The History Algeria Ignores: Gendered Narratives of the Black Decade

(1988 – 1999)

By Said Rafik Lahmari

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In Partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA)

Main Supervisors: Dr. Adriana Qubaiova, Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani (Central European University)

Second Supervisor: Dr. Irene Pérez-Fernández (University of Oviedo)

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Abstract

This study explores women's counternarratives of resistance in Algeria during the Black Decade (1988–1999), a period marked by the rise of political Islam and civil unrest. It challenges the stereotype of women as helpless victims by emphasizing their agency and resilience in both their lived experiences and in their recounting of events. Focusing on the impact of the Front of Islamic Salvation (FIS) and its conservative interpretation of Islam on gender relations, the study examines how Algerian women resisted oppression under the FIS regime, shedding light on the intersection of political and religious ideologies with gender during this time. Using a feminist post-colonial gendered approach, the study highlights women's everyday acts of agency and resistance in the face of socio-political unrest by documenting narratives that have been ignored in the literature. The thesis analyzes how women contested the Family Code and contextualizes its role in defining gender roles before and during the Black Decade. Particular attention is given to the historical background of the hijab and its use during the conflict, emphasizing its significance for those who chose to wear it or not. The study unearths hidden stories through oral history and archival research, offering a more inclusive historical record and a different narrative that contests the simplistic idea of women as helpless victims.

Keywords: resistance, agency, memory, counternarrative, metanarrative, Black Decade, Algeria

Acknowledgments

Author's Declaration

I, **Said Rafik Lahmari**, declare that this thesis contains only original, previously unpublished work.

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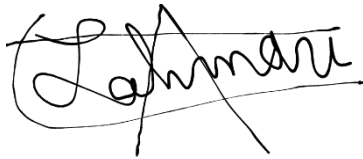
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Positionality

Before delving further into my research, it is essential to adhere rigorously to feminist research standards and to approach this endeavor with a profound commitment to self-reflexivity (Van Stapele 2014). As a (self-identifying Arab) Berber queer cis-gendered man, occupying the dual roles of researcher and author of this thesis, I am acutely aware of the intricate interplay between my identity and the contours of this study. This acknowledgment is not merely a perfunctory gesture but a deeply ingrained recognition of how my personal positioning shapes the nature, scope, and interpretation of the data I engage with. It is important to acknowledge that my identity as a cisgender male intersects with the subject matter, which revolves around women's narratives. I want to clarify that I am not speaking for the women in this research. Rather, I am creating a platform for their voices to be heard authentically (Harding and Norberg 2005). This project is not about my interpretation but about amplifying the diverse stories of these women. This commitment to highlighting marginalized voices aligns with feminist scholarship and shapes the direction of this thesis.

As I delve deeper into the exploration of women's social realities, I am acutely aware of the potential for my involvement to be perceived as patronizing or indicative of mansplaining. However, my journey through this master's program has been marked by a profound recognition of the importance of acknowledging and navigating my own identity in a manner that upholds the agency and voices of the women whose experiences I seek to amplify. This journey has underscored the nuanced complexities inherent in studying topics within the realm of gender studies, where subjective perspectives often intersect with academic inquiry. It is essential to recognize that my engagement in this research is not aimed at achieving a semblance of objectivity,

as the very nature of social sciences, and gender studies in particular, precludes such an endeavor. Instead, I see myself not merely as an external observer, but as an integral part of the research process, intricately interwoven with the narratives and insights shared by the interviewees (Campbell and Wasco 2000, 779). In shaping the structure and composition of this thesis, I draw upon my personal vision and understanding, which have been shaped by my unique experiences and perspectives within both academic and social spheres. Through this acknowledgment of my own subjectivity and positioning, I endeavor to approach this research with humility, reflexivity, and a deep commitment to honoring the diverse voices and perspectives that contribute to its richness and depth.

Introduction

The Algerian War of Independence against French colonialism (1954-1962) witnessed the active participation of women in various spheres of political activism, including propaganda, mobilization, and armed struggle (Flood, 2017, p.110). However, despite their active involvement in the resistance movement, Algerian women have faced numerous challenges in their struggle for social, political, and economic equality. (ibid.) The rise of violent extremism in Algeria has further compounded the already grim situation[1] for Algerian women, who have increasingly become targets of heinous acts of violence, such as kidnapping, rape, and murder; acts committed by members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS),[2] which came to be known as the Black Decade (Bennoune, 1995, p. 153). The targeting of women by extremist groups[3] is a deliberate and strategic tactic aimed at undermining the social, cultural, and political role of women in Algerian society. This has had profound implications for the security, dignity, and well-being of Algerian women, who have been forced to navigate a complex and dangerous environment characterized

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[1] What I mean by the "grim situation" is the increased subjugation of women in society, which became much worse after the Family Code was implemented. Women's rights and liberties were severely curtailed by this legal framework, which also served to uphold patriarchal social norms. I will go into great detail in the first chapter about how the Family Code solidified women's subordination, restricted their autonomy, and institutionalized gender inequality, making it harder for them to succeed in many spheres of life.

[2] First and foremost, I understand the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) as a political party founded on Islamist values that exploited democratic processes to win elections, only to subsequently reject democratic principles as sinful and blasphemous. Crucially, I perceive the FIS as embodied by the men who patrolled the streets of Algeria, instilling fear in many Algerian women. This fear was often symbolized by the image of the bearded man in a *serwal*, a figure frequently mentioned in interviews. The bearded man became emblematic of the FIS itself. Thus, the FIS represents not just a political entity but a pervasive discourse within the country, encapsulating both how it was perceived and what it symbolized.

[3] In employing terms such as "Islamists," "extremists," and "fundamentalists," interchangeably, I aim to capture the multifaceted nature of certain ideological groups within the context of Algeria. While these terms may carry distinct connotations in scholarly or political discourse, they often overlap in their application to describe groups that advocate for strict adherence to Islamic principles and seek to implement them within the political and social spheres. By using these terms interchangeably, I acknowledge the complexity of these movements and their varying interpretations and manifestations. Additionally, the inclusion of the term "tero," derived from "terrorists," as a colloquial reference used in Algeria, serves to provide insight into the local discourse surrounding these groups and their activities. This decision reflects an effort to contextualize the terminology within the specific socio-political landscape of Algeria, recognizing the significance of local perspectives and language in understanding the dynamics at play.

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by violence, discrimination, and marginalization. Thus, I argue that despite the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria, which significantly constrained women's societal roles, Algerian women were not passive victims of the era's oppressive events. Instead, they actively resisted in diverse ways and contexts.

My thesis research explores narratives that were an integral part of my upbringing recounting a dark and violent period in Algerian history called the Black Decade (1988-1999). The Black Decade is a period of civil unrest that saw the rise of political Islam in the country. After adopting a more democratic political approach within the Algerian politics in the late 1980s, more political parties were allowed in the political sphere, among them the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).[4] After this party won the municipal elections, it was considered a threat by the political party that ruled the country; the Front of National Liberation (FLN). As a result, the military, backed by the FLN government, staged a coup to halt the elections and prevent the Islamist party from ruling the country. As a result, the country witnessed numerous massacres carried out by supporters of the Islamist party. These individuals took to the streets, targeting and killing anyone associated with the government, which ultimately led to the onset of the Algerian Civil War.

Moreover, I centralize my focus on Algerian women's resistance, which include acts of remembrance. Memory is a fundamental component of our perception and understanding of the world around us. Our memories shape our identities, our relationships, and our understanding of past events. Alas, memory is a gendered component, which makes the process of remembering

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[4] I have chosen to concentrate solely on the FIS's oppression of women instead of including that of the FLN because the scope of my study is deliberately limited to allow for a more in-depth investigation, focusing on the specific actions and ideologies of the FIS. This targeted approach enables a detailed examination of how the FIS influenced gender dynamics during the Black Decade. This exploration contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse narratives that emerged during this complex period in Algerian history, emphasizing the intersectionality of religious and gendered dynamics.

intrinsically gendered too. How these individuals remember, and whether they (choose to) remember or forget certain details and events can tell us much more about memory's gendered nature, and the gendered dynamics of the time. Individuals who experienced the tremendous traumas connected with a lengthy conflict exhibit a wide variety of recollection and remembrance of that chaotic period in the aftermath of a post-conflict era. Some people may purposefully forget or selectively omit certain events or details from their memories, influenced by factors such as fear of the consequences of openly discussing certain events; government-induced pressure to conform to a particular narrative; or the selective nature of collective memory, in which some aspects of the past are emphasized while others are marginalized.[5]

Consequently, I contend that the testimonies provided by the interviewed women differ markedly from the nation's dominant narrative.[6] The process of recalling and constructing these counternarratives is, in itself, a powerful act of resistance. While acknowledging the severity of that period, women's accounts defy the oversimplification of their stories and experiences. The hypothesis proposes that the complex interplay of personal, societal, and political factors has resulted in differences in how women recall and recount their experiences during Algeria's Black Decade. Particularly, these individuals' subjective truths in their told stories offer a unique perspective on this period of violence. These truths differ from dominant narratives and official

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[5] I will go into great detail about the gendered nature of the memory-making process in the fourth chapter.

[6] The state's main narrative typically centered around a united country confronting a single struggle and a common adversary. Before the country's independence, the French were depicted as the enemy, while in the 1990s, this role was attributed to the FIS. For followers of the FIS, however, the narrative was reversed. They used similar populist techniques to unite the country under the banner of Islam, portraying the FLN and democracy as the enemies to be defeated. This metanarrative of a singular national struggle did not allow for a diversification of experiences, thereby obscuring the significant gendered differences between men's and women's experiences. As a result, women's unique perspectives and struggles during this tumultuous period were marginalized, and their resilience and resistance efforts were obscured. The dominant narrative overshadowed the significant contributions and acts of defiance by women. This marginalization not only erased their individual experiences but also diminished the recognition of their active roles in resisting both governmental oppression and Islamist violence. Women's stories of bravery, endurance, and everyday resistance were sidelined, failing to receive the attention and acknowledgment they deserved in the broader historical context.

accounts of the events, which have downplayed their gendered experiences and ignored their contributions. Thus, I argue that Algerian women were not mere bystanders of systemic oppression but rather resisted the oppression they were facing in many ways, even in the most ordinary and routine aspects of their daily lives. Their resistance is also evident in the way they remember and recount their stories. My main research question is how did Algerian women confront and resist the oppression and violence they encountered in their daily lives as a result of the surge of Islamism in the country?

Theoretical Framework

This thesis employs a feminist post-colonial approach to analyze the gendered nature of the civil war in Algeria and how certain gender identities intersect and affect individuals' experiences (Anzaldúa, 1987). When the civil war began, Algeria was a newly formed state after more than a century of French colonialism. As such, I argue that the Black Decade is closely tied with the legacy of colonialism, especially when it comes to the Family Code and how it is tied to past laws and regulations produced by the French and how such a connection affects Algerian women. In addition, this framework will allow me to avoid the oversimplification of a rather nuanced and complex matter. I adopt Leila Ahmed's understanding of women's role in Arab and Muslim societies, in which I scrutinize the reductive view of women as oppressed individuals within their communities. This framework also allows for a top-down analysis of gendered experiences by emphasizing how people's narratives either contradict or support prevailing discourses, especially those that are imposed by the government. Additionally, it aids in the decolonization of gender stereotypes and expectations.

Furthermore, I draw upon Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood to analyze the forms of enacted agency in women's resistance narratives. In order to explore such resistance, it is crucial to discuss how women's agency is informed, performed, and enacted (Butler 2002). In other words, women's acts of resistance are a demonstration of their agency and their ability to break through societal shackles. Moreover, performativity and agency are intertwined, influencing how agency is enacted. Utilizing Butler's nuanced viewpoint, I investigate the complex strategies women use inside oppressive power structures. It is possible to gain a better understanding of how women defy social norms and claim their identities by examining how performance influences agency. I also incorporate Mahmood's nuanced perspective on agency, which diverges from simplistic notions of conformity or resistance to norms. This framework enables feminists to examine agency practices without rigidly evaluating them against liberal standards. By intertwining Mahmood's insights with Butler's, I aim to enrich the understanding of women's agency, particularly in non-Western contexts, moving beyond essentialized interpretations of women's roles in Arab societies. Mahmood argues against the hasty assumption that individuals in illiberal political movements lack agency simply because their actions do not fit into liberal frameworks (Mahmood 2011). This fits neatly within the scope of my research as my aim is to defy the simplistic view of Algerian women as mere victims and reaffirms my argument regarding their agency.

In addition, I will be using a memory politics framework to analyze women's narratives of the Black Decade. Particularly, I am interested in how people choose to remember and retell certain events and omit others. Similarly, I am interested in the factors that affect and manipulate people's acts of remembrance. Particularly, "'memories' are constructed through acts of manipulation, through the atavistic play of power" (Bell, 2003, p. 71). As such, this theoretical framework will allow me to analyze these factors and see their effects on public discourse, and whether there is a

chance for the creation of counternarratives to that of the state. As Bell argues, "there will always be dissent and the story will never be accepted consistently and universally" (Bell, 2003, p. 74) despite governments' attempts to control the narrative. In addition, this framework will help me investigate the creation of a collective memory of the period and the construction of a national belonging that posits an "us" against "them" agenda. In other words, approaching my research with such a framework will help me study the factors that help shape how people remember certain events, which can (and should) influence their sense of selfhood and belonging and fortify their allegiances and beliefs in certain causes and entities.

Adopting this framework means that instead of paying attention to issues of accuracy and truthfulness in what the women told me in the interviews, I will be paying more attention to the "values, beliefs, and norms shaping cultures at a particular historical juncture" (Maurantonio 2014). In essence, my approach involves a deliberate departure from the concept of objective truths regarding the experiences relayed by these women. Instead, I place a greater emphasis on valuing and centering their individual narratives and lived experiences as the primary sources of authentic truths that I aim to delve into, explore, and comprehend (Hirsch and Smith 2002; Sangster 2002; Nielsen 2019; Charlton, Myers, and Sharpless 2008). Particularly, I am not interested in the past itself, but rather in how such a past is remembered and narrated by these women (Assmann 2009). By prioritizing their unique perspectives and personal accounts, I aim to cultivate a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of their lived realities, acknowledging the subjective nature of "truth" through remembering.

Literature Review

In order to understand the overall historical background of the Black Decade and women's experiences in this tumultuous period, the following literature review aims to review scholarly work that covers three main fields: Algerian history, political Islam in Algeria, and women's experiences during the Black Decade. While I utilize these contributions as a historical and contextual foundation for understanding the conflict and women's experiences, particularly on political and somewhat social levels, I contend that these scholars largely overlook women's daily encounters with violence and their narratives, as well as their efforts in resisting the terrors of the period. My research contributes an important corrective to these discussions since it serves as a window into the Black Decade that is crafted by women who lived through and survived that period. As such, I position myself within this scholarly discourse aiming to fill the existing gap on women's (counter)narratives of the period in the fields of oral history, memory politics, and gender studies.

A Short History of Algeria (1954-1962)

During the war of liberation against French colonialism, Algerian women played a crucial role in resisting colonial oppression and fighting for independence by organizing protests, conveying messages and supplies, and engaging in other acts of resistance (Charrad 2001, Turshen 2002, Fanon 1965, Bennoune 1995). Women were crucial in giving medical treatment and nursing to individuals injured in the fight (Charrad 2001, Bennoune 1995). However, their contributions were later downplayed or forgotten during the civil war as their protection was deemed paramount (Turshen 2002). Women went from being active participants in the liberation struggle to becoming sidelined in the interwar period and the civil war, in alleged need of protection, which further

exacerbated and crystallized women's societal role and experiences during the period. It was believed that their lives needed to be safeguarded, but this protection was often linked to men's honor and reputation. Though Turshen's argument stands correct since women were indeed considered as in need of protection, many of them rebelled against this view and were socially active and went beyond the mere victimization framework.

Thus, women were soon consigned to conventional gender roles and barred from positions of authority and decision-making. Women who had taken active positions in the battle were discouraged from continuing their involvement and were instead encouraged to concentrate on family responsibilities (Charrad 2001, 162). Like their Argentinian counterparts during their respective civil war, after the independence, women's "morality [was considered] suspect, their femininity [was] doubtful, and their ability to behave as obedient wives [was] questionable" (Masson 2017, 35). To put it differently, the patriarchal perception of women, which gradually diminished during the War of Liberation due to their significant contribution to the war efforts, resurged with greater force. Women had to revert to their conventional patriarchal role in society to construct a nation.

In this sense, women's role in society is attached to the broader nationalistic cause. The part women play in reproducing nation-states and ethnic communities, both biologically and symbolically, is crucial to the expression of nationalism in its diverse forms (Masson 2017). This perspective was further strengthened with the ascent of fundamentalists. Women were expected to play a crucial part in maintaining and reproducing the ethnic and cultural identity of their nation or community. This includes not just biological reproduction but also the symbolic reproduction of cultural values, traditions, and practices. The role of women in nationalism is seen as critical because they are often the primary caretakers and transmitters of culture within families and

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communities (ibid.). Thus, their actions and beliefs can have a significant impact on the maintenance and propagation of cultural and national identity. However, this view of women's role in nationalism has also been exploited by fundamentalists, who use it to justify their oppressive policies and practices towards women. This often leads to the curtailment of women's rights and freedoms, including restrictions on their education, mobility, and autonomy.

An Introduction to Political Islam in Algeria

The Black Decade in Algeria has received attention in scholarly debates since the 1990s. Lhouari Addi (1992) provides a comprehensive analysis of the period and the political factors that contributed to the rise of political Islam[7] in Algeria. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) relied on the democratic process in order to win elections and rule the country. However, they later opposed any sign of democracy along with the government's promotion of it, which the party viewed as a western imposition that contradicted their Islamic values. While in other Muslim Arab countries such as Syria, politics and political ideals were sacralized (Addi 1992, p. 81), the politicization of the sacred occurred in Algeria, leading to the incorporation of religion into politics and the view that they are inseparable entities (ibid.). As such, the FIS's supporters did not necessarily endorse the party for religious reasons, but for economic ones, such as the promise to restore better economic conditions and national unity, which were obscured under the veil of religion.

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[7] I define political Islam in the context of Algeria as the fusion of Islamic principles with political ideology, particularly concerning governance and societal organization. Since Algeria's independence from French colonial rule in 1962, Political Islam has emerged as a significant force, encompassing a range of movements and parties advocating for the implementation of Islamic law (Shari'a) and the promotion of Islamic values within the political sphere. These movements vary in their ideologies and approaches, from moderate to more radical factions, each with distinct visions for the role of Islam in Algerian society and politics.

In the aftermath of the 1988 riots[8] in Algeria, a nationwide call for multipartisan politics emerged. The Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut – FIS) capitalized on this sentiment and experienced a significant surge in popularity due to its populist agenda and they 'have thus posited themselves as the true heirs to an FLN" (Brown and Stora 2001, 207). Women's organizations and liberal opposition parties were profoundly concerned about the Islamists' undemocratic agenda and their use of populist rhetoric to appeal to disillusioned, unemployed young people (Salhi 2017, 21). They successfully sold promises of reform while publicly criticizing the existing government. Members and supporters of the FIS monopolized public debate, instilling terror in other political actors and damaging the democratic process (ibid.). Their surge in popularity was reflected in the FIS's success in the "June 1990 municipal elections and then the December 1991 opening round of balloting in the national legislative elections" (Addi 1992, 75).

However, due to the FIS's rejection of democratic values[9] and their consistent labeling of democracy—in its social sense: including advocacy for women's rights—as "blasphemous," (Addi 1992, 79)[10] the military intervened prior to the scheduled legislative voting in order to terminate the electoral process (Addi 1992, 75).[11] This intervention had a profound impact on Algerian

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[8] The October 1988 unrest in Algeria was widely perceived as a culmination of the deepening economic crisis aggravated by a significant decline in oil revenues. This downturn led to rising unemployment rates, a housing shortage, and steep increases in the prices of essential goods. Moreover, it represented a manifestation of civil society's outcry for social justice amidst escalating corruption. Initially expressed through strikes and peaceful demonstrations, this discontent swiftly escalated into widespread riots. Responding to the young rioters who targeted government buildings, the military exercised violent repression, resulting in fatalities, injuries, and the arrest and torture of numerous demonstrators. This further fueled anger and resentment, prompting additional groups to join the protests, advocating for substantial political reform (Salhi 2017, 19).

[9] The FIS rejected several democratic values, including pluralism, the rule of law, freedom of speech, gender equality, and protection of minorities.

[10] "Ali Benhadj repeated ad infinitum that democracy was incompatible with Islam and was kufr [blasphemy] because it placed the power of the people over God's power over the people" (Salhi 2017, 33).

[11] The issue of democracy at the beginning of the Black Decade is complex, because the FIS used democratic means to gain power, but later abandoned democratic standards. At the same time, the government used undemocratic tactics to preserve democracy. While I am not suggesting that the government's violations of democracy were justified or

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politics and society, as it sparked a period of violence and unrest that lasted for over a decade. Devotees and supporters of the FIS responded by launching a campaign of terror, targeting government officials and civilians alike, and spreading extremist religious doctrines. This campaign of terror was marked by a significant increase in murders, femicides, and overt religious practices. According to Human Rights Watch, "armed Islamist groups have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of politically motivated killings in Algeria" (Human Rights Watch 1997, 2). According to the report, these groups frequently targeted women, particularly those perceived to be "pro-government" or who did not adhere to strict interpretations of Islamic dress codes (Human Rights Watch 1997, 6). While no specific figures were given, the report states that "thousands of people have been killed in Algeria" (Human Rights Watch 1997, 2) during the Black Decade. Similarly, Amnesty International said that armed Islamist groups and government security forces both committed acts of torture and murder against civilians, including women and girls (Amnesty International 2000, 4). According to the study, "hundreds of incidents of rape, sexual assault, and forced marriages" (Amnesty International 2000, 5) have been documented, and both sides of the war have targeted women in particular for sexual violence. Thus, the evidence suggests that women bore the most significant impact of the armed conflict from both parties involved. This impact has been both direct and indirect, with women facing violence, displacement, and loss of loved ones, as well as being subjected to gender-specific forms of harm, including sexual violence and exploitation, which I will elaborate on specifically in the chapter on daily life disruptions.

Moreover, the Algerian people were subjected to a climate of fear and insecurity as the FIS and its supporters sought to impose their radical agenda on the country. By rejecting Western-style

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without consequence, they claimed that they were motivated by the protection of a democratic state rather than submission to an Islamist alternative.

democracy and secularism as being incompatible with Islamic values, the FIS "espoused a radical program that wanted to enforce strict *Shari'a* rule and to establish an Islamic state in Algeria" (Charrad 2001, 154). The FIS's vision for women was "based on a wholly conventional and restricted vision, attempting to limit them to the role of wife and mother, and to impose strict gender segregation in public areas" (Brown and Stora 2001, 132). Additionally, the extreme agenda of the FIS included a rejection of Western cultural influences as well as a call for the Islamization of education and the media "believing that Western cultural influences were corrupting Algerian culture and leading to moral deterioration" (Charrad 2001, 156). Thus, this period of violence and instability had far-reaching consequences for Algeria, including the loss of thousands of lives and the destabilization of the country's political and social fabric.

Women's Experiences During the Black Decade

Women played an important role during the civil war, both politically and socially, actively resisting both Islamist and government-imposed oppression and subjugation. Leila Ahmed (2021) argues that the Black Decade had a significant impact on how women were perceived and treated in Algeria and that it was a turning point in the fight for women's rights. The conflict brought to the fore the stark realities of gender inequality and sparked a new wave of feminist activism in the country (ibid.). In particular, the violence and political upheaval of the 1990s challenged traditional gender roles and societal expectations, prompting women to become more politically active and assertive in their demands for equality. Furthermore, the crisis of the Black Decade highlighted the importance of women's participation in the public sphere, both as activists and as survivors of violence.

This research also highlights the importance of adopting a feminist lens to illuminate the gendered dimensions of the issue and highlight the intersectionality of gender, religion, and politics in the Algerian context. Focusing on the experiences of women in times of conflict, which are often overlooked or marginalized, makes us understand the conflict itself even better (Narriman Guémar 2019). On the same note, considering that overemphasizing male dominance over women oversimplifies the intricacies of women's oppression, it is important to note and explore the particulars of such oppression; "It is not simply that men control women but that a particular group of men control a particular group of women" (Lie 1997, 252). In the context of the Black Decade, this often meant that Islamist militants and conservative political leaders exerted control over women who were viewed as threats to their ideological and political agendas. As such, Algerian women and men experienced the Black Decade quite differently depending on their political affiliations, socioeconomic status, and religious beliefs.

Moreover, the experiences of women in Algeria during the Black Decade share similar patterns of gendered violence and subordination as Bumet's (2012) work on the Rwandan genocide. Particularly, Women's identities in both contexts were enmeshed within those of their male relatives, with loyalty to husbands and sons being a key expectation. Women were subjected to sexual violence and rape as a means of attacking the honor and identity of their male relatives. As Human Rights Watch notes, "Families sought to safeguard the honor of their female members by confining them to their homes and controlling their movements, which further restricted their access to education, healthcare, and other basic services," (Human Rights Watch 1997, 10) while in reality, the matter exceeded protecting the women's honor to protect that of men.

In addition, the mandatory militarization of men during conflicts involves the production of distinct and opposing categories of gender, namely masculinity and femininity (Cockburn 2017,

145). The cultivation of qualities such as toughness, aggression, and violence, which are considered necessary for warfare, is seen as central to the construction of masculinity and militarization. In contrast, femininity is associated with weakness, passivity, and nurturing, and is linked to domesticity and care work. This gendered process of militarization sheds light on the construction of the Algerian woman's image as a passive victim who needs protection from her father, brother, or husband, even though she played a significant role during the war of liberation. As such, women's identities not only become enmeshed within the men's identities but also crystallized and essentialized as their alleged passivity connotes a need for protection.

Furthermore, the forceful implementation of *Shari'a* law by religious extremists has led to further subordination of women within the private sphere. The onset of the civil war saw the rise of a conservative interpretation of Islam that sought to curtail women's rights and freedoms. Women were increasingly subjected to restrictions on their movement, dress, and behavior. They were also forced to conform to traditional gender roles and expected to prioritize their duties as wives and mothers above all else. This subordination of women within the private sphere had profound consequences for their social, economic, and political status in Algerian society. The FIS also wanted to impose Islamic clothing restrictions, such as the headscarf and *niqab*, on women and to limit women's involvement in public life (Salhi 2017). In this sense, wars have a major influence on the society in which they have occurred, with one of the most dramatic results typically being the reinforcement of conventional gender roles and the restriction of women's rights and freedoms (Cohn 2013, Moghadam 2003). The confusion and instability of war can create a setting in which conventional gender norms are perpetuated, if not amplified. This is because such conventions create a feeling of security and order in an otherwise chaotic environment (Moghadam 2003, 91). In other words, traditional gender roles are seen as a way to maintain a sense of structure

and predictability in a society. By adhering to these roles, people can establish a clear set of expectations and norms that can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety. This sense of security is particularly valuable in times of social upheaval or instability.

Additionally, armed groups may have considered women's participation in public life as a challenge to their authority and legitimacy, and may have striven to limit their rights and freedoms to impose control (Masson 2017, 37). Women's rights are frequently viewed as disposable in the pursuit of political aims, and as a result, women may be targeted for violence or discrimination (Moghadam 2003, 92). As such, women are pushed into the private sphere, "which is not considered politically relevant" and as a result, their involvement in politics provides them with an ultimatum of either being silenced and ignored in the private sphere, or having to "become visible only when they enter the public space," which puts them in the way of sexual violence and oppression and is a privileged process that is not allowed for women in most cases (Masson 2017, 36). So, gender and war go hand in hand when it comes to curtailing women's freedom. In this sense, war is both the cause and the result of gender inequality. Cockburn argues that "[gender issues] make war thinkable," (2017, 149) which means that the existence of gender inequalities creates the conditions for war to become a viable option. This is because gendered narratives, such as men being the saviors of women or the 'motherland',[12] are often used to justify the initiation of armed conflict (ibid.). In other words, gender issues play a critical role in the process of making war a conceivable and acceptable option. These gendered narratives also serve to perpetuate and reinforce pre-existing inequalities and power imbalances within society, ultimately leading to

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[12] Motherland is a gendered concept that usually connotes feminine attributes. This gender characterization reflects social norms and cultural understandings, associating the nation with characteristics traditionally attributed to women. The motherland symbolizes a source of comfort and strength, which is often depicted in maternal images. In this context, both the motherland and women are depicted as in need of protection (or conquering).

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further marginalization and subordination of women (ibid.). Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the intersectionality of gender and war and how they are interlinked in the perpetuation of violence and oppression and how gender issues and war feed into and reproduce each other.

As such, along with the vast economic failures, the rise of the now popular FIS, and the decline of the FLN, women's behavior and activities started becoming a target of contestation and political scrutiny. In other words, to avoid discussions of the economic crisis that hit Algeria, a "misogynist alliance was created between the FLN and FIS to turn their focus on women" (Bennoune 1995, 65). As a result, violence against women intensified which led, among many other outcomes, to the hampering of women's access to education. For instance, members of the FIS started many campaigns throughout a long and extended period in which they started a series of intimidation and harassment acts against female university students (ibid.). Following their motto "Our crisis is a crisis of faith and morals," (Bennoune 1995, 65) the party found that by restricting women's movement, they would be saving the country's 'Muslim' morals, and hence the country as a whole. For example, leaders of the party found that "sending women back to the kitchen" (Bennoune 1995, 65) is an answer, or rather a solution, to the problem of men's unemployment. Particularly, fundamentalists blamed women being in the workforce for the unemployment of men and believed that if women let go of their education and job positions, then men could take over.

In addition, these leaders were "obsessed" with what they called 'mixite', (Bennoune 1995, 65) which entailed the mixing of the two normative genders in public spaces, but most specifically in schools. As a result, the FIS agenda in the early 1990s proposed a separation between boys and girls in schools, a cut on the higher education programs that were allowed for women, and a decrease if not a disallowance of female teachers as they were believed to "poison [young men]'s

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minds" (Bennoune 1995, 65). On the same note, "fundamentalist teachers" adopted scare tactics to teach and bring children up on FIS values including the story that "their parents will go to hell if they go to the beach (because they dress scantily in public) or their mother does not veil" (ibid.). This targeting of women was particularly prevalent in higher education, as seen in the numerous attacks on female dormitories across Algeria during the Black Decade.

According to Bennoune (1995), women in higher education were highly targeted and constantly harassed by members of the FIS. As an example, female dormitories were attacked in several universities across Algeria, such as at the University of Constantine, Cites Universitaires El Alia, and Bordj El Bahri in 1990, and the University of Oran in 1991 (Bennoune 1995, 66). Furthermore, in 1989, at the beginning of the Black Decade, more than 300 FIS members surrounded the University of Blida dormitories, preventing women from entering or exiting the campus perimeters. These events were emotionally scarring for the women inside the dormitories, and despite their calls for help, the police "refused to intervene" (Bennoune 1995, 66). The constant threat of violence and intimidation created a hostile environment for women in higher education, leading to the disruption of their academic pursuits and furthering the marginalization of women in Algerian society. Female students were even threatened with death in some instances, underscoring the severity of the situation faced by women during this period (Bennoune 1995, 66).

Nevertheless, female students were not mere victims who succumbed to the FIS members' pressure. Many women chose to pursue their education despite the constant danger they were put under. Particularly, "Algerian women were not simply the passive victims of terror; they were also agents of resistance who employed a range of strategies to resist violence and oppression" (Flood 2017, 29). For instance, female students from the University of Blida have issued a statement, following the FIS' imposed siege and the police's ambivalence to the situation, stating: "These

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people are imposing on us their morals … by force if necessary on those who don't agree with them. They make no secret of the fact that they want to forbid all differences in behavior and in clothes, and all this is going on under the passive gaze of the police … Female students have been threatened with death" (Bennoune 1995, 66). Such a statement serves to reinforce the agency and autonomy of women in the face of patriarchal violence and political upheaval. It also highlights how women's experiences of conflict and violence are often framed through a lens of victimhood and powerlessness, which obscures their agency and resilience (Bumet 2012, 99). The tendency to view women solely as victims of conflict not only erases their contributions to resistance efforts but also reinforces patriarchal norms that position women as passive and subordinate (ibid.).

In addition, women's dress code was heavily monitored by the fundamentalists. Physical violence against women who did not follow these clothing restrictions grew more common and severe, with some women even losing their lives as a result (Salhi 2017). Women who did not adhere to traditional Islamic dress codes and were unveiled were particularly vulnerable to violence from fundamentalist groups. The violence against women is not limited to wartime but continues to operate along a continuum in the pre- and post-war context as well (Cockburn 2010, 146). Cockburn argues that women's experiences of coercion and abuse by men are strikingly similar in both war and peace contexts (ibid.). The fact that gendered violence continues to occur in a variety of settings emphasizes the deeply embedded power imbalances and interconnectedness of various forms of oppression that continue to exist in society. Although the Black Decade and Algerian French colonialism are frequently presented as having come to a conclusion, the war on women is still being waged along a continuum (ibid.).

Methodology

The thesis utilizes an oral history method to capture women's subjective experiences of the Black Decade through interviews conducted both online and offline. This approach aims to construct a history from below, focusing on women's experiences during this period, as there are no official histories documenting women's daily narratives and few existing records related to their histories. In addition, I rely on archival sources located in the *Archives De Luttes Des Femmes Algeriennes[13]* which provided me with personal archives and documents of women who were active from the Algerian War of Independence until the Black Decade. Most of these women collected women's organizations' announcements, newspaper clippings, dissent letters sent to authorities, and other documents.

Initially, oral history[14] emerged as a research methodology uniquely positioned to capture and safeguard the diverse array of experiences amidst tumultuous periods. Embracing a feminist perspective in oral history as a research tool becomes imperative, given the tendency of conventional sources to overlook women's lived realities. This places oral history at the forefront of rectifying this imbalance and ensuring that the narratives of women are accorded the recognition and dignity they deserve (Sangster 2002, 5). By engaging in recorded interviews and dialogues with individuals who have undergone this period, I aim to honor and validate their narratives, providing them with a platform to convey their truths, memories, and interpretations of the events that unfolded during the Black Decade. This approach is particularly salient because it affords

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[13] The Archives of the Fight of Algerian Women.
[14] Oral history is a research methodology and narrative tradition that involves the collection, preservation, and interpretation of historical information and personal experiences through spoken accounts provided by individuals who have firsthand knowledge of past events. These oral testimonies are typically gathered through recorded interviews and conversations, allowing individuals to share their memories, perspectives, and insights about specific historical periods, events, or cultural phenomena. Oral history aims to capture and convey the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals whose narratives may not have been documented in written records (Portelli, 1981).

these women agency in shaping the historical record, enabling their voices to contribute to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the period. In addition, using oral history has allowed me to steer away from event-centered narratives to encompass daily stories and experiences that have solely traveled through orality and word of mouth. Choosing this research method was very important to me as a researcher as I was inspired by the vast sea of stories I have been hearing since I was a child growing up in Algeria.

It is noteworthy that all the women I interviewed[15] opted to have the conversations within the confines of their own homes. This choice, I believe, was instrumental in creating a safe and secure space for these women to recount their experiences openly and candidly. The idea of 'home' as a safe space is a concept well-documented in the literature on qualitative research, particularly in the context of sensitive topics (Clapham, 2015). It has been noted that conducting interviews in a familiar environment can help foster trust, ease, and a sense of control for participants, ultimately enhancing the quality of the data collected (Smith, 2009). Despite encountering some interruptions during the interviews,[16] they proceeded smoothly overall, allowing me to cover all the questions I had prepared.

Before I started conducting the interview, one of the respondents asked me "so what do you want to know? Should I answer in a specific way?" This question reflects Abram's concept of shared authority (Abrams 2010, 166). In this sense, I did not want my interviewee to feel that I hold the bigger part of the equation – or that there is an equation to begin with! Thus, I asked her

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[15] I decided to return to Algeria in August 2022 to conduct oral history interviews with a select group of four women who had lived the Black Decade. While I prepared and anticipated to interview more than four women, most interviews fell through last minute due to the fear that accompanied a topic such as the one I am researching. However, I was able afterward to schedule more online interviews either on Zoom or WhatsApp, along with follow-up interviews when I had further questions or requests for clarification.

[16] Mostly by the interviewees' family members who were curious as to what kind of conversations I was having with them.

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to consider our interview as a conversation; a chat between two Algerian citizens with a somewhat shared history. But most importantly, echoing Gailani's argument on reproducing the "anthropological gaze," (Jones-Gailani 2020, 62) I aim to adopt the feminist oral history tradition of steering away from rendering the women as objects of a research project rather than subjects in their own stories (ibid.).

As I thought about this research and prepared for the interviews, my aim was to shed light on the alternative histories, or rather the counternarratives, that I grew up hearing. These stories focused on women's resistance rather than the simplistic narrative of their oppression propagated by the government. As such, there is a relationship between the state-imposed narrative of the Black Decade, which subsequently alienated women's personal experiences, and women's counternarratives. Women contextualize their countering of this national memory through a rejection of the "master narrative" (Jones-Gailani 2020, 60). This rejection stems from the ways they spoke about and told their stories. Throughout the interviews, the women told me about their past experiences with a smile and a giggle using humor and irony as a way to convey their feelings and emotions about an unhealed past. In addition, while they recounted numerous stories about their experiences during that period, much was left unsaid. Their silences and pauses were as revealing and significant as the stories they shared, which I will elaborate on in the fourth chapter.

Women contextualize their countering of state-imposed national memory through a multifaceted rejection of the master narrative, which manifests in several significant ways. Firstly, they employ personal narratives that diverge from the state's account, offering individualized perspectives that highlight their unique experiences and struggles during this period. These personal stories often reveal the omissions and inaccuracies within the official narrative, exposing the biases and gaps that marginalize women's roles and contributions. Secondly, women link their

personal experiences to the collective memory of their communities, thereby creating a powerful counternarrative that challenges the monolithic state narrative. This collective memory encompasses shared experiences of trauma and resistance, providing a more comprehensive and inclusive historical account of the period.

Moreover, I also relied on archival research, especially in the first chapter on the Family Code, to support the oral history interviews I conducted. I believe studying the archives is crucial as it allowed me to gain direct insights into past events and unfiltered narratives of the period. Hence, "archives are now viewed as primary sources for creating knowledge rather than mere storehouses for finding what is already known" (Gaillet 2012, 39). After being put in contact with an organization in Algeria that collects personal accounts and archives of Algerian women since the War of Independence, I was given access to their database, which included many scanned documents spanning from the 1950s till the early 2000s. These documents were divided and categorized by the name of the woman who agreed to give out her archives and for them to be digitized. Among the documents, there were booklets produced in the early nineties, records of the Algerian Civil and Family Code, feminist advertisements, newspaper cutouts, and many other documents that helped structure the first chapter of this thesis.

Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz note that "Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies" (2002, 2). Particularly, archives, as repositories of records and documents, possess inherent power to influence the narratives and interpretations that emerge within historical discourse. They serve as gatekeepers of knowledge, determining which voices and perspectives are preserved and which are marginalized or omitted. Consequently, archives play a pivotal role in shaping how individuals, groups, and societies

perceive themselves and their histories. By controlling access to information and shaping the narratives that are constructed, archives exert a significant influence on the formation of collective memory and national identity. The archives I received contained documents that had not been previously acknowledged or referenced in written historical accounts such as newspaper cutouts and women's Non-Profit announcements. These documents, originating from women who submitted them to the organization, reveal a previously ignored aspect of history. Consequently, I suggest that the absence of access to such documents has resulted in a partial omission of historical narratives. Therefore, my purpose in utilizing these archives is twofold: to reveal the involvement and personal perspectives of women through their documents and accounts, and to promote wider accessibility to these historical resources through my thesis.

While thinking about the relationship between memory, oral history, and archival methods, I echo German archivist Angelika Menne-Haritz's idea that "archives do not store memory. But they offer the possibility to create memory" (Menne-Haritz 2001). In other words, researchers actively shape and interpret historical narratives. While archives serve as repositories of documents and records, they do not inherently possess memory in the way that individuals do. Instead, they supply researchers with the basic elements needed to create and rebuild memory (Gilliland, McKemmish, and Lau 2016, 274). My goal in using this archival material goes beyond simply extracting existing narratives or memories; rather, I want to actively construct and shape the memories that I intend to share in this thesis. Archives are a rich source of historical material, but their true worth resides in the researcher's ability to understand and contextualize the information contained inside them. By critically examining the archival material, I hope to create a story that resonates with the experiences and viewpoints of individuals whose voices have been ignored or

excluded from traditional historical accounts. My aim in the thesis is to contribute to writing a history from below of women during the Black Decade.

Overview of Chapters

The subsequent chapters are organized around areas where women's resistance was particularly noteworthy. In the first chapter, I delve into the historical trajectory of the Family Code, tracing its roots back to colonial influence. Utilizing the archival material I gathered, I analyze the Code through the lens of women's resistance since before the start of the Black Decade. Alas, exploring women's experiences and ways of resistance helps us understand the Code and its effects more coherently. Moving to the second chapter, I examine the hijab as a complex site of agency for Algerian women. I explore how the decision to wear it or not can both be construed as an act of resistance defying Western approaches of looking at unveiling as the only form of resistance. In the third chapter, I explore women's daily realities during the Black Decade. This chapter is thematically structured to illuminate the various ways in which women resisted within different facets of their everyday lives. In the last chapter, I delve into how women remember and discuss the events of that era. I argue that even the act of remembrance itself, which is a gendered process, can be regarded as a form of resistance. Collectively, these chapters shed light on the complex and enduring character of women's resistance during the Black Decade, providing a thorough knowledge of their tenacity and agency.

Chapter 1: Legislating Gender: The Family Code in Algerian Society

After gaining independence in 1962, the government tried to portray women as having as much political and social influence as they did during the War of Liberation. However, their role in society diminished, relegating them to reproducing and caring for the new nation. This betrayal was cemented by the government's establishment of the Algerian Family Code in 1984.[17] Many women voiced their dissent against the Family Code, recognizing the harm these new regulations inflicted on them. Particularly, this new code[18] recognized women as minors and as such stripped them of any agency they previously possessed. This text's logic is predicated on the notion that women are less than human (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 18). Thus, its contents prove that women are legally incapable of doing basic tasks in any human being's life—much like if they were a child (ibid.). In response to these laws, women

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[17] Established in 1984, I define the Algerian Family Code as more than just a piece of legislation; it marks the interwar period's shift from informal societal standards to official legal regulations. It incorporated societal norms that already existed into a legal framework, complete with sanctions and means for enforcement. The code essentially turns long-standing societal norms—many of which have been criticized by women's organizations for being discriminatory, restricting, and patriarchal—into legal language. But it's crucial to understand that these standards existed in Algerian society long before the Family Code was created. They filtered into public and institutional settings as well as homes, normalizing themselves in the daily lives of a great number of Algerians. As a result, the Family Code maintained the status quo and its impact on women's lives by formalizing established practices and enshrining them in the legal system.

[18] The changes in the legal code concerning women's rights stem from reinterpretations of Shari'a principles, often influenced by patriarchal norms and cultural traditions. While Shari'a theoretically promotes gender equality under divine law, (Wadud 2021) these reinterpretations prioritize men's authority and control, manifesting in discriminatory practices within specific legal provisions such as inheritance rights, marriage, dress codes, and access to education and employment. These reinterpretations are shaped by societal factors including entrenched patriarchal attitudes, cultural traditions, political agendas, and historical contexts. Patriarchal norms dictate women's subordinate roles, guiding legal interpretations to uphold and perpetuate these norms.

in Algerian organizations marched, met, and discussed their disapproval of the FLN party's new legislation.[19]

In this chapter, I trace the chronology of the Family Code from its introduction in 1984 until the Black Decade (1988-1999) in order to analyze the events that led to these alterations and to interrogate the longstanding assumption that women were passive victims of the Family Code and the Black Decade. Thus, I argue that Algerian women's activism against the Family Code, which is closely tied to their experiences before and during the Black Decade, is one way in which they showed their resistance and counteracted the assumption of their idleness. For this purpose, I will be relying on archival material collected from the Archives of Algerian Women's Fight. Moreover, I will analyze the impact of the Family Code on the Black Decade and how it worsened the situation for women during the Civil War. Finally, I will portray the ways in which the Family Code impacted family dynamics within the Algerian household relying on the interviews I have conducted.

Tracing the Background of the Algerian Family Code

Algeria was subjected to 132 years of brutal French colonial rule from 1830 to 1962, during which time its people faced systematic discrimination, torture, and immense suffering. Following the end of colonial authority, the Algerian resistance began an arduous eight-year war for

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[19] It is important to examine the Family Code in light of women's activism prior to and during the Black Decade for a number of reasons. By looking at the history and application of the Code, it first provides a nuanced understanding of gender relations, power dynamics, and legislative motivations. Secondly, it exposes a covert past of legislative changes that solidified patriarchal standards, enslaved women, and guaranteed male supremacy. These covert tales highlight the tenacity of women while exposing state control mechanisms. Thirdly, it dispels the myth that women were helpless victims by highlighting their proactive advocacy for rights and resistance. Finally, understanding the Family Code in the context of Algeria's larger history offers a thorough comprehension of the Black Decade by highlighting underlying conflicts and changes.

independence, which culminated in the nation's liberation. Algerian women's rights advanced significantly following independence, as they quickly achieved full civil and political rights (Bennoune 1995, 54). This watershed moment represented a tremendous stride forward for Algerian women's rights, as established in Algeria's inaugural constitution of 1963, which specifically promised equal rights and responsibilities for both sexes (ibid.).[20]

However, the frustration over women's rights marginalization grew with the implementation of the Family Code in 1984, in which the government codified personal matters based on *Shari'a* law.[21] This legal move, allegedly motivated by cultural and national preservation, effectively entrenched gender inequities and reinforced patriarchal systems in Algerian society (Bennoune 1995, 54).[22] As a result, women became progressively sidelined in both social and legal sectors, as the government promoted traditional values and religious identity over the advancement of gender equality. As such, the Family Code was enacted to revamp the management of family relations, which had previously been overseen by colonial-era laws such as the 1916 Code

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[20] I am using 'sex' here because this is how it is mentioned in the constitution since there is no differentiation between sex and gender in the Algerian context.

*The early spike in female representation in Algeria's inaugural national legislature, with 10 out of 194 members filled by women, signified a promising start toward gender inclusion in governance (Bennoune 1995, 54). However, the ensuing steep drop in female representation to a mere 2 out of 138 seats the following year highlighted a disturbing regression in attention to gender equality and women's issues in politics (ibid.). This fall coincided with broader cultural transformations, as shown by the FLN party's April 1964 post-war convention, where delegates urged for a greater emphasis on "Muslim traditions" following independence. Their concerns about the perceived threats to societal norms, personal freedoms, and democratic values fueled a narrative that prioritized traditional values over progressive reforms (ibid.).

[21] Personal matters such as marriage, inheritance, child custody, movement, etc.

[22] This dynamic replicates colonial-era discriminatory restrictions like Le Code D'Indigenat continuing a cycle of marginalization and exclusion for Algerian women. This code served as a regulatory tool for colonial powers to both govern and discriminate against the indigenous populace, exacerbating their marginalization. This code delineated "thirty-three infractions that were not illegal under the French civil code but were illegal in Algeria when carried out by Muslims" (Khanna 2007, 9). For instance, actions such as traveling without a permit, showing disrespect to a French official, or speaking critically about the French Republic were deemed punishable offenses if committed by indigenous individuals. The discriminatory regulations and limitations within the Family Code echoed this system.

Morand[23] and the 1959 Marriage Ordinance.[24] These laws were vestiges of Algeria's colonial past, representing the imposition of French legal structures and ideals on the Algerian people. The Family Code aimed to be a departure from this colonial legacy and a shift toward a legal system more consistent with Islamic ideals and Arab cultural identity. The Family Code attempted to assert Algeria's independence and cultural sovereignty by adopting *Shari'a* law and highlighting Arab identity. However, the patriarchal ideals that characterized each code continued along a continuum spanning the pre- and post-war periods alike. In this section, I argue that tracing the history of the Family Code back to colonial rule and connecting it to the Civil War reveals a continuous pattern of oppression against Algerian women. This oppression, rather than having distinct starting and ending points, persists in different forms over time.

When the Family Code was enacted in 1984, it essentially consolidated and formalized many of these existing practices into a single legal framework.[25] As a result, the Family Code's articles frequently reflected long-standing Algerian societal conventions and practices. This continuity between pre-existing societal standards and Family Code regulations demonstrates the

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[23] The 1916 Draft Code (also known as Code Morand), overseen by Marcel Morand, stands as a significant cornerstone of Algerian legal doctrine. Without dedicated legislation, it emerged as a primary reference for Muslim Algerian law. Despite being primarily theoretical, it assumed a legislative-like form and authority. Consequently, certain provisions heavily influenced judicial proceedings, persisting in relevance even in the years following independence (Arabi 2001, 122).

[24] The establishment of a new family code in Algeria was a lengthy process that involved extensive consultation and drafting. The final Ordinance of February 1959 marked a significant departure from traditional Maliki law. Key reforms included banning child marriage, ensuring free consent in marriages, requiring personal appearance before state officials for marriage validation, replacing unilateral divorce with judicial divorce, and prioritizing children's welfare in custody and support decisions (MacMaster 2007, 95).

[25] Algeria codified family concerns in two stages: first, through the Algerian Constitution of 1976, and then through the Family Code of 1984. However, it is crucial to highlight that societal conventions around marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other familial issues predate these legal achievements. These standards had been strongly embedded in Algerian society in the form of common law long before legal rules were formalized by the newly formed Algerian sovereign government. What is intriguing is that many of these traditional practices and standards were virtually included into the Family Code with little modification. Prior to the formation of official legal frameworks and after the complete abrogation of the 1959 Marriage Ordinance, judges used their personal interpretations of Shari'a law to resolve family disputes and concerns (MacMaster 2007, 102). This period, marked by judicial discretion and emphasis on religious precepts, paved the way for the eventual formulation of family law.

intricate interplay of tradition, religion, anti-colonialism, and law in defining familial connections and dynamics in Algeria. It emphasizes the idea that legal changes typically reflect, and sometimes even prolong, existing social norms and beliefs. Furthermore, it implies that, while formal legislative reforms may strive to modernize or regulate family problems, they are firmly embedded in historical and cultural circumstances that influence their interpretation and implementation. As such, it is counterproductive to view and study the Family Code without tracing its history back to the colonial period, especially that Algeria's independence did not mean the end of colonial intervention and effects.

After Algeria's independence in 1962, the country still held the promise of gender equality for women especially after their brave efforts during the War of Liberation,[26] a role officially recognized by the National Liberation Front (FLN) (Salhi 2003, 27). This promise quickly evaporated with the creation of the Family Code in 1984 (ibid). One participant stated that, "'our only regret is the loss of that absolute equality achieved during the revolution. As far as that's concerned, we seem to have moved backwards rather than forwards'" (Shaaban, as cited in Salhi, 2003, p. 27). In efforts to relieve itself from socioeconomic responsibilities, the Algerian state has put the family as "a strategic component of Algerian socialism" (Lazreg 1990, 778) leading the society to assert the role of women as homemakers and banishing them to the private sphere and off the labor market—in order to avoid competition (ibid). As such, though promised equality under the 1976 Algerian Constitution, "a narrow concern for capital accumulation […] obscure[ed] the specific history of women's struggle during the war of independence and their demands for the

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[26] "Women participated actively in the nationalist struggle as fighters, cadres, nurses, and teachers, and bore a large share of French repression" (Bennoune 1995, 53). Many of them, such as Djamila Bouhired, were tortured and sexually abused by French soldiers, which "became for many the symbol of the Algerian freedom struggle" (ibid.).

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implementation of their rights," (ibid) leaving them to suffer the consequences of such oppressive measures.

Ahead of the 1984 Family Code, the 1976 Constitution recognized women's active role during the War of Liberation and the cruciality of equality between the sexes. This Constitution "insisted that the status of women still needed improvement," and that women themselves "must ultimately remain the best defender[s] of [their] own rights and dignity through [their] deportment and qualities as well as relentless struggle against prejudice, injustice, and humiliation" (Salhi 2003, 28). This constitution included the right to free movement, work, education, and voting. Nevertheless, making reforms to family and women related issues proved to be harder than expected "due to the normative values of *Shari'a,* which limit, or even hinder, the process of reforms related to family law" (Benzenine 2021, 287). For instance, a ministerial order in 1980 breached women's right to free movement and prohibited them "from traveling unaccompanied by a male relative" (Salhi 2003, 29). This new law was obscured from public knowledge until a group of women who studied abroad were stopped at the airport and prevented from traveling. Though these women attempted to make their voices heard and create "a scandal," (Salhi 2003, 29) the event was only reported in a couple low-profile newspapers. It was not until a few years after that Chadli Benjdid, the Algerian president at the time, proposed the creation of a new Family Code, which many newspapers reported was based on a "tendency towards Islamic fundamentalism and, as such, threatened women's rights and privileges as fully enfranchised citizens" (Salhi 2003, 29).

Before it was established into law, the necessity for women to be accompanied by a *mahram*[27] was primarily a social norm deeply ingrained in Islamic culture. This standard was based on interpretations of numerous *hadiths*, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which stated that women should travel with a *mahram* for their own safety and protection (Al Etoum et al. 2024). While generally recognized and practiced, particularly in conservative and religiously observant populations, this rule was neither officially compelled nor enforced by the government. Instead, it served as a cultural and religious norm supported by families and communities, frequently out of religious duty and concern for women's safety and modesty. Families followed this method to protect their female relatives while maintaining traditional notions of modesty and propriety. Women frequently accepted this norm, seeing it as a sign of piety and devotion to religious teachings in addition to its normalization in the public and private spheres (ibid.). However, despite its widespread social acceptance, the obligation for women to be accompanied by a *mahram* remained mainly informal and unregulated within the legal structure. Women might officially travel without a *mahram*, however they might face social shame or disapproval from their families or communities. This allowed for some flexibility and personal choice, especially when women needed to travel for legitimate reasons like as education, job, or religious pilgrimage.

The new Family Code was "referred to as 'The Code of Infamy'" (Catalano 2010, 547) for being a backward step for women's emancipation and liberation. It reflected the dominance of Islamic law and the Maliki school, signaling to many advocates of fundamental rights the unfavorable condition of Algerian women in a newly formed neopatriarchal state, [28] (Benzenine

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[27]In Islamic law, a family member with whom marriage would be deemed *haram* (forbidden) is referred to as a *mahram*. According to certain interpretations of Islamic law, a woman must travel long distances with a *mahram* in order to protect and ensure her safety.

[28] A neopatriarchal state is characterized by the fusion of traditional patriarchal values with modern political structures, where religion, state, and family dynamics intersect to reinforce hierarchical power relationships.

2021, 288) in which religion is closely linked to political authority and influence, affecting the structure of government itself (Catalano 2010, 538). In neopatriarchal societies, the family is the primary unit and the cornerstone of the community, in contrast to secular nations where the individual frequently has the upper hand. The emphasis on the family as the cornerstone of society indicates a hierarchical framework in which familial ties are ingrained in laws and customs (ibid.). As a result, the state upholds power structures that put family authority over personal freedom by reinforcing and perpetuating conventional patriarchal ideals. The intertwining of religion, state, and family relations results in this system of sharply defined societal roles and power dynamics, often to the detriment of marginalized groups, particularly women. As such, women may face constraints imposed by cultural norms that prioritize their domestic responsibilities while limiting their freedom and autonomy in broader social and political spheres. The fusion of religious, political, and family authority underscores the complexity of neopatriarchal societies' governance, where traditional values combine with modern political structures to shape social norms and power dynamics. In Algeria's case, these political structures are typically wrapped in a shroud of religious fanaticism and sacralization.

The Family Code included articles that mostly focused on the right to movement, work, marriage, divorce, and custody. For example, it required women to fully submit to their husbands and extended family members (Article 39).[29] Because of this legal obligation, women's autonomy and ability to make decisions were severely limited, placing them in a subordinate position within the family system and in constant submission to their husbands and their families. For instance, in

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[29] From the Family Code: "L'epouse est tenue de : 1/ Obéir à son mari et lui accorder des égards en sa qualité de chef, 2/ allaiter sa progéniture si elle est en mesure de le faire et de les élever, 3/ respecter les parents de son mari et ses proches." (The wife is required to: 1/ Obey her husband and show him respect as the head of the household, 2/ breastfeed her offspring if she is able to do so and raise them, 3/ respect her husband's parents and relatives).

a letter directed to President Chadli Ben Jdid by International Association of Democratic Women Workers (AITDF), members illustrated that a woman is required to include her desire to work in her marriage contract. However, the husband retains the right to revoke his approval at any time, leaving the woman uncertain about her options as she is legally bound to obey her husband according to this provision (Association pour l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes 1992, 2). Thus, the Family Code, with its focus on various aspects of women's lives, profoundly impacted their rights and freedoms and hindered their emancipation and social participation.

In addition, the Family Code's formalization of polygamy[30] gives men the right to legally take a maximum of four wives (Article 8),[31] which exacerbates gender inequality and puts women in married partnerships at greater risk. As a result of this unfair treatment, women's rights, particularly regarding inheritance, property ownership, and domestic decision-making, are limited. Moreover, wives in polygamous marriages often face economic hardships as their husbands struggle to support multiple families, leading to precarious financial situations for some.[32] Furthermore, women in polygamous marriages may experience societal shame and

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[30] By the formalization of polygamy, I mean the codification of a right that existed before in the Algerian society. In Islam, men are allowed to marry four wives as long as they equate between them. This right was agreed upon socially but was not part of the constitution or any regulations that organized family matters previously. The codification of polygamy meant that not only the Islamic law protects this right for men but the secular civil law too.

[31] From the Family Code: "Il est autorisé de contracter un mariage avec plus d'une épouse dans le respect de la charia, à condition que cela soit justifié, que les conditions et l'intention d'équité soient réunies, et après avoir informé préalablement les épouses précédentes et futures. Chacune des épouses peut intenter une action en justice contre le conjoint en cas de vol, ou demander le divorce en cas d'absence de consentement." (It is permissible to marry more than one wife within the limits of Sharia, provided it is justified, conditions and the intention of equity are met, and after prior notification of both previous and future wives. Each wife can take legal action against the spouse in case of theft, or seek divorce in case of lack of consent).

[32] As a result, the polygamy article was altered in 2005 which limited a man's right to polygamy by requiring judicial authorization and proof of financial capability.

marginalization, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and alienation.[33] This article states that men are allowed to marry more than one woman if the motive is justified without stating what the motive can be and what the conditions for the justifications are. As such, in the same letter, women from the organization denounced this obscurity as "deliberate" (Association pour l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes 1992, 3) in order to make it impossible for women to ask for divorce. In addition, the legalization of polygamy and making it men's right renders women "interchangeable objects that continually puts them in a field of competition" (Association pour l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes 1992, 4). Beyond coercion or subjugation, a number of factors affect women's decisions to enter polygamous marriages. In this situation, a woman's decisions are influenced by her personal beliefs, her family's expectations, and her economic situation.

Moreover, women lose their ability to sign marriage contracts without the assistance of a matrimonial guardian (Article 11),[34] which perpetuates the idea that men should be the ones to watch over women as well as making it impossible for women to conclude their marriages" (Association pour l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes 1992, 3). This prohibition makes it more difficult for women to negotiate the terms of their marriages and express

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[33] Thus, unrestricted legalized polygamy is not only a violation of women's dignity, as they are seen as one-quarter of a human being, but it is also one of the factors that lead to family dissolution (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 19). In such contexts, a woman's worth may be equated with her ability to secure and maintain a marital relationship, particularly in polygamous unions where her husband's attention may be divided among multiple spouses. This can reinforce harmful notions that a woman's primary role and worth lie in her ability to fulfill traditional gender roles within the confines of marriage, rather than in her individual aspirations, achievements, or inherent dignity. Additionally, the practice of polygamy can exacerbate existing power imbalances within marriages, further marginalizing women and potentially leading to family dissolution as tensions arise from competing interests and unequal treatment among spouses.

[34] Fron the Family Code: "La conclusion du mariage pour la femme incombe à son tuteur matrimonial qui est soit son père soit l'un de ses proches parents. Le juge et le tuteur matrimonial de la personne qui n'en a pas." (The conclusion of marriage for a woman is the responsibility of her matrimonial guardian, who is either her father or one of her close relatives. The judge and the matrimonial guardian of the person who does not have one).

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their own desires, which maintains unequal power dynamics in married relationships. Such an article prevents women from divorcing their husbands if they wanted to and obliges them to resort to Article 54 of the Family Code defines *Khol'a*.[35] So, divorce is practically impossible for women since the requirements for starting divorce procedures are so onerous and demanding of proof (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 19). The *Khol'a* renders men's right to divorce normalized while women's right to it a special case.

Moreover, the Family Code was equally oppressive to mothers. For example, Article 48's legislative requirement that mothers breastfeed and care for their children until they reach maturity serves to further solidify conventional gender norms that place a woman's duty as the primary caregiver and household worker. This assumption maintains women's financial dependence on male family members and restricts their prospects for career and personal growth outside the home. Such an article also strips women of their agency as they are legally required to breastfeed their children whether they want it or not. In that sense, women bear the majority of the obligations inside the family, but they are systematically excluded when it comes to issues like housing, child custody, and post-divorce schooling. Many women become homeless or economically disadvantaged after being denied housing rights and custodial privileges following a divorce, which exacerbates their social and economic disenfranchisement (ibid.). The state is equally complicit in this as it provides no financial support for divorced mothers (ibid.). When it comes to

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[35] This article is a concept that severely restricts women's ability to file for divorce and essentially keeps them in abusive or unhappy marriages. This provision lays the onus of paying a "ransom" to women who want to end their marriages, underscoring the structural barriers that prevent women from obtaining legal recourse and from being freed from oppressive marriages. Thus, "Khol'a [sic] is the problematic ransom that women must pay for their freedom, just like slaves" (Salhi 2003, 30).

custody, women are not allowed to become the primary carers of their children until instructed and agreed upon by the husband (ibid.).

Moreover, the necessity of obtaining male approval for fundamental decisions related to raising children highlights the widespread gender bias present in the legal system, which gives precedence to paternal power over mother rights. In other words, "The mother can never become the tutor of her children, and the father's consent and permission are needed for the most basic needs of the child, including registering them at school, and even approving the child's participation in school activities (Articles 52, 62, 65)" (ibid.). Thus, the Family Code "has often codified the ownership of wives and children by fathers / husbands" (Salhi 2003, 30). these articles underscore the societal perception of women as both minors and objects, subject to the control and whims of men. They depict women not only as individuals lacking full autonomy but also as commodities for men's amusement and manipulation. This portrayal perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and reinforces unequal power dynamics, further marginalizing women in society.[36]

In addition, the government[37] may have created the Family Code in the name of upholding Islamic and *Shari'a* law, but their true intentions were very different. The legislation's underlying motivations were complex and frequently self-serving, despite their claimed religious motives. For example, academics contend that the elite group used the pretense of sanctity to justify their own

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[36] The 1984 Family Code represented a significant setback for women's rights in Algeria since it tightly institutionalized societal norms and behaviors, effectively eliminating any flexibility that existed earlier. Prior to the adoption of this legislation, there was some informal flexibility in how traditional standards around family matters, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, were understood and enforced. However, with the passage of the Family Code, these customary practices were institutionalized into legislation, leaving little space for variation or adaptation to individual situations.

[37] The government was mostly made of wealthy people who had secular values yet branded themselves as though adopting the Shari'a for their rules and regulations in order to appeal to the Algerian clergy and prevent them from revolting against the government itself.

subjective and egocentric view of culture and society (Salhi 2003, 31). Their power was maintained and a political authoritarian regime was sustained by the manipulation of religious and cultural narratives (Catalano 2010, 536). Furthermore, the undemocratic way in which these reforms were carried out strengthens the grip of the authoritarian regime by concentrating power in the hands of a small number of people and silencing those who voice opposition (ibid.). In addition to making gender inequality worse, this concentration of power threatened the democratic ideals that society ought to be built around. As a result, the Family Code was used by the ruling class to both preserve and bolster their hold on power as well as to subjugate women.[38]

Strategies Against Family Code Restrictions: Women's Responses

In Algeria, the struggle against the Family Code represents a significant chapter in women's activism both in the country and the region. From the grassroots mobilization of women's NGOs to the advocacy efforts through meetings and petitions, and the powerful symbolism of marches and public demonstrations, Algerian women[39] have tirelessly challenged the oppressive provisions of the Family Code and demanded recognition of their rights as equal citizens. Though their fight was constantly interrupted by various political events, women's organizations have taken different shapes and forms, in order to affirm women's place in the Algerian public sphere

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[38] The enaction of the Family Code in 1984, was a devastating emblem of the Algerian government's persistent denial of women's human dignity and their rights. This law, which was ostensibly intended to regulate family matters, instead established and codified oppressive and submissive processes that mostly targeted Algerian women. Particularly, through the codification of the already existing restrictive social norms and transforming them into legal frameworks that disadvantaged women by nature, the government sustained a system of discrimination and gender inequality. In addition to solidifying patriarchal norms and practices, the Family Code furthered Algerian society's marginalization of women by depriving them of agency and self-determination and by putting them under the government and men's mercy. Furthermore, the enactment of such laws is a reflection of a larger trend of state-sponsored sexism and indifference to the wellbeing of women, which is a sign of the government's breach of its commitments under international human rights standards.

[39] When referring to Algerian women, I am not suggesting that every individual woman participated in the struggle against the Family Code. Instead, I am specifically addressing those who were engaged in various capacities, such as members of women's NGOs, veterans of the War of Liberation, intellectuals, and independent activists.

and society. This section delves into the myriad ways in which women resisted against the Family Code, shedding light on their strategies, challenges, and triumphs through founding organizations, drafting letters and other types of communication, and protesting. It disapproves the assumption that women were mere bystanders to their oppression.

Prior to the country's independence, some Algerian women were able to form their own organization called the Algerian Women's Union (Union des Femmes Algeriennes – UFA). Though this organization worked closely for the goals of women's emancipation and liberation from French colonialism, it was later on coopted by the government and was renamed the Algerian Women's National Union (Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes – UNFA) (Salhi 2017, 20). Many women have deserted this newly branded organization and decided to open their own, especially in the 1980s, prior and after the institutionalization of the Algerian Family Code. In 1985, the first women's organization was formed called Association for Equality before the Law between Women and Men (Association pour l'Egalité devant la Loi entre les femmes et les hommes) "aiming for the repeal of the Family Code and the acquisition of civil laws guaranteeing gender equality" (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 19).[40] Thus, women were both able to exercise their different rights within the Algerian public sphere and were experiencing rising levels of discrimination and oppression from a patriarchal masculinist system.

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[40] The formation of this organization sheds light on the hypocrisy of the government that simultaneously considers women as minors but also gives them the "opportunity to enjoy political citizenship and form their own associations through which they can make claims for equality before the law" (Salhi 2017, 20).

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The period between the Family Code's adoption and the Black Decade that followed saw a notable growth in the number of women's organizations.[41] This increase was a sign of the growing activism of women who were motivated by the desire for gender equality and social change (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 20). But the growth of these groups also posed a problem for women who wanted to get involved in activism. Choosing which organization to join grew more difficult as there were so many groups promoting different causes and strategies (ibid.). Women had the challenge of choosing from a wide range of possibilities a group that aligned with their personal values and goals. Because of this, potential members were left feeling apprehensive and confused as they tried to figure out which platform would be best for their activities.

These associations frequently convened to coordinate and mobilize protests, with particular emphasis on significant dates like March 8th—International Women's Day. This annual occasion evolved into a tradition for Algerian women to assert their presence and assert their rights through

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[41] These organizations can be divided into 4 movements with different goals, aspirations, and values with all of them focusing on the Family Code. First, organizations that followed in the steps of the UNFA – which was coopted by the government – only wanted to change some articles in the Family Code such as the right of women to live in the family home after divorce, and shared custody. This kind of organizations believed in the existence of a "progressive Islam" (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 20) and their activities often had a social character such as holding events in daycares (ibid.). Examples of such organizations is the Algiers-based Association for the Defense and Promotion of Women's Rights (Association pour la Défense et la Promotion des droits de la femme). Second, there were organizations that wanted to abolish the Family Code and change the mentalities of the people that allow for such laws to be passed. Such organizations had a cultural character as well which manifested in photography expositions, clubs, art galas, etc. An example of such organizations is the Algiers-based Association for the Emancipation of Women. Third, there were organizations that had a legal character and wanted to change the discriminatory measures and the abolition of the Family Code. Such associations included the Boumerdes-based Women's Voices (Voix de Femmes). Fourth, many organizations believed in the triumph of the women question above all other political and social matters. An example of such associations is the Independent Association of the Triumph of Women's Rights (Association Indépendante pour le Triomphe des droits de la femme).
In addition, to these 4 distinct categories, there were the *moujahidate* (women combatants) who were active during the War of Liberation and who assumed a supporting role in all the categories mentioned previously. In addition to women who were part of Islamist organizations and who wanted the application of Islamic laws that acknowledge women's rights (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 21). Thus, women's activism was as multifaceted as their struggles, and they assumed various roles and responsibilities to fight French colonialism, a patriarchal society, a wounding Family Code, and finally the rise of Islamist fundamentalism.

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collective action in public spaces. These demonstrations served as powerful expressions of solidarity and resistance, providing women with a platform to voice their grievances and advocate for change. March 8th emerged as a symbolic day of empowerment, where women across Algeria came together to challenge societal norms and demand equality and justice. Through these protests, women asserted their agency and contributed to the ongoing struggle for gender equality and social transformation.

On March 8th, 1964, two years after the independence, the newspaper *Alger Republicain,* wrote the headline "From the May 1st Square to the "Majestic" venue, strong women's protests that centered March 8th as a grandiose day" (De la place du 1er Mai a la Salle du 'Majestic' puissantes manifestations des femmes qui ont fait du 8 Mars une journee grandiose) ('Alger Republicain Headlines' 1965). The newspaper continues to read "hundreds of women could not penetrate the meeting hall because, all showed up for the *rendez-vous,* showed that they have as much energy ready to effectively enter the country's active life, for a total women's emancipation, next to people who are still oppressed" (ibid.). Such an article reaffirms how socially active women were after gaining their independence, and how impressive and monumental their activism was. In addition, photos taken during these protests vividly depict the large number of women who participated in the march and carried banners bearing messages like "Women for the Elimination of the Family Code" and "Women Have the Right to Their Own Houses Without Any Constraints," among other things (see Figure 1) (Archives De Lutte Des Femmes Algeriennes, 1964).

These pictures act as potent visual depictions of the broad grassroots movement supporting women's rights and opposing legislation that discriminate against them (see Figure 2), such as the

Family Code. They draw attention to women's collective tenacity and unity in demanding equality and autonomy in a range of spheres of life, such as housing rights and legal rights.

Figure 1 Algerian women marching on International Women's Day (March 8th, 1990) in Algiers holding the banner الحق في العمل بدون قيد *(The Right to Work With no Constraints).*

Figure 2 Algerian women marching on International Women's Day (March 8th, 1990) in Martyrs Square, Algiers with the Statue of the Martyr showing in the background.

Moreover, the reflection piece penned by M. Hammouche in *Le Soir d'Algérie* on March 10th, 1998, provides a poignant snapshot of the shifting dynamics surrounding women's rights and societal attitudes towards gender equality in Algeria. Hammouche, a male writer, wrote "Nous, les hommes comme les femmes" (Us, men like women) (Hammouche 1998) as a reflection on

International Women's Day. In this short article, Hammouche starts by complementing the "*belles femmes*" (beautiful women) (ibid.) in the streets of Algiers on Saturday May 9th who visited florists, pizzerias, and the like, in a day dedicated to them—albeit with a note of irony regarding the limited scope of their celebration, as women were granted only half a day off on their designated day (ibid.). Interestingly, the March 8th celebration was postponed to the next day so that it does not interfere with the "masculine" (ibid.)[42] domain of the holy Friday. This postponement underscores entrenched gender norms and the relegation of women's rights issues to secondary status. Hammouche states that the sad view of the lack of women from the Algerian streets, like they used to be in the past, was either due to the ideal of equality between the sexes not being a mobilizing force anymore, or that the feminist cause lacked so much framing and organization, or both (ibid.). Similarly, an editorial featured in *El Watan* in 2005 lamented the decline in women's visibility and participation in public demonstrations and political activities compared to earlier periods ('Les Femmes d'Algerie' 2005). The editorial attributed this trend to various factors, including societal conservatism and the perceived waning influence of feminist movements.

Furthermore, the Association for Equality before the Law between Women and Men (AITDF) made a noteworthy contribution on March 8, 1992, when they wrote a lengthy 14-page letter addressed to the president of the republic, Chadli Benjdid. The association's female members painstakingly addressed every element of the Family Code that they believed to be unfair and

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[42] Growing up in Algeria, how a Friday looks like was quite set in stone and repetitive. Every Friday, my mother (and other mothers, I assume) wakes up early to clean the house and then cooks the Friday couscous that is supposed to be ready by the time my father and brother come back from the mosque. Men go to the Friday market in the morning, then come back, and get ready for the mosque (taking a shower and dressing up for the mosque is normally what is done). My point from this short description is to show that on Fridays, the streets are dominated by men in their *qamis* either running errands outside or going to the mosque, while women are not to be seen since they are confined to their homes. This makes the Holy Friday a masculine day.

discriminatory in this lengthy letter.[43] This program demonstrated the AITDF's commitment to promoting gender equality and opposing laws that uphold gender-based disparities in Algerian society. When it came to marriage, the organization made it clear that they were opposing the way that "women are never adults" (Association pour l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes 1992, 3) referring to the fact that the Family Code considers them as minors. On the same line, they said "when it comes to their rights, a woman is the person that is completely incapable of getting her own rights" due to her perceived "soul weakness and dementia" (ibid.). In addition, the letter demonstrated the AITDF's proactive approach to addressing structural injustices ingrained in the Family Code. Through a methodical examination and critique of every discriminatory provision, the group emphasized the pressing requirement for legal modifications to preserve the rights and honor of Algerian women. During that time, the AITDF's commitment to gender equality was demonstrated by this act of activism, which also acted as a spark for greater societal awareness and mobilization around women's rights problems in Algeria.

Moreover, some of the organizations utilized petitions to make their voices heard. For instance, many women from a variety of backgrounds, including university students, presented a united front against the discriminatory elements of the Family Code in their petition to meet with the Minister of the Interior (Salhi 2003, 29). Their willingness to oppose the harsh measures imposed upon them and to promote gender equality under the law was demonstrated by their united action. Even with a sizable number of signatures, their attempts to engage in substantive discourse with the government ultimately failed, underscoring the deeply ingrained reluctance on the part of the political establishment to confront the complaints of Algerian women, or to even consider them

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[43] Key issues brought up included limitations on their freedom of movement, the difficulties associated with child custody arrangements, and the intricacies of divorce proceedings.

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and their struggle. But in spite of all of this, women's rights activists' sense of resilience and togetherness grew stronger, opening the door for more advocacy and mobilization in the face of structural barriers, especially through protests.

In addition to the protests previously mentioned that were held on March 8th, many protests were held in direct response to the Family Code even before its creation. For instance, feminist activists in Algiers fiercely opposed Chadli's government's 1981 efforts to draft a new Family Code since the news were known three years before its establishment (Salhi 2003, 29).[44] On December 23, 1981, young feminist activists and women veterans of war united to fiercely oppose the law (ibid.). The fact that women veterans joined the fight against the Family Code meant that those who fought for the sovereignty of the country were also opposing the current regime's way of dealing with women. However, feminist activists' hopes were severely dashed when the Family Code was signed into law in June 1984, despite the dissent shown by women's organizations and the escalation of demonstrations. This event exposed the political establishment's steadfast opposition to the objectives of the feminist movement. The ongoing fight for gender equality in Algeria is emphasized by these rallies, which also show how complicatedly governmental authority, legislation, and activism interact to shape sociopolitical dynamics. This interaction would later on lead to the intensification of women's rights' limitations during the Black Decade, which I will dive into in the next section.[45]

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[44] One hundred female activists protested the government's covert approach to the legislative process by staging a sit-in at the Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes (UNFA) offices (Salhi 2003, 29). Later, in a forceful protest on October 28, 1981, women voiced their dissatisfaction with the government's choice to discuss the Family Code behind closed doors by taking to the streets (ibid.). The culmination of this public outcry was a 500-woman rally in front of the National Assembly during a plenary session on November 16, 1981, which represented the feminist movement's increasing momentum.

[45] I would like to conclude this section by summarizing the following, the fight against the Family Code in Algeria represents a turning point in the history of women's activism, a time of intense opposition and promotion of gender equality both domestically and internationally. Algerian women have persistently challenged the restrictive sections

The Impact of the Family Code During the Black Decade

The consequences of the Family Code were later on exacerbated due to the rise of Islamism in the country.[46] During the October 1988 riots, women's organizations took to the streets to demonstrate that their struggles extended beyond feminist demands and opposition to the Family Code. They were also protesting the corruption of the government and the failures of the economic system. In other words, "the women's groups, who throughout the 1980s have incessantly expressed their anger at the institution of the Family Code, also joined the demonstrations and called for the respect of the democratic liberties" (Salhi 2017, 19). However, the switch to a multi-partisan system allowed the emergence of fundamentalist religious political parties including the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Due to the prevailing political climate, women's associations and members of the FIS were perceived as direct adversaries in a quest for civil liberties. While the former faction endeavors to advance these liberties, the latter works actively to quash their efforts

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of the Family Code, claiming their rights as equal citizens, through a variety of grassroots organizing strategies, including the creation of women's NGOs and advocacy campaigns through meetings, petitions, and the potent symbolism of marches and open protests. Women's organizations have persevered through many obstacles and disruptions brought about by political upheavals, maintaining their importance and presence in Algerian society. The rise of several women's movements, each with unique objectives, hopes, and approaches, highlights how complicated women's concerns are and how diversified women's activism is. Algerian women have shown steadfast perseverance and persistence in their quest of justice and equality, whether they are calling for drastic societal shifts or incremental legislative reforms. Thus, the development of women's activism in Algeria illustrates the complex relationship between political power, legal frameworks, and grassroots mobilization. It also reflects broader changes in public opinion and official policies. Finally, women's rights activists in Algeria keep moving forward in spite of failures and challenges, sparking social change and upending deeply ingrained patriarchal conventions.

[46] For the Algerian government, as well as for the conservative and Islamist opposition, women are sacralized; they must be protected by law. But protected from whom and from what? (Benzenine 2021, 303) Marnia Lazreg argues that women were "perceived as a social 'cell' in need of 'protection and preservation' from social ills" (Lazreg 1990, 777). As the Black Decade progressed, fundamentalist organizations placed women at the center of a convoluted and sometimes contradicting narrative. These groups disseminated ideas of female inferiority based in biological determinism and traditional interpretations of Islam, all the while calling for the preservation of what they considered to be the true Muslim nation (Rouadjia 2006, 7). Women were portrayed as being fundamentally inferior to men and as highly esteemed symbols of the country's religious and cultural validity (ibid.). In other words, fundamentalists promoted the notion that women should protect the integrity and purity of the Muslim community. Within this narrative, women were held in high regard for their responsibility to preserve customs and the moral fabric of society. Their humility and devotion to gender norms were praised as crucial for maintaining the community's integrity.

(Salhi 2017, 22). In other words, women's groups sought to abrogate the Family Code and seek more rights both in the private and public spheres, while the Islamists viewed their efforts as a threat to their Islamic identity.

For instance, these organizations encountered significant backlash when they opposed the incorporation of polygamy into the Family Code. This opposition led to them being derogatorily labeled, by the first FIS founder, Ali Belhadj, as "the women who wanted to marry four husbands," (Bennoune 1995) a characterization that not only shocked Algerian society but also served to vilify these advocacy groups. Such labeling reflected a broader societal resistance to the challenges posed by women's organizations to traditional gender norms and entrenched patriarchal structures. Similarly, in 1989, women gathered for a demonstration to renounce the Family Code, once again. As a result, Abbas Madani, the second founder of the FIS told Agence Grande Presse "that recent anti-fundamentalist demonstrations by women were one of the greatest dangers threatening the destiny of Algeria. This is because women participants were 'defying the conscience of the people and repudiating national values'" (Salhi 2017). Again, Islamists demonize women's groups and paint them as the main cause of social and national stagnation, undermining the importance of other social and economic issues in the process.[47]

During the formulation of the Family Code, the Algerian government strategically intertwined legal provisions with *Shari'a* law, leveraging religious principles to advance their

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[47] Activist women's actions were rendered a threat to national unity because of their opposition to Islamist values that hindered their liberties and put limits to their rights. For the Islamists, opposing their ideals connoted a reminiscence and a desire to go back to colonial times, a period they based their agenda on moving away from. As a result, they viewed every act of dissent against the Islamist agenda and lifestyle as a betrayal to the newly sovereign nation. In this sense, a binary was created between 'us' and 'them', with the former being a true Algerian nationalist and the latter a colonial sympathizer and supporter, even if these so-called sympathizers were active agents during the War of Liberation (e.g., Moudjahidate). Both the government and the Islamists capitalized on such a sentiment and belief and drew a clear distinction between the two factions of the population, which made it easier for them to control narratives and lump dissenters under the umbrella of national betrayal and colonial reminiscence.

political agenda. This manoeuvre served a dual purpose: it aimed to consolidate governmental authority while appeasing the Algerian clergy,[48] perceived as potential challengers to the regime. "Until 1989, the government has expeditiously allied itself with the established clergy in an attempt to undermine the Muslim brothers" (Lazreg, 1990, p. 777). Thus, the resulting Family Code represented a fusion of *Shari'a* principles with colonial-era amendments, reflecting a complex interplay between religious and colonial influences on Algerian law (ibid.). While the code succeeded in garnering support from the established clergy, it failed to fully quell the discontent among Islamist factions, who viewed it as an opportunity to advance their own agendas (ibid.).[49]

An instance of overlap between the Family Code and the FIS' agenda was regarding the *mixite*.[50] In 1989, the National Committee Overseeing Educational Reform, which belonged to the government, stated that the decline in academic standards was attributed to "bilingualism, *mixité*, and the notable increase in female teachers" (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 24). A group of associations denounced in a joint statement dated June 20, 1989, "efforts by the National People's Assembly (Assemblée Populaire Nationale – APN) to eliminate female sports, discriminatory practices regarding grade advancement (demanding higher averages for girls), and the conversion of schools into centers of ideological

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[48] In the context of Algeria, the "clergy" refers to recognized religious leaders, while "Islamists" are individuals or groups advocating for Islamic governance, and the "Muslim Brotherhood" specifically denotes an Islamist organization. The Algerian government strategically aligned with the established clergy to consolidate its authority and undermine potential challenges from Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood during the formulation of the Family Code, leveraging religious principles to advance its political agenda, all within the framework of a state that historically adheres to principles of secularism.

[49] The Islamists' opposition to the code was based on a general opposition of the government and not to the code itself, especially considering that the contents of the Family Code aligned with the FIS' agenda when it comes to limiting women's role to their households and making "men, and men only, the breadwinners" (Lazreg 1990, 779). This strategic alignment with religious norms underscores the government's efforts to legitimize its authority and navigate the landscape of Algerian politics.

[50] Mixité or الاختلاط was the word used in the Algerian dialect as well. It means the mixing between sexes in public places such as cafes, schools, universities, etc.

indoctrination" (Association pour l'Egalité devant la loi entre les femmes et les hommes 1991, 24). On July 2, there was a protest in front of the National People's Assembly building in Algiers. The Minister of Education was then obliged to answer. "No discriminatory measures can be prescribed or tolerated within the education system, in accordance with the Constitution," he said in response to the accusations (El Moudjahid, July 6, 1989). In the next year, and with alignment with the APN the year before, the FIS attempted to completely delete *mixite* in educational institutions in the municipalities that it controlled. In response to this, a coalition of women's organizations declared in a one-page announcement, on July 9th, 1990, their denouncement of the prohibition of *mixite* in schools as "it excludes little girls from the educational system" ('Déclaration Associations Femmes Contre Le FIS' 1990). They demanded other women and political parties to protest against such "illegal and reactionary procedure" ('Déclaration Associations Femmes Contre Le FIS' 1990).

Education emerged as a prominent theme in my interviews, with the women I spoke to expressing their dissent and demonstrating how they resisted limitations imposed on their educational opportunities because of the *mixite*. For instance, LI believed in the cruciality of continuing her education. For her, life was not worth living if she did not do this one endeavor that she held so close to her heart. At the beginning of the Black Decade, and in spite of the rising tensions in Blida where she lived, LI did not feel that the rising conflict affected her life much. "It wasn't until they bombed my high school that I finally realized that … oh … this is really affecting me," she said. The FIS had strategically targeted educational institutions in order to prevent women from studying and female teachers from teaching as discussed above.[51] As such, while she waited

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[51] They believed that the governmental curriculum is corruptive of youngsters' brains and that men and women (and boys and girls) should not intermingle in such spaces.

for many months for the high school to find them a solution for her to continue her education, she was met with complete disappointment. "I was in 10th grade, and I already lost the 1st trimester because I waited in vain. It was then that I decided to take up things with my own hands and do something about my situation," she said.[52]

LI and her family heard that even if the government fixes the high school, the FIS will blow it up again and women were not allowed to go to school anyways. "I've defied them. Studying was the only thing I could do, and I wasn't going to let it go," she added, "when my friend FX and I used to go to school, mind you we were the only girls studying at the time since the others were forced to stay home, we would meet people who would ask us where we were going, and we used to always say that we're doing a sewing apprenticeship. So, we used to study but in hiding." Tight antagonism marked the Islamist fundamentalist viewpoint on women's roles in society, especially in the public and private spheres and in education. The FIS's opposition to women's education was part of a larger movement to limit women to traditional responsibilities in the home. However, the FIS frequently approved of actions judged appropriate within conventional gender standards, notwithstanding their limited position on women's engagement in broader societal arenas. For example, sewing was considered a home activity and a conventional gender function, thus women were frequently permitted to participate in it. The conservative view that women should have the greatest influence in the house and follow traditional gender norms while limiting their involvement in public and professional domains is reinforced by this selective authorization (Salhi 2017).

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[52] LI lived in Bougara, which was a relatively small and quite conservative town, and her high school was the only available one at the time. Afterwards, she decided to make a transfer to Sidi Moussa, a city-like town around 30 minutes away from her home. "And that's when the suffering started," she exclaimed.

Even though they did not fully agree with the Family Code contents, the FIS were happy with the intertwinement of the Code with *Shari'a* law in some of the articles such as polygamy and limiting women's freedom to movement. Even further, one of the two party leaders, Ali Belhadj, "portrayed women as needing male protection and reiterated that the safest place for them was the home and their primary duty was 'to produce lions to fight for the cause of Islam'" (Salhi 2017, 21) aligning with the government's ruling of women as minors that are in need of protection. Thus, "Islamists argued that *Shari'a* law should be applied throughout society and called for stricter measures with regard to the treatment of women" (Salhi 2003, 31–32). In addition, the fundamentalists offered several justifications for their viewpoint regarding the place of women in the household. First, they argued that housework is more closely aligned with female nature and psychology than professional labor (ibid.). They made the argument that women are more naturally suited for positions in the house than in the workforce (ibid.). Furthermore, they asserted that women who work had increased rates of morbidity and death than women who stay at home, suggesting that working outside the home puts women's health at greater risk, and that staying at home was, in fact, beneficial for their well-being. Moreover, they claimed that working women are morally inferior, suggesting that women's moral standards may drop as a result of working outside the home (ibid.). This is largely attributed to the *mixite* mentioned previously and that their mingling with other men may lead to their moral decline. Lastly, they contended that the presence of women in the workforce causes a shortage of jobs for males, implying that female employment adds to male unemployment. This belief not only attacked women but fueled men who were jobless at the time, amidst an economic crisis, to force their daughters, sisters, and wives, to quit their jobs and stay at home instead.

While conducting my interviews, I was able to notice the connections between the rise of Islamist fundamentalism, the prevalence of the Family Code, and women's experiences during the Black Decade. These connections[53] are deeply embedded in how women perceive themselves and navigate their lives today. For instance, in a follow-up interview, LI was very convinced that she cannot travel without a *Mahram*[54] solidifying the article that halted women's movement in the Family Code. This highlights how women are compelled to adhere to such restrictions, often viewing them as religious obligations, despite their societal and legal implications. Moreover, when talking about her wearing of the veil, ZH said, "I didn't wear it at the beginning, but then when my husband told me to do so, I did." Her statement shows how Article 39 of the Family Code became intrinsic in the Algerian society in which women are expected to obey their husbands. Similarly, HL expressed "it was a given that I needed to obey my mother-in-law's orders. At the end of the day, she ruled the house more than my husband did." This illustrates how women are not only socially pressured to obey their husbands and their respective families but are also legally bound to do so, as disobedience could lead to judicial consequences under the Family Code, which dictates that "All family relationships are subject to the provisions of this law" (Algerian Family Code, 1984, 1).

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[53] These connections were made by me. The questions that were asked to the interviewees did not discuss or include the Family Code as is. Instead, I asked indirect questions in order to come up with the connections myself.

Islamist fundamentalism promoted strict interpretations of religious laws, which was supported by the already existing sexist and oppressive Family Code. This code imposed many restrictions on women's rights and freedoms. During the Black Decade, these restrictive laws, combined with the violence and instability, significantly impacted women's lives, limiting their roles in society and increasing their vulnerability. For instance, this is apparent in the way that SL's father had custody of her and her sister, which forced her to follow him when he moved to East Algiers to escape the Islamists (this is further discussed in the displacement section of the second chapter). Moreover, such a connection also presents itself in the way that HL was only allowed to move with the presence of her mother-in-law, a *mahram*. This also showed the obedience that is required of her by law to her mother-in-law, father, and husband.

Furthermore, KH, who was married right when the Black Decade ended and who later on sought a divorce from her husband said,

> "At the beginning, I hid the news from everybody since I know how shameful it is for a woman to be divorced, let alone if she asked for one herself. It wasn't until much later that people started knowing about it, and I hated my life when that happened. I wanted the ground to open and swallow me."

The consequences of the Family Code, which firmly established societal views on marriage and divorce in addition to codifying patriarchal standards, are intricately linked to KH's experience. The Family Code's emphasis on maintaining the sanctity of marriage and its reinforcement of traditional gender roles is to blame for the stigma associated with divorce, as demonstrated by her experience. For example, Article 53 of the Family Code lays out requirements for divorce that frequently disadvantage women, making it difficult for them to pursue a divorce without encountering social backlash. In addition, the legal structure created by the Family Code reinforces the belief that a woman's character and social status are negatively impacted by divorce, which adds to the humiliation and shame felt by women like KH who dared to defy expectations of marriage. KH's battle thus emphasizes the long-lasting effects of the Family Code on women's independence and emphasizes the pressing need for legislative changes that advance gender parity and defend women's rights within the framework of marriage.

Contrarily, building on the FIS' comment on the women protesting the polygamy article, most women I interviewed were against polygamy despite acknowledging it as men's right in the Quran (and the Family Code). NL stated, "I can't say that God or the Quran are lying, but I know that no woman would accept it on herself." She added, "I can't accept to share my husband with other women." These statements show the divide that occurs between religiosity and the women's circumstances and preferences. In other words, even though NL was religious enough to admit the

validity of polygamy within *Shari'a* law, she still would not want it upon herself. Thus, her sentiments are indicative of a broader tension between religious doctrine and lived experiences among women in Algerian society. While religious teachings may uphold certain principles, the practical implications of such teachings often clash with individuals' personal values and aspirations. NL's reluctance to accept polygamy for herself underscores the complex negotiation of religious beliefs and individual agency despite being religious herself. Moreover, her stance challenges the assumption that religious adherence translates directly into compliance with traditional gender roles emphasizing her dissent and resistance. NL's perspective highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how religious interpretations intersect with women's autonomy and lived realities. She agreed that a man can marry four wives but only if the woman is "a spinster, a widow, or in need of protection," then she added, "but not my husband."

Putting the family as the cornerstone of a nationalist state control witnessed a regional pattern across some countries in the Arab world, including Algeria, Iraq, and Syria. Despite variances in legal systems and historical settings, there are significant parallels and connections between how these family regulations are formed and applied. All three countries have seen sociopolitical changes, which have influenced the formation of their family rules. In Algeria, for example, the growth of political Islam in the 1980s sparked arguments about religion's role in defining family law and women's rights (Zerrougui 1993). In Syria, the Ba'athist regime's secularization efforts attempted to modernize family law but were met with opposition from conservative religious groups (Al-Ali, 2000). In Iraq, the aftermath of the US-led invasion in 2003 resulted in considerable legal revisions, including amendments to the personal status law, with mixed outcomes for women's rights (Howard 2009).

Moreover, one significant commonality is that these family codes are generally patriarchal, prioritizing male family members' authority and perpetuating gender inequities. For example, like the Family Code in Algeria, which stressed the husband's role as head of the household and gave him broad authority over divorce and custody, (Mernissi 1991) in Syria, personal status law, influenced by Islamic doctrine, gives men more control in marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Al-Ali 2000). Similarly, in Iraq, the family law system, which is a hybrid of Islamic and civil law, has traditionally promoted male power inside the family (Howard 2009). Another similar aspect is how the legal framework affects women's rights and standing inside the household. In Algeria, Syria, and Iraq, women frequently encounter legal and social hurdles that limit their autonomy and agency in familial situations. For example, the family law in all three countries made discriminatory practices such as unequal divorce rights (Mernissi 1991, Al-Ali 2000, Howard 2009). Thus, there exists a regional pattern among a few Arab countries, which were previously colonized, that shapes the way that they view family matters and women's rights. Particularly, they put the family in the middle of their nationalist agenda so that it serves as a focal point for conserving cultural identity and opposing external (colonial) influences, while also sustaining patriarchal traditions and reinforcing gender inequities in society.

To sum up, this chapter's multi-method analysis of the Family Code establishes the framework for the following sections. I explained how the Family Code contributed to the ongoing marginalization and oppression of women in Algerian society by dissecting it. This code reflects long-standing social norms and roles that predate its formal codification, and it is based in a colonial legacy of marginalization and discrimination. Importantly, Algerian women dispelled stereotypes by actively opposing the Family Code through marches, petitions, and protests, demonstrating their agency and will to alter their social standing. This chapter dispels the myth

that women were helpless or content with their lot in life, particularly during the Black Decade, by highlighting their fearless activism and political involvement. Additionally, I made a connection between the Black Decade and the Family Code by demonstrating how the Civil War bolstered the idea that women required protection and characterized any opposition as anti-national. The Family Code's enduring influence can be seen in modern society and continues to be a patriarchal framework that limits women's rights.[55]

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[55] The 2005 amendments introduced measures requiring judicial approval for polygamous marriages and enhanced women's rights in matters of divorce and inheritance. Building on this progress, the 2015 revisions aimed to strengthen legal protections against domestic violence and improve access to justice for women.

Chapter 2: Veiling Narratives, Hijab, and Identity in Algeria

The veiling[56] of women has emerged as a topic of significant academic and political debate across Arab and Muslim nations, predating the wave of decolonization in the region. This discourse often revolves around contrasting narratives: one portraying veiled women as oppressed individuals compelled to wear the *hijab*, while the other depicts them as empowered agents choosing to don it as a symbol of religious devotion and national identity. Although these perspectives may evolve over time, with variations corresponding to Algeria's historical context, they typically share a common starting point: opposing factions employing women's veiling as a tool to assert their moral superiority and discredit their opponents.

In the upcoming chapter, I will delve into the nuanced history of veiling in Algeria, examining its manipulation as a political instrument by various actors including French colonial powers, the Algerian government, and Islamist groups. This exploration will shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of veiling and its intersection with broader sociopolitical dynamics within Algerian society.[57] First, I will trace the history of veiling in Algeria spanning from the colonial period (1830-1962) to the interwar period (1962-1988) while discussing its use as a tool to further the stakeholders' political and social agendas. Second, I will discuss its implementation and

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[56] I use the term "veil" as an overarching term encompassing various forms of veiling, such as *the haik, hijab, burqa*, and *niqab*. In contrast, I define "*hijab*" as a term introduced in Algeria during the interwar period, representing a novel and contemporary manifestation of veiling. Practically, the *hijab* is covering one's body and hair, without covering the face and hands, unlike the *haik*, which covers the full body except for one's eye and ankles, and the *burqa*, which covers a woman's full body and face. While the term itself translates to "veiling" in English, I aim to contextualize its usage within the specific historical period under discussion in this chapter.

[57] Particularly, the way in which veiling was used by these stakeholders in different periods in Algeria's history in order to fulfill their goals and agendas by conquering the way that women dressed.

reinforcement by religious fundamentalists during the Black Decade to further their Islamist project in the country and the repercussions that such a reinforcement had brought to the lives of Algerian women. Finally, I aim to explore Algerian women's relationship with the *hijab*, challenging the simplistic view of it as solely an oppressive tool that stripped women of all their agency. Instead, I contend that the act of veiling is multifaceted and requires a nuanced understanding.

The Historical Background of Veiling in Algeria from the French colonial period (1830-1962) till the start of the Black Decade (1988)

In the 1930s, the French started a campaign of modernization and civilization in Algeria, in which they positioned themselves as builders of a Western Algerian society, in which they attempted to erase any and all signs of Algerian, Arab, or Muslim identities. As such, veiling became "the bone of contention" (Fanon 2004, 43) for the French colonizers who situated this piece of garment in contrast to modernization and linking it to backwardness.[58] Simultaneously, it was believed to be representative of "the status of the Algerian woman" (Fanon 2004, 44) and winning over the veiling narrative meant winning over all Algerian women (ibid.).[59] Paradoxically, colonial powers professed a commitment to 'protect' women who were perceived as "humiliated, sequestered, cloistered" (Fanon 2004, 44) by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. In this narrative, Algerian men were unjustly depicted as barbaric and threatening, accused of coercing veiling upon 'their' women. Thus, despite the colonial powers positioning themselves as rescuers of these

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[58] Particularly, the veil "was seen by the colonizer as a demonstration of the inferiority of local cultures" (Boussoualim 2021, 1291).

[59] Particularly, unveiled Algerian women "announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open, and breached" (Fanon 2004, 47). Put differently, the French colonial authorities perceived the unveiling of Algerian women as a symbolic unveiling of Algerian society itself, viewed as a means to undermine the honor and integrity of Algerian men, a goal they sought to accomplish.

ostensibly 'oppressed' women, their primary and underlying objective was to exert control and undermine the dignity of Algerian men. In addition, the French unveiling campaigns, in their attempt to modernize and salvage the Algerian veiled women, "depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority, and are a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged" (Abu-Lughod 2013, 47). In this narrative, Algerian women are assumed to be helpless victims that need Western intervention and saving.[60]

In contrast, for the Algerian resistance, veiling symbolized more than just a cultural or religious practice; it represented a form of protection for women, the preservation of the country's authenticity, and even the success of their mission in defeating the French colonial forces (Boussoualim 2021). Veiling served as a visible marker of Algerian identity and solidarity, uniting women in their shared struggle for liberation. It became a potent symbol of resistance against colonial oppression, signaling defiance and resilience in the face of adversity. By embracing the *hijab*, Algerian women were assumed to have asserted their agency and autonomy, reclaiming control over their bodies and identities in the midst of a turbulent period of national upheaval. During the anti-colonial struggle, nationalists[61] viewed veiling as a means of safeguarding women

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[60] To elaborate on this matter: During colonial times, the practice of covering the body sparked a sense of curiosity among Europeans regarding the perceived beauty concealed behind the veil. For example, as Algeria came under colonial rule, European visitors were drawn to the region and found themselves fascinated by the traditional garment known as the *haik* (Fanon 2004, 48). Beneath the layers of fabric, they imagined a hidden beauty waiting to be discovered, fueling their romanticized perceptions of Algerian women. As European travelers encountered Algerian society, they interpreted the veiling of women as a manifestation of Algerian men's possessiveness and jealousy. This interpretation was colored by orientalist attitudes that viewed Arab culture as backward and primitive, and Arab men as inherently oppressive towards women (Said 2016). In this context, the colonial gaze not only reinforced stereotypes about Arab masculinity but also perpetuated a narrative of cultural superiority among Europeans (ibid.). By ascribing the behavior of Algerian men to cultural backwardness, Europeans rationalized their presence and interventions in Algeria as endeavors to civilize and modernize what they perceived as a primitive society. Moreover, they justified their fascination with the concealed beauty behind the veil, assuming the role of explorers eager to unveil hidden splendor.

[61] I define nationalists as individuals or groups advocating for Algerian independence from French rule. These nationalists sought to assert Algerian sovereignty and end colonial domination, often through various political, social, and sometimes armed means. An example of a nationalist group is the FLN (National Liberation Front).

from the cultural and moral impositions of colonial rule. By adhering to traditional customs and norms, women asserted their autonomy and agency in the face of colonial pressures to assimilate or abandon their cultural heritage (Boussoualim 2021, 1295).

These problematic manifestations spilled over to the interwar period (1962-1988) in which the ghost of the colonial past still followed Algerians in their efforts to build a newly independent nation. In essence, the nationalists' dedication to keeping the country authentic by having its women wear veils did not go away after the country's independence. Rather, it intensified as they worked to keep the movement moving forward and gave it new meaning as a symbol of resistance to French colonial modernization initiatives. In this period, debates around the traditional form of veiling, the *haik,* considered it outdated.[62] As a response, the *hijab* has emerged as a rebranded symbol of modernity and equality.[63]

The Implementation of Hijab Policies During the Black Decade

Like the ex-colonial powers in Algeria who wanted to see the success of their unveiling and civilizing mission by unveiling the women, the fundamentalists in the 1990s wanted to see the success of their political project by veiling them (Boussoualim, 2020, p. 1297). [64] Drawing from

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[62] In this period, veiling was once more contested, though this time it became more about which style was more representative of the ideal Algerian woman and which one prevented them from reaching their full potential. Algerians found themselves in the midst of many intersecting factors that shaped their new reality including the emergence of national identity, negotiations between European and local forms of modernity, and the importance of tradition (Rahnama 2020, 429).

[63] Contrary to contemporary Western perceptions associating the *hijab* with oppression, during this period, it was celebrated as a symbol of liberation and progress. The *haik* was believed to "inhibit the Algerian woman from participating in religious matters and society equally," unlike the *hijab*. (Rahnama 2020, 434) In this sense, the *haik* was linked to tradition while the hijab was linked to modernity. Another notable debate unfolded among Algerian nationalists and feminists, reflecting divergent views on the role of the hijab in society. On one side stood nationalists who sought to reclaim Algerian identity and distance themselves from any remnants of the colonial past (Rahnama 2020). On the other side was the feminist movement, which viewed the veil as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, arguing that it restricted women's participation and agency in society (Rahnama 2020).

[64] In their understanding, seeing an increase of veiled women in the streets meant that their threatening approach was working, and their Islamist project was succeeding.

the interviews, I was able to deduce that ahead of the Black Decade, many women did not wear the veil, but the Front of Islamic Salvation (FIS) enforced it by explicitly stating that they wanted to Islamize the country and "render it similar to Afghanistan," as LI said. Thus, the fundamentalists made the decision not to wear the *hijab* very hard for women as the repercussions cost them their lives. Particularly, members of the FIS presented the *hijab* as "God's undisputable commandment necessary for salvation and the achievement of required change" (Boussoualim 2021, 1297). As a result, the FIS invested in educating women on the importance of veiling and labeled women who did not to wear the veil as "'victims' of the state and western media" (Boussoualim 2021, 1297).

In December 1994, the government had announced that 211 women were killed since December 1993 with "rapes, mutilations, decapitations," (Boussoualim 2021, 1297) with many of these cases were due to women not wearing the *hijab*, which was further confirmed in the stories told by the women in the interviews. In Algiers, the Islamist armed groups (GIA, MIA, AIS)[65] killed women daily for not abiding by *Shari'a* laws in their attire. Most women who did not wear the *hijab* were executed in broad daylight in the street or taken from their homes and then killed, storied that LI, ZH, and others heard constantly during the Black Decade.[66]

Drawing from the interviews, all women did not previously wear the *hijab* before they were forced to. All of them declared that at the beginning of the Black Decade, they did not find it necessary to wear the *hijab* as the decade began with protests around different Algerian cities

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[65] In Algeria, the GIA (Armed Islamic Group), MIA (Islamic Armed Movement), and AIS (Islamic Salvation Army) were significant Islamist militant groups that emerged during the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s. The GIA, formed in 1992, aimed to overthrow the Algerian government and establish an Islamic state through violent means, engaging in widespread acts of terrorism and targeting civilians. The MIA, established in 1994, initially sought to negotiate with the government but later aligned with the GIA, sharing similar objectives. In contrast, the AIS, created in 1994 by dissident members of the Armed Islamic Group, pursued a more moderate approach, advocating for political dialogue and reconciliation. Despite ideological differences, all three groups contributed to the violence and instability that characterized the Algerian Civil War, which resulted in significant loss of life and lasting social and political repercussions.

[66] Most of the interviewees brought up unveiling as one of the main causes why women were killed (besides working for the government being another major cause). These stories will be told and elaborated later.

organized by the FIS and other Islamist political parties. It was not until 1994, as mentioned by LI, that rumors around the forceful wearing of the veil became known and were disseminated across the country. LI remembers going to her school with her other female friends without wearing a veil despite living in Blida,[67] even after hearing rumors that all women should wear it. Her conservative father did not feel the threat either nor did he oblige her to wear it.[68]

A few months after those rumors, many announcements were posted on different stores in the *Laabaziz* village of Blida in which members of the FIS explicitly ordered women to wear the *hijab* and this time not wearing it came with consequences. Despite these threats, LI still decided to ignore the announcements and still go to her school without a veil covering her hair. It was not until this period that LI's father gave her an ultimatum; either she wore the veil, or she stayed at home and gave up on her education. However, LI still resisted her father's decision in her own way, "I used to wear normal clothes, and then throw a *foulard*[69] on my head, and then I remove it when I get to the classroom. When I leave, I put it again." Interestingly, LI also acknowledged that her father was insistent on her wearing the veil not because of his religious beliefs despite him being conservative, but because of his fear of what might happen to his daughter and the rest of the family if she defied the Islamists' wishes.

In Algiers, ZH heard about the same rumors and read the same announcements posted all over the Casbah. She said, "when that thing came out about everyone having to wear the hijab and whoever doesn't they'd kill her, then I was a bit scared because I didn't wear it." For her, wearing the veil meant letting go of her lifestyle and values. She knew that she would hate the veil every

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[67] One of the most heated regions in the country where the FIS committed the most crimes and dominated the already-conservative streets.

[68] LI comes from a conservative working-class family and has 4 brothers who were quite opinionated about her whereabouts.

[69] Foulard is French for veil but is widely used in Algeria to talk about the veil or *hijab*.

day of her life if she was not convinced to wear it. As such, she decided against it even with all the risk and fear that brought on her. Such a fear was instilled in her after the many stories that infiltrated the Algerian discourse about women who were victims of religious extremism[70] because of their refusal to wear of the *hijab.* ZH tells the story of a girl who lived in the Casbah who, despite the constant threats, still chose not to wear the veil*,*

> "And there is that one who went to visit her sister, this is the fiancée of my uncle's wife's brother, it was the time when they gave a deadline for the *hijab* and whoever doesn't wear it, they'd kill her. Her sister lives in the Casbah, she went to her, poor her,[71] then she asked her to stay to have lunch. She stayed to have lunch then she told her I am leaving, she went with her, she was peeling a mandarin orange as she was leaving the house, and as they were going down, they shot her. They shot her and her niece. Her niece was wounded she didn't die, but she died instantly. Why? Because she didn't wear the *hijab*. She told them only the *hijab* I won't wear if they [Islamists] want to kill me let them kill me. And her sister told her that day 'why did you come like this with no *hijab*. They gave a deadline and whoever doesn't wear it, they will kill?' she told her 'only the *hijab* I won't wear let them kill me', then that day they killed her, poor her."

This story provides many pieces of information about that period, the way stories travelled, women's resistance, and the extent to which the Islamists have gone to in order to erase, what they called, the phenomenon of *moutabaridjate* (Boussoualim, 2020, p. 1296).[72] First, stories and information about what was going on during that period usually travelled by word of mouth. Many women in the Casbah, for example, would gather every evening to talk and exchange the news they heard that day. ZH said, "this is all we used to talk about in that period." They would gather in *wast el dar*[73] and talk for hours about what has been going on. Gathering in such a location allowed escaping and going back to one's home easier. Particularly, gathering in specific locations, such as communal spaces, creates opportunities for individuals to exchange information and stories

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[70] Here I refer to the violence that was inflicted on women by the religious armed groups. The word extremist here is used both by the respondents and the researcher.

[71] Direct translation from *Meskina*, an Algerian expression usually used to show sympathy and sorrow.

[72] Women who reveal their beauty. Often looked at pejoratively. Direct translation: women who wear makeup.

[73] Houses in the Casbah were built during Ottoman time. As such, they are built in a way all houses in a certain building shared a common courtyard.

(Johnson & Smith, 2018). These gatherings often serve as hubs for community members to share firsthand accounts of events,[74] such as murders, bombings, and *faux barrages*.[75]

When asked about how she heard about the FIS news and announcements, LI said that she heard through *elhadra*,[76] "people say '*ram 9alou*'[77] if it's true or not, I'm not really sure." Such a statement sheds light on two important aspects; the way in which women (and people in general) communicate with the fundamentalists, and the way in which they refer to them. Firstly, during follow-up inquiries about the origin of news or information, interviewees often recount hearing without pinpointing the exact source or provider of the information. This lack of specificity suggests a pervasive sense of hearsay or rumor circulation within the community. This observation highlights how commonplace informal methods of communication are and how information spreads through word-of-mouth among areas affected by the Black Decade events. People frequently obtain information from unofficial networks or talks with peers and acquaintances rather than from official sources or recognized media sites. This unofficial news dissemination may encourage the spread of hearsay and rumors, affecting people's perceptions of current events and how they respond to them. Additionally, the interviewees' unwillingness or inability to cite

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[74] During times of strong repression, such as the Algerian Civil War, oral traditions were especially important, particularly for women, who were frequently sidelined or restricted from formal avenues of contact. Unlike written records, which could be heavily monitored or censored by authorities, oral traditions provided a more covert and durable means of disseminating information and resisting oppression. Stories and narratives were passed down orally, allowing information to be transmitted across societies without the limits of written documentation. Oral traditions were especially important for women in resisting hardship because they allowed them to assert agency and solidarity. These narratives were not restricted to formal settings, but frequently occurred in informal areas, such as meetings or talks, where women could openly exchange information and viewpoints. The emphasis on oral modes of communication demonstrates women's resilience and adaptation in constrained situations. In the absence of written records left by women (or men) from that time period, oral narratives emerge as a potent tool of preserving and transmitting communal memory and resistance, even if delivered through seemingly ordinary routes such as gossip. Moreover, the physical proximity of individuals in these settings enhances the efficiency of information dissemination, allowing stories to spread rapidly among community members. Moreover, gathering in communal spaces fosters a sense of solidarity and collective resilience, enabling these women to cope with the psychological and emotional impacts of conflict, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter (Leap and Thompson 2018).

[75] Fake checkpoints, where armed members of the FIS used to ambush civilians to kill and kidnap them.

[76] Translates to 'talk' or 'gossip', which usually refers to anything that travels through the grapevine.

[77] Translates to 'they said' – they here refers to the fundamentalists.

specific sources highlights how imprecise information sharing is in emergency and uncertain situations. It highlights a wider tendency of relying less on reliable sources of information and more on oral histories and collective wisdom.

Moreover, despite the grave risks associated with unveiling, numerous women courageously defied the mandate and risked everything to retain their autonomy. Their acts of resistance took various forms, from refusing to wear the veil to seeking education or employment opportunities, often in defiance of imminent threats. For example, LI recounts her daring journey to high school, where she donned the veil while leaving her house, only to swiftly remove it upon entering the classroom. LI said, "there were many like me who used to wear it and then remove it once they reach the classroom." Contrarily, ZH decided not to wear it at all despite knowing the risks. She said, "I didn't want to wear it, frankly. Even when they insisted to wear it or they'd kill us, I didn't want to wear it. So, I risked it … I'd always go out without the *hijab*." Similarly, KL, who also lived in the Algiers Casbah, recounts the story of when she encountered a FIS member a few meters outside of her home. "I knew he was going to attack me. The street was empty. It was just him and I. But then he didn't." Apparently, the FIS member lived in her neighborhood and was friends with her brothers. "He called me over, he gave me a slap on my face, and ordered me to never leave the house again without the *hijab*." KL said that she still did not wear it even after this encounter. "I saw death that day," she added. Thus, even though Islamist fundamentalists enforced the veil on women, many of them did not abide by this order and chose to risk their lives over succumbing to this new societal order.

In addition, Islamists during the Black Decade propagated a narrative that blamed women for the ills that hit the Algerian society and believed that the Muslim *ummah*[78] has reached its demise mostly due to these women who not only 'dirtied' the Algerian and Muslim societies but also brought God's wrath on the rest of the population (Moghadam 2011). This discourse actively sought to control and regulate women's behavior, both in public and private spheres. In addition, not only did such a narrative reinforce traditional gender roles that limited women to the private sphere, but also justified acts of violence and discrimination against women deemed to have violated religious and moral codes. By framing women's actions—specifically being a *moutabaridja*—as a threat to religious and cultural values, Islamist groups justified the imposition of restrictive measures aimed at curtailing women's freedom and mobility. As such, the traveling of these stories had installed fear in many women and have prevented them from living their lives normally. ZH said, "every time I went out, I would just wait for a bullet to enter my head. I used to keep walking and turning around. I was always scared." Her testimony highlights the pervasive atmosphere of terror that permeated everyday life for many Algerian women during this period. In this sense, this fear led many women to get veiled as a form of protection against potential reprisals from Islamist militants. Thus, veiling, which once signified piety and modesty for Algerians, took a new significance as a means of self-preservation in the face of pervasive Islamist violence and intimidation.[79]

[78] Nation.

[79] Alas, building such a narrative around women's moral decay and culpability in affecting the Muslim ummah negatively allowed the Islamist fundamentalists to perpetuate gender-based violence against women, and further curtailing their agency and autonomy in the society, all while installing fear and trauma in them. This fear has fundamentally reshaped women's attitudes towards the hijab, casting doubt on their agency and exacerbating the divide between proponents and opponents of veiling.

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Additionally, it is critical to investigate the multiple aspects of the veil-wearing debate, particularly among women who adopted the practice prior to Islamism's triumph.[80] For many women, wearing the veil was not only a cultural or societal expectation, but a deeply personal choice motivated by their religion and devotion to God. Though I have not interviewed women who were veiled before the Black Decade, HL told me the stories of her neighbor who did. She said, "my neighbor ZM wore the veil way before the Black Decade started. She was religious and wanted to do it on her own," she added, "there were many as well who still wore the *haik* to look modest and to cover oneself, but probably also for religious purposes." These women saw veiling as a way to show their religious identity and grow closer to their faith. They believed that by wearing the veil, they were fulfilling a religious responsibility and following Islamic principles. Their decision to wear the veil stemmed from a strong sense of spirituality, indicating a desire to live a pious and devout life consistent with their religious beliefs. "ZM prayed every prayer on time and used to go to the mosque a lot too," HL added. Furthermore, for these women, the veil represented modesty, humility, and obedience to God's will. They attempted to follow Islamic decency and propriety norms given in the Quran and prophetic traditions by covering their hair and bodies.[81]

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[80] This element emphasizes the complexities of veiling as a religious and cultural symbol, intermingled with personal views and spiritual convictions.

[81] Furthermore, the practice of veiling was frequently linked to cultural traditions and societal standards, influencing women's views and experiences. In some communities, veiling was deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, symbolizing not just religious devotion but also cultural identity and legacy, which is reflected in the wearing of the *haik* even after being labeled as backward in the interwar period. Women who wore the veil before the development of Islamism have done so to express their cultural history and upbringing, as well as their religious beliefs.

Personal Connections with the Hijab and its Significance

Since veiling has been a topic of contestation for a very long time, women tend to find themselves in the middle of a heated debate between opposing poles. Similarly, they are usually portrayed in Western and some local scholarships that they lack the ability to make their own decisions regarding wearing or not wearing the veil. While in many cases, that holds some truth especially for those women who have been forced to wear it, some women defy that narrative and show that it was their decision to wear it. "Veiling must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency" (Abu-Lughod 2013, 39). As such, in the following section, I will delve into the nuanced perspectives surrounding veiling among Algerian women. Rather than strictly categorizing women into opposing camps, I will explore the diverse reasons and motivations behind their decisions regarding the veil.

First, despite the pejorative connotations that the veil was associated with, wearing it in some settings and societies holds a much greater value (Abu-Lughod 2013, 39). For instance, LI affirmed to me on multiple instances during the interview that "every woman should wear the *hijab* because it is a *fardh*[82] and is in no way oppressive" and said that she wants to get even more conservative when it comes to wearing it.[83] Her steadfast affirmation of the hijab as a religious obligation reflects a deeply held belief in its intrinsic value and significance within Islam. LI does not see in veiling any sort of oppression or backwardness. Instead, she finds in veiling a sense of protection, piety, and religious fulfillment. This sentiment is echoed in the testimonies of other women I interviewed who have embraced the hijab as a symbol of their religious identity and

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[82] Roughly translated to religious obligation or duty. The h*ijab* is believed to be a religious obligation on every Muslim woman.

[83] In other words, she wishes she was convinced to wear the full *burqa* if circumstances allowed but did not say what kind of circumstances prevented her from it even after I asked her about them.

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commitment to Islamic principles. Thus, veiling cannot be diminished into an oppressive piece of cloth stripping women from any type of agency they have.

Second, the decision of certain women to embrace the veil despite initial reluctance underscores the interwovenness of personal convictions and the external influences that affect them. Some women did not wear the veil and were against it but then were eventually convinced to wear it either during the Black Decade or just recently. For example, ZH who has been wearing the *hijab* since 2018, said, "when I was young, I didn't wear it, but now that I grow old and even my husband obliged me to wear it, so I did. Now it's okay, but when I was young, I didn't want it. I wanted to wear clothes, I wanted to live. But now I wore it." When I asked her whether she was happy with her decision, ZH shrugged and said "yes, I am, but I have to, anyways." Such a belief stems either from religion or society. Some women believe that the *hijab* is, indeed, an obligation and they must reach a point in their lives when showing their hair and certain parts of their body to other men with no kinship ties becomes prohibited. Others, due to societal pressure—usually exerted by parents, husbands, or other male members of the family—resort to wearing the *hijab* in order to satisfy them. In the case of ZH and IT, they were both instructed by their husbands to wear it. While for ZH that happened a couple decades into the marriage, IT's husband asked her to wear it before they got officially married. IT's father was not religious and viewed the *hijab* as oppressive. As such, when his daughter wanted to wear it, he disagreed, but since she convinced him that she wore it because it was her own decision, he accepted it.[84]

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[84] The instructions from the husbands and fathers to (not) wear the *hijab* illustrate the enduring influence of patriarchal norms on women's agency. Particularly, while women in the Black Decade were victims of the horrifying violence exercised by the fundamentalists, they still had to endure the patriarchal violence and norms within their own households. NI's recollection of those times encapsulates the pervasive impact of terrorism on both the external sociopolitical landscape and within the confines of familial relationships. She said, "terrorism was both inside and outside" referring to her authoritarian father who she said was "insufferable" in those times and after. For more than a decade, besides not being allowed to leave the house except to go visit her married sister, NI still had to succumb to

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Third, many women, such as NL, wore the *hijab* based on pure memetic behavior because other girls and women around her age wore it. When NL's best friend wore the *hijab* at a young age in the early 2000s, since she comes from a conservative family, NL quickly wore it too. At the age of 14, NL told her father that she wanted to get more *multazima,*[85] and the first step was to wear the *hijab.* While her father showed some resistance at the beginning fearing that she was not fully convinced, he eventually allowed her to, and she never removed it since. Such an act sheds light on the role of peer influence in shaping veiling practices among Algerian women, and like NI and LI, it also shows the patriarchal pressure that is put on her for wanting to get veiled. It also highlights NL's agency in choosing to wear the veil, emphasizing that resistance can also manifest through the act of wearing the *hijab.*

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her father's wishes in wearing the *hijab*. Here, terrorism (The use of the word "terror" refers to the familial patterns of control that mimic the terror instilled by so-called terror groups. Her experience speaks to the insidious nature of domestic violence and the ways in which it can mirror and perpetuate broader forms of systemic oppression) symbolizes not only external threats but also the pervasive sense of fear, control, and coercion she experienced within her own household. Similarly, LI's father, as mentioned previously, also gave her an ultimatum to either wear the veil or quit her education, which LI eventually succumbed to. Beyond the evident violence and reinforcement of patriarchal norms in the public sphere, the interviews revealed the presence of patriarchal dynamics in the private realm as well. For instance, NI described her experiences living under the authoritarian control of her father, which enforced stringent rules and regulations on their household. She described how his pervasive control induced panic in the family members, creating an atmosphere of fear and trepidation. She said, "honestly, we suffered and we were scared more because of my father. He was very controlling. He'd tell us 'be careful of the noise, be careful of the light, we should have dinner early' we used to live terror itself in the house. There was terrorism inside and outside." Despite these limits, NI demonstrated her disobedience to her father's power, especially by defying his demands to keep the house dark and silent at night. This act of resistance frequently resulted in confrontations and verbal abuse from her father, emphasizing the power dynamics at work within the family structure.

Furthermore, the story of a nurse being abused by her conservative brother emphasizes the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in private domains (Salhi 2003, 33). Her brother was against her working with male colleagues, which resulted in him inflicting physical and psychological abuse on her. The deepening of patriarchal norms in the private realm is caused by a shift in power dynamics, in which men perceive a loss of control or influence in the public arena as a result of the existence of armed organizations and military forces. As a result, establishing authority over women in the house allows men to reassert their masculinity and dominance. This view is consistent with Bertrand de Jouvenel's finding that men frequently get a feeling of self-worth and identity from exerting control over others (De Jouvenel 1949, 110). Thus, patriarchal beliefs emerge not only in response to external challenges, but also as a strategy of exercising control and upholding conventional gender roles within the household.

[85] Translated to religiously committed. Usually used to describe women who are committed to proper Muslim attire and practices Muslim rituals and duties.

In summary, the debate over veiling in Algeria from the colonial period to the present has become ingrained in the academic and political domains, acting as a field of conflicting ideologies. Veiling became a tactic of resistance to maintain Algerian authenticity while the French carried out campaigns of unveiling. But as time went on, the definition of authenticity changed to reflect various sociopolitical contexts. The Black Decade saw the veils become a symbol of Islamist ideologies and societal pressures, leaving women to make difficult decisions in the midst of unrest. Notwithstanding differences in experiences, the veil endures as a contentious emblem with deeper connotations than merely subjugation. This chapter goes beyond reductionist viewpoints by analyzing the hijab's history from colonial times to the Black Decade and recognizing the range of reactions to the hijab. Furthermore, it clarifies the ways in which competing ideologies instrumentalize veils, enhancing our comprehension of their relevance in Algeria and advancing a thorough understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics of the Black Decade.

Chapter 3: Daily Experiences Amidst the Black Decade

The events of the Black Decade wrought profound changes in the lives of Algerians, reshaping their political, social, and daily realities. The tranquil existence that characterized life prior to the onset of the Civil War underwent a profound transformation.[86] Mostly relying on the interviews that I have conducted with survivors of that tumultuous period, this chapter's primary objective is to provide a comprehensive documentation of these women's stories that only traveled through word of mouth but were not documented. These interviews and the stories within them reveal the various forms of violence endured by women, providing a deep understanding of their lived experiences, struggles, and remarkable resilience during this challenging period in Algerian history. This chapter is divided into two sections, each presenting a myriad of narratives. I argue that both the content of these stories and the very act (and setting) of telling them serve as powerful forms of resistance.

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[86] Prior to the 1990s, Algeria went through an era of comparatively stable and cohesive society. Even if the 1980s brought economic hardship in the form of falling oil prices and austerity measures, (Bourouh 2008, 562) many Algerians remember a normal and contented way of life. "Life was very normal, we were happy," said HL. Based on the interviews, many people had access to educational possibilities, and colleges and universities served as centers for both social and academic engagement. In addition, cultural pursuits like athletics, theater, and music offered opportunities for enjoyment and leisure among a society that is still licking its colonial wounds. However, such social stability quickly faded as the conflict started, which led to people's routines to be disrupted and their lives forever altered, a phenomenon that was noticed even in the streets. For instance, the Islamists removed satellite dishes from people's roofs and replaced them with loudspeakers, which they often used to share their announcements and spread their propaganda. At the same time, they were backed by many shops all around the capital that played the Quran instead of the usual music played in stores (Salhi 2017, 23). Similarly, the street scenery has drastically changed when they were infiltrated by bearded men wearing *qamis* and *sirwal* as those worn in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan or Afghanistan respectively (ibid.). The transformations observed in the public sphere extended their influence into the private realm, thereby beginning to impact people's lives, particularly those of women.

Everyday Acts of Resistance: Navigating Violence and Daily Life Disruptions

The 1990s in Algeria were characterized by an atmosphere of pervasive violence that disrupted Algerian people's daily lives and routines, especially those of women. One of my interviewees, ZH, stated, "even in your own house you are living in fear," referring to the level of fear that she felt even in the confines of her own home. This next section will compile a set of stories that were collected from the interviews, which portray women's counternarratives[87] as an act of resistance against the violence they endured. In this section, I delve into various topics that disrupted the routines of these women, emphasizing their resistance through experiences of motherhood, displacement, and the myriad of horrors they faced. These themes are interconnected with the overall story of women's resistance, demonstrating their resilience and strength in the face of adversity.

To conceptualize violence[88] in this chapter, I was inspired by Rob Nixon's perspective on ecological and geographical violence, which he defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011, 2). In other words, I deem day-to-day experiences, gestures, habits, and events, which are often not seen as violence, to hold

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[87] I elaborate on this in the last chapter.

[88] Violence can be understood in varied ways depending on the discipline and the purpose of the study. For instance, violence could be limited to the corporeal defined as "an intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body," (Spierenburg 2008, 17–18) which includes "war, murder, rape, torture, corporeal punishment, brawls," etc., (Dwyer 2017, 10). Another way to understand violence is as an interplay of power and ideology in which the powerful exercises a certain kind of violence against the weaker in the form of wars, genocides, and massacres (Dwyer 2017, 12). While there are numerous definitions and interpretations of violence, I have selected these two particular perspectives to frame the type of violence addressed in this chapter against them.

much importance in the way that women experienced the Black Decade.[89] In addition, I argue that violence during the Algerian Civil War was perceived subjectively,[90] often excluding the daily fear and horror experienced by women.[91]

The experienced and witnessed violence during the Civil War triggered profound emotions of fear, uncertainty, and suspicion among Algerian women. ZH vividly recalls the pervasive sense of apprehension she experienced when venturing outside her home to attend school. She describes a constant state of vigilance and self-monitoring, explaining, "We always go out with fear, we check ourselves all the time, you see someone following you, you'd think it's a *tero*.[92] Even if it weren't him." This sentiment reflects the pervasive climate of fear and paranoia that permeated daily life during the conflict, where even mundane activities were overshadowed by apprehension and suspicion. I asked ZH to describe to me her daily habits and rituals on a random day in the Black Decade, to which she answered, "I used to wake up, have my morning coffee, wear my clothes, and head to school. I usually come back home for lunch, and then head back again. In the

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[89] Echoing Veena Das, I also deem "the everyday itself as eventful" (Das 2006, 8) meaning even the small gestures of violence—whether considered violence or not—the habits, the constant state of fear, etc., are events within themselves and they tell us much about the kind of violence that was experienced by women in that period. Furthermore, experienced daily fear, though not materialized nor actualized to a physical form in most cases, is still real and present (Das 2006, 9). In other words, I argue that the potential of something happening to these women is as much a type of violence as one that was inflicted on their bodies, though this one took a toll on their emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, I draw upon Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil," (Arendt 1970) which suggests that numerous instances of violence against women might have been motivated by thoughtlessness or adherence to societal norms, rather than a deliberate intent to cause harm.

[90] The way that violence is perceived is very personal and differs amongst people and societies. Because of cultural norms, individual experiences, and the larger social context, what one person perceives as violent may be considered normal or acceptable behavior by another (Loetz and Selle 2015, 9).

[91] Additionally, considering violence as subjective allows me to refute the theorization of violence as a finite or limited concept and consider it as a continuous process that starts and functions before the war starts and continues even after the war ends. I echo Cockburn's (2017, 147) argument, which suggests that violence is not only perpetuated through overt acts of aggression but also through subtle and everyday practices that reproduce and sustain harmful power dynamics. As she notes, the concept of "violence as banal practice" (Cockburn 2017) is crucial in understanding how power dynamics are maintained, as it reinforces gendered roles and identities that perpetuate violence.

[92] *Tero* is short for terrorist and is widely used to talk about or describe members of the FIS who usually had a distinct appearance; long beard, shaved moustache, visible prayer mark on their foreheads, and wearing a *qamis* – religious attire.

evening, I come back, I do my homework, I eat, and sleep." Though such a flow of events seems

normal at first glance, ZH continues to describe the images and sounds she remembers. She said,

> "I used to take the shortest route to school through the *Trois horloges* stairs, and not once
> or twice, but many times, I saw decapitated heads thrown there. At the very beginning, I
> used to get very scared and change my whole route to school, but then I learned to walk
> past them and ignore their existence."

ZH exhibits incredible resilience by learning to ignore and walk past severed heads, refusing to let

the violence dictate her daily life or disrupt her routine indefinitely. This act of mental fortitude

and normalization in the midst of terror becomes a powerful form of resistance, embodying the

strength to endure and adapt, which is preserved and conveyed through her memory.

Coupled with daily life experiences and stories of unnoticed violence, stories of men and

women being attacked and/or killed during that period proliferated the public sphere mostly

through word of mouth, which created long-lasting feelings of fear. For instance, ZH told me the

story that she heard through her uncle's wife,

> "There was a divorced single mother who worked as a cleaner at a hospital in Algiers who
> was coming back from work with her son that she just picked up from daycare. When she
> arrived at her house, she found three bearded men waiting for her. They gave the kid money
> and told him to go buy ice cream. After he left, they forced her inside her house, slaughtered
> her, and left. When her son came back, he found his mother lying on the ground with her
> head decapitated."

This story travelled around, especially in the Casbah, which instilled more fear in the women who

lived there. "We were very scared when we heard. I didn't know the woman personally, but still,

it was scary," ZH said.[93] When I asked her about the repercussions of such fear, she answered,

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[93] Moreover, all the way down in the south of Algeria, a disturbing incident occurred in June 1989 in Ouargla, when Islamists targeted a woman's home because she lived alone with her seven kids. She was called immoral by the fundamentalists, who said that her way of living fostered conflict and jeopardized social harmony. Unfortunately, one of her children perished in the ensuing fire as a result of the attack (Salhi 2003, 33). At the same time, during the summer, allegations surfaced of acid attacks directed at women in public areas, including beaches, for not conforming to modest and Islamic dress code (Hamitouche 2020, 152). Moreover, after the 1991 World Athletics Championships, Hassiba Boulmerka, a former middle-distance athlete, received harsh criticism due to her sportswear. Rather than celebrating her victory in the competition, mosques across the country condemned her, branding her achievement as

"honestly, I even went out the next day with no *hijab*. So, yes, I was scared, but I didn't want to let that disrupt my life." ZH continues to tell me that if she succumbed to that fear, she would never leave the house again. Despite the widespread fear, ZH's decision to go out without a *hijab* highlights a potent act of resistance. She fought against both the direct threat of violence and the larger social pressures imposed by fundamentalist forces by consciously choosing not to allow fear to dictate her behavior. This choice demonstrates her tenacity and resolve to uphold her independence in the face of efforts to restrict it. ZH's story demonstrates how women's decisions made in the face of fear are acts of resistance that strengthen their agency and fortitude in confronting oppressive circumstances.

Similarly, one of the most notorious massacres in the history of the Black Decade is that of the town of *Rais* in Blida.[94] The news about this massacre traveled across the country instilling more fear and increasing people's anxiety. A report that was submitted to the 32nd Session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Human Rights Violations in Algeria included a testimony at the Algerian League for the Defense and Human Rights (LADDH) from a survivor of the horrific massacre who had lost 16 members of her family. Ms. Bachiri said,

> "During the Raïs massacre, [my brother and his kids] were killed […] They were having a marriage ceremony […] His guests [i.e. daughter, her husband and children] were staying overnight with him. They [also] slaughtered [her other brother] along with his seven children. They slit their throats. He is blind the poor guy… a blind man… what could he have done to deserve this? […] The sons were dragged outside with their father and had their throats slit, whereas the daughters were taken away. […] They were there… with military uniforms and toting their guns. One of the soldiers cut the finger of one of Amara's daughters and said to his colleague: 'take the gold, take the gold'. Amara's 2-year-old granddaughter was found burnt in the oven. His old daughter, was slaughtered too… she was lying on the ground… they put one of her sons on her right arm, another son on the left arm and they shouted 'Allah Akfar'… We say: Allah Akbar [Allah is the Greatest]' but

shameful (Salhi 2003, 33). Such stories were continuously repeated in the Algerian public sphere, and they stuck in women's memories because of their gruesome and horrifying nature.

[94] Rais and other surrounding towns were called the "Algiers' green belt, the string of cities around the capital where a majority of residents had voted for the Salvation Islamic Front (FIS) in the 1991 elections" (Mellah 2004, 23).

they were saying 'Allah Akfar' [Allah is the worst of the unbelievers]. They came in cars. People who stayed at home were slaughtered, and those who went out were shot dead. My sister lives nearby. Her young son saw exactly what happened […] Their heads were covered with turban […] Their faces were covered […] They slaughtered both my brothers and their children. A total of sixteen […] They [also] burnt [the house] We are puzzled… Why would anyone want to kill this family? They are not involved in anything" (Mellah 2004, 21).

LI remembers this incident too. Her town was only a few minutes away from *Rais* and she recalls, "We were all terrified when it happened. We heard faint bullet shots, and some neighbors were saying that they might've attacked *Bentalha* or *Rais* since they're quite heated. It wasn't until the next day that we heard about the massacre that happened." This massacre with all its horrific and gruesome stories marked the memories of Algerians and instilled fear and doubt in them, as confirmed by LI and other interviewees who lived nearby. Such stories of horrific violence traveled very quickly among Algerians and marked their daily lives, adding to their anxieties. Though this was one of the biggest massacres in the Black Decade, LI and NI still chose to talk about it despite the taboo nature of the topic. This underscores their willingness to defy the societal norms by sharing their story when they received the news of the massacre.

Moreover, the lives of women were significantly affected when a male family member was in immediate danger or hazard. Women were frequently stressed, afraid, and hesitant in this situation because they were worried about losing or hurting their loved ones. They had to deal with the difficult challenge of making sure their families were secure while also coping with the general unrest and volatility of society at the time. The challenge is further compounded when a man's decision to evade danger results in significant life-altering consequences for women. For instance, HL had a husband employed by the government, adding tension to her daily life. She said, "a few

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days before, we heard about this list[95] going around and both my husband and his uncle were on it. Of course, we were scared but we didn't think they were serious, until they killed his uncle who worked as a cook for the military. So, my husband decided to escape right away."[96] When asked about how this affected her life, she replied, "he's my husband and I had to support him no matter what. I didn't work, and I was just taking care of the kids, so it was a given that I would move with him when he moved somewhere else. I wouldn't have been able to take care of the kids by myself." In this case, HL suffered as a woman, wife, and mother. And though these experiences are interconnected, each brings about a new and different kind of suffering. She demonstrates the gendered norms and expectations placed upon her by having to support her husband in addition to carrying out her domestic duties. This compounded burden highlights the enormous strength and resilience required to negotiate the complexities of these intersecting roles, as well as the pervasive inequalities of the time.

During that time, being a mother presented many difficulties and challenges, which demonstrated mothers' agency and resistance. Raising children during the Civil War's chaos came with a great deal of responsibility and anxiety, as mothers constantly feared for their safety and the safety of their families. For instance, in June 1991, HL woke up at 3 AM to the megaphone screaming outside her window. Living close to the mosque, she could tell that it was the FIS members using the mosque speakers for their announcements. She recalls, "they were so loud, they were saying 'bring your kids to the mosque and go do *jihad*', it was very scary. But even scarier,

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[95] This list was created by the Islamists, and it contained the names of people who were to be killed because of their involvement with the government.

[96] On July 16th, 1995, HL's husband received the news of the killing of his uncle, and though it shocked him, he was quick about making the decision to run away. HL told me how there were bearded men waiting for around two hours in their building around the time her husband usually left work. That day, he was asked by a distant family member to be a witness in her court case to get unemployment money from the government. "Little did he know that it would save his life," HL said. Thanks to this tardiness, HL's husband escaped his potential death.

that's when my contractions started." HL was 9 months pregnant with her second child, when her

contractions started, and her pain was gradually increasing. Around 7 AM, accompanied by her

mother-in-law, she went to the police station next to them, and considering the urgency of the

situation and the nature of her husband's work, the policemen managed to call an ambulance and

provide her with a police escort to the clinic. She recalls, "there was a curfew, and as we were

heading to the military clinic, the streets were so empty, except for military cars everywhere we

went." When she arrived at the hospital, the doctors refused to take her in because her usual doctor

was not there, but after much insistence, they finally took her in. Her mother-in-law, alternatively,

asked the policemen to take her back to the police station as there was no other way back to her

house, and with the curfew and the nature of the clinic, she was not allowed to stay with her

pregnant daughter-in-law. HL's seeking medical help in the middle of a curfew, and then her

insistence on the medical staff to take her in demonstrates her refusal of the war-imposed

circumstances.

Four years later (1995), HL went to visit her parents in Blida for the first time in a year

after giving birth to her third child. She said,

> "I went with my mother-in-law to visit my parents. My son was one year old. It was a long
> journey from where we used to live in Algiers to reach my parents' house. So, we had to
> take three buses to get there. On the last bus, it was getting dark already. As we were
> approaching, the driver parked aside, which made me freak out but I kept my reactions in.
> He turned to us and said, 'I will drop everyone in the bus station but there will be no buses
> after that. They are closing all transportation between the two wilayas as it's getting heated.'
> We obviously freaked out, but my mother-in-law went up to him and asked him if he was
> going back to Algiers, to which he said yes. So, we went all the way to the station, we
> literally passed by my parents' house, but we didn't go down and we went back with him
> to Algiers. I was more scared for my son than for myself, to be honest. He was so young,
> and I was terrified of what might happen to him if we ever bump into them [the Islamists]."

Thus, mothers confront special obstacles during wartime, which profoundly alter their lives and

identities. As previously stated, conflict exacerbates existing gender disparities, putting women at

increased risk of violence and instability (Enloe, 2000).[97] The reinforcement of traditional gender norms in times of militarization exacerbates the constraints on women's agency, limiting their capacity to advocate for themselves and their families (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). This is evident in the near refusal of the hospital to admit HL despite her being in labor. Thus, in such settings, women bear a disproportionate share of the care burden, having to deal with the physical and emotional toll of conflict while also guaranteeing the survival of their families.

Furthermore, Algerian women also suffered forced displacement, which obliged them to uproot their entire lives and ways of being to new environments. For instance, at the age of 14, SL's family moved from the busy Algiers Casbah to a suburban town in Algiers East, causing a major shift in her life. Her father's government work made this relocation necessary, and it came about after her parents' divorce, in which her father was granted custody of SL and her sister. SL was uprooted and thrown into a new setting when she left the comforting surroundings of downtown Algiers, where she had friends, habits, and a sense of belonging. Midway through the school year, she had to move from her previous school and integrate into a new one, which was a difficult and alienating procedure. SL remembers clearly the looks and hushes she got when she first arrived at the new school, her unique Amazighi[98] characteristics making her stand out in a mostly homogeneous environment. [99] She said, "I remember when I entered the classroom, and everyone turned to look at me as if I was an alien that doesn't belong there. It was a classroom full of Arabs and I was the only Amazighi girl there." She consequently suffered months of exclusion

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[97] Mothers frequently experience increased vulnerability as they handle the intricacies of caregiving in the midst of wartime disruption. For example, they may face the hard decision of shielding their children from harm or fulfilling their societal obligations as caregivers as shown in HL's story (MacKenzie & Childs, 2016).

[98] The indigenous people of North Africa, mainly in countries like Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Mali, are referred to as Amazighi, or Berber. They speak the Tamazight language. They have a rich cultural history that includes distinctive customs, music, and artwork.

[99] Amazighi people tend to be more northern European looking, including blonde hair and colored eyes.

and harassment, which culminated in a horrific event in which she was hurt physically. "The kids threw a rock at me once and it hit me in the head. There was so much blood. I understand that they were kids and didn't know better, but I was a kid too." Her academic performance suffered as a result of this move, adding to the emotional toll and emphasizing the complex relationship between mental health and scholastic success. At the end of the day, SL's father took the tough choice to return her to live downtown with her mother after realizing the negative impact of ongoing distress on her general wellbeing.

Similarly, when HL's husband had to flee Downtown Algiers for a safer neighborhood after hearing that he was targeted, she had to move with him too leaving her old life behind. Since they moved to a suburb that was still under development with very few neighbors since the apartment complex was not finished yet, HL found herself alone. "There weren't a lot of people when we first moved. It was only us and a couple of other families in the building. And there were no amenities outside. It was a desert." When I asked her about her daily activities, HL said, "I used to stay at home at all times, especially that I wasn't allowed to go visit my parents in Blida. It was quite heated over there, so for my own safety, my father asked us not to visit them. So, I barely did anything during my days there."

Thus, the forced displacement faced by women during the decade had far-reaching consequences for their lives and experiences. Beyond the physical act of being uprooted from their homes, it set off a chain reaction of psychological and social issues that lasted their entire lives. First, the rapid displacement heightened their worries, leaving them with uncertainty and worry about their future and the protection of their families. Furthermore, the disruption of established social networks and surroundings forced individuals into isolation, losing relationships with neighbors, friends, and community structures that had previously offered critical support and

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companionship. This sense of isolation was exacerbated by anxiety as women navigated uncharted terrain and attempted to develop a sense of belonging in their new environment.

In addition, many Algerians started doubting road checkpoints even if they belonged to the army or the police out of fear for their lives.[100] For instance, NI said, "this one time, my uncle came over to take me to his house in order to spend a few days with him and his wife in *Boumerdes*[101] because she broke her leg. I remember him rushing to leave because it was getting dark," NI said. She then told me that after passing a checkpoint, her uncle sped the whole way back to his house despite his wheel being deflated. "I didn't know why he was speeding that much, and I didn't want to ask him then because he looked frustrated. But when we arrived at his house, I finally asked, and he told me 'you don't know who the people at the checkpoint were? It was them.'"[102] Fake checkpoints were a major source of anxiety for people in the 1990s because of how much gruesomeness happens in such checkpoints.

For example, anxiety peaked for many when wedding processions came to a halt at these notorious checkpoints. IT said, "they would usually target wedding parades to steal the bride." NI added, "I remember hearing about this wedding, where they stopped the procession, killed everyone who were in the car, and took the bride with them. Only a little girl survived who then escaped because she was hiding under the seat." IT said, "they take a ready-to-go bride."[103] These stories are part of a general phenomenon that used to happen in the 1990s in which the FIS

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[100] Outside of Algiers, the FIS put many fake (They are called fake (faux) because they resemble police or military checkpoints as they used to wear the same uniform) checkpoints in order to trick drivers into stopping. They would later on verify that whoever is in the car conforms to Islamic rules and regulations (Especially Islamic modest dress code, in addition to the kind of relationship between the people in the car). For example, if a girl (who is veiled) is in the car with her father, then they are usually allowed to pass through. However, if a woman is riding with a male friend (no kinship ties), then they are prone to get killed or kidnapped.

[101] A wilaya neighboring Algiers.

[102] Evidently, the FIS members would make fake checkpoints to stop people and to either kill them or steal their cars.

[103] عروسة واجدة

members would organize various fake checkpoints and would crash weddings in order to kidnap the bride, take her to the mountains where they resided, and then marry her for a period of time before passing her along to the next one. These women were called *sebeya*[104] and though this concept existed in 622AD with the start of the Islamic era and was later given up on, (Najmah Wanees Saad Wateelah 2023, 537) it was adopted in the Algerian Civil War as well. Even though this concept applied to non-Muslim women only, it applied to Algerian Muslim women during the Black Decade because they were believed to be against Islamic teachings and thus stripped from their Muslim status. ZH remembers a similar instance,

> "There was a wedding parade *entre-wilaya*,[105] which means it was a long journey. And though they made it seem as though it wasn't a wedding procession by not putting flowers on cars and not using the honk, they were still stopped at a *faux-barrage* and since they were all dressed up, the *tero* knew that they were heading to a wedding. So, they killed everyone and left their bodies there. They usually take the bride, but this time, they killed her too."

Thus, wedding processions became a very heated tradition that started disappearing during the decade in order to protect people's lives. However, regardless of the processions, weddings were regarded as anti-Islamic[106] and they were often hunted and shut down by the FIS.

As such, weddings became a very dangerous environment for people to be in since many raids happened that resulted in mass homicide. "They used to enter a wedding venue and shoot everybody with no mercy." IT said, "my grandma used to work as a wedding cook, a good one at that, and she catered for many weddings because she was successful in what she was doing, but

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[104] سبية (or captive in English) is every woman who is taken captive in war or forcibly transported from the enemy country, provided she is not a Muslim, as non-Muslim women are eligible to be enslaved. The bride and the women captured along with her are all part of the spoils of war. They are divided among the warriors, and it is common for some of their husbands to be killed, while others are redeemed so they do not return to the land of the Muslims (Najmah Wanees Saad Wateelah 2023, 537).

[105] Between two wilayas.

[106] Since they included music, dressing up immodestly, and mixing of the genders, which are all against Islamic teachings.

then she had to stop when this targeting started. She didn't want to risk her life for that." The

raiders would usually kill most people at the wedding but then keep and kidnap the ones that they

could use such as brides and chefs. "They would take women who'd cook for them, clean for them,

and heal them," IT said, highlighting and emphasizing women's traditional roles and the way they

were expected and forced by the Islamists to abide by them. Such events instill fear in women and

makes them reluctant to live their lives normally. LI said, "Take for example weddings, we usually

go to wedding parties to have fun, look good, and show off our clothes. After that, we didn't have

any of it. They kill everything in you as a woman." Such a statement shows the desperation that

women were facing due to the gruesome events that were happening and that most people could

not do much to counter.

Interestingly, the banal violence endured by women during the Black Decade was distinctly

gendered, leading them to experience the war differently from their male counterparts.

Nevertheless, these women navigated their struggles by bargaining with the patriarchal and

gendered violence they faced. For instance, LI and her friend used the Islamists' bias against them.

In order to avoid getting caught on their way to school, they told people around them that they're

doing a sewing apprenticeship. As such, they used to put different cloths and sewing tools in their

bags to cover the copybooks and pens in case the fundamentalists searched them. LI said,

> "I remember once FX and I were on the bus heading to *Sidi Moussa* where the high school
> was. The bus suddenly stopped, and three bearded armed men entered. We knew it was
> them, so we peed our pants from being scared. We thought they were going to catch us and
> kill us. They came to us, asked us where we were going. We said to an apprenticeship
> center. Then they asked to see what's inside our bags. We opened them, and they saw the
> cloths. So, they just got off the bus. We thought we were going to die that day."

This deceitful tactic is a reflection of what Deniz Kandiyoti calls "patriarchal bargaining," (Kandiyoti 1988) a process by which women get around restrictive systems by taking advantage of the prejudices and expectations of the patriarchy. LI and her friend deftly subverted the Islamists' restraints by adhering to the gendered standards they imposed. They took on the appearance of conventional female roles—going to an apprenticeship in sewing—in order to ensure their safety and further their education. This act of resistance exposes the subtle ways in which women navigate patriarchal systems, showcasing their resourcefulness and strength in the face of systematic oppression. This strategy of resistance demonstrated the adaptable tactics women used to maintain their agency and autonomy while working within the restrictions of the oppressive regime rather than directly opposing it. This kind of resistance also highlights how complicated women's lives were during the Black Decade, when surviving frequently required striking a precarious balance between subversion and compliance. Women like LI managed to survive in a hostile environment while continuing to pursue her goals of education and personal development by being aware of and in control of the expectations that were placed upon them.

Itha A'ammat Khaffat: Community Solidarity as an Act of Resistance

Amid the unrest and horrors that women were experiencing, most of my interviewees expressed the importance of their networks of family members, friends, and neighbors in helping them go through those events. For instance, ZH told me about the beautiful evenings she would spend in *wast-el-dar* (the inner yard) with her neighbors,

> "We used to gather down there, we'd bring sweets and coffee, and we'd talk about everything and nothing. We weren't allowed outside because of the curfew but since we were inside the building, no one cared. We used to talk about the events that were

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happening, and this is where we got our news from, about someone that we knew or didn't know dying. So, we laughed and mourned together."

For ZH and her neighbors, *wast-el-dar* became a safe space of solidarity and sisterhood. As a result, their happiness intensified, and their mourning was felt less when they met.

LI echoed ZH's sentiment regarding the amount of help that having neighbors and friends around provides. She said,

> "You feel that everyone is the same. It's like when they said *'ida a'amat khaffet'* (roughly translates to: A problem shared is a problem halved).[107] That's it. You say this thing [suffering] isn't falling on me only. We are a community that is all scared that something might happen to us in that situation. At the end of the day, that was our reality, and there is nothing I could do about it."

Hence, because LI was not alone in experiencing this issue, she was relieved of the burden of finding a solution single-handedly. Recognizing that she was not the sole individual subjected to the terror of the Black Decade enabled her to understand the limited control she had over the situation, alleviating the guilt that often accompanies such circumstances.

For HL, the fact that her mother-in-law was with her in every step of the way helped her feel less alone. She said, "I don't know what I would've done without her by my side. Though she was very assertive and sometimes bossy, she was a very strong and resilient woman, and I am forever grateful that she was by my side." Considering all the experiences that HL went through (childbirth in the middle of the clash, the bus scare, her husband's escape, etc.), she needed a communal bond to help her through this period, and she got it, especially that she did not see her family home for four years as she was instructed to by her father.

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[107] Arabic proverb, which suggests that when individuals share their burdens or problems with others (or when a group of people are facing the same issue or problem), the weight of those issues diminishes, and the path to finding a solution becomes clearer. By confiding in others or seeking collective support, the challenges faced seem less daunting, and the prospects of overcoming them appear more attainable.

As she was giving birth, HL went from hearing the nurse and the doula asking her to push to them reassuring her to calm her nerves from the bullets heard outside. She said,

> "It was just the three of us, and both of them kept telling me not to get scared, especially when we heard the bullets. Another nurse would go around the rooms and close the blinds. Another one passed by and reassured us that they won't attack the clinic, though deep down, I knew that if anything, a military clinic would be their first target."

Interestingly, HL told me that thanks to the two people who were with her that were constantly talking to her, she was completely distracted, and she barely felt the birth until her daughter was handed to her. "After I gave birth, they took me to another room with another woman to spend the night, and then was let go the next day because they didn't want to keep anyone there in case they [Islamists] actually attack the clinic." When asked if she remembers her interaction with the other woman with her in the room, HL said, "I don't remember much except this one thing, I remember her mother and sister came and brought cherries, and they gave me some, which was such a nice thing to do in such a time." This act of selective remembrance reflects HL's subconscious effort to find comfort and positivity in her memories, emphasizing the gesture of goodwill from others rather than the overall challenging circumstances she was in. These incidents demonstrate women's empowerment in the face of hardship by highlighting their resilience and capacity to collectively overcome challenges. This empowerment is demonstrated by the various women in HL's story who offered her support and assistance. Each encounter highlights the agency and strength of these women, from the support and care given by her mother-in-law to the help given by the nurse and doula during childbirth to the final act of solidarity displayed by her hospital roommate.

When asking if she was scared when her husband escaped his death, HL said, "I really wasn't because my mother-in-law was there for me all along," she added, "when my husband ran away, she stayed with me. And when we used to visit him in Algiers East, which was very

underdeveloped back then, she used to lead the way and I used to follow her very trustingly." Then she also added the importance of her family members during those times. She said, "my brother and sister used to come over and spend months with me. I was in an isolated town, I didn't know anybody, my husband could've lost his life at any minute, and I really needed and appreciated the support that I got just with their presence around me."

Interestingly, community solidarity went beyond a coping mechanism and a space for sharing fears and stories, to a space of participation in the war. Deducting from the interviews, after the intensification of killings and kidnappings in the *Bougara* town of Blida, the government gave weapons to civilians who were ready to fight the Islamists if they approached the town who came to be known as *Chnabet*.[108] "Life got safer after that happened," LI said. As a result, many neighbors became watchdogs ensuring everyone's safety. Interestingly, women also took part of this initiative, and though they didn't hold or use weapons, they were confined to a traditional gendered role: screaming. "I remember a dear neighbor came over once to tell us that he joined this initiative and became one of the *Chnabet*. He instructed my sister and I to yell if something happens and they will be at our doorstop to defend us right away. 'El'ayat a'likoum ou slah a'lina'[109] (screaming is on you, the weapons are on us) This is what he told us." This shows the

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[108] الشنابط – From the interviews: Starting in 1993, there was a drive to equip civilian populations against Islamist militant groups from a variety of sources, including the ruling establishment. Though there was some initial resistance, advocates of enlisting citizens in the fight gained momentum, and militias began to progressively organize in March 1994. Veterans of the Liberation War actively participated in these militias, which were supervised by the *gendarmerie* (military police). These militias were originally assigned to protect villages and their occupants from armed groups' assaults; in addition, they assisted the army by doing reconnaissance in the field. They quickly outgrew their defensive function, though, and started serving as the military's auxiliary soldiers. Many people were drawn to these full-time militias by the substantial pay and other benefits that exceeded the minimum wage. However, entry into these militias was extremely selective, since the governing class demanded steadfast allegiance, frequently at the expense of violence. By 1996, the army had stepped up its efforts to force civilians to join these militias and choose sides in the struggle between the government and the rebels.

[109] العياط عليكم والسلاح علينا

way that community solidarity among neighbors transformed into participation in war. Even though this participation was based on traditional gender roles, LI said that she felt quite involved. "I felt like I was doing something at least, and it felt good." She then continued to tell me an instance when this strategy came into action,

> "One day, we heard someone knocking on the door around 8PM, and since we weren't expecting anyone at that hour, we thought it was them [the Islamists]. There was a guy calling my father's name and asking him to open the door, which made me even more scared. I started screaming with all the power I had. My brothers tried to stop me from yelling, but they couldn't. The *Chnabet* heard me and were there after five minutes. It turned out it was the military that wanted to use our house to pass through to the other street since we had two doors. I ruined their mission, but it felt good to know that the *Chnabet* would be there that fast."

Thus, community solidarity proved to be an important factor in women's coping mechanisms during that period, with family members and neighbors being a safe haven for these women to manage the horrors of the Black Decade. In addition, this community solidarity proved to be a participatory political practice in the overall atmosphere of war. Though their participation was stereotypically gendered and confined to traditional gender roles, the interviews have shown that it still made women feel part of the struggle and not only on the receiving end of the war.

To conclude, this chapter explores the ways in which traditional forms of violence such as massacres, killings, and abductions, were happening alongside daily banal violence. This violence tends to be overlooked despite the emotional (and sometimes physical) toll it has on those who experienced it. Through my research, I wanted to show the ways in which daily life disruptions can be considered as violence, in its most banal form. Many of the accounts that I have documented throughout this chapter have shed light on women's daily experiences and the way in which the Black Decade marked their lives; effects that manifest in the way they remember and talk about events from that period. My research has shown that even after twenty-three years of the Black

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Decade, the ghost of that period still haunts the women I interviewed. Their lives are still shaped by their experiences of daily violence, be it psychological, emotional, or physical. Moreover, despite the general sense of amnesia that the Algerian people experience regarding that period, in addition to the reconciliation efforts that the government strove to achieve,[110] women's daily experiences of what I construct as violence have been largely dismissed. Whether these experiences were those of displacement, isolation, constant sense of fear, or confinement, women were at the other end of the Black Decade experiencing every part of it and being affected by it. These incidents of daily banal violence are acts of resistance that show women agency and resilience in the face of oppressive circumstances. These women defy the systems that aim to marginalize them and declare their existence by enduring and overcoming daily adversity. This kind of resistance, which is frequently disregarded, emphasizes the strength of quiet, steadfast opposition to structural injustices.

However, as I previously noted, women found their own ways to cope with the gruesome images they have seen and the horrible events they have experienced. Such coping mechanisms helped these women navigate a sense of fear and insecurity that would have otherwise been unmanageable, which mostly manifested in the form of community solidarity. Women found a sanctuary in meeting their neighbors, family, and friends. In such meetings, women usually discussed the events happening around them referring to their experiences in this tumultuous period. While several individuals felt comfortable discussing such matters within the privacy of their homes, they harbored doubts and fears that their conversations might be overheard or reported by others, potentially exposing them to danger.

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[110] I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Speaking Through Silence: Memory Politics and the Act of Remembering

This chapter explores the ways in which Algerian women challenge the prevailing metanarrative[111] that was employed and enforced during the Black Decade by the government. These women actively challenge the marginalization and oversimplification of their experiences within a patriarchal framework through their personal narratives and memories. In this chapter, I show how women's testimonies are an important tool for defiance against patriarchal structures that try to minimize and silence women's struggles and contributions. I argue that Algerian women resist the simplification of their resistance efforts by remembering and sharing their experiences. Additionally, I argue that memory-making is a political and gendered process that is constantly manipulated.

The Politics of Remembrance: A Gendered Perspective and the Building of Counternarratives

In this section, I delve into the gendered nature of women's experiences and their process of memory-making, examining the narratives that challenge the overarching metanarrative imposed by the state. Women's personal narratives can be interpreted as counter-narratives[112]

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[111] I define metanarrative (also referred to as a grand narrative or master narrative) as an all-encompassing story or interpretation that aims to provide a cohesive and comprehensive account of historical events, experiences, and social phenomena. In the scope of this thesis, what I am calling metanarrative is the narrative that was crafted by the state during and after the Black Decade. This narrative is that of national unity, reconciliation, and *amnesia* (see my use of amnesia in the footnotes below). I also take the state's metanarrative as an exclusionary framework that sidelines women's unique experiences.

[112] I understand counternarratives as a way to oppose or subvert dominant master narratives that are socially and culturally constructed. These narratives often have normative, oppressive qualities, or they may exclude experiences and points of view that are different from those that are presented in them. In this situation, storytellers can use counternarratives to criticize or stand in opposition to the ideas and themes that master narratives advance. When used

because they present distinctive viewpoints that question and reveal the underlying presumptions of societal norms and discourses that are dominated by men (Siriphant 1998, 101). These stories offer perspectives that frequently defy the official or prevailing narratives that are shaped by patriarchal structures. Because counternarratives are often left out of official histories, it is crucial to highlight gendered perspectives by listening to various viewpoints and exploring the connections between historical memories and official records (Jones-Gailani 2020, 90). Women share the nuances and complexities of their lives—things that the mainstream narrative tends to ignore or misrepresent—by sharing their lived experiences. The stories of the women I interviewed, for example, draw attention to the everyday acts of resistance that women performed in the Black Decade and challenge the stereotype of them as helpless victims.[113]

Counternarratives are closely tied with the way these women remember and tell their stories. In other words, women craft their own narratives of certain events by making sense of their memories. "Individual memories are not simply an 'archive of lived experiences deposited somewhere in the brain,' but instead a dynamic of ever shifting moments of remembrance" (Jones-Gailani 2020, 39). In other words, the act of remembering itself is manipulated and subject to many internal and external influences such as, governmental control or trauma. For instance, many

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in this way, counternarratives refer to the stories people tell that provide implicit or overt opposition to the dominant cultural narratives (Lundholt, Maagaard, and Piekut 2018, 1).

[113] Counter-narratives can also cast doubt on the validity of the laws and customs upheld by male hegemony (Jones-Gailani 2020, 90). They can highlight the ways in which these conventions uphold the status quo, thereby limiting the liberties of women and sustaining gender inequality. For instance, ZH said, "many girls didn't wear the hijab when it was being enforced, including myself," which shows women's defiance to the patriarchal status quo of the period. Similarly, LI kept repeating the phrase "we [she and her female friend] were the only ones who used to go to school." Her insistence that they were the exception has great influence in creating a narrative that challenges the dominant one of their submission. Rather, she emphasizes the agency and resistance she and her friend had in the face of their circumstances. Thus, women's stories have the power to challenge and ultimately topple oppressive structures by highlighting the inconsistencies and injustices present in these norms. As explained by Mohanty: "In fact narratives of historical experiences are crucial to political thinking not because they present an unmediated version of the "truth" but because they can destabilize received truths and locate debate in the complexities and contradictions of historical life" (Mohanty 2003, 524).

government officials in the 2000s "often drew on the collective understanding of the past to support the government's policies" (Zeraoulia 2020, 26).[114] Particularly, the postwar regime excluded memories of the past from the memorial process invoking a case of *amnesia*[115] in the country. However, this past still exists and its memory continues to shape citizens' perceptions of the political system, themselves, and their future (ibid.).[116] Moreover, since 1991, educational programs have not included any discussion of the conflict, whose mention is frequently taboo (Ghanem 2021, 1). The government pushed a narrative of national reconciliation in the hope that the events from the Black Decade would slowly disappear from people's consciousness (Ghanem 2021, 3). This narrative created a sense of self-censorship in how the women I interviewed remember and speak about that period. LI said, "I don't like to talk about it. I'm always scared that period will come back and haunt us again." Similarly, both ZH and HL stated that they would not have brought up any of those stories if I did not ask them. When asked about the reasons, they expressed LI's same fear. Thus, recalling and telling their stories is an act of defiance itself against the metanarrative because they have shown that the latter is not the only narrative that exists.

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[114] On September 29, 2018, the national television aired graphic and horrifying images of civil war victims in an attempt to frighten viewers and highlight President Bouteflika's role in bringing about peace. In addition, on February 28, 2019, following the large-scale demonstrations on February 22, the former prime minister, Ahmed Ouyahia, invoked the history of the Black Decade and the Syrian civil war and its aftermath to dissuade demonstrators from taking part in protests against Abdelaziz Bouteflika's candidacy for a fifth term. Under the previous four mandates, the President was portrayed as the driving force behind peace in Algeria; however, in the later mandates, the strategy has shifted to a threat of violence returning if he were to leave office (Zeraoulia 2020, 26).

[115] My use of amnesia here is figurative and metaphorical. Particularly, growing up in the postwar period and gaining consciousness of my country's past, I have always felt that the ghost of the Black Decade is still roaming around my home and my country, but people seemed to have forgotten about the war (or at least they acted like it). As such, I am utilizing this term here to show people's (un)conscious act of forgetting the events from that period (or that period in general) in order not to repeat it—a fear shared by most Algerians as the interviews have shown.

[116] Though this amnesia was quite present in the interviews in the way the women diverted from their stories, were silent for a while, or struggled to remember certain events, they were open to talk to me, which I believe goes beyond the rapport that I built with them. I believe that even though I did not live through the Black Decade, I still share the same history with these women, which allowed us to connect on some level because that period was very present in my upbringing despite the government's attempt to cover it. Zeraoulia sums it up well, "Indeed, the new generation does not remember the details of the civil war, but every family has a victim to tell the story of the civil war. Among the younger generation, people lost their fathers, mothers, neighbors, and cousins, and hence, the civil war is not a part of their country's history, rather a part of their family reality" (Zeraoulia 2020, 28).

The production of these counternarratives by women functions as a means of resistance against the narrative of reconciliation enforced by the government and the prevailing patriarchy in Algerian society, both of which have marginalized their experiences. They "offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews 2002). This resistance lies in the multitude of stories that are generated in contrast to the monolithic nature of the government's metanarrative. Particularly, building a single, cohesive story to oppose the prevailing narrative is not where a counternarrative's potential for resistance lies. Rather, it is expressed through a multitude of distinct stories that encompass a broad spectrum of experiences (Lundholt, Maagaard, and Piekut 2018, 2). For instance, the various stories I collected from the interviews and the archival material prove that the Black Decade is far from being forgotten. NI said, "that period marked me. I try not to think about it much, because if I do, I will go crazy." LI echoes this sentiment, "you see me laughing and you might think I'm quite careless when I am telling you these stories, but it's because what I saw made me so cold. Everything was normalized back then, and I can still feel that normalization." HL added, "I don't even dare to admit it to myself, but what I went through marked me, and even if they [the government] tried to make us forget, it's just a theatrical act. We will never forget." Because these narratives demonstrate the complexity and heterogeneity of the lived experiences they represent, they collectively pose a challenge to the monolithic master narrative—Algerians did not, in fact, move on and are not healed or reconciliated with their past (Lundholt, Maagaard, and Piekut 2018). Because of this diversity, resistance can take on a richer, more complex form that recognizes and elevates the distinct viewpoints and voices of the marginalized. Counternarratives can more successfully challenge and dismantle the oversimplified and frequently oppressive themes that are upheld by dominant cultural narratives by embracing a range of stories.

Furthermore, the state's narrative ignores the gendered nature of the war and its (gendered) narratives. For instance, while international organizations proved that many rape incidents occurred (Amnesty International 2000) the government still failed to act to limit them or prosecute those who were responsible (Narriman Guémar 2019). After the war ended, the government provided no support for rape survivors, especially with the pardoning of everyone who was involved, as an act of sweeping those atrocities under the rug. Such an act disacknowledges both women's suffering and resilience and flattens their experiences. Thus, "memory is gendered" (Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie 2022, 907) because men and women experienced the war differently, which means that their acts of remembering differs as well. For example, on the one hand, since NI's father did not allow her to go out, her recalling of the war mostly stemmed from her being at home, and her stories mostly centered on what happened in her neighborhood. For instance, NI recalls a gruesome image that, though she did not see it with her own eyes because she "was always[117] at home," she heard about it while it was happening, and it shook her as much. Though interestingly, this event was not caused by the Islamists, but by the government.[118] NI said,

> "When they [the military] kill one of them,[119] they usually bring him to the bus station here and ask the kids to stomp on him. They killed a very known terrorist once and they

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[117] The use of "always" here is hyperbolic but was used by NI, which I believe stresses on how much she was confined to the private sphere.

[118] The acts of Islamist groups and their effects on women are the main subject of the thesis, but it is important to recognize the larger socio-political framework in which these actions took place. The story emphasizes how different players and institutions within the social environment are interconnected by exposing the government's role in maintaining the unfavorable experiences of women. This complicity could take many different forms, from active participation in discriminatory policies to silence over systemic problems that impact women's security and rights. Furthermore, it challenges oversimplified narratives that only ascribe women's oppression to one group or ideology by shedding light on the complex power relationships and alliances that affect women's experiences during times of war. Ultimately, this recognition of the government's role adds layers of complexity to our understanding of women's experiences. Moreover, the story underscores the profound impact of indirect exposure to violence on women's psychological well-being. Even though women may not directly witness certain events, the mere knowledge of such atrocities can evoke intense emotional responses and exacerbate feelings of fear and vulnerability.

[119] I remember when growing up and hearing stories from the period, I always wondered who *houma, hadouk, hadouk nas (all translate to they or them)* were because the Islamists were never mentioned by name. Not understanding the context nor the history behind the stories that were recounted next to me, I was puzzled as to who these imaginary people were. The language that was used to describe the period and the people who brought it was very vague and ambiguous – vague enough to make stories from the period seem like a distant (almost forgotten) fairytale. Such

instructed the kids in the neighborhood to go and stomp on his body continuously. So, you'll see many men passing by the station just to stomp or spit on his body and then leave. It was cathartic to hear about such a thing happening, even though I was not involved in it, because we were all so fed up with the number of people the terrorists killed, but I couldn't help but be shocked and scared of such a thing happening only a few meters away from me."

Similarly, when ZH was 13 years old, she remembers being left home alone when her mother and grandmother had to go visit a family member who was very sick while her father was on a work trip. "I was okay with the idea," she said, "I was used to staying at home and we lived in a very small apartment, so I was never scared." However, this day was different for her because a few hours after her grandmother and mother left, she heard screaming outside her window. She said,

"I was minding my own business until out of nowhere I heard men screaming followed by bullet shots. Apparently, there was a clash between the police and the *tero*. While all of this was happening, I was lying down on the floor because I was afraid of a stray bullet coming in and hitting me. I am not sure what I was thinking, I just remember that I was very scared that I was hugging a pillow so tight. After the clash ended, I looked from the small cracks in the window to see if they were still there, and I saw other women looking out the window too and screaming. I looked down to the street, and that's when I saw a couple decapitated heads thrown there. I will never forget that image."[120]

Therefore, the varied ways in which women recall their experiences highlight the specific influence of gender on their lives. These gender-specific experiences mold their memories, resulting in individual and intricate remembrances. As a result, these gendered alternative narratives defy the prevailing national narrative, revealing a diverse array of stories that showcase their strength and diverse experiences.

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wording could be attributed to the pervasive sense of distrust and fear experienced by individuals during this period. Based on the interviews that were done, it was clear that there was a general climate of suspicion in society, which originated from a deep-seated dread of the unknown. The idea that people can unintentionally run into fundamentalists in their daily contacts, endangering their safety, reinforced this mindset. "You can't really know who used to be one of them. We knew many of our neighbors in the Casbah who joined them, so it wasn't that illogical that other people were part of the FIS too," said ZH. There was a great deal of risk associated with criticizing the fundamentalists or showing dissent to their agenda.

[120] This story also highlights that such gruesome and traumatic images tend to stay in people's memories, which transfers into the way they tell stories about them. Though many scholars debate whether traumatic experiences stay with people or get blocked as a protective mechanism, (McNally 2003, 2) the trend in my interviews prove the former.

Moreover, a prevalent theme in the interviews was the way women recalled their wartime experiences, frequently noting a perception that women had it easier than men. Although I was very doubtful[121] of this statement at the beginning, I found it more intriguing to explore the reasons behind this belief and understand why they remembered it in this manner—especially that it kept recurring. When I asked LI to elaborate further, she said,

> "Even though they were horrible people, they still had some Muslim beliefs in them. So, they'll still be respectful in the way they approached us. Especially that both FX [her best friend] and I wore the *hijab* a few years after they started. So, whenever they talk to us, they barely even look at us in the eyes. But then we see how they treat men, and it's completely different. They completely humiliate them by hitting them or sometimes even spitting at them."

Hearing the statement that men suffered more than women repeatedly was eye-opening for me, but it also tells us much about the protection that women received thanks to their gender identity, the way the FIS looked at and considered women as, and the way violence was structured in the Algerian society. First, the horrors that the Islamists inflicted upon women for years essentialized their position regarding gender. In other words, the increasing number of femicides, displacement, torture, rape, etc., attributed a bad name to the Islamists when it comes to women's rights and oppression. However, though they steered away from it, Islamists based their agenda on Muslim understandings of gender and women's role in the society; an understanding that has long respected women and prioritized their valuation and protection (Wadud 2021). In the context outlined, the FIS embodies a multifaceted approach to gender roles, drawing elements from three distinct Islamist perspectives, (Ghadbian 1995, 25–29)[122] which allows it to simultaneously respect

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[121] I went into fieldwork with the idea that although both men and women suffered the consequences of the civil war, women had it worse, and I was ready to prove it with the interviews that I have conducted.

[122] Firstly, it adopts a conservative stance asserting that while women and men possess inherent equality, their roles are distinct and tailored to different societal functions. This viewpoint emphasizes the complementary nature of genders within traditional roles. Secondly, elements of a radical position are evident within the FIS ideology, advocating for the confinement of women to the private sphere, primarily to fulfill domestic duties in service to men. Here, women are perceived as indispensable for maintaining familial harmony but are restricted from broader societal

and oppress women. LI told me that "sexual harassment those days really decreased … the good Islamists at the beginning of the conflict were against harassing women since they respected us. So, they never really approached a woman or harassed her, neither did other men too because they were afraid of the Islamists." Contrarily, unlike the other women's opinions, ZH believes that "for me to feel if I were a man that I am more protected than a woman … no … because we were both at risk. They made no difference, they used to kill both men and women. So, a woman used to get scared, a man used to get scared." Though LI might have not experienced harassment in the street, nor has she seen it happen, her understanding of it amounted to catcalling and *dsara*.[123] However, what LI might not have noticed is the transformation of previous forms of harassment to physical violence. Particularly, I argue that traditional forms of harassment that existed in the country before the Black Decade did not minimize or disappear, they rather metamorphosized into a more intense and harsh nature, including femicides and physical violence.

This kind of violence was "justified by the Islamists' 're-Islamization from below' project, which justified any form of action they took to correct what they saw as wrongdoing" (Salhi 2017, 18). Thus, though LI defied the Islamists by seeking an education, she still adhered to their enforced dress code, and she lived in a conservative area as well, which have shaped her experience with harassment. In other words, women who adhered to the Islamists' rules and regulations might have escaped the traditional forms of harassment such as, catcalling, since women were urged to abide by such rules. Some graffiti in the streets of Algiers directly addressed women, which read "O you woman who wears the *jilbab* may you be blessed by God, O you woman who wears the

engagement. Finally, the FIS also reflects aspects of a reformist position, advocating for the inclusion of women in political spheres, albeit within the framework of Islamic principles. This perspective aligns with the notion that women's participation in governance is not contradictory to Islamic teachings, advocating for a more progressive interpretation of gender roles within the framework of Islamic governance (Ghadbian 1995, 25–29).

[123] *Dsara* is colloquial for a man hitting on a woman whether verbally or physically.

hijab may God put you on the right path. O you woman echo exposes yourself, the gun is for you" (Bennoune 1995, 187–98). This graffiti clearly made the distinction between those who abode and those who did not, while clearly stating that the latter would be punished.

According to the women I interviewed, men suffered more than women. One way to explain this seeming contradiction is by examining the broader metanarrative of the state, the patriarchal nature of society, and the ways in which women recall and discuss their experiences. However, the goal of my research is not to compare the anguish experienced by different genders, but to show how experiences of violence and the way they are remembered are gendered. This method sheds light on the various ways that people manage and get through difficult times, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of conflict on people and communities. Nonetheless, such a belief sheds light on the structural violence inherent in Algerian society, which manifests in various forms, including entrenched gender roles, unequal power dynamics, and systemic discrimination against women. As such, by accepting and spreading such beliefs, society inadvertently reinforces these inequalities, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and oppression. In other words, accepting the belief that women suffered less reduces their suffering because they are found in a cycle of comparing their pain to that of men and subsequently unacknowledging their own pain. By choosing to remember their experiences this way, women are forced to align with gendered narratives that minimize their suffering, reflecting how societal norms shape and constrain their recollections and interpretations of wartime events.

Speaking Through Silence

As I base my research on feminist guidelines and directions, I aimed to ensure a collaborative and interactive approach with my interviewees, valuing and centering their voices

and experiences. I was asking guiding questions providing the space for them to answer at their own pace. However, my gender identity[124] resurfaced when I discussed certain topics with these women. Certain topics such as, rape and sexual harassment are considered taboo in the Algerian society especially if discussed among people of differing gender identities. As a result, the only time that rape was mentioned was in the interview with LI who said, "there are many women who were raped, and they could be a good asset to your research." LI acknowledged that there were women that were raped, and she presented the information as though it was common knowledge, though her tone and volume drastically decreased, considering her father and brother were in the same house. This interaction was followed by a long silence that I hesitated to break.

In this context, silence serves a dual purpose: it acts as a means of circumventing discussions on a taboo subject in Algerian society, namely rape, while also functioning as a shield against potential consequences that may arise from broaching such sensitive issues. Individuals opt for silence to safeguard themselves against anticipated outcomes like social judgment, scrutiny, or the haunting specter of the civil war's lingering trauma. Thus, silence serves as a refuge from potential negative reactions or judgments from the listener (Sangster 2002, 176). In contexts where experiences or emotions may be stigmatized or misunderstood, silence becomes a shield against censure or disbelief. For instance, survivors of rape (or civil war) may choose silence to avoid facing skepticism or condemnation from those who cannot comprehend their experiences. The fear of being judged or accused further reinforces the impulse to remain silent, with survivors often feeling compelled to justify themselves in the face of perceived scrutiny (ibid.).

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[124] I define gender identity here as the alignment of my deeply felt sense of being male with my assigned sex at birth. I identify as a cis-gendered man.

This long, and frankly awkward silence, also uncovers LI's way of trying to protect me, as the listener, from such stories as well. I believe that, even if LI had stories to share, she might have thought that I should not or do not want to hear them, especially that the subject of rape was brought up by her and not me, since I tried to avoid topics that might make the respondents feel uncomfortable. In other words, silence can also serve to protect the listener, shielding them from discomfort or the burden of having to respond appropriately to sensitive or unfamiliar subject matter (Sangster 2002, 176). Even though this does not fully apply to me because I wanted to hear more about it.[125] I believe that this is what LI thought she is doing by not discussing the topic further. LI refrained from providing me with any further stories that included rape or sexual assault, and she quicky shifted the topic after the long silence she took. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the many incidents of rape that occurred in the period.

During periods of societal breakdown and increased weapon availability, women are disproportionately affected due to their limited mobility and lack of protection. With the erosion of traditional safety mechanisms, such as community support and institutional safeguards, women become vulnerable targets for various forms of violence, including organized rape as a tactic of warfare (Bertrand de Jouvenel as cited in Arendt 1970, 33). Many thousands of women have been victims of rape by members of armed Islamist groups. Women and girls were usually kidnapped and "held captive in situations of sexual slavery, or killed in some cases, especially when pregnant" (Erturk 2008, 22). As explored in an earlier section, many perpetrators of rape portrayed and justified their actions as "'temporary religiously sanctioned marriages,' blatantly violating Islamic teachings in the process" (Erturk 2008, 22). For instance, in 1995, armed Islamists kidnapped Saida

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[125] I communicated my desire to hear more about rape or sexual assault stories, and I attempted to ask further questions, but I was met with resistance (either by shifting the topic or paranoically looking at the door in case someone enters). This has prevented me from asking further questions.

and her sister-in-law from their house in Blida and took them to a camp in the mountains, "where they were subjected to mass rape by a large number of men over three days" (Erturk 2008, 22). Not only did they rape them, but they also cut their hair as an act of further humiliation. After the third day, one of the Islamists helped them escape, which took them two full days to reach Blida again on foot. Though the women reported the incident at the *gendarmerie,* "they were reportedly subjected to insults and were arrested as potential terrorists." Both women were detained for ten days until their families got them out (Erturk 2008, 22).[126]

Within Algerian society, rape survivors (regardless of their gender) are considered "a disgrace" (Erturk 2008, 22) and are consequently blamed for what happened to them. As a result, most women suffer the consequences of assault in silence, not disclosing their experience to authorities or other strangers. Many of the women who became pregnant as a result of being raped decided to have an abortion; this was a practice that was approved during the decade by a ruling from the Higher Islamic Council in Algeria,[127] which allowed abortion in such extreme situations as to be compliant with Islamic law. However, many continued to carry out their pregnancies, taking on the extra burden of being a single mother (Erturk 2008, 22). Many women who survived rape, have courageously testified to the world about the horrible crime of gang rape. For instance, an article about the "5,000 victims people want to hide" was published by El Watan on March 11, 2000. Twelve-year-old Nora was kidnapped from her school gates, held, raped repeatedly, and discovered by the security forces six months later, no longer in her right mind and more than three

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[126] When it comes to rape survivors, the Algerian governmental bodies are usually oblivious and do not take matters seriously until, in most cases, the women's death.

[127] The Higher Islamic Council in Algeria is a governmental body established to provide guidance on religious matters, ensure the proper practice of Islam, and advise the government on issues related to Islamic law and education. It plays a crucial role in shaping religious policy and maintaining the state's interpretation of Islam, often influencing legislation and public religious practices.

months pregnant (Salhi 2003, 34). Nora's father disowned her afterwards and asked for her to be slain because of the 'shame she had brought on the family'.

This social stigma and silence surrounding rape as a weaponized tool of war was not only the fault of individual families and the Algerian society in general but was also a product of the government's silence and complicity. The Algerian government "fail[ed] to condemn organized rape as a crime against humanity, and fail[ed] to acknowledge that its victims are victims of torture, in need of support and counselling" (Salhi 2003, 34). The government has failed to hold those responsible for such crimes accountable, which further exacerbated the way that survivors of rape talk and share their experiences. Since these women did not find the support they required from society and the government, they often found themselves sidelined in their communities with no rights to protect them.

A noteworthy phenomenon that surfaced during the interviews was that the interviewees would frequently switch from talking about their personal experiences to sharing stories about other women. These narratives, whether heard during the Black Decade or in its aftermath, seemed to hold a peculiar allure for the interviewees. I kept trying to steer the conversation back to their personal stories, but it always ended up turning into stories about strangers or acquaintances. This pattern initially baffled me, and I had a hard time understanding its importance during each interview's complexity. However, as the interviews progressed, it became increasingly evident that this diversion was not a random occurrence but rather a recurring theme present in every interview without exception. This tendency raises intriguing questions about the underlying psychological mechanisms at play. It suggests that trauma survivors may employ a nuanced coping mechanism, whereby they find solace or security in recounting the experiences of others rather than their own. This inclination could stem from various factors, including the sensitive or traumatic nature of

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their own stories, feelings of shame or guilt inherent in patriarchal societies, or a desire to maintain emotional distance from their own trauma. By shifting the focus onto external narratives, survivors may find temporary reprieve from confronting their own pain or vulnerability. I argue that this reprieve causes women who experienced severe hardship during that time to believe—as I previously discussed—that men have suffered more. The strategy used by the women I spoke with is essentially a coping mechanism that allows them to avoid facing their own pain. They quietly deflect attention from their own experiences by attributing more suffering to men, as a defense against the intensity of their own feelings. This mechanism is especially important since women frequently face stigma or disdain when they express signs of vulnerability or pain (Ahmed 2014). As they navigate away from their own suffering, they also try to avoid the deeply rooted shame that is reinforced by the patriarchal structure of society and the state's dominant narrative. These social forces create a narrative that not only downplays the severity of women's suffering but also stigmatizes it, preventing candid conversation and extending silences.

Moreover, this pattern emphasizes how complexly individual trauma narratives and collective memory interact. Recounting the experiences of other women affected by the Black Decade may be a way for survivors to feel validated, connected, or like they belong in their community. These common stories help people process collective trauma, reaffirm their cultural identity, and develop resilience in the face of hardship. By sharing the experiences of other women who were impacted by the same historical period of unrest and turmoil, survivors participate in a multipurpose process of collective storytelling. Placing their experiences in a larger context of shared suffering and resilience, the women that I interviewed provided a measure of validation for their personal experiences. Survivors find comfort in knowing that they are not alone in their struggles because others have faced comparable difficulties and obstacles, especially that

ultimately, most women are left to fend for themselves when the government, society, and their families refuse to acknowledge the harm done to them and the violence they endured.

To sum up, counternarratives play a pivotal role in both oral and written histories, offering a vital means to challenge dominant master narratives that often overlook or marginalize them in favor of narratives serving specific political agendas. While analyzing women's stories, it becomes clear that counternarratives—while crucial—can occasionally prove to be confusing and inconvenient in their capacity to offer a convincing counter to the main metanarrative. Because everyone remembers events differently, there is a mosaic of accounts that are difficult to align or interpret. However, as previously discussed, it is precisely this diversity and complexity inherent in counternarratives that imbues them with significance and utility. They provide different viewpoints, upending monolithic narratives and enhancing our comprehension of social structures and historical occurrences. Moreover, all women I interviewed, except for ZH, felt that men fared worse than they did during the Black Decade, and they consequently remembered events from that period in the same way. This highlights the consequences of the prevalence of a metanarrative that erases the gendered nature of the war and subsequently women's suffering. This narrative makes women believe that their experiences are invalid and their suffering unjustified, which manifested in their strong conviction that they suffered less because being a woman somehow help protect them.

Memory is gendered, politically manipulated, and affects the way women remember and forget certain events—both consciously and subconsciously. From the accounts I gathered, some women find in speaking about their experiences publicly, or in the scope of this research, an important step towards empowerment and reconciliation. Whereas many others prefer to keep their memories and experiences private or forget about them. While my approach in selecting the

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women I interviewed was based on my knowledge of them (of who would be more capable to speak up about their experiences), I acknowledge that within these narratives, much has been left unsaid, hidden, or even forgotten due to many factors including internal and external censorship, governmental and societal pressure, and self-protective mechanisms. Hence, memory is easily manipulated, which makes it unreliable at times. However, I echo Alistair Thomson who argues that "every historical source that recounts historical experience […] is an artificial, partial, and subjective representation, and all involve some degree of retrospectivity and thus variability over time" (Thomson 2012, 1:90–91). Thus, the unreliability of memory does not make of my oral history interviews and the stories in this thesis any less credible or trustworthy. These accounts represent the women's truths, forming a rich tapestry of counternarratives about their experiences during the Black Decade.

Conclusion

The idea behind this thesis stems from an assignment in my undergraduate studies at the American University of Beirut. In a course on Arab culture and society, we were asked to write a paper on a gender-related issue. So, I wanted to look back into my country's history and research women's experiences in the Black Decade, two words that have always haunted me. Growing up in Algeria, I have been surrounded by a myriad of narratives and stories from that period. Whenever my family or neighbors gather, such stories resurface bringing a sense of solidarity among those telling them. However, to my surprise, there was barely any literature on the topic. Thus, I wanted this thesis to fill a very existing gap and to be a documentation of an untold history, which goes beyond centering the metanarrative of the period to including counternarratives that highlight women's brave resistance. As I have explained throughout my thesis, Algerian women were not bystanders to their own demise of gender inequality and patriarchal dominance. The existing literature and the narrative that travels the Algerian society focuses on women's victimhood, which strips them from their agency. Women's activism and advocacy efforts, which were significant during the War of Liberation, did not fade away with the birth of the new sovereign state. Instead, they adapted and transformed, turning women's daily experiences and routines into acts of resistance against a patriarchal society and a dark period in Algerian history.

In employing a historical multi-method approach, relying on oral history interviews and archival research, my thesis utilizes a feminist post-colonial framework to analyze women's active role in the Black Decade. I argue that women's counternarratives transcend the monolithic narrative of the state and the view on women's victimhood and agency. These counternarratives reveal women's resilience and resistance throughout the decade, illustrating that their memories of

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this period are shaped by a unique process influenced by political manipulation and gendered biases. Women's experiences and memories of that period differ significantly from men's because they were contending with both a patriarchal system that marginalized and oppressed them and the rise of Islamist fundamentalism that further entrenched their subordination.

This thesis also employed a memory politics framework to analyze how women remember and recount their stories from the Black Decade, revealing the distinctly gendered nature of their experiences during the Civil War and their subsequent recollections. The predominance of the state-imposed metanarrative, which frequently aimed to minimize women's suffering and resistance in order to align with state interests, shapes these memories. In contrast, women's counternarratives offer more complex and intimate portraits, emphasizing their hardships, resilience, and acts of defiance. The women's stories and the metanarrative are constantly at odds with one another because of this dynamic, which shows how the women's unique perspectives and experiences challenge and reshape the accepted historical narrative.

The gendered nature of memory-making in Algeria provides insight into the ways in which women negotiate and oppose structural and immediate violence. Their personal narratives contrast sharply with the state's attempts to present a monolithic version of history, showcasing the resilience of women in preserving and asserting their memories despite pressures to conform. This thesis demonstrates how the process of creating memories involves more than just retelling the past; it also involves actively resisting the practices of historical documentation that exclude certain groups of people. These women used oral histories, primarily passed down by word of mouth, as a method of creating memories. This means of memory-making and preservation has proven to be resilient in the face of state repression and the influence of Islamists. Through personal storytelling in close-knit communities, these women preserved and transmitted their

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truths and experiences to the next generation. Because of this oral tradition, they were able to preserve their histories in a flexible and adaptable way that eluded censorship and suppression as well as counteracted the state's narrative. Thus, by challenging the dominant metanarrative, women's memories assert their rightful place in the history of the Black Decade, contributing to a more inclusive and accurate representation of the past. Through their counternarratives, women resist marginalization and ensure that their stories remain a critical component of Algeria's collective memory, highlighting the complex interplay of power, gender, and resistance in the formation of historical understanding.

To conclude, my research not only fills a gap in the history of Algeria and the Black Decade but also contributes to the fields of memory studies and feminist history by highlighting the crucial role of oral traditions and narratives in preserving marginalized voices. This contribution also emphasizes women's resistance and agency and their role in creating their own histories. By emphasizing women's agency and diverse experiences, this work enriches the broader discourse on memory, identity, and gender in post-colonial contexts. When I started conducting the research, I hoped to meet more women and document more of their stories. However, due to the delicate and taboo nature of the topic, this endeavor proved harder than expected. Many women canceled our interview and refused to talk to me in fear of the implications that such research might bring. Thus, even though I gathered many stories and counternarratives in this thesis, I believe there is much more to be done, and many more stories to be documented. Similarly, many questions remain unanswered such as, the role of the government in the atrocities that women endured, the involvement of women in the Islamist fundamentalist agenda, and the effects of such a period on women's activism today. These are limitations I intend to tackle and questions I plan to address in my future academic endeavors as I establish myself as a researcher and historian of Algeria.

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Appendices

Interview Questions

Daily (Quotidian) life (chapter)

1. Can you describe a normal day in your life during the period? What did you do from waking up till sleeping? Did you feel a change coming to your daily life and routine?

2. How did you react to the FIS winning the elections? Did you feel threatened?

3. Were you religious before the period?

4. Were you married? Did you have kids?

    a. How did you feel about your husband or kids being under threat or at risk?

5. Were you able to see or visit family members that did not live with you in the same house in that period?

History (context chapter) – to show metanarrative vs. counternarratives

6. What do you think about the term "Black Decade"? Does it resonate with you? When did the term of the Black Decade mean to you when you first heard it in comparison to now?

7. How often do you hear stories from the Black Decade?

8. How do you feel about talking about that period? Are you comfortable talking about them with, say, friends?

9. Can you recall the instance you heard about the coup and how it made you feel?

Education (chapter)

10. What is your level of education?

11. Were you allowed to study?

12. Were there other women with you in class?

13. How was your family's reaction to you seeking an education?

14. When you were a student, have you heard about stories around you about your classmates and their families that were victims of terror?

Hijab (chapter)

1. The forceful implementation of the hijab was a significant aspect of the Black Decade. Were you forced to wear it? Did you feel any kind of pressure? From whom?

2. What is your relationship with the hijab? Did it evolve or change in any way? Did the Black Decade affect that relationship?

Collective Memory (this will run across all chapters)

3. In your interactions with other women who experienced the Black Decade, have you noticed any common themes or patterns in their memories and experiences?

4. Did you find common stories or experiences that you thought only occurred to you but, in fact, occurred to other women around you?

5. How did you feel when you heard about the coup and the FIS taking up the streets?

6. Memory is a complex phenomenon. How do you believe memories of the Black Decade are collectively remembered and shared within Algerian society? Are there any aspects of this collective memory that you find particularly significant?

7. What do you understand when I say "collective memory"?

    a. Do you think the Black Decade is remembered equally among all Algerians?

    b. Did you at any point question the government's narrative on that decade?

    c. What do you think is missing from the governmental narrative about the Black Decade? What would you have wished was more considered?

8. As time has passed since the Black Decade, have you noticed any changes in the ways women in Algeria remember and talk about that period?

Trauma

9. Have you ever heard the word "trauma" during or after the Black Decade?

10. What is trauma to you? Do you think you suffer from any trauma that you wish to share with me?

11. How did you distract yourself from what is happening outside your house?

    a. Were there any tools you used to cope?

12. Were there any resources provided to you by your parents, school, friends, community that helped you cope with the traumatic events of the period? (Could even be the mere act of talking about those events).

13. Were there any instances that you thought to yourself that being a woman was hard in such a tense environment?

14. Looking back, how do you think the traumatic experiences during the Black Decade have shaped your understanding of womanhood and your identity as a woman?

Gender roles (umbrella theme)

15. Did you believe or do you now think that things might have been easier if you were a man?

16. How do you perceive men's struggle during the Black Decade? Do you think you have suffered equally or benefited from their struggle in any way?

17. Has it influenced your perspective on gender roles and societal expectations?

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