

ELDERLY IN ALGERIA BETWEEN POLITICAL ACTIONS AND SOCIAL CONCEPTIONS

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Abstract

This article examines one of the questions rarely dealt within the field of political sciences in Europe but also in Algeria known and recognized as a young and youth country. That's why the problems of elderly don't appear in Algeria. This study focuses on both the social aspect of this new phenomenon and its political one. The purpose is to understand the social conception of elderly in Algeria, to underline the demographic, the historical and the legislative specificities, and to clarify the conditions in which the common mental representations relating to the age limit are constructed. Given that the Algerian society represents the traditional model very attached to the principles of solidarity but rather affected by the contemporaneity and the specificities of modern society marked by the spirit of individualism, the idea is to wonder about the elderly people in Algeria and the conditions in which the phenomenon of aging is developed. We have noticed the importance of the role of the society in constructing ideas about elderly and its influence on the actions and the attention of the state to this category of population. However, the Elderly will be in the future one of the priority areas of the Algerian national institutions.

Keywords: Elderly, old person, age limit, family solidarity, elderly home, retirement.

Résumé

Cet article s'interroge sur une question rarement traitée dans le champ des sciences politiques en Europe comme en Algérie connue et reconnue comme étant un pays jeune et de jeunesse. C'est pourquoi, le problème des personnes âgées en Algérie reste sans écho. Cette étude se focalise autant sur l'aspect social de ce nouveau phénomène qu'est la vieillesse, que sur son aspect politique. L'objectif est de souligner le sens, les spécificités démographiques, historiques et législatives de la vieillesse en Algérie, et d'éclaircir les conditions dans lesquelles se construisent les représentations sociales relatives à la limite d'âge. Sachant que la société algérienne représente un modèle traditionnel très attaché aux principes de la solidarité mais assez affecté par la contemporanéité et les spécificités de la société moderne marquée par l'esprit de l'individualisme, l'idée est donc de s'interroger sur la place de la personne âgée en Algérie en essayant de comprendre les circonstances dans lesquelles s'est développé le phénomène de la vieillesse dans une société aussi particulière. En conclusion, nous avons constaté l'importance de la société dans la construction des idées relatives au vieillissement et son impact sur les actions de l'Etat en direction de cette catégorie de population. Cependant, la vieillesse sera dans le futur l'un des domaines prioritaires des institutions nationales algériennes.

Mots-clés: Vieillesse, personne âgée, limite d'âge, solidarité familiale, maison d'accueil, retraite.

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Rezumat

Acest articol examinează una dintre întrebările care se întâlnesc rareori în domeniul științelor politice din Europa, dar și în Algeria, cunoscută și recunoscută ca țară tânără și de tineret. De aceea, problemele persoanelor în vârstă nu apar în Algeria. Acest studiu se concentrează atât pe aspectul social al acestui nou fenomen, cât și pe cel politic al acestuia. Scopul este de a înțelege concepția socială a vârstnicilor din Algeria, de a sublinia particularitățile demografice, istorice și legislative și de a clarifica condițiile în care se construiesc reprezentările mentale comune referitoare la limita de vârstă. Având în vedere că societatea algeriană reprezintă modelul tradițional foarte atașat principiilor solidarității, dar afectat de contemporanitate și de particularitățile societății moderne marcate de spiritul individualismului, ideea este să ne întrebăm despre persoanele în vârstă din Algeria și despre condițiile din care se dezvoltă fenomenul îmbătrânirii. Am observat importanța rolului societății în construirea ideilor despre vârstnici și influența acestora asupra acțiunilor și atenției statului asupra acestei categorii de populație. Cu toate acestea, bătrânii vor fi în viitor unul dintre domeniile prioritare ale instituțiilor naționale algeriene.

Cuvinte cheie: vârstă înaintată, persoană în vârstă, limită de vârstă, solidaritate familială, centre de îngrijire, pensionare.

1. Introduction

The aging of the population is becoming a very worrying phenomenon all over the world nowadays. It is a physiological and clinical fact that has attracted more and more gerontological attention, raised sociological interest and economic concern, and has become a political preoccupation too.

Algeria is not exempt from the effects of this demographic change quite visible in the last decade. That's why it strives to take the necessary measures towards the senior category in the short, medium and long terms.

Steeped with traditional principles like that of solidarity, the Algerian society is nevertheless affected by the contemporary attitudes of modern society, especially the spirit of the individualism. Accordingly, it's worthwhile to investigate the status of the elderly in Algeria, trying to clarify the conditions in which the phenomenon of aging has taken place.

The aim of this study¹ is not only to better understand the social situation of the elderly in Algeria, but also to demarcate the constraints under which the Algerian government is acting to take care of this category of the population.

¹ This article is inspired first by the study I did in 2011 about the old migrants in France and by your ideas about the elderly in Algeria presented during an international symposium organized in May 2018, in Romania, by the Faculty of Philosophy and Socio-Political Sciences of the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iasi.

This article represents a scientific contribution about seniors in a southern youth country which needs to be completed and enriched by other studies in different disciplines. Given that this question attracts very few researchers, the deep purpose of this article is to attract the interest of our researchers for the issue of elderly which probably will be in the future a very important social and political challenge.

To develop our problematic, the first step is a brief history of the demographic changes in Algeria. Then, we try to situate the elderly person in Algeria and finally, we end with an overview of the different actions carried out by the Algerian government for the interest of this category.

The plan of the article will be as follows:

- The demographic history of Algeria
- Aging in the Algerian society
- Strategy and institutional actions toward the elderly people
- Conclusion

2. The Demographic History of Algeria

The demographic composition of Algeria has witnessed a remarkable evolution since the sixties. An unexpected and sudden demographic growth took place in this country the first years of independence. The various positive changes, introduced just after the independence, have in fact been reflected in the national political and security situation, public health, education, work, social security, and life conditions. This new situation has enabled the population of Algeria to soar from 10.800.000 in 1960 to 32.364.000 in 2006 and reach 41.700.000 in 2017 (National Office of Statistics, <http://www.ons.dz>).

The high birth rate has made of Algeria, a country with a very young population. Demographic transformations took then the necessary time to move from one age category to another.

As a result, the country has developed a keen interest and came up with programs and development plans that aims the category of young people who, apparently, appropriated the legitimacy of the demographic field of view.

Socially, this situation has been approved all the time, the society is more concerned about the future of its children and claims – at every opportunity² and in every possible way³ – more attention and more action for them.

² The Algerian history shows in 1980, 1988, 1994, 2001, 2011, that even though the main claims of its events were about other subjects, they remain focused on the future of young people.

³ The written press, television, cinema, sport, radio, song, university, research... etc.

In no case can this be translated as a disinterestedness of society in its bearers and transmitters of social and cultural heritage, because the interest granted to this category of population means in fact an interest of society in its background.

Convinced by the statistical analyses of its youth, the Algerian society tended to react as a young pregnant mother who concentrates her efforts on her children around her and neglects the baby she carries in her belly under pretext that it will only need her after birth, a few months later. Is it really necessary to cry out to deserve attention?

The same statistical data reveal that the weight of the population aged over sixty will probably be much heavier on society in the coming decades (NOS). It is for this reason that it seems useful to examine this worrying serenity of the society towards the phenomenon of old aging.

3. Aging in Algerian society

Let's start by defining aging because it's not easy to find the acceptable term to use. The definition is linked with the age: "old" is used as opposed to "young", but this word is socially perceived as an insult. The age classification is a factor of social segregation (Ennuyer 2011). Generally, we speak of "elderly people", "seniors", "eldest" or "elders" (Pellissier 2013, 1 and 13-15).

At what age do we become old in Algeria?

Algerian legislation (The law N° 10-12 of 23 Muharram 1432 corresponding to December 20, 2010 on the protection of the elderly), defines old people as the persons who have reached the age of sixty-five and over. We note that the legal definition expresses only the biological aging; it means that it decides about the age limit from which the citizen can enjoy certain advantages and a particular treatment within the institutions of State.

Trying to redefine the age limit, Patrice Bourdelais explains that now, you have to reach 75-80 years to look like the sixties of the 1950s, in terms of health, life expectancy, and activities (Bourdelais 1993). In other words, the notion of aging requires a much more detailed explanation that goes far beyond the institutional definition based only on the age, which sometimes does not cover the person in the sense that he conceals his state of moral and physical health and well-being. This is how some of us might look a lot younger than their actual ages, while others seem to be in the senior years even though they are still far from it. That's why, it seems that society has a say in the definition of age categories.

If Pierre Bourdieu confirms that the biological age does not necessarily correspond to the social age, he also explains that age is only a biological data handled and manipulated socially. The challenge in the question of age limit is apparently the succession of social power and privileges (Bourdieu 2011, 143-154).

We understand that old age is a social construction; it is for this reason that it remains relative; “One is always older or younger than another” (Bourdieu 2011, 144); it depends on the social perception of the concept of old age, produced and reproduced through successive generations, in the collective and individual social unconscious.

Indeed, in the sixties and seventies, person was considered elderly in Algeria before the age of sixty. The traces of an anticipated old age accelerated by the aftermath of war and the pain of living, often deceived the glances and amplified the illusion of belonging to the old age.

The transformations taking place in the life expectancy – which has clearly increased over the years compared to the sixties – was linked to the change of the social vision on the elderly person (Mimouni 2013, 11-32).

The political history of Algeria shows that the consequences of terrorism during the 1990s, known by the media as the Black Decade, did not spare the aging class that was beginning to emerge. The seniors have to deal with terrorism in its psychological aspect, but they were also obliged to look after family and ensure social serenity. They especially tried to resist the economic imbalances resulting from the crisis of that time, knowing that parents who lived in this period, retirees aged sixty and over, were “forced” to replay the role of parents towards their children and grandchildren (Mimouni 2013, 11-32).

This role assumed at the time of the crisis mentioned above, is not a coincidence. It's rather related to the ordinary and the original inherited mission that society has entrusted to them since a long time. Considered as a source of affection, a reference of wisdom and a human vector of values, traditions, and culture transmission, the old people represent in the Algerian society, the people more worthy of attention, respect, esteem and feelings.

Indeed, the Algerian society carries until today the indices of a traditional society. This clearly explains the attitude of Algerians towards their elders. The attachment expressed by children and grandchildren to their grandparents is proof of this. Thus, the idea of aging in retirement homes or homes for the elderly is totally unacceptable and socially rejected. The curse will continue for life whoever dares to detach from his or her elderly parents, regardless of the reasons, especially when they are linked directly.

It should be noted that the rules governing Algerian society are not only rooted in the ethics, traditions and customs of the ancestors, but they are also based on Islam, which has an indisputable legitimacy.

The case of the elderly is similar to the case of women, children and generally all the questions of the family because they all enjoy a strengthened legitimacy. It's necessary to underline that the family code in Algeria is based on the basis of the Sharia law (The Law n ° 84-11 of June 09, 1984 relating to the family code modified and completed.). In other words, the intervention of the State in the direction of the elderly will, in all cases, enjoy a double legitimacy: a legal and a religious one.

4. Strategy and Institutional Actions towards the Elderlies

While it is true that the Algerian society remains largely qualified as traditional, it is not totally wrong that it hasn't escaped the current of Western modernism.

Affected by individualism, the way of life of young Algerians began in the 2000s to embrace gradually the Western life model (the European society). Several factors contribute to accelerating and facilitating this transition from tradition to modernity (Internet, Satellite cables, technology, tourism, studies etc).

This change has had repercussions on the internal relational mechanism of society: family solidarity based on human relations and values is slowly giving way, to state institutions and to links based on organic functions and complementarity needs (Durkheim 1893).

In parallel and over the years, the rate of the old age group is increasing. Faced with this new situation, seniors, especially the poor, have a real need for care.

The research responds to the new data and since 2002 (Mimouni 2013, 11-32), it became interested in the older person: reports are drawn up, field surveys are carried out, dissertations and doctoral theses deal with the subject particularly in the field of sociology, anthropology and psychology.

The State, for its part, aware of the changes in society, does not hesitate to set up an institutional network to accommodate this category of people. The Ministry of National Solidarity, the Family and the Status of Women, entrusted 37 public administrative institutions with legal personality and financial autonomy spread (Homes for the elderly), over 30 wilayas (regions or departments), to accommodate elderly people in difficulty, and/or without

family ties (www.msnfcf.gov.dz). Nine other host institutions are located at 9 wilayas, in the center, east, west and even in the south of the country (The executive Decree N° 02-178 of 7 Rabie-El-Aouel 1423 corresponding to May 20, 2002).

For a better care of old age, the actions of the state are not limited to this stage. This was expressed legally in 2010 by the law on the protection of the elderly which puts forward family and social mediation as the best way to keep those people in their family environment (The law N° 10-12 of 23 Muharram 1432 corresponding to December 29, 2010 on the protection of the elderly).

As a part of the definition of the implementation modalities of the law on the protection of the elderly mentioned above – which aims at preserving social and family cohesion –, a first executive decree was published in 2016. It defines the way of the organization of family and social mediation for the maintenance of the elderly person in his family environment (Executive Decree N° 16-62 of 2 Joumada-Al-Oula 1437 corresponding to February 11, 2016).

A guide to protect the old from neglect and abuse was developed and posted on the ministry's website (www.msnfcf.gov.dz). The goal of this operation is to popularize the knowledge of the rights of this category of citizens and to make known the bases as well as the religious references (Koran) and the legal references (the national laws⁴ and the international regulation⁵) on which the old age programs were based.

It should be noted that the intervention of the State with its various actions in terms of care and protection of the elderly, is each time directed to and for the benefit of society. The legal actions and institutional policy confirm the state's philosophy in the management of this category of its citizens which is emerging more and more demographically.

Acting in accordance with the codes and the social rules and inspired by the Islamic religious spirit, the State adopts a national and a coherent strategy, not only for the protection and respect of its old people, but also provides to keep the balance of a changing society.

⁴ The national laws: The law of public health, the law of social security, the code of the family, the constitution particularly the article 34, the penal code particularly article 282/314 –, the law of the protection of elderly.

⁵ The international regulation: The International Plan of Action on Aging, adopted in Vienna in 1982, the United Nations Principles for elderly adopted in 1991, The Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging, adopted in 2002.

5. Conclusion

The demographic transformations in Algeria through successive years since independence have led to the emergence of the age group of seniors. As a result, the public policy has developed a special attention on the elderly. This attention is expressed through laws and public institutions created to take care of old age people.

The reaction of the Algerian state towards this emerging category seems reassuring. New expectations in this direction will undoubtedly be formulated and probably planned. This indicates that the reflexion in the coming decades would be to worry about the institutional measures of caring for the elderly and their legal protection, but it would rather be to worry more about the society, the common sense, the human values and family ties that are not replaceable and/or insurable by any law all over the world.

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