desire to fully belong to their new societies.None of the participants intended to return. This finding is not new in itself: research into women's diaspora and migrant women has revealed that, in general, females resist the idea of returning home more than their male counterparts. However, the main difference here is that these highly educated women also displayed a detailed awareness of the current problems in Algeria and appeared to have many ideas as to how these could be fixed. Several participants to this research, and other members of my network, had even returned to Algeria, offering their experience, skills and competence in setting up projects, but left again because of the bureaucracy, general corruption and more importantly the lack of women's rights and the increasingly radical Islamisation of society. Participants have a very lucid idea about what they think has gone wrong with the 2005 amnesty law, and the post-conflict peace building in the country which they considered a failed process.

It seems that the participants individually attributed to themselves the imaginary Algerian identity (democratic, liberated, secular) that they dreamed of possessing before being forced to flee. For the most part, they can only foresee the implementation of women's rights and gender equality in Algeria if the country pursues a policy of secularism. Arguably, this is not necessarily what the majority of women living in Algeria aspire to. Hence, educational levels, age and political beliefs certainly add to this complexity of imagining an Algeria that never existed and perhaps never will.

Participants in this research readily shared ideas on how the nation can be helped to recover from its trauma. For this to happen, it is important to find ways of mobilising the existing networks, not only the one revealed in this research. Both attachment to an imagined Algeria and the capability to re-invent and embrace new transnational identities were very palpable among participants to this research. Therefore, exilic-diaspora is the most appropriate way to describe this transnational network of highly skilled Algerian women who fled the country during the black decade revealed in this reaserch.

There were several reasons behind the participants' displacement, ranging from the general climate of fear and insecurity, including persecution directed specifically against them or their immediate families, to social and familial repression. Some participants who had initially moved abroad to enhance their skills, take up jobs or pursue further education found they were unable to return. The fact that their decision to depart (or not to return) took place in an atmosphere of conflict and terror meant that their experience of exile often displayed a traumatic character.

The interviews further revealed trauma related to the oppression and sexual harassment of women which increased during the Black Decade. Moreover, when fleeing the country and on arrival in the receiving country, participants faced the barriers of restrictive asylum and immigration policies. A general disregard of the international law protecting women suffering gender-based violence, as well as the stigma attached to all newcomers from Algeria, who are frequently regarded as potential terrorists, made it particularly difficult for women to obtain visas or recognition as political refugees. The experience of the international gender-blind asylum process is a traumatic event in its own right. The lack of immigration status for those who decided not to claim asylum was no less traumatic.

Once they were living in their countries of migration, participants deplored the lack of recognition of their Algerian diplomas, and they often felt unwelcome. Although they showed resilience when it came to rebuilding their lives, particularly their professional lives, it was not without facing a high level of discrimination. However, they all agreed that they now enjoyed more rights as women, and although the adjustment to their new countries differed from one to another, the majority appeared to enjoy financial independence and have either widened their knowledge in the field in which they studied or worked in Algeria or requalified in another. It also appeared that due to their settlement in multiple locations, the nurturing of an idea of a 'homeland' is now negotiated in a transnational space, often in cyberspace. Social networking sites such as Facebook are used to exchange ideas of resistance, scientific knowledge, music and recipes from Algeria, as well as information on political and social developments. Participants, however, also showed a

Conclusion

This article describes an investigation into the extent to which the lack of freedom of thought, the restrictions associated with the Algerian Family Code, and the increased levels of violence against women in the Black Decade prompted highly skilled women to flee Algeria, and the barriers they face in rebuilding their lives in their new societies and in returning to Algeria. This raised the question of whether the networks they have created could act as a diaspora. The article therefore has used the term ‘diaspora’ not simply as a description, but as a concept permitting the study of the social interactions, identity reconstruction, sense of belonging and mobilisation of this group of women, who are now located in transnational space.

The reasons behind the decision to use the concept of diaspora to explore the lives of these particular women were twofold. First, the highly skilled Algerian women I met, including online, often expressed the urgent need to create a diaspora. What they meant by diaspora was a network of Algerians who live outside the country but are still attached to and interested in its political, economic and social progress. They believed such a network should also be a space in which its members could help each other adjust to and integrate into their new societies. The second reason is the assumption that there is no solidarity between Algerians living abroad, regardless of gender or educational level. The eruption of new conflicts around the world, however, as well as the emergence of new communication technologies and the spread of the global market has encouraged and facilitated population movement, and it is now evident that migrants no longer necessarily seek out countries where they have cultural and post-colonial ties or personal or family networks. It is necessary to study Algerian migrants in countries other than the traditional locus of Algerian exile, France. In this case, the research has yielded some interesting results that do not fully accord with the previous consensus.

The violence of the Black Decade and its aftermath increased the rate of feminisation of migration amongst intellectuals and highly skilled Algerians, which was particularly noticeable from the beginning of the 2000s onwards.

an ‘imagined Algeria’, which they identified with an Algeria that women of their generation fought for – plural, tolerant and prosperous. However, the cyber facilities and online social networks that allow frequent virtual returns to Algeria, as well as visits to the country on vacation or business, make it obvious that this dreamed-of Algeria does not exist. This is not unique to Algeria but could be applied to any other society that has emerged from the collective trauma and economic disaster caused by war and internal conflict. A mutant Algerian society has emerged, which faces a great challenge in reconstructing its economy and identity, particularly given the geopolitical environment in the region. It appears to remain a country that is now ‘alien’ to the participants to this research.

time please." He simply couldn't answer, because you see, he didn't even know what time the prayer was, because I'm sure he doesn't pray himself. But everything has become linked to religion over there. What they want is to transform the language of Algerians, all you hear is 'Inshalla', 'Bi-idni Allah' ['God's will']. They have the laundered money from terrorism, and they have [built] shops and big villas now [and] you'll read written large on their facades, 'koulou hada biidniallah' ['all this is with permission from God'].

Here, Nadia gave concrete examples of how she sees changes in today's Algeria, both in relation to the implementation of the Amnesty Law, which allowed terrorists and wrongdoers to escape accountability, and to the rise of what she sees as backward behaviour and a 'strange' religious language introduced in the name of Islam. Not only Nadia, but many Algerian women I have met during the course of this study, think that there is a loss of spirituality in favour of a series of prohibitions that are alien to the former version of Islam known in Algeria. Participants have almost all grown up in families who practiced Islam, but they have now adopted secularism, rejecting the radical practices that have mainly emerged from a version of Islam known as Salafism, believed to have been imported to from Saudi Arabia. This may not of course be representative of all Algerian women living abroad, but it could be argued that it is the case with many of those highly skilled women who fled the country during the Black Decade.

It is clear that the women who participated in this research were facilitated in the reconstruction of their identities, both personally and professionally, by migrating to societies where the idea of gender equality is mainstream. In some cases, though, they felt they were stereotyped due to the fact that they are women of colour and Muslim. However, their identity as intellectuals and professionals helped them challenge this identification and enabled them to adopt multiple identities in order to adapt to their new societies, regardless of where they live. Algeria has historically been a meeting point of diverse cultures and civilizations (Evans, 2012), and this has enriched the Algerian personality, including that of women, who remain the essential transmitter of this diversity. The participants appeared able to adopt positions that reflect both their origins and a transnational identity. They showed an attachment to

And you know what? This summer I was there and got out in Algiers. I was walking and suddenly felt a hypoglycemia: I'm diabetic. It was Ramadhan and everything was closed, everything, everything. I wanted a glass of water and it wasn't possible. They will never see me in Algeria during Ramadhan again. While in our religion you don't fast if you are ill, no restaurants are open [there], and if they see you take a glass of water or eat… I feel that even the democrats play the game [of the reconciliation law]. You should see how my family is watching me when I go there now! My sisters and I used to be left-wing activists; they all pray and fast now. They have forbidden too much now, too much.

Nadia deplored the fact that, as she described it, radical Islam has now gained a hold over nearly everyone in the country, placing greater restrictions on daily life. She shows her disappointment that even close members of her family, who used to be left-wing activists and continue to claim adherence to democracy and secularism, now observe Ramadhan and practice a particularly strict form of Islam.

As well as actual visits to the country, on vacation or business trips, cyber facilities and online social networks allow frequent virtual returns to Algeria, sometimes several times a day, and this has made it obvious to many of the participants that the Algeria they dreamed-of no longer exists. This is illustrated by Louisa's comment: "We can't return to Algeria anymore because we have adopted another way to approach life, and I don't want to disadvantage my daughter." According to these participants, and many observers, a sort of mutant Algerian society has emerged, one that faces great challenges in the reconstruction of its economy and identity, particularly given the current geopolitical climate in the region. The transitional governance of Algeria may have achieved more-or-less satisfactory economic results, but it appears to remain a country that is now 'alien' to those women who do not live there anymore, as Nadia demonstrated:

One day, I went to order cakes and the baker told me: "Come back tomorrow after the Maghreb prayer." I said to him: "My watch does not indicate the time in prayers but in hours and minutes." I insisted and showed him my watch: "Look, Sir, it does not indicate prayers [laughs], give me a proper

service, horrible staff at every [level of] public administration, mountains of stupid paperwork, no facilities for children, no parks, a poor education system, no health and safety, no good hospitals. And most dramatic is the Islamisation of society – it is a very poor understanding of the religion and the expansion of a very poor and twisted form of Islam, focused on women's outfits. ... The list is long."

Many other participants agreed that public services have dramatically deteriorated in post-Black Decade Algeria. Referring to the state of hospitals, four participants evoked chronic illness as the main barrier to their return.

The new amendments to the Family Code are supposed to have given women more freedom, but participants expressed concern about the lack of information from Algerian consulates – the first contact point between a country and its community abroad – regarding the impact on women's rights. Algerian civil servants remain deeply influenced by patriarchal ideology and do not translate this new legislation in a way that enhances the position of Algerian women living abroad. Participants also mentioned the amnesty law, implemented in 2005, which many regard as responsible for driving Algerian society into the arms of radical fundamentalism, as a barrier to their return.

Participants frequently mentioned the 2005 Amnesty Law , which is often held responsible for driving Algerian society into the arms of a more radical kind of fundamentalism, as a barrier to their return:

We [women] have not been consulted about the reconciliation; I am of course against impunity. That's why we have learned to be discrete over there, to look left and right and behind before walking anywhere. Now it is a bit safer, or at least there is no danger of death, I think.

In general, participants showed an attachment to an 'imagined Algeria', which they identified with the sort of Algeria that women of their generation fought for and dreamed of: plural, tolerant, just and economically prosperous. It is this 'imagined Algeria' that they carried into exile and to which many of the women I met (and I myself) dream of returning. This is set against the Algeria some of the participants experience when they return on visits to the country:

stated they do not believe that a diaspora exists, stressed they felt there is an urgent need to establish one. For example, Faroudja, who now lives in France, commented:

"No, there is none. However, there is a will to establish a diaspora, there is a will to do something for Algeria, but there is always something there to obstruct the transmission of solidarity mechanisms for women. The Algerian regime manages this division wherever Algerians are, through consulates, embassies, fake diasporic organisations, etc."

This suggests that the Algerian regime considers diasporic networks a threat. Faroudja explained that the idea of an Algerian nation was born in France within an Algerian patriotic network and that is possibly why any initiatives to establish a network is met with suspicion. For Fatiha too, a secondary-school teacher in the UK, suspicion and lack of trust were the main obstacles to establishing a network of solidarity between Algerian women in her area: "It saddens and angers me: everyone is suspicious of everyone; it's draining. We are the new Greeks, a people that thrive on drama."

The question of returning to Algeria

More than half of the participants believed they had integrated well into their host societies. At the same time, up to 95 percent said they use the Internet, mainly Facebook, to remain informed about Algerian news, two-thirds use Skype to communicate with family and friends in Algeria, and nearly half subscribe to international professional e-mail lists that include former colleagues from Algeria. More than half consult Facebook many times a day and share information on women's rights in Algeria.

When questioned if they missed Algeria, up to 82 percent said 'yes', but only a third considered returning, while two-thirds said there were too many barriers in place. The main barriers invoked were social, political, economic and domestic; more than two-thirds (78 percent) said the most important one was social. Nadia, a former lawyer who lives in Canada where she works for a humanitarian NGO, described her experience of visiting Algeria:

"Algeria is a country [that is] hard to live in now. When on holiday, I get frustrated with almost everything – unfriendly shopkeepers, lack of customer

Louisa's quotation, above, echoes the current debate on fundamentalist Islam and its effects on Muslim communities in the West. Although Louisa was one of the few who mentioned this issue, members of the Algerian Women Diaspora Facebook network discuss it on a daily basis. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, Algerian women, at least those who consider themselves secular, were put in the difficult position of having to dissociate themselves from their communities, members of whom were often wrongly stereotyped as radical Muslims. The subjectivity of this process can make it problematic to negotiate belonging in a host society that does not see any difference between secular and non-secular Muslims, considering all Muslims to be a threat.

Maya, mentioned above, also lives in France but appeared more concerned about the way the phenomenon of Algerian regionalism creates barriers to establishing a network:

"I am connected to a group of Algerian women intellectuals who fled here. We meet sometimes, but regionalism remains the main issue, as it was in Algeria. I remember once I invited the group for an afternoon coffee. The discussion was around whose cake tastes better – the usual Blida versus Algiers [contest] – whose dresses are most beautiful, whose accent is classier, etc. The discussion quickly turned to [the question of] which region's women participated most during the war [of independence], and it became political, [revolving] around the Black Decade. In the end, no one agreed on anything. I became sickened [by it] and just do my own work [now]."

Regionalism is both a way of networking and a scourge in Algeria, and is grounded in the country's system of post-liberation governance. Which network an individual belongs to is reputedly the main criterion for nomination to a high-ranking position. It also gets translated into Algerians' social and domestic lives. Maya's quotation suggests that regionalism continues to affect the establishment of networks of solidarity between Algerian women abroad, at least in the French context.

During my fieldwork, I also asked my interviewees whether they thought that an Algerian diasporic consciousness exists. The majority, although they

Women also wanted to retrieve the standard of living they lost during exile: “My degree was insufficient to find a good job with a good salary, so it was necessary to enrol for a Masters when I arrived. However, regarding my PhD, I found it unnecessary … It was a five-year waste of my life, but was imposed by my family, which I had to obey.” In some cases, parents are held accountable by other members of the extended family for their daughter’s ‘conduct’, and it is often considered unacceptable for a young woman to travel or stay abroad if not for the purposes of further education or marriage. Other participants explained that obtaining an extension to their visa was the only motive for undertaking further education.

Around one third (31.33 percent) declared they had been discriminated against because of their Algerian nationality, but only seven percent said they experienced gender discrimination when applying for jobs or training, while ten percent said that their immigration status was often a barrier to accessing courses, funding and the labour market in general.

Identity, identification and belonging

The survey revealed that half (53 percent) of the participants considered themselves to belong to an Algerian network, although for two-thirds of them it meant little more than a means of meeting other Algerian women and sharing their experiences. Other participants mentioned lack of time as one reason for not networking. Often isolated from family and friends, mothers – particularly single mothers – struggle with childcare costs. Also, rebuilding professional lives in a new, often hostile environment is time-consuming and demanding. Interviewees gave their answers greater depth by mentioning other barriers:

“Those illiterate [women] who came to the US with green cards have no jobs, live in bad areas and spend their time in Pakistani or Saudi Arabian mosques ... They have nothing to do with our Maghrebi sense of Islam. … I don’t feel any [sense of] belonging to this hypocrisy. I don’t trust an Islamist whatever [their] level of education. I don’t get together with anyone. I have so many friends in the grave today and [took] that entire, cruel journey into exile because of ‘them’.”

provide for herself and her child, despite being personally persecuted by the GIA. Terrorism in Algeria provided an opportunity for some men to express their hatred towards, and exert even more control over, women.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the participants' experiences, which are unique in content but similar in context: moving between their struggle in the private and the public sphere in 1990s Algeria. It is undeniable that the participants all revealed a certain degree of post-traumatic stress due to the context in which their departure occurred, including their loss of 'home'. As Peter Papadopoulos (2006) suggests, this does not only refer to loss of a physical space, but also to the loss of continuity in the migrant's relationship with the external world and of a locus of identity that could enable the individual to value him/herself in exile.

Life experiences abroad

The process of regaining a sense of 'home' by reconstructing new identities is also gendered. The recovery of a complex sense of self can open up "a space for developing agency" from which "transforming opportunities [can] emerge" for the women concerned (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 41). Although many of the participants faced obstacles to re-building their lives and careers, more than two-thirds (78.5 percent) eventually re-entered the labour market. For many, it was necessary to re-establish their academic or high-profile careers, not only to give something back to their adoptive countries, but also to regain their lost identity. However, the survey revealed that more than a half (65 percent) had to re-qualify first. Those who live in the US, UK and Canada found that their Algerian diplomas were not recognised, and many had to start their higher education from zero or re-qualify in another field, particularly architects or medical doctors. This study revealed that several doctors who migrated to countries other than France faced difficulties in pursuing their medical careers. One participant, who works as a counter assistant in a UK pharmacy, said: "Algeria spent much money on educating us up to this level, but lost us. Unfortunately, with the non-recognition of our diplomas, our host countries also lose us, and God knows, they need doctors here."

everywhere, visited all our friends and his family, but they all took his side. When we received a death threat in a letter from the GIA, because I am half-Algerian, half-French, I went to the French consulate to organise our departure. He refused to leave with us. I took my children and left him in Algiers; he was assassinated five months later."

Under the Algerian Family Code, Maya would have had to stay in the family home until the end of the divorce process, which could take from three months to two years. In any case, she had nowhere else to go: in Algeria, it is very common for the family house to be registered in the husband's name, even when both husband and wife have contributed towards buying it. Maya explained that when she went to SOS Women in Distress to seek help with this issue, she was told that as she was half-French, she was better off leaving the country, especially as terrorism was at its peak. Maya was disappointed by the perceived lack of solidarity, believing the cause to be the fact that she was seen not as a woman, but as a 'foreigner', who had the opportunity of using her French passport to leave Algeria.

Despite everything, however, when the GIA (an armed Islamic group) sent its death threat, Maya offered her husband the chance to leave the country with her. During the interview, she expressed sadness that he considered her act of solidarity an offence to his male pride. He was later killed. As she explained, in tears, "we never divorced in the end, but he is not here anymore". Maya's story exposes the extent to which the decision to leave a country in a time of war and conflict is gendered. It also reveals the relationship between feminism in Algeria, Algerian culture and the experiences of women such as Maya, who happens to be from a minority group.

Louisa, who now lives in the US, provides an example of a different experience of migration. Louisa and her husband were both journalists. She explained how difficult it was to obtain a visa from any Western country; Algeria was isolated in its war against terrorism at that time. When her husband was given the opportunity to leave, even their combined salary was not enough to pay for the flights. Louisa sold all her jewellery to buy her husband a ticket and enable him "to find a decent place to stay", while she remained in Algeria for a further few months. She continued to work, and

43 questions. Together with the interview questions, the questionnaire was framed to explore the definition of what constitutes a diaspora, based on the findings of the initial literature review. It included the circumstances of the participant's departure from Algeria, their life abroad, whether they belonged to an Algerian network, and whether they intended to return to Algeria. There was also a set of questions on participants' use of the internet to connect with each other and with Algeria, and to remain informed on Algerian affairs. The majority of questions gave the option to choose more than one answer and also space to add comments.

The results of the data analysis

The following summary of the data analysis is divided into four subsections: the circumstances under which the participants left Algeria; their life experience(s) abroad; their negotiation of new identities and their perceptions of belonging to a female Algerian diaspora; and the barriers they face, as women, to returning to Algeria. The RDS method is efficient in reaching those who are geographically isolated but still connected to friends or former colleagues. Some of the women had complex journeys: two participants, for example, said that their first destination was France, but they then moved to the US and Qatar, respectively; one first left for Dubai then went to the US; one migrated to East Africa, then moved to Canada; and one left for the Canary Isles and then went on to Spain. Two left for France but had returned to Algeria at the time of completing the survey.

Circumstances of leaving Algeria

The participants were forced to leave Algeria during the 1990s due to a variety of different circumstances; not all of them were 'refugees', as understood by the 1951 Refugee Convention. For example, Maya, a sub-editor, explicitly stated that her decision to leave was based, at first, on the humiliation she felt when her husband declared publicly that he wanted to divorce her:

"When I left Algeria in June 1994, I was in a bad relationship with [my husband]. At a party with family and friends, he announced that he wanted to repudiate [divorce] me; it was such a humiliation. I went to seek help

seeds). Seeds then recruit 'nodes', to whom they are connected by 'ties', a relationship defined by specific criteria. As part of the initial network, I web-recruited six seeds (two male and four female), through Facebook, blogs and personal networks, in Algeria, France, Canada, Spain, the UK and US. The seeds were selected to reflect the geographical dispersal of Algerians during the 1990s. They went on to recruit nodes using a web-based process, sending a survey to at least one other person (three or more is the ideal). The choice of seeds was a learning process in itself, since the resulting recruitment depends on identifying seeds.

This recruitment should be repeated six times or more – this is called the "six waves of recruitment"; regardless of whether or not the global size of the network is known, mathematicians consider reaching six waves reasonably representative of a network (Heckathorn, 1997). The second observation upon which RDS is based is that information gathered during the sampling process, using a questionnaire, can provide the means for making extrapolations about the underlying network structure (Bearman et al., 2004). It was at this point that my input as a feminist researcher was crucial, as the sampling process is usually driven by the assumption that surveys and questionnaires are tools with which to measure objective social facts through a supposedly detached and value-free form of data collection (Maynard 1994). To remedy this bias, I designed the survey based on a semi-structured questionnaire.

The first page of the survey sent to the respondents gave a brief description of myself, my professional and academic background, and the aims of the research. It also explained the process of recruitment and assured the participants of strict confidentiality. The survey was accessible online for nine months, from spring 2013. The basic element of analysis for RDS-SN was the first 'recruitment'. Each participant recruited had to have the same characteristic: an Algerian professional female who had migrated during the 1990s. While the recruitment of 'strangers' is often inevitable, respondents were encouraged to recruit friends, current or former colleagues, or members of their professional associations.

The survey's design was based on a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire, available in three languages, English, French and Arabic, with

which of these is preferred. The process of empirical observation is inevitably affected by the researcher's theoretical choices, which in turn are influenced by the commitments of the wider scientific community. Political ideas may be an important factor in determining which theories are favoured by the scientific community, helping shape the research process (Ramazanoglu, 1992; Herman, 1992).

It is important to note that feminist research recognises that emotions can also provide a valuable source of knowledge. The analysis of the emotional response of the researcher during fieldwork and data analysis often generates insights into the dynamics of the group under investigation (Kleinman and Copp, 1993; Kirkwood, 1993). Whether these emotions are acknowledged or not, all researchers are affected by them at some time during their work.

Sampling the network and designing the survey

For the purposes of my research, the first crucial task was to geographically locate participants, and show that members of the network were linked to each other and corresponded to the set of criteria that define a diaspora (described above) and to my working definition of the concept. As there is no known methodology with which to study diaspora, I decided to experiment with Douglas Heckathorn's (1997, 2011) innovative research method, Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), which he used to study the spread of HIV within a specific group. I came across RDS when looking for a methodology I could use to locate a hard-to-reach population and to see how its members connect with one another. After exchanging emails with Professor Heckathorn regarding the possibility of adapting his method to investigate the existence of an Algerian women's diaspora, I resolved to use it to at least sample my network.

RDS is a method that combines 'egocentric' and 'snowball' sampling techniques based on referral from individuals to other people they are connected to (Heckathorn 2007). These individuals in turn refer more people. The first points of the network – in this case, myself and other persons I am well connected to – are called 'seeds'. These seeds are dispersed geographically (calling to mind the meaning of the Greek word 'diaspora' – the scattering of

often predominates, particularly the discourse that informs international humanitarian programmes.

Feminist research is also characterised by its interdisciplinary nature, giving the researcher the freedom to use different methods of interpreting data. I was therefore able to explore different ideas and choose the tools that would best help me answer the questions of whether, and how, these women create transnational networks, mobilise themselves collectively and thus develop a diasporic consciousness. At the same time, it encourages the development of a wide range of innovative approaches, such as personal observation, discussions with individuals and attending informal gatherings – that is, an 'emic approach'.1 On the other hand, feminist research does not encourage the use of coding to break down data into different sections and themes (Hesser-Biber, 2013), as this could inhibit the emergence of valuable questions that were not foreseen in the initial theoretical outline. This research has proven the validity of this argument.

Such an approach is not exclusively feminist – "other intellectual trends in social sciences that have stimulated this interest", including that of the social constructionists (Hesser-Biber, 2013). Their work has helped reveal the white, male bias of many of the dominant scientific explanations of social life, proposing instead that human behaviour is socially constructed and that reality is fashioned in interaction (Campbell, 1994; Harding, 1993). It has also challenged the commitment to 'objectivity', the core tenet of the dominant scientific model (Bryman, 1988; Phillips, 1977). The evidence suggests that the hypothesis-testing method is not and cannot be 'value-free', and so cannot be 'objective' in the strict empirical sense. Several philosophers of science – such as Thomas Kuhn (1977) and Peter Winch (2007) – have argued that observation is always mediated by a prior understanding of how the world interconnects. The formulation of any research question, as well as the process of research itself, takes place within an overall theoretical framework. Which particular models for understanding and interpreting data are dominant at any given time is determined by what theories are available and, crucially,

1- The 'emic approach' investigates how people think and perceive the world, and their rules of behaviour, as opposed to the 'etic approach', which focuses on the observations of the 'impartial' anthropologist.

diaspora, these women would need to be motivated by a sense of solidarity and political mobilisation; above all, they would need to display a diasporic consciousness. This raised questions concerning their adaptation to their new environments, whether they nurtured the idea of returning home, and their contribution to the debate around national reconciliation and how to rebuild Algerian society. The literature on transnationalism and diaspora contends that the dream of return is nearly always just that, a dream, and rarely occurs in practice. But as this 'myth of return' still retains a strong emotional attraction and generates nostalgia among many Algerian migrants, I wanted to discover whether, and how, these women mobilise and engage with each other as a group in order to create positive changes for themselves in their new environments and for their peers in Algeria. This motivation is what gives the research its feminist underpinning. The methodology is informed by feminist theoretical literature on women's narratives, lives and experiences (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1992; Hemmings, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2013).

Methodological approach

As Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2013) shows, feminist values and beliefs, as well as critiques of the positivist concepts and methodologies that have previously overlooked gender, are the foundation of any research framed by feminist theories. Feminist research focuses on the meanings that women give to their lives and the world around them. This is particularly important to bear in mind when choosing participants and analysing the data collected during fieldwork. Migrant women are generally deemed to lack power or agency, particularly those who migrate from South to North, or who come from the so-called 'patriarchal belt' (Caldwell, 1982) – as do the subjects of this research. By contrast, drawing on the work of Sue Wise and Liz Stanley (1983), this investigation is based on the premise that oppression should be seen as an extremely complex process, but one in which women are not totally powerless; they often use their strength and internal resources to resist injustice and inequality. Feminist refugee scholars have shifted the discourse from "traumatised and needy women" to women who are also "resilient and resourceful" (Loughry, 2008, p. 167). This literature, however, is often ignored, and the discourse on exiled women as lacking agency

the rule of law, where women could exercise their civil rights (Moghadam, 1994a). They believed that the cancellation was more to do with ensuring the continuity of traditional power structures (which upheld the discriminatory Family Code) than protecting democracy. A decade of horror followed.

Myriam Hachimi Alaoui (2010) points out that the rise in violence, which continued in post-conflict Algeria, increased the rate of the feminisation of migration from about 36 percent in 1982 to 51 percent in 2011 (NAQD, 2011). These women fled the persecution of fundamentalists, their own families and communities, and in some cases, the Algerian security services. According to Nadia Ait Zai (2009, p.22): "[t]he family law inspired [by] pure Islamic tradition is the main obstacle to the emancipation of women. It even generates violence towards women as men's and women's relationships are based on subordination and submission", and she claims "[o]ver 10,000 women have been raped and killed during the black decade". Women lost any hope of change, since the authorities were unable to protect them. Worse still, after the conflict, the regime negotiated an amnesty (the Law of Rahma) with the former terrorists. This rehabilitated the terrorists without allowing their victims justice, including their many women victims; there were no prosecutions and not even an official acknowledgment of the crimes. In addition, although the Algerian government had ratified the international Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, it tabled significant reservations to some of the clauses. As one participant in this study claimed: "The promises made to women have not been kept. We have been betrayed." Many educated women believed that the government had sacrificed women in order to pacify the fundamentalist opposition, and saw no other option than to leave Algeria.

Methodology: the experience of using RDS in this context

In relation to the wider body of knowledge on the subject, my research can be divided into two key strands: how to conceptualise diaspora and the best methodological approach to take to explore the concept. My initial concern when designing this research was to offer evidence of the high numbers of highly skilled, professional women who fled Algeria during the Black Decade – a female brain drain that the Algerian rulers denied. To be defined as a

patriarchy. Highly skilled women who were forced into exile during this period developed a sense of self-awareness that has enabled them to create efficient networks to help overcome their divisions and ease the pain of exile. This research explores these networks and the experiences of highly skilled (as a social class) Algerian women (as a gender) who migrated during and following the traumatic Black Decade.

Violence against women and the feminisation of Algerian migration

According to Karima Bennoun (2013), up to 71,500 university graduates (men and women) fled Algeria between 1992 and 1996. The country may have lost considerable economic wealth during the conflict, partly as a result of the assassination and dispersal of such a large number of intellectuals and professionals from its (mainly left-wing) middle class. The Algerian official press and NGOs claim that, between 1997 and 2005, more than 2,000 women were kidnapped, raped and/or assassinated by terrorists. Nevertheless, the true number of victims on both sides greatly exceeds these official figures (Elkarama, 2008). Women were victims not only of radical Islamist groups, but also of state security bodies, including police and gendarmes. Although the violence committed by Islamist groups has been widely acknowledged, there has been little investigation into the experience of women at the hands of state officials (Souadia, 2008). Women were forced to develop strategies of resistance against several disparate enemies.

The background to this violence lay in the political situation. The victory of the Algerian Islamic Party (FIS) in the first round of the general elections in December 1991 was perceived by the regime as a threat to democracy, and before the second round took place on 11 January 1992, it cancelled the electoral process and declared a state of emergency. Opinion among the Algerian elite was divided between ‘eradicators’, who backed the cancellation, and the ‘dialoguistes’, who were in favour of continuing the democratic process and engaging in a dialogue with the FIS, correctly predicting the violence that would follow cancellation (Souadia, 2008, p. 271). A great number of Algerian women were in favour of continuing the democratic process, which they believed was the only hope for progress towards a state governed by

scholars. Paul Gilroy's The Black Atlantic (1993) paved the way for the consideration of diaspora as a heuristic device to better understand migrants' relationship to 'others', to their host country and to their homeland (Vertovec, 1996). Stuart Hall (1990), meanwhile, challenged the traditional approach to ethnic and national boundaries, and helped open up the concept of diaspora to other groups, permitting the addition of social class and gender as essential features (Anthias, 1998).

The other main argument this article investigates is that feelings of belonging to a cohesive Algerian diaspora are relatively weak because of significant political, linguistic and other differences – mainly amongst those who migrated to France before or during the 1970s (Begag, 2002). The highly skilled and generally politically involved Algerians forced out of the country during the 1990s contrasted greatly with the mainly low-skilled male migrants and their female dependants of earlier migration flows (Collyer, 2006). Algerians in France, including the Pieds-Noirs, the Jews and the Harkis, who left Algeria in 1962 at the time of independence, tended to see themselves as exiled individuals rather than part of a diaspora. William Safran (2005) suggests that migrants' continued commitment to 'home', through the development of a diasporic consciousness and the idea of restitution of what has been lost, only occurs as a result of the violence of displacement. Drawing on these arguments, as well as the debate around diaspora, this article attempts to work out a definition of the concept that will best reflect the experience of the particular set of women migrants under investigation.

Conventional definitions of feminism often state that women – by virtue of their gender – share the experience of social and political oppression. This, however, does not mean that all women share the same experience of oppression: the social contexts in which women live and struggle differ widely from one society to another. Nevertheless, Assia Djebar (2012, 2002) recounts that under the French occupation Algerian women created networks of solidarity, despite their differences. They had to fight two enemies, the coloniser and the indigenous patriarchy, and in the process, they created distinct strategies of resistance and solidarity. Later, during the 1990s, women were also faced with radical political Islam, an even more extreme form of

Maamoura, two survivors of the so-called 'Hassi Messouad event'. On 13 July 2001 at Hassi Messaoud, a southern Algerian city, a group of men, incited by a local imam who issued a call to 'cleanse' the city of 'impure women' (Lezzar, 2006), attacked and sexually abused more than a hundred women (Kaci, 2010). The majority of these women were divorced, widowed or single mothers who had come to the city to look for work and to escape the stigma of their social status in their own communities (Lamarene-Djerbal, 2006). In the eyes of their aggressors, they were a threat to the community (Kaci, 2010). Although most of them were constrained from speaking out, Fatiha and Maamoura managed to leave for France, where they met Nadia Kaci, an artist and writer who had fled Algeria in the 1990s. Kaci (2010) recorded their testimonies in a book, Left for Dead: The Lynching of Women in Hassi Messaoud, a detailed account of the events and a description of their juridical and social context, including an exposition of the status of women in Algeria (Lezzar, 2006).

Beyond ethnicity: diaspora as a gendered device and political engagement

Central to the article's focus on Algerian women is a discussion of the proposition that "diasporic experiences are always gendered" (Clifford, 1994: 313). The etymology of the word 'diaspora' always refers to the migrant's social condition, which is constructed from multifaceted identities relating to their past, current and future circumstances (Brah, 1996; Anthias, 1998; Soysal, 2000). Research has shown that migration is a non-linear journey, which is marked by resistance to the process of forgetting 'home' while negotiating a sense of belonging to a new society. This process does not occur without experiencing an on-going duality between the 'self' and others' perception of the 'self', which necessarily includes gender. Nira Yuval-Davis (1999) points out that women are given the role of transmitting and reproducing the community by assuring the continuity of its traditions and language. This "burden of ethno-cultural continuity" dictates women's behaviour (Yuval-Davis, 1999: p. 196). In order to look at the role of gender in the development of a diasporic consciousness in multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, it is crucial to revisit the work of two ground-breaking

Consequently, the motivation for this research rested on two facts. Firstly, not only have researchers and policy-makers often neglected highly skilled female migrants, but migrant women in general have frequently been represented in a stereotypical manner as passive dependents or victims (Morokvasic, 1984). Secondly, although there is a substantial body of literature on Algerian migration to France, due to its size and social significance (Sayad, 2007), there has been little research into the category of highly skilled Algerian women who migrated to countries other than France during the internal conflict in the 1990s (the 'Black Decade').

My interest in using the concept of 'diaspora' in this context was to interrogate the assumption that Algerians do not show solidarity with one another or constitute a diaspora as such. It was also due to a desire that arose within my online network of Algerian women, following the revolution in Tunisia in 2011 and its spread across the region, to communicate their experience of the Black Decade with Tunisian and Egyptian friends on Facebook. Many women expressed regret that they had not formed a diasporic space that could be mobilised to present evidence of the Algerian experience and the reality of the collective trauma felt by the survivors. Although men also contributed to these online discussions, it was mainly women who created platforms, blogs and Facebook groups to share concerns, including debates on why Algerians abroad do not appear to form solidarity networks or mobilise around issues affecting their country of origin.

It could be argued, however, that several Algerian diasporic networks have in fact been created in different times and spaces, and under different circumstances. As Collyer (2008, p. 694) points out, "[t]he Algerian diaspora has always been a focal point for political innovation and contestation. For the first years of Algerian independence, the ruling regime therefore paid great attention to developments in France and developed sophisticated surveillance methods" to track its nationals living abroad.

This article argues that the experience of highly skilled women who migrated during and after the 1990s differs from that of previous waves of Algerian female migration, and has often been associated with forms of resistance and solidarity. This can be illustrated by the case of Fatiha and

Chela Sandoval (2000), however, claims that migrant women possess the aptitude to create social movements that unite across cultural differences. She believes that such a movement could become a vanguard for a progressive identity politics, with the potential to challenge the deep inequalities created by the global market. As new communication technologies bring people closer together, it has become increasingly important to learn the skills needed to adapt to new environments by transcending differences. Sandoval demonstrates that migrant women have successfully developed these skills through their experience of oppression, migration and adaptation. She argues that women who have developed the capacity to shift from one identity to another can offer these skills to a world that needs to confront cultural differences by transforming the sense of 'self'.

The meaning of 'diaspora': the Algerian experience

The emergence of transnational populations, endowed with multiple commitments to various places without being totally disconnected from their homelands, attracted academic and policy interest during the last quarter of the 20th century. This led to an emphasis on the development of 'diasporic consciousness' (Van Hear, 1998, p. 4). Robin Cohen (2008, 2010) has put forward criteria which identify a group as a diaspora: the action of dispersal; the collective trauma behind the dispersal; the group's cultural flowering in a new environment; the difficulty of integration in this environment; the feeling of belonging to a particular community; the transcendence of national borders; and the cultivation of the idea of return. More recently, Peggy Levitt and Nadya Jaworsky (2007) have tracked changes in the study of migration which show that contemporary migrants, supported by new communication technologies, always maintain some kind of relationship with their country of birth. As a result, new kinds of migrants are appearing, whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass their host societies and their countries of origin. Unexpectedly, this research has shifted towards Algeria as a "locus of identification that is broken, war-torn, unfamiliar and irrevocably lost"; this has been particularly so for women, as Jane Hiddleston (2006, p. 1) describes. If diaspora is political – a network of solidarities formed between groups of migrants to keep the memory of 'home' alive – it has also, de facto, become gendered.

Highly Skilled Algerian Women Exiled during the Black Decade: Transnational Belonging and Political Engagement

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Introduction

Although the recent attention focused on migration gives it the appearance of a specifically modern phenomenon, it has always been a feature of the world stage, a manifestation of wide disparities in socio-economic circumstances, and long regarded as a potential means of improving life chances or human security. However, during the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, and more recently, the Syrian civil war, migration has assumed new dimensions and patterns. Globalisation creates the idea that people will benefit from migrating to richer and more secure countries, increasing the pressure to do so, at the same time as it propagates negative perceptions in the host countries of the political, social and security consequences of migration (Bakewell, 2008). Public opinion is increasingly subject to political manipulation, and focused on fears – for example, of loss of national identity (Papademetriou, 2012). Donald Trump's presidential election victory was in part grounded in his promise to 'gain control' over US borders. Translated into policies and social practices, therefore, these claims not only result in exclusion of people from the Global South, but also deepen the disparities suffered by minorities living in the Global North. According to James Carr (2016, p. 2), the 'war on terror' after 9/11 created an 'anti-Muslim racism' that has exacerbated an "Islamophobia in western public opinion that spans centuries". Trump, for example, has invoked 9/11 to justify barring people from seven Muslim countries from entering the US, although none of the 19 assumed to have committed the attack came from these nations. Behind the ban lies a deeper Islamophobia and fear of transnational movements that challenge the global market.