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**Evolution of the Women's Movement
in Contemporary Algeria:**

**Organization, Objectives and
Prospects**

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Evolution of the Women's Movement in Contemporary Algeria: Organization, Objectives and Prospects

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FOREWORD

Algeria is in the midst of a critical process of economic and political transition from a centralized oil-based economy to a diversified economy, and from one-party rule to a multi-party democracy.

At the height of the political turmoil in the early 1990s pitting the government and military against violent Islamic extremists, Algeria's economic and political transition appeared uncertain, and the state seemed vulnerable to collapse. Yet the outcome of the November 1995 elections showed that the government retained considerable popular support, although it had now to acknowledge and accommodate Islamist and secular opposition forces. At the same time, economic and political crises has given life to Algeria's civil society. Layachi (1995, p. 187) describes how interaction between the state and elements of the nascent civil society intensified after 1993:

The High State Council met with the leaders of the moderate Islamic party, Hamas, the Islamic Supreme Council, the National Association of Imams, the National Association of Zaouias, the National Union of Public Enterprises, the Federation of the Management Association of the Friends of Algiers, Protection of the Casbah, the Culture and Progress Circle, the National Syndicate of Algerian Jurists, the Lawyers National Order, and the Rally for Culture and Democracy.

Missing from this list is the array of women's organizations that emerged in Algeria during the early 1980s and grew during the 1990s. Ever since the struggle around the proposed family code in 1984, the growth of the feminist activism has become a defining feature of Algeria in transition. Women's organizations are now an integral part of the democratic movement that gained momentum in the 1990s and they constitute a significant part of civil society.

This study addresses itself to women's involvement in the political transition in Algeria. Cherifa Bouatta describes and analyses the problems and prospects, strengths and weaknesses of the women's movement, from its inception in the early 1980s to its current situation. The study shows that the Algerian women's movement may be the most audacious and forward-looking one in the Middle East and North Africa. Notwithstanding the cultural barriers faced by women's organizations, women's participation is necessary to modernization and democratization in Algeria.

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses some of the social and historical factors behind the evolution of contemporary women's organizations in Algeria. The paper states that the women question was never a priority. Yet, since the late 1980s, women became advocates of their own cause. After 1991, terrorism has also perturbed the activities of women organizations. However, amidst the turbulence, the women movement appears as the most forward looking among all other civic movements and as a necessary element to build up Algeria's democratic future.

1. Introduction

'The history of women's struggles remains to be written ...'. These were the first words of the declaration adopted during the first national meeting of Algerian women on 30 November – 1 December 1992, in Algiers. This very significant affirmation leads to at least two observations: First, the literature concerning the feminist movement is still parsimonious. It consists of only a few articles published in the press or some reflections elaborated by women themselves. Hence, any attempt to tackle the status of women requires the incursion and the direct contact with the proponents of the contemporary women's movement.

However, and this is our second observation, when one tries to define the outline, the objectives and the nature of this movement, it becomes evident that it is impossible to ignore the historical dimension. This is due to the fact that the itinerary of the current struggles and turbulence in Algeria is guided, in part, by the founding moments of its contemporary history: the national movement and the war of liberation. This also applies to the question of women.

This paper cannot capture all the dynamics of women's struggles since the emergence of the national movement. The objective is less ambitious: It is to discuss some of the social, political, and historical factors behind the evolution of the contemporary women's movement.

2. The Woman Question in the National Liberation Movement

We begin with a short detour through the national movement. The goal is to determine the significance of the woman question in the eyes of the protagonists and actors of the national movement.

Prior to the war of liberation (1954-1962), there were three associations of women, created between 1934 and 1947: the women's section of the Algerian People's Party (PPA), the Union of Algerian Women, and the Association of Muslim Women of Algeria. The entrance of women into the political arena was therefore made under the umbrella of political parties. Women joining these structures were bound to adopt the programmes of these political parties. These programmes concentrated either on labour struggles, especially for women's associations affiliated with the Communist Algerian Party (PCA), or anti-colonial struggles, particularly for the women associated with the PPA. These associations may be considered as satellites of the political parties, used for transmitting their ideologies to the women's circles. Concerning the woman question itself, the political parties approached it by adopting one of the following two formulas:

- The woman question is not a priority.
- The woman acquires her rights through participating in the struggle for national liberation.

This approach was also that adopted by the various nationalist leaders and also in the founding text of the war for national liberation.

In the first formula, the woman question was not a priority; rather, priority was accorded to the liberation of a people, and to their independence. This grand task, for the nationalist leaders, had to

have no deviations at all. It had to mobilize everyone, including the women who had to share this masculine point of view. The *moudjahidates* who survived the war of national liberation admit that their attachment to the national movement and their subsequent integration into the National Liberation Front (FLN) were not motivated by any project of female emancipation.¹ These women liberation fighters considered only one priority: the liberation of the country. It must also be emphasized that political expression was not on the side of women. During the war, the media of the FLN – the periodical *El Moudjahid* or the radio *La Voix des Arabes* – were in the hands of men.

Today, after the multiple traumatic experiences of the Algerian people – daily terrorism and violence from the *intégrists*, Islamist fundamentalists, since October 1988 – many intellectuals, and sometimes ordinary citizens, protest the mystification surrounding the history of the national movement. In this context, questions are emerging on the real position occupied by women during the war of liberation.² A first observation is necessary: in general, the women occupied secondary ranks. Notwithstanding the existence of *Fidaiyates*³, imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to death, working as liaison agents, and *maquisardes*⁴ fighting in combat zones; there is no evidence of any women accessing to leadership or integrating the spheres of decisions. The women remained in subordinate positions.

This is a classic tendency in revolutions: the leaders, generally men, decide on the priorities and impose their views on the women who join them. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the tendency includes the belief that the defined priority – liberation of the country or class struggles – will bring about other liberties, including the liberation of women. The Algerian experience illustrates the limits of such a belief.⁵

The second formula states that, through attachment to the liberation movement, women acquired all their rights. It is as if the society has profoundly changed, as if the social structures that organize the patriarchal system, the mentalities that underlie it, have been shaken to the point that the women are conferred a new status, different from the status defined up to now by the tradition.

Magic reasoning, incantatory, was repeatedly used by politicians, even after independence, for two reasons: to occlude the conditions of women on the juridical and also on the social and psychological levels; and to put a relative ban on the woman question. Since the political establishment declares that the woman has acquired all her rights, no one is allowed to question the status of women in society. Note the ambiguity of the two formulations. On the one hand, it is said that the woman question is not a priority. On the other hand, it is stated that the woman has acquired all her rights. We shall see that after independence, the politicians use practically the same arguments and remain prisoners of the contradictions that they are incapable of surmounting.

¹ See Cherifa Bouatta, "Feminine militancy: *Moudjahidates* during and after the Algerian War", in Valentine M. Moghadam, ed., *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, (London: Zed Books and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp 18-35.

² See, for example, Djamilia Amrane, *Les Femmes Algériennes dans la Guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1991).

³ *Fidaiyates*: women who fought in the war of liberation in the towns and cities.

⁴ *Maquisardes*: women fighters in combat zones, usually in the mountains.

⁵ In recent years, some Palestinian friends have said: "We pose the woman question now, during the struggle, in order to avoid the Algerian experience".

3. The Woman Question Under the Reign of the One-Party System

On the eve of independence, Algerian feminism was non-existent. By comparison, Egypt had had a feminist elite since the 1920s, which had emerged on the public scene and demanded women's rights. This elite had used the press and had published books on the conditions of Egyptian women. After Algeria's independence, the sole party, FLN, was to structure the whole society around its mass organizations: the General Union of Workers (UGTA), the Union of Algerian Peasants (UNPA), the National Union of the Youth of Algeria (UNJA), and for the women, the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA). The UNFA, the only officially recognized women's organization, was created in 1963 with three objectives:

- the emancipation of women
- the participation of women in political life for the construction of the country
- social protection of the mother, the infant and the disabled.

Here again, we note that the woman question does not appear as a central axis of this organization. When it was created, the UNFA, which was close to the left wing of the FLN, considered that Algerian socialism would bring about all other liberties.

The UNFA created some women's centers for sewing, embroidery and knitting. Concerning the socio-juridical situation of women, the UNFA worked to transmit the directives of the ruling party to the female population for 20 years, during which time it had the monopoly on women's representation. For the majority of women, the most vivid image of the UNFA through the years is that of women's activities, conferences and congresses, chaired by the men of the FLN. In fact, it was these males who influenced the orientations of this organization. For example, we may cite the declaration of one of them at the 1978 congress of the UNFA: 'The woman in our country, far from waiting for the granting of her rights, acquires them through her sacrifices and struggles (...) the common discussion on problems such as divorce, marriage or the participation in political action, these kinds of preoccupations prevail in the capitalist world: they arise out of individualism and egoism, attributes that have no social dimension'.⁶

Here, we find the thesis of nationalist leaders, mentioned earlier, which consists in proclaiming that the woman 'has acquired all her rights' and to object to any form of women's demands and, therefore, to forbid any debate around the question. At the same time, we note the intimate link, made by all politicians, between the rights of women and the struggle for liberation. This link will later legitimize the women's struggles that appeared outside the UNFA.

In 1970, the Algerian authorities instituted their socialist era. It was the time of industrialization, nationalization of oil and gas, and the agrarian revolution. The militants of the Party of the Socialist Vanguard (PAGS) considered that the authorities consisted of progressive forces who were behind the 'tasks of national edification'.⁷ This is how the PAGS developed its ideology of 'critical support'.⁸ Militants of the PAGS join the mass organizations of the FLN. Women militants of the PAGS found themselves in the UNFA. The woman question was not a priority, neither for the

⁶ M. S. Yahoui, cited by Yasmina Redouane in "Les Associations de Femmes en Algérie" (Paris: DEA, 1991).

⁷ The expression in quotes refers to the terminology used by the PAGS in the 1970s.

⁸ Same as above.

PAGS nor for its women militants. The priority was the construction of socialism. Women who dared to mention the realities of the women's world were quickly labeled 'gauchiste' (leftist).⁹ The entry of PAGS militants into the UNFA was badly received, at least by some intellectuals who saw it as an endorsement of a non-democratic organization that had clearly turned its back on women's concerns.

It must be emphasized that though the women militants did attempt to open up to working and peasant women, their actions could not go far enough. The obstacles were numerous; and they were loyal to the political line of their party. The objectives and the social function assigned to the UNFA by the authorities were additional obstacles. The UNFA was patently an instrument. It had no autonomy, it was in the duty of political objectives defined outside it and which it had to defend on the national and international scenes. The UNFA appeared as an organization distributing prebends, attributing honorary places according to clan, regional and allegiance memberships. Its functioning was far from following democratic rules. Hence, in 1979 the majority of its members did not hesitate in applying the infamous article 120, which stipulated that all members of mass organizations who were in any position of responsibility also had to be members of the FLN. This is how women militants of the PAGS found themselves in front of veritable tribunals, where they were condemned and expelled from the UNFA.

In any case, the woman question was far from being the primary interest of this organization. This is why women do not identify with it, whether they are intellectuals, urban, rural, working or housewives. There is a defiance on both sides. The UNFA denies the socio-psychological reality of women and the latter deny any recognition or legitimacy to this organization.

4. Attempts to Create Autonomous Spaces

Under the shadow of the one-party system, the political monolith, some women attempted to create spaces of independent expression through cultural and trade union groups. Psychology students created a working group and a cine-club. In Oran, study and reflection workshops on Algerian women were organized in early 1980, with contributions from historians, economists, sociologists and psychiatrists. The proceedings of these workshops were published and the organizers created a women's journal *ISIS*. Other groups were then created, such as the *moudjahidates* collective and groups that studied and criticized official proposals for a new Family Code. This latter effort gave life to the women's movement, and is indeed regarded as the spark that led to the emergence, the objectives and the strategies of Algeria's feminist movement.

It was against the desire of the authorities to legislate, at the end of the 1970s, on the men-women relationships within the private sphere, that the women groups began to organize at work places and in universities. These groups were opposed to a legislation that was to rule their lives and the content of which they did not know. In fact there were public rumors – the actual information being suppressed – about the preparation of a Family Code based entirely on the *Sharia* (Islamic law) and which would confer upon women the status of minor. It was therefore, according to the terminology

⁹ Same as above.

of that era, a project of a reactionary nature,¹⁰ and hence it was against the dominant political discourse, which advocated progress, and against the Constitution, which stipulates equality between the sexes. Groups of women organized themselves for the purpose of denouncing the process of decreeing on the fate of women while ignoring them; they demanded to know the contents of the Code and to participate in drawing it up. They obtained no response.

In September 1981, the press announced the adoption by the government of a project for a Family Code which was to be submitted to the national assembly (APN, parliament). The text was still unknown. However, an unofficial copy was circulating among women's circles, but no one could say whether it was the same as the governmental text. Again, the women reacted; they gathered in front of the parliament building to reject the process of drawing-up and adopting laws without a preliminary consultation of the most concerned.¹¹ They called upon the solidarity of the *moudjahidates* and they were together on a street demonstration on the 3rd of December 1981.

On 21 January, 1982, a large number of *moudjahidates* gathered at a debate/conference and decided to call upon the president of the republic. They expressed their demands in six points, which were subsequently adopted by the militants of women's rights. These were:

- Monogamy
- Unconditional right to work
- Equal division of the common family property
- Same age of majority for women and men
- Identical conditions of divorce for men and women
- Effective protection of abandoned children

The plan for the Code was deferred again.

In October 1983, a new plan of the Family Code was submitted to the parliament; its content was still secret. The women's action committee, created in the previous mobilization, reacted through a petition based on the six points of the *moudjahidates'* declaration. In June 1984, however, the Family Code was adopted by parliament.

What are the essential elements of the Family Code, and what juridical status does it give to women?

- Concerning marriage, the man marries without a guardian, whereas a woman must have one, regardless of her age and status (divorced, widowed).
- The man may have more than one wife, up to four.
- Concerning divorce, the man can divorce without giving any reasons, whereas the woman can divorce only under strict conditions fixed by law.
- In case of divorce, the man keeps the family home, whereas the woman keeps the children.
- The man is the uncontested head of the family.
- The wife must obey her husband.

¹⁰ "Reactionary": This term was used by the Algerian left in the 1970s to refer to those using religion in their opposition to socialism. Today, this adjective is reserved for the *Islamists*.

¹¹ We must emphasize that in those years, repression was very strong and street demonstrations were strictly forbidden.

- The woman inherits half the share granted to the male members of the family.

We could list further elements from this Code to attest of the inferiorization of women. Instead, we would rather attempt to appreciate the stakes involved in this law.

First, the Family Code is anti-constitutional; in all three constitutions – 1963, 1976 and 1989 – the equality of the sexes is clearly stated. The two sexes are equal under the penal code; the labour legislation also promotes this equality, but relations within the family are established in terms of domination. It is the traditional, patriarchal vision of the relations between the sexes that is reproduced within the private sphere. This juridical duality institute the woman, on the one hand, as a citizen according to the constitution, the penal code and the labour legislation, whilst on the other hand, she is a minor under masculine guardianship, according to the Family Code. This division in the juridical system concerning women borders on schizophrenia.¹²

Second, the Family Code reveals that the authorities had in fact given a pledge of Islamism to the *intégrists*. Although Algerian laws are inspired by natural rights, the Family Code is based on *Sharia* precepts (based on Islamic laws). The references used by the legislator, mentioned in the preamble of this text of law, are exclusively religious. They have the Koran and the tradition as origins. The women and the modernists are faced with a crucial problem due to the actions of the authorities: the place of religion in society. For many, disputing the Family Code is considered as an attack against one of the *constants*¹³ of the Algerian people, its 'Islamicity'.

These essential aspects of the Family Code – its anti-constitutional nature and its relegation of women to the status of minors – led activists to reject and denounce the Code. It also led to the emergence of a broad movement for women's rights.

The promulgation of the Family Code and the women's struggles against it revealed two visions of society where the woman is the principal stake. The supporters of the Code, claiming originality, authenticity and considering the identity problem as intimately connected to the status of women, advocated a patriarchal order based on religious precepts. Any evolution, any deviation from the religious precepts was seen as *fitna*¹⁴ that could disorganize society to such an extent as to plunge it into the *djahilia*¹⁵. The ideas defended by the supporters of the Family Code, regarded as reactionary in the 1960s and 1970s, were in fact the precursors of the ideas of the Islamists, who were to appear in the 1980s and appropriate these ideas as theirs. In contrast, the women who mobilized and took a position against the Family Code and for equality between the sexes were unambiguously organizing around citizenship and democracy.

¹² Noureddine Saadi. *La Femme et la Loi en Algérie* (Alger: Bouchene 1991).

¹³ *Constants*: this term was used by the various regimes since independence to indicate the existence of some invariants that are not to be questioned, Islam being one of them.

¹⁴ *Fitna*: dissension, rifts which might befall on the *ouma* (the community of Muslims).

¹⁵ *Djahilia*: pre-Islamic period. This term is used by the *Islamist* to refer to a decline.

5. The First Women's Association

The efforts of the various women's groups against the Family Code failed, since the Code was adopted. Nevertheless, members of these groups decided to change the form of their struggle and their structural framework, given that the movement had begun to be tolerated by the authorities. From informal groups, they were transformed into a legal association.

The Association for Equality Between Men and Women Before the Law was born in May 1985. Its social objective was 'to participate, contribute and propose measures and concrete steps towards the equality of men and women before the law; equality which was stipulated in the Algerian constitution of 1976, articles 39 and 40'. It is also inspired by the 'African Charter' and the 'universal declaration of human rights'.¹⁶ The request for the creation of the association was sent to the interior ministry in June 1985, and on many subsequent occasions, but it received no response.

6. The Democratic Women's Associations

Women's organizations are regulated by Law 87/16 of 21 July 1987 concerning non-political associations. However, freedom of expression and association was not granted until two years later, in the constitution of 1989. Associations were therefore technically illegal prior to the period 1987-89.

What made the authorities decide to open up the political field? In the late 1980s, Algeria was in a deep economic crisis, the price of oil had fallen, the foreign debt was at 26 billion, the purchasing power of workers was seriously hit. The Algerian population, mainly the youths, descended on the streets to reject the current regime. They targeted various state symbols, burned public edifices, attacked police stations; a movement of insurrection was engulfing the country. The army intervened with a severe repression. Once the situation calmed down, the authorities proposed a national referendum for a new constitution. It abolished the reign of the one-party system and opened up the way for the creation of political parties and associations. The women massively joined this new space of freedom created by the constitution.

It is difficult to come up with an exhaustive number of the associations created as a result of this opening in the political field. However, two indicators allow an appreciation of the number and objectives of the women's associations affiliated to the democratic movement: There were 20 women's associations in the first national meeting of women (30th November and 1st December 1989), and the author of a document published by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in May 1993 identified 24 associations.¹⁷

Using the above two references, we propose the following table. This table is not exhaustive, since there are still new associations being created. It is difficult to know the exact number because of the present security situation. The terrorist violence has limited feminist activity and forced the women to constantly modify their strategies, as discussed below. The proposed classification is somewhat

¹⁶ Reported by Yasmina Redouane, as in note 6.

¹⁷ Caroline Brac de la Perriere "Les Associations Algériennes ayant pour But la Promotion des Femmes" (Alger: FNUAP, May 1993).

arbitrary. In fact, even the associations that are unambiguously engaged in the struggle for the promotion of women's legal rights, such as Triomphe, Defense et Promotion, Emancipation, also have a cultural agenda, which they consider as equally essential. Similarly, associations with cultural and scientific vocations, through their mere existence and their writings, contribute in destroying the stereotype images of women and to encourage all forms of female activity. In any case, the different organizations often meet during demonstrations to denounce misogynist practices and to demand women's rights. In other words, the classification does not comply fully with the reality of the associations. In order to compensate for this deficiency, I propose to present the best known associations. This presentation allows a more precise idea on the nature of the associations, and the lines of divergence and convergence. The best-known associations are: Egalité, Defense et Promotion, Emancipation, and Triomphe.¹⁸

Egalité

The association Egalité was founded in 1985, after the adoption of the Family Code by the APN. It obtained its official approval in 1989 and it is a national association.

Objectives:

Participation and contribution in all measures for the achievement of equality between men and women before the law.

For this association, the realization of the social objective involves:

- The abolition of the Family Code
- Enactment of civil laws guaranteeing equality between men and women
- Unconditional right to work
- Same age of majority for men and women
- Equality in divorce and its consequences, abolition of polygamy, and equal division of common property.

Achievements:

Egalité is permanently engaged in a task of information and an awareness campaign around the content of the Family Code, the organization and mobilization for its abolition. It also organizes debates/conferences on the themes 'democracy and the principle of equality' and electoral consultations. It campaigns for political parties which have pledged to defend women's rights. It collects press archives and publishes a bulletin and sometimes a newsletter. The association also participates in international debates on the subject of women and the law, specifically on women under Islamic laws. It organizes an annual general assembly and has 500 members mostly aged between 35 and 40 years. However, very few are actively involved, according to one of its members. Egalité is the association that puts the heaviest emphasis on the responsibility of the authorities for the difficulties of women. It blames the authorities for acts of violence against women.

¹⁸ These are abbreviations. The full names are: Egalité: Association for the equality of women and men before the law; Emancipation: Association for the emancipation of women; Triomphe: Independent association for the triumph of women rights. Defense et Promotion: Association for the defense and promotion of women.

Table 1: Classification of Women's Organizations in Algeria

<i>Types of Organizations</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Achievements</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>1) Associations with a cultural vocation</i>			
- Aicha	Promotion of research and reflection on the women question Promotion of women's creativity	A 1992 diary: Women's Rights in Algeria 3 booklets: - Women and work - The book of Aichas - The vote of women	Algiers
- Dafatir Nissaiya		Publication of a magazine (2 issues) Conferences: Women and violence, Female poets	Algiers
- Foundation Nyssa	Establishment of a documentation centre for women	Publication of a journal: Nyssa	Algiers
<i>2) Associations for the advancement of women</i>			
	Various struggles for the transformation of the juridical and social status of women	Numerous demonstrations, conferences, debates, publication of bulletins, organization of artistic gala	
- Egalité			National
- Emancipation			Algiers
- Defense et Promotion			National
- Voix des Femmes			Boumerdes
- Tighrit N'temtut			Tizi Ouzou
- UNFA			National
- Israr			Constantine
- Femmes, Environment Developpement			Algiers

Table 1 continues...

... Table 1 continues

<i>Types of Organizations</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Achievements</i>	<i>Location</i>
3) Socio-Humanitarian Associations			
- SOS femmes en detress	Reception and help to women in distress	Creation of a reception centre	Algiers
- Iqraa	Elimination of illiteracy	Creation of a number of literacy centres	National
- Association for the health of the mother and the child	Multi-form help for women, especially mothers		Algiers
- Family planning association	Campaign and information on contraception	Creation of pilot centres	National
- Socio-professional Association SEVE	To promote and help women in business	Took part in many meetings of directors and businessmen	National
- National Association of Midwives	To promote the status of midwives and to participate in improving women's reproductive health	Organization of the 1st national meeting of midwives Participation in international conferences	National
4) Islamist associations			
- El Islah Wal Irshad	Amelioration of women's status in an Islamic framework	Programmes to eliminate illiteracy Charity activities, <i>Da'wa</i>	National
- Association for the defence of oppressed women	Struggle against mentalities that oppress women	Material and psychological support	National

Source: Author.

Triomphe

The association Triomphe was created as a result of divisions within Egalité. The secretariat of Egalité was composed almost entirely by members of the Socialist Organization of Workers (OST, Trotskyist tendency), which became the Workers Party (PT) in 1990. The president of this party was a member of the secretariat of Egalité.

During the rise of the Islamists and their first aggressions against women, the independent members of Egalité (not affiliated to a political party) accused the members of the secretariat of following the directives of their party, at the expense of women's interests. In reality, there was a consensus between the members of the secretariat in condemning the Islamist discourse, whose principal characteristic was the rejection of any form of female emancipation.¹⁹ However, when the Islamists moved on to aggressions against women, the secretariat members of Egalité, who belonged to the worker's party (PT) refused to designate the guilty and to denounce the Islamists. They considered that the state was solely responsible for the aggression against women: this was the position of the PT. This caused divisions within Egalité. Some women, including the president, left and created Triomphe on 15 February 1990. The association Triomphe has as a principle that no member of its secretariat should belong to a political party.

Objectives:

To ensure that institutions aim at guaranteeing equality of rights and obligations for women and men; full citizenship for women; the abolition of all laws consecrating inequality: the abolition of all discriminatory practices.

Achievements:

Triomphe has organized conferences on the Family Code. It has published a legal guide specifically for women use and elaborated a project of a manifesto of women's rights which was proposed to the rest of the women's movement. It also created a fund of documentation about women and a workshop of lectures which aims at promoting the situation of women. Triomphe has over 200 members mostly aged between 25 and 40 years.

Projects:

Triomphe has ambitious and varied projects, including communications (women magazines, video library, films and theater performances about women), an automatic laundry, a multi-purpose women's center consisting of a documentation center and a nursery, where women can also sell their products and receive legal, psychological and health advice.

Emancipation

This organization was created on 19 January 1989, and is based in the capital Algiers. Politically, the association has the label of the Socialist Worker's Party (PST, Trotskyist tendency), rival of the PT. The majority of the secretariat's members are from the PST.

¹⁹ We have discussed this at length in C. Bouatta and D. Cherifati-Merabtiné, "The Social Representation of Women in Algeria's *Islamist Movement*", in V. M. Moghadam, ed., *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

Objectives:

To inform and to enhance the awareness of women about the rights that favour their emancipation; to defend the moral, material, and juridical rights of women; to offer women a framework of expression through the organization of diverse cultural activities; to struggle for the abolition of the Family Code and to cooperate with other associations and organizations in promoting the rights of women.

Achievements:

Emancipation has organized roundtables on the subject of employment of women, the image of women portrayed in school books, photographs and painting exhibitions, film-debate sessions on the theme of women. It also published bulletins and posters on women and elections and on mixed schools. It participates in the coordination of women's associations and in international seminars. The membership of this association consists of the former members of the women's cine-club, students and labourers. There are about 150 members.

The following declaration by the president of Emancipation is a fairly accurate summary of the approach of this association: 'We consider that, given the patriarchal society in which we live, it is insufficient to place the struggle of women at the level of juridical rights. This is because, beyond the legal texts in our country, which may or may not stipulate equality, we are suffering tremendously from the social consensus which locks most of us in the house, which tolerates only a minority at work and at schools, and which considers us as minors forever. This status is enforced by the Family Code, the Code for the oppression of women'.²⁰

Projects:

Emancipation considers itself to be expanding and in 1995 was planning a general assembly for the election of a president and the adoption of a programme.

Defense et Promotion

The founding members of this association come from *Presence de Femme*²¹ and the UNFA. In fact, the members from the UNFA are militants of the PAGS who joined the women's wing of the FLN in the 1970s. This is why this association is labeled pro-PAGS.

Objectives:

Defense et Promotion has as objectives the defense of the juridical rights of women, the information and mobilization around women interests, the practical assistance of women faced with juridical problems.

Achievements:

This association has organized many debates/conferences on the Family Code in which lawyers participate; cultural activities, such as the projection of films about the woman question in Algiers and surrounding areas. It has organized a number of artistic gala with sales of products created by women. It showed a strong support and solidarity with the victims of the October 1988 uprising. It has published news flashes about its activities and positions concerning the problems of Algerian

²⁰ Declaration during the first national meeting of women.

²¹ *Presence de Femmes* is a magazine created in the late 1980s. It is no longer published.

women; it has established research and reflection workshops to create papers supporting the accomplished steps of its approach. The most important of these workshops were concerned with the Family Code, as well as information, culture, defense and promotion of work for women.

It is the only women's organization which, instead of demanding the abolition of the Family Code, is content with demanding the amendment of some articles that are judged the most discriminatory against women, such as, the same age of majority for men and women, the suppression of polygamy, unconditional right to work, guarantee of a home for the mother and her children in case of a divorce. The members of Defense et Promotion believe that, given the balance of power in the political field, it is difficult and even unrealistic to obtain the abolition of the Family Code. In contrast, the demand of some amendments will have less resistance and more immediate contribution in improving the situation of some women.

In another difference compared to other associations, Defense et Promotion associates the problem of the Algerian women to the general social question, and consequently, it aims at getting closer to all women. The president of this association declares 'our aim is to get as close as possible to housewives and to women from all layers of the population'. Defense et Promotion has about 500 members mostly aged between 30 and 50 years.

7. Conflicts and Divergences

At first sight, it might appear that the associations listed in the previous table and the four selected representatives have practically identical objectives. They all declare that they work for the emancipation and the promotion of women. However, these associations differ in their strategies and in their analysis of the social and political spheres. We can distinguish the following lines of demarcation.

On the Family Code

On the one hand, there are associations which demand its abolition and its replacement with civil laws. This is the case of Egalité, Emancipation, and Triomphe. On the other hand, Defense et Promotion limits itself to demanding amendments to the most discriminatory articles of the Code. According to the members of this association, the Algerian women's movement is not strong enough, resistance to change is still too important, and the men in power are far from adhering to the principle of equality between the sexes. These reasons prevent a demand for the abolition of the Family Code, whereas it is easier to mobilize the women, to create a movement of opinions around the most unfavourable laws and to demand their amendment. It is around these two positions – abolition versus amendment of the Family Code – that the conflicts between the different women's organizations are situated.

In demanding the abolition of the Family Code, the women are confronted with the Islamicity of this text of law. According to the conservatives and the Islamists, opposing the Family Code is opposing Islam. In fact the Islamists consider this Code as the text of law that most conforms to the *Sharia*. hence their accusation about the women's organizations: that they are blasphemous non-believers who are fighting against the Islamic identity. It is in attempting to avoid this grave accusation, which could prevent more women from joining the associations, since they may face popular

prosecution, that some women's groups have preferred amendment to abolition. Hence, the question of the Family Code has brought about the problem of the position of religion within society. The demands of *Egalité* and *Triomphe et Emancipation* for the abolition of the Code raise the question of a secular movement in a Muslim country, thus provoking the ire of the Islamists. The latter consider that the law is of divine origin, and that politics cannot be separated from the religion, Islam being a totality. The members of *Defense et Promotion* have chosen to avoid alienation of many women and the whole of society, by opting for amendment and presenting Islam as a religion of tolerance, openness and equality.

On the Objectives

The association *Defense et Promotion* considers that the juridical dimension is just an aspect of the domination of women. It acts as a symptom (in the psycho-analytical sense of the term) since it is only the official, visible sign of the female status. Its attributes originate from the social structures and social representations. The socialization of young girls takes place in a strongly sexist environment. These young girls become the best transmitters of the patriarchal message and contribute in the reproduction of women's inferiority. Therefore, this association refuses to restrict itself to the struggle on the juridical aspect.

In reality, women are far from being considered as autonomous beings. The woman as an individual does not exist; she is always under the guardianship of the community. Therefore, according to *Defense et Promotion*, there must be a transformation of the reality by promoting education and employment for women. At the same time, there must be action against the social image of the woman in order to suppress the stereotypes that confine her to maternity, the private sphere, and being constantly under masculine guardianship. This current of opinion best represents *Defense et Promotion* and also *Emancipation*. The other associations are essentially defined by the struggle on the juridical level. They work towards the abolition of the Family Code and its replacement with civil laws. The association *Egalité* emerged from the women's struggles around the Family Code.

With hindsight, some militants are beginning to wonder whether they have been trapped by the abolition vs. amendment argument at the expense of broader women's interests. A united front against the most unfavourable articles of the Family Code could have improved the juridical status of women.

On the Constituency

Here again, two tendencies can be distinguished. One is a rather elitist position which considers that only the elite can theorize, react, and denounce. The reasoning is thus: we cannot wait until everyone is conscious of the situation to start the struggle. The elite acts as a beacon, it opens the door. In contrast, the other tendency attempts to penetrate the society, to get to the workers, the housewives, and women of all sections of the population. It wants to anchor itself socially. In this conception, it is the masses of women who carry out the struggle. In fact, the elitist and the mass option are rooted in two different philosophies of social change, including theories of revolutions.

On Affiliation with Political Parties

Most associations, at least the best known ones, have been founded by militants of political parties. Most conflicts and divergences between the members of different associations are due to the fact that their leaders and/or founders belong to rival political parties. The members of *Egalité* are also militants of the PT (Workers' Party), those of *Emancipation* belong to the PST (Socialist Workers Party) and those of *Defense et Promotion* belong to the PAGS.

Is the political affiliation necessarily a source of conflict? Is it an obstacle to the independence of women in relation to their political party? In other words, do the militants of political parties have to stick to the orientations of their respective parties within the women's association? Could they, and do they wish to, distance themselves from their parties when they are in women's organizations? These questions are baffling for the other women joining the associations. They do not understand why the movement is divided. They consider that the women should be united because they share the same struggle. The partisan divergences were undermining the specifically feminist issues.

Recall that it was the problem of autonomy that led to the divisions within *Egalité*. In any case, it seems that, if in the first instance, the women's organizations founded by militants of political parties were perceived as satellites/annexes of their respective parties, the situation did not remain so. Later, the idea of independence became acute and resulted in reflections within the associations and even within the political parties. As an insider, I am convinced that a number of militants have felt the necessity to distance themselves from the orientations of their party as a result of their work on the woman question. They have therefore contributed to the liberation of the woman question from the hold of political parties. An important result is that all political parties declaring themselves democratic demand the abolition of the Family Code and they consider the woman question a major issue.

On Culture

In this section, we tackle the values of the founders of the democratic women's movement. In general, it can be noted that, despite the divergences mentioned earlier, they are of the same culture. By culture, we mean the vision of the world, the founding attributes and representations of a social group.

The founding members of the women's movement are, in their majority, influenced by the ideology of the Left. They all come from socialist parties. They are mostly academics, students, workers, and union representatives. They convey a message of an emancipatory project based on the equality of the sexes, employment and education, which are considered as the main criteria of women's promotion and socialization. They matured under the shadow of the one-party system in its socialist phase. They are women of the post-independence who were fortunate to have access to education and training. They do not consider the day of liberation as very distant. They identify with the *moudjahidates* whom they see as the first to have cracked the patriarchal system.

8. Common Actions

Despite their divergences, the women's organizations have undertaken many common actions. The most important are listed below:

- On the occasion of the 8th of March, 1989, several thousand women demonstrated in front of the parliament building to denounce violence against women. A delegation composed of representatives of different associations presented the deputies with a motion condemning *intégrism*.
- On 8 March 1990, the three associations Egalité, Triomphe and Voix des Femmes organized an artistic gala followed by a meeting and a march on the parliament building.
- On 14 April 1990, the women's associations in Algiers and Boumerdes sent a common delegation to the government to demand improved security for women citizens and material means to develop their activities (premises, funds, etc.).

On 30 November and 1 December 1990, in Algiers, the first national meeting of women took place. There were about a thousand women and fourteen associations from around the country. These proceedings resulted in the creation of a national coordination of associations which would allow the consultation, the initiation of common actions and the adoption of a plat-form consisting of two chapters. The first established facts on the multi-form oppression of women: political, social, economic and ideological. The second chapter defined the actions to be undertaken in order to reduce and/or eliminate the oppression. For example, on the heading 'juridical domain', the women recommend:

- A campaign of information and denunciations around the reactionary legal texts, especially the Family Code.
- The struggle of all associations and all women for the abolition of all forms of discrimination and for guaranteed full citizenship for women.
- A call to the constitutional council to recognize the anti-constitutional nature of the Family Code.
- A call to all parties, associations, and political forces to speak out on the right of women, which are an integral part of human rights, and to make sure that they are respected.

Ultimately, the national coordination was to include only women from Algiers, Boumerdes and Tizi-Ouzou. The other associations had material difficulties (transport, finance, etc.) which prevented them from taking part. The national coordination organized the second national meeting of women on 17-18 May 1991. The central theme of this meeting concentrated on the electoral law and the vote of women. The elections were not fair and through the proxy vote, the men could hijack the vote of women.²² The associations wanted to urge the women to vote themselves. A national committee for the struggle against the vote by proxy was created. The coordination also put up a proposition for revising the electoral law. It demands the abolition of article 53 which stipulates: 'A spouse who can provide, at the time of the vote, a proof of marriage, by presenting the family booklet [used in Algeria for registering births, deaths and marriages] in place of an electoral card, is exempt from the formalities of proxy vote'. It also demanded the amendment of article 54 which gives a voter the option of up to three proxy votes. The women propose to reduce this to a

²² The local elections were held in June 1990 and the *Islamists* won the majority of the votes, but were denied their victory by the government.

single one. They recommend the elimination of the dispositions which allow a vote by proxy for 'some family members' without a valid justification such as an illness or being abroad.

9. The Islamist Women's Organizations

We mentioned earlier the dearth of written documentation concerning women's organizations of a democratic orientation. The situation is even worse regarding the Islamist associations. Since their official birth, that is, since the opening of the political field in 1988, these associations appear to act with the greatest discretion. Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that the most known Islamist parties all have their own women's sections.²³ The most vocal, and therefore the best known is the association *El Islah Wal Irshad* (reform and guidance). Initially, this was the name of a religious charity, in which women formed a section. Another Islamist organization that we will discuss in this section is the National Association for the Defence of Oppressed Women.

The objectives of the women's section of *Islah Wal Irshad* conform to the programme of its parent association. The latter has a programme of thirty objectives. It is neither possible nor necessary to cite all of them. We may infer that the objectives have two main axes: charity activities and activities on the religious and educational fronts. In order to give an idea of the directing conception of this association, we cite the first two articles of its programme of action:

- propagate Islam as a just dogma, and the *Sharia* as a noble morality;
- promote Islamic Thought and liberate it from any mystification and any alienation.

These objectives derive from the religious grounding of the association. A reading of the totality of the programme allows the elucidation of the position of the women's section. Its aims are:

- to organize the spare-time activities of the woman and to preserve her against moral deviations and mystification;
- to educate and to preserve the child in order to avoid delinquency and any form of deprivation;
- to participate materially and morally for the teaching of the Koran and the Arabic language;
- to organize campaigns of *Da'wa* during religious festivities.²⁴

In fact, the choice of these objectives is not arbitrary. We selected them because they represent activities promoted by the women's section which have been observed in public. More precisely, the women of this section supervise young girls in centers for the practice of sewing, embroidery and home economics. They distribute gifts to the most needy. But they are also *Da'iwate*, that is, they propagate the Islamic discourse in the women's circles. We must also emphasize that all these women are *moutahadjibate*, even *moutadjalbibate*.²⁵ Concerning this subject, the leader of this section insists in a declaration to a newspaper (*El Watan*, March 26, 1991): 'The *hijab* is an act of women who are conscious of their obligations towards the Koranic precepts... the veil is obligatory

²³ These parties are: Hamas, which is linked to the association *Islah Wal Irshad*; Ennahda which has a women's section: the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) which says that it has a women's section.

²⁴ *Da'wa*: action of proselytism. *Da'iwate*: women whose role is to convert or to bring people closer to the religion.

²⁵ *Moutahadjiba*: A woman who wears the *hijab*, the Islamic veil. *Moutadjalbiba*: A woman who wears the *djilbab* which is a more rigorous veil than the *hijab*: it is ampler, longer and often of black color.

in a Muslim society. There is no discussion about the subject'. However, she adds in the same declaration: 'The *hijab* is not incompatible with knowledge or with work. Of course the essential role of the woman is to look after her home and the education of her children'.

With respect to those affiliated with this association, we note that it includes women of all ages and from all social groups but it appears that the majority are students.

The National Association for the Defense of Oppressed Women is a relatively new association having appeared at the beginning of 1995. Information concerning this association is still scanty. Nevertheless, we may first note that all its members are *moutahadjibate*. However, this fact alone is not fundamental since the *hijab* is not necessarily a sign of Islamist militancy.

A better indication of the allegiance of this association is given in an interview of its leader by a national weekly (*El Hakika*, 15/02/95) in which she declares herself to belong to the Islamist movement. She announces: 'Our association has emerged from deep inside our society and within the framework of its *constantes*, i.e., the religion, the nation and the language. We are authentic Algerians.' Concerning the origin of the oppression, she says 'Because of her mentality, the woman is her own oppressor. But there are other reasons: they are the mentalities of dominance, the traditions and the fact that femininity is regarded as a weakness'. This is due, according to her, to the misunderstanding of Islam.

The objectives of this association are:

- psychological and material help to the women
- struggle against the negative mentalities that oppress the women
- work to project the true image of Islam.

The founding philosophy of both these associations stem from Islam and from what the regime calls the *constantes*, that is, the Islamicity and Arabness, regarded as the defining dimensions of Algerian identity. Any distancing, particularly from the religion, is interpreted as westernization and alienation. Both associations underline that Islam is not incompatible with education and work for women. However, two observations are necessary:

- The profession that a woman can have must be feminized.
- Maternity is the privileged function of the woman.

The comparison between the two movements, democratic and Islamist, indicates that the differences are fundamental. They refer to antagonistic visions of the world. The democratic associations derive their principles from human rights, in a universal conception of the human person. Their project of society is republican, democratic and modern. By contrast, the Islamist associations base themselves on religion and the specificities of the Muslim person. Their project of society is Islamic.

We mentioned earlier that the democratic associations surfaced around the rejection of the Family Code. This rejection was expressed (and is still expressed) in the name of Human Rights and the rejection of any form of discrimination between the sexes. In contrast, the Islamist associations consider that the Family Code is the only text in the Algerian legal framework, which is derived from the *Sharia*, which makes it untouchable. Furthermore, the democratic women's organizations

planned, in the run-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995), to demand that the Algerian government adhere to the Convention On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Islamist women refused to join this appeal.

10. Democratic Women's Associations and the World

In the last few years, and especially since 1990, the Algerian women's associations have established solid links with a number of organizations from other countries and regions. This opening towards women abroad was first deployed at the regional level of the Maghreb, especially at the initiative of the Moroccan sociologist and feminist Fatima Mernissi. She gathered women from the Maghreb into writing workshops which allowed the publication of a number of books on the situation of women in the Maghreb; for instance, we may cite *D'Algerie et de Femmes*, published in 1994, and *Femmes et Violence*, published in 1995. In addition, a new women's group, Collectif Maghreb Egalité 95, was created during preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The activities of this group resulted in the elaboration of three reports:

- An evaluation of the implementation of the strategies adopted at the Third UN Conference on Women, in Nairobi in 1985;
- An assessment of the state of ratification and application of international conventions on women's rights;
- An elaboration of measures towards an egalitarian codification of the personal status and the rights of the family in the Maghreb. This is in fact an alternative Family Code to the existent ones in all three states (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia).

Beyond the Maghreb, the women's associations are establishing an increasing number of links with women in the Mediterranean region: Spain, Italy and France. On many occasions, the women in these countries have voiced their support and solidarity with the Algerian women in their struggle against terrorism and fundamentalism. This solidarity has also had other aspects: financial help for the creation of women's cooperatives (this an ongoing project between the association Defense et Promotion and Italian women); organization of holiday camps for children who were victims of terrorism; reception of women who are under threat.

11. The Democratic Women's Organizations and Islamism

The rise of Islamism since 1988 resulted in many forms of violence against women. These included verbal aggression in religious sermons where women, especially members of women's organizations, are vilified; and physical aggression is also carried out. Some examples of the latter:

- Burning of the house of a woman accused of being a 'prostitute'; her five-year-old son was burned alive.
- Creation of Islamist militia in some districts and university campuses and accommodations to oversee the morals of people. The female students were forced to adhere to timetables set up by the militia. They had to be back at their residence by a specified time; they were not

allowed to meet or be walked home by their (male) friends. Those students who did not abide by this curfew were whipped.

Unlawful entry into the house of a women's rights militant.

We prefer to stop here, because the list is now quite long, and includes assassinations, abductions, and gang rape.

However, even when confronted with the Islamists' violence, divergences still appear within the women's movement. For example, *Egalité* refuses to condemn Islamism because it is the authorities who are to blame. It is the authorities that have made official the inferiorization of women by adopting the Family Code. This association also considers that the Islamists use the apparatus of the state – schools, mosques, and media – to broadcast their discourse against women. The other associations, *Defense et Promotion*, *Triomphe* and *Emancipation* designate the Islamists as the enemy of women and call on the state to assume its responsibility by guaranteeing their security.

This divergence was accentuated during the legislative elections of 1991, where the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the first round. Democratic political parties, the main trade union UGTA, and sections of civil society denounced these elections and called for a halt to the electoral process. Some women's associations also joined this movement.²⁶ *Egalité* did not agree with this position: it demanded, along with the FIS, that 'the choice of the people be respected', which means the Islamists should be in power.

It is difficult to understand the position of *Egalité* towards the FIS, which has never hidden its representation of women: the women must be moulded by *Sharia* laws, otherwise they face rejection, condemnation, curse and even death. The Islamists consider the democratic women's associations as the vehicles of colonialism. However, a plausible hypothesis that may explain the reactions of *Egalité* is as follows: in its rapprochement of the Islamists' theses, it is attracted by the masses. The FIS is a mass party; it therefore carries the aspirations (of revolution?) of the people and thus it must be supported.

The emergence of Islamism was accompanied by violence, aggressions against women and against civil society as a whole. The interruption of the electoral process amplified the violence of the Islamists. The *Jihad*²⁷ was recommended; terrorism rapidly became part of everyday life; it targeted all the population and particularly those who declared their rejection of the theocratic Islamist project. Any public expression criticizing the project or questioning the theses of the Islamists risks retaliation. The authors of such criticism have been assassinated.

Women of all categories have been victims of terrorism. The daily *Le Matin* estimated that some 211 women were assassinated in a space of a year.²⁸ These women were cleaners, students, doctors, teachers, mothers and wives of policemen; the list is long. Dictates were announced; the women were summoned to wear the *hijab*; various types of ultimatum; mail threats were sent. The recalcitrants paid the price: they were assassinated. Rape has been another form of aggression.

²⁶ These different political parties created the CNSA – National Committee for the Safeguard of Algeria – in January 1992.

²⁷ *Jihad*: holy war.

²⁸ "211 women victims of terrorism", published in *Le Matin*, national daily, No. 907, Dec. 22, 1994.

Women were kidnapped; considered as *ghanima* (war booty), they were forced to accept what the terrorists call Zaouadj El Moutaa (pleasure marriages).²⁹ The Islamists consider that this practice 'legalizes' rape in the form of a 'marriage' that may last one hour or many years.

The daily *El Watan* published the accounts of seven victims of this practice who agreed to tell of their sufferings.³⁰ These young girls, some just into their teens, were kidnapped on the street, or under the eyes of their relatives; others disappeared indefinitely. In cases where the girl returned, sometimes the family could not accept her because she brought 'dishonour'; she was sent away to relatives in a different village or a different town. But this was not always the case, for the family rejection may drive the girl to the streets with no recourse, no escape.

We must emphasize that for the terrorists, one becomes a woman at a very early age. A twelve-year-old girl could be coveted as a sexual object and hence as a *ghanima* that can be enjoyed. In some cases, after the rape some young girls were assassinated; sometimes they were liberated by the police or they managed to escape themselves. However, this was not the end of their suffering. Traumatized, their corporal integrity violated, they (sometimes) became the source of shame for their relatives. Hence, they were victims twice: victims of terrorism and victims of the patriarchal parental ideology which is incapable of protecting them but willing to reject them. We know the fate of non-virgin women and young pregnant girls in our society. They are considered as having transgressed the supreme taboo: sexual relations outside marriage are unthinkable, even when the young girl is a victim of rape.

The population, and particularly women, have been effectively blackmailed by the terrorist groups. This is a most monstrous blackmail because it concerns life and death. The objective is to force the population into the Islamist mould.

The Islamist terrorism led to different positions on the part of the women's organizations. During 1995, some were not heard from. Had they dispersed? Had their militants dispersed under fear? It is only through declarations and press releases that the durability of some associations was confirmed. For example, after a long eclipse, the association Emancipation advises, through the press, that it had just had its general assembly and that a new president had been elected. The creation of a new women's association, El Aurassia, was reported in the press.³¹ Originally, the women's organizations were supposed to work towards the social and political visibility of women, as proposed in a workshop in Morocco (Rabat, 8th March 1994). Algerian women participated in this workshop, but most associations were forced into a stance of withdrawal to protect themselves from terrorism.

Two questions therefore arise: what activities remain? how is the feminist voice expressed?

Note that many women's associations have taken part in the demonstrations against terrorism, organized by the political parties. Some of them also put their signatures to the various declarations condemning terrorist acts. Meanwhile, the socio-humanitarian associations, such as SOS Femmes

²⁹ Zaouadj El Moutaa: This is a Shiite practice which requires the consent of the woman. However, Algeria is Sunni and this kind of men-women relations are unknown. In addition, the terrorists do not worry about asking the women for their consent.

³⁰ *El Watan*, national daily, No. 1297, 24/01/95.

³¹ December 1994.

en Detress, IQRAA and the Association for Family Planning, have continued their activities, making sure to keep a low profile. There are also new forms of expressions: some women organize a group or a workshop to write, reflect, testify and to publish about this troubled period. The objective is to preserve a memory constituted by women's own words.³²

A newly created women's association, RAFD (Rassemblement des Femmes Democratic) became the most vocal during the period of Islamist terrorism. It has as its objectives and achievements:

- a rally of women on the 8th of March 1994
- a march of women on 22 March 1994, to shout their rejection of Islamism and to denounce terrorism
- a public mourning, on 3 February 1995, on the site of the car bomb which killed 42 people and wounded 286.

The Algerian women's associations participated in the regional conference in Dakar, organized by the Economic Commission for Africa, as part of the preparations for the Beijing Conference. Several of these associations were present for the organization of workshops and debates on the situation of Algerian women and the daily violence they endured. The group Maghreb Equality 95 planned the organization of a 'parliament of women from Muslim states', to convene at the Forum of the Non-Government Organizations, the parallel meeting of the Beijing Conference in September 1995.

12. Conclusions

Through the rejection of the 'thesis of priorities', the new women's organizations have challenged any hierarchy on the list of democratic demands defended by political parties of the left. For a long time, the woman question was not regarded as a priority in Algeria. National liberation was prioritized first, and then it was argued that socialism would solve all social and economic problems, and with it the woman question would be solved. Towards the late 1980s, women began to reject this kind of logic and they reversed the reasoning: the woman question is the major question of society and democracy.

After 1991, terrorism strongly perturbed the Algerian political landscape, including the formation and activities of women's organizations. Terrorism, daily killings, and the uncertain future resulted, among other things, in a neglect of the struggle for women's rights, since it was the right of life which was at stake. At the same time, with the escalation of terrorist violence, women have been the most visible of those braving the wall of fear and descending onto the streets to demonstrate.

Paradoxically, the turbulence in the country revealed a whole repressed past. The crisis has acted as a psychological trauma: it opened on fixation points, on problems not solved, not tackled, such as the place of religion in society, the role and objectives of educational institutions, identity issues, and the woman question. Concerning the latter, all democratic political parties acknowledge that it is not possible to contemplate democracy, the future of Algeria, while occluding the nature of relations between the sexes.

³² For example, Dafatir Nissaiya.

As a last word, here is the expression of one democratic leader on the subject: 'It will be difficult now to conceive the Algerian destiny in a project which ignores the equality between the sexes. The irruption of the women's struggle has produced a revolutionary mutation in our society. Through the feminist movement, Algeria has the foundation of its democratic future'.³³

³³ Said Sadi, "Algerie: Alternative", *El Watan*, No. 1297, 24/01/95.

APPENDIX: THE FAMILY CODE
(Excerpts)

The entire set of articles in the Family Code places the woman in a subordinate position. However, given the length of the code (14 pages) and the legal jargon used throughout, a full translation is difficult. We opt to list the articles most significant for the discrimination they create between the two sexes and which are most criticized by the democratic women's organizations.

Article 8: The man is allowed to marry more than one woman within the limits of the *Sharia* if the reasons are justifiable, if the conditions and the intentions of equity are met and after informing the current and future spouse(s). Either woman can start judicial action against the husband in case of deceit, or request divorce in the absence of consent.

Article 11: The ratification of a marriage for a woman is the responsibility of her matrimonial guardian, which is either her father or a close relative. The judge is the matrimonial guardian of a woman who cannot provide one.

Article 31: A Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man.

Article 48: The divorce is the dissolution of marriage. It is initiated by the husband through mutual consent or by request from the woman, in the limits of articles 53 and 54.

Article 52: If it is decided that the children are to stay with their mother, and if the mother has no guardian who accepts to receive her, the mother and her children are guaranteed a home, according to the means of the husband. The family home, if unique, is excluded from such decision.

Article 54: The husband can leave his wife subject to mutually agreed reparations (*Khol'a*).

Article 87: The father is the guardian of his young minor (under the age of 21) children. After his death, the guardianship is passed on to the mother.

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