

Propaganda, Nationalism, and Feminism: Algerian Women in the French-Algerian War

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The Algerian War of Independence (1954—1962), fought between the French colonial army and the nationalist *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), saw women participating in revolutionary activity on nearly all levels. That said, in the drive to mobilize the population, Algerian women became targets not only for wartime violence, but also directed propaganda campaigns from both major political players. The French colonial authority, on one hand, used media, visual propaganda, and social initiatives in order to promulgate the idea that the French colonial system was necessary in order to bring women into the arena of western-oriented progress. The FLN, on the other hand, utilized images of armed female militants, despite their minority in the overall female population, in order to promote a carefully controlled idea of ‘female warriors’ tied the breaking of gender confines with the needs of the nation. Neither narrative, however, accounts for the true diversity of experience for Algerian women, nor do they consist of analysis and consideration of the experiences of individual women. The collective struggle is substituted for the individual experience. This paper looks at the relationship between the presentation of narratives through literature, media, and personal accounts and how certain narratives can be used, or omitted, to reflect wider goals and ideals of the political apparatus. By taking the three-tiered approach of examining the women’s experiences as presented by women themselves as well as presented by the aforementioned political actors, I argue that specific narratives misrepresent and silence women’s experiences so as not to contradict the ideals and goals of larger political apparatuses.

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1.0 - INTRODUCTION

“We are at the end of 1961 or at the beginning of 1962. A young Kabyle, Hamid Boughenou, tells my wife and I his story, which led him from the insurrectional *maquis* to Paris...

This boy was a wonderful storyteller, as the Kabyles often are, and he fascinated us. Among the memories that were the most striking was an episode of liaison between two maquis. They are two, a comrade and him. On the way, they are inspected [by FLN authorities] and discover with amazement that the “*contrôleur*” is a woman. Wanting to express his astonishment, our storyteller's comrade exclaimed, in English so as not to be understood: It's a girl. It's a girl!”

— Vidal-Naquet, 1991

The Algerian War of Independence (1954 - 1962), fought largely between France and the Algerian nationalist movement *Front de libération national* (FLN), saw women throughout the country assume vital roles in revolutionary activity that ultimately helped lead to the successful establishment of the independent Algerian state. One such demonstration of this participation can be seen above in Pierre Vidal-Naquet's preface to Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne's *Les femmes algériennes dans la guerre*. In this passage, the acclaimed French historian quickly exposes not only the sense of surprise at the image of a woman fulfilling a vital military role, but also the irregularity of the image—both in terms of tradition and temporal expectation. The anecdote first exposes a linguistic relationship between a collective reality understood on a broad spectrum and tactical “othering” through discourse and language for particular purposes. One can suppose, when this inspection occurred, the two men would generally converse with the inspector in

Arabic, Kabyle, or perhaps even French. By invoking English in order to express a foundational moment in the comrade's reality (that is, his surprise), he attempts to create a linguistic wall in communicative discourse. He invokes his surprise in English in order to not challenge the authority this woman has as an inspector for militants in the *maquis* while still expressing a cultural value that might be taboo in this situation—the taboo that, in the absence of social upheaval that the war had brought, a woman would likely never be in such a position of authority.

The second point that one can see through the anecdote is more contextual: in the social upheaval carved by the independence struggle, women across all sectors of society saw a shift in duties and expectations that often allowed them to fulfill roles that might be restricted to them otherwise. The inspector position that the anecdote refers to involves the administrative functions of the *wilaya*, or the paramilitary regions created by the FLN: as militants would pass from one *wilaya* to another, *contrôleurs* would act as the equivalent of border control inspectors. This position, which in the case of the anecdote is filled by a woman, ensures direct contact with every militant that passes the borders to the *wilaya* section. It ensures a position of power and authority over the militants that cross these borders, many of whom are male Algerians not accustomed to being under the authority of women. It is here that the element of surprise comes into play: though women were involved in the revolutionary struggle on many different levels and in many different capacities, their experiences were muddled in with the collective discourse of the nationalist movement or the propagated narratives of the colonial authority and international media. The ultimate importance of the passage can be discerned through an analysis of both points: despite the immense significance of women, both as participants and targets, the

women's experience is set against the background of persistent 'othering' by both their nationalist compatriots as well as colonial propaganda.

This paper will put particular emphasis on this persistent 'othering,' as well the vast misrepresentation and silencing of women and their experiences during the conflict. The surprise of the Algerian man cited in the above anecdote shows the distinct irregularity of active and visible involvement by women in political and social conflicts prior to the war. However, when considering Algerian women, looking from the 'outside-in'—that is, looking at accounts from male dominated structures, institutions, and ideologies—is not sufficient to realize the gendered nature of the conflict. In the decades since independence, numerous accounts and experiences by women have been researched and published. These works, and the discourse around these works, allow the carefully crafted image of militant Algerian women deployed for specific political purposes to be disputed and analyzed in comparison to the lived experiences of these women. Boughenou and his fellow militants can relay their experiences *with* women during the war, but they cannot provide us with the lived experiences *of* women, unencumbered by the social and political biases of gendered conceptions. Militants in the FLN, as well as their counterparts in the colonial army, helped craft particular narratives around Algerian women in order to further specific political agendas. By looking at how women have presented their own experiences—through academic studies, interviews, and fictionalizations—the subsequent analysis of the narratives presented by other political actors can be better understood in terms of their motivations and their consequences. In this way, the actions of women and towards women during the war can be understood not only in terms of targeted wartime offense, but rather in terms of a larger mega-narrative that takes culture, tradition, class, urbanity, gender, language,

and motive into account when looking at wartime narratives. With that in mind, this paper will take a three-pronged look at the narratives and testimonies of and around Algerian women during the war—by the women themselves, by the FLN, and by the French Colonial Army—in order to both contextualize the testimonies of women within studied historiographies and political paradigms as well as place analysis of narratives rooted in political agendas in the context of lived experiences. The objective of this paper is ultimately to align the current historiography of the Algerian war, so often dominated by narratives crafted by masculine political agendas and reiteration of masculine experience, with the women’s lived experience.

The two major actors in the war, the colonial army and the FLN, relied heavily on ideological prowess, publicity channels, and language itself in order to conduct legitimate and effective propaganda initiatives to influence Algerian women—effectively carrying out a campaign of gendered separation while still targeting them on a mass scale. For the French, this often meant utilizing orientalist and emancipatory language borne in western and colonial ideologies of progress and enlightenment—ideologies that had, in many ways, led to the brutal implementation of imperialist policies (Silverstein, 2004). This tactic was not new, and had in fact been central to colonial policy throughout the nineteenth century in various political, social, and economic arenas. Silverstein states:

“...the famous “civilizing mission” (*mission civilisatrice*)...had less to do with the “white man’s burden” to ensure a universal human progress from savagery to civilization as it did with an imperative to secularize or disenchant the territory and chronology under French control, to integrate these spaces and times into a centralized, national structure (p. 45).”

The inclusion of women into these policies is inherently gendered when placing French enlightenment ideology in tandem with the evolution of Islamic thought in the colonial era. The

vastly different historical and social trajectories of women in the two ideologies led to an implementation of policies outside of the cultural context in which they were theorized and implemented, creating a three-fold discourse on gendered language: colonial discourse, Islamic discourse modified by colonial presence and policy, and pre-colonial gendered conceptions. Ideologies grounded in enlightenment were implemented by the colonial army by utilizing propagative discourse and language to convince the international audience and the home front of the absolute necessity of converting the Muslim woman to modernity (Macmaster, 2009; Seferdjeli, 2005; Kimble, 2006). Overall, however, the goal of the colonial army was to replace ties between the family, the community, and the nation with ties between the family and the empire (Macmaster, 2009; Seferdjeli, 2005).

The FLN, on the other hand, reframed the narrative of Algerian women (even after explicitly making the women's question not a priority in the struggle) as mythical bearers of the nation. By combining modernity with traditionalism, the FLN created a nationalist discourse and strategy that divided society into "ahistorical and immutable" women and revolutionary men in touch with modernity only for the sake of liberating the nation (Helie-Lucas, 1987). Chatterjee (1989) refers to this as a division between the material and the spiritual; the "outer" and the "inner." The "inner"—that is, the home and the woman—must remain separate from the "profane activities" of the "outer"—that is, the modernity of the colonizer. Women were to fully commit to whatever was needed in order to liberate the nation, and for most women this meant committing to traditional, domestic roles repurposed for the struggle. Even women who broke these gender confines, however, rarely sought a struggle for emancipation. Armed female militants, the *fidayate* and the *mujahidat*, often admitted after the war that their attachment to the

struggle was not based on the chance of female liberation, but rather a loyalty to the nationalist movement (Bouatta, 1997). Despite the fact that the majority of women involved in the struggle acted through traditional domestic roles, however, the *fidayate* and the *mujahidat* became the face of Algerian women due to the fact that they clearly represented a mythical ideal of a woman courageously rising up to defend her nation (Helie-Lucas, 1987). This mythical narrative created a structure in which female militancy could be appreciated, but at the same time these female militants could be quelled and quietly pushed back into traditionalism when necessary.

The utilization of language and discourse as well as the lack thereof during and after the war is incredibly significant in its ability to reframe historical narratives through the ideological dimensions, medium, and language that this narrative is expressed through. The space in which warfare was conducted in during the Algerian war created a struggle that rested on public support as much as it did armed violence. The ways in which this public support was gained by one actor or the other *as well as* the ideologies of that actor created the historical narrative that we view the voices and experiences of the nation through. The nation cements its ideology in its history. The questions, often controversial, that arise in the struggle for public support are overwhelmed by the larger struggle for independence or domination. The nation (in this case either actor, the French colonial army or the FLN) resolve questions that counter their movement's ultimate ideology by reframing these questions, not in the interests of the parties involved, but rather in line with their own preferred goals for their vision of the nation. When the women's question was asked in Algeria, it was asked by male-dominated political structures and actors on how they could utilize women for the larger political project.

The focus of this paper is thus on works that create a specific narrative: newspaper articles, journalistic books that describe a military objective, pieces of visual propaganda—with a background of academic sources to help detail the objectives and situations in which these narratives were formed. This focus creates a system of understanding what particular objectives were undertaken and how these objectives were presented to fit into a specific historiography and narrative. Though there are certainly many operations, initiatives, combatants, and civilians who could be used as a basis of analysis for the narratives that I argue are present, the scope of this paper relies specifically on initiatives and responsibilities aimed directly at Algerian women, the goals of these initiatives and responsibilities, and how they were presented by various sources.

In contrast with this goal, the current historiography and literature presents the image of Algerian women within the context of a less multi-faceted scope in which various factors such as class, social customs, region, and so on did not combine in different ways to create diverse experiences throughout the war. The Algerian woman, ultimately, is presented as part of the collective struggle of the Algerian *people*, certainly not related through the collective struggle of Algerian *women*, and moreover ignorant of the voices of individual women. French archives—full of images, statistical reports and records, news articles, and the writings of the colonizer on the colonized—often present the Algerian women as the “native.” She is oppressed by the strata of her own culture and in need of the settler’s culture to bring her into the modern world. Nationalist literature, on the other hand, pins the spotlight on a small minority of armed combatant women in order to further the narrative that women were breaking traditional gender confines not for the sake of western-oriented progress, but anti-colonial sentiment. Both

arguments lack the voices of women on the experiences, legislation, policies, narratives, and official documentation that shaped their lives over the course of seven years.

Therefore, the gap in the current literature is raised: the image of the woman is presented without the voice of the woman. She is made subject to the representation and discourse about this representation by others. In both the literature on French emancipation tactics as well as the FLN's move to mobilize the Algerian woman, the voice of the woman herself is absent. While there are a number of academic works that look specifically at the women's experience, very few look at these experiences of women, presented as fully fledged narratives, in conjunction with the reinterpreted narratives by larger political and social authorities and apparatuses. By pairing the contrasting and often more nuanced accounts, it is easier not only to identify propaganda and its purposes, but also to identify why certain information is absent and how this absence could resonate for specific political agendas. This remains true when looking through the diverse accounts of the women themselves—the biases of one woman can be analyzed and critiqued by looking at the works of others. In analyzing these separate and sometimes distorted sets of narratives, specific questions can be raised and considered concerning how women were groomed to fit the mold of ideal nationalist women leading up to war, why women rejected French emancipation efforts during the struggle despite direct social and medical aid from colonial associations, and how women assisted the nationalist front on a broad scale

In order to do this, I will first start with a historical overview to bring context to the situation of these women. By looking at the context of women within a violent colonial paradigm, a history is created that inserts women into a patriarchal tradition separate from French cultural influence while at the same time exacerbating endemic poverty, illiteracy, and

overall misery. The particular nature of Algeria as a settler colony tightly held under French control created a set of political and social conditions that distanced any attempts at creating progressive political models that could fit into both Maghrebi Muslim traditions and non-western historical models.

Following this will be a presentation of the current works of Algerian women who were active during the war. By combining a piece of semi-autobiographical, fictional literature, Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, with interviews, academic studies, and autobiographies, a narrative can be created which presents a collection of diverse experiences that call on past violences, traumas, and bonds created during the war. Numerous women, in the decades since independence was won, have written or been interviewed to create more nuanced analyses of gendered experience and observation. However, even in these works there often exists contradictions and gaps—from social and class biases, the fear of breaking social taboos by speaking of certain topics, and simply the diverse ways in which the war manifested for women. Thus, the inclusion of a piece of fiction written by a well known Algerian woman is important in its reveal of cultural legacies either not directly written about by women or its implication of a wider scale manifestation of certain experiences.

With women, until this point, removed from French cultural influence due to traditional seclusion from the male gaze, it is then worth noting the emancipation politics adapted during the war towards Algerian women by the colonial government. Mainly centered around propaganda campaigns to invite Muslim women into the modern world, the French introduced various emancipation initiatives. By looking at the utilization of western-oriented emancipation politics by the French and the ultimate resistance of by Algerian women, one can consider how

polarization created by the historical context led to women largely aligning with nationalist goals in order to resist notions of progress based on foreign historical trajectories.

In the following section the opposite will be considered: how the FLN mobilized women for the nationalist cause. Through counter-propaganda against emancipation politics as well as the utilization of traditional gender roles and expectations to further the war effort, the FLN mobilized women on a national scale in both the military and civilian sectors. The FLN mobilized the entire population around values of tradition, religion, and the concept of the nation to oppose the colonial authority. It is important to note here, and throughout the rest of this paper, that values of “tradition” for political aspiration are not always rooted in historical foundations—rather, these values are often selective, modified, or even imagined in order to direct political goals. By looking at FLN mobilization through the lens of the women’s experience, one can analyze not only how the movement mobilized women, but also the diverse responsibilities and roles expected of them within the movement.

Finally, considering the immense stagnation of women’s progress following the war, I will briefly trace the political history of Algeria following the war. After independence, the women’s question was largely put aside and deprioritized for the sake of the nation and the success of its political and economic objectives. The combination of political instability, governmental concessions to Islamists, an oppressive Family Code, the lack of any non-state sanctioned organized women’s movement, and significant economic changes put Algeria on the trajectory of a violent civil war throughout the 1990s in which women who did not conform to traditional and Islamist ways of life were systemically targeted.

Throughout these sections, there will be a number of terms and titles in Arabic or French that readers may need references for. As such, I have provided a list of relevant terms and definitions below:

FIGURE 1.1 - DEFINITIONS

<i>ALN</i>	Armée de libération national; the armed sector of the FLN
<i>Bled</i>	rural, Algerian countryside
<i>Fidayate</i>	Urban, armed female militants
<i>Haïk</i>	Traditional garment used by women in the Maghreb, rectangular fabric covering the whole body and tied at the waist—Algerian manifestation of the “veil”, sometimes accompanied by facial covering
<i>Maquis</i>	Rural militant camps
<i>Maquisards</i>	Guerilla militants
<i>Moussbiliate</i>	Civil activists; those who took up more foundational and support roles in the revolution
<i>Mujahidat</i>	Rural female militants, sometimes armed, sometimes acted as nurses or propaganda agents
<i>Mujahidin</i>	Guerilla militants
<i>Pied noir</i>	People of French or other European origin born in Algeria between 1830-1962; overwhelmingly supported colonial rule
<i>Wilaya</i>	The six paramilitary divisions that the FLN divided Algeria into, with each section having its own administration to oversee ALN activity

The narratives of the Algeria women during the Algerian war for independence have often been deployed by other actors for political capital or for specific political purposes that restrict the women’s narrative to what is useful to the collective, creating a mega-narrative of history that largely reiterates, misrepresents, or silences the actual narratives of these women. By placing the woman’s testimony of her experiences at the center of the history about her experiences, a new, more complicated history of the Algerian war and its consequences for Algerian women can be created.

2.0 - ALGERIAN WOMEN IN THE COLONIAL EMPIRE

“The dream of Muslim women whose lives are lived in inner courts and windowless houses is to be assimilated to French women and thereby escape the life of a recluse. They envy the European women’s lot as caged birds envy the life of birds free to fly in the sky. How delighted they would be to express their support for assimilation! But even though this concerns them more than anyone, they will not be asked. Should French senators and deputies traveling in Algeria want to do so, it would actually be impossible: Muslim women being invisible to men, only women could reach them.”

— Hubertine Auclert, *Arab Women in Algeria*, p. 8, 1900

A militant feminist convinced that she was giving a voice to *femmes musulmanes*, Hubertine Auclert was a lifelong suffragette who, after living in Algeria for four years, assimilated her lifelong feminism with a denunciation of the pressing racism ever-present in colonial politics. It is important to note, however, for Auclert and many other French intellectuals who advocated against the virulent racism of colonialism, anti-racism was and is not anti-colonialism. The views in the French metropole on Algerian colonization, between its official status as a French colony in 1834 and the referendum for independence in 1962, stretched broadly across the political spectrum. From blatant disregard or advocacy of racist policy to Auclert’s more progressive views on the Algerian people, one theme remained clear: the best thing for the Algerian people was assimilation to the French lifestyle. Assimilation was the key foundation of French colonial policy and philosophy.

While this philosophy prevailed and grew throughout the metropole and the colonial administration, the new colonial order broke the traditional order of life for Algerians thrust under the French flag. As the new administration restructured political and judicial structures, the foundations of social relations that had prevailed for centuries were radically disturbed (Madranges, 1991). In Algeria, and throughout the French empire, European jurists, magistrates, and politicians arrived in the colony to implement western style institutions and philosophies on political, legislative, and judicial levels in order to combat an inherent “ignorance” of the colonized subjects. Rather than implementing a law entirely formed on long established French judicial and legislative tradition, however, traditional Muslim law was refracted and reinterpreted through a French lens that modified the law in the spirit of domination (Surkis, 2019). Many of these laws and codes were rooted in historical legal traditions that allowed flexible and diverse implementation—the colonial authority, however, changed legal structures so that these flexible, heterogenous codes became fixed positive law. The transformation to this homogenous legal system changed the very foundations of Islamic law as conceived by Maghrebi citizens, creating new understandings of Islamic and legal principles that were fundamentally different from those of the pre-colonial era (Hussein, 2016). Colonial administrators relied on “ministerial, parliamentary, and local reports on Algeria’s judicial organization, repeated translations of canonical texts of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*, compendia of customary law, new colonial legal journals, geographical surveys” in order to fill epistemological gaps between French and Muslim Law. In 1905, this project continued with the project to codify Muslim law—a product and consequence of interpretation and implementation as if they fully knew and understood “Muslim Law” (Surkis, 2019).

In this space of legal colonization, however, it is important to note the gendered nature of domination, and domination itself was often placed in the context of reaching Muslim women: “‘The Arabs elude us,’ complained General Bugeaud, the administrator of the Algerian territory in the 1840s, ‘because they conceal their women from our gaze (Scott, p. 55, 2007).’”

Surkis (2019) discusses a particular, contradictory paradigm in the new legal order: though critical of the hidden “interior life and cloistered women,” colonial agents actively worked to preserve local gender orders and relegated family and personal status law exclusively to Muslim law. French authorities considered religion as something that should be regulated to the private sphere, and family law in turn was the most private part of this sphere. A legal model was created that recognized patriarchal local laws while subordinating them to French oversight (though that is not to say that French laws concerning women were not also patriarchal). Yet, even as these local laws were upheld, they were criticized—particularly in their treatment of women—and gradually became the focal points for legal manipulation. Selective colonial codification of the Islamic law, completely transformed from pre-colonial legal tradition, was held up by colonial administrators as indicators of inherent differences between French and Algerian men. This fixation on the differences of sexual politics and privilege continued across the century, particularly following an 1865 *sénatus-consulte*. The mandate allowed Muslim men to obtain French nationality—however, in order to do so and become full French citizens, they were required to renounce Muslim law (Surkis, 2019). Even as the new colonial order restructured and reinterpreted nearly all other aspects of Islamic law, the legal areas that women were subject to were both critiqued and left largely alone. Personal status and family law, notably, had no use in creating a legal infrastructure to dominate the colony in the same way that property ownership or

the legal structure of the judicial system did, for example. Thus, as all other aspects of legal structure were adjusted in accordance to colonial necessity, laws relegating the family became a sacred focal point for Muslims. Women, at the center of these laws, were both elevated to a particular sacredness in their legal distance from the colonial system while also subject to the increasingly rigid, homogeneous nature of personal status codes.

That said, as the colonial empire spread across the region, women's organizations formed throughout other Middle Eastern and North African countries in cooperation with both colonial and anti-colonial movements (Macmaster, 2009). However, the legal paradigm in Algeria left the country's women lagging behind. The first women's movements appeared historically very late in comparison to other regional historiographies. As active organizations in the region were creating, sharing, and spreading progressive and modern ideas about the status of women within Islam—as opposed to western-centric progressive ideas on the status of women—Algerian delegates were notably absent (Macmaster, 2009). Macmaster attributes this absence less to inability of Algerian society to get on board with progressive notions of enfranchisement and veiling practices, for example, and more to a repressive colonial regime afraid of the consequences of a pan-Islamic movement spreading across the empire. Even without this hesitance and fear by the colonial administration, the social ramifications of elevating women to legal equivalents of the last remains of untouched culture and tradition can be clearly seen in the absence of an Algerian progressivism aimed towards women's issues.

Furthermore, even if Algerian women were able to begin to gather grassroots support for mass women's movements, debates on women's issues were continuously monopolized by French women in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding the issues faced by Algerian

women through orientalist and racist lenses, French women focused their campaigns on the seclusion of women through veiling, child marriage, patriarchal legal standards, and so on. Algerian women, according to the archetypes of suffering painted by French women on their experiences, could only be saved by the presence of and implementation of French values (Macmaster, 2009). Hubertine Auclert's exclamation at the beginning of the chapter—"How delighted they would be to express their support for assimilation!"—was broadly reflected in the views of French women on the struggles of their Algerian counterparts. Assimilation into French values would improve not only the lives of women, in this view, but of all Algerians. If women were not declaring this themselves, it was only because of the ignorance or seclusion forced on them by traditional social structures.

These European ideas of progressive, western feminism were conceived through organizations such as charitable networks, women's circles, and other social organizations that reflected the duties and expectations of women in French society. A small, weak class of educated Algerian women—called *évoluées*, in the respect that they were more evolved and open to progress than their "oppressed sisters"—were integrated into these organizations as proof of the desire of Algerian women to assimilate (Macmaster, 2009). Evidence to the contrary did not appear until 1944, when the first significant, independent women's movement formed: the communist *Union des femmes d'Algerie* (UFA). The first mass women's movement independent from European led organizations that focused their efforts on women's issues perceived through the western lens, the UFA marked the beginning of the growth of independent women's movements in the interwar period (Madranges, 1991). The varied organizations that grew in the decade between the end of World War II and the beginning of the independence struggle received

boosts from the growing nationalist sentiment throughout the country, cementing a concrete bond and alliance between the goals of Algerian women and the goals of the nation (Madranges, 1991). With this alliance, however, came the interdependence of Algerian women's movements on the ideology and narratives of nationalist "state feminism"—ideology and narratives that were concerned less so with overall progress of women and more so about cementing the future power of the independent state. As the interdependence of these movements grew, the gender dynamics of the coming war with France began to be cemented within the social order (Madranges, 1991).

Galindo (1954) associated the growth of these new movements with the competing notions of colonial domination and the social dynamics created during and after World War II. The war itself characterized a reflection of the individual whose evolution and awareness was seen as possible in liberated populations after the struggle of occupation. At the same time, however, the fragmentation of French opinion, presence of foreign propaganda throughout the empire, and the landing of colonial troops on the European continent allowed the development and growth of nationalist movements across North Africa. In this vein, as Muslim forces returned from France after experiencing ideas of liberation from occupying forces across Europe, they looked to emancipation and often total liberation from their own occupying force: the French colonial empire (Galindo, 1954).

These emancipatory and liberationist messages resonated with the growing population of young, educated Algerian women, who looked to both emancipation from the oppression of the colonizer and the oppression of traditional and neo-traditional social institutions. In the letter columns of *La République Algérienne* in 1953-54, these women renounced the "double imperialism" that denounced customs and traditions as a form of oppression equal to the

oppression of colonialism (Macmaster, 2009). Macmaster cites a number of women who advocated emancipation through newspaper, radio, and other media outlets. In the article *The twin sailors of women*, F. Ahmed wrote “we Algerian women have two sailors: colonialism...and those listless beings who cling to the customs and traditions inherited, not from Islam, but from their ignorant fathers. The second jailor is worst than the first (p. 39)...” Similarly, Nadia G. attacked the tendency to blame colonialism for poor work conditions and options for women, calling out the male leaders of Islamic organizations and political associations for their indifference to the fate of women. At the same time, other women called out the humiliation of being portrayed as orientalist stereotypes by colonial forces. Macmaster cites the example of a woman from Tlemcen who attacked veiling practices and spoke out on the humiliation of being photographed by tourists “like freaks” or “specter[s] looming up from by-gone ages (p. 39).”

Yet even as this class of young, educated women spoke out against these prevailing themes of patriarchal oppression in both the colonial and traditional sectors of society, they remained only a small portion of women in the country. A study conducted by Germaine Tillion in 1953 found that three-quarters of the total population were illiterate in Arabic and 91% of the population was illiterate in French (Horne, 1977). These numbers only worsened when focused on women: only 4.3% of Algerian women were able to read and write (Daniele, 1999). Furthermore, while Tillion found that one million Algerians were totally or partially unemployed and two million were underemployed, the exclusion of women from public life relegated women’s work to sectors that did not require professional qualifications. Though secondary education fared slightly better than higher education, even the University of Algiers, which had over 500 Algerian students, had only about fifty girls (Horne, 1977; Daniele, 1999). It is

important to note, however, that prior to colonial conquest, a significant amount of the population (including women) was literate in Arabic. Colonial authorities systemically restructured the education system, undermined and eliminated the existing free school system, and neglected to enforce mandates on compulsory education. Adding to this, Arabic was not named an official language of Algeria until 1947, and even after this the shortage of Arabic language teachers restricted literacy even in the native language (Heggoy, 1976). Thus, while this small class of educated women spoke out against the conditions of women across the country, the vast majority of women remained uneducated, illiterate, and secluded.

As feminist consciousness grew in small numbers throughout the country, political struggles began to draw towards conflict. The French colonial authority, *pied-noirs*, and nationalists violently clashed on topics of legislation, judiciary, and social regulations. In 1947, for example, a new bill of rights for Algeria was blocked by both the *pied noir* lobby and Algerian nationalists. The bill called for the recognition of both French and Arabic as the official languages of Algeria, the separation of church and state for Muslims, and enfranchisement for Muslim women (Horne, 1977). The equalization of Muslims in the colony saw vehement *pied noir* opposition, even as nationalists opposed the very idea that the French had the right to create legislation for Algeria. Despite the fact that many nationalist leaders rejected the bill, the fear of an increase in the power of Muslim leaders led *pied noirs* to rig electoral campaigns and, essentially, completely disenfranchise the nationalist movement. This disenfranchisement exacerbated into the arrest and exile of many nationalist leaders (Horne, 1977).

As political polarization grew and nationalist forces organized, conflict grew until the official start of the Algerian War for Independence: the Toussaint Rouge Incident. On November

1, 1954, anti-colonial sentiment and nationalism culminated with thirty attacks carried out by the FLN across Algeria. In Cairo, where many nationalist leaders lived in exile, the FLN called for the cooperation of all Algerian Muslims to free the state from colonial domination (Horne, 1977). Though not all Algerians initially responded to this call, the presence of women in those that did cannot be denied.

3.0 - WOMEN WRITING IN WAR: THE EXPERIENCE OF ALGERIAN WOMEN

3.1 - INTRODUCTION

As Algeria descended into war in 1954, various political players within the colonial apparatus and the national landscape began to look towards women as means to accomplish a diverse spectrum of goals that aligned with the large-scale wartime objectives. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the French colonial authority, on one hand, reached out to Algerian women with promises of emancipation oriented on the social norms and traditions of the west. These promises were meant to indicate a willingness to bring Algeria into a more progressive political and social landscape to both the international community as well as Algerian women themselves. These promises, however, were set against a background of contradictory policies that consisted of both a sense of benevolence meant to “free the native woman” as well as the institution of mass violence, torture, and destruction in both rural and urban zones. On the other hand, the Algerian nationalist movement created a paradigm in which women were crafted into the backbone of the revolution—supporting militants by fulfilling traditional domestic roles as *moussebilate*, or the civil activists that made up the majority of participating women. Even so, however, these women were pushed to the foreground of historical narratives in place of female armed militants, a distinct minority, in order to propagate a narrative of “mythical female

warriors” who would rise up for their country before descending back into traditional patriarchal conventions. Neither of these narratives acknowledges not only the extreme diversity of the women’s experience, but also the pervasiveness of experiences that, although vital for the war effort, did not break social conventions in ways that could be meaningfully used to propagate a specific message.

In the decades since the conclusion of the war in 1962, women’s accounts have emerged through oral interviews as well as a spectrum of literature to contest the powerful narratives crafted by the aforementioned parties. One such work is Assia Djébar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, which presents a number of different stories following Algerian women during the war—knit together despite the vast contrasts between many of the stories—in order to showcase not only the immense difference in experience, but also the varying tragedies and horrors that befell many women. Djébar has called the novel “une préparation à une autobiographie,” a semi-autobiographical work that ties together the author’s experience with narrated retellings of the testimonies of other Algerian women that Djébar interviewed—a situation of personal discourse within the context of other women to create a diverse, subjective narration (Geesey, 1996). Furthermore, Djébar ties together these stories on the war for independence with narrative interludes on the 1830 colonial conquest, suggesting a historical reality that Algerian women have always been present in the spirit of resistance. Djébar (1996) writes in one interlude between stories:

“How could a woman speak aloud, even in Arabic, unless on the threshold of extreme age? How could she say ‘I’, since that would be to scorn the blanket formulae which ensure each individual journeys through life in collective resignation?...How can she undertake to analyze her childhood, even if it turns out different? The difference, if not spoken of, disappears (p. 156).”

Even as traditional historiographies relay specific and intentional narratives that are often not disputed by women for fear of breaking social taboos or reliving trauma, the combination of fiction and fact creates a more comprehensive and cohesive outline of women's testimony that acknowledges both difference and hierarchy, diversity and privilege, within a population of women that were invariably affected by both the war and the narratives spun by political actors in the war. Alison Rice's *Polygraphies* (2012) discusses Djébar's work as a testimony of both fellow Algerian women and herself:

“In [Djébar's] own textual testimony, she is bearing witness to the witness of the other, in a circle of witnessing that itself bears witness to how even anonymous observation is not “innocent” but filled with meaning for all those involved. When it comes to the possibility of witnessing, spectators are never disengaged from the action they observe but instead are inevitably concerned, caught up in the scene simply because of their presence (p. 33).”

Djébar's utilization of fiction is a method of testimony, presenting a character who is presenting themselves—a testimony not just of individual experience but a collective event that spectators made and participated in.

Fantasia, along with the vast majority of Djébar's work, is notably written in French—not unlike a significant portion of Algerian women's literature and research after the war. That said, when considering ‘the witness’ and ‘the other,’ it would be remiss to not discuss the potentially problematic nature of translating experience, especially from an era in which women were largely illiterate in both French and Arabic. Djébar is far from the only participant in this issue, but she is a well-known author who has spoken significantly on the subject. In an interview with Renate Siebert, Djébar stated:

“Very often, particularly when I am in Europe, I am asked, “Being an Algerian woman, why do you write in French?” I always repeat that when I was a child, I had no choice

because in schools Arabic was not taught... Writing in French was not a choice (cited in Duranti, p. 4, 2011).”

This is a brief illustration of the transformation of education and lack of incentive and resources to teach Arabic under colonial rule that was discussed in the previous chapter. However, there is more to the francophone nature of Algerian women’s literature than colonial era education policy. Djébar has further stated that writing in French has become a post-colonial necessity for Algerian women, allowing them to maintain a distance between the lived reality and the written word—creating a “neutral linguistic space” in which certain topics that are a taboo in Arabic, such as sexuality, trauma, and Islamic heritage, can be discussed from a linguistic distance (Duranti, 2011). Younger authors, who were born before the attempted Arabization of Algeria, have much less problematic relationships with this linguistic gap in literature (Duranti, 2011). However, in looking at experiences relayed from a period of time in which female illiteracy was extensive, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of both translating and transcribing ‘the other.’

In *Fantasia*, for example, Djébar interviewed other Algerian women in order to include fictionalized accounts of their experiences in the novel, creating a spectrum of narrative representations. However, by writing the novel in French but basing it on experiences that were likely largely in Arabic, there is a question of what cultural and linguistic connotations are lost in translation. Similarly, Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne’s study, *Des femmes dans la guerre d’Algérie*, is written in French—though she was also a victim of the colonial disregard of Arabic language in education. As a comprehensive piece of research in which a large number of women were interviewed on their experiences, many through oral interviews due to illiteracy, this

question of translating cultural and linguistic connotation is emphasized again. In writing pieces of fiction that translate pure autobiographical or fictitious sentiment, translation is less of an issue, as there is a lack of ‘the other.’ In taking the experiences of another and translating them, the biases of the translator—which can be based on class, individual experience, post-war experience, et cetera—combine with the linguistic changes to create a potential loss and re-representation of experience. Many female writers from the era of the Algerian war, some of whom I use in this chapter, were those who had access to education, were of higher class and wealth, and often had more exposure to the west, so in translating and transcribing certain experiences they might put less emphasis on certain ideas that are particular to class, region, and so on. The interviewed and observed woman is subject to ‘othering’ by the author.

I am, of course, doing something similar throughout this chapter. However, by pointing out these potential biases for analysis and consideration, both in the work of the writers and academics that I am referring to as well as my own work, I hope the diverse range of experience as well as the factors that can contribute to the loss of experience in literature and research become clear.

3.2 - THE *MOUSSEBILATE*

The *moussebilate* made up a clear majority of participating women during the war, comprising approximately 82% of all female militants (Amrane-Minne, 1991). Despite this, however, both the *fidayate* and women active militarily in the *maquis* have received an arguably

disproportionate focus in historiography of Algerian women during the war for a number of reasons. Notably, 91% of the Algerian population was illiterate at the start of the conflict, with only 4.3% of women able to read and write (Madranges, 1991; Amrane-Minne, 1991; Daniele, 1999; Horne, 1977). Thus, the experiences of these women could not be told outside of oral tradition unless specifically sought out. In the cases of many *fidayate* and *moudjahidate*, autobiographies, literature, and media was accessible due to the privileged positions these women held compared to their poorer, illiterate counterparts. The *fidayate*, particularly, was composed almost entirely of women who had received some sort of education, with some even progressing to university levels in urban Algeria (Drif, 2017; Macmaster, 2009). Furthermore, the complete break with social norms and tradition that many women engaged with when participating in direct militancy was a clear attraction for media attention and imagination. Not only were women made perpetrators of wartime violence and death, but they were also made visible to national and international audiences by imprisonment and sensationalized trials (Vince, 2015). For example, though consisting of only 2% of total activists, the *fidayate* saw an arrest rate of 50.8% and made up 37% of recipients of detentions of three or more years (Amrane-Minne, 1991).

That said, the experiences of *moussebilate* are decidedly less accessible than their more militant counterparts. The integration of these women into the war effort was often a simple transition of domesticity rather than political action and discourse. These women “prepared food for the *mujahidin*, rolled and prepared couscous, washed and sewed the outfits of the maquisards, housed them, collected money; they were on the lookout, they were liaison officers (El Korso, 1998)...” When Fatima Benmohand Berci describes her first act as a member of the civilian

resistance, political opinion is noticeably absent from the account. After groups of *maquisards* came to her house, Berci describes an encounter that is absent of any sentiment of support or lack thereof for the nationalist movement—rather, the encounter takes the form of a sense of domestic duty:

“They asked my husband to buy meat, bread, and couscous. [They said] ‘In two, three days you will make food, twelve men are going to come and eat here’. My husband did the buying and me and another woman prepared the food. Around nine in the evening a group of *mujahidin* came and ate at the house (Vince, p. 34, 2015).”

This encounter, not inherently negative, assumes a transfer of traditional domestic duties from familial confines to a larger political apparatus. Furthermore, there is little evidence to account for choice and preference of the woman in this case—not to say that women, given invitation to political discourse, would not support the decolonization of the nation, but rather that the political apparatus of the nationalist movement extended an *order* for the household to participate in the aid of *maquisards*; the domestic roles of women were fundamental in carrying out this order. In other cases, however, there is a distinct disparity in roles that are noted in women’s accounts:

“In certain regions, the man makes the woman do everything while he does nothing. For him, the woman is a slave, she gets up at five in the morning, prepares to eat, takes care of the cattle, the land, then at home she takes care of the children and returns to him in the evening full of bloom, takes her coffee when she is not even allowed a small coffee with him (Amrane-Minne, 1991).”

This, notably, is not a discussion of *moussebilate*, but rather a paradigm of gender relations prevalent in many rural areas before and during the war that had the potential to, and often did, extend to the roles of the *moussebilate*. The woman cited in the above quote, Yamina, was prefaced by another woman, Farida, who gave a description of this paradigm with the conditions

of work for many women in the *maquis*. She describes the heavy burden of women who carried water, wood, cooked, cleaned, and so on, and further, an experiment in which men would temporarily take over some of these duties in the *maquis*. By the third day of this experiment, however, all roles and duties were resumed by whatever gender traditionally fulfilled them. At the start of this experiment, she quotes one woman who took the idea as a joke: “Oh, that's good, we're going to rest (Amrane-Minne, 1991)!” There is no indication here of whether ‘rest’ applies to a break in duties of the *maquis*, or rather duties expected of them throughout their entire lives. This is particularly noteworthy as the indication and discussion of an experiment aimed at analyzing gender roles, at a time when these roles were strictly enforced to uphold both the foundations of the war as well the social norms the war sought to preserve, shows an acknowledgment of the women’s place and the potential injustice of it. Even as women upheld the structure of the revolution by supporting militants throughout all of Algeria, any lack of direct, armed militancy did not exempt them from the violence of war and direct attacks by the colonial army. A commonality was created, despite the prevailing attitudes that pushed responsibilities based on gender, through the threat of violence that was invariably present for both men and women involved in the struggle in any capacity.

Djebar acknowledges this phenomena several times throughout *Fantasia*, most often through the representation of the incidents in which French soldiers would target women suspected of aiding militants by burning down their homes. In one such story, the narrator states: “My farm was burnt down three times. Whenever they came back and found it in good repair again, they knew the brothers had rebuilt the house for us (p. 149)...” Here, a systematic and circular relationship is acknowledged in which, by fulfilling her domestic duties, the woman also

bears the burden of retributive violence. With much of the war fought through guerrilla tactics, women were targeted when militants could not be—despite not engaging in direct and violent militancy, the engagement of the *moussebilate* was fundamental for the survival of both the militancy. In this relationship, the brothers are referenced as repaying the woman's losses and trauma by rebuilding her farm—however, this is only a temporary measure. By acknowledging the loss of her home and rebuilding it in payment of her sacrifice, the brothers restart the cycle in which the home will be destroyed once more.

Fatma Yermche furthers this narrative in which the *moussebilate* acted not only as the foundation in which the revolution could survive, but also the barrier which prevented the French from discovering militants:

“When they [the French soldiers] asked me questions [such as], ‘Have you cooked for the *mujahidin*?’ I denied everything, I said, ‘I haven’t seen them and I haven’t cooked for them.’ They beat us. They made us drink soapy water, [they used] electricity [to torture us], the women too, especially those who were suspected of having cooked (Vince, p. 61, 2015).”

Zohra Drif, in her 2017 autobiography, also discusses this narrative in which women were systematically targeted:

“Aldjia was sixteen and had taken refuge with her mother, Djouhar, at the home of Fatima, a widow and mother of four. Their village, in the region of Tigzirt, had sustained bombardments for twenty days. On the twenty-first day, the army invaded. The soldiers killed all the men and boys and placed the girls in the rooms of the empty houses. For a whole week, the soldiers took turns raping every young girl in the village without stopping. When Djouhar was finally able to retrieve her daughter, she found her body, her soul, and her senses wrecked forever. Now her limbs were shackled because Aldjia constantly self-mutilated and tried to escape.”

Despite the lack of sensationalization for their roles, the *moussebilate* were routinely targeted either in place of militants or as a mechanism to send a message to militants. Even so, the

relationship between the *moussebilate* and militants was only a short lived acknowledgement of the paternalistic necessity of gendered conventions to uphold systemic fluctuations in the political apparatus. Vince (2015) quotes Khaoula Taleb Ibrahim, who commented on the collapse of this short-lived acknowledgement and systemic wartime relationship: "...all these exceptional women were ordered to return to their homes, to their tasks of mother, wife, sister and daughter (p. 4)." Likewise, Djébar (1996) puts this collapse into another narrative. Set after the war, this section of *Fantasia* follows a woman seeking aid from party officials—after losing her sons, her husband, her brothers, and many other members of family, as well as assisting as a *moussebilate*, the woman is refused help to rebuild her home after its destruction during the war and is instead forced to pay to rent a small hut. The narrative itself in telling in its representation of the this collapse of the relationship between militants and *moussebilate*, but it is the woman's lament after the fact that resounds with the realities of many women after the war: "All the men I used to depend on, all those men have gone!" Gone, not only as in *dead*, but rather as in abandoned—with the necessities of wartime relations finished, there is an assumption that traditional roles, relationships, and power dynamics can return.

3.3 - THE MOUDJAHIDATE

Women not directly involved in armed militancy did not only operate on this system of discreetly hiding and helping militants however—their roles ranged from the traditional domestic duties of the *moussebilate* described above to various responsibilities ranging from propaganda agents to

nurses to liaising. These various roles were particularly striking in the diverse environments of the *maquis*. Women involved in the health services and nursing sectors of the movement in rural Algeria, for example, were often forced to deal with wounded *maquisards* single-handedly, treating them with insufficient medicine or, more often, no medicine at all—sometimes performing operations under these same conditions (Amrane-Minne, 1991). Their activity was not limited to *maquisards* or even the vicinity of the *maquis* itself. Yamina Cherrad relayed as much in her experience of the war: “I took care of civilians, especially the wounded among them. I dedicated one day a week for them and I used to go to the villages near the infirmary and even in some very far off villages (Amrane-Minne, 1991).”

Many of the *moudjahidate* were tasked with similar responsibilities—in essence, making leeways into the surrounding area and countryside through health and hygiene in order to build trust and support for the FLN in the rural population, particularly in women who were potential targets for the colonial army’s own propaganda campaign. These women were often organized into mobile infirmaries to treat the civilian population, and further, were expected to meet with women in nearby villages to teach and give advice on health and hygiene that should be applied to their own care as well as the care of their children (El Korso, 1998). One such example is recounted by a woman named Farida, who remembered discussing the hygiene of jewelry with these rural women:

“By caring for children and women, I was trying to improve their notions of hygiene. For example, they wore heavy earrings and sometimes had torn, even infected lobes. I explained to them that it was not good, especially for the little girls, I wanted them to preserve the lobe of their ears (Amrane-Minne, 1991).”

Informing the civilian population was another facet of this tactic of building loyalty and trust between rural women and the FLN— *moudjahidate* were to explain the goals of the liberation struggle and build relationships with rural women in order to cement loyalty to the movement. Amrane-Minne (1991) cites one woman who discussed exchanging recipes with women in the villages and learning regional pottery techniques. Though neither is a distinctly political activity, the ability and act of sharing recipes and tradition implies a camaraderie and credence in the trustworthiness of FLN agents. It is further important to note that these relationships were built between Algerian women—of different backgrounds, social classes, and economic situations, but Algerian women nonetheless. As will be discussed in the next chapter, similar techniques by the French colonial army to organize European and Algerian women to propagate rural Algerian women was decidedly less successful. Though this can be explained by a variety of reasons, the difference between what these rural Algerians may have seen as ‘foreign interlopers’ and fellow Algerians is vast: one sought to involve them in the war effort under the background of a century of colonial violence, the other sought to bring them into a struggle based on shared national consciousness. This camaraderie and understanding narrowed the chasm that, though extensive, further prevented poor and illiterate women from politicization. Malika H. recounts one experience in which one woman did not even understand that the movement and the party were organizations rather than people:

“I was washing the clothes with the women, showing them how to boil them to try to get rid of the lice. It was a very poor region, people lived in tents. Women were not politicized, I kept the image of a frightened woman who was waiting for what her husband was going to say. So I was trying to explain to them. I remember one of them who thought that El Djebha (the Front, masculine word in Arabic) was a man and El Djich (the army, feminine word in Arabic) a woman (Amrane-Minne, 1991).”

3.4 - IN THE *MAQUIS*

Though it is important to note that both *moussebilate* and *moudjahidate* were present within the *maquis*, there was a particular environment within these rural guerrilla camps that greatly influenced the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of women. There are, however, conflicting views about how this environment manifested: one that backs the idea that male combatants accepted the presence of women in the *maquis*, and the other that states men were by and large hostile to the presence of women. Djebbar acknowledges this possible contempt for the addition of women into the *maquis* in a narrative that follows a young girl who follows her brothers into the *maquis*. On several occasions, she not only confidently proclaims to French soldiers that her death will not hinder the revolution in any capacity, but she also fights and hides with her brothers. Even as she does so, however, an onlooker states:

“She’s the one, the thirteen year old girl...behaving as if she were the fourth son in the family, running away like that from the dour and the French soldiers, instead of staying put with the other females (p. 122).”

There is a particular contempt for women operating outside the bounds of what is traditionally acceptable. Were she simply providing domestic services for the *maquis*, or operating as a *moussebilate* in the nearby village, she would be fulfilling both her role as a woman and her responsibilities to the revolution. However, the reality of many women active in the *maquis* saw contention on their presence. Seferdjeli (2012) writes on this contested subject extensively, and in doing so draws attention to the gaps that are often produced in the process of collecting oral history and reproducing it through a separate author with their own biases and conclusions. Even without the contention and widespread disagreement on the topic, one can acknowledge that

whether or not men saw female militants in the *maquis* as equal, they were often, at the very least, *separate*. One woman, Khadjidja Belguembour, stated:

“Us in the *maquis*, we didn’t live with the male soldiers under the same roof. In the countryside, where there was a refuge, the men were separate, the women cooked, did the logistical stuff, separately. I never saw the *maquisards* eat, unless we were on the move. I never saw a *maquisard* sleep. There wasn’t any discussion. The only discussion I had sometimes, if I had the time, was with the injured. Otherwise each of us had our job to do (Vince, p. 92, 2015).”

Briefly returning to the quote cited above from Djebbar’s *Fantasia*, the concept of ‘staying put’ implies a duty, a responsibility, to maintain one’s place with the other women. In a population almost entirely mobilized for the war effort, the concept of ‘staying put’ is not an implication that women should not participate in the struggle at all, but rather the jobs expected of women are separate from the *maquis*, and thus are separate from those of their husbands, brothers, and sons.

In contrast to this, Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, a *fidayate* during the war who saw more of an equal standing with male militants due to the nature of urban militancy, argues that though the *mujahidin* were initially opposed to the presence of women in the *maquis*, they eventually accepted them without reservation due to the bonds created by proximity and the shared experience of constant danger. What is most remarkable here is an observation that others have used to uphold the exact opposite of her argument:

“During the interviews, it struck me that out of 47 women militants who married during or after the war, 38 are married with men militants. Now, for a fighter, to get married with a woman fighter is the best proof of accepting the fight she engaged in and of esteem for what she has been (Amrane-Minne cited by Seferdjeli, p. 241, 2012).”

The idea of forced marriages, or even the idea of *pressure* to marry, within the *maquis* and the subsequent sexual environment is only vaguely recorded due to the taboos of the subject.

Seferdjeli (2012) cites Bouatta’s 1994 interview with a woman named Houria who was married

twice in the *maquis*— when asked about the relationship with her first husband, the woman simply responded, “No, we don’t talk about that...” She additionally cites two more interviews in which women refused to speak about the circumstances in which they were married. Furthermore, none-withstanding the taboos encountered when broaching the subject, the experiences of women and marriage varied greatly depending on both the time period as well as the *wilaya* in which one is considering. In some cases, leaders forbade women to remain in the *maquis* and removed them from camps unless they agreed to marry. Djébar integrates this into one of the earlier narratives of *Fantasia*, though somewhat tactfully avoiding the forceful nature that is implied in the reality of marriages in the *maquis*. When ordered to marry, the young women of the narrative refused on the grounds that: “Did I join you just to get married? No, I won’t marry anyone! These men are all my brothers (p. 131)!” Djébar does not refer in any capacity to the idea that women could be forced into marriage. Rather, the character’s refusal to marry is quite final: she joined the *maquis* to support and fight for her country, and the aforementioned bonds created by proximity and the shared experience of constant danger referenced by Amrane-Minne created, for her, an equal responsibility and ability that drew her away from marriage rather than forcing her towards the idea. Nonetheless, the implication that leaders ordered women in the *maquis* to marry their fellow *mujahidin* implies a transfer of guardianship from the traditional family unit to the “new fathers” of the nationalist movement (El Korso, 1998).

This idea of guardianship can be further considered in light of the virginity tests that, in a number of *wilaya*, were deemed necessary. One *moudjahidate*, during a roundtable with El Korso—during which it is notable that only this woman would speak on the topic— recalled her

horror at the order to test the virginity of a young woman. She stated: “These medical visits, it was a little bit because of the FLN’s responsibilities towards the families. The leaders of the FLN/ALN considered themselves a little bit their [unmarried *moudjahidate*] guardians (Seferdjeli, p. 248, 2012)...” Thus, we can return to Amrane-Minne’s conclusion that the marriage of female militants is an observation proving the acceptance of women. Given that it is a topic in which many women have carefully omitted due to the violation of intimacy and the social taboos potentially broken by breaching the subject, her conclusion that the marriage of thirty-eight out of forty-seven female militants to their fellow combatants was a sign of acceptance seems disputable. Rather, high levels of marriage in the *maquis* might be far more connected to the transfer of paternalistic convention from the father to the leaders of the *maquis*, in light of the implied trauma that peers through the gaps in oral interviews.

Nonetheless, though it is indisputable that women had important roles in the *maquis*, the idea that their presence was a mark against traditional gender roles can be easily contested. These women, though they certainly modified the bounds in which tradition applied, continued to be tethered to tradition by the continued suspicion of male combatants and the subsequent transfer of male guardianship from fathers and brothers to brothers in arms.

3.5 - THE FIDAYATE

As mentioned previously, despite making up only a small minority of female combatants, the *fidayate* make up a disproportionate amount of the media and literature by and on female

militancy during the war. For example, many of the well-known biographies and accounts that have surfaced in recent decades—such as those by Zohra Drif, Jacqueline Guerroudj, Louisette Ighilahriz, Danièle Djamila Amrane Minne—were written by educated women who actively engaged in direct militancy. Though there is often an overlap between the *fidayate* and the *moudjahidate*, as it was not uncommon for women to flee urban areas as the colonial authority grew closer to capture, these women all participated in the armed struggle. It is notable that literature on women *not* involved in armed struggle was often taken on by these women following the war—Amrane-Minne’s work, though comprehensive in her ability to discuss the war with rural and urban women alike in her doctorate study *Des femmes dans la guerre d’Algérie*, is rooted in the experiences of the author. The disproportional literacy rate that not only resounded through gender but also class put many of experiences of the *moussebilate* and *moudjahidate* in the context of women who, by joining the armed struggle, saw a level of equality and deference that was unlike anything most women experienced during the war. Women involved in the armed struggle, even when not penning their own story, captured international media attention. Djamila Bouhired, for example, was later depicted in number of Arabic films such as Youssef Chahine’s *Jamila, the Algerian* (1958), and Djamila Boupacha was catapulted into international fame with the aid of French writer Simone de Beauvoir during her trial in 1961. Given this focus on these particular women, it is not surprising that Djébar writes little to nothing of them in *Fantasia*. Though it is perhaps unintentional, the novel’s focus on roles and experiences that could more easily resound with female veterans and the diversity of experience not often shown in academic study or autobiographies suggests that the story of the *fidayate* has already been well represented and need not be fictionalized for lack of

representation. While these women all played a tremendous part in advancing the prospect of Algerian independence, their experiences do not represent the norm. Rather, they highlight the diversity of experience for women across Algeria whose livelihoods were fundamentally transformed but the war.

The *fidayate* had the unique position of inconspicuousness within the urban landscape. Apart from the disguise that both the veil and womanhood itself provided, the veil allowed women to transport arms, medicine, and supplies in secret. Before mass searches were instituted during the Battle of Algiers, French soldiers were reluctant to look beneath the veil—the combined forces of anonymity and the sense of untouchable ‘native women’ made the veil an indispensable barrier which the FLN used to its advantage (El Korso, 1998). As the Battle of Algiers progressed, however, the function of the veil to act as a disguise and prevent identification of known bombers was vital. Drif notes, in an interview with Amrane-Minne (1991), “We lived the same life, but in terms of activity, we had a more intense life than them because we could move around veiled. They were the ones who were cloistered!” In the 1957 eight-day strike, the relentless movement of colonial forces to arrest those associated with the FLN and surveil suspected areas, most notably the Casbah of Algiers, men were essentially immobilized. This ‘cloistering’ of men and exchange of roles changed the dynamic in which men and women interacted. Women were vital not only for the support systems of the movement, but also the surveillance, the armed attacks, the transportation, and so on. Drif states:

“To begin with, I simply carried out orders, but conditions became increasingly difficult, the casbah fell under tight control, and our brothers wouldn’t have been able to carry out their work without us. Our lives were like theirs, but our activists could be more adventurous because we could go out wearing the veil. They were the ones shut up at

home. Once, we dressed them up in veils to go outside; they had to dress up like us if they wanted to go out (Amrane-Minne, 1991).”

It is here that one of the major differences between the *fidayate* and other participating women is clear—though there is a separation of *experience* that was present along gendered lines, there was not a separation of roles or responsibilities. Traditional separation of responsibilities based on patriarchal conventions would stunt the movement of urban nationalist forces. That said, while many women were confined largely to roles that didn’t break convention, it became necessary to do so with the *fidayate*. That is not to say that womanhood itself was admired, the position the break with tradition had forced women into was the focal point of admiration. Drif (2017) gives a clear example of this when recalling a conversation with a FLN leader, Ben M’hidi, in which she suggested men use the veils to disguise themselves. At his vehement refusal, she recalled responding:

“What’s the matter? What’s going to happen? Where is the dishonor in disguising yourself as a woman to fool the enemy for the sake of our struggle? You’re afraid of getting caught while dressed as a woman, aren’t you? Is it so dishonorable to be a woman in your eyes?”

The exchange is telling, in part due to his response to this condemnation, and in part due to his refusal in the first place. M’hidi’s refusal (“Never, never at all!”) is an indication of hierarchy. Though the women are instrumental in carrying out the objectives of the revolution, the tools by which they do so (both veils and the nature and expectations of womanhood itself) are unfit to be wielded by men—these tools are those created by a system of hierarchical control and presupposition of strict and inherent placing within a paradigm of class, gender, and race. To use this system, a system that the FLN leaders intimately understood, is one thing when these leaders were in control of the ways this system was transformed for the benefit of larger national goals.

Further, with the transformation of these tools at the discretion of FLN leaders, it can be supposed that they also wield the power to return the system to the hierarchal, gendered nature of pre-war Algeria when the necessity to have it otherwise is over. It is a temporary disregard of the nature of the system in order to progress the agenda of a movement in which the systems that uphold the patriarchy are inherent. However, to have men wear veils, despite the benefits, is to symbolically lower these men along the hierarchal axis of society. In fact, M'hidi's response is as such: if men were to be seen or if it were to become common knowledge that men were using the veil, the populace would be horrified and the movement would subsequently lose their respect.

The use of the veil was not the only method of disguise for the *fidayate*, however. These women were able to use preconceived notions of women and specifically European women to their benefit. During one incident in which three bombs were to be planted by the *fidayates* (though only two went off) Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhardi, and Djamila Bouhired, Drif (2017) recalls an anecdote in which the two other girls confidently avoided detection:

“Samia told me that when they reached the final checkpoint, one of the soldiers on guard had asked them what they were carrying in their beach bags. With a smile, Djamila replied, “Why, bombs, of course!” The soldier, Djamila, and Samia laughed at her joke and the two young girls, elegant and all smiles on the outside, passed through the checkpoint smoothly, in a hurry to get to the beach.”

Whether these women wore the veil or went without, they utilized expectations of a particular image (that of the native women or that of the European and *pied noir* women) in order to further the goals of the nationalist struggle. The *fidayate* were able to access a larger spectrum of roles and responsibilities due to the nature of anonymity and diversity of the urban environment. Amongst French and *pied noir* civilians rather than just military combatants, these women were useful in that they could use the expectations of the populace as a disguise for their actions. It is

notable that their roles, however, came at the discretion of a movement that had no female leaders whatsoever—this ‘breaking’ of traditional gender roles was sanctioned by a male-led apparatus built on a political history in which an Algerian form of progressivism was unable to develop amidst a political system run by settlers and the colonial authority (Amrane-Minne, 1991). The transformation of gender roles for the *fidayate*, in this sense, was a temporary measure rather than a true step towards equality. Michèle Perrot, quoted by Amrane-Minne (1991), goes as far as to proclaim only *one* woman that stood on *almost* equal footing in both the Battle of Algiers and the war in general: Zohra Drif.

3.6 - CONCLUSION

The narratives put out by both the nationalist movement and the French colonial system on the topic of women often seem to be singular and lacking the multifaceted approach of intersecting factors of gender, class, urbanity, region, and so on in the current historiography of Algerian women. Given the hindrance of social customs and taboos on censuring the spoken history of many women, there are gaps in which even this multifaceted approach cannot breach. These gaps can be all the more telling—women, no matter their level of participation, were subject to violence and trauma across the board, and the lack of record does little to erase that.

The combination of literature meant to portray these experiences with the interviews and accounts written to pin down the realities faced allows one to examine both the history how it is told as well as how it is *not*. Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia* follows not only the narrated accounts of

women Djébar interviewed, but also accounts of the struggle that existed for Algerian people from the moment France touched down on the country's shores. By weaving together a narrative in which women spoke of vastly different and often contradictory experiences with the images and stories of women watching their homes fall under the force of colonial armies, stories of women kidnapped and sold, Djébar acknowledges that women's history is not a singular experience. Rather, these histories and stories extend in many directions, into the past and future. Singular narratives lack the extension of women into nearly every facet of national defeat and trauma.

4.0 - FRENCH PROPAGANDA AND THE ALGERIAN WOMEN

4.1 - INTRODUCTION

During the independence struggle, a distinct and significant imbalance of powers directly influenced the manner in which warfare was conducted. The French colonial army, sustained by centuries of colonial profits and domination, had a clear and distinct advantage in terms of manpower, financing army operations, arms and ammunition, transportation, and other aspects that are vital in waging a war. The FLN, on the other hand, could only maintain a sustained offensive by transforming public support into a mobilized, broad legitimacy of their movement against the colonial force. In order to sustain effective military action against the French army, the entire structure of the movement was based around translating public support into public action. This was particularly prevalent in the armed wing of the FLN—*l'Armée de libération nationale* (ALN). For the nationalist movement to remain an effective opponent, it was necessary for public support to manifest through various civilian actions such as hiding and aiding in the safe transport of militants, carrying messages between nationalist leaders, transporting arms, and providing supplies to the movement.

Considering how necessary public support was in order to maintain the offensive, the mission of the French colonial army was not entirely directed towards an absolute military

victory. Rather, their offensive was directed towards a psychological end-goal that transformed this imbalance of power into a deeply political conflict fought not just between the two major political and military players, but a conflict amongst the civilian population. This psychological end-goal was intended to be a complete loss in faith by the civilian population in the nationalist movement. Civilians would be conditioned to believe in an *Algérie française*. The traditional conduct of war based on direct military violence was overhauled into ground-level, psychological violence based on a tug-of-war of public support. In a war where an entire population must be mobilized in order to combat the enemy, the central goal of that enemy became an implicit drive to take away the support for the revolution and bring this support into their own camp.

One of the key ideological beliefs of Algerian nationalism was based around the view that women and family constituted the last remaining fortification of cultural, religious, and social values against the colonial force. Nationalists viewed the place of women through the reflection that, after nearly a century of colonial rule, the majority of economic and social structures had been breached by the ever-extending hand of colonial domination. This hand, however, had failed to breach the private reserves of family life, dominated by Algerian women (Macmaster, 2009). As the last bastion of Algerian society that had not been penetrated by the colonial empire, women represented a clear strategy in which the French Army could fragment the foundations of this society. By creating a system of contact and support for these women, colonial initiatives could draw support away from the nationalist movement and thus draw valuable and vital resources from the rebellion.. The colonial army enacted a system in which Algerian women would theoretically learn to be ‘modern, civilized women’ under French direction in order to

dismantle a vital system of support for nationalist militants. The precise doctrine, outlined critically by Fanon, follows the logic that: “If we want to destroy the structure of the Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and the houses where the men keep them out of sight (p. 37, 1959).” He questions the ideas that, if women were the focal point of family life, then conquering and possessing them would allow the colonial authority to conquer and possess the family. The Algerian woman, Fanon says, began to assume primordial importance in the view that they, as women, served as an intermediary between the group (that is, the entire Algerian people) and the obscured sections of this group (the family) (Fanon, 1959).

In moving forward into an analysis of the strategy of “building contact,” I would like to briefly look at the significance of source material that will be used in this section. There is a striking contrast in both the research and the analysis between academic sources based on the Algerian woman’s experience and those based on French colonial archives. Both will be considered in conjunction with primary source materials on the propaganda and discourse utilized by the colonial army. Ryme Seferdjeli’s *The French Army and Muslim Women During the Algerian War*, for example, reveals the research of an Algerian women with insight and critique of a gendered French colonial history that might ignore some of the more nuanced aspects of Algerian culture and experience. In contrast to this, Neil Macmaster’s *Burning the Veil: The Algerian war and the 'emancipation' of Muslim women* is used throughout this chapter. This work, along with many other academic works based on French colonial archives, presents Algerian women and the organizations curated by the colonial army through the lens of French colonial history. The voices of Algerian women affected by the war as well as these organizations

are generally absent. Given Macmaster's direction, a certain aspect of criticism is necessary in order to place his account of the colonizer's history in ownership of Algerian women. Both sides of this academic paradigm are important in consideration of the Algerian women's history—by joining colonial history with the colonized woman's experience, one can look critically at the propaganda that was both inherent and actively produced by these organizations. Further, the examination of how the colonial army crafted its narrative involves not only a consideration of propaganda utilized at the time, but also an examination of how that propaganda is critiqued in contemporary academia.

4.2 - BUILDING CONTACT

The most central part of the propaganda initiative was the concept of 'building contact' with the rural Algerian population and, particularly, rural Algerian *women*. This stage intended to build bridges between the French army and the civilian population in order to both 'pacify' this population as well as create a system of intelligence gathering. These bridges were built and the strategy of 'building contact' was initiated by sending teams organized by colonial authorities into communities in the *bled* to create the foundations for trusting, loyal relationships with the colonial authority. The basis for the strategy was this idea of "reconquering" the population and drawing a potential support base away from the nationalist movement. The colonial army intended to isolate the FLN from the populace in order to dismantle any ability to conduct military operations in zones that the army had deployed organizations to (Seferdjeli, 2005).



FIGURE 1.2 - SOLDAT!...

Combining the idea of “reconquering” the colonized nation with the *mission civilisatrice*—that is, leading Algerians from the “barbarity” of tradition and into the “modern, civilized” world—led to the distinct military strategy utilized by the French army during the war. To “reconquer” a nation that has already been conquered by the colonial empire implies more than a military victory over the Algerian people. Rather, this reconquering of the Algerian people, and particularly the Algerian women, was a direct attempt to subjugate the colonized people into the narrow scope of what belonged in the modern, civilized world.

In this military strategy, soldiers of the French army were shifted from traditional military conduct to the contradictory position of both fighting a war and gaining the trust of the

population they were fighting against. The above poster, from between 1957 and 1962, states: “Soldier! Become the propagandist of French Algeria. Meditate on this justified reproach. Get to know the truth of the Algerian problem.”¹ Soldiers were thus put in a position in which the enemy had to be distinguished from the potential ally—all military personnel were expected to act in the way which would drive the modern Algerian to the side of the colonist, while at the same time using armed force to eliminate the threat of nationalism.

Though this difficult and contradictory position resonated throughout the military, it is particularly prevalent in the campaign against women. Many women saw direct violence at the hands of the colonial army—torture, rape, the destruction of homes and property, and more (Branche, 2002; Amrane-Minne, 1999; Lazreg, 2008). That said, there is the question of what propaganda these soldiers are intended to spread—for many, rape became a form of pacification, a demoralizing, violent attack that would destroy the women’s ability to act against the colonial authority. For others, pacification was seen through the transformation of the women from “primitive” to “modern.” It is in this sense that the strategy of building contact operated.

4.2.1 - OPERATION PILOT

The first application of the aforementioned strategy of ‘building contact’ to legitimate policy and organizational ground-work was through ethnographer Jean Servier’s Operation Pilot—an operation that soon became the standard model for the colonial army’s counter-insurgency

¹ FR ANOM 0009Fi84

‘pacification’ strategy. The operation, under the rubric of the *Emancipation de la femme*, was intended to convince Algerian women of the wrongs inherent in their way of life, and the freedom they would have if they denounced many traditional customs and practices within their communities (Macmaster, 2009).

Servier proposed the idea of an *Algérie nouvelle* in 1957—an Algeria totally free and modern, vacant of the “prejudices imposed by archaic customs and religious practices (Macmaster, 2009).” To begin to implement these changes and create an *Algérie nouvelle*, the operation was directed at isolated zones where the FLN had already established solid military and political structures and had significant influence on the populace (Seferdjeli, 2005; Macmaster, 2009). The army would first work through a system of destroying ALN and FLN forces before settling on a strategy of pacification—a large part of which involved the initial implementation of ‘building contact.’ Teams consisting of psychological warfare officers, a mobile loudspeaker and cinema lorry, small medical teams, and an early version of the EMSI—social welfare teams that sought to modernize and westernize Algerian women through European customs—were to gain the trust of inhabitants as well as cultivate a loyalty to the French cause (Macmaster, 2009). This is reminiscent of attempts to build efficient propaganda systems to target the rural population in years previous. In 1956, before targeted strategies against Algerian women were put in place, the news broadcast *Les Actualités Françaises* released a video of pacification scenes from the *bled*. Scenes of French doctors were interplayed with that of Algerians in traditional garb. One scene shows a doctor examining an infant while a young Algerian boy looks up in wonder. Another set of scenes shows young Algerian men in a classroom setting, a European teacher smiling at them from the chalkboard. The overall

implication is much like that of the 1957 operation: the French army was present not for violent colonial oppression, but rather for the good of the Algerian people

There is a certain notion of materiality here that is crucial in examining the “superficial” achievements of these teams. The foundation of these teams was to provide medical and social aid to the inhabitants of villages. However, the acceptance of vital medical care or social instruction for the sake of, for example, an infant’s long-term health does not necessarily denote ideological preference. For Algerian women to accept advice on infant care or seek medical aid for diseases and issues suffered by their children does not fulfill an ideological bond. Rather, the bond based on materialism is formed between these women and the colonial teams—it is based on a measurable social good that a community can possess (health) and not a system of beliefs imposed by this material care.

Servier essentially outlined a program that looked to transform Algerian women into a model of western modernism. Yet even as instability and infighting damaged the success of Operation Pilot, this transformation continued to be carried out in the growing importance and organization of the EMSI into a legitimate, large scale institution operating throughout the *bled*. Each EMSI team worked on populations living around a military sector, and particularly in rural territories that were transferred from FLN control to the control of the French army. Initially, this indicated protected zones with clearly defined missions for the particular zone they were assigned to (Seferdjeli, 2005). EMSI teams consisted of one medical doctor, one European woman as an assistant, two Muslim women as assistants, French female military personnel, French female civilians, and Muslim women recruited from the *Adjointes Sanitaires Sociales Rurales Auxiliaires* (ASSRA). The women of the ASSRA were intended to have a clear

understanding of rural women and thus assist in gaining the rural, Muslim women's trust—a trust that would then be extended to the rest of the team (Seferdjeli, 2005). The inclusion of Algerian women in the operation is particularly noteworthy. Later referred to as the 'Algerianization' of the French front, it became a norm throughout the war to recruit Muslim men and women for the French cause (Seferdjeli, 2005).

This tactic of 'Algerianization' is a particularly interesting form of propaganda, in which the colonial force operated against perceived biases by adding the familiarity of fellow Algerians in order to create a perception of support. Unable to penetrate the secluded homes of the Muslim family, army officials were left with a barrier between their ideals of psychological warfare against the female population and the actual women of this population. Christiane Fournier, a journalist who worked directly with the EMSI, propagated the necessity of the EMSI and the European women involved as a benevolent force. Despite the essential presence of the European, however, she stressed in both an interview in 1959 and 1960 that it was fundamental to have both one European woman and one Muslim woman for each team (Paris club, 1959; Magazine feminine, 1960). Muslim women were particularly valuable in that they could speak regional dialects and or shed light on particular cultural aspects.

There is a particular nativism present here, however, that both makes the Algerian woman necessary in the emancipation effort while incapable of emancipating herself. This view advocates for her "progress" within the social sphere but only so long as this progress supports the colonial paradigm. She must accept the "superiority" of the French lifestyle in order for any narrative to accept the notion of progress in her social condition. The very notion of progress touted by colonial authorities can only be based on Western notions of where *western women*

have been historically and where they are at a certain point in history. In translating the historically crafted idea of progress of one society to another, it is not granted the capability of fluidity to adapt to the new cultural and historical context. The Algerian women's historical experience is a testimony against the colonial power—the exploitation of the French empire, the polarization created by French settlers, the systemic creation of endemic poverty by restricting the land rights of rural Algerians, and so on. The initiatives aimed at pacification were designed to indoctrinate this European notion of progress while also eliminating the presence for a separate, Algerian implementation of modernism based on anti-colonial nationalism.

The EMSI was shown to emphasize the heroic self-sacrifice of young French women in harsh and dangerous conditions. To citizens throughout Algeria and France, the EMSI was painted into a picture of smiling, blond assistants tending to the needs of grateful, oppressed peasants and their babies. The European woman was a picture of generosity, sacrificing her safety and leisure for what they considered the desperate aid of their “native” sisters. The Algerian woman is consistently portrayed as barbaric by nature but with potential to become modern. This is seen through both the application of institutional propaganda as well as visual reproductions of these institutions and organizations. In every way, the EMSI was the crowning jewel of the *mission civilisatrice*.

For example, the following propaganda piece produced in 1958 titled *Françaises*² demonstrates this supposed generosity of the European woman. In this piece, a young, dark haired Algerian woman stands next to a blond European woman. The Algerian woman looks forward into the distance. The European woman, though her eyes are on her companion, has one

² FR ANOM 0009Fi531

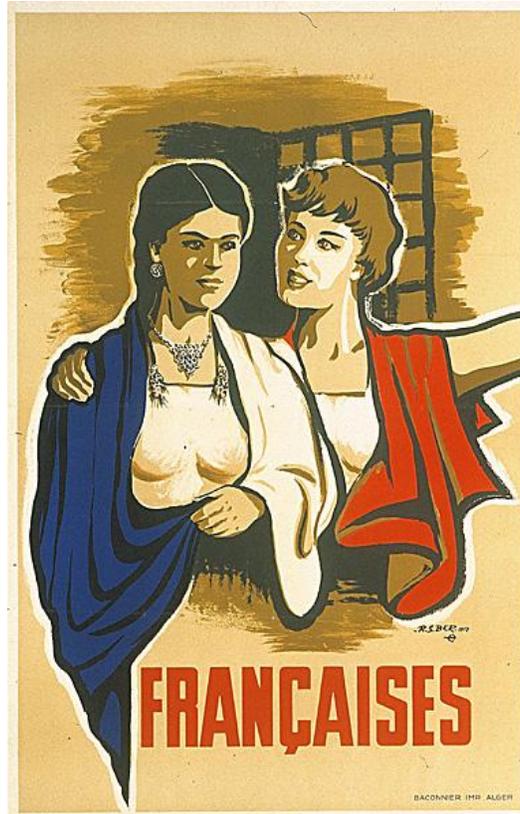


FIGURE 1.3 - FRANÇAISES

arm draped around the shoulders of her counterpart while the other seems to gesture outwards towards the distance that the Algerian woman looks towards. The title carries the true intention of the image: framed by the tricolor flag, the women look to the future. The title is, for all intents and purposes, what the European woman gestures the attention of the Algerian woman towards. She gestures towards a future where they will both be *femmes française*, united under one flag. She does not simply gesture, however—the arm that wraps itself around the Algerian woman implies a sense of guidance and trust. She is *gesturing* towards prospects of freedom and sisterhood and she will also *lead* the Algerian woman towards these prospects. Even the lengths of the two women's hair demonstrates an imbalance in perceived freedom. Where the Algerian

woman's is long and braided, the European woman's blond hair is cut short around her ears. Here, we see notions of "traditional" femininity playing in notions of "modern" femininity. For the Algerian woman, this seemingly innocuous contrast in hair length signals that feminine presentation and tradition make up her value and existence as a woman in Algerian society. The European woman, presented with short hair, is presented as a woman with more freedom and control over the values and perceptions imposed by notions femininity. This image demonstrates the values of the *mission civilisatrice* and by association the EMSI clearly—the European woman is to lead her Muslim sisters into a future modeled around French values, a future of an *Algérie française*.

Villagers lined up upon the arrival of the EMSI for treatment of their illnesses, with the organization paying particular attention to childcare—from the hygiene of infants, to weighing and advising on food intake and care (Seferdjeli, 2005). One of the original European women on the first EMSI, named Balbine, saw her role manifest through bringing the Muslim woman out of the comfort of her home and teaching them to support her children, look after herself, and think primarily of her family before her community in order to become "plus élevés"—literally higher, but more contextually translated as higher beings (*Magazine féminine*, 1960). Each element of how this woman intended to elevate the Muslim woman implies a certain disconnect between pre-emancipation history and the work of the EMSI. In the first two—teaching them to support their children and look after themselves—one can certainly acknowledge these things were done before the EMSI arrived. The Algerian woman surely took care of herself to some capacity, if she was alive and well enough to receive the EMSI teams. She also must have supported and taken care of her children to some capacity, considering that these rural areas were often absent of

French influence before these emancipation experiments came into being. The Algerian people had lived without French influence before, and yet their children had survived. This role of teaching women to support her children and herself implies that these women cannot subsist without European intervention, and any ways in which they do so are invalidated because they are not the western way. Moreover, it is worth noting that at least a portion of the endemic poverty suffered by these women that may have impacted their ability to care for themselves and their children can be attributed to the colonial policies in the previous century. In the last part of the EMSI volunteer's statement, "to think primarily of her family before her community," one can see a concise attack on nationalist sentiment. To think of one's community is to think of one's nation. The goal is to remove the collectivity that exists between Algerians—if they are more concerned for their family, they are less likely to help the nationalist movement.

Though initially intended to deal with issues revolving around medical, social, and psychological activity, after the demonstrations of May 1958 (which will be discussed in the coming pages), the roles of EMSI teams expanded into direct political activity. They transformed from benevolent teams attempting to improve the lives of women, which, though still propaganda, removed them from the implication direct political work had on the fact that they fell under the authority of the army. At this point, they became advocates persuading Muslim women that they needed to fall in line with modern western civilization or fall behind entirely. In a broadcasted speech by Charles de Gaulle in September 1959, he stated, "Thanks to the progress of pacification, democracy, and social evolution, it is possible to catch a glimpse of a time when the men and women living in Algeria will be in a position to determine their own fate once and for all, freely and with full awareness (*De Gaulle Offers Algeria Three Options*, 1959)." The

EMSI was a vehicle not for only the benevolent cause of aiding the Algerian woman; the EMSI were actors that were in place to push Algerians to “determine their own fate” through the lens and pressure of French authority. Only once they had been pacified could they make decisions with “full awareness”—free, that is, from nationalist influence. To determine their own fate in line with nationalist sentiment, as perpetuated by the ideas of pacification, is illegitimate. To do so implies a lack of rational awareness in accordance to “social evolution.” Self-determination only becomes legitimate when it validates the colonial authority’s political intent.

Following the reforms of 1958, the EMSI was additionally given the task of informing women about the reforms to traditional family law (Seferdjeli, 2005). To bring the woman into the circle of colonial trust was to bring the family. In this way, the French could reach and attract the support of their husbands, fathers, and brothers (Seferdjeli, 2005). In an article by *Le Monde* in 1958, *Le Conseil national des femmes françaises* wrote an open letter to Algerian women, written in Arabic, French and Kabyle. In it, they express a congratulations for the courage expressed in order to abandon outdated customs:

“We want...to congratulate you for the courage that many of you have shown in marking your desire to free yourselves from customs that belong to a bygone past: ... We say our gratitude to fathers and husbands who have approved your decision We believe that the current circumstances will allow you to obtain the freedoms to which every human being is entitled ...”

Here, we see the imposition of French feminist values through a contradictory lens: we are thankful for the men that have allowed you to slip from under their patriarchal thumb and fall under the fist of the colonial empire. The words of these women embody the purpose of the EMSI. To bring women into the “modern” world gives the colonial authority more access to the public support in both the social sphere as well as electorally. Additionally, however, one of the

ultimate goals of contacting the woman is to contact the men that she is connected to. The woman abandoning customs that tie her to the past also abandons customs that the FLN pressures her to retain. If the woman abandons these customs, and she is the center point of the family unit, surely the men of the house see or approve of this and can also be brought into the French sphere of influence. Thus, the women of France say their gratitude to the men of Algeria, who have allowed their wives and daughters to step into “modernity” and thus allowed themselves to follow.

Overall, the opinion of success of EMSI was divided, with some praising the excellent work and calling for increased funding, and others noting the clear lack of security for many of the teams within the operation. The FLN made a number of attempts to re-enter zones from which they had been driven in the initial ‘destruction’ phase of Operation Pilot, and in some instances cut the throats of local women who provided water to French soldiers. There was a distinct change in climate due to FLN pressure—assistants began to be badly received, local women often said they had no need for medical or other help, and loudspeaker lorries were greeted with skepticism and irony (Macmaster, 2009). Additionally, the overall number of women who joined EMSI teams, both Muslim and European, was relatively low throughout the entire war, no matter how much praise was piled upon their initiatives. Though their initial numbers doubled after the May 1958 demonstrations—rising to 85 women in the EMSI and 213 in ASSRA—requests to increase the amount of teams were often denied or decreased by the army by far less than the initial request. By the end of 1959, there was little more than three hundred women working across the EMSI, with an additional 230 Muslim women working as *harkettes*, or women used generally as assistants and interpreters but were not part of the EMSI

or ASSRA. With their goal to win over a population of Algerian women totaling two million, there was only one EMSI per six thousand women and one ASSRA per three thousand women (Seferdjeli, 2005). Fournier states that the fact that only three hundred European women working with the EMSI was incredible—however, it was a number grossly unprepared to effectively aid and sustain trusting, meaningful relationships with nearly two million Algerian women (Magazine féminin, 1960; Fournier, 1959).

4.3 - ENFRANCHISEMENT

After the initial stage of building relationships with women in rural areas, the EMSI engaged in direct political action as the September 1958 Referendum approached. Voters across the French metropole and the colonial empire were asked to declare support for a constitution written by Charles de Gaulle that would introduce the Fifth Republic. To many, this referendum was a referendum more for de Gaulle himself than governmental restructuring. In a speech in Constantine the week following the referendum, de Gale stated:

“Last Sunday, three and a half million men and women of Algeria, without distinction of community, in complete equality, gave France and myself their vote of confidence. They did this quite simply without any constraint and in spite of the threats that certain fanatics brought to bear against them, their families and their property... all Algeria must have her share in what modern civilization can and must bring to men in terms of well-being and dignity (de Gaulle, 1958).”

Despite the continuing pressure of war and nationalism, the mass approval from the referendum was translated, by many French political and military figures, as a support and desire for an

Algérie française. In this speech, which continues into promises of economic growth, education, fraternity between the French metropole and Algeria as well as a condemnation of those “prolonging a fratricidal conflict,” de Gaulle emphasizes the equality present in the vote. Not only were all in the French Empire asked to participate, but women in Algerian were given electoral power for the first time. An electoral power that accompanied illiteracy, low levels of political literacy, and an organization set up to manipulate the potential Algerian voter into the French-Algerian voter.

One level in which women were reached was the portrayal of de Gaulle as an admired paternal figure who sought a direct relationship with the women of the empire (Seferdjeli, 2005). The colonial authority and the Fifth Bureau instituted a campaign that appealed to personalized male authority in order to reach into the confines of patriarchal Algerian society and redirect towards a western lens. He personified male authority, already heavily present in Algerian society, and made it so he could assume the role as the authoritative, loved father. Even as the EMSI worked to create a space in which women were distanced from traditional, patriarchal confines, they simultaneously worked to fill that space with another: the state, and particularly the French state. Those that were in touch with European values due to propaganda campaigns directed towards Algerian women saw de Gaulle as a method of deliverance for a better life—a life that, by all accounts, was in tune with western values of female progress. One women, Aïcha Chérif, stated:

“I hope that you will give us peace. I do not want to be sold like a beast; I want to get married according to my own taste with the one I love. I do not want my husband to abandon me with the children and leave me in poverty, without assistance. I do not want to be forced to veil, since the Good Lord gave us a face that we should not be ashamed to show. When I am big I also want to have trust in

my husband and that he lets me do my shopping for myself (Macmaster, p. 281, 2009)...”

What is particularly notable here is the use of the pronoun *you*—this is not a reflection on the empowerment the vote could give women. Rather, this is a direct appeal to a father figure crafted out of a western authority figure instrumentalized as the savior of the colonial woman. Even as EMSI were instrumental in building a relationship with women, it continued to be the male figure—kept separate by country and culture—that Algerian women were directed towards for inspiration for better, more “modern” lives.

Prior to the referendum, the colonial authority justified the exclusion of women from the vote for a number of reasons. The first refers to the mass rates of illiteracy: an illiterate, uneducated woman was not considered as a rational and informed potential voter. Even if they were not illiterate, however, the patriarchal structure of society made the concept of independent voting on behalf of women impossible—women could never vote freely so long as their vote could fall under the influence of male relatives. Furthermore, there was no way to verify the identity of women who would theoretically vote due to the prominence of the veil—so long as voting stations were male operated, women would be obliged to keep their veil, and thus the verification of their identity, hidden (Macmaster, 2009). Enfranchisement was for the “modern, democratic” women, and should be kept as so to encourage the evolution of colonized women. As the referendum approached, however, these barriers were instrumentalized for political gain.

Thus, in June 1958, all Algerian women were enrolled in the electoral register. Following this was a massive propaganda drive to register women before the September referendum. During this period, Algeria saw twenty-eight Arabic and French transmissions that stressed the

importance of enfranchisement in the drive towards prosperity, and equality. The colonial authority dangled the possibility of personal status reforms should women turn out to vote, and further framed enfranchisement in terms of political maturity (Macmaster, 2009). If they turned out to vote, that is, then this implied they were ready for equality in employment, civic, and social spheres.

Despite mass calls from the FLN to boycott the vote, the EMSI was instrumental in ensuring the vote was formulated through propaganda directed at women. Women-only polling booths were established to combat the aforementioned issue of veiling and identification, and further to provide women a comfortable space of political empowerment (Seferdjeli, 2005). Polling stations that were not solely operated by women had EMSI teams stationed in order to “inform” the Muslim woman. EMSI teams propagated the notions that to refrain from voting was to directly inhibit personal and social progress:

“To vote yes is to vote for peace, it is to want prosperity, happiness for your children . . . to vote yes is to express your deep desire for emancipation, to live freely and happily, to live as Frenchwomen like your sisters from the Métropole . . . to say no is to say I do not want peace, I do not want tranquillity, I do not want prosperity, but destruction, I do not want more schools for my children, I do not want more hospitals . . . I do not want to be happy (Seferdjeli, p. 57, 2005).”

Ultimately, however, the masses of women that did turn out for the vote were still largely illiterate and lacked any political efficacy. While these were once terms that justified excluding women from the vote, the colonial authority turned these into an advantage. Women who were confused about the mechanisms for voting could trust the European EMSI staffers to help—that is, simply tell the Muslim woman to vote yes (Macmaster, 2009). Though certainly women

turned out en masse and gave a clear mandate for de Gaulle, it is questionable how much of the vote was manipulated to the advantage of Europeans.

4.4 - UNVEILING

The colonial authority initiated a large-scale unveiling campaign in tandem with moves to enfranchise Algerian women. In 1958, as campaigns for the referendum came to head, demonstrations of ‘fraternity’ between Algerians and Europeans occurred en masse. On May 16, 1958, Algerian men marched in the Forum of Algiers and joined hands, embraced, and showed solidarity with their European counterparts—a picture of reconciliation to be exported to the French metropole and the international media (Macmaster, 2009). Despite the inspiring sight of Algerians embracing the colonizer, there were reports of the *Dispositive de protection urbaine* (DUP), an organization derived from Nazi and socialist models of urban control, rounding up Algerian men and intimidating them through tactics that included confiscation of identity cards (Macmaster, 2009). These tactics of fear and intimidation in order to portray national solidarity with the French cause would be seen in demonstrations throughout 1958—particularly with the women’s demonstrations.

Following the success of the May 16 demonstrations, young Algerian women marched to the Forum, where they removed and burned their *haïks*. The following days saw hundreds of women from the Algiers slums marching with banners and placards, removing their *haïks* or having them removed by Europeans ‘sisters.’ Masses of women applauded speeches by Muslims

women on their desire for emancipation and modernity as French citizens. The EMSI was particularly instrumental in the demonstrations, using their women's circles in order to interest and involve women in the demonstrations and even bringing women to the forum in trucks. Teams were encouraged to promote participation in the demonstrations, encourage women to unveil themselves or encourage others to do so, and work to unite European and Muslim women through their women's circles in a way that would garner curiosity in the upcoming demonstrations (Seferdjeli, 2005). From May 19 and on, these massive unveiling gatherings were expanded to urban areas throughout Algeria—a tactic that can be seen as a great misunderstanding of regional veiling practices, given that many women in urban areas had no custom of veiling themselves. In urban society, the veil was often a marker of social status and wealth—the veiled woman had no economic need to work. In rural communities, however, women were less likely to come into contact with unknown males not restrained by lineage or close communal ties. Furthermore, it was less of a taboo for women in rural areas to work outside the home, particularly in the field and other such work where the veil would only hinder productivity (Lazreg, 2008).

An instance of unveiling can be seen in the following photograph³. Though the woman in the center seems to bring her hands together as if to applaud the unveiling, her face is turned in discomfort and humiliation. The European women around her, however, smile in success and pride—they personally remove the veil from their “sister's” head. Symbolically, they lift the veil from her head and thus lift the Algerian women out of a patriarchal tradition. To remove the veil is not unlike the propaganda image *Françaises* seen earlier in the section, where a European

³ *Paris Match*, 1958

woman guided her Algerian counterpart towards the future. By instituting an unveiling campaign for Algerian women, the colonial authority sought to bring women into a more “modern” future, where, by French social and feminist standards, the veil had no place. The act of removal not by the women’s own hands but by the hands of the two European women suggests a duality of



FIGURE 1.4 - UNVEILING

progress; she cannot advance into the future without the example, the aid, and the leadership of her French “sisters.” In rural areas where veils were worn by women (as veils were less common in rural villages and towns), the EMSI and ASSRA unveiled women in a similar manner— however, instead of agents of these organizations removing the veils of Muslim women, these agents were given instructions on how to convince women to remove their own veils. In both rural and urban areas, getting rid of the veil was, for French organizers, on par with getting rid of flies or lice (Lazreg, 2008).

Christiane Fournier records a conversation with an Algerian woman named Ketty who refused to wear the veil in her 1959 *Les EMSI des filles come ça!* chronicling her time as a

journalist with the EMSI. In this conversation, Ketty tells of her mother: forced to marry an old man and give birth to her at only twelve years old. She goes on to discuss a conversation with her mother as they walk through their village, her own face bare and her mother “imprisoned” in her veil next to her.

“All these people, all these people who have looked at us!”

“What do these people matter to you, mother, since we are the ones who have a conscience (p. 135)?”

She tells Fournier that her consciousness is in the form of the self—not in the satisfaction of neighborhood opinions of prudence and piety. The reader is then told more of Ketty, how she refused to wear the veil and be sold into marriage, and how she had run away when this was not accepted by her father. The reader can admire her resolve to live her own life. It is not Ketty’s decision that is a source of analysis, but rather the presentation of how Ketty broke with her family and community in order to live this life. The unveiling campaign sought to remove women from traditional community and familial structures and create loyalty and relationships with a new order: modern women of the western world and Muslim women who had chosen to follow them there. Fournier presents an instance where a Muslim woman broke these traditional ties without direct European influence. Given that the audience of the book is directed at the French Metropole, those learning about the work of the EMSI at the time of its publication would not see Ketty’s story within the cultural and social context that Ketty is telling her story within. Rather, her story is told by a French woman to other French citizens, who would see the story as evidence that there are many Algerian women in Ketty’s situation who need help to break these ties.

The idea behind the mass unveiling demonstrations followed that if ordinary Algerians and Europeans proclaimed fraternity and solidarity, the French metropole, international community, and Algerians themselves would hear the call of a 'nation' and see the will of the people directed towards an *Algérie française*. However, there were numerous claims that the army had coerced many Algerians, or that the unveiled women were prostitutes or dregs of the slums and were both not representative of the larger population of Algerian women and likely paid for their part in the demonstrations (Macmaster, 2009). Furthermore, there were claims that some prominent women in the demonstrations were paid or threatened for their roles. Monique Améziane, for example, who had never regularly worn the veil, was approached by colonial authorities in Constantine and told her brother would be executed if she did not publicly unveil herself (Lazreg, 2008). Though these reports undermined the campaign and the demonstrations, the mere visual and presence of women at these demonstrations was enough to create a narrative that women accepted and rejoiced unveiling at the hands of French organizations, military personnel, and politicians.

The primary purpose of the propaganda campaign was to negate the image of a colonial dictatorship set on a white-supremacist regime—that is, gain legitimacy in national and international media by showing a new order based on full equality and integration of Muslims and Europeans. Army propagandists initiated a media campaign, in which a Radio-Algeria broadcast in both Arabic and Kabyle, presented by a Muslim woman named Nadir, who denounced the veil and called for emancipation (Macmaster, 2009). These radio broadcasts often included letters written to the radio host by other Algerian women on emancipation (Lazreg, 2008). By combining mass unveilings and these radio broadcasts, an idea was created that a new

solidarity could be achieved by displaying the masses of women who had already accepted *Algérie française* as their future. In a way, they gestured towards these women and the mass coverage of them and said, “Look at your sisters! They have joined us; you will not be alone when you do too.”

On May 19, when former Governor General Jacques Soustelle visited Algiers, he stated, “To see here the Muslim women who come up to us, to see as close to her an Alsatian in traditional costume, we can be moved and proud, because it is the symbol of the total unity of France (M. Jacques Soustelle souhaite..., 1958).” However, at the end of his speech, as a delegation of Muslim women approached the balcony Soustelle and other members of the Committee of Public Safety, the same article shows a contradiction in his honoring of tradition as a symbol of unity: “At the request of Mr. Soustelle, several Muslim women symbolically removed their veils. One of them seemed embarrassed for a moment; she put her hands in front of her face then, regaining courage, she lowered them and looked at the crowd, who applauded her for a long time.” He invokes the tradition of the homeland and compares it to that of Algeria—juxtaposing the traditional Alsatian wear in order to laud the Algerian woman in her own traditional dress. A country that honors the traditions of all its people—that of the metropole and the empire—stands united. He then, however, requests a group of women remove their veils. The move from embarrassment to courage in the case of one of these women is telling. The veil, in many ways, is a barrier between the male colonizer and the Muslim woman. So long as it exists, she cannot be French. To request that these women remove their veils is symbolic in that it removes this barrier—the embarrassment stems from ingrained traditions that would normally bar one from showing their face and hair to an entire crowd of strangers. The courage lies in



FIGURE 1.5 - DÉVOILEZ-VOUS

stepping forward and removing the veil—symbolically leaving bygone traditions behind and stepping into a future of an *Algérie française*. That said, however, in combining this mixed embarrassment and courage just after proclaiming unity around the traditions of all citizens of the French Empire, Soustelle creates a contradiction reminiscent of the request for all soldiers to promote propaganda. So long as the nationalist forces use tradition against the colonial authority, the French cannot honor this tradition.

The French colonial authority thus sought to remove women from the influence of the FLN by removing her veil. The above poster states: “Aren’t you pretty? Unveil yourself!”⁴ The campaign combined traditional notions of femininity (beauty and perceived vanity) with idealized notions of progress and the future through the eyes and methods of French

⁴ 5th Bureau of Psychological Action, 1954-1962

expectations. Not delving too deeply into the fact that the FLN had been using unveiled *fidayates* already by this point to carry out missions, plant bombs, and so on, in the eyes of the French, there is a prevailing idea that the veil separates a woman from womanhood, from femininity. The veil makes her untouchable, in a way, because she cannot be seen in the manner that women are seen in the European context. To remove the veil makes her accessible, not just for French political gain, but also for the European eyes.

The most elaborate ceremonials of unveiling with biggest media impact were a series of massive demonstrations throughout major towns from May 18 and on. Women shared rostrum or balconies with generals and dignitaries, presented them with bouquets, made speeches in favor of emancipation and casted their veils to the crowds. (Macmaster, 2009). Fournier (1959) described the gathering as such: “Two hundred thousand women of all social circles, of all affiliations, of all denominations...ideologically located the birth of their friendships [through the demonstrations]...” She called the May demonstrations the beginning of a Movement of Feminist Solidarity, heavy with the uncertainty of the future. Yet many, if not most, of these women were relatively poor and illiterate women who came from slum enclaves of cities—women most readily manipulated by European women’s circles and organizations; not so much ideologically motivated as enthralled by the movement of the crowd and manipulated into attendance by women’s organizations. The newspaper *El Moudjahid* claimed the group was mainly domestic servants, cleaning ladies of the General Government, or prostitutes. Though the claim that most of these women were prostitutes likely reflected a large propaganda bias from the nationalist camp, it is likely many were, however, domestic servants (Macmaster, 2009).

It is notable, however, that though French media and official accounts refer to the singular act of removing the veil, it is much more complicated than this. For Algerian women, traditional dress included both the loose *haïk*, a large cloth to be wrapped around the entire body and over the head, as well as a smaller face covering called the *hadjar*. In photographs of the march lauded by French and international media outlets, very few women removed both of these items. Some women did not truly take off either, rather slipping the *haïk* around their shoulders (where it could be easily slipped back over their head) and keeping the face veil in place. Others removed the face veil but kept the *haïk*—in some cases, interestingly, women removed the face veil but covered their face with their hands anyway (Macmaster, 2009). Despite the wide range of response to removing the veil in demonstrations, however, most did not participate at all in adjusting their traditional dress at all. Those who did participate often replaced the *haïk* and *hadjar* as soon as possible (Macmaster, 2009). Thus, despite the mass acclaim by the French metropole and international media over these demonstrations, there was very little actual transformation in accordance to veiling practices.

4.5 - CONCLUSION

Over the course of the war, numerous initiatives and institutions were put in place to reach Algerian women and bring them into the sphere of French influence and loyalty. The strategy of building contact, evolved into numerous initiatives and policies designed to impact the lives and attitudes of Muslim women towards European notions of modernity and progress. The drive to

enfranchise and unveil Algerian women makes up only a small part of the policies directed at these women, and though these two policies were incredibly significant in targeting deep, traditional viewpoints and social structures, it is important to acknowledge the wide scope of policy and propaganda used by the French colonial authority to target women. Algerian women were targeted in all aspects of life and custom to draw them to a more “civilized” version of womanhood. By focusing on this need “civilize”, the colonial authority spun an imperialist narrative that reduced Algerian women to an almost infantile necessity for western guidance. To both supporters in the metropole as well as the international audience, the narrative implied a necessity for western presence and intervention to resume specific goals of progressivism and dominance in colonial relations.

5.0 - THE FLN AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

5.1 - INTRODUCTION

“I do not know exactly which first title of glory you give to your national heroine: to be a victim of foreign occupation, or to be a saint. For us, we know well the face of our heroine, and if it is on her death—this death that every day in all places of our land, you take—that we ask to reflect, it is her life only, each day resuscitated, which fascinates us. She is called Djamila Bouazza, Djamila Bouhired. She is called today Djennet Hamidou, but she is always the same, because she is first an Algerian woman (El Moudjahid, 1959).”

During the Algerian War, despite the colonial push to win the loyalty of women in both urban centers and through the rural *bled*, by 1962 the vast majority of the population, including women, were actively participating in the drive for national liberation. This participation manifested in many ways, through both passive and active acts of resistance. The tasks of Algerian women, wide-ranging and varied as they were, created an incredibly significant infrastructure of resistance that allowed the eventual success of the liberation front. Nonetheless, the representation of women and their place in the revolution by the FLN did not always conform with the reality of the situation. Even as the movement held up various women as national heroines—Djamila Bouazza, Djamila Bouhired, Djennet Hamidou—they created a mythical narrative of female participation in the struggle that did not universally align with the experiences of all, or even most, Algerian women. In creating this narrative, however, they were

able to create a political structure that would last throughout the war and into the era of the independent state that subordinated women to a powerful, national narrative that deprioritized gendered discourse.

Throughout the war, the majority of high level FLN leaders did not consider the “women’s question” to be a significant issue that needed the immediate attention of the movement (Bouatta, 1997). Rather, they saw women’s equality as a byproduct of liberation; attention needed to be focused on the success of the independence movement, and once independence was achieved leaders could look to other issues. Despite this position, however, the nationalist movement was forced to take a position on the women’s question for a variety of reasons (Macmaster, 2009). First and foremost, the French camp was already in the process of establishing the numerous organizations and initiatives discussed in the last chapter with the intention of winning the loyalty of Algerian women. To take a stand against the emancipation of women propagated by the colonial army, or to even remain neutral, would paint the FLN as backwards reactionaries. To the international community, the women’s question had the potential to manifest as a conflict between the “progressivism” of the west and the “reactionary traditionalism” of the colony. A more internal issue, however, lay in the fact that women were already participating in mass numbers to further the liberation struggle. Macmaster notes that early in the war, women had already assumed a variety of roles that included weapons transportation, messengers, medical personnel, the offering refuge for wanted militants, and necessary domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In both urban and rural areas, women had become vital players in the struggle and had, in many ways, already contributed to a slow shift in the way in which gender was viewed in the movement. Frantz Fanon, in his 1959 book *A*

Dying Colonialism, stated that the growth of the movement necessitated the official addition of women to covert operations:

“The sheer growth in the number of FLN cells, the wide range of new tasks—finance, intelligence, counter-intelligence, political training—as well as the necessity to provide each active cell a number of replacement reserve cells, each of which would be ready to become active at the slightest alert, made leaders aware of the need to seek new methods for carrying out individual assignments. After a series of meetings among FLN leaders and a consideration of the growing problems faced by the revolutionary front, the decision to include women in the struggle was reached (p. 50).”

Yet even as this decision was reached, he notes a certain reluctance of nationalist leaders to include women in the struggle. He attributes this reluctance to experience in the French judicial system: to include women in the struggle would put them at risk of arrest, torture, and likely death—to increase the scope of the struggle would increase the number of Algerians at risk of death from the struggle. In his explanation of this formulated risk, it is interesting to note the clause that he uses to connect the concepts of women and death: “To commit to eliminating the gender confines... would designate new soldiers in the struggle to the risk of certain death.” He assumes the addition of women to the liberation struggle automatically commits nationalist leaders to the elimination of gender confines. Though Fanon has been referenced previously in this paper, it is here important to note his role in solidifying the image of the Algerian women during the liberation struggle—in a number of books, essays, and other media forms, he paints her as a figure widely accepted as equal in the revolution. Among the literature and media that has been popularized about the Algerian war, many of Fanon’s works are central pieces in the study of Algerian decolonization. He acknowledges her necessity, and he acknowledges the acceptance of nationalist leaders of her place in the revolution, but he paints this acceptance as a

promise between the nationalist movement and Algerian women that emancipation was tied to the concept of nationhood. So long as these concepts were considered as one, women would have no reason to strive for emancipatory progress within the movement—rather, they would focus their attention fully on the liberation movement.

This promise, perpetuated by Fanon and other media outlets such as the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid*, led to the primary ideology of the FLN propaganda campaign against women during the war—the idea that liberation from colonialism and capitalism would automatically create the conditions for the emancipation of women while, at the same time, restoring the principles of non-colonial societal order. Bouatta (1997) notes that the FLN developed two intertwined formulas in order to deal with the women’s question in a manner that both controlled it and contained it. These formulas were that (1) the women’s question was not a priority—that is, the nation and independence from the colonial system was the priority, and attention could not be focused on the women’s question—and (2) the Algerian women would be liberated automatically with the liberation of the nation. By utilizing both of these formulas, many of the women who participated did so on account of their attachment to the nation and the national movement rather than anticipation for gender emancipation.

In opposition to the French emancipation campaign, the FLN crafted their drive for women’s progress as a campaign not rooted in counter-insurgency objectives but rather in national solidarity and the future of the nation. In this way, they set forward policy declarations that countered the colonial army’s move to drive Algerian women into their ideological camp as well as avoided the designation, by both women and international groups, as an organization that declared the women’s emancipation agenda as anti-national and rooted in western progressivism.

In the July 4, 1958 edition of *El Moudjahid*, this concept is reiterated by an Algerian woman at the Congress of the Democratic Federation of Women on June 5 in Vienna:

“...for the Algerian woman it is not a question for the moment of securing the right to work or of the improvement of the standard of living, but of the end of this horrible war which is imposed by French colonialism on the Algerian people in struggle for a just cause, that of freedom and independence, fight that other peoples have recently led or are still leading.”

In a number of instances, Algerian women were used to solidify the intentions of the FLN. Their words were meant to reiterate to all other Algerian women that their struggle was not a gendered struggle, but a national struggle. To remove the element of gendered struggle, however, submits women entirely to the direction of the nationalist movement. The woman quoted above specifically aligns the struggle of Algerian women with the struggle of a unified cause and denies gendered and individualistic motivations. *El Moudjahid*, as the official newspaper of the FLN, actively perpetuated the idea that women supported the two-pronged approach of the movement: women knew emancipation was not a priority, and women associated national liberation with female liberation.

Yet, in a handbook 1956 FLN handbook entitled *Les mouvements des femmes*, the intended roles of women were not quite as equal as Fanon and writers of *El Moudjahid* portrayed. The roles that nationalist leaders intended for women, inscribed in the section entitled *le torrent populaire en énergie créatrice* (the transformation of popular current into creative energy), were largely subsidiary to the roles of male militants: giving moral support to fighters and members of the resistance, giving instructions regarding provisions and providing refuge for members of resistance, and helping the families of *maquisards*, prisoners, and other detainees (Daniele, 1999). These early intentions of nationalist leaders did not manifest in the reality of the

women's role in the liberation struggle, however. By late 1956, only months after *Les mouvements des femmes* was published, many leaders had seen women caring for wounded fighters and carrying out operations the *maquis*, had used weapons transported to them by women, and had even fought beside them using those weapons (Daniele, 2011). These women integrated themselves both into the supporting infrastructure of the struggle and into direct militancy—no longer agents of “moral support,” but what Macmaster calls “the embodiments of propaganda (p. 335).”

Even as women increasingly took part in varying sectors of revolutionary activity, no women, over the course of the entire war, ascended to any leadership positions (Amrane-Minne, 1991). By generating loyalty solely to the movement rather than promising gender reform, women were placed in subordinate positions with little reason to question their inability to ascend to leadership positions. Yet, despite this, the FLN crafted a narrative that women were welcome in all sectors of the revolution—that, as members of the nation, they had the opportunity to assist the nation on all fronts. In the May 31, 1960 edition of *El Moudjahid*, the journalist clearly defines this narrative:

“In the National Liberation Army, all sectors are open to women. Young women have left the traditional garments to endorse the harsh equipment of the *maquis*, they have arms and cartridges and have learned how to use them...”

Fanon and *El Moudjahid* insist on the idea that women received equal opportunity within the liberation struggle, and so long as this narrative was held up the nationalist movement could be seen as clearly upholding the idea that liberation and emancipation for women was tied hand in hand with independence. Thus, women were subordinated to the goals of the movement, and later, the political party that arose from this movement. Despite the discourse that women had

equal opportunity within the revolution, a minority of women within the struggle modified gender roles enough in their participation to have some semblance of equality. Those women who created and maintained the infrastructure of the revolution, however, often only saw change in the scope of duties and moral support that was already expected of them.

5.2 - FEMALE MILITANTS

Between 1955 and 1956, nearly thirty women were arrested on various charges related to direct militancy, with some of these women having participated in arms transfer and others by simply housing known militants. Whatever their level of participation, these roles only grew in the following year—by 1957, a number of women were serving as active combatants in the liberation struggle (Macmaster, 2009). The FLN seized on this image and often distributed photos of female militants in uniform and carrying arms in the *maquis* as part of an international media campaign—proof of the women’s place in the revolution, and her dedicated to resisting French efforts to force her into their conceptualization of emancipation (Macmaster, 2009).

The image of women breaking traditional gender roles and ascending to this mystical idea of the female warrior was exported by nationalist media as a symbol of liberation. In the November 16, 1959 edition of *El Moudjahid*, the journalist outlines the image of an Algerian militant—a brave, covert woman who knows the consequences of her actions and yet acts anyway:

“The freedom of the Algerian people is identified with the liberation of the Algerian woman. The Algerian woman who in the avenues of Algiers or Constantine transports grenades or machine gun magazines, this woman who tomorrow will be outraged, raped, tortured can not rethink until in the tiniest details of her old behaviors, this woman who writes the heroic pages of Algerian history explodes the shrunken and irresponsible world in which she lives and jointly collaborates in the destruction of colonialism and the birth of a new woman...”

The Algerian women that the reader is intended to identify with is not the woman who hides militants in her home and continues on with her day, nor the woman who cooks and cleans for the men in the *maquis*—the women who the reader is intended to identify with the woman who completely transcends all expectations of traditional gender roles and takes up arms to defend her country. The woman who became a figure of myth, a warrior, is the representation of the liberation of the Algerian people. Once again, in this piece, the liberation of women is directly tied to the liberation of the nation—this liberation, however, implies sacrifice. The Algerian female militant is held up not to represent the domain of possibility for women within the struggle, but to propagate a myth: the nation will grant liberation to all who sacrifice in its name.

5.2.1 - THE *FIDAYATE*

The *fidayate*, because of their direct terrorist contact with the *pied-noir* population, became the faces of Algerian women involved in the liberation movement in the French metropole and international arena. These women were urban guerrilla fighters, often from wealthier families and with educated backgrounds, that represented a mere two percent of female combatants

(Amrane-Minne, 1992). Their close proximity and the necessity to live in spaces with their male militant counterparts created a dynamic of equality that, though undeniably a form of empowerment, was unusual and not widespread in the overall Algerian women's experience. Transporting arms and medicine, collecting money, giving refuge to other militants, and acting as lookouts and guides were just a small portion of the many tasks that were related to women in the urban movement (Daniele, 1999). Though the *fidayate* were only small percentage of women actively participating in the war, the combined factors of their proximity to the enemy in the context of urban warfare, their unusual embrace of combat, and their atypical proximity to Algerian men carved a disproportionately large niche in the history of the Algerian war that relegated their actions, which were undeniably significant, to a tendency to overshadow that experiences of non-combatant women.

In the context of urban warfare, the *fidayate* were essential largely for their ability to camouflage themselves in moving between the European and Arab city sectors. In accounts by Frantz Fanon, he identifies urban centers during the war as “the nervous system of the enemy apparatus.” This transformation of the native city into an autonomous battle ground between colonialism and nationalism changed the dimensions of what was once Arab centers and created spaces divided between the European city and the Native city. In populated, busy cities, women could easily be mistaken for civilians and could exhibit a freedom of movement—both with and without the veil—that men did not have. In moving between these spaces, Algerian women learned to use the traditional *haïk*, or veil, as a means to manipulate their image. The previous political reality—that of unveiling oneself as a symbol of association with European values and the colonial cause, receded into a tactical advantage. As the Algerian women crossed between the

Arab city and the European city, the *haïk* was taken on and off, without the veil she was a model of a woman integrated into European culture and with the veil she was the model of a traditional Muslim woman respectful of her seclusion (Fanon, 1959). Fanon paints an image of these women, an image, notably, that was later immortalized in one of the most famous depictions of the war, the film *The Battle of Algiers*:

“Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols (p. 58).”

In this excerpt and in the film, the Algerian woman moves through the city and transforms herself in accordance to the needs of the mission. If she is moving through a checkpoint, she may remove her veil and appear as a European, and thus she will not be questioned at all and can calmly move past the attending soldiers. If she is transporting arms, perhaps she wears her *haïk* to hide rifles. She transcends the traditional expectations of how a woman should present herself for the sake of liberation—she dresses as a European not out of idealization for western gender expectations, but rather so soldiers, settlers, and others expect nothing from her. Even Algerian women not actively a part of the militant struggle took up the habit of transformation when crossing the lines between European and Arab (Fanon, 1959). The optional use of the veil transformed it into a symbolic weapon and a picture of resistance. Veiled, the woman was a symbol of nationalism. Unveiled, she mingled and gathered intelligence, planted bombs, carried ammunition and supplies in an unassuming handbag. To assume the appearance of a western woman allowed her to escape the knowledge and suspicion that an Algerian woman would not

travel alone and unaccompanied. Unveiled, she became a *piéd noir* woman, not at all out of place in the European quarters, garnering no suspicion that she carried explosives in her bag (Macmaster, 2009). This manipulation of the veil and the expectations around it became a vital tool for many *fidayates*, particularly throughout 1956 and 1957 during the Battle of Algiers.

One of the most notable operations in which Algerian women took part in ALN missions was through the operation run by Yacef Saadis. Saadis, who was operational executive of Algiers Zone (ZAA), created a secret network that passed through the Casbah and assembled a hierarchy of approximately 1,400 operations, an overwhelming number of which were women (Horne, 1977). Saadis's network recruited women and girls from petit bourgeois or modest nationalist families that were well known to have sympathies for the FLN and could be trusted to send daughters who would, first and foremost, further the nationalist cause. Many of these women had been educated at lycée level, and some even were educated in the law through either their own university studies or by having relatives in the field of law—ultimately, women who, in a population of largely illiterate citizens, were outliers in their educational history (Horne, 1977; Drif, 2017).

Called “Yacef’s girls,” they were expected to place bombs in strategic places throughout European quarters—particularly in places unavailable to male terrorists. Yacef himself was known to dress up as a woman in order to travel throughout the city and carry out missions as well as examine past and future terrorist sites (Horne, 1977). The sheer advantage and anonymity it gave was enough, in a society driven by patriarchal values, for Yacef to temporarily abandon the benefits of his gender for the other. Well known for her activities for the FLN today, Zohra Drif is a prime example of a woman in Yacef’s network. Drif, who recalled her father calling the

invasion of France during WWII “God’s revenge on the Frenchmen for their treatment of Muslims”, exalted the collectivity of the terrorist group (Horne, 1977).

Throughout the Battle of Algiers, there were thirty-five bomb successful explosions in the city directed by the FLN (Amrane-Minne, 2007). Two thirds of these bombings involved *fidayates* working alone or without another *fidayate* in order to transport and position the explosive (Amrane-Minne, 2007). Some of the most famous bombings carried out by women during the battle, immortalized in the Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, are the bombings carried out by Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhdari, and Djamila Bouhired on September 30, 1956 in response to the bombings of the Casbah carried out on August 10. Although one bomb failed to go off (the bomb placed by Bouhired), three people were killed and fifty were wounded (Drif, 2017; Hubbell, 2018). Though Lakhdari married and left Algeria soon after the incident, both Drif and Bouhired were eventually arrested for their terrorist activity and immortalized in the French and Algerian press. Drif, however, was not arrested until the end of the Battle of Algiers—sparing her much of the torture received by her compatriots as she could give up no information that the colonial army did not already have. Bouhired, on the other hand, was arrested much earlier and turned into a symbol of resilience by both the nationalists and French leftists (Drif, 2017). Though the two women received consequences for their activity that fell on two very different sides of the spectrum, their actions and arrests were clearly highlighted by varying media outlets. The consequences of the bombings they carried out were clear and visible—on the French side, the amputated limbs of *pied-noir* children created emotionally loaded cries for execution (Hubbell, 2018). On the nationalist side, however, they were the clear embodiments of what was necessary for the success of the liberation movement: self-sacrifice

and a realization that anyone who supported colonialism, civilian or soldier, was the enemy. Imprisoned and unable to contribute to the discourse, militant women were utilized by newspapers and leaders as figureheads of the revolution—firmly pigeonholed into the narrative of female warriors who transcended all barriers of gender and morality for the sake of the nation.

As it became more common to search women in the European city centers as French authorities became more aware of ALN tacticians using the preconceptions of female appearance to their advantage, the bomb network began to fall apart as missions failed to deliver success and many women were imprisoned (Horne, 1977). Where before the media would simply focus on the image of militant women as propaganda, as *fidayates* were increasingly arrested they became the face of the nation. For example, in the November 15, 1957 edition of *El Moudjahid*, the author writes:

“Djamila Bouhired's message is part of the tradition of the Algerians who fell for an independent Algeria. The soldiers of the National Army, the men and women of Algeria are engaged, like Djamila Bouhired, in a relentless fight against foreign domination.”

The same idea is expressed in the May 25, 1959 edition:

“After Djmaila Bouhired there were still young girls tortured in Algeria, young girls raped, imprisoned girls, young people murdered—and all, all the women who watch the fire burn: and all who watch the freedom approach. There are, in Algeria, free women.”

The *fidayates* became not only the face of Algerian women to Algerians, but also to the onlooking international community. As they were arrested and put through long, publicized trials, the names and faces of the *fidayates* became symbolic for the suffering and necessity for action that incited all other Algerian women to fight. Despite the relatively small percentage of

participating women that were involved in urban militancy, these women were seized upon by the media on both sides as symbols or terrorists, leaving the rest of Algerian women nameless.

5.2.2 - THE MOUDJAHIDATE

The *moudjahidate* differed from the *fidayate* in that these women were active outside of urban areas, playing active roles both in the *maquis* as well as throughout rural Algeria. Much like the *fidayate*, these women embody a very picturesque representation of the militant woman.

Furthermore, the *moudjahidate* consisted of only about sixteen percent of all militants, with approximately two thousand women joining the *maquis*—a number that, though larger than the percentage of women that made up the *fidayate*, is still relatively small in the context of the wide-scale mobilization of citizens that took place during the liberation struggle (Daniele, 1999). Of the women that became *moudjahidate*, seventy-four percent were younger than twenty-five years old and fifty percent were younger than twenty (Daniele, 1999). In many respects, they were girls—young and less cemented into the traditions of the older generation.

The *moudjahidate*, though in many ways similar to the urban female guerrillas, were young women faced with the much colder, harsher lives of rural militants. These women abandoned all tradition to live in rural militants camps, to fight alongside male combatants, to forsake the guardianship of the father for the guardianship of nationalist leaders who were representatives of the nation. In the November 16, 1959 edition of *El Moudjahid*, the journalist attempts to describe

the new equality of the *mujahidat* within not only the nationalist movement, but within the family:

“It happens that the Algerian girl is wanted or that several members of the network to which she belongs are arrested. The necessity to disappear, to take off, becomes urgent. The militant first leaves her family and takes refuge with friends. But soon comes from the direction of the network to join the nearest maquis....The parents no longer dare to react. The father himself even has no choice. His fear for dishonor becomes absolutely absurd, having regard to the immense tragedy experienced by the people. But also the national authority which decides the girl’s departure to the maquis would not understand the reluctance of the father...So the girl goes to the maquis, all alone with men. For months and months the parents will be without news of the young girl of eighteen years who sleeps in the forest and in the caves, who travels the Djebel dressed as a man, a rifle between her hands....

Sometimes the girl, with a new identity card, goes down to the family...She watches the father, she sits down face to face with the father, she speaks and is not constrained. And the father does not turn away from her face, to see her new personality shine in the house and he is not discontent that his daughter speaks aloud and it absolutely does not occur to him to remind him that the woman must be silent...”

The journalist here paints the *moudjahidate* as a woman transcending all traditional and social boundaries. More than anything, however, the article expresses the idea that, in light of the revolution, one must never question the morality of the patriot. In this description, the article clearly follows the line of reasoning that liberation for women is intimately connected to liberation of the nation. In a society so intimately connected around the nucleus of the family, the father’s acceptance of his daughter’s choice, a choice that means putting aside long held social and gender confines, is the father’s acceptance of his daughter putting aside tradition for the nation. Nevertheless, putting aside tradition is not the same as abandoning it. The temporary disruption of patriarchal social structures that revolve around the *father* are disrupted, but the father is merely replaced by another masculine guardian: the nation and its representatives.

Certainly, in a number of different *wilaya* and *maquis* camps, women did verge on a more equal standing to men, and were vital for a number of different tasks. Some women mirrored their counterparts in the EMSI and informed women of the civilian population about the political situation and gave women advice on hygiene, cooking, and health. Many of their activities revolved around further information services, with the women of the *maquis* becoming vital propaganda agents of the FLN. Others filled necessary positions as nurses and doctors, treating *maquisards* with little or no medicine—often even going so far as to perform operations in the dirty, chaotic atmosphere of the *maquis* (Daniele, 1999). It is thus undeniable that many women did become active and necessary throughout the *bled*, whether their militancy was materialized through combat or through other means.

The argument concerning how accepted women actually were throughout the *maquis* has already been discussed. Whether they were accepted by their male compatriots in the *maquis* or not, however, the *moudjahidate* were undoubtedly the main force of the FLN's propaganda initiative against women in the *bled*—their ability to organize meetings with women and relate to them on the basis of linguistic, cultural, and social similarities made them an important political force and gave them freedom in the *maquis* not awarded to women in more domestic roles. Women with the mobility of the *maquis*, thus, took up the function of political propagandists—traveling throughout villages in the *bled* to make contact with local women and raise their political consciousness. Macmaster (2009) describes this role in as a noteworthy function of previous discussions of European women acting as the arm of the propaganda wing: new “women combatants” who gave local women advice on health and home, helped manage

households and raise children, and educated women on the political situation and the aim of the Algerian revolution

As opposed to European in the EMSI, Algerian women were contacting their fellow Algerians on the basis of cultural understanding, not under the intention of changing ‘the other.’ Furthermore, they didn’t follow the systemic regime of shaming women that French organizations often did when attempting to win the loyalty of rural Muslim women. Instead, they were to inspire a sense of national pride and rage that the violence of war and colonialism had already laid the foundations for. Rather than engaging in physical combat, they became figureheads in ideological combat for rural, poor Algerian women. Though much of this work involved gaining the loyalty of these women, who would then have incentive and desire to give supplies, refuge, and information to militants, another important motive for these propagandists was to enlist women into the revolution. In the July 20, 1959 edition of *El Moudjahid*, the author describes the systematic recruiting of women throughout the *bled*. Groups of women were periodically forced to restructure so that those with experience in talking and working with the population could teach new recruits. The newspaper transcribes the story of one such woman, Fatma de B, describing the roots of her militancy, and her reasons for joining the ALN::

“...one of the youngest. She joined the maquis in 1956 but her maturity was far beyond her age. She recounted how her father, educated in patriotic sentiments, had patiently explained to her the meaning of our struggle and the injustices the French occupation rested upon.

However, she said, all of this would have remained true and fair but yet abstract because I was young. And I might not have grasped the depth at that time if I had not assisted in a particularly horrible scene. It was over the course of the summer of 1953. We had a neighbor who was pregnant. I was at her house when, during sweeping, French soldiers broke into the house. I could hide but I saw everything...

They took the woman and opened her stomach. They plucked the fetus from her

stomach and played with it like a ball. They threw it from one another: ‘Here's what we do with an Arab, a dirty Arab...’ they said. I saw all this with my own eyes. I was not yet fifteen years old.”

The graphic nature of the story is targeted imagery towards Algerian readers, while at the same time combining the relative youth and revolutionary ambition of a woman into an idealized militant. The beginning sees her as naive, but of a patriotic family—and then forced out of her naivety by trauma. One can imagine that many of those reading the FLN newspaper imagine themselves as a patriotic family, and putting the story into a relatable context forces these readers to examine their own dynamics of militancy. The retelling of the French soldiers’ actions paint the colonizer as barbarian, as disrespecting all sanctity of life. Though it’s likely there are many different stories that could have been featured here, this particular story is put into the spotlight for its ability to trigger horror and action. The particular vulnerability of a pregnant woman is used as a call to action that no man, woman, or child is safe under the colonial barbarians. The colonizer—both soldiers and those who support them—is ‘other-ed’ in the same manner that the colonizer ‘others’ the native throughout the colonial conquest. By putting this story into the context of nationalist transformation, the author creates a void in which the reader can instrumentalize their own rage at the colonial situation into action. The naive, young girl who changed into a woman of the *maquis* shows the ability of the average citizen to transform into a militant.

5.3 - THE *MOUSSEBILATE*

Though they consisted of the vast majority of women during the war, the class and education level of *moussebilate* made them not only poor images for the Algerian nationalist movement, but also made it so their experiences were largely inaccessible to any but those willing to seek them out for oral histories. In a study by Amrane-Minne (2007), the women who fulfilled more domestic roles have been underrepresented not only in studies after the war, but also in narratives of various parties throughout the war. Despite the fact the women often risked their lives to carry out tasks for the liberation front (it should be noted that in the *maquis*, one out of every five women were killed), the fact that these tasks fit the traditional roles of women—tasks that centered around helping and selfless, modest duty—pushed them into obscurity (Helie-Lucas, 1987). Throughout the editions of *El Moudjahid* between 1954 and 1962, women are presented as fighters, as nurses in the midst of combat, as false *piéd noirs* carrying explosives—but they are the least represented in the tasks that they took up the most. Even when these women are represented, however, their emancipation is still tied with national liberation—despite the fact that, within the nationalist movement, these women experienced very few changes to gender roles. In one edition of the newspaper on July 20, 1959, the author writes:

“We accomplish our homework modestly, because we usually only look at our daily work, this life that I have already spoken of, with its risks, with its joys. But there arrives each between us, at a certain serious moment, to understand that this life that we find normal has importance that surpasses our individual framework, that for our country and for all the women of our country, she had a sense of something much larger. That of the example, that of the future. Because, by doing our duty with our brothers, we testify what is, and what will be, the free Algerian woman.”

The individual is once more subordinated to the nation. The rejection of the individual framework as important deprioritized anything but the struggle for liberation. Looking specifically at the sentence “that for our country and for all the women of our country, she had a sense of something much larger,” the author implicitly targets the idea of emancipation. Here, we no longer see emancipation tied to liberation, but rather the idea of focusing attention on emancipation at all is a *betrayal* to liberation. The implication that the collective nation is more important than individual progress simultaneously praises the modest work of women who make up the infrastructure of revolution while creating a sense of shame for those thinking of utilizing the revolution for individual or gendered change.

It is important to note the likely readership of the paper. Peasant women, uneducated, illiterate, and not exposed to French cultural influences prevalent in urban centers, abided by what was expected of them: the labor of the countryside that was vital for the survival of all, including but not limited to carrying wood and water to camps, preparing food for the entire *maquis*, and washing clothes—ultimately, their role was to be anonymous and support their male counterparts, to show deference to the demands of the patriarchal structure of the FLN (Macmaster, 2009). Urban women, on the other hand, were often far more educated and had been exposed to the idea of modern, vocal French women. Given illiteracy rates in the country, the readership of the paper was likely more directed at educated elites than the large percentage of rural, illiterate peasants (Madranges, 1991). Many, if not most, of the women who made up the more domestic, necessary duties of providing a foundation for revolutionary activity did not have the opportunity or ability to read articles such as the one above. Articles like this, at least in part, are a reminder and admonishment to those with access to continue in their duties to the

revolution and base their ambition on collective, national progress. Though they paint militants as the national heroines, the narrative of the honor of tradition is upheld by lauding the modesty of the women who upheld the basic structures of the liberation struggle.

In general, ALN forces in the countryside survived by female volunteers and women coerced into providing necessary aid— providing food, washing clothes, keeping guard, providing shelter, carrying messages, arms, and transporting supplies into the mountains from markets, shops, and FLN depots in towns. These women, coerced or not, were more exposed to violence and intimidation by the French army than those of the mobile *maquis*—as many villages had been left with only women when men left to join the struggle, escape recruitment, or avoid FLN and army harassment alike, the women faced the destruction of their property (the burning down of their homes, namely) and oftentimes rape by French soldiers (Macmaster, 2009; Lazreg, 2008). Thus, even as these women were lightly praised for their roles in upholding the revolution, they faced just as much, if not more, risk of harm or death than their sisters in combat. Here we can return to Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* discussed earlier in the paper: the traditional roles that were reallocated towards revolutionary politics gained a new and more public relevance. In *Fantasia*, a number of women were interviewed that described domestic chores with the clear understanding of this new relevance. While these chores and roles were viewed by both the women and the nationalist movement as reallocated expectations, rural women assumed these roles through a specific political development and performed them with complete understanding of the political implications and consequences of assuming these roles. Though female combatants faced the constant risk of capture and arrest, *moussebilate* faced the constant risks of retribution from the colonial army for their roles in

aiding the nationalists. Women in urban areas often had their homes raided and torn apart, their family members tortured in their own homes for information on the militants they had come into contact with, and, in some cases, arrest, torture, and rape (Drif, 2017). Women in rural villages, on the other hand, faced much of the same risks along with the threat of French soldiers burning entire homes and villages that had aided the FLN, mass rape in villages where most of the men had died or fled to the *maquis*, and murder (Macmaster, 2009). Thus, even though they were not considered militants, they faced the same brutal risks and consequences of those engaged in combat.

It is important to consider, however, where the line was drawn between civilians and militants. Helie-Lucas (1987) notes that the same task fell on different sides of this line depending on the gender of those that carried it out. A man who carried food to armed fights, helped hide militants, carried supplies, guided them through mountains or the countryside was considered a fighter himself. A woman who performed these same tasks, however, was often only considered “a helper.” In veterans’ statistics collected after the war, 10,949 women were registered as veterans, with 9,194 of these women registered as civilians. Yet the tasks these women performed included various necessary sectors, including the largest sectors: (1) supervision of hiding places and food collection and (2) liaisons and guides (Helie-Lucas, 1987). Thus, the title of *moussebilate* is an incredibly gendered term. Though male “militants” throughout the country carried out the same tasks as these women, the tasks and place of women in the revolution were made not subsidiary in the actions themselves, but by linguistic designation. These women put themselves at the same personal risk as their male counterparts, yet were considered as fundamentally different.

Daniele (1999) creates another question of participation: "...when a family gave refuge to members of the Algerian *maquis*, the armed (national) resistance, only the woman in charge of the refuge was considered a militant (p. 64)." We once more run into the issue concerning who is considered a militant and who is not. The other women of the family and village or neighborhood took equal part in aiding resistance fighters through providing supplies, food, or refuge. It was only the woman entrusted by the FLN to be in charge that was considered to be officially part of the FLN—the others were simply civilian activists. In a situation in which the entire population was mobilized for the sake of liberation, the disproportionate, gendered designation of what constituted as a militant or a civilian further subordinated women to the narratives purported by the nationalist movement.

5.4 - CONCLUSION

Throughout the Algerian war, the FLN utilized literature, media, and discourse to craft a narrative around women that supported both the short and long term political goals of the nationalist movement. The women that the movement did laud as national heroines, whose names became well known expressions of revolutionary ambition, were vital to the success of the movement—but they were only a small portion of the women who participated in the liberation struggle. However, by turning these women into national symbols who were solely focused on the success of the movement, they allowed an internalization of similar logic by

militant women throughout the country. By not allowing emancipatory discussion within the nationalist movement, and rather by purporting both the idea that the women's question needed to be deprioritized as well as the idea that women's liberation would come automatically with the liberation of the nation, the elevation of these women could be made temporary. No long-term changes were made for women to assume new priorities in the independent state, and thus they could quietly be demobilized at the end of the war.

For many *moussebilate*, on the other hand, the gendered question mark associated with national liberation was irrelevant. The disconnect between women making specific and deliberate actions to support the nationalist movement by reallocating their traditional duties to a revolutionary support system and the interpretation that the roles of these women did not significantly change contributed to a marginalization of the voices of any woman who participated on this level: it changes them from deliberately political actors to nameless civilians who simply did their traditional duties.

6.0 - INDEPENDENCE AT LAST

6.1 - THE END OF THE WAR

In the final years of the war, Algerian women participated in a number of mass demonstrations against the colonial authority. The push for female enfranchisement prior to the 1958 referendum coupled with an increased nationalist sentiment in the final years of the war saw women participating en masse in the 1962 referendum for independence, an electoral example of the power of women's participation in the independence process. However, this participation went beyond electoral demonstration—throughout the war, women consistently demonstrated their support for an *Algérie musulmane* on a number of fronts. As French demoralization in both the metropole and Algeria became increasingly clear, women began to assert open defiance against the colonial authority. In the numerous situations that left men unable to protest publicly—due to detention, work in underground FLN networks, or fear of arrest—women took up the mantle of defiance and began to replace men in areas of public militancy and street demonstrations (Macmaster, 2009). Macmaster cites the roles of these women as ranging from “making flags, taking lead in advanced columns, dressed in nationalist colors, galvanized crowds by singing Algerian

anthem”—prominent, active roles that put women at the forefront of the publicized portion of the revolution.

These demonstrations marked a cleared turning point in the war. Particularly looking at 1960, the active, public place of women in anti-colonial expression showed a particular affinity for militant nationalism to manifest across class, gender, and often even political boundaries. One of the most notable examples of this was seen in December, when de Gaulle’s arrival in Algeria triggered massive unrest and numerous violent street confrontations. In Algiers, de Gaulle was treated with nationalist flags and crowds chanting “*Algerie musulmane!*” and “*Libérez Ben Bella!*” As violence escalated and both *pied noirs* and the colonial army fired into the crowds, de Gaulle became increasingly convinced that the goal of an *Algérie française* was impossible. The fact that the FLN constituted a legitimate expression of the Algerian people’s will was becoming clear—as was the fact that negotiations with the nationalist movement were on the horizon (Macmaster, 2009). A combination of the broad unpopularity of the war in metropolitan France as well as a break within the army—a failed putsch in which upwards of fourteen thousand officers and generals were implicated in a revolt against de Gaulle—cemented this need for peaceful negotiation with the FLN. Despite military success through the last years of the war, the FLN’s broad propaganda campaign had largely won over the population. Mass demonstrations combined with international pressure gradually increased the lopsided dynamic in which France’s bargaining power weakened and the FLN’s grew stronger (Horne, 1977).

Furthermore, the December 1960 riots, orchestrated by the FLN, pushed the United Nations Political Committee to accept that any referendum in Algeria should be supervised by the United Nations, rather than by the French colonial government. After the establishment of a supervisory body of French and Algerian interlocutors to further discourse, the General Assembly voted on a number of motions—the first of which entailed “...the right of the Algerian people to self-determination and independence (Horne, p. 465, 1977).” Thus, not only had de Gaulle been forced to accept the impossibility of the war ending with an *Algérie française*, but also that the French would have no supervisory control over the negotiations—they were under the eye and judgement of the international community.

Nearly a year and a half of negotiation later, agreement was reached in March 1962 with the Evian Accords. All political prisoners, including many well known female *fidayates* and *moudjahidate* such as Djamilia Bouhired, Djamilia Boupacha, and Zohra Drif were released. The self-determination motion declared in December 1960 set in place a referendum in July 1962 in which Algerians (including women) could vote *oui* or *non* on the Evian agreements (Horne, 1977). Women, who had voted for the first time in the September 1958 referendums under the influence of French agents, turned out en mass to vote *oui* (Macmaster, 2009; Horne, 1977). Two days after the referendum, which saw 5,993,754 Algerians vote in favor of the Accords and only 16,748 against, de Gaulle recognized Algerian independence from the French Empire (Horne, 1977).

6.2 - THE NEW ALGERIA

After the war, many women's experiences remained in the foreground of history given the cultural taboos that were present in their experiences—including but not limited to torture, political dissent, rape, and sexuality. Zohra Sallami, in an interview with *Révolution africaine* in 1968, stated that independence changed nothing for Algerian women: “It is very simple and it is to be expected because social structures cannot be changed in one year, or five years, or ten years unless there is a real revolution (Sallami, 1968, cited by Vince, p. 122, 2015).” Of course, there had been a revolution—but not a revolution of gender roles. The new, independent state was not a blank slate from colonial-era legacies, patriarchal legacy, and historical condition. Furthermore, throughout the war, the FLN didn't actively promote new, long term socio-political roles for women. Rather, the roles of women during the war, though often empowering, were frequently either symbolic, classist, or simply a redefinition of already existing expectations. That said, however, it is difficult to give accounts of not only the diversity of experiences after the war, but also political, economic, and social circumstances that shaped these experiences. Many women did, certainly, benefit from the independence struggle. Others, however, were not so lucky. This paper has focused largely on the experiences and narratives crafted during the war, and, in part, how women look back on these experiences and narratives in the post-colonial state. Though their lives after the war were shaped by the liberation struggle, it is undeniable that the struggle for women's empowerment in Algeria continued long after 1962. Thus, this section is just a brief

overview of these struggles, not a comprehensive, holistic look at that diversity of struggle and experience.⁵

Both during and after the liberation struggle, the majority of Algerian men did not acknowledge the need, or even the desire, for women's emancipation—those who did saw it as a secondary priority (Salhi, 2003; Bouatta, 1997; Helie-Lucas, 1987). The strong ties formed between men and women during the war were often cut with independence—in some cases, men who had married their compatriots during the war divorced the former *moudjahidate* after the war to marry younger, more traditional women (Salhi, 2003). Further, as stated in previous sections, the FLN had created the dual narratives that the women's question was either not a priority or that women's emancipation would be achieved automatically with colonial emancipation (Bouatta, 1997). These narratives were continued after the war, when male politicians put a relative ban on the women's question as well as obstructed the political, judicial, and social levels that could be achieved by women (Bouatta, 1997). There was a historically permeating idea that the women's question was second to a more important one—during the revolution, it was second to achieving liberation; after independence, it was second to achieving socialism (Helie-Lucas, 1987).

In an interview with Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne (1999), a woman named Fatima Benosmane stressed regret at the lack of female political action after the war, and further, the lack of explanation to new generations about the place of women during the war:

⁵ For further insight on the experiences of women after the war, one can refer to Natalya Vince's *Our Fighting Sisters* for a more comprehensive look at the post-colonial situation of Algerian women

“In my view, we the militants made a mistake when we did not try to explain to young people what the war of liberation was about. It remains a big blank in their minds because we did not tell them about it to allow them to judge for themselves this period on its own merit. We gave them nothing to make them appreciate our achievements. We fought for independence, and once independence was won, each one of us went her own way. Each woman went home, saying: ‘Let the others deal with it.’ We should never had said ‘Sebaa snin barakat!’ ‘Seven years, that’s enough (p. 69)!”

This retreat from politics was not a small-scale phenomena. In a survey by Hélène Vandeveld-Dallièrè in the 1970s (cited by Vince, 2015), 925 women and 367 men in the Constantine region were interviewed. Of the women interviewed, she calculated only fifteen percent of women, compared to fifty percent of men, were interested in politics. Notably, women in rural areas did not orient their experiences around politics and political institutions, but rather pensions. The single most important tie between the state and women who had been the backbone of the revolution was a monetary relationship that Vince goes so far as to call a “blood debt.”

This retreat from politics was not always voluntary, however. A women name Houria Imache Rami stated, “in the *maquis*, we were all equal in the war—it was afterwards that our citizenship was taken away from us (Messoaudi, 2001 cited in Turshen, p. 893, 2002).” A study of *moudjahidate* saw difficulty in reintegrating with society after independence. Apart from psychological trauma (one woman was cited as never marrying due to the trauma of rape after her arrest) and social pressures (another was forced to quit her job by her husband after the war), many former militants, though admired, were also hindered by their activity during the revolution. Former *mujahidate* were often seen as different and lacking

marriageable qualities due to having lived so closely among men during the war (Turshen, 2002).

The deep weaving of concepts such as nation, religion, ethnicity during the war created the social foundations for the independent nation. With women as symbols of the nation and the nation as the focal point of liberation, a dynamic was created in which it became difficult for Algerians, and particularly women, to critique the State that represented the Nation—the post-independence era became a struggle against ideals that many Algerians had fought for in the first place, yet the inability to criticize nationalist political discourse silenced any and all oppositional evaluation (Helie-Lucas, 1987). A form of populist nationalism called *messalism* subjected everything as subsidiary to the independence struggle and subjected women to a specific narrative: women were always under the “yoke of colonialism,” suffering through poverty and victimized by the colonial system. Women could only be liberated if the nation was liberated, and women *would* be liberated if the nation was liberated (Macmaster, 2009). When independence came to fruition, however, women could only be “liberated” within the boundaries of nation, religion, ethnicity—the lives of women who achieved empowerment in some form or another through militancy were thus shaped by these stagnant social dynamics.

After liberation, when the FLN began to structure society around mass organizations, the UNFA (*Union Nationale des femmes algériennes*) was the only officially recognized women’s organization. It is noteworthy that the organization was an FLN organization, and as such it followed the narrative that socialism would bring emancipation and liberties to women. Given its status as the only recognized political women’s organization, in the twenty

years following independence the UNFA worked to translate the official, nationalist directives put forth by the FLN to the female population (Bouatta, 1997). More than anything, Bouatta notes, the UNFA was a political instrument; with absolutely no autonomy to work outside the bounds of the socio-political directives passed down from the nationalist party, it had no legitimacy, ability, or motive to solve the ‘women’s question’—in the same way the party had no motive to do so.

Notably, the UNFA was a source of criticism not only for women, but also the state itself. For many female veterans, the existence of a single-sex organization to promote women after years of fighting closely alongside men was not a positive state into female empowerment—particularly when the organization was primarily focused more on good works for the social elite rather than actual state construction (Vince, 2015). The organization was likewise critiqued by state-actors, with one FLN Central Committee member, Mohand Said Mazouzi, calling the UNFA “inefficient and inoperative.” President Boumediene declared that the UNFA could not be effective without extending their work to rural women and the countryside—a part of the country where they were notably absent (Vince, 2015). Thus, despite the vast role that women played in the independence struggle, there were no independent political organizations to work in their interests and for their progress in the new, one-party state. So long as the narrative of the ruling party was that the women’s question was secondary to the primary national goal, the women’s question could not be a priority for state-sanctioned organizations. The only possible way for women to move forward, when their interests went against state-policies, would be to break with the agencies of the state and question the principles of the state.

But to question this state would be to question the principles of the revolution. Helie-Lucas describes the translation of necessary revolutionary-era structures and ideals—morality, obedience, and conformity—to post-independence expectations. The brand of the UNFA was a manifestation of these ideals—ideals that in no capacity stressed the importance of emancipation. Even attempts to work with rural peasant women, a large percentage of the population, could not go far with the political obstacles created by strict objectives and functions of the UNFA (Bouatta, 1997). As the inefficiency of the organization became progressively more clear, there were attempts to create autonomous spaces for female expression and progress. Various small organizations throughout Algeria sought to reflect on the social arena, create women’s journals, and critique official legislation. Though these organizations could not influence legislation and politics on a wide scale, they did lay the foundation for the growth of a feminist movement in the coming decades (Bouatta, 1997).

That said, however, women’s movements not under the umbrella of the FLN or UNFA were at risk to be seen as subversive and anti-national. In the independent, one party state, women who attempted to create autonomous spaces for women’s empowerment were a threat to the ideals of the Nation. To reject the UNFA was, in many ways, a rejection of the state-ideology that powered the UNFA. Nonetheless, the UNFA made few motions to grow the political consciousness of women and the problems faced by them. Further, they made few attempts to reach the, though largely uneducated, experienced *moudjahidate* and turn them into a political force of women who had been the backbone of the war (Macmaster, 2009). Without autonomous organizations for women there would be no movements on real, emancipatory progress. The UNFA was a recipe for the continuation of colonial-era gender

norms, revolutionary-era gendered morality, and post-independence power struggle. Despite mass participation during the revolution, the first National Assembly saw only 10 women out of 194 members. This decreased further by the second meeting of the National Assembly, which saw only 2 women out of 138 members (Amrane-Minne, 1999).

Though the grassroots, autonomous women's organizations could not often meaningfully impact the political landscape, there was one prevailing factor that impacted women, politics, and legislation throughout Algeria in the decades after independence—the Family Code. The Constitution created after achieving independence did guarantee equality between the sexes. However, attempts at reforming the Family Code against the interests of women began early on in the independent state—long before the implementation of the 1984 Family Code that saw the subordination of the state to Islamist pressure (Amrane-Minne, 1999).

The succession of presidents moreover saw a slow descent into compromise with Islamist factions, and therefore a slow descent into an oppressive Family Code. After the coup of the government of the first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, Colonel Houari Boumedienne took over until 1976 and sidelined both the *mujahidat* as well as the UNFA. Under Chadli Bendjedid, compromises to Islamist factions were known to be made in order to secure power, often at the expense of women's rights (Turshen, 2002). Helie-Lucas states, “At a time when Islamists were not yet seeking direct political power, our rules, shamelessly betraying women and their sacrifice during the war of liberation, believed that they could contain Islamists by leaving in their hands the private sphere and the control of women (1998).”

In 1981, the plan to adopt a new Family Code was announced, though the actual text of the code was kept secret. As an official copy circulated throughout women's circles, the code was revealed to be in line with many Islamist policies. Though the text could not be verified, women—including many well known *moudjahidate*—organized in front of parliament and demonstrated against the code on December 3. Thus, the plan for the code was deferred again (Salhi, 2003; Vince, 2015).

Before the official deferral of the plan, however, activists demanded to see the official text of the code. Though this was denied, it prompted a significant development: a break with the UNFA. During the demonstrations, the UNFA stated that women were not aware of their rights, and therefore had nothing to discuss concerning the government proposal of the code. Feminists responded by stating that not only had the UNFA not promoted the interests of women after independence, but that they weren't concerned with women at all—rather, they were only really concerned with international political issues that were distant from the real problems faced by Algerian women (Salhi, 2003). Thus, two decades after independence, an autonomous feminist movement broke free from government influence. This new movement saw the combined efforts of both the younger generation of women's rights campaigners as well as female war veterans, such as Zohra Drif, Zhor Zerari, and Baya Hocine. The addition of the *moudjahidate* to the movement created a tense dynamic for the regime: the state was put face to face with betrayal of the revolution. Those who had helped form the state were now against it.

Another plan for a new Family Code was submitted in October 1983, with the content of the code still secret. Despite women's action against the plan, the new Family

Code was adopted by parliament in June 1984 (Bouatta, 1997). This code proved to be even more in line with Islamist policies than the last. Some of the provisions of the code included a number of rulings worrying to the growing feminist movement, including the ability of a man to divorce without any reason (whilst wives could only divorce under strict conditions), the ability of a man to have up to four wives, the provision that wives must always obey their husbands, and the idea that men are the uncontested heads of the family (Bouatta, 1997). For all intents and purposes, the code created a legal inferiority for women and relegated them to the status of minors under the law.

The unrest created by the imposition of the Family Code continued throughout the decade. Large-scale riots in 1988 saw important political reforms—one of the foremost being the creation of new political parties. However, years of compromise with Islamist factions saw the creation and growth of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)—a large player in the coming civil war (Salhi, 2003; Turshen, 2002). With new political parties on the scene, elections in 1990 and 1991 saw a descent into unrest. As non-Islamist factions fractured and the FIS gained momentum, the military removed Chadli from power and established a High State Council under Mohamed Boudiaf. After the arrest of Boudiaf in 1992 and the annulment of democratic elections with the support of France (which gave the FIS a majority) a violent civil war began to ensue (Salhi, 2003).

6.3 - THE CIVIL WAR AND INTERNATIONAL FEMINISMS

As the country descended into war, Islamist factions began to target prominent women and men in Algeria. As the government response grew, the terrorist activity grew with it (Turshen, 2002; Helie-Lucas, 1998). Women were often clear targets in the struggle between the non-Islamist government and the Islamists. In 1990, for example, the FIS organized a march against the government that called for an application of shari'a that was in fact an extremely misogynous interpretation of very selective traditional Islamic *fiqh* provisions that advocated for the curtailing of women's rights and a separation between the sexes (Turshen, 2002). In many cases, entire lists of women who were targets of mass killings were pinned up at the entryways of mosques—many of these women were soon executed (Helie-Lucas, 1998). In 1994, a *fatwa*⁶ legalized the murder of girls who chose not to wear the *hijab*, and another legalized the kidnapping of girls along with forced marriage. The party set out a specific set of rules regarding women's conduct and what was specifically not permitted under their interpretation of Islamic law (Turshen, 2002).

Women across Algeria were assassinated, abducted, murdered, and raped—and many well known, urban *mujahidat* were targeted by FIS for their open critiques. Zhor Zerari, for example, recalls not only having been on assassination lists, but also receiving threatening phone calls (Vince, 2015). Though these women were targeted directly, many other women

⁶ It is important to note that many of the *fatwas* employed by the FIS and other Islamist groups were results of completely transformed pre-modern legal traditions reinterpreted and recontextualized by modern Islamists to redeploy the content and form of pre-colonial Islamic law into rigid, fixed law not advocated for by pre-modern legal scholars and Muslims

throughout the country were brutalized indiscriminately. Salhi (2003) cites cases where women had acid thrown at them for going to beaches. One woman had her house burned down because she lived alone with her children. Turshen (2002) discloses further horrors: in one case, a woman was forced into a temporary marriage and raped in her family home; some women who were kidnapped were relegated to slave status, not allowed the privileges of washing their hair, praying, or wearing veils. Benamour (1995) theorizes that the idea of women as symbols of national identity resurfaced in response to the social and political gains women had begun to experience in the years leading up to social upheaval (cited by Turshen, 2002). As the government made compromises to Islamists leading up to the civil war, women began to organize and seek political reform—leading to a specific, conservative backlash against women. While many of the atrocities listed above were undeniably the work of Islamists, new research has shown some atrocities were committed by the Algerian army disguising themselves as Islamists in order to discredit them to both Algerians and the international audience (Pennell, 2019).

Given their position as the direct targets of Islamists, women were often first rank in the resistance. Looking back at their social and political retreat following the revolution, women were brought out of nationalist sentiment in favor of an international resistance to anti-women, Islamist policy (Helie-Lucas, 1998). Throughout the war, women participated in mass demonstrations against Islamists—for example, in 1994, women defied a GIA boycott of school in order to stand in solidarity with teachers and the ideal of education for all. They further defied another boycott declared by the FIS in response to the 1995 elections. Even as the 1990s saw mass violence against women, it also saw the long-awaited growth of

women's movement's throughout the country. As the country descended into violence, women became active, largely for the first time, in NGOs and other women's organizations that were not directly associated with the state (Turshen, 2002). The turbulence of the civil war opened questions on the country's repressed past—the social traumas and political turbulences of the post-colonial state created the acknowledged necessity of the new, democratic state to deal with gender relations (Bouatta, 1997). However, though resistance against Islamist movements is undeniably important, the civil war created a problematic trend in Algerian women's literature and research in the almost exclusive focus on Islamists as the problem for women to resist. Much of the literature cited throughout this chapter takes this same approach, creating a bias that often totally or partially ignores the roles of corrupt and authoritarian states in subordinating social movements, even giving them a pass for unjust state action. That said, it is important to recognize that Islamists are not the only hurdle in women's movement in the region, and instead that there is both a social and political problem that exists in accordance to state power, ideology, and action.

6.4 - CONCLUSION

At the end of the civil war in 2002, after Islamist forces were defeated and a new political system was put place, Abdelaziz Bouteflika became president with the aid of the new coalition of women's NGOs, and activists. Despite this promising start, however, progress continued to be slow for women in Algeria (Tlemçani, 2016). In 2005, only minor changes were proposed to the blatantly oppressive Family Code. It wasn't until 2015 that Bouteflika

proposed abolishing the code entirely, finally establishing legal equality for women who, in the decade between these proposals, increasingly began to take a more active role in public and social spheres (Tlemçani, 2016). Thus, while recent years have seen vast improvements in some areas—over 60% of students were girls and 38% of attorneys were women in 2015, showing the opening of the judicial and educational sectors to a more gendered balance—other areas have lagged behind. Between Bouteflika’s initial appointment to the presidency and the Arab Spring, no more than five women were active members of the government. In 2014, this number increased to seven women, however, these women were notable in that they were not radicals or feminists—that is, they made no move to support the grassroots women’s movements for social change (Tlemçani, 2016). Thus, while certainly this era saw massive advancements in some areas, women still struggled to find a place in the Algerian state. The male elites of Algeria dominated the gender dynamics of the country.

However, post-civil war Algeria has not been able to silence the voices of women. The grassroots, autonomous feminist movement that began to form in the 1980’s gained momentum throughout the “black decade” of the civil war and into the modern day. In 2019, women once again rose to play a crucial role in the political landscape of Algeria. After nearly twenty years in power, women participated in mass numbers to call for the resignation of President Bouteflika. Haffaf (2019) cites women joining marches and, in one case, even establishing a “feminist square” near the University of Algiers. This group, consisting of women of all generations, demanded a free Algeria that declared equal rights to all citizens. President Bouteflika resigned in April 2019—and women have, more than ever, demanded to be part of the political conversation

These demonstrations, more than anything, show the continuous drive of women in Algeria for progress and empowerment through the lens of the North African, Muslim women's experience. The legacy of the *moudjahidate* can be seen in the demonstrations as women strive for a better future for Algerian women. Though Algerian women faced decades of struggle after the revolution, their experiences throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the millennia have led to a bright spot of political, social, and economic potential in the current calls for democracy and freedom.

7.0 - CONCLUSION

“In the past few years analogies between the struggles of Palestinian women and those of women in other national liberation movements, in particular with the struggle of Algerian women against the French colonial occupation of Algeria, have become an integral part of daily discussions and strategizing sessions of Palestinian women on the grass-roots level. “We will not let what happened to our Algerian sisters happen to us.” This assertion, made by a young Palestinian woman activist in response to a question from an American feminist about what will happen to Palestinian women after national liberation is achieved, is indicative of the growing awareness among Palestinian women that the struggle for national liberation and for gender equality are inseparable.”

— Simona Sharoni, *Gendered Identities in Conflict: The Israeli-Palestinian Case and Beyond*, p. 130, 1995

The Algerian War of Independence saw women in every region, village, and city participating in nearly all sectors of revolutionary activity, including but not limited to armed militancy, transportation of supplies, propaganda operatives, and domestic support. Perhaps the most significant implication in the quote above, however, is that despite their massive contributions to the liberation struggle, they remained tethered to oppressive traditions after the war. They ultimately failed to translate their own necessity in the struggle into a parallel national policy of liberating women from traditional values. Though many women saw empowerment in their own cultural sphere through direct militant action during the war, the vast majority of women simply had their domestic duties and responsibilities repurposed for the nationalist cause; they moved from cooking, washing, and providing in the home to doing the same in militant camps.

Algerian women thus saw their own failures to move beyond the combined oppression of the colonial state and patriarchal tradition become a counter-example to many women fighting their own liberation struggles throughout the Global South. The women participating in the First Palestinian Intifada (1987 - 1993) saw the Algerian War of Independence as a demonstration of an independent state where national liberation was achieved without any changes to the status of women or gender relations in society. It was necessary, in order to avoid the “bitter experience of Algerian women,” to be critical of the fact that gender distinctions and tensions based on traditionalism were inherently woven in with the broad ideology of the national struggle. In discussing the nationalist movement’s relationship with feminism during the intifada, Sharoni (1995) identifies a key theme that has been prevalent in numerous anti-colonial struggles: though nationalism provides women a community setting to become involved as political actors, they do not have a say in the terms of this inclusion in the movement. Looking back at the failure of the Algerian women’s movement to get ahead of this obstacle, Palestinian women saw the necessity of translating feminist discourse into a unified and cohesive revolutionary policy, rather than separate from a nationalist discourse based on gendered traditionalism (Sharoni, 1995). The separation of feminist and nationalist discourse in the Algerian case created the conditions in which the dominant ideology of the nationalist movement overtook any notion of an independent Algerian feminism that could exist in the post-war state.

Locked into their status as symbolic figures of the national consciousness, Algerian women were still suffering from the oppressive weight of tradition at the height of the Palestinian Intifada nearly thirty years later. They were a broad counter-example of how women in colonial states could fight for a liberation that would liberate them along with the nation, rather than

liberate the nation that would only include them so long as their place supported the traditional, oppressive paradigm of the power structure. The intifada opened up a space for local discourses contextually oriented around the larger conflict between Israel and Palestine but also on women's concerns and gender issues. Women were able to link their own concerns to the national struggle and thus shape this national struggle with their own experiences (Sharoni, 1995). Algerian women, on the other hand, had not been able to establish this link. Instead, their experiences were muddled in with the collective discourse of either the nationalist movement or the colonial paradigm. Any experience that did not fit perfectly into these narratives were misrepresented or silenced.

The combined portrayal of the colonial army and the nationalist movement of the Algerian women turned femininity into a “commodity and spectacle (Khannous, 2001).” In historical studies, literature, film, art, and so on, women were presented in two separate yet similar veins. On the nationalists side, Algerian women were either objects of the colonial gaze and western imposition into the Muslim family or mythical warrior figures who transcended gender roles only to reassume them when necessary (MacMaster, 2009; *The Battle of Algiers*, 1969; Fanon; 1959). On the French side, women were presented as vain, malleable creatures who were easily influenced by western “modernity.” These women, suffering from endemic poverty, poor hygiene, and deep patriarchal hierarchies, could only benefit from French emancipation directives (Paris Club, 1959; Magazine féminine, 1960; Le Monde, 1958). While these are very two separate and differentiating views of the women, they are similar in that they both ignore the voices of the woman and remove any and all of her autonomy in her own story, perspective, and ideology. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) states, “...both as object of colonialist

historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.” The woman’s actual experience is entirely engulfed by the propagated narratives of her experiences: she is an object of the colonialist’s history as well as the colonist’s imperialist views that subject her to warped interpretations of her experience. On the other hand, she is an object of tradition and an object of the nation; her experiences are warped by the creation of a collective narrative that removes any experience that doesn’t fit into the paradigm of a nationalist, Islamic centered understanding of history. In both, she is the subject of male dominated historical narratives—her voice cannot be present in these narratives as to include it would be to contradict them.

Thus, the significance of discourse and language is greater than the roles they play in propaganda—even as the nations reconstruct historical narratives based on their own interpretations of language, citizens must construct their experiences within the nation. The women’s experience is a product of cultural norms and, in part, a product of this propaganda. The decades after the end of the Algerian war saw a slow trickle of women’s voices emerge from the collective narrative of the struggle enforced by the nationalist government. In many ways, the silence of these women and thus the *lack* of language before the emergence of these new narratives that diverge from the collective history is just as important. Here we can look to a quote by Assia Djébar: “Every language has its own silence, its own decency ... there are things that can be told in French, but not in Arabic (Duranti, p. 2, 2011).” The social taboos that existed in Algeria forbade certain experiences from being told, and if it is forbidden in the social sphere then it must also be forbidden in the language of the social sphere. Throughout this paper, there

has been a divide in the experiences of the *fidayate*, the *mujahidat*, and the domestic women. In each set of experiences, however, one will find examples of torture, rape, political dissent, and sexuality that required women to self-censor in order to survive in the new nation. Women across society—in all social and economic classes and in both urban and rural areas—faced experiences that could not be told in the historical framework of the independent nation (Durant, 2011). Thus, in order to express these narratives, many women had to turn to the language of “the other”—the former colonial empire. Women can transcend cultural and social boundaries to broadcast experiences that would otherwise be forbidden by seeking a separate audience—in essence, they can choose the “world view” in which they share their story, even if this world view is their former colonial oppressor. Language becomes a performative choice in which narratives change and shift in line with cultural connotations. How can one translate the experience of an illiterate, rural Muslim woman recorded from oral tradition? In one vein, it is impossible—there are connotations and cultural nuances that might be lost in translation. That said, however, to translate any experience into collectivity erases the nuances of the human condition and record. Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne (2007) writes, “When artists, writers, historians or participants in the war describe their experiences, each provides a different view of this traumatic period. No one can tell the whole story. But all these fragments of truth, and even, paradoxically, all that remains unspoken, gradually help to write history, perhaps the most terrifying aspects of which remain still to be discovered (p. 349).” Thus, this thesis is not to say that women, when writing of their experiences, are not crafting their own narrative apart from those of the male-dominated power structures. Rather, their experiences are crafted out of social and political biases—by looking at multiple sources across class and society one can see a more holistic narrative of the

women's experience that interacts and questions these biases. Language is a performative choice, but silence and time are as well.

In looking at the social, political, literary, and media oriented mechanisms by which different narratives of the women's experience were created, one can understand how representation relates to the consequences of formulating historiographies that resound in the social and political lives of those subject to these historiographies. The cycle in which these narratives are created and their repercussions realized is a cycle that resounds on a global scale—women throughout the Global South can look to the movements of how other women in other countries and translate the relationship between feminism, nationalism, and colonialism into a post-colonial order. Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, for example, looks at this relationship in which women define their movements through the influence of Third World feminisms rather than western-oriented progressivisms. Though Jayawardena does not look at Algeria as an example, she does provide an analysis of how women in nationalist movements have historically crafted ideologies that have the potential to resound in a greater feminist solidarity in the Global South.

Furthermore, this paper looks specifically at the creation of narratives and their effects *during* the war. For a greater understanding of how these narratives have resounded for Algerian women in the post-colonial period, Natalya Vince's *Our fighting sisters: Nation, memory and gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* crafts an analysis on how women relate their experiences during the war to their experiences after independence. In addition, there are a number of works that provide more in depth looks at actions and initiatives not mentioned in this paper. Marnia Lazreg's *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, for example, includes a section that provides an illuminating

analysis on the effects and experiences that torture had on women during the war. Neil Macmaster's *Burning the Veil: The Algerian war and the 'emancipation' of Muslim women, 1954-62*, though cited a number of times throughout this paper, includes exploration of a number of French initiatives towards women, including but not limited to the Plan de Constantine, the involvement of the S.A.S. and M.S.F, and attempts to modify personal status law. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Mildred Mortimer's *Women Fight Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War* looks at nearly five decades of literature by Algerian women in order to explore the influences of individual and collective memory in women in order craft spaces for their experiences in the history of the war. In order to look deeper into the origins of colonial conflict and its effect on Algerian women, Judith Surkis' *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830-1930* traces the influences of the French colonial system on personal status law and gender perceptions in the pre-war era.

By piecing together women's narratives with the narratives perpetuated by the colonial and patriarchal authority, a new, more complicated and more gendered history emerges. To look at only the narratives perpetuated by the major actors—the colonizer and the nationalist—is to look at only a fragmented history and fragmented truth of experience. This broad argument maintained over the course of this paper is important in two respects. The first returns to the anecdote at the beginning of this conclusion: the case of Palestinian women. The question of providing a framework answer to why women join movements that ultimately work against their self-interest might be too broad after an extensive look at only one case. Further, there are aspects that this paper has not covered of the Algerian women's experience—colonial-era property ownership, the Plan de Constantine instituted by colonial authorities, and an in-depth

analysis of support based on class might provide another paper a more economic analysis on many of the events discussed throughout this paper, for example. Rather, a question that might be applied to the analysis of other women's movements historically and occurring today revolves once more on discourse and language. We see throughout the Algerian woman's experience during and after the war how male-dominated positions of power used propaganda as an instrument of female oppression. The use of such visual, linguistic, and institutional propaganda can provide an illustration to other women, and particularly organized women's movements throughout the Global South, on how colonial and patriarchal authorities can utilize prevalent cultural norms as instruments to further oppression and subjugation to particular agendas. Thus, in the absence of such a women's movement in Algeria, we see the necessity of organized women's movement in anti-imperial struggles—these organized movements must be present in order to piece together nationalist discourse with feminist discourse and create a narrative in which the experiences of one do not threaten the other.

Jayawardena cites the issue of facing both “misogynistic cultural norms resurrected as emblems of cultural authenticity and a necessity for de-colonization” as well as western, imperialist feminisms that portray non-white customs as outdated and barbaric. In the application of both of these views, there is strong, impactful discourse deeply rooted in historical pasts. By using entrenched cultural views or forced emancipation tactics that paint important cultural values as relics of the past, women are subjugated to impositions by “the other”—in this case, the western or Islamic, nationalist legislature or social movement, perhaps—on the correct conduct on life. In Algeria, there was no widespread, powerful women's movement that existed separate from political purposes in order to advocate for a narrative and reality in which women could be

empowered and heard through a Algerian progressivism based on important cultural norms. Furthermore, there are distinct class and imperial divisions that create conditions in which western cultural values and feminism undermine the potential progress of women in the Global South. That said, it is pivotal to look at the discourse of colonial feminisms in order to generate, in an increasingly globalized world, international feminist solidarity that does not undermine the narratives and experiences of non-white and non-western women by placing them in the historical concepts of progress and modernity generated by the west. In essence, the case of Algeria women shows the importance of extracting feminist historiographies and narratives from both colonial and national constructions of the non-western woman. In order to create a space in which culturally and regionally specific version of progress can exist as well as a space in which women can share truthful experiences without the fear of being ostracized by both her society and the west, international feminisms must be created around an authentic construction of historical legacy and an acceptance of linguistic and cultural fluidity in feminist ideology.

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