From women's radical nationalism to the restoration of patriarchy (1959–62)

The final stages of the war from late 1959 until early 1962 saw the most overt and radical phase of women's nationalist activism and evident signs of the failure of the emancipation agenda to make any significant or durable impact on Muslim women. However, this apparent sign of female radicalisation proved to be illusory since at a more hidden, but potent level, it was paralleled during the final years of the war by two developments that in the long term were to carry enormous negative consequences for women in post-independence society. The first of these was the underlying strength and continuity of conservative Islamic religion and culture that was to shape the post-war political order, and secondly, the massive disruption and challenge to patriarchy caused by war-time conditions that determined males at independence to reassert their domination over women and youth with a vengeance.

The failure of the EMSI and the emancipation apparatus

As has been seen throughout this study, the emancipation strategy consisted of a package of different forms of intervention, from unveiling and propaganda campaigns, to mobile socio-medical teams, improved access to schooling for girls, youth training programmes, the joint European–Muslim women's circles, to the granting of voting rights and promulgation of the 1959 personal status law. This emancipation, for a variety of reasons, made very little durable impact on the bed-rock of Algerian society: as Omar Carlier notes, 'If the weight of colonial history is enormous, if the responsibility of the former coloniser for the post-1962 order is not insignificant . . . the internal dynamic of the country is far more decisive'.¹

The scale of SAS, EMSI and MSF operations was so thin on the ground, under-funded and fragile that they barely scratched the surface of the enormous weight of social and economic problems faced by a desperately poor and traumatised population. The key ideological and

transformative intention of the army, to win Algerian women over to a French model of *civilisation*, had little impact since it was associated with the occupying power, and the FLN, which in general terms had mass popular support, directly opposed and countered the enterprise. Statistically the number of women who became associated with the activities of the local women's circles on a regular basis remained infinitely small. For example, most women scattered through the huge territory of the Aumale sector had no circle which they could attend, and those who did, mainly in the small town of Aumale, represented only one or two women in every thousand. Moreover, as it became slowly more evident from late 1959 that an eventual French retreat was likely, so it became more dangerous for young women, as well as for the extended family group to which they belonged, to be seen to become too closely associated with the French. Since women were always regarded as virtual minors, being under the control of males, such association threatened to jeopardise the entire kin group, both in relation to immediate FLN violence and its survival and status in the eventual post-independence order.

It is undoubtedly the case that many hundreds of thousands of women, especially in the *bled*, the camps and urban slums, did have recourse to the welfare operations of the army, especially where the health and well-being of their own children was concerned (treatment of trachoma, inoculation programmes, supply of medicines, food and clothing). The French army misinterpreted the huge queues of women that often came from miles around to attend the sessions of the mobile medical teams as concrete evidence of turning the tide against the FLN 'terrorists' who, it was thought, looked on helplessly. But after the over-optimistic 'revolutionary' phase of emancipation (1958–59), army intelligence reports began to show a much more sober or pessimistic assessment of French influence on Muslim women, and in particular an underlying consensus that Algerians held a highly instrumental attitude to the strategies of 'contact'. Women, it was noted, turned out en masse to gain material goods or services, but increasingly did not even attempt to disguise their lack of interest or open hostility towards ideological propaganda and the broader political goals of the French project. The EMSI of the Oran region reported in December 1960, 'the female Muslim population, especially in the *douars*, is more interested in the small and immediate material benefits they can gain from these contacts and meetings than by the idea of social emancipation that we try to teach them'.² The French army, after the radical phase of emancipation, moved towards a more sober assessment that any meaningful transformation of women's lives would require not years, but decades of reform, particularly via the

long-term impacts of universal education. General Challe, in his important directive *Action sur les milieux féminins en Algérie* of March 1960, noted, 'The evolution of the female milieu is a long-term project since it involves a transformation of deeply rooted customs. It will be the fruit of the work of several generations'.³ However, the time-scale of the emancipation campaign was at most a mere six years (1957–62), during the final two years of which the French were merely treading water and preparing for withdrawal.⁴

The one exception to this pattern of minimal or superficial impacts of French ideology concerns the numerically very small number of girls or young women who came from relatively well-off families and had received a sound education to secondary level. The urban middle-class elites were deeply divided politically, culturally and linguistically between a francophone and francophile strata that had been educated within the French lycée system and were closely tied to the colonial state as junior civil servants, teachers, lawyers and technicians, and a class of Arab speakers who, educated in the reformist *médresa* and in the universities of Tunisia (Zitouna) and Egypt (El Azhar), remained deeply resistant to French secularism and were often excluded from the rewards of government employment.⁵ One of the tragic consequences of the Algerian war of decolonisation, which also shared the features of a civil war, was that the numerically small, educated elite, which was potentially so valuable to the future independent society, was split down the middle. The political decisions of young women tended to reflect their location in families that stood on one side or another of this divide. The *évoluées* who had received an education within the French system to secondary or university level, and who had absorbed the intellectual and cultural traditions of the French humanities and science, and the universal values that underpinned them, embraced emancipation with fervour: on the other side stood the 'Arabo-Muslim' nationalists who fought for an integral Algerian identity. In many respects the two opposing groups shared identical visions of women in the good society, a modernist future of universal education, access to employment, and full political participation: but such a potential for unity was over-ridden by the all-consuming immediacy of the battle for independence or a French alliance.

Historians, as Ryme Seferdjeli notes, have neglected the study of the Francophile *évoluées*, not only because they were on the losing side and therefore of little interest to Algerian and left-wing historiography, but also because they could be type-caste as traitors to the nationalist cause and lackeys of the repressive occupying forces.⁶ However, this group – like that of the pre-war JUDMA (see chapter 1) – supported the reformist

side of French emancipation and aspired to a liberal, progressive agenda on women's rights that was not dissimilar to that which was to be later held by many Algerian feminists from the 1980s onwards. The *évoluées*, symbolised by the *Secrétaire d'Etat* Nafissa Sid Cara, did not hold to a militant secularising tendency as the FLN claimed, as puppets of French cultural imperialism, but sought to support a body of reform that was compatible with the Koran and a modern Muslim society through the tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). However, the *évoluées*, who were viewed by the FLN as 'collaborators', became increasingly nervous as a French retreat approached and which, noted an officer, 'probably means for them a brutal return to an ancestral way of life that they do not want at any price'.⁷

Very little is known about the political fate of this educated pro-French elite at independence: many of those whose families were closely linked to the French army and administration would have departed for France; some may even have been killed by mobs; but the majority probably survived, along with the pro-French families to which they belonged, by either a last minute conversion to independence (sometimes named the *martiens*) or by keeping their heads down. But overall it can be assumed that they were excluded from the official post-independence women's organisations since these tended to promote those who carried the symbolic prestige of FLN war-time militants and who were vetted and registered by the *Ministère des Moudjahidine*.⁸ The women's movement post-1962 was considerably weakened by the loss of a significant portion of the tiny class of secondary educated and more politicised women who might otherwise have been expected to play a key activist role.

The radicalisation of nationalist women, 1959–62

The adverse conditions under which the French emancipation campaign began to labour from 1959 onwards can be in part related to a deep shift in the political balance of power away from the French army to the FLN. Relatively little is known about the role of Algerian women during the final stages of the war, in part because the oral evidence gathered by Danièle Amrane and others has been largely based on the testament of the educated *moudjahidate*, most of whom had been killed or arrested by 1958⁹ or were removed abroad by order of the FLN in late 1957 and early 1958. As the tide began to turn against *Algérie française*, a process that was marked most clearly by de Gaulle's speech of 16 September 1959 on 'self-determination', and signs increased that the FLN, even if it had lost the military battle, would win an eventual political victory, so the self-confidence of the settler population ebbed away.

Algerian women, especially in the bigger towns, sensing this demoralisation, began to assert an open defiance of the French authorities. For example, on the anniversary of the events of '13 May' the army and government attempted to re-enact the hugely successful Forum mass demonstrations. The conservative newspaper *L'Echo d'Alger* published numerous photographs of columns of veiled Algerian women under the rubric, 'Muslim women come out from the dark. For the first time, their faces revealed, they enter into public life'.¹⁰ But most of the colonial press admitted that the attempt to recapture the heady spirit of May 1958 had failed and Europeans seemed dispirited or lacking in enthusiasm. Most telling of all was the presence of Algerian women counter-demonstrators who had the extraordinary courage, since they ran the very real risk of being lynched, to mount a protest in the midst of tens of thousands of Europeans. One woman waved 'a *fellagha* flag', until it was torn from her hands, while a group shouted 'give us back our prisoners'.¹¹ In a situation in which Algerian men were absent, often in underground FLN networks or in detention, or in which their open protest would usually lead to arrest or physical violence, women began to replace men in the sphere of public militancy and street demonstrations. The army commander at Tizi-Ouzou reported, 'Very often . . . the male population is happy to maintain a glum passivity while the women show a violent hostility, even attempting to engage in aggression against the forces of order'.¹²

From late 1959 onwards such public signs of protest or disaffection began to multiply. As we have seen (chapter 7), the EMSI and MSF circles were faced with signs of growing and overt political opposition, especially among young women who made clear that their sole reason for attending activities was to profit from material benefits and to gain access to such advantages as sewing machines, clothing and semolina. The army recorded a growing volume of small, but significant acts of resistance: for example, it was not unusual to overhear Algerian women saying to European women, 'We will chuck you out and we will have fine dresses and beautiful houses'.¹³ An intelligence report commented, 'the EMSI have noted a deterioration in the climate, much difficulty in getting women to meetings, and think that it is most urgent to deal with the young girls who are more affected by the enemy propaganda. During the organised visits to the beaches (an army chore) they insist on singing in Arabic and when they do, start singing rebel songs'.¹⁴

Evidence of the extent to which young women, especially of Algiers, were increasingly drawn into militant nationalist activism was provided during the violent street clashes of 10–12 December 1960 which marked, in the words of Ben Khedda, the 'decisive turning-point of

the war'.¹⁵ On 9 December de Gaulle arrived in Algeria for a tour of the major cities, but this triggered massive street violence by extreme right-wing settler organisations against both the security forces and the Algerian population. The SAU attempted to orchestrate pro-Gaullist demonstrations by Algerian inhabitants of the Casbah and popular quarters, but this went badly wrong when thousands poured out from the slums waving green-and-white nationalist flags and chanting 'Abbas au pouvoir', 'Libérez Ben Bella' and 'Algérie musulmane'. In the ensuing repression, during which both the *pieds-noirs* and the army fired at the crowds, an estimated 120 Algerians died.¹⁶ The crucial political importance of these four days of rioting lay in the fact that de Gaulle became convinced that *Algérie française* and the integration of the two communities was an impossible dream, and recognised that the FLN constituted a legitimate expression of the popular will of the Algerian people with whom he would need to negotiate sooner or later.

In a society in which women were normally excluded from public spaces and the political sphere arrogated by men, women now came to play an unusually prominent role during these spontaneous mass demonstrations, helping to make dozens of FLN flags, or taking the lead in the advancing columns, dressed in the national colours and galvanising the crowds by singing the Algerian anthem. The SAU officer for the Bas Casbah reported on the 12 December: 'Demonstration Rue de la Lyre, headed by a woman carrying an infant and a rebel flag, dispersed by a charge of the Zouaves (Fifth Company)'.¹⁷ Many of these young women were killed or injured, including a twelve-year-old girl struck by the police while shouting 'Vive l'Algérie algérienne' who later died in hospital.¹⁸ The funeral of this girl was, against the Muslim custom of interment as an all-male affair, organised almost solely by women who turned it into a mass nationalist protest, to which the army responded by further gunfire.¹⁹ Djamila Briki, who took part in these events, explained how the political mobilisation of women in Algiers first developed among the hundreds who gathered daily outside the prisons to bring food and clothing to arrested husbands, brothers and sons, or who attended trials and provided mutual support in the face of execution orders. From this solidarity of women, most of whom were veiled, illiterate and had previously rarely left the confines of the home, emerged a movement that demanded improved prison conditions and visiting rights, and that on occasion resulted in full-scale riots outside the prison gates.²⁰

The mobilisation of women during the final stages of the war was in particular a revolt of teenage girls and young married women. Historically, independence or liberation movements, from the Kenyan 'Mau Mau' revolt of the 1950s to the Soweto rising of 1976, have

frequently found a strong support base among the disaffected youth of sprawling shantytowns, often rooted in youth sub-cultures, street gangs and anti-authoritarian 'delinquency'.²¹ In the case of Algeria, there has been little research on the links between the nationalist movement and the rapid increase in alienated urban youth, a consequence of the combination of extraordinary demographic expansion, military deracination of rural populations, migration of refugees into the northern towns, and lack of educational and employment opportunities.²² The reports of the Algiers SAU provide a detailed picture of growing official concern at the tidal wave of refugees pouring into the shantytowns and which was overwhelming attempts to provide welfare, health care, housing and employment.²³ The FLN-led boycott of schools and subsequent pupil strikes left thousands of disaffected youths free to congregate in the street, where they, rather like the Palestinian *Intifada*, harassed the forces of order or collaborationist demonstrations through stone-throwing.²⁴ There are indications that teenage girls or young women shared in this radicalisation of youth and there existed a growing political and generation gap between them and older, more conservative women. A Fifth Bureau report noted instances of growing hostility by boys and girls, influenced by the FLN, towards their mothers for listening to French propaganda and, 'threaten their mother when she comes into the house by saying she has been "to listen to propaganda" and they are happy to think she will be beaten'.²⁵ When Lieutenant Morel chased and arrested a girl for carrying a nationalist flag, older women disapproved of her actions, saying to him, 'Well done, we've had enough', suggesting a tension between the younger radicals and older women.

What the older, more conservative women resented was the extent to which young women, in the absence of males and their authoritarian control, seized the opportunity to invade public spaces and to engage in highly expressive acts of militancy. Djamila Briki comments on the demonstrations of 11 December, 'It was a battle by women: there were some men, especially the young and elderly, but compared to the women one could count them on one hand. Women were in the majority at Climat de France . . . it was an explosion: there was shouting, the *you-yous*, the veils torn up to make flags'.²⁶ The SAU officer for the Bas Casbah, Captain Bapst, also remarked on the role of women in his sector, 'Women appeared at the windows and on the terraces. They uttered violent "*you-yous*" which spread throughout the quarter . . . The demonstrations were made up largely of youths and women: adult male workers were in a minority'.²⁷ This spontaneous street action significantly escaped the control of the FLN, which began to fear a dynamic rank-and-file movement that threatened to challenge its authoritarian

leadership,²⁸ a challenge that was all the more disquieting since it simultaneously subverted patriarchal authority.

To many journalists and outside observers in the summer of 1962 it looked as if the rising tide of female militancy, the sheer energy and revolutionary élan of the populace, would inevitably result in a radical transformation of the position of Muslim women in the new society. The elation of the crowds on independence day, 3 July 1962, that seemed to promise the dawn of a new age, was captured by a number of contemporary photographers, as in Marc Riboud's picture of a young, unveiled woman leaning through the open window of a passing car waving the national flag. She looks straight at the camera, delighted, dark glasses clutched in her left hand and the caption below reads, 'In the centre of Algiers women bursting with joy at the prospect of the liberation of women'.²⁹ However, as the future was soon to reveal, the nationalist euphoria and energy of mid-1962 did not translate into a vibrant post-independence women's movement that was able to play a major political role in the construction of the new Algerian society. Indeed, Algeria stands today as one of the most remarkable instances of a huge gap between the often-claimed credentials of a 'revolutionary', 'socialist' and emancipation movement, and the negative, long-term repressive nature of a post-colonial state that imposed a conservative agenda on women and imprisoned them as the virtual minors of men. This anti-feminist politics stood out in even starker relief because Algerian women combatants had achieved international acclaim as *the* symbol of a fierce and engaged militancy, the archetypal heroines of anti-imperialism and anti-colonial liberation. So dramatic was the hiatus between the glory of the war-time *moudjahidate* and post-independence exclusion of women from political life that Palestinian women involved in the later *Intifada* treated Algeria as an exemplary warning of what they should themselves avoid in their own national struggle.³⁰

Why Algeria, which during the 1960s shone on the international stage as a beacon for anti-colonial, socialist and 'Third World' liberation movements, should have so singularly failed in the area of women's rights presents a key problematic that has long exercised historians, political scientists and contemporary feminists. To provide a complete answer would require a further volume on post-independence Algeria which is beyond the scope of this study. Here the focus is specifically on the impact of the War of Independence in shaping the post-colonial order and the long-term failure of a progressive women's movement. The remaining part of this chapter examines two key elements of the war period that were to carry negative implications for the post-independence order: firstly, the deep continuity

in conservative religious tradition and secondly, linked to this, the disruption of patriarchal family structures which weakened male control over women and which they were determined to reverse once independence was achieved.

The roots of populist Islamic nationalism during the War of Independence

Although many commentators have dated the penetration of radical Islamist currents into the FLN regime from the 1970s onwards, this happened in *some* areas of policy-making from at least 1957–58. Socialist or Marxist interpretations of the Algerian War of Independence as a ‘revolutionary’ struggle tended during the 1960s and 1970s to underplay the centrality of religion in populist nationalism. FLN documents show that the organisation, wherever it could establish a presence at the local level both in the *maquis* as well as in the big cities, including Paris, asserted a strict respect for religious practice and a puritanical form of justice based on Islamic principles (*sharia*). Although the FLN assumed a hostile stance towards traditional religious leaders (*imams*, *sheikhs*, *marabouts*) who supported the French, and was prepared to assassinate them, it was willing to integrate such men into its own apparatus where possible, especially as they might retain wide influence and prestige among local people. In Wilaya I (south Constantinois), for example, each of the six sub-divisions (*Mintaq*) had its own Muslim justice and the minutes of a Wilaya level council of the *cadis* in October 1960 show them making agreement on regulations relating to everything from property disputes, regulation of inheritance and contracts, to issues of marriage, divorce and dowry payments. The FLN *cadis* in Wilaya I exercised a general surveillance over the moral life of the community, ‘they lead the people in the path of goodness, stop that which is evil’, ensured provision of mosque buildings for Koranic schools and prayer, and recruited *imams* and teachers.³¹

Such a minute regulation of religious life and Islamic justice was not restricted to the illiterate peasant and nomadic populations of the interior, but extended into the shantytowns of the major cities in both Algeria and France. For example, the Paris police captured in October 1959 in Seine-et-Oise an extremely detailed instruction, ‘based on the commands of the Holy Koran’, to the FLN *Comités de Justice* on how they were to adjudicate on matters of marriage and divorce.³² In the *maquis* the ALN commanders, many of whom had received a religious education in Koranic schools and *médersas*, often imposed strict religious observance and a rigid control of moral behaviour among

both the soldiers and the local population, backed up by draconian punishment.³³

A number of factors contributed to such a powerful religious culture. Firstly, the origins and long-term evolution of Algerian nationalism, particularly under the leadership of Messali Hadj between 1926 and 1954, was built around a populist discourse and symbolism that was deeply religious. When ALN commanders, who were in many instances of urban origin and education, first arrived in the maquis they came into close daily contact with rural societies that were barely touched by secularism and regulated by age-old customary practices and beliefs. Even the minority of ALN leaders who were personally attached to a more socialist or secular vision recognised that any revolutionary assault on peasant beliefs would be counterproductive. The FLN was far more inclined to adapt its message to the deeply embedded traditional *mentalités* of the peasantry, and the social structures that underpinned it, than to engage in the kind of Bolshevik onslaught on Islam that the Soviet Union unleashed in Central Asia during the 1920s. Indeed, given the enormous difficulties that Algerian nationalism faced in developing a single, binding ideology that could over-ride spatial and cultural fragmentation, the competing loyalties based on region, language and clan endemic in society, religion and the shared community of faith (*umma*) offered the strongest cement.

What this meant in practice was that as the FLN began to infiltrate in the early stages of the war into rural communities where its own position was tenuous it tended to follow a quite pragmatic, rather than overly ideological line in relation to the existing political elites, the assembly of village elders (*djemâa*), and the 'big-men' of the *grandes familles* who carried considerable influence within local clientele and clan networks. Since in the initial stages of FLN penetration into new rural areas the number of ALN militants was frequently very small and fragile in relation to the tens of thousands of inhabitants they were seeking to control, it was more advantageous to co-opt local power-brokers, even when they came from conservative elites (wealthy landowners, *caïds*), than to alienate or assassinate them.

A good example of this process relates to the Ourabah family, the most prestigious and influential *grande famille* in the lower Soummam valley, headed by the ex-deputy Abdelmadjid Ourabah who held quasi-feudal protective powers (*'aiyanaiyya*) over several Kabyles villages. The ALN commander Amirouche tried on several occasions to win the Ourabah clan over to the FLN side, and it was only when this failed that this opened the way to the tragic massacre of Melouza, of villages that were thought to have rallied to the French army or the MNA.³⁴

While the ALN was quite prepared to use terrorism against its opponents, in general it preferred where possible to work with pre-existing political or clan networks: Mintaqa commanders were instructed to use methods, when making contact with civilian populations, 'stamped with a total courtesy', including towards any 'member of the *djemâa* or tribal council'.³⁵ The model commander of the Wilaya was a leader who should ensure that his soldiers 'must always respect the people', particularly as 'an abject colonialism' had kept them in ignorance and, '*maraboutisme*, for example, must be fought intelligently. It is stupid, even criminal, to treat people roughly'.³⁶ An ALN report noted that the local five-man committees which it set up to run village life, the 'People's Assemblies', tended to be based on the old *djemâa* and, as such, 'are still composed of wealthy and elderly individuals', or even of individuals 'who in the past served a colonialism of which the people still carry the scars'.³⁷ There are signs of a 're-Islamisation' of Algerian society at grass-roots level as the poor, faced with an apocalyptic slaughter and destruction, turned towards a millenial faith or ecstatic escapism. Mouloud Feraoun reports, with some irony, how the peasants in his home village of Tizi-Hibel were impressed by the first mass meetings addressed by an FLN leader: 'their leader was wonderful. He began reciting from the Koran. A *fatiha* entirely done in Arabic. You should have heard his pronunciation, his tone, and his zeal . . . And so, the people of Tizi-Hibel, once the most villainous on the surface of the earth, have found their faith again; they are now paying the salary of a muezzin and frequent the mosque assiduously. God is great!'³⁸

It would be a mistake to fall into the trap of assuming a simple equation between poverty and radicalism, that the more oppressed the peasantry, the stronger would be their determination to fight against the colonial system. Although there has been very little investigation of the class basis of the FLN and nationalist mobilisation in the rural interior where 80 per cent of the population lived, the evidence suggests that the core militants came not from the great mass of the landless poor, but from a strata of slightly better-off independent landowners and shopkeepers, craftsmen, teachers and petty entrepreneurs who lived in the small towns and commercial centres of the *bled*. Michel Launay, in his study of a wine-producing region of Oran, noted hostility between the category of *petit-bourgeoisie* that had access to education and the egalitarian religious ideology of the *Ulema* and provided the cadres of the FLN, and the mass of impoverished day-labourers who resented this elite.³⁹ Eric Wolf noted that poor peasants or landless labourers have often lacked the tactical power to challenge oppression and were 'often merely passive spectators of political struggles or long[ed] for the

sudden advent of a millennium'. By contrast a more independent strata of middle, 'free' or 'tactically mobile' peasants led the path to revolution. But by a curious paradox this class was also the bearer of tradition and 'it is precisely this culturally conservative stratum which is the most instrumental in dynamiting the peasant social order'.⁴⁰

While at the higher levels of the ALN and FLN a younger generation of militants tended to displace pre-war Algerian political elites,⁴¹ this leadership recognised the sheer weight of the conservative religious, cultural and social values that permeated the grass-roots nationalist movement. The Algerian War did not constitute a classic revolutionary movement like that in France in 1789 and Russia in 1917 that sought to sweep away the fabric of the old society. This continuity in the deeper level of culture and the matrix of family and clan life in which it was embedded was to carry fundamental consequences for the position of women.

The war-time challenge to male domination and patriarchy

The post-independence Algerian state prevaricated over emancipation and reform of family law because it recognised the enormous and almost immovable weight of patriarchy, of an embedded system of family structures, sentiment and power that would be difficult to transform without creating dangerous political opposition. Mounira Charrad has, to date, provided the most cogent explanation for the post-independence failure of Algeria to elaborate a family code that would match the needs of a rapidly changing society and bring Muslim women fully into the *cit*. In a comparative study of state formation in the three Maghrebi nations, she argues that the very different outcomes in family legislation between the progressive Tunisian code of 1956, the conservative Moroccan code of 1958, and the peculiar 'stalled' situation in Algeria that lasted until 1984, can be explained by the relative ability of central governments to exert political domination over traditional kin or clan-like bases of power that defended the most conservative readings of Maliki law. Charrad provides a useful macro-level hypothesis for an understanding of post-independence Algeria: the newly formed state showed deep contradictions in its drive to assert national integration over and against localised or regionalist interests, while simultaneously allowing space for kin or clan-based associations which paralysed moves to legislate on family law and to assert control over the private domestic sphere.⁴²

Charrad's analysis, while providing a very useful model as a point of departure, remains at a quite general level and does not identify how or why 'tribal' structures were able to remain so powerful over and against

the encroachment of the centralising state. What made it possible for socio-cultural patterns of male domination over women, particularly within the family group, to survive through two decades of enormous political and economic crisis and change between 1954 and the late 1970s? Part of the answer to this question can be found in two interlinked phases: first, the massive social disruption of the war dislocated the family group and created a deep crisis for Algerian male virility by temporarily marginalising adults and subverting their 'traditional' role and honour as protectors of women and children. In a second phase that followed independence men, many of whom returned to family life from the maquis, prison camps and French factories, sought immediately to reassert their authority with a vengeance and to restructure patriarchal arrangements.

In the first phase we examine the enormous scale of the war-time dislocation of the family group and its internal structures. The French army programme of 'pacification' involved a massive uprooting of the peasantry from the mountainous interior, the destruction of thousands of hamlets, and relocation into militarised encampments. Between two and three million people, half of the rural population, were definitively torn away from the land and dumped in camps that, in many instances, formed the nucleus of post-war urban settlements (see chapter 6). The General Inspectorate for Resettlement reported how, in response to forced displacement by the army, the population descended like a torrent into the valleys where they were herded into barbed-wire compounds, without even basic housing. 'The people then re-house themselves with relatives or strangers (who hire their filthy huts out at exorbitant prices), are squashed ten to a room, living in a state of promiscuity and disgusting filth . . . such a dislocation of rural society was not foreseen'.⁴³ In addition a quarter of a million refugees sought safety across the borders in Morocco and Tunisia,⁴⁴ or fled the insecurity and hunger of the interior for the shantytowns of the northern littoral. The population of some towns doubled in size between 1954 and 1966, including that of Constantine which went from 111,000 to 240,000.⁴⁵ Most of this refugee population did not regain their villages of origin on independence since the ties to the land had been definitively fractured, indeed the departure of close to a million *pieds-noirs* during 1962–63 further accelerated rural–urban migration as Algerians moved quickly to occupy empty European properties in the towns.⁴⁶ The process of *déracinement* meant that family units were in many instances torn away from the extended kin networks of the village which had in the past structured local, endogamous marriage alliances, and forced into urban zones in which they had to share housing and communal space with strangers.

At the same time displaced family units were stripped of their 'natural' protectors in a time of danger: fathers, brothers and sons. The war was marked by the massive departure of younger, active males from rural society who joined the FLN in the maquis or abroad in Tunisia, Morocco, France and elsewhere, or migrated to the northern cities and to metropolitan France to find employment and to escape violence and forced recruitment by the French army or war-bands (MNA, ALN, Bellounists) that competed for manpower. An approximate estimate indicates that up to a half of all able-bodied men of working age (fifteen to fifty years) would have been either killed or absent from their families for years on end.⁴⁷ This meant that in many villages, especially in Kabylia, populations were reduced to women, children and the elderly, a society of 'women without men'. By this term the anthropologist Willy Jansen refers to a key element of Algerian socio-religious culture which regarded celibacy of all adults, but in particular of women, as reprehensible and a threat to good order. Women who lived on their own, or headed households in which adult men were absent, were regarded with suspicion and hostility as a grave danger to the sexual order, and opprobrium extended to the growing number of poor widows and repudiated women who were forced to work as domestic servants, seasonal agricultural labourers, or on the margins of society as prostitutes, bath-house attendants, musicians and washers of the dead.⁴⁸

Although some contemporary observers argued that Algerian women, in the absence of husbands, remained firmly under the power of older males (grandfathers, uncles), most agreed that women had to cope without men and gained experience of a new-found autonomy.⁴⁹ Quite typical is a report of the French commander of Azazga in 1959: 'on a large part of the territory villages are practically empty of the active male population, the men being either in France or in the ranks of the rebels'.⁵⁰ By 1958 Mouloud Feraoun was noting in his diary how Kabyles women were taking over the kinds of work previously strictly allocated to men, carrying the wounded on their backs, burying the dead, collecting money, standing guard, working the fields. He speculated on signs of a radical transformation of gender roles:

Perhaps a new world is being constructed out of ruins, a world where women will be wearing the trousers, literally and figuratively, a world where what remains of the old traditions that adhere to the inviolability of women, both literally and figuratively, will be viewed as a nuisance and swept away. This constitutes a form of brilliant revenge for all those peaceful attempts at emancipation that were generally resisted as not at all helpful for the unfortunate woman on the road to liberty. Tomorrow, the

women of Algeria will no longer have any reason to envy other women, except, perhaps, education.⁵¹

In the second phase that commenced with the coming of independence in mid-1962, Algerian men immediately sought to reassert their lost authority over women, to return to the status quo ante bellum. Part of this was fuelled by a deep psychological *ressentiment* and even revanchism against women that arose from the feeling of humiliation, anxiety and lost honour experienced by many men in their inability to fulfil their protective role towards their wives, daughters and female relatives during the chaos of war.⁵² There are close parallels between Algeria and the situation in metropolitan France during the Liberation when men, humiliated and ‘feminised’ by the defeat of 1940, the *exode*, and mass internment, and challenged by the war-time role of women in the work force and the Resistance, sought to assert their masculinity through the ritual shaving of collaborators (*femmes tondues*).⁵³ Indeed, since hundreds of thousands of Algerian men had lived through and witnessed the Liberation in France at first hand, it seems likely that the hunting down and violence against Algerian women ‘collaborators’ in 1962 was a symbolic replay of August 1944.⁵⁴ While French men had sought to assert themselves against the super-virility of German soldiers, and then of American GI ‘liberators’ embraced by young women on tanks,⁵⁵ so Algerian men in July 1962 could finally act to erase the experience and memory of Bigeard’s crack paratroopers parading machine-like through the streets of Algiers. But in the case of Algerian males the psychological scars of sexual humiliation were far deeper than anything experienced in France because of the way in which a colonial army engaged in actions that represented a deliberate, frontal assault on the fundamental values, the sacrosanct respect of female seclusion and male honour. While the psychological damage of such a subversion could be, to some extent, mitigated by the thought that this was an inescapable fact of war that could be heroically born by the national community, male insecurity was further deepened by the inability of men, in a situation of massive deracination and endemic poverty, to fulfil their classic roles as providers whose duty it was to ensure the well-being of the household (decent housing, clothing and subsistence), the seclusion of women, and obedience to the rules of honour, including avoidance of women’s employment.⁵⁶

When the war ended in mid-1962 the desire of most Algerian men was to return to their families, but for hundreds of thousands ‘home’ was not the peasant house or village that they had last seen but an entirely different location (resettlement camps, shantytowns, urban slums), and

the very structure of the family and its kin or village networks was radically dislocated. Hoping to pick up life where they had left it, returning soldiers, prisoners and migrant workers found the domestic circle geographically displaced and dispersed, reduced to smaller, nuclear units cut adrift from the framework of village clan networks, and run by women who had learned to cope without men. The highly educated and Francophile teacher Mouloud Feraoun betrayed a sense of the general male resentment at new-found female independence: 'In the village, the women openly took the places left vacant by the men. This is something that gives them a lot of confidence and even insolence'.⁵⁷ Or again, in another passage, 'The men have taken on a haggard look . . . They have lost, my sister told me, all their arrogance as well as their superiority complex regarding women'.⁵⁸ Feraoun reveals a prudish anxiety about the deregulation of women's sexuality: the young daughter of Salem, a relative, found refuge in his house after she had run away from her village to avoid rape: 'But I think that she already has been, just looking at her easy manner, the audacious and slightly covert expression on her face, and her fully developed body'.⁵⁹

Returning men felt deeply anxious and insecure in relation to such change, and set about asserting their domination over women with a new energy.⁶⁰ As Mohammed Harbi notes, at independence the lower classes surged back into the public spaces from which they had been excluded with a messianic puritanism that sought revenge on all collaborators, the *harkis* and pro-French bourgeoisie and in particular those immoral women who symbolised the subversion of Islamic society:

Invitations were forced on the bourgeoisie and notables to matrimonial alliances that went against their deepest wish. Things went as far as humiliating them publicly. At Nedromah they were made to sweep the street. The moral order reappeared in full strength, in the name of Islam. At Mila a woman was stoned for adultery. In Algiers they hunted down the 'girls of 13 May' and demanded that men accompanied by a woman show their *livret de famille*. In Adrar a hashish smoker was publicly whipped. In Guelma the population went with the *imam* to the Roman theatre to destroy the statues to shouts of 'no more idols'.⁶¹

This populist integrism has strong resonances with the moralism of the Taliban and their destruction of the great Buddha statue at Bamiyam. Attacks on women 'collaborators' mirrored the public rituals of humiliation carried out at the French Liberation and by the army and police during the War of Independence.⁶² 'The "suspects" are crushed into cells full of human excrement. Women, after being shorn, are locked up separately under the same conditions'.⁶³

The attack on the women of '13 May' was directly linked to the emancipation campaign that men had had to endure in silence. Numerous French reports on the emancipation campaign carried out by the EMSI, the MSF and the mobile propaganda units at village level, report the morose silence of the men as they watched 'their' women lined up and harangued by interpreters. Colonel Crozafof ascribed this in an Orientalist way to the primitive jealousy of the Arab, noting the fear, 'of the dispossessed male and it is important to recognise the part played by sexuality in the life of the Oriental, and also the important role played by Muslim women in his household', such that any reform would undermine his privileged position as, 'an unchanging and arbitrary power in the conjugal domain'.⁶⁴ The silence of the peasantry was not a sign of disinterest but rather of the fact that the French army practised a ruthless violence and any man showing the least sign of overt criticism or resistance to the military intervention with women ran the risk of immediate arrest, interrogation and incarceration. At independence Algerian men were suddenly released from this restraint and sought to eradicate any indications of the hated emancipation campaign that they had had to bear so long in silence.

What made it possible for men to reassert their authority over women post-independence was, as we see in the final chapter, the flexibility and durability of patriarchal norms and the family structures that underpinned them, and the extent to which the one-party state, recognising the enormous weight of such religiously sanctioned practices, for reasons of political opportunism quietly shelved any meaningful attempt to promote a progressive reform or agenda on women's rights.

Notes

- 1 Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad*, 28.
- 2 SHAT 1H2569, quarterly report, ZCO, 15 December 1960.
- 3 SHAT 1H2088/4, *Action sur les milieux féminins en Algérie*, 27 March 1960.
- 4 The volume of army reports on the issue of Algerian women and emancipation decreased rapidly from about mid-1959 onwards and this appears to reflect the fact that the civil and military administration no longer regarded the issue as a priority.
- 5 On this 'cultural and linguistic dualism', see Kateb, *École, population*, 47–9.
- 6 Seferdjeli, 'French "Reforms"', 20–1, 47–54.
- 7 SHAT 1H2569, quarterly report, ZEO, 7 October 1961, on the growing anxiety of ASSRA assistants.
- 8 Amrane, *Les Femmes algériennes*, 273–5.

- 9 Significantly, the most extensive testament by Djamila Amrane, Louisette Ighilahriz, Jacqueline Guerroudj and others after 1958 relates to narratives of prison life in Algeria and France
- 10 *L'Echo d'Alger*, 13 May 1959.
- 11 *Depêche quotidienne*, 14 May 1959.
- 12 CAOM 13CAB64, commander ZEA Grande Kabylie to General Salan, 13 October 1958.
- 13 CAOM 2SAS68, monthly report of the SAU of Sainte-Eugène, Algiers, 20 May 1961.
- 14 SHAT 1H2462/1, intelligence report for Hussein-Dey, Algiers, 22 August 1960.
- 15 Horne, *Savage War*, 434.
- 16 For these events see Horne, *Savage War*, 428–34; Kaddache 'Les Tournants', 51–70; Alleg (ed.). *La Guerre d'Algérie*, Vol. 3, 265–74.
- 17 CAOM 2SAS56, report SAU officer Bas Casbah on events of 9–16 December 1960.
- 18 Kaddache, 'Les Tournants', 63; CAOM 2SAS60, SAU officer Clos-Salembier, report on events of 8–16 December 1960.
- 19 Oral account of Djamila Briki in Amrane-Minne, *Des femmes*, 215.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 208–15.
- 21 On the colonial authorities anxiety about the 'detribalisation' of African youth pouring into the slums of Nairobi where they came to fuel the 'Mau Mau' revolt, see Paul Ocobock, ' "Joy Rides for juveniles": Vagrant Youth and Colonial Control in Nairobi, Kenya, 1901–52', *Social History*, 31: 1 (February 2006), 39–59; on the culture and violence of youth 'gangs' and emergent nationalism in Bulawayo see Terence Ranger, 'The Meaning of Urban Violence in Africa: Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1960', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 193–228.
- 22 On the radicalism of youth see Launay, *Paysans algériens*, 374–7; Mark Tessler, 'Alienation of Urban Youth', in I. William Zartman and William Mark Habeeb (eds), *Polity and Society in Contemporary North Africa* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 71–101.
- 23 SHAT 1H2556/1, Pierre Chaussade, Secrétaire Général du Gouvernement, Instruction aux Chefs de Section Administrative Urbaines, 17 January 1957, spoke of an 'uprooted, "detribalised", and mixed mass'; CAOM 2SAS69, SAU of Baraki, report for 30 November–31 December 1958, noted 2,000 additional refugees had arrived in the previous six months, 'a mobile mass that is difficult to control', that was leading to further expansion of the *bidonvilles*.
- 24 CAOM 2SAS69, the SAS officer for the Algiers suburb of Baraki, Captain Brassens, *Enquête sur la cellule familiale musulmane* (May, 1959), remarked on the tendency of boys to escape all parental control for the turbulent life of the street, while girls however, 'except for the rare exception, remain under the control of the mother', and a strict surveillance by the father.
- 25 SHAT 1H2461/1, Fifth Bureau report, 23 August 1958.

- 26 Amrane-Minne, *Des femmes*, 214–15.
- 27 CAOM 2SAS56, SAU Bas Casbah, report of Captain Bapst, 14 and 15 December 1959.
- 28 House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, 154; Meynier, *Histoire intérieure*, 207. Launay, *Paysans algériens*, 376–7, notes that at independence military and political leaders regarded the youth elite as deeply suspect because of their independence of mind and anti-authoritarianism: the first words of an ALN sergeant to a local post-war meeting of young people was, ‘We are going to bring you to heel’.
- 29 Gervereaux and Stora (eds), *Photographier la guerre d’Algérie*, 30.
- 30 Fleischmann, ‘The Other “Awakening”’, 126, note 35.
- 31 Harbi and Meynier (eds), *FLN: Documents*, 628–30: minutes of an assembly (*majlis*) of *cadis* in Wilaya I, 10 October 1960.
- 32 Archives de la Prefecture de Police (APP), HA49, SCINA synthèses quotidiennes, 31 October–2 November 1959 (see above chapter 9).
- 33 Harbi and Meynier (eds), *FLN: Documents*, 625, provides a list of punishments imposed in Mintaqa I, Wilaya I, 17 November 1957, including, ‘Whoever forgets the principles of religion will be condemned and have Muslim law applied to them’.
- 34 Harbi and Meynier (eds), *FLN: Documents*, 193–4, 444–6.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 289–90.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 425–6.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 424–5.
- 38 Feraoun, *Journal*, 67–8.
- 39 Launay, *Paysans algériens*, 176, 371, 396–9.
- 40 Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* [1971] (London: Faber and Faber, 1973 edn), 290–2.
- 41 See Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership*.
- 42 Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights*, 179–82; for a similar analysis in relation to legal reform in Iraq and South Yemen, see Mervat F. Hatem, ‘Modernization, the State and the Family in Middle East Women’s Studies’, in Meriwether and Tucker (eds), *Social History*, 73–6.
- 43 SHAT 1H2574, Chef de Bataillon J. Florentin, *Les Regroupements de population en Algérie*, 11 December 1960.
- 44 UNHRC, *The State of the World’s Refugees 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41, in December 1959 there were 110,245 refugees in Morocco and 151,903 in Tunisia.
- 45 Vandeveld-Daillière, *Femmes algériennes*, 63–4.
- 46 On post-1962 changes in urbanism and housing see Marc Côte, *L’Algérie ou l’espace retourné* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 181–272.
- 47 Some 50,000 men were engaged in the ALN and by 1961 263,000 with the French forces, while 330,000 were absent as labour migrants in France and perhaps an equal number in the major cities of northern Algeria. The number of men killed, disappeared or imprisoned in camps was over 250,000. So in round terms over a million men aged fifteen to fifty out of

two million in this age-group were permanently or definitively absent from their families. This figure varied greatly by region and in some zones of Kabylia almost 100 per cent of able-bodied adult males would have been absent.

- 48 Jansen, *Women Without Men*, and 'The Economy of Religious Merit'; Abrous, *L'Honneur face au travail des femmes*.
- 49 Vandeveld-Daillière, *Femmes algériennes*, 286; *Temoignage chrétien*, 'Combien de Djemila Bouhired?', 3 January 1958, noted a 'profound transformation' of the role of women: 'All of a sudden they had to go out from the house, to go from prison to prison searching for a disappeared husband, then to bring his regular food basket, to replace him when he has gone into the maquis, to feed her children, to find work, to organise legal proceedings, to appoint a lawyer, confront the police, the administration, the army'.
- 50 SHAT 1H2461/1, note of Commandant Bouraix, 23 January 1959.
- 51 Feraoun, *Journal*, 242–3, 257.
- 52 The reassertion of male authority and gender roles on the termination of conflict can be found in many historical situations: see for example in relation to the Spanish Civil War, Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, Colo.: Aredon Press, 1995), and Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008) analyses the surge in media representations of virility after the perceived humiliation of the terrorist attack on the 'homeland'.
- 53 Virgili, *Shorn Women*; Michael Kelly, 'The Reconstruction of Masculinity at the Liberation' and Corran Laurens, '“La Femme au turban”: les femmes tondues', in Kedward and Wood (eds), *Liberation of France*, 117–28, 155–79; Luc Capdevila, 'The Quest for Masculinity in a Defeated France, 1940–1945', *Contemporary European History*, 10: 3 (November 2001), 423–45.
- 54 The Algerian conflict was constantly interpreted on both sides in terms of a narrative and language of 'Liberation' and 'Resistance': see Philip Dine, 'The Inescapable Allusion: The Occupation and the Resistance in French Fiction and Film of the Algerian War', in Kedward and Wood (eds), *Liberation of France*, 269–82.
- 55 Mary Louis Roberts, 'La Photo du GI viril: genre et photojournalisme en France à la Libération', *Le Mouvement Social*, 219–20 (April–September 2007), 35–56.
- 56 Under *sharia* law marriage was a contract in which it was the duty of the husband to maintain his wife and to control her outside activities, including the right to engage in employment: see Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial*, 33–5.
- 57 Feraoun, *Journal*, 257.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 241.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 265.

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- 60 Miriam Cooke, has noted the appearance at this time of anxiety and hostility towards ‘monstrous’ women in the works of male Algerian writers: see ‘Arab Women Arab Wars’, in Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (eds), *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East. Tradition, Identity, and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 154–5.
- 61 Harbi, *Le FLN, mirage et réalité*, 364.
- 62 In Paris the police and the *harki* brigades under Captain Montaner engaged in their own shearing of Algerian women or ‘collaborators’ with the FLN: see House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, 79, 128 and Rémy Valat, *Les Calots bleus et la bataille de Paris. Une force de police auxiliaire pendant la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Michalon, 2007), 91–2.
- 63 SHAT 1H1793/2, note of 18 August 1962, quoted in Harbi and Meynier (eds), *FLN: Documents*, 538.
- 64 SHAT 1H2460/1, report of Colonel Crozafof, commander of sector Algiers-Sahel to commander Zone Nord Algérois, 3 March 1959.