the way to the Islamists, the only alternative political force after thirty years of totalitarianism. Paralysed by all these years of self-absorption, France could only note with alarm that its preferred model of development had run into a brick wall.

It is therefore clear that nothing is simple in Franco-Algerian relations: for the new Algeria France represented an ambiguous fascination; critical or openly anti-French public statements structured the Algerian public debate, while at the same time many-sided cooperation linked the two countries, and the interpenetration of the two societies became a reality.

Some hard facts:

The number of Algerians legally resident in France today is estimated at 540 000. To this figure must be added the families of harkis (military personnel of Algerian origin) who left Algeria between 1961 and 1962 and whose number is estimated at between 200 000 and 250 000, as well as French people of Algerian origin with dual nationality or naturalised status (about a million). In other words, Algerians, taken as a whole, represent the largest minority community in France. On the other side, the "pieds noirs" and other repatriated groups (a little under 1.5 million) play a not inconsiderable role in relations between the two countries (they have always benefitted from a Secretary of State or a ministerial representative) even though statistically their influence is bound to decline .

From the economic point of view, France is by far Algeria's principal partner and her third customer. On the other hand, and to the great unhappiness of the Algerians, she is not the first investor on the ground (from 1990 to 1998 France only invested 340 million francs, a figure affected by the war). The civil war having had its devastating effects, France surrendered its place to less exposed countries such as Canada, the United States, Britain and Italy. Nevertheless, French firms provided the largest international presence at the reopening of the Algiers Fair in 1999, and several hundred attended the 2000 Fair. The external debt of Algeria totals some 22.75 billion Euros of which 3.47 billion are owed to France.

The presence of a strong Algerian contingent in France has economic implications for the country since informal social transfers are estimated at between three and five billion francs per year, which can be considered as an outflow of funds. On the other hand, transfers of savings, benefits and pensions have shown a marked decline since the 1990s.

Of course, the impediments to the free movement of people after 1992 have affected the easy relationships which had developed naturally since independence. But, since the return to relative civil peace, normal relations between those residing in France and Algerian French have resumed.

Finally, the considerable quantity of Algerian savings deposits in France cannot be ignored. In addition, the financial interests of the Algerian "Nomenklatura", although unknown, nonetheless represent a sociological element to be taken into account and another form of cross-linking.

These were therefore two countries intimately linked by an historico-politico-socio-financial imbroglio which had to manage an unprecedented crisis following the sudden halt to the democratic process in 1992.

1992-1993: drama and doubt

Following the catastrophic first round of legislative elections, which would ineluctably have brought the FIS to power, the senior military hierarchy and the *Haut comité d'Etat* (*High Committee of State*) halted the democratic process, creating the first divisions between the various elements of administration and power in France, as well as in public opinion. Although François Mitterrand adopted a crafty prudence in his declarations, an element of public opinion protested against the "official" intrusion of the military into public life. Within the administration voices were heard declaring that the process should have run its course with the Algerians taking the consequences. From 1992, two schools of thought faced each other: the pragmatists, or "realists", who considered that the coup d'Etat was a lesser evil than the world-wide and growing Islamist threat; and the moralists, or "idealists", who felt that principles come first, and that the coup d'Etat was a blow against democracy and human rights in general. A little later, when Islamist violence was devastating the country with a crescendo of massacres, the first category divided into two camps: those who considered that the Islamists were likely to take power and it would be best to anticipate their victory by adopting a reserved attitude to the existing regime, and those who believed on the contrary that despite the violence of the counter-insurrection, good sense and geostrategic rationality favoured discreet support (moral and economic) for the current regime while promoting a return to the interrupted democratic process (a process which was to be re-established by General Zérroual after the presidential election by universal suffrage in 1995). French prevarications and concerns were aggravated by the assassination, after one hundred days in power, of Mohamed Boudiaf, the historic leader urgently recalled from thirty years in exile in Morocco to take over the presidency of the High Committee of State. Boudiaf, an uncorrupted man seeking a return to a close relationship with France, was killed on 26 June 1992 at Annaba by a member of his own security forces, for not having understood where the limits were which he could not overstep in his fight against corruption and prevarication.

Whatever the circumstances, the Algerians keenly felt this turbulence within the French leadership whilst the violence became radicalised, the Islamists occupied whole regions of the country and the assassinations of intellectuals, journalists and senior officials multiplied. Each French move was over-interpreted by an Algerian leadership on the defensive. Thus, the move of the Air Algérie terminal from Orly to Roissy for security reasons was felt in Algeria to be an unjustifiable aggression, and resulted in the suspension of flights from Paris. The situation became critical when the GIA attacked the French community in Algeria (by far the largest in 1992 with 25000 people registered and probably 40000 in fact). The French government was obliged to steer an extremely difficult course at that time. Most of the attacks represented direct pressure by the Islamists to force France to abandon its support, even though distanced, for the Algerian government. On the other hand, some cynics saw, in some of these dreadful acts, the hand of factions of the Algerian security services aiming at dragging France into the war. However, the Foreign Minister, Roland Dumas, gradually imposed a tone and firmness on French policy which was not repudiated by the second cohabitation and the government formed by Edouard Balladur in March 1993, and was not exploited politically.

1993-1995: support, incomprehension, discord, multipolarity and the transfer of violence to France

The Balladur government, while keeping to the line established by Roland Dumas, was characterised by a scattering of the power of decision. This vagueness in the discussions with Algiers contrasted with official support, and contributed to a gradual breaking down of the bridges with the government which it was supposed to support. *De facto*, President Mitterand retained a powerful influence on foreign policy. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, defined a harder line implying, and this was a new departure, "help for the Algerian government in its struggle against terrorism". The Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, having his own contacts and networks, maintained his own links with some members of the senior military hierarchy known as "eradicators", while the Minister of Defence, François Léotard, wondered about the need for a real dialogue with the Islamists. "It is interesting to note" commented Mélanie Morisse-Schilbach, "that the divergence of views was not the result of cohabitation but of differences within the French Right". That is the least one can say, although in this case it was more a question of personal strategies than fundamental differences. But an obvious sickness had infected the French administration and a public opinion torn between horror and indignation against Islamist violence, and protestation against the disregard for human rights manifested by the Algerian government. At that time, Franco-Algerian relations, inspired by emotion, had become to some extent schizophrenic.

It thus became difficult to find one's bearings amid the chorus of discordant voices coming from the French capital. The Islamists took advantage of this period of indecision to bring the war on to French soil. After the failed attack on the Air France Airbus (Christmas 1994), the attacks turned towards Paris from August 1995, striking twice at the RER, and provoking a fierce response from the French authorities, who dismantled French Islamic networks which had been discovered deeply implanted in suburbs containing a high concentration of North African immigrants.

From this time the inhuman violence of the Islamists gradually turned French and international public opinion against them. The attacks in France and, above all, the rural massacres in conditions beyond imagining (as in those of Raïs, Benthala, and Beni Messou where on each occasion hundreds of people were massacred and dismembered) swung opinion towards the supporters of eradication or, at least, of capitulation. The government recovered its legitimacy and gradually re-established its control over practically the whole of the country. Some critical analysts have pondered over the willingness of the leaders of the GIA to provide such decisive arguments to the Algerian state. "The GIA (...) contributed greatly to French support for the Algerian regime (...) and its claiming of attacks perpetrated in France in 1995 made it the enemy of the Algerian authorities and France, as well the FIS. Also, many doubts remain about the "emirs" of the armed gangs of the GIA, who have done so much to weaken the cause which they were supposed to serve".

France and the European Union: from private property to careful opening

The care with which France maintained its exemplary relations with Algeria transformed them into an exclusive relationship. This led the French authorities to keep the European Union at arm's length from any political intervention in the country. The first years of the civil war were accompanied by "trench warfare" in Brussels, during which France was keen to avoid any involvement by European organisations, except in the collective dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership of Barcelona begun in 1995. As François Mitterand stated at the end of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Europe of 27 October 1993: "We have not spoken of it to the Council of Europe (...). I do not think that the current drama in Algeria is currently in the domain of the European Union. As far as that is concerned, France is acting as she must in respect of this neighbouring country". In the same vein in 1995 Alain Juppé, President of the Council of Foreign Ministers made no mention of the meeting with Sant Eggidio, who had proposed a new political platform for Algeria, developed by the non-governmental parties, Islamists and FIS included, but referred instead to "recent developments".

Meanwhile, as the inhuman violence of the Islamists was met with pitiless and dark repression, public opinion, the media and governments, notably Northern European, showed growing and vocal disapproval. The Algerian government, already essentially suspect for having abruptly interrupted the democratic process, regardless of the circumstances, found itself warned for its repressive practices which combined torture, arbitrary arrest, disappearances, and exile to the Sahara (the figure of 10 000 disappearances being generally admitted). It therefore became more and more difficult, as time went by, for France to maintain a position of tacit “veto” blocking any European involvement, other than financial, in Algeria.

The opening to more engagement by the EU was progressive. It corresponded, certainly, to a growing demand for more involvement on the part of European public opinion but was also linked to the blocking of the Franco-Algerian bilateral relationship, which became increasingly intractable after the affair of the Air France Airbus hijacking and the beginning of the attacks on French territory.

The rationalisation and europeanisation of French policy with respect to Algeria took off with the arrival of Jacques Chirac. The Balladur years had been marked by the cacophony of the French players. The Juppé government defined a clear political line which the Minister of foreign affairs translated into action, while President Chirac did not intervene himself in the debate. This line was: firm support for the Algerian government and for President Zérrouk but pressure for the acceleration of democratic processes; and facilitation of relations with Algeria in the setting of negotiations of the Barcelona Conference, the Mediterranean Forum, and other international negotiations. France thus redefined its role as a bridge, or mediator, in relations between Algeria and the EU, as when she successfully pressed Algeria to accept a visit by EU representatives (Troïka and European Parliament) without the habitual outcry against meddling and attacks on sovereignty.

So the visit of Commissioner Marin to Algiers in December 1996 represented an alignment of the EU with French themes (Marin expressed his pleasure at the progress of the democratic process and announced non-repayable aid of 125 million euros) and also a qualitative diplomatic leap forward for the Union, which became a full participant in the Algerian scene.

The Union knew how to manage the pressure of European idealists cleverly. The visit of the Troïka in January 1998, even if it led to few concrete results, marked the solidarity of the EU with the Algerian people, and the visit by members of the European Parliament in February of the same year, although agreed with difficulty and in spite of the constraints fixed by the Algerian authorities, eventually led to a partial opening by the Algerian authorities towards greater transparency.

Besides, while the Algerian government was successfully pursuing its struggle against the Islamist guerillas, the EU recognised the necessity of the struggle against terrorism in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Thus, two Euro-Mediterranean conferences took place on this theme between 1995 and 2000 as well as some seminars, and this theme of cooperation has been discussed in the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for peace and stability framework yet under negotiation.

At the end of the day, Mélanie Morisse-Schilbach saw three interests in France’s new Algerian policy via the European Union:

1. a re-balancing in regard to the other member states and critical European opinion, which increasingly disfavour diplomatic private property (one cannot be a paragon of the Union and at the same time act in a totally exclusive way);
2. a way of concealing the immobility, or better, the blockage, which characterised the Balladur years for reasons as much French as Algerian;

3. the search for a multiplying effect for French diplomacy which was reaching the limits of national action in a globalised world, and of which the Barcelona process was a practical illustration.

In this respect, it seems that from now on French policy towards Algeria has reached an equilibrium even though, in this matter, nothing is ever guaranteed. France has absorbed the lesson of the utility of the European dimension when the emotionalism of bilateral relations becomes too strong, and blocks the advance of the simplest matters. On this theme, the visit of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to France from 14 to 17 June 2000 was the proof of the success of this policy and of the re-establishment of relations on as normal a basis as possible in the current state of emotions between this historic couple.

Chirac/Jospin/Bouteflika: a complicated “normalisation”, under surveillance and touchy

The active engagement of France in the battle against the Islamic networks in France and Europe reinforced the new credibility of Paris in Algiers, but things went badly at the beginning. President Chirac sought to use the opportunity of the presence of President Zéroual at the United Nations, at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of that organisation in 1995, for a discreet meeting intended to put pressure on the acceleration of the democratic process. The refusal of the French President to allow photographers resulted in the adjournment of the meeting by the angry Algerians. However, the adoption of the new Algerian constitution, followed by the legislative elections of 5 June calmed French fears, whilst Paris invested more and more in the negotiations for financial aid from the EU.

In Algiers, the struggle between the different factions in power, in other words between President Zéroual and his team, some in favour of moving closer to certain Islamist elements, including the FIS, and others termed the eradicators, turned to the advantage of the latter. Zéroual felt himself obliged to resign. After long and difficult bargaining the choice of the winning clan fell upon the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, “withdrawn from the Republic” since the arrival in power of Chadli Benjedid, and therefore relatively unmarked by the scandals of the last twenty years. However, the resignation en bloc, for whatever reasons, of the competing candidates at the end of the first round of the presidential election in April 1999, tainted the ballot and marred the democratic character of the election which brought Bouteflika to the Presidency of the Republic. The critical remarks, “the disappointment” of France with the conditions of the ballot, and the choice of Bouteflika, received in a country and above all by a media always ready to sound the trumpets over interference and anti-French feeling, did not start the new Franco-Algerian relations off on the best foot .

However, the new President cleverly made the most of his talent as a conciliator and, while working to set up a government taking into account the need to balance all factions, he won the “referendum on civil concord” hands down, which he had set up as a personal plebiscite on his future policy. France, having recovered her equilibrium, had only to renew the dialogue at the highest level.

This was not an easy thing to do since the arrival of Lionel Jospin’s government in May 1997 had re-created several levels of decision in France, a situation aggravated by the discordant voices coming from the different parties forming the “plural majority”. However, a “historic” visit to Algiers by the Minister of the Interior of the Jospin government, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, in July 1999, signalled the expected warming. This was symbolised by the State Visit of the Algerian President to Paris in June 2000 (14 to 17 June) - the first since that of Chadli in 1983. In the same way, the *Assemblée Nationale* had, some time before, lifted an old “taboo” by officially recognising as a war the “events” which led to Algeria’s independence.

An analysis of this visit is interesting because it sums up in itself the 38 preceding years. Bouteflika, a man of words rather than of action, has blown hot and cold in speeches and interventions which have placed Franco-Algerian relations back in their permanent ambiguity.

The Algerian President defined his journey with the theme "exceptional relations". Taking up the expression of his master, President Boumediene, he declared forcefully that "Algeria wants to maintain exceptional relations with France". In his speech (symbolically delivered in French) to the Assemblée Nationale on Wednesday 14 June, Bouteflika also recalled the central role of France in the Mediterranean and as a mediator with the European Union with which an association agreement was under discussion: "...but such an association agreement is not necessarily an obstacle to a reinforcement of Algero-French relations which remain, in all logic, one of its key elements. I would even say that under the Algerian approach, our bilateral relationship with France will condition, in large measure, the setting up of multilateral projects in which my country will play a part. Hence our desire to see France consolidate its relationship with Algeria and, in so doing, play a pivotal role between the Mediterranean South and Europe. In raising this strategic aspect, I do so not from sycophancy, but in taking into account the nature of things: a mutual understanding in which history, language and culture remain, in spite of everything, capital to be exploited without complexes or acrimony."

However, during his visit the Algerian President did not hesitate from employing the stick as well as the carrot: denouncing those who had abandoned Algeria over the last ten years, repudiating the pardon for the *Harkis*, *criticising the timidity of Air France which was slow in restarting its flights, railing against the insupportable weight of debt* and, finally, claiming to "return with empty hands" for having only seen granted a debt conversion of 400 million francs (65 million euros) but "confident"!

On his return the Algerian press sang the same tune, blowing hot and cold: "reunion", "dream relationship" and "red carpet" ran alongside acid reflections on the French political class which "persists in believing that Algeria is a lost part of France, indeed that the Algerian war is not yet lost", and on the fact that "Paris would like to have the same image of Bouteflika as King Mohamed VI", that is to say, in the eyes of Algerian editorial writers, of someone complaisant and easily influenced.

President Chirac, for his part, recalled the courage and dignity of the Algerian people in the face of terrorism, their determination to insist upon the respect for individuals, and the primacy of law. He referred to the faith of France in Algeria's future, and finally underlined that by the interweaving of communities "the spirits of the two peoples become intimately mixed". The government promised an easing of the conditions for granting residence permits, notably for industrialists, researchers and students. The Ministry of Finance authorised Coface to ease the very strict security clauses applied to the country and to help it to improve its quotation in the league table of "risky countries".

At the end of the day, what view can one take of the past decade? A civil war which has claimed 150 000 victims and which continues to kill does not seem to have provided any lessons for the Algerian leadership. The same words are still employed and signify nothing. Paris is still the bogeyman to be brought out when things go badly and when a real or imagined conspiracy is to be revealed. The Nomenklatura still struggles for power and shares out monopolies and the spoils of the public sector in a slow privatisation.

Paris watches with anxiety as the violence slowly but surely resumes its place. The moments of grace of successive elections and the referendum on the civil concord of 1996 to 1998 are far distant. The risk which some analysts fear is that the steep rise in oil prices will kill off the latest stirrings of reform among the political class who may seek, as in the past, to buy civil peace with cash. The war of factions has resumed more intensely than ever and some wonder about the need to keep at the head of the State a Bouteflika considered by them as already "devalued".

In this perspective, what could be the outlook for "exceptional" relations between France and Algeria? In reality, one might think that nothing could really change these curious relations which could be described in many ways as sado-masochistic. The Algerian community in France is becoming little by little a real pressure group. It should play a fundamental bridging role between the two countries. In spite of repeated threats of economic opening to the world

at large, the economic relationship ought not to weaken for reasons of trade, proximity and the traditional links established between the two countries. As for investment *in situ*, *certainly foreign firms have increased their presence in Algeria since the beginning of the civil war, as they are less susceptible to aggression than French firms. But, as an advantage of globalisation, many French firms act in Algeria under another guise (Canadian, Italian etc) to minimise the risks.*

When France does not seem to respond to their hopes, the Algerians bring out the American bogeyman. Indeed, American companies are very present in Algeria but only in the hydrocarbon sector. The memory of the period when the United States negotiated with the Islamists in the darkest days remains present in people's minds. The visit to the Maghreb of the American Vice-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Stuart Eisenstadt, in June 1998, was supposed to revolutionise Maghrebo-Atlantic exchanges, but turned out to be a damp squib. Finally, in 1997 and 1998, in the persons of Madeleine Allbright and Ronald Neuman, the Americans themselves sought increased engagement by France in the Maghreb.

It therefore seems clear that France will continue to play the principal role in the perennial drama which she has enacted with Algeria for more than a century and a half. Could the passion fade, and the ambiguity also? Probably not. New technologies intertwine the two societies even more; television and the internet render the relations between the two societies ever more interactive, indeed interdependent.

However, the political game is far from over for Algeria. Civil society has survived and even become stronger because of the war, and democracy has progressed. But Islamist violence is on the rise, while the old nomenklatura demons are also rearing their heads. It is the historic duty of France to do its best to help the movement towards democracy and the modernisation of this unique neighbour who, from all that has just been said, and whether we like it or not, is a part of ourselves. Sami Naïr said, in a remarkable article in 1994: "In summary, between France and Algeria, everything happens as if there were a systematic disagreement: they speak without listening to each other, they explain without understanding each other. This is why, forty years after the All Saints' Day celebrations, everything remains to be done."

In a few years, those who experienced the decolonisation war will have passed the torch. But new generations of Algerians seeking jobs will come, who will only have a mythical, televisual image of France. The colonial fantasy must not be replaced by an imaginary paradise. Some of the reciprocal emotionalism must go. As for the rest, there is a solution to remove, at least partially, the bilateral incomprehension: it is called development and education!

Jean-François Daguzan

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Roland Dumas

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Valéry Giscard d'Estaing

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Summary

Franco-Algerian relations, already marked from the beginning by a highly emotional component, have become more complicated since the beginning of the civil war. After some hesitation France has opted for a policy of tacit support for the Algerian authorities, but this policy has done nothing to resolve the fundamental ambiguity of the bilateral relationship, born of frustration and a lack of understanding. The different situations of cohabitation in France rendered the expression of a coherent and intelligible political line difficult up to 1999. From then on, French policy towards Algeria can be summarised as reasoned support for the Algerian authorities and a partial delegation of the subject to the level of the European Union, in order to get round the emotionalism inherent in the bilateral relationship. To some extent, by reason of the multitude of links which tie them together, France and Algeria are obliged to live together complementing each other. It is now a matter of better organising that which cannot be "normalised".

Jean-François Daguzan is a Docteur d'Etat in Science-Politics. He is a Master Researcher at the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (Foundation for Strategic Research) in Paris; Editor-in Chief of the review *Géoéconomie* and Associate Professor at the Université Paris II - Panthéon-Assas.

He has published, among others: *Le dernier rempart? Forces armées et politiques de défense au Maghreb*, Publisud, Paris, 1998. With Raoul Girardet he directed the work:

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