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## Gender and Wars of Liberation

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## Gender and Wars of Liberation

After 1945, four European countries were involved in armed struggles aimed at chasing colonisers from their overseas possessions: France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Portugal.<sup>i</sup> A much larger number of African and Asian countries were involved: Algeria, Angola, Burma, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Indochina, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, and the Philippines.<sup>ii</sup> The first wars began in Asia immediately after the end of the Second World War; the last ones ended in Africa in the early 1970s. In this text, we will focus only on situations of armed violence that resulted in engagement by the armed forces of the colonial power or nationalist insurgents. Indeed, these struggles were always nationalistic, even in the case of communist guerrillas. Armed combat is one means to achieve this goal and is always part of a broader series of actions aimed at winning popular support for this political project and bringing it to fruition. In Asia, some of these liberation movements had already taken shape during the Second World War to fight Japanese occupation. After Japan's defeat, once the colonial power regained control, local combatants took up arms again. In Africa, this was not at all the case. Indeed, at least for France, holding on to its Empire was an important means of maintaining its rank among nations. Free France received its earliest military support from Sub-Saharan Africa, while French North Africa served as a base for the Allied landing in Southern Europe, engaging hundreds of thousands of men in combat, including native people.

In most cases, the colonial powers refused to admit that these were wars, and this denial sometimes lasted for decades after the events were over.<sup>iii</sup> Yet they all had sent their armies into rebellious areas, sometimes calling up not just troops serving in the colonies, but also troops sent from the mainland armed forces. Some were mobilised on a massive scale, including conscription – notably in France and Portugal. However, these conflicts were still

officially considered “internal unrest”, and insurgents were “rebels” or “outlaws”. In most cases, a state of emergency was declared, giving the state the authority to resort to extraordinary measures of repression without admitting that it was at war. But for historians, these were indeed wars, engaging armed troops and aimed at possession of a territory and acquiring or maintaining sovereignty.

With the possible exception of the second part of the First Indochina War, once China sent in troops to support the DRV, these wars were all guerrillas, led by armies that were much less well equipped and much smaller than the forces mobilised by the colonising country. This type of warfare resulted in surprise attacks in the form of ambushes, random assaults and kidnappings, and an ability to disappear very quickly. The civilian population’s support was thus crucial to the guerrilla movements’ success and, earlier on, to their very existence. This makes it much harder to estimate the number of people involved because we must count not just combatants, but also all the people who aided, fed, treated, guided, and informed them, etc. This basic interconnectedness between armed troops and civilians is what sets apart the two armies. This is also why the civilian population was a major stake in all these conflicts, either in the short term to win the war, or in the longer term to achieve a political project (independence or remaining in the empire). Let’s be very clear about what this entails in terms of warfare: the civilian population in its entirety was involved in the war. Not only was the civilian population affected, a victim of war; it was also a player and stakeholder in military confrontation and in the political stakes. Hence the interconnections between gender and wars of liberation are unique and different, at least in part, from international conflicts involving two armies comprised mainly of male soldiers.

To make our presentation clear, we can distinguish between the colonised and the colonisers, even though they interact with each other to a substantial degree, as we shall see.

An internal analysis of the armed movements provides an initial indication of the gendered dimension of war, but this must be rounded out with a study of the gendered dimension of repression. More broadly, we must ask: Did the wars of liberation reshape gender relations within the colonised societies? But we must also investigate the reorganisation of masculinities within the armed groups and the effect of this reorganisation on events in the rest of society. The second section of this text will focus on how the colonial powers reacted to the military and political challenge. What effects did colonial powers' policies have on gender relations? Since the resolution of the conflict was sometimes viewed as a social and economic problem, we must look beyond the repressive aspect of the wars and regard them as total wars. Colonial powers *did* implement policies aimed at convincing the native populations to stay within the colonial realm, or at least aimed at sapping some of their main claims. Whereas the colonial project was intended as a long-term one, the outbreak of armed protest upset this order of things and forced the colonial powers to react and adapt very quickly, proposing sometimes radical mutations in social organisation. We can also consider some of the transformations in gender relations caused by the war to be radical, but are we talking of long-lasting changes or of brief and soon forgotten mutations? Are we looking at variations along a basic unchanged pattern of male domination of women? Although focusing on the period of the wars and the specific moments when gender is under pressure, the legacies of the situations borne out of the wars must be questioned.

Frantz Fanon is the first important writer on this topic.<sup>iv</sup> During the Algerian War of Independence, he laid the foundations for an analysis that regarded the bodies of the colonised peoples – notably but not only women – as an essential location of power, and thus a site where “revolutionary violence” had to act. Fanon called for the liberation of bodies and minds. By insisting on how Algerian women could actively use their headscarves and their bodies as an instrument of the fight for independence, Fanon established an enduring and

emancipating myth of their participation in the conflict.<sup>v</sup> The Algerian reality would ultimately be very different, but Fanon, who died during the war, was not there to notice. His text is brilliant and thought-provoking, but it must not obscure the fact that he was a participant in this struggle. This intellectual sought to use words to bring about a certain reality. Fanon was very active in the nationalist newspaper *El Moudjahid*, the French version of which notably endeavoured to present the international public with a view of the FLN that Western public opinion could identify with. While referring to clinical cases or observed facts, Fanon picked aspects of war-torn Algeria that supported his life's combat. His ideas are immensely fertile. The idea that human beings are transformed by action and that violence can be revolutionary notably deserves our attention. However, the relationship with time is exactly what Fanon's analysis is missing. Yet the facts that he examines have specific temporalities: gender relations in colonised Algeria were established over the long term and not only require greater consideration, but also their significance cannot be reduced to the colonial situation alone.<sup>vi</sup> Hence the post-independence continuation of certain forms of domination cannot be ignored.

Moreover, the first historical research on women during the Algerian War was carried out by Djamila Amrane, an historian and former militant, in the 1980s when women's rights suffered a considerable regression in Algeria. Since then, the case of Algeria has been studied in depth thanks to research by Ryme Seferdjeli<sup>vii</sup> and especially Neil MacMaster, who focused on French policy targeting women,<sup>viii</sup> as well as the role of Algerian women in the armed struggle in France.<sup>ix</sup> Other wars of liberation have also been studied in a women's history perspective, but not all. Women's place in the Malayan Communist Party, as well as in nationalist parties and the guerrilla, has been brought to light thanks to research by Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, Lenore Manderson, and Virginia H. Dancz.<sup>x</sup> Likewise, the role of women in the ranks of the Viet-Minh was studied by François Guillemot and Sandra Taylor.<sup>xi</sup>

The conflicts in Angola and Mozambique were frequently the subject of research. Meredith Terreta's research has analysed the situation in Cameroon. Lastly, Cora Ann Presley has carried out substantial research on the Kikuyu in Kenya. However, we must acknowledge that some conflicts have not been studied sufficiently, and especially, the gender aspect has not been treated evenly by all researchers. The main focus has been women's role in liberation movements. Sometimes emphasising their role, seeking to leave behind a view of women as being mere victims, these research works have not always investigated the effects of women's engagement on social gender roles. Nor have they examined the situation before and after the war in order to situate these possible changes in the longer term.

Contemporary thinking about women's roles in armies have cast fresh light on historical research on these questions that has focused more on the relations formed between men and women within liberation movements (e.g. Adrianna Tan on Malaysia). Meanwhile, research in the field has largely ignored masculinity.

Since M. Sinha's seminal book, we have seen the value of thinking about the interconnected constructs of masculinity of the coloniser and the colonised.<sup>xii</sup> This subtle interplay of reversed reflections and its effect on the societies in question has been identified. But many societies have not yet been examined in this perspective, and the study of masculinities in colonial territories has yet, to a large degree, to be constructed. So what can we say about this question during the wars of liberation? The effects of war on masculinities in a colonial context have received very little attention – notably with regard to the multiple forms of masculinity in nationalist ranks and their interactions with colonisers. Nevertheless, there is some fascinating research on Zimbabwe that may serve as a foundation for thinking about these questions.<sup>xiii</sup> Here and there, we can find some indications that researchers have noted this question even if it has yet to be explored substantially. Another field to explore is

the reaction of colonisers. We are starting to identify more and more clearly the counter-insurrectional techniques used by colonial powers almost everywhere during these conflicts. But these have not yet been analysed in terms of gender or their long-term effects. Here again, we will propose to bear in mind this question while taking a fresh look at this research.

### **Section 1: Armed movements and gender relations**

Before considering how the rise of an armed movement influences gender relations, we must assess the social situation during the period leading up to armed conflict. Attention has focused in particular on women's participation in politics.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish between movements that made specific demands in terms of actively fighting for gender equality, e.g. education for girls, and movements that merely organised sections for women. In this specific, determined position, women militants could play a definite political role aimed at awakening nationalistic awareness among women, often in areas where men were not allowed. This was notably the case in Algeria, where women nationalist militants of the MTLD went into homes to lead debates among women in an area where men were not allowed. After armed combat began, the "Association of Muslim Women of Algeria" continued to work to "convince girls and women of the need for their active participation in demonstrations or even armed actions", according to a police report of the era.<sup>xiv</sup> As the war took hold, young women demonstrated their desire to "actively join the armed struggle being led by their fathers, husbands and brothers",<sup>xv</sup> as in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Some of them joined the *maquis* – as nurses – or terrorist groups, while women were mainly encouraged to support the men in their entourage. Quite interestingly, in the charter of the association directed by midwife Mamia Chentouf, whose husband was a nationalist leader, we find the idea that women must "encourage, in every possible way, men to take part in all the events organised by nationalist groups [and] strive to show their husbands or sons who might collaborate with the French government, how their family will be

scorned.”<sup>xvi</sup> Gender roles were maintained – public actions were still the reserve of men – but women played an active role. While they did not prescribe values, they at least acted as guardians of those newly-asserted values. A similar notion of “shaming” existed in other movements, e.g. in Mozambique, where women from the FRELIMO “liberated zone” were able to encourage their husbands to join combat because women’s mere presence in the guerrilla coincided with a discourse casting shame on the men.<sup>xvii</sup>

Although there was no direct link between participation in nationalist parties receptive to feminist demands and engaging in the armed struggle, some women’s individual engagement began that way. This was the case in Malaysia, where the Malayan Communist Party, created in 1930 and active in fighting the Japanese occupation, entered the anti-colonial struggle in 1948, training women and men for the guerrilla. This was also the case of the youth members of the Malayan National Party (MNP), grouped together in the API,<sup>xviii</sup> whose motto “Freedom through Blood” clearly indicates that they were willing to risk their lives for independence.<sup>xix</sup> Outlawed in summer 1947, the API went underground. It was joined by members of the AWAS:<sup>xx</sup> the other movement founded within the MNP, reserved for women and modelled along the lines of the Indonesian movement Isteri Sedar (Conscious Women), which opposed the Dutch in the 1930s. The name of the AWAS movement is a warning (the acronym is pronounced like the word for “beware!”). While advocating education for girls, greater autonomy for married women and more political rights for women, it was a school of Malay nationalism<sup>xxi</sup> that would lead more women to join the armed struggle after the state of emergency was declared in June 1948. This was the case for Hamida Binti Haji Sanusi, who led a group of woman combatants. In this engagement, they were similar to the women involved in the Huk movement in the Philippines at the same period. In both countries, women’s engagement resulted in the movement’s leaders taking careful watch of the romantic and sexual relations of its members.



This preoccupation with good morals can be found elsewhere. In Algeria, combatants were designated as relatives, “brothers and sisters”, also a reminder that all romantic relations were prohibited. However, this prohibition was quickly lifted, and some members of the maquis later got married – although all regions of Algeria did not have the same policy on this subject. Yet uncomfortable with the presence of women in the maquis, especially young women (mainly working as nurses), some leaders encouraged them to get married or made them leave the maquis and join camps outside Algeria.<sup>xxii</sup> In Kenya, where women were active in the Mau Mau movement (between 1952 and 1958, more than 34,000 women were imprisoned for participating in the struggle<sup>xxiii</sup>), where they even swore allegiance, sexual intercourse with guerrilla fighters was forbidden. In Cameroon, women were in the refugee maquis – different from the CNO, or the exclusively military maquis.<sup>xxiv</sup> They did not all join the UPC (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon) of their own free will, and some were forced to marry combatants.<sup>xxv</sup> Conversely, some served as spies or even combatants in the Bamileke region in 1957.<sup>xxvi</sup> The UPC secretary general Ruben Um Nuyobé himself came out in favour of women’s emancipation and their playing an active role in the fight for independence – a stance that he described as being another factor that set them apart from the coloniser. The school of UPC cadres set up in 1955 also included several women from the UDEFEC (*Union Démocratique des Femmes Camerounaises*) and helped legitimise women’s unique role in the national struggle. Marie Ndjat, the secretary general of UPC central committee of Songmbengue, had graduated from the school of UPC cadres. Leading a group of men, she headed up several armed actions before being arrested. Several members of the ESOCAM (“Social Evolution of Cameroon”), an association founded to support The French administration and aimed at supporting Westernisation of Cameroon women, testified against Ndjat. In addition to her “savagery”, she was criticised for unfeminine behaviour and for sleeping with UPC men...<sup>xxvii</sup>

In the 1960s, the FRELIMO also made an appeal to young women to join its ranks. It targeted girls aged 10 to 15, unmarried, who lived in the “rebel” milieu. They were armed and, beginning in 1967, a Female Detachment (*Destacamento Feminino*) was even created, with its members trained in Tanzania. A sign of the times and of ideology, these girls were the subject of many speeches. They were supposed to embody the “new socialist women”. In reality, these girls, described as “little sisters”, experienced a new form of equality with men and were truly liberated from their parents, who stayed in their villages. That said, the FRELIMO also intended to act as a substitute for parental authority, prohibiting sexual or romantic relations among guerilla fighters and punishing violators, before later adopting a more flexible policy in the last few years of the war.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Without joining armed movements, women played a crucial role in providing essential support for the guerrilla: feeding, caring for, hiding and informing guerrilla soldiers. They also relayed public protest by taking part in demonstrations in front of jails or writing petitions to the UN, as in the case of the UDEFEC studied by Meredith Terreta. Thus, in areas traditionally reserved for women or in places that only women could visit (public baths, private homes, etc.), women involved in struggles for liberation also expanded their “repertoire” of possible actions, such that we can wonder whether these areas were still specific to women. Thus, we can cite the example of lying down in the road, as a French communist woman (with her male colleague) lay down on the railway tracks to oppose the war in Indochina by preventing the departure of a convoy of military supplies in February 1950.<sup>xxix</sup> While this practice occurred in other countries and involved both men and women, lying down on the road was much more surprising in Algeria. Yet in late June 1958, around fifty veiled women, with no police record, gathered before the Algiers Prefecture in the early morning. They asked to meet with the prefect, held up signs in French, and stated that they were there for “news about our husbands and children currently under arrest”. Their gathering

was filled with wailing, adding a sound that is uniquely Algerian and typically involves women. They eventually occupied the street, with some of them lying down and blocking traffic. A week later, they returned with their young children and unveiled a black veil in front of the Prefecture – “a sign of mourning”, according to the police officer who wrote a report about it.<sup>xxx</sup> These many forms of demonstrations also played on the roles assigned to women (they wore headscarves and brought along their young children, but they had signs written in French and could use their bodies – despite being veiled – to achieve their goals). In Cameroon, the women of the Bamileke region also used their own status to achieve their goals and contribute to the struggle: as the main farmers in the region, they were responsible for planting the fields. They used this power by planting on the roads so that their harvest would block the circulation of military or administrative vehicles.

Even while acting explicitly as “mothers” or “wives”, they did not necessarily give up on their own agenda.<sup>xxxi</sup> The founding of a women’s section of the FLN in metropolitan France in 1961 was part of this autonomy. While the FLN disagreed with the need for a section specifically for women because it would allegedly divide the united front against colonialism, Salima and Rabah Bouaziz, a married couple, wanted to start groups where women could speak about the specific problems facing Algerian women who had immigrated to France. This section was short-lived because the war ended in March 1962, but it was the organiser of the demonstrations on 20 October and 9 November 1961, following the one that had been severely repressed on 17 October.<sup>xxxii</sup> The profiles studied by Neil MacMaster showed that this section reflected a change in the situation of Algerian women in France. Thus, the anti-colonial struggle enabled young women to gain a form of autonomy that would have been unthinkable otherwise. Hence Zahra Benbournane (alias “Jacqueline”), born in 1943 to a family of 12 children in Alès, southern France, where her father was a miner. Her mother and brother were active in the FLN when, aged 14 years in 1957, she was recruited as

a liaison agent. Indeed, she spoke good French and could pass as a French girl. Soon thereafter, she entered the FLN's "Special Organisation" and was sent under cover to the Paris region.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In 1961, when Jacqueline was 18, the Bouaziz couple asked her to organise a group of women in the area around Drancy. Then she was sent to an area near Alès to do the same. Thus, this very young woman was in charge of organising groups of women who were often as old as her mother, and of whom at least 90%, of course, were illiterate.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Young girls were also present in the organisation in Algeria, where in fact young women without family responsibilities went under cover, thus finding in these two forms of dependence (as women and as young people) the arguments in favour of taking action, with or without the blessing of their elders and parents.<sup>xxxv</sup> In 1960, *El Moudjahid*, the FLN's newspaper, published a play that portrayed one such woman, a young *fidaïa*, addressed by another young woman in these terms: "I am full of regret that I am married and cannot make my own decisions. I am ashamed I cannot be like you. And I am proud of you and those like you..."<sup>xxxvi</sup> These young women were indeed the "children of the new world" that noticed and described by a very young Assia Djebbar, whose younger brother joined the anti-colonial struggle as a teenager.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The same remark holds true for the much larger number of young women who joined the armed struggle in Mozambique. But there, unlike in Algeria, they were actively encouraged by political leaders to join the maquis and even to take part in military training. In Mozambique, probably more than in Algeria, they were more than mere icons in their participation – although they, too, were celebrated as the heroines of a new world.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In any case, these anti-colonial movements, particularly armed movements, were characterised by youth. While guerrillas were able to use gender identities to their advantage without necessarily subverting the order of the sexes in the end, youth was an entirely different question. Indeed, bearing arms gives a completely unusual power to the young people of countries at war. Youth gained power in village communities that, while their

traditional structure had been disrupted by colonisation, had succeeded in maintaining the principle of authority based on age. Although they sometimes found arrangements with guerrilla movements, village leaders ultimately had to obey younger men whose origins were sometimes completely unknown to them. Indeed, when combatants were fighting in regions far from their homes, they were not subject to any control by family or regional networks. Combatants also used *noms de guerre*, making it even harder to identify them.<sup>xxxix</sup> Thus, in southeastern Angola, Inge Brinkman has shown that the MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) successfully took full control of regions where its leaders, who were from other regions, set up a new order. The MPLA notably began to fight witchcraft, condemning to death witch doctors that had been denounced by civilians. Thus, it took over from villages' traditional jurisdictions organised by elders. While satisfying civilians who were concerned by witch doctors' powers, the MPLA showed its power to oppose the colonial rulers (who had outlawed execution of witch doctors), while building its own power at the expense of elders.<sup>xl</sup> This upheaval in the authority ties in society was one of the essential aspects of these guerrilla movements, particularly when they had the means to consolidate their control over territories.

## **Section 2: How colonial powers responded**

The presence of colonial forces was not necessarily more favourable for male elders to maintain their power, notably over the women of the community. Thus, one of the recurring techniques for fighting guerrilla movements was to set up "forbidden zones", along with massive forced resettlement of populations in order to enclose and monitor the civilian population, thus cutting the guerilla fighters off from their logistics bases. Whatever their name, these operations always worked in the same way: civilian populations suspected of supporting the guerrilla were ordered to leave their homes, which were often destroyed.<sup>xli</sup>

They were grouped together in camps surrounded in barbed wire, with exits monitored by soldiers and enforcement of a curfew. Here again, power was held by armed men, and traditional authorities were stripped of their power.

In Malaysia, the British used this system of resettlement areas and “new villages” extensively. They mainly targeted the MNLA<sup>xlii</sup> and its Chinese supporters, mostly living on the edge of the jungle. Under Briggs’ Plan, these were forcibly moved to “new villages”: in all, 450 camps were created, holding over 470,000 people (of whom a very large majority of Chinese). Resettlement was also used in Cameroon; once a camp was set up in an area, “any huts or shelters remaining outside the resettlement areas [must be] razed to the ground and surrounding crops destroyed.” Algeria also saw extensive resettlement, with 25% of the Algerian population ultimately moved to these camps over the span of a few years.

This deprivation of freedom also meant restricted access to economic resources (mainly fields and pastures), resulting in malnutrition problems, as in Malaysia and Algeria. But the effects were also psychological and social, as shown by Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad: cut off from their land and traditional activities, peasants found themselves “defined by what they were no longer and by what they were not yet”.<sup>xliii</sup> The basic social unit was no longer the village, but the camp. Group control structures no longer worked as before, and the elders lost some of their power. Conversely, sociologists note that younger men became the protectors of the elders. The world was turned upside down.

Furthermore, colonial authorities attempted to compensate for precisely this by proposing an alliance with community elders to regain power that they had lost either due to the rebellion or due to colonisation and repression. In Kenya, the situation is especially well researched, and we know that the British successfully recruited a very large number of “loyalists” within the Kikuyu community itself, at the very heart of the Mau Mau Uprising.<sup>xliv</sup> Local authorities, the “chiefs”, were considerably strengthened. The “relocation scheme” set

up by the British involved giving loyalists land confiscated from the Mau Mau, with economic power and political power mutually strengthening each other. In this context, it is no surprise to know that the loyalists liked to describe their adversaries as “uncircumcised boys”.<sup>xlv</sup>

Alongside resettlement, French policy was also based on recruiting militias made up of Algerians. These militiamen were encouraged to live with their families near or inside French military outposts. While described as people who had “chosen France” and were seen as “traitors” by the FLN, they never had the same power as Kikuyu loyalists, as France refused to give them weapons on a permanent basis and gave them no political power. While we can find examples of substantial empowerment related to this French policy, these are more limited to former maquisards of the Army for National Liberation (ALN) who joined the French army as commandos. These men had given up any possibility of going back, and the colonial power gave them the weapons for military combat. More precisely, it exploited their desire for revenge, offering these armed men substantial power over civilian populations and over ALN maquisards.

Yet something else made these repressive policies new: they were also social engineering policies aimed at transforming society. According to Lieutenant Colonel Lamberton, in charge of repression in the Sanaga-Maritime department in Cameroon, they had to “replace the ideology spread by the UPC with a reasonable and sane conception of the role that the Bassa people [could] play in helping build a modern Cameroonian nation.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

Acknowledging the limits of the contribution of colonisation to colonised societies and the need to find powerful levers to avoid the population supporting rebel forces, the colonial powers focused particular attention on colonised women – alongside repression that could also affect these women. In any case, this was true in Kenya and Algeria, but other countries still must be studied.

Such policies fit in the long term. As Partha Chatterjee has shown for 19<sup>th</sup> century India, building an image of colonised women as victims of the traditions of their society was part of the process of setting up colonisation. The same holds true for Algeria, but public attention was not focused on women's dominated position until the war began. Initially, the war led to the use of classic systems playing on supposedly universal moral values, described in a psychological action programme as "major fundamental instincts".<sup>xlvii</sup> Values were clearly assigned by gender: "Any man who gives his aid to the rebels and takes it away from his own family is contemptible and a criminal, not worthy to be the head of a family. Such a man believes himself to be courageous because he runs around the mountain carrying a rifle and bullets. But during this time, his abandoned children cry in hunger. So where is the courage of this man who cowardly flees the cries and criticism of his sons and daughters? True courage lies in the women who stay in the home deserted by their husbands, consoling their children and trying to feed them nevertheless." Lastly, according to the programme designed for women in eastern Algeria, very favourable to the FLN, these husbands "are despised by any man worthy of being called a man". And to complete the picture, little girls were given a storybook showing a girl named Malika defeating the "rebels". There is no clearer way to portray the degradation of men targeted by French propaganda.

Yet the innovation lay in a policy presented more explicitly as positive for women and aimed at giving them power within Algerian society, beginning in their own families. Three areas were given priority: inheritance, marriage and children. Careful not to shock Algerian men, the French legal experts studying these questions in 1957 clearly stated that they wanted their proposed reform to be "an initial stage on the path, both traditionalist and reformist, that is supported by the entire Muslim community of Algeria, including men and women alike". Furthermore, they indicated: "The legislator's aim is, admittedly, to increase the rights of Muslim women, but only insofar as the rights of Muslim men are already recognised. The aim



is not, through the reform process or as a result of unintended consequences, to upset a balance that has deliberately been established.”<sup>xlvi</sup> And they mentioned precedents in India, Morocco, Tunisia, and elsewhere.

So, in a few words, what did this reform comprise? Preventing women from being wholly disinherited, prohibiting them from being married too young or against their will, allowing them to file for divorce. In 1958, the regime change in France brought – for the first time – equal political rights for French and Algerians in Algeria, as well as the first political rights for Algerian women. The promises of equality, between the colonised and colonisers, on the one hand, and between men and women, finally seemed to become a reality. Hope was certainly born for some Algerian women, as shown in demonstrations or petitions sent to the French authorities demanding, for example, “to free [women] from abusive customs that, 12 centuries after the Prophet’s death, all too often make them slaves, to pass laws that will allow them to be born free and to move forward, to give them a status guaranteeing equality of their rights with those of men.”<sup>xlix</sup> Certainly aware of the symbolic value of his choice, Charles de Gaulle appointed an Algerian woman to his first government. As the Secretary of State in charge of “monitoring social questions related to living conditions in the departments of Algeria, the Oasis and Saoura, as well as problems modifying the personal status of Muslim law”, she was behind the February 1959 ordinance that reformed marriage in Algeria.<sup>1</sup>

However, Algeria had not seen demands on these topics during the interwar period, unlike in other countries such as Kenya and India, where the colonial power had already taken a stance and attempted to intervene.<sup>li</sup> The Law of 1959, for many reasons, was timed oddly. Especially, it was part of the French administration’s “arsenal” to win the war, and this aspect did not go unnoticed by the FLN.

On the ground, these regulatory dimensions came along with intense propaganda and social activity aimed at women. The French Army and female army personnel focused mainly on

childcare. The British did the same in Kenya: the officers of the Community Development Department, set up in 1954, created women's clubs whose names meant "Progress Among Women" in Kikuyu. There, women could learn the basics of childcare and watch propaganda films. They also received food, which proved crucial once famine began to strike some regions.<sup>lii</sup> Interestingly, all women were treated alike, whether they were the wives of homeguards that guarded the camps, or married to Mau Mau rebels. The aim was to rely on women not just to overcome the uprising, but also to build a new Kenya. Other policies were tested locally, such as the prohibition of female genital mutilation in the Meru district in 1956.<sup>liii</sup> On this topic, Lynn Thomas has shown that young women refused the prohibition proclaimed by the coloniser, while breaking free of the old women who traditionally carried out genital mutilation.<sup>liv</sup> They performed the act on themselves, with other instruments, thus proving agency against both the colonial authorities and traditional authorities, while using one aspect of the fight against the rebellion as a means to have their voice heard and show their courage (in the face of pain and the risk of repression for having braved the prohibition).

It is hard to draw general conclusions on such policies' effectiveness in building greater autonomy for women.<sup>lv</sup> In any case, these policies were part of a broader wartime context, and we cannot pick out a single element to draw conclusions about their effects on gender relations.

As we have seen, the wars of liberation were very specific due to the nature of the political system in which they broke out. They are also quite specific due to the kinds of conflicts that structured them (both political and military conflict, conflict over the control of various territories, ideological conflict, internal conflicts between ethnic groups or political groups more or less manipulated by the main sides, etc.). These wars saw the rise of struggles in several different registers, combined in time and space, and involving men and women in

different ways. They also saw the deployment of a very diverse repressive arsenal aimed at the entire civilian population, not just armed combatants. Yet if we ask what overall effects wars of liberation had on gender relations, it would appear that these wars were not so different from international wars from women's perspective. While women gained autonomy due to the war, the coming of peace meant returning to a conservative social order and various forms of relegation. Conversely, for men, wars of liberation did indeed see changes in their power: some men won power from others (as in the case of Kenyan "loyalists"); younger men sometimes won definitive access to power that their elders had refused to acknowledge. Still, did they invent other forms of masculinity? This question remains to be explored.

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<sup>i</sup> We could have included Rhodesia – a war aimed at freeing a population from colonialism – but we preferred not to include it because the Rhodesian authorities were not linked to any mainland European country. The same reasoning is even truer in the case of South Africa.

<sup>ii</sup> As Achille Mbembe has suggested regarding Cameroon, we need to have a much more detailed approach to the areas considered – but that is not possible in the current article. See Achille Mbembe, *La naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun, 1920-1960: histoire des usages de la raison en colonie*, Paris, Khartala, 1996.

<sup>iii</sup> For Algeria, France first used the term "Algerian War" officially in October 1999, i.e. 37 years after the war ended and the ceasefire was signed.

<sup>iv</sup> *A Dying Colonialism*, London: Writers and Readers; 1965, 159pp (French edition: 1959).

<sup>v</sup> See, for example, Aaronette M. White's critique of Fanon in "Men Are Fighting for Freedom, All the Women Are Mourning Their Men, but Some of Us Carried Guns: A Raced – Gendered Analysis of Fanon's Psychological Perspectives on War", *Signs*, vol. 32, 4, Summer 2007, pp. 857-884.

<sup>vi</sup> Thus, Robert J.C. Young's article, while very interesting, falls in the trap of focusing on the relationship between colonised and coloniser. See Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An historical introduction*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, chapter "Women, Gender and Anticolonialism", pp. 360-382.

<sup>vii</sup> Ryme Seferdjeli, "Fight with us, women, and we will emancipate you": France, the FLN, and the struggle over women during the Algerian war, PhD, London School of Economics, University of London, 2005.

<sup>viii</sup> Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: the Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954-62*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012, 432pp.

<sup>ix</sup> To my knowledge, in no other case was the Metropolitan country affected by the armed struggle taking place in the colonies. The Algerian War of Independence is an exception in this respect.

<sup>x</sup> See, for instance: Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia, 1945-1972*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980; and Virginia H. Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, Singapore, 1987; Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Against Multiple Hegemonies: Radical Malay Women in Colonial Malaya", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 47, 1, 2013, pp. 153-175.

<sup>xi</sup> François Guillemot, *Des Vietnamiennes dans la guerre civile. L'autre moitié de la guerre, 1945-1975*, Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2014. Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution*, Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1999.

<sup>xii</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995

<sup>xiii</sup> For example, N. Bhebe, T. Ranger, L. White, M. Kesby, N. Kriger, A.K.H. Weinrich.

<sup>xiv</sup> Intelligence gathered on 11 August 1955 by the General Intelligence Police of Algiers, 3F/141 (ANOM).

<sup>xv</sup> Intelligence gathered on 10 November 1955, 3F/141 (ANOM).

<sup>xvi</sup> Intelligence gathered on 20 October 1955, 3F/141 (ANOM).

<sup>xvii</sup> Allen and Barbara Isaacman, "The role of women in the liberation of Mozambique", *Ufubama*, 13 (2-3), 1984, pp. 128-185, p. 153, quoted by Harry G. West, "Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of FRELIMO's Female Detachment", *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 4, Oct. 2000, pp. 180-194.

<sup>xviii</sup> Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Generation of Awakened Youth)

<sup>xix</sup> Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Against Multiple Hegemonies: Radical Malay Women in Colonial Malaya", *Journal of Social History*, vol.47, 1, 2013, pp. 153-175.

<sup>xx</sup> Angkatan Wanita Sedar (Generation of Conscious Women)

<sup>xxi</sup> The AWAS was reserved solely for Malay men and women, later opening up to non-Malay people in only 1948. Ethnic categories are very important in Malaysia, and being Malay (or not) is an essential criterion of political life. From this perspective, the MCP was unique in that there were no ethnic barriers to joining.

<sup>xxii</sup> Data from author Ryme Seferdjeli.

<sup>xxiii</sup> According to Cora Ann Presley in *Kikuyu Women, the Mau Mau Rebellion and Social Change in Kenya*, Boulder, Colorado, 1992, 213 p.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The UPC's *Comité National d'Organisation*.

- <sup>xxv</sup> See several eyewitness testimonies of demonstrations in 1958 (but not confirmed by French services) in FM/DPCT//19 (ANOM)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Meredith Terretta, "A Miscarriage of Revolution: Cameroonian Women and Nationalism", *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* Nr. 12/2007, 7.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Harry G. West, "Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of FRELIMO's Female Detachment", *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 4, Oct. 2000), pp. 180-194.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Her name was Raymonde Dien, and the incident occurred in St Pierre des Corps; see Michel Bodin.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Intelligence notes dated 24 and 30 June 1958, 3F141 (ANOM).
- <sup>xxxi</sup> This view is supported by Meredith Terretta regarding the Cameroonian UDEFEC. Terretta believes that defending a certain conception of motherhood was, for the women of the UDEFEC, a way to demand an autonomous social role, made difficult by French repression.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> On the evening of 17 October 1961 alone, at least 40 people were killed in the repression. See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*, Oxford, OUP, 2009.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> The FLN's *Organisation Spéciale* (OS) was more specifically in charge of violent operations in Metropolitan France.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Neil MacMaster, "Des révolutionnaires invisibles: les femmes algériennes et l'organisation de la section des femmes du FLN en France métropolitaine", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2012, 59-4, pp. 164-190.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> We can cite the testimony of Zohra Drif, who described her father and brother's support of her actions and, conversely, the father's hostility and mother's support of the friend with whom she went undercover. See Zohra Drif, *Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN. Zone autonome d'Alger*, Alger, Chihab Editions, 2013, 610 p.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Quoted by Ryme Seferdjeli.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Assia Djebar, *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde*. Paris: René Juillard, 1962.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Harry G. West, *art. cit.*
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Here, we use one of Kerby's comments on Zimbabwe, but it also works for other conflicts, e.g. Algeria.
- <sup>xl</sup> Inge Brinkman, "War, Witches and Traitors: Cases from the MPLA's Eastern Front in Angola (1966-1975)", *The Journal of African History*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2003), pp. 303-325.
- <sup>xli</sup> For information on these practices, see Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the XXth Century World*, Cambridge, CUP, 2010, chapter 5 "Sustainable violence: Strategic resettlement, militias, and 'development' in anti-guerrilla warfare".
- <sup>xlii</sup> Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), affiliated with the MCP.
- <sup>xliii</sup> *Le déracinement*, p. 161.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Conversely, in Malaysia or Cyprus, where this tactic was also used, loyalists were largely recruited from different ethnic or religious communities than the insurgents.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Quoted by Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya*, Cambridge, CUP, 2009, p. 136.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Quoted by Achile Mbembe, *op. cit.*
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Psychological action programme entitled "Muslim Women against Rebellion" for eastern Algeria in early 1958, presented in a letter to prefects from the IGAME de l'Est, 10 January 1958, 932//89 (ANOM).
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Interior Ministry, Department of Algerian Affairs, "Draft reform for the personal status of Muslim and Kabyle women in Algeria", June 1957, 142 pp., FM/81F/74 (ANOM).
- <sup>xlix</sup> Motion from the Committee for Social Action and Women's Solidarity of Miramar, Bains Romains and Bainem dated 29 September 1958, FM81F75(ANOM). These committees were headed by French women and were largely directed by the authorities. However, some Algerian women undoubtedly saw a real possibility for things to change.
- <sup>l</sup> This covered marriages involving people of local civil status. The ordinance was very largely inspired by the Tunisian law of 1956. The legal age was raised to 15 for women and 18 for men. The consent of both spouses was required and both spouses had to be present at the wedding. During the wedding ceremony, birth certificates were checked and a family booklet was given out. Repudiation by the husband was abolished, and divorce became the only possibility for dissolving a marriage. In this case, divorce proceedings were held before a judge and both spouses had to be present (to avoid the wife being represented by a male relative without her knowing it). The judge would decide on the future for the children and mother.
- <sup>li</sup> See Cora Ann Presley's research on Kenya or M. Sinha's analysis of the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act in India.
- <sup>lii</sup> See Cora Ann Presley, "The Mau Mau Rebellion, Kikuyu Women, and Social Change", *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1988, pp. 502-527.
- <sup>liii</sup> The fight against female circumcision goes back to the interwar period, but it was given renewed impetus during the fight against the Mau Mau, with older men supporting the colonial policy in this field as in many others.
- <sup>liiv</sup> Lynn M. Thomas, "'Ngaitana (I will circumcise myself)': The Gender and Generational Politics of the 1956 Ban on Clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya", *Gender & History*, vol. 8, 3, Nov. 1996, pp. 338-363.
- <sup>liv</sup> For example, we know that Cameroonian women were very mistrustful of maternity and child care (Terretta, *art. cit.*) and in Algeria, the February 1959 ordinance had no effect on the Algerian population, with people continuing to get married exclusively under the Maliki rite. This was especially true because this is what the FLN recommended, and through its own political commissaries and especially its justice committees, it intended to settle all civil law questions for Algerians. Thus, when possible, the FLN approved the choice of spouses, got involved in sex cases, divorces, inheritances, etc.