



# ALGERIAN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION FROM THE ERA OF FRENCH COLONIALISM TO THE ERA OF POLITICAL PLURALISM

المشاركة السياسية للنساء الجزائريات: النضال من أجل الاعتراف من عهد الاستعمار الفرنسي إلى عهد التعددية السياسية

DAI Mostefa: PhD student  
BENNEGHROUZI Fatima Zohra: Associate professor  
University of Mostaganem

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## Abstract

This research is limited to the study of the political participation of Algerian women from the era of French colonialism to the era of political pluralism in independent Algeria. Like all Algerian citizens, women were suffering from French cruelty and injustice for a long time, so they organised themselves and tried relentlessly to change this situation especially after the emergence of Algerian national movement. They fought for their right for education and opened schools for girls, created some newspapers and magazines and joined associations and organisations in order to raise their awareness and develop their intellectual and cultural levels, which eventually helped them in achieving their independence. Afterwards, they continued their political struggle by joining the National Union of Algerian Women which allowed them to be active members in society under the one-party system. Finally, the Algerian Constitution was amended in 1989 allowing citizens to create new political parties, which gave women a real chance to experience a new degree of political openness.

**Keywords:** Algerian women; Political participation; French colonialism; Feminist struggle; National movement; Political pluralism; Political rights.

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## المخلص

يقتصر هذا البحث على دراسة المشاركة السياسية للنساء الجزائريات من عهد الاستعمار الفرنسي إلى عهد التعددية السياسية في الجزائر المستقلة. مثل جميع المواطنين الجزائريين، كانت النساء يعانين من القسوة والظلم الفرنسي لفترة طويلة، لذلك نظمن أنفسهن وحاولن بلا هوادة تغيير هذا الوضع خاصة بعد انبثاق الحركة الوطنية الجزائرية. لقد كافحن من أجل حقهن في التعليم وفتحن المدارس للبنات، وأنشأن بعض الصحف والمجلات وانضممن إلى الجمعيات والمنظمات من أجل رفع مستوى وعيهن وتمية مستوياتهن الفكرية والثقافية، مما ساعدهن في نهاية المطاف على تحقيق استقلالهن. بعد ذلك، واصلن نضالهن السياسي من خلال الانضمام إلى الاتحاد الوطني للنساء الجزائريات الذي سمح لهن بأن يكن عضوات ناشطات في المجتمع تحت نظام الحزب الواحد. وأخيراً، تم تعديل الدستور الجزائري في عام 1989 مما سمح للمواطنين بإنشاء أحزاب سياسية جديدة، مما أعطى النساء فرصة حقيقية لتجربة درجة جديدة من الانفتاح السياسي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النساء الجزائريات؛ المشاركة السياسية؛ الاستعمار الفرنسي؛ النضال النسوي؛ الحركة الوطنية؛ التعددية السياسية؛ الحقوق السياسية.

## 1. Introduction

Despite the prominent role of Algerian women in the national war of liberation, which began in 1954 and lasted until 1962, the nationalist struggle was always more important than demands for gender equality. After independence, government authorities have officially recognised the significant role of women in fighting colonialism and constructing their independent country. However, there were not many women's movements or feminist organisations created in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, former female fighters in the war of independence often contended that liberation from colonialism was more crucial than gender issues.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the examination of the political landscape in Algeria back then is very important in order to know how Algerian women were struggling for the promotion of their social and political status.

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## 2. History of Women's Political Participation in Algeria

### 2.1. Algerian Women's Struggle before the War of Independence

Many historical facts give clear evidence that Algerian women played an important role during the revolutions and uprisings against the French colonialism since 1830. There had been a lot of Algerian heroines in this period of time who fought against the colonisers side by side with men. Lalla Fatma N'Soumer (1830 - 1863) is considered as one of the greatest female fighters in the Algerian history. She is an eternal heroine who dedicated her life to fight colonialism for the freedom of her country. In 1851, the French army was determined to occupy the mountainous region of "Djurdjura", so its leaders launched a large campaign which surrounded the area from different sides, but the local resistance was very strong and violent. Therefore, Lalla Fatma N'Soumer started leading the combatants of her tribe in a big revolution in 1857 in which she accomplished victory in many battles against the French forces who tried in vain to stop her. These French defeats forced the French Governor General "Randon" to come out himself and face her with his forces, and after several bloody battles, he defeated the rebels and captured their leader Lalla Fatma N'Soumer on July 27, 1857, and she was put under house arrest until her death in 1863.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, and not far from the mountains of Djurdjura, women in the east of Algeria were not so different from their counterparts in the Kabylie region, especially in Constantine, where they stood with their leader "Ahmed Bey" in many hard times. They participated in the resistance with a great courage and defended their city which is considered as the Gate of the eastern region. After the city's fall, Algerian women declared mourning in the entire region and wore black Hayek (a traditional Algerian veil) instead of white Hayek and kept it during all the colonial period. This kind of dress still exists and represents rejection and opposition to any foreign presence, and is also regarded as a form of political awareness of the reality of citizenship and the defence of homeland.

These Algerian heroines' participation in the resistance against colonialism gives multiple sociological meanings highlighting the status of Algerian women within the prevailing social and political values.

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While the leadership of armies in most societies was an exclusive domain of men, Algerian women were able to lead armies and resistance campaigns on the widest scale which highlights an important social value that women proved to have the same qualities and abilities as men. Therefore, the members of community, whether men or women, did not find any problem to fight under a woman's leadership on the one hand, and recognise her eligibility to take responsibility and play important roles in society on the other hand.

The participation of women in the political field had different forms which could have been seen in the various acts of resistance, whether military by participating in war or peaceful by refusing to change the colour of their dresses, which is similar to strikes and demonstrations nowadays. The will of women was a prominent factor in their national struggle, which demonstrated the value of their initiatives that were also ways of political participation stemming from the belief in the necessity of performing their roles and taking responsibility with all its burdens.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the social conditions of the country under colonialism needed all the efficient abilities and qualities of men and women, because the time did not allow any conflict over rights and duties, and the priority was to accomplish total independence of the country which was the higher goal for all citizens. However, Algerian women in general were living in ignorance, repression and serious deprivation due to colonial injustice and brutality in addition to the fear from being influenced by the coloniser's foreign culture.

With the development of national awareness, Algerians began to pay attention to the importance of educating women in order to raise their intellectual and cultural levels; and with the emergence of Algerian national movements, including the Association of Muslim Scholars which opened some schools for girls. From 1930 to 1939, there were growing demands for the education of girls whose number was 21 679 educated girls in 1939 and had developed in 1957 to 81 448 educated girls. After the Second World War, Algerian girls continued their education to reach the secondary school and even the university. Furthermore, several newspapers and magazines were created and played a major role in the struggle for the development of Muslim women's status in North Africa; and with the existence of radio as a means of disseminating information

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in most Algerian homes, women had the chance to listen to news broadcasts and learn more about what was happening in their country and the whole world.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.1.1. Women's Organisations

For a long time, Algerian women had demanded for the freedom of their country and the rights of its citizens through institutional work by establishing various women's associations and organisations, some of which are:

### 2.1.1.1. French Islamic Union of Algerian Women

It was created in 1937 and had a total number of 36 women, some of them were Muslims and others were Europeans. It was a place of coordination and collaboration between different women from different cultures in order to establish harmonious relations between Algerian and European women who were considered to be more superior at the intellectual and cultural levels. During its early years, this organisation had raised some issues, such as hygiene to prevent diseases and protect public health. It was well known then that Muslim members of the organisation were under the protection of the French government especially the rich ones. This union created also a health centre that was open every afternoon and provided health care to women and girls between 1944 and 1947. It organised also many cultural activities like lectures, conferences and charitable markets.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1.1.2. Union of Women of Algeria (UFA)

It was working under the supervision of the Algerian Communist Party (PCA), but did not receive great acceptance or support by Algerian women due to the fact that most of its members were French. This union lasted for some time until it was finally dissolved on September 15, 1955; ten months after the national liberation revolution had begun. This union had a newspaper called "Women of Algeria" which was calling for all Algerian women from all regions and of all social positions and backgrounds in order to show their solidarity with French women. It advocated also equality and justice for all women in the world and especially Muslim women.

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## 2.1.1.3. Association of Algerian Muslim Women (AFMA)

This association was working under the supervision of the Party of the Algerian People (PPA) which became later the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD). It was established on June 24, 1947 and dissolved on November 1, 1954, in order to become later a committee for work under the leadership of Mrs. Mamia Chentouf, and the general secretariat was held by Mrs. Nafissa Hamoud, and both of them were in charge of political planning and coordination in the west (particularly in Oran and Tlemcen). The goals of this association were ostensibly to help poor families while in fact its main objective was the political development of women. It was using theatrical rooms and cinema halls for its activities like "Donia Zad" cinema hall in Algiers as well as many other places in Oran and Tlemcen whenever its members had an opportunity to meet together. Generally, the organised debates revolved around national independence and the work needed to achieve it.

The Association of Algerian Muslim Women did not raise any feminist demands in its programme and did not raise the issue of promoting women in any occasion, but was interested only in the independence of the country like the majority of the Algerian people. The first members of this association were: Nassima Hablal, Fatima Zekkal, Salima Belhaffaf, Malika Mefti and Z'hor Reguimi whose main task was to introduce Algerian women to the idea of independence using all possible ways especially in the districts of Belcourt and the Casbah in Algiers. Mamia Chentouf was the contact person between the groups of women and the MTLD party which was represented by Muhieddine Hafir, Ali Mahrez, Abderrahmane Taleb and sometimes Abdelhamid Sid Ali.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2. Algerian Women's Participation in the War of Independence

The most important characteristics of the war of independence and the main reasons for the victory of the Algerian resistance were its popular dimensions, because they stemmed from the will of the people of different social positions. The National Liberation Army (ALN) was able to continue its struggle and battles due to the continuous support of Algerian people by providing shelter, catering, communication and other financial aids. There was a comprehensive community mobilisation in which people were incited to resist, and women responded quickly like many other members of the Algerian society despite the difficult social

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and cultural conditions in which they were living. Moreover, Algerian women had many motives for going out to war and joining the Mujahideen (freedom fighters) in the mountains. The political motive was their real desire for independence in order to live in peace and freedom after living for a long time in the bitterness of ignorance, injustice and widowhood. The social motive was their bad social conditions and their torture and imprisonment by the French colonial army, whether for being fighters themselves or being wives, sisters or daughters of other fighters.<sup>7</sup>

There were also other women who joined the the National Liberation Army because the French army found out about their political and military activities, whereas some others had no choice since they had no one left because the French had killed all the members of their families. The female students had a great opportunity to join the liberation army after the strike on May 19, 1956, during which the students expressed their political awareness and faith in the revolution, but involving women in politics was a long hard process since there were still prevailing customs, traditions and stereotypes that were against it. Therefore, the national movement made its first contact with widows living alone and married women whose husbands and parents were known for their patriotism. Later, due to the increasing enthusiasm of Algerian girls, political leaders were forced to accept them and rely on them to complete certain tasks.

Thus, there were many forms of feminist struggle in the war of independence depending on the educational level of each woman. The role of some women was limited to accommodation, food and instruction, whereas some others carried weapons and engaged in combat and military activities. According to their roles, Algerian women were divided into three categories:

## 2.2.1. Militant

The militant devoted her efforts to establish the basis of women's organisation in the city forming a political system for women composed of cells, sections and groups to mobilise the masses and raise their awareness, as well as to train new local leaders who in turn held regular meetings in order to instruct people and disseminate the principles of patriotism and independence among them. So, at the level of her city, the militant played the role of political official with her fellow activists,

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supervised the female soldiers, tried to cover the political and social situation in her region and kept contact with women's organisations to encourage them to spread the spirit of struggle and national awareness. In the villages, the militant moved from one village to another dressed in village uniforms which helped her to easily integrate into the local community, and usually there was a militant and her deputy in each village.

## 2.2.2. Volunteer Fighter (Fedayee<sup>8</sup>)

The volunteer fighter was a Mujahid who carried out her operations in the cities where she lived among their citizens. She did not wear military uniforms like soldiers, but retained her ordinary appearance so that the French enemy would not suspect her behaviour. Most of the volunteer fighters were young students who gave up their studies and left schools after the strike of 1956.

The volunteer fighter was participating in many important activities such as destroying the enemy's military centres, attacking the barracks, police stations, gendarmeries, parks, coffee shops and cinemas. Moreover, she carried weapons and explosives and many other types of equipment and confidential documents and delivered them to officials from one place to another.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2.3. Mussabila<sup>10</sup>

Mussabila had the same duties as the Fedayee because she guarded the Mujahideen during their operations in the city, and immediately after they finished them, she would show them the escape ways, keep them hidden from the eyes of the enemy and hide other equipment or confidential documents. There were many important Algerian women who had written their names in history and the field of feminist national struggle like Djamila Bouhired who fought in the National Liberation Army since the summer of 1956. She was arrested in 1957 after the French had discovered the laboratory of her uncle Mustapha Bouhired where weapons and bombs were made. She was carrying confidential documents and letters and going to meet Yacef Saadi and Ali La Pointe. Before her arrest, she had participated in preparing and putting one of the bombs in the Milk Bar coffee shop in Algiers.<sup>11</sup>



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## 2.3. Algerian Women's Struggle Abroad

Like their counterparts who participated in the war of liberation in Algeria, there were other Algerian women who participated in the organised struggle in France, where they helped to collect money and medicines in order to be sent to Algeria. They helped also to create feminist groups to raise women's awareness, and organised many important events like the most significant public demonstrations of October 17, 1961 in which many of them were imprisoned.

One of the outstanding works done by Algerian women for the national cause outside their country was their representation of Algerian women at international women's conferences and meetings. They participated in the Fourth Congress of Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) held in Vienna in 1958, where they made the voice of the revolution heard by the federation. They asserted that Algerian women did not want to improve their living and working conditions at that time, but they strongly demanded to stop this terrible war imposed by French colonialism on the Algerian people who were fighting for the cause of freedom and independence.

They also participated in the Fourth International Women's Conference held in Bamako in 1960, which supported the struggle of Algerian people and the fairness of their cause. It praised their heroic resistance against colonialism for more than five years in order to get their independence. It supported also the just demands of the Algerian people and their interim government to obtain the necessary guarantees to fairly achieve self-determination and respect the unity of the Algerian people and their national territory. Finally, the conference called on all African women whose husbands and sons were working with the French colonialism to make great efforts in order to force their governments to withdraw their citizens from the Algerian war of independence.<sup>12</sup>

As a conclusion, it can be well noted that Algerian women had strong stands and efficient political and military activities no less important than men's. Despite the illiteracy rate of 99% among Algerian women and their weak educational level, they were effective symbols for all women of the world with their perseverance and heroic struggle against colonialism. It is worth mentioning that there were two prominent

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incidents in which Algerian women demonstrated strong preservation of their identity and traditional values:

The first incident occurred during the celebration of 100 years of French colonialism in Algeria, where France wanted to prove to many great leaders from Paris and other European countries that Algerian women had changed their values and identity and became completely French in their clothes, language, thinking and way of life. However, the colonial administration had a big surprise and was shocked when ten Algerian girls stepped out on the stage wearing Algerian Islamic dresses after being taught in French schools for a long time, so the Minister of French Colonies could only admit to the audience: "*what am I meant to do if the Quran is stronger than France?!*".<sup>13</sup> Therefore, since 1931, the French colonialism gave great importance to the dangers of Algerian women and their roles in society until the painful events of May 08, 1945 happened, in which women witnessed horrific massacres in Setif, Guelma and Kherrata. There were more than 45 000 martyrs who left behind many female relatives (mothers, sisters, wives and daughters), which caused deep social, economic and cultural changes in society, and made Algerian women change drastically their ways of thinking and rebel against this bad reality.<sup>14</sup>

The second incident happened in 1958 when French colonialism tried to liberate Algerian women by making them abandon their traditional values and take off their veils. So, its methods to destroy Algerians were not only by oppression and cruelty, but also by using cultural and ideological weapons in order to attract the minds of women and destroy their national identity. However, Algerian women proved once again their awareness and courage in face of these dangerous and destructive policies. On May 13, 1958, French Governor General Jacques Soustelle held meetings which people were forced to attend by military force. He called for women's emancipation by forcing some Algerian women to take off their veils and burn them at the end of his speech in the North Africa Square in Algiers. During the following day, there were no Algerian women who took off their veils in the streets, which confirmed that they were still able to resist the power and influence of colonialism and they would never agree with its policies, fulfil its desires or give it a chance to change their traditional values and national identity.<sup>15</sup>

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## 2.4. Algerian Women's Struggle after Independence

### 2.4.1. Under Algerian Law

Algerian women had imposed themselves on colonialism through their participation in the war of liberation, and on Algerian government through their dedication to work, family and public life. Therefore, Algerian authorities recognised their important roles in society before and after independence and their ability to hold positions of responsibility. This recognition started with the platform of the Soummam Congress on August 20, 1956, which stated that there were great potentials in women's movement and big admiration from all Algerians for all women and girls who had given a brilliant example in courage, perseverance and sacrifice with their participation in the Algerian revolution against colonialism.<sup>16</sup>

#### 2.4.1.1. Tripoli Charter

At the Tripoli Congress in June 1962, the constituent and constitutional texts of its charter were based on ensuring public freedoms and respecting their exercise in society. Later, in the declaration of the Constituent Congress on September 25, 1962, the National Constituent Assembly proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria that guarantees the permanent rights of citizens and their exercise of fundamental freedoms in one liberated society.

Thus, this charter was the first official document that delineated the dimensions of national policy for the post-independence phase. It had affirmed its commitment to promote women's rights and help them to be active social members in various fields. One of its articles states that women's participation in the struggle of liberation had created the appropriate conditions to break the old nightmare that was surrounding and constraining them, and engage them in the management of public affairs and development of the country.<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of 1963 (the first constitution of the Algerian state which was issued on September 8, 1963) contains a special chapter entitled Basic Rights which consists of many articles, the most important of which is Article 12 which states that all citizens of both sexes have the same rights and duties.

#### 2.4.1.2. Constitution of 1976

International human rights standards have obliged states all over the world to take into consideration the principle of equality between men and women in their national constitutions or any other legislative text.

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Therefore, all Algerian national constitutions have followed these standards starting with the Constitution of 1976 which states in Article 42 that the Constitution guarantees all political, economic, social and cultural rights to Algerian women. So, this article gives the legal protection for all women who participate in social activities, and emphasises on considering them as citizens enjoying the same rights as men in public life.

Furthermore, Article 39 guarantees fundamental freedoms and human and individual rights, and forbids any discrimination based on sex, race and work.

Additionally, the Constitution of 1976 links the effectiveness of women in political practices to joining the FLN party as the only political organisation at that time. Article 81 gives women the right to participate effectively in political activities and national development. Thus, the party is the basic framework in which Algerian women could engage and learn more about political work and gain sufficient experience to better exercise their political rights; in addition to the National Union of Algerian Women which is the feminist wing of the party where women are trained, organised and mobilised in order to participate in social, political and developmental work.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.4.1.3. Constitution of 1996

Despite the new circumstances under which this constitution was adopted and the new multi-party system which gave the chance to many Algerian citizens to create new political parties that allowed more freedom and diversification in the political field. However, the articles of this constitution did not bring much promotion for women's rights due to their generalisations, for example, in the opening of chapter IV entitled Rights and Liberties, Article 29 states that: "*All citizens are equal before the law. No discrimination shall prevail because of birth, race, sex, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance*".<sup>19</sup>

In order to achieve this equality, Article 31 explains that: "*The aim of the institutions is to ensure equality of rights and duties of all citizens, men and women, by removing the obstacles which hinder the progress of human beings and impede the effective participation of all in the political, economic, social and cultural life*".<sup>20</sup> However, this process of removing obstacles has not really been seen in society because of the

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lack of serious strategy that encourages citizens to participate effectively in political life.

The most important aspect of this article is the concept of citizenship, which was attributed plainly to women for the first time, and therefore it is a confirmation that Algerian women are enjoying and exercising their civil rights, and are participating just like men in all state institutions which ensure appropriate conditions for their participation as Article 51 indicates that: *“Equal access to functions and positions in the State is guaranteed to all citizens without any other conditions except those defined by the law”*.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Article 32 of the Constitution imposes responsibility on both men and women alike to transfer the common historical heritage to young generations, it states that: *“The fundamental human and citizen's rights and liberties are guaranteed. They are a common heritage of all Algerians, men and women, whose duty is to transmit it from generation to another in order to preserve it and keep it inviolable”*.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.4.2. Under One-Party System

The reality created by the followed colonial policy which became more dangerous because of 8 years of war against the coloniser, the systematic destruction of economic structures in Algeria and the looting of its natural wealth had severely damaged the country. Moreover, after independence, Algeria inherited a chaotic economic structure which was directed to serve the French economy; in addition, nearly one million colons left Algeria at once in a matter of a few months, leaving their farms, activities and jobs, and the terrorist Organisation of the Secret Army (OAS)<sup>23</sup> which was formed by colons adopted the scorched-earth policy<sup>24</sup> by destroying properties and killing many innocent people.<sup>25</sup> Under all these bad conditions, it was necessary to recruit all the existing forces in order to get the country out of its problems. Therefore, women (being a considerable reserve of the labour force) were integrated into the productive sector and their contribution to national development was no longer considered as a strange event, but as a progression in their roles and duties. However, illiteracy which reached a rate of 99% among Algerian women at that time, prevented them from being employed in many jobs that required a certain level of education, and kept them away from a lot of positions of leadership especially in the political field.

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Besides illiteracy which was a key factor in the deterioration of women's status at that time and their stay at home, the absence of a full long-term project to integrate women into social and political life was also an important factor. When women went out to resist the coloniser, their main goal was to achieve independence, therefore, after it was achieved, they believed that their duty was over and they needed to return home to the natural role that society had set for them. However, women who were active in the public sphere had been divided into two groups. The first one joined the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA) which was the only place for women to express and exchange ideas and fight for their rights; this category of women was generally following and representing the Algerian authority approach in society. Whereas, the second one made great efforts and mobilised its members in order to fight for the promotion of the Family Code.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.4.2.1. National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA)

The National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA) was established immediately after independence on January 13, 1963 after a national seminar which gathered about 75 activists from different regions of the country.<sup>27</sup> Its main objectives were to mobilise and politicise Algerian women and raise their awareness in order to objectively face and solve their real problems, and give them the chance to participate in the national construction and comprehensive development processes, in addition to expand the scope of their work to ameliorate their roles and give them real and appropriate position that fitted their social status and historical role. However, there were many factors that prevented the union from accomplishing its goals and kept it confined for a long time to largest cities especially Algiers, and did not allow it to spread its programme across the country's smallest cities and rural areas. This limitation could be clearly seen in many occasions and events like the celebration of International Women's Day whose aim was more about strengthening solidarity and cooperation with struggling people around the world than paying attention to the problems of Algerian women. For instance, International Women's Day of 1968 was dedicated for solidarity with the people of Vietnam, 1969 for solidarity with the Palestinian people and 1970 for solidarity with struggling people in Africa<sup>28</sup>, in addition to other

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works of charity in which gifts were distributed on the children of martyrs and poor people.

Thus, the ideological characteristics of the works of the National Union of Algerian Women had overshadowed its real objectives which were supposed to tackle women's issues in the first place, and consequently women's problems remained unsolved and linked to generalities of the Algerian state's ideology and away from women's core concerns, which can only lead to the conclusion that this union was working to keep women in their traditional role.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.4.2.2. Family Code

### 2.4.2.2.1. Stages of Family Code

In early 1963, several committees began working together to formulate one Family Code for all Algerians which would be consistent with the suggested guidelines of the Tripoli conference. However, this bill was neglected in early 1964 and nothing was officially published about it as a result of the differences that existed among the members of committees who had different and sometimes contradictory ideological ideas and choices. Some of them believed that the Algerian Family Code was supposed to be consistent with the religion of Islam, whereas others felt it was supposed to include modern principles and rules, and due to these differences, they could not agree on final unanimous legal texts.

The second bill was in 1966, and this time it was certain that the law was going to be issued, as it was confirmed by the President of the Republic in his speech on March 8, 1966 where he said that there were some enemies of the revolution and women who were spreading rumours about the Family Code. These rumours claimed that all rights achieved by women were going to be taken from them, and the government could simply answer them by saying that women had struggled for a long time and gained respectfully their rights in society.

### 2.4.2.2.2. Bill of 1984

Women's representation in the legislative institutions was very low because there were only two female representatives (Mrs. Ben Mihoub and Mrs. Khemissi) in the National People's Assembly (APN)

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which was ratified in September 1963. Both of them tried to draft new laws for the promotion of women's rights, but it was very difficult to make their voices heard by the other 138 members of the assembly. There were also no female members in the government or Council of the Revolution which was established after June 19, 1965. Mrs. Zhor Ounissi was the first woman to be appointed as the Minister of Social Affairs in the Algerian government in 1982, as a member of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front Party in 1983, as the Minister of Social Protection in 1984 and then as the Minister of Education in 1986.

In September 1981, Al Mujahid newspaper had published that the government had adopted the bill of the Family Code (personal status law) which was going to be discussed by the National People's Assembly. During this period, three major demonstrations were organised from October to December of that year, in which women moved to the headquarters of the National People's Assembly to submit a petition bearing thousands of signatures demanding the cancellation of this bill. The most important parts that were refused by the feminist movement at that time were the issues of the guardian whose role was fundamental and can not be ignored when a woman wanted to get married even if she was very old, and polygamy that was permitted by the law provided that the man would be just and fair to all his wives. Whereas, the law did not mention any punishment for the man who did not do so, in addition to his rights to divorce if he wanted and prevent his wife from working outside the home if she did not stipulate that in the marriage contract.

The feminist movement organised also several meetings to discuss how to respond to this bill, but they were divided into two groups due to their attitudes towards the ability of the National Union of Algerian Women to solve this problem. Some women believed that the union could not do anything because it was part of the Algerian system and it was not necessary to contact it, whereas others (especially educated working women) contacted the union and were received by its Secretary General who promised them that the bill would not be ratified without being discussed by public and social organisations. However, at the end, the union failed to solve this problem because its members refused to work with other women before obtaining an approval from the National Secretariat of the FLN party. Therefore, women created two councils: the



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first one for writing about their concerns that would be directed to national officials, and the second one for preparing delegations that would contact the National People's Assembly and FLN party. Furthermore, to make their movement even more efficient, they contacted some of the former female combatants like Meriem Ben Mihoub who called also several former combatants. On December 13, 1981, about 300 women participated in a gathering in front of the National People's Assembly, some of them were prominent figures like: Zohra Drif Bitat, wife of the president of the National People's Assembly and Djamilia Bouhired and other members of the union.

However, the means of protest was not effective in this case because the presence of women in Legislative Councils was very weak and had led eventually to failure of all protests; and the bill was passed on June 9, 1984 with very minor changes. Later, the first independent association of women was founded in 1985 and was called Association for Equality before the Law of Women and Men (AELFH) which was not officially adopted until 1989.

As a conclusion, it is noted that the political participation of women in that period was influenced by the national policy of that time. In the early years of independence, their participation in political life was limited due to the absence of freedom of expression and ideological and political frameworks that might allow them to work according to their own political orientation since the only representative of women was under the power of the ruling party. However, there was a slight breakthrough in the era of President Chadli Bendjedid which allowed women to work like other groups of society, and with the emergence of some intellectual movements in the political arena which women had the opportunity to join in order to develop their political awareness and prove their existence through participation in the formulation of national policies.

However, the participation of women in light of this breakthrough had focused mainly on the Family Code especially with the effects of globalisation and openness to the world. Since the promulgation of the Algerian Family Code on June 9, 1984, the opinions about it were different from one group of people to another. The first group believed that this law needed to be retained because it was derived from the

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Islamic Law (Sharia Law) and it was really a social and legal gain that required permanent preservation; whereas the second one thought that this law did not keep pace with modern necessities and contemporary developments and did not really protect women's rights. This position was taken by some women's associations such as RACHDA association. The third group felt that it was necessary to modify this law and enrich it in order to fill some of its gaps and reformulate some of its articles, especially the issue of the dissolution of the marital union in a manner that corresponds with the Sharia Law and protects the Algerian family physically and morally in all different social situations.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.4.3. Under Multi-Party System

Until 1989, the FLN was the only legitimate political party in the Algerian Republic. This party was established on October 23, 1954 and was exercising its power over the country since then, and supporting both centralism and nationalisation of the private sector. After the constitutional amendments in February 1989, the creation of other political parties was authorised under some conditions. In November 1996, the establishment of new political parties was constitutionally guaranteed, but provided that they have no religious, linguistic, racial or regional basis. In June 1997, 39 political parties tried to win parliamentary seats in the legislative elections, and the most important ones were: National Liberation Front (FLN), National Democratic Rally (RND), National Republican Alliance (ANR), Socialist Forces Front (FFS), Algerian Movement for Justice and Development, Islamic Renaissance Movement (from which National Reform Movement has emerged), Islamic Society Movement (Movement of Society for Peace (HMS) currently), Algerian Renewal Party (PRA), National Party for Solidarity and Development (PNSD) and Workers' Party (PT).

The period of political pluralism in Algeria was a turning point in its history because the scope of freedoms had been extended in terms of creation of associations and parties after there were only one party and some organisations that revolved around it. After the events of October 1988<sup>31</sup>, new frameworks began to emerge that would absorb all political views and orientations. The new political parties had different ideological positions such as revolutionary, Islamic and secular orientations, and each one of them attracted people who had the same ideological positions.

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Moreover, different associations and organisations were created and every other political activity that was previously monopolised by FLN party became permissible in this period.

Consequently, women began to enter and organise themselves in these political structures, and female public figures started to defend and fight for women's rights, and except for those who were presenting themselves as independent and not belonging to any political party, most of these figures were members in political parties and tried to find their appropriate position in the political arena after 30 years of one-party policy that kept them away from politics.

Thus, the political struggle of women had taken many forms, and its importance and objectives changed according to the nature and ideology of the political organisations that women worked within. Since the suspension of the electoral process in January 1992, Algerian society had been under the pressure of terrorism and state of emergency that was declared at that time. There was a clear regression in the exercise of individual freedoms and especially freedom of expression compared to the three years that followed the riots of October 1988. The political activities had declined at the national level and therefore women's political participation had also declined due to this situation until state institutions were stabilised and began to come out from the transitional period and the situation of the country began to settle down; and then women returned gradually to work again in the social and political fields.<sup>32</sup>

Algerian legislations have recognised and guaranteed women's rights and their equality with men in the constitution and other laws in accordance with the provisions of international laws which are considered as primary legislations as soon as they are accepted and ratified by Algerian government. In the different constitutions of Algeria from 1963 to 1996, there were always some laws dedicated to the principles of equality and non-discrimination between men and women in all domains including the one of political rights.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, in order to reflect the principle of absolute equality enshrined in the 1996 Constitution, which was amended in November 2008 by Law No. 08-19<sup>34</sup>, a new article was added (Article 31 bis) which states that: *"The State shall work for the promotion of political rights of*

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*women by increasing their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies. The modalities of application of this Article shall be determined by an Organic Law*".<sup>35</sup> However, the proclamation of the organic law stated in Article 31 bis has been greatly delayed since it was issued only in early 2012, which explains how to increase the chances of women's representation in elected assemblies.<sup>36</sup> This new law was first presented to the Council of Ministers in November 2011 for evaluation and approval after The President of the Republic announced it. Starting from April 2011, the council embarked on a series of reforms in line with the demands of Algerian society, and with the provisions of international conventions and treaties ratified by Algeria and incorporated into its legal system on the one hand, and in application of the President's programme which was voted on by Algerian people on the other hand.<sup>37</sup> This law, as indicated by its title, seeks to increase women's chances of access to representation in elected assemblies by introducing quota system for women on electoral lists.

### 3. Conclusion

The political situation of women in Algeria has changed and evolved through history. Women participated in the war of independence and gained recognition from Algerian government which was slowly promoting their rights. They have experienced important improvements in education, social integration and job opportunities. There is also a continuous development in their political participation due to the progress in Algerian legislations concerning women's political empowerment.

However, there still exist some restrictions on the political and civil rights of women, which consist just one part of the broader limitations that affect the whole public sphere in the Algerian society. For instance, the freedoms of expression and creating associations are still controlled by the Algerian government that is heavily influenced by the FLN party and does not allow any opposition or criticism for the ruling political system.

The multi-party system in Algeria which is visible at the level of political parties and Parliament, is most of the time dominated by the FLN

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and RND parties. Despite the positive speech of these two parties, they have no effective strategy for gender equality in politics. However, after a long struggle of Algerian women for their political rights, new organic laws have been promulgated in 2012 in order to promote their political status. Therefore, these new laws will give women the chance to participate more in politics, improve their presence in political institutions and demand for more social and political rights in the future.

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- 6- Ibid.:41
- 7- Badi, S. (2005). "Woman and Political Participation, Voting, Party Work, Parliamentary Work". Magister Thesis. Constantine: Constantine University.
- 8- From Arabic word "Fida'i" which means self-sacrificer. It is used to describe a person who devotes himself to greater national or religious causes, and even sacrifices himself in order to achieve his goals.
- 9- Necib, 2002:176
- 10- From Arabic word "Sabbala" which means devote and dedicate. It is used to describe a person who dedicates himself, his money or properties to serve higher causes.
- 11- Barkat Derrar, 1985:57-58
- 12- Necib, 2002:177
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- 15- Barkat Derrar, 1985:56
- 16- Necib, 2002:179
- 17- ibid.:185
- 18- Badi, 2005:120
- 19- Article 29 of the Algerian Constitution of 1996
- 20- Article 31 of the Algerian Constitution of 1996
- 21- Article 51 of the Algerian Constitution of 1996
- 22- Article 32 of the Algerian Constitution of 1996
- 23- On February 11, 1961, Jean-Jacques Susini and Pierre Lagaillarde (two anti-independentists and proponents of "French Algeria" during the Algerian war of

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independence) founded the Organisation of the Secret Army in Madrid. It was a secret organisation which intended to keep Algeria under the rule of the French Republic at any cost.

24- It is a military policy used mainly in times of war. It is a deliberate destruction of all properties and resources so that the enemy can not use them.

25- Henni, A. (1991). *Economy of Independent Algeria*. Algiers: ENAG Editions.

26- Badi, 2005:114

27- Vandeveld, H. (1968). "Woman and Political and Social Life in Algeria since Independence". Thesis for Higher Education Degree. Algiers: Algiers University.

28- Necib, 2002:188

29- Badi, 2005:115

30- *ibid.*:118

31- There were riots and demonstrations throughout Algeria in October 1988, during which Algerians went out into the streets to protest against their social problems and demanded social, political and economic reforms. But these riots led to bloodshed and destruction of public and private properties. They ended with the adoption of a new constitution that moved the country from a dominant one-party system to a competitive multi-party system.

32- *ibid.*:122

33- Akhrib, A. & Ben Madhi, N. (2013). "Woman's Political Rights in Algerian Legislation (Between Text and Practice)". Master Thesis. Bejaia: Bejaia University.

34- Hartani, A. K. (2003). "Women and Political Representation in Algeria". *Algerian Journal of Legal, Economic and Political Sciences*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 46-66. Algiers: Algiers University.

35- Article 31 bis of Law No. 08-19 of November 15, 2008 concerning the amendment of Constitution.

36- This new law is Organic Law No. 12-03 of January 12, 2012 which determines the modalities for increasing women's chances of access to representation in elected assemblies.

37- Benachi, H. (2013). "Enhancing the Presence of Woman in Elected Assemblies under Organic Law No. 12-03". Guelma: Guelma University.