

# Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?

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We had visited the site and noted several possible targets. We had been told to place two bombs, but we were three, and at the last moment, since it was possible, we decided to plant three bombs. Samia and I carried three bombs from the Casbah to Bab el Oued, where they were primed. . . . Each of us placed a bomb, and at the appointed time there were two explosions; one of the bombs was defective and didn't go off.

Djamila B., Zohra D., and Samia, Algiers, September 1956  
(quoted in Amrane Minne, 1993: 97)

In the terrorists' camp, I lived in hell. I awoke at dawn to start cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching firewood and water. I nursed the sick and served the wives of the terrorists, the legal ones they called "free women." Every night the terrorists visited me, taking their turns. They forced me to have sex several times a night. During my [six months'] captivity I was raped by about 50 dirty, stinking, brutal, violent men. . . . The rest of the night, to keep me from running away, they bound my wrists and ankles with wire and took away my clothes.

Chr a M riem, March 1998  
(as told to Belloula, 2000: 115)

**F**ORTY-TWO years separate these quotations, yet the experiences described seem to be centuries apart—and in reverse order.\* During the Algerian war for independence from France (1954-1962), thousands of women were active participants, taking initiative even on deadly missions. During the civil war of the 1990s, tens of

thousands of women and girls were the victims of terrorists who denied not just their womanhood but their humanity. I went to Algeria in April 2001 to ask how this apparent shift from active participant to passive victim could have happened. How is it that Algerian women—whose struggles became, through the pen of Frantz Fanon (1924-1961), the hallmark of a national revolution's potential to liberate women—found themselves the target of a civil war in the 1990s? How did Algerian women, whose analysis and praxis of women's liberation were so advanced, respond to increasing restrictions on their lives and the lives of their daughters in the aftermath of war? What options do Algerian women think they have now, and which are they pursuing as the civil war winds down but economic difficulties increase?

### *The Algerian War*

The war for independence (usually referred to as the Algerian war in the francophone literature) was not the first in which women participated actively as combatants, spies, fundraisers, and couriers, as well as nurses, launderers, and cooks. But the Algerian war set a precedent for African women in liberation movements, in part because Fanon immortalized it. Fanon (1965 [1959]) dramatized the changes wrought in women and in the family by the revolution and by women's participation in the revolution, which he saw as necessary, even inevitable, given its nature.

The ministry for veterans' affairs reported in 1974 that 11,000 Algerian women had fought for the liberation of their country (about 3 percent of all fighters); Amrane Minne (1993: 219) thinks this a serious underestimation of women's participation. Of this number, 22 percent were urbanites and 78 percent came from rural areas; these percentages mirror exactly the rate of urbanization in Algeria at the time (Amrane Minne, 1993: 231). The militants took up arms to fight for independence from

France but also political weapons to free women from ignorance and servitude. Urban educated women joined the *maquis* (the rebel forces operating in the mountains) when arrest in the city was imminent; living in villages they taught illiterate peasant women about their social role and explained colonialism, the revolution, and the reasons for the independence struggle. Sometimes, in regions loyal to the National Liberation Front (FLN), bold educators tried to transform social relations between men and women, which they found shocking (Amrane Minne, 1993: 83).

The French military and police did not spare women participants who were captured; about 2,200 *mujahidat* (women combatants) were arrested and tortured (Hessini, 1996: 9). The French killed some women in shootouts, and they condemned six to death (eventually commuting their sentences) (Amrane Minne, 1993: 231). Until Amrane Minne, herself a veteran, published her studies in 1993 and 1994, few details about the women who had fought for liberation were available. A number of survivors are also beginning to tell their stories and publish their memoirs (see, for example, "Une moudjahida," 2001; Ighilahriz, 2001; "Entretien," 2001; "La moudjahida," 2000).

### *The Aftermath of the Algerian War*

After eight years and more than 1 million deaths, Algeria won independence in 1962, and women secured citizenship, equal rights to coeducation and health services (both free), and entry to the professions. The gains were impressive: by 1994-95, 46 percent of primary and 50 percent of secondary school students were girls; half of university graduates were women; 50 percent of doctors (and only 48 percent of nurses), one-third of judges, and 30 percent of lawyers were women (Oufriha, 1999). So much has been written about the disappointments following independence (Bennoune, 1999; Helie-Lucas, 1999; M'rabet, 1983; Nouredine,

1991) that it is worth remembering how much Algerian women advanced in the 1960s and 1970s. Most commentators mention the small percentage of women in the paid labor force (about 6 percent in 1980; see United Nations, 1995: 142) as indicative of women's return to private life after the war; but the low rate is equally suggestive of a socialist economy buoyed by the wealth of the nationalized oil fields. Many families in the growing middle class could afford to withdraw their daughters from the paid workforce, and there was no competitive capitalist economy to draft women into low-paid work (Khalida Messaoudi, interview, 24 April 2001). (In contrast, Moroccan girls start to work in petty trade in cities when they are as young as five.)

If many women fighters withdrew from public life in the aftermath of the Algerian war, so did many men. Although little research is available on what happens to women combatants who return to civilian life, some evidence suggests that women are rejected by civilian society (Hale, 2001). A rare study of seven *mujahidat* in Aurès (a region from which more than one-third of women fighters came) describes their considerable difficulties reintegrating after the Algerian war (Haddab, 2000). All enlisted when very young and later had marital problems. One woman never married (her friends think she was raped when she was arrested and that she chose to remain alone). One woman was forced out of her hospital nursing job by her husband; two more were housewives at their husbands' insistence. Four became teachers, the most socially acceptable work role for a woman. In the first year after independence all participated in the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA, a creation of the FLN), none was a member of the party. On a personal level they noted that it was time to get married and have children. There was one exception, an unmarried militant, an Arabic teacher, who was elected in the communal elections of 1974 to *wilaya* (provincial) vice president for social affairs. According to Haddab (2000: 300) she described herself as a man; she suppressed her femininity deliberately and traveled on a bicycle that was later motorized. Haddab

(297) says that although the *mujahidat* were admired for their patriotism and courage, they also were perceived as different and not marriageable because they had frequented men.

When Messaoudi (1995: 94) asked the *mujahidat* what they did in the 20 years after independence, they said their struggle had continued but not publicly; they worked with orphans and mistreated war widows. Having been deprived of family life during the war, Messaoudi says, the *mujahidat* were ready to return to domesticity, never imagining what was in store for Algerian women. Some women were bitter: Mme Houria Imache Rami, a *mujahida*, told me, “[in the *maquis*] we were all equal in the war—it was afterward that our citizenship was taken away from us” (Interview, Algiers, 26 April 2001). A former fighter told Messaoudi (1995: 94-95) “our domestication didn’t start in 1962, it happened before independence; even during the war, the FLN started eliminating women from the *maquis*, sending us to the borders or abroad. That’s when our role was defined, when we were excluded from public life.”

Salah Louanchi, a militant who participated in the FLN’s post-war decision-making bodies, told his wife of discussions immediately after independence about whether allowing women to take paid jobs would dislocate the family (Louanchi thought women should work, at least in the transitional period); most men maintained that “women would find satisfaction in Arabo-Islamic values”—to which his wife retorted, “couldn’t the same be said of men?” (Louanchi, 1998: 165) Only the delegates from the city of Mostaganem demanded that women be allowed to work in the ranks of the party. In April 1964 at the party congress of the Economic and Social Commission, an UNFA spokeswoman called for equal responsibilities for women militants at every level of the party, an end to polygamy, regulated daycare for children, new adoption laws, and new laws concerning legitimacy. None of this was taken into account, and neither the FLN nor the UNFA returned to these problems at the meeting. At the end of the congress, when the list of central committee members was

announced, women were allowed to choose a woman representative; the selection was to be made on the basis of being a woman, not on the basis of being militants with their own identity and their own program. Anne-Marie Louanchi (1998: 165) comments: "It was thought that with the construction of a more just society, these problems would take care of themselves. The future would tell us that we were wrong."

By the 1980s, Algerian women were finding the promissory notes of socialist revolution canceled, despite their vigorous protests. In 1980, a ministerial order forbade any woman from leaving the country without a male; it was annulled after women demonstrated. In 1981 women learned of a second attempt to pass a personal code: the law regulating family life that had been under discussion since 1966. Together with *mujahidat*, young women demonstrated and wrote an open protest letter to President Chadli Benjedid in which they listed six demands: same legal age of majority for women and men; unconditional right to work; equality in marriage and divorce; an end to polygamy; equal inheritance rights; legal status for unwed mothers and protection of abandoned children (virtually the same list proposed in 1964). Chadli backed down, but not for long. On June 9, 1984, the legislature adopted the Family Code, even as women were gathering 1 million signatures on a petition protesting its statutes. The code made all women minors in education, work, marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and it guaranteed polygamy to men. Also, men could divorce unilaterally and could evict their ex-wives from their homes. Sharia law, which is based on the Koran and other sources, defined inheritance: men were entitled to twice as much as women. Although women were successful in eliminating some of the worst provisions of the original draft (Lippert, 1987), Khalida Messaoudi (1995: 90) calls it a history of "crimes against women."

How could women (and progressive and revolutionary men) have allowed this to happen? No single factor accounts for women's losses: they were the cumulative effect of a series of

events—the 1965 coup that overturned Ahmed Ben Bella's government and installed a military regime under Colonel Houari Boumedienne; the repressive socialist regime that failed to recognize the *mujahidat* and that gave UNFA a secondary role to play; and the years of the Chadli administration (1979-1991), which were particularly inimical to women, manipulating the few who were in government. Chadli was known to make compromises with Islamic opponents to stay in power, compromises that sacrificed women's autonomy. Chadli also accelerated the Arabization and Islamization of education. Classical Arabic became the medium of instruction, and religious teaching, which had previously been restricted to Koranic schools and the Islamic Institute, became an integral part of the curriculum (Carlier, 1999: 89).

The women's movement existed but was not organized. "Not until 1987 when a law was passed authorizing the creation of NGOs did the women's movement really take off" (Nasera Merah, interview, Algiers, 26 April 2001). In August 1989 a new electoral law allowed men to vote by proxy for up to three female members of their families (Hessini, 1996: 12); again, women protested effectively and in 1991 the election law was modified to prohibit men from casting their wives' votes (Martinez, 1998: 76). But in 1992, life was to change dramatically for Algerian women and men.

### *The Civil War*

Civil war, in which armed Islamist groups attacked first the government and then the civilian population, had been brewing since the 1980s. In October 1988, thousands of youths joined "bread riots" and demonstrated in the streets of Algiers against the effects of the structural adjustment program imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. (International help in dealing with Algeria's massive foreign debt, which was a consequence of the government's near total dependency on

volatile oil and gas revenues, had been made conditional on budgetary cuts.) Although the government repressed the demonstrations brutally, killing hundreds and injuring many more, the workers, students, and unemployed young men who demonstrated did obtain important political reforms: a free press, the right to organize civil society, the creation of new political parties, and eventually the departure of President Chadli four years later.

Among the nearly 60 new political parties was the Front islamique du salut or Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which emerged as a federation of the hundreds of networks of cells, including paramilitary groupings, that had constituted themselves in the 1980s (Kaplan, 1998: 26). The FIS carried 54 percent of the popular vote in local elections in May 1990; it received about 1 million fewer votes in the first round of legislative elections in December 1991, but the non-Islamist vote was so badly fragmented that the FIS emerged the overall winner (Pierre and Quandt, 1995). Fearing its imminent fall from power, the government canceled the second electoral round in January 1992 and the military removed Chadli from power; a new High State Council took over headed by Mohamed Boudiaf. In March 1992 the council dissolved the FIS (the FIS leaders, Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, had been arrested in May 1991), but in June 1992 Boudiaf was assassinated (Taveau, 1999: 217-218). Years of violence ensued, violence so savage and bloody that many Algerians are still stunned (Rédha Malek, interview, 17 April 2001). An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 people lost their lives in terrorist acts carried out by competing armed terrorist groups in their bid for state power.

Operating in the name of Islam—the Armed Islamic Group (GIA, now number three on the United States list of terrorist organizations), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, a faction of the GIA), the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA), and the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS, the armed wing of the FIS, and which agreed to a truce in the summer of 1997)—began to target prominent women and men (doctors, lawyers,



journalists, and other professionals and intellectuals who were secularists, unsympathetic to Islamism) and individuals connected with the government like the police and the military. (Military service is compulsory for men in Algeria and young recruits were regularly targeted.) One analysis of the exceptional violence is that it grew as it met with government resistance. As the government responded with force, the terrorists stepped up their activities, establishing roadblocks and killing everyone ambushed in this way. As the government reacted to this new tactic, the terrorists again escalated their attacks, descending en masse on popular towns in the Mitidja, the fertile plain that extends to the east and south of Algiers. On a single night in August 1997 they massacred between 100 and 300 women, men, and children in Haï-Raïs and in September they slaughtered between 300 and 500 in Bentalha.<sup>1</sup> They also kidnapped young girls and women, forcing them to serve as cooks and cleaners in their forest camps and to provide sex when demanded.

From the beginning it was clear that women were both targets and pawns in the power struggles between the Islamists and the government.<sup>2</sup> On April 20, 1990, the FIS organized a march of several hundred thousand to present their platform to Chadli; among the points were a call for the application of the Sharia, a code that would further curtail women's rights in urbanizing and industrializing Algeria, and the acceleration of educational "reform" to protect schools from non-Islamic influences like coeducation and mixed groups in school lunchrooms (Al-Ahnaf, Botiveau, and Frégosi, 1991: 49-51). Other aspects of the FIS platform included actively discouraging women from working outside the home, and creating separate administrative services, public transport, and beaches for women and men (Hessini, 1996: 13). *Fatwa* (religious commandments based on scholarly legal decisions) singling out women followed in rapid succession. A 1994 FIS *fatwa* legalized the killing of girls and women not wearing the *hijab* (which in Algeria consists of a scarf that hides the hair and neck and a full-length robe; veil is not an accurate translation);

another *fatwa* legalized kidnapping and temporary marriage (Hessini, 1996: 6-7). According to the FIS, Muslim women have rights to (religious) education, respect, inheritance, freedom of opinion, the vote, and to refuse an imposed husband. They do not have the right to work outside the home, become political leaders, or participate in sports. They should not wear makeup, perfume, fitted clothes, or mingle with men in public; they should wear the *hijab*, "which not only establishes the distinction between masculine and feminine, but underscores the separation between public and private" (Hessini, 1996: 8). According to *El Mounquid*, the official FIS journal, the *hijab* distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims; it is obligatory for Muslim women and not an individual decision (Imache and Nour, 1994: 15).

Islam is the state religion of Algeria but Algeria is not an Islamic state, which is the goal of the Islamists. Women who do not observe the Islamists' rules are, by their definition, not Muslim women. A radical interpretation of jihad, which legitimizes the use of force to impose Islamist beliefs on "non-observing" Muslim and non-Muslim alike (al-Ashmawy, 1989: 67), justified the declaration that women and girls who refuse to wear the *hijab* are legitimate murder targets. Katia Bengana, a 17-year-old high school senior in Blida, had been warned but she told her mother, "Even if one day I will be assassinated, I will never wear *hijab* against my will. If I must wear something, it will be the traditional dress of Kabylia, rather than the imported *hijab* they want to force on us" (Taveau, 1999: 141). On February, 28, 1994, as she left school with her head uncovered, she was ambushed, shot, and killed by a group of men. This is one example of too many (Aslaoui, 2000: 437-440).

According to the FIS, Muslim women have the right to respect and to refuse an imposed husband. But not Yamina, a 16-year-old from Bathia, a village at the foot of the Ouarsenis Mountains, who was forced to quit school when the terrorists installed in her village burnt it down, and who wore the *hijab* (in self-defense). In December 1994, Nebaâ, the "emir" of the terrorist band, forced

her into a temporary marriage with his “lieutenant,” Haroun, despite her father’s protest. The night of the ceremony Haroun raped her in her family home while holding a knife at her throat. Over the next two months, he repeatedly beat her with a belt and raped her. Then he was killed in a shootout with government forces, and seven months later Yamina gave birth to a son whom the village and the state regard as illegitimate (Belloula, 2000: 36-38). Again, this is but one of many examples.

A *fatwa* legalized kidnapping, but how is the treatment that followed justified?

Captured women did not have the right to wash or to comb their hair. We were not allowed to pray, or to cover our hair, or wear a veil. Girls like me who had worn *hijab* no longer had the right to do so. All of the daily [religious] duties became privileges granted only to the so-called free women, the wives, mothers, or sisters of the terrorists (Mériem, Chr ea, March 1998, as told to Nac era Belloula, 2000: 116).

Even interpretations of Islamic law that justify slavery and taking women as “war booty” (current in Sudan and Algeria), would not seem to condone the treatment of Fella Zouaoui, 14 years old, of Sidi Moussa. Khaled Ferhah, a GIA operative who coveted her, organized a raid on her home to kidnap her and take her to his camp as “war booty”; in the course of the raid, his band murdered all the members of her family at home (three happened to be in town that day). According to GIA rules, first he had to offer Fella to Zouabri, the group’s “emir,” who raped her every night for a week and then assigned her to Khaled. Khaled thought he would then keep her for himself and spare her the collective rape reserved for most captives. His comrades disapproved, putting both of their lives in danger. Khaled tried to flee with Fella but he was intercepted and beheaded on the spot; Fella was tied with wire and dragged back to Tala-Acha, the camp where Zouabri condemned her to death. Blamed for Khaled’s attempted escape, she was tied, spread-eagled, to an

iron gate on the ground where she was gang raped daily and stomped on by dozens of terrorists shouting, "To hell with the sorceress!" Her torturers tore out an eye and stabbed her repeatedly. After 12 days Zouabri took a sword and cut her body in two. Although her corpse has never been found, Fella's fate is known because another captive, Djamilia, escaped to tell it (Belloula, 2000: 117-120).

The GIA and other armed Islamist bands carried out the FIS policies as they understood them but were beyond the reach of central control (Pierre and Quandt, 1995). The ideology of the terrorists in Algeria recalls that of the Taliban in Afghanistan; many Algerians went to Afghanistan to train and to fight.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of the connection between Algeria and Afghanistan recently came to light when Mahfoud Nahnah, a conservative close to the Muslim Brotherhood and leader of the Mouvement de la société pour la paix (MSP, formerly Hamas), acknowledged publicly that in the early 1980s he sent "thirty small groups of Algerians" to Afghanistan to fight the Russian army (Tlemçani, 2001). These "Afghan-Algerians," as they are called eventually, became the core of the GIA and other armed terrorist groups (Rashid, 2001: 135).

### *Algerian Women Respond*

Algerian women took to the streets to combat the Islamists as soon as the government legalized the FIS in September 1989 (Khalida Messaoudi, interview, Algiers, 24 April 2001). Women demonstrating against the FIS alternated with FIS supporters, including at least one large demonstration of several thousand pro-FIS women on 21 December 1989 (Rosehill, 1990). These two groups—the Fissistes who supported the FIS and the feminists who opposed the Islamists—each had their own reasoned positions.

*The Fissistes*

Women convert to Islamism for a variety of reasons. A study carried out in Algiers in April-May 1991 of 200 university students, half of whom wore the *hijab*, found that the motives for adopting Islamist behavioral codes varied from conviction to submission in the face of threats (Imache and Nour, 1994). Students not wearing the *hijab* admired women who did but also perceived them as possibly having personal problems, or as wearing the *hijab* to avoid problems (like being hassled in the street) or attain goals like marriage.

For some women, marriage to a terrorist leader brought wealth and status. Nadia (a pseudonym), who came from a poor peasant family in Haï Bounab, was 16 years old when she met Ahmed Chaabani. Ahmed became a GIA "emir" under Antar Zouabri. Recounting her marriage, she told Baya Gacemi (1998) that her husband had more money working as a terrorist than he would have earned from a regular job. The terrorists ran rackets, in which they extorted a "tax for the revolution" from all the inhabitants; with this money they could afford to dress in name-brand clothes and wear Reeboks, Nikes, or Filas. They also ate well; Nadia described the elaborate meals she prepared for Ahmed's band. Some of the goods were stolen from the houses of the people they killed. Nadia related how Ahmed and his followers once furnished a house for her with a truckload of furniture, a stove, blankets, sheets, dishes, and large baskets of food stolen from two *patriotes* (men enrolled in communal self-defense groups armed by the government) whom they had murdered the night before. "Nothing but expensive products, foreign brands. Everything was new. There was even a washing machine, which I never used because I didn't know how to." (Gacemi, 1998: 133-134)

Thoraya Ayad-Boufaroua (interview, Algiers, 20 April 2001), a radio journalist, suggested that some young women sympathize with the FIS because strict Islamist rules offer them protection. She gave the example of a colleague who was married to an abusive husband; when he converted to Islamism he became more

respectful of her, began helping out at home, and stopped drinking, which meant there was more money in the home and less violence. To reinforce this improvement, she too converted and started wearing the *hijab*.

### *The Feminists*

Why were women the target?<sup>4</sup> Conservative ideas about the place and role of women in Algerian society are deeply entrenched—a holdover from the colonial period when a woman was a symbol and the last line of defense against the loss of national identity—and some believe these ideas resurfaced (with a vengeance) in reaction to the real advances women made after independence (Benamour, 1995). Salima Tlemçani, a reporter for *El Watan*, said that it was because most women refused to accept Islamism, a refusal they demonstrated by marching in the streets and defying boycotts (interview, Algiers, 22 April 2001). Algerian women mark International Women's Day on March 8 every year, and the press (many Algerian journalists are women) carries many articles. For example, in 1989 women marched in Algiers and issued a declaration calling for legal equality (Women Living under Muslim Law, 1989); in 1990 women marched in the capital, in Oran, and in Blida, Batna, and other cities ("Une histoire de lutte," 1990). On March 22, 1994, at the height of the Islamist terror campaign, thousands of women demonstrated in the streets against violence: they carried a clothesline from which they hung men's trousers, and they chanted, "Zeroual, don't drop your pants: no compromises with the Islamists!" (Taveau, 1999: 142; Zeroual was in reference to the president, Liamine Zeroual). In September 1994 women defied a GIA call for a boycott of schools; despite reprisals—school burnings and murders of teachers—women brought their children to classes, standing in solidarity with teachers (Alia, 1995: 9). In November 1995, women were the first to vote in the presidential elections, despite the FIS call for a boycott.

What have Algerian women done in response to the attacks on their lives and the increasing restrictions on their behavior? There are dozens of active new Algerian NGOs such as SOS Femmes en détresse (SOS Women in Distress), which was founded in 1991 to fight conditions that are socially degrading to women and to help support women in psychological, medical, or legal difficulties, and RACHDA (Collective against Denigration and for the Rights of Algerian Women), which was founded in 1996. Algerian women holding elective office have created a caucus of women parliamentarians to push for legislative reforms. One issue is the government's failure to recognize women raped by terrorists as legal victims of terrorism, which would entitle them to an indemnity. According to Khalida Messaoudi, there are 2,029 women who survived rape by terrorists (Dridi, 2001).

### *The Future*

"[The Family Code] is our prison," said a twenty-six-year-old nurse who in 1997 was collecting signatures on a petition to abolish it; "I am fighting for women's rights . . . but not for me, not even for my daughter; I hope that my granddaughter will have full rights and respect" (Taveau, 1999: 141).

The Family Code is by far the most preoccupying women's issue in Algeria. Currently there is a project to reform civil codes and procedures, which Justice Minister Ahmed Ouyahia has said will certainly include amendments to the Family Code ("Codes civil et de procédures civiles," 2001), so women are mobilizing around the country. Yamina Bettahar (2000: 55) believes that President Chadli's first attempt to pass the code in 1981 gave birth to Algerian feminism and the demand for full citizenship for women, and led the *mujahidat* to question the unconditional support they had always accorded the FLN. Algerian women place so much emphasis on reforming the code because, as Bettahar explains (60-61),

it reveals the failure to distinguish between politics and religion. The 1984 Family Code exposed secret negotiations between political and religious leaders, and the government's willingness to sacrifice women's rights in order to stay in power. This pattern continued in the 1990s: for example, when Liamine Zeroual won the presidential election in 1995, he felt obliged to please the Islamist Mahfoud Nahnah, among the runners-up, on such issues as the promotion of traditional Islamic family law and the promotion of Arabic over French (Kaplan, 1999). Messaoudi (1995: 188) has said that like every totalitarian movement the Islamists want absolute power over society, and they have understood perfectly that such power passes through control of women's sexuality, which Mediterranean patriarchal society (and the Family Code) facilitate.

Study after study confirms how dramatically Algerian women's attitudes and lives have changed—in the later age at first marriage (26 years); in their use of contraception (60 percent of couples); and in their desire to give birth to daughters. Oufriha (1999), a university economist, found that 90 percent of women rejected marriage before age 18 for their daughters; 85 percent believed that their daughters and sons should have the same amount of education; 79 percent wanted their daughters to have a university education; 90 percent no longer opposed paid work for their daughters.

Dalila Djerbal (interview, Algiers, 26 April), a university sociologist, confirmed these findings and added that the lack of housing had created new compromises and arrangements, which were departures from the norm of the husband lodging his wife and children. If a wife has an apartment and her husband does not, they are likely to move into her home. Djerbal also said that economic necessity has pushed women into income-generating activity and that the increasingly high rates of literacy and schooling had prepared them for the workforce. In 1995-1997, 24 percent of women were in the adult labor force (UN, 2000: 144). In a study of 555 women 16 to 40 years old in Algiers and Oran,



Remaoun (2000: 83) found that more than half of women work in the informal sector, and most of the women she interviewed did not face family opposition to their activity.

Women hold 5 of 380 seats in the National Assembly (APN); Louisa Hannoune is the only woman to lead a political party (Workers Party); and women held only 2 of 40 ministerial posts in 1999. Nonetheless, the trend to women's participation in public life, which I see as a gain from the Algerian war and women's roles in it, seems irreversible. Overturning the Family Code, which deprives women of equality in their private lives, appears to be just a matter of time; Justice Minister Ouyahia recently affirmed the government's promise to abrogate the code (Ababsa, 2002).

The armed Islamists have lost popular support, but it remains to be seen whether the Islamist parties that do not espouse violence will gain or lose at the polls. The attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, have spurred the major industrial nations to fight terrorism, including providing assistance to the Algerian government by denying European havens to GIA and GSPC terrorists (Agence France Presse, 2001). But it is the economy, currently undergoing rapid liberalization, which will ultimately determine the fate of women and men in Algeria (Melbouci, 2001).

Women are represented on the commission to reform education (Mahfoud Bennoune, interview, Algiers, 16 April 2001). Knowing the difference free education has made to women's literacy, which has risen from under 10 percent to over 60 percent in the past 40 years, women parliamentarians like Khalida Mes-saoudi (interview, Algiers, 24 April 2001) are worried that poverty is forcing many parents to keep their daughters out of school because there is not enough money to buy them proper clothes. *Mujahidat* like Myriam Benhamza (interview, Algiers, 24 April 2001) worry that there are no more free school lunches and that children arrive hungry and do not bring food to school. The Association El Wasl, which works with the survivors of the massacre at Hai-Rais, has raised funds to supply free lunches to primary

school children (interview with Mme. Malek, Mme. Samson, and Mme. Zaibek, 18 April 2001).

The National Institute of Public Health is supporting a study of violence against women by SOS Femmes en détresse and is currently carrying out a multidisciplinary project on violence and social change to survey suffering, institutional violence, family violence, and a woman's changed identity following the death of a husband and subsequent loss of status (interviews with Dr. Doudja Hamouda, Meriem Bellala, Algiers, 17 and 23 April 2001).

### *Lessons*

If the Islamists' objective was to persuade errant Muslims to follow new religious teachings, one could have expected reeducation camps for nonconformist women and girls. But it would seem, as Messaoudi believes, that their purpose is total population control as a necessary step to seizing control of the state. Their novel interpretation of Islam, which draws on the teachings of the medieval Syrian Sunni scholar Ibn Taymiyya as reworked in the twentieth century by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (Armstrong, 2000), gave the Islamists the tools they needed for social control.<sup>5</sup> If women could be locked in their homes under the vigilance of male family members, half the population would be under Islamist control.

And initially the Islamists were successful, for any number of reasons: many Algerians were deeply discontented with FLN rule and government corruption; many were willing to attribute the decline in living standards to the moral failures of Algerian society; many unemployed men were willing to believe that women were holding prominent jobs that "belonged" to men; and many jobless young men, angry at the lack of opportunity in legitimate occupations and already trading illegally in contraband, were willing recruits to armed groups that offered them employment, money, prestige, and power (Martinez, 1998). The *fatwas* that reg-

ulated every aspect of daily life, from the most public to the most private behavior, were instruments to redesign an advanced, sophisticated society, which had achieved so much in the 30 years since independence.

The Algerian model of Islamist struggle for control is heroic and more powerful than ever in the world of Islam (Carlier, 1999: 88). From Sudan to Bosnia and from Morocco to Afghanistan, this model restores prestige, confidence, and pride to those who have felt humiliated and wronged. In Algeria the Islamists have consciously reactivated, reformulated, and reinvented memories of the war for independence; one can see this in the very name they have chosen, Islamic Salvation Front, which recalls the National Liberation Front. The heroic model gives to disciples of difference (that is, those who insist that “we in the Arabo-Islamic world are different from you in the West”) a positive new identity in the mirror. In its most nihilistic expression, it draws off and channels poor delinquents, the dishonest and idle unemployed, as well as able black market traders, into the armed bands that recruit the most violent dissidents of the FIS.

A final reason for the Islamists’ initial success was external support: the FIS is part of a pan-Islamic movement, and the armed Islamist groups received training from Al Qaeda and financial support from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere (Rashid, 2001). It was this combined force that defeated Algerian women. When the tide of public opinion turned against the Islamists—in Algeria from 1994 to 1995 and abroad after the massacres in 1997—both local and international support was withdrawn, allowing the military to gain control and Algerian women to voice their demands and be heard once more.

#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Independent journalists like *El Watan's* Salima Tlemçani who visited these sites immediately afterward (and who regularly went to morgues to count bodies) maintain, contrary to accusations by Nesroulah Yous (2000) and several international human rights organizations—Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (Messaoudi, quoted in Taveau, 1999, 156)—that these massacres were certainly the work of Islamist terrorists and not government forces (Salima Tlemçani, interview, 22 April 2001).

<sup>2</sup>Islamism is a political movement and is not the same as the religion of Islam. Imache and Nour (1994: 26-27) make the following distinctions in the Algerian context: traditionalists are concerned only with normative behavioral values; fundamentalists, who oppose traditionalists as superstitious, want to purify Islam by returning to the sources—the Koran and the Sunna—but they do not confront secular authorities, and they see the West as a model for meeting the many socioeconomic needs of poor Muslim societies; Islamists want to seize political power and recognize state power as a necessary step in realizing their global project of Muslim civilization.

<sup>3</sup>Rashid (2001: 111-112) has an interesting explanation for the extreme violence against Afghan women, saying that it was bred in all-male schools and training camps and helped troop morale; he seems to think that eventually, the very tight restrictions on women came to represent what made the Taliban movement distinct and unique: an amalgam of Pushtun law and Islamic law. The violent Islamist practices in Algeria appear to have been imported from Afghanistan; Algerian women were always commenting to me how foreign they seemed.

<sup>4</sup>For a very different reading of these events, see Winter (2001).

<sup>5</sup>Qutb has been called the most influential advocate in modern times of jihad, or Islamic holy war, and the chief developer of doctrines that legitimize violent resistance to regimes whose implementation of Islamic precepts the Islamists judge to be imperfect. See Irwin (2001). In the 1960s and 1970s, when many Afghan religious scholars came under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb's ideas attracted particular interest in the faculty of religious law in Kabul.

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