The Veil as Metaphor of French Colonized Algeria

The paper examines the shift of the veil from a religious and traditional symbol to a political metaphor during French colonized Algeria (1830–1962). It discusses the significance of veiling for both the colonizers and the colonists. For France, unveiled women would have been the proof of colonial power. For Algeria, veiling represented resistance to assimilation. Caught in between, the veil can be considered a metaphor for the Algerian colonization.
The first part of the paper explores the religious and traditional meanings associated with the veil. The second part analyses the political importance of the veil during colonization and its use as a tool for misleading the French authorities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

May 13, 1958: *"Colons seized the overthrow of the 4th Republic. French women, to applauding crowds, lifted the veils from the heads of a number of Muslim women, who gratefully smiled at the cameraman" (New York Times Magazine).* Behind this drama cited by D. Gordon[1], were wives of French generals pretending to be native Algerians.

May 6, 1962: for the first time, terrorist shooting opens on veiled women in the streets of Algiers.

Why was the veil meaningful for both the French and the Algerians? How was the veil perceived by Algerians and by the French? In what way did colonization transform the significance of the veil? How can the

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shift of the veil from a religious and traditional symbol to a political metaphor be explained? I will analyze the significance of veiling for both the colonizers and the colonists. For France, unveiled women would have been the proof of colonial power. For Algeria, veiling represented resistance to assimilation. Caught in between, the veil can be considered a metaphor for the Algerian colonization. The history of the veil during French colonization was intertwined with the history of Algerian women. I argue that it is not true that Algerian women were apolitical. They participated in politics in specific ways, according to the circumstances. Under the French colonization, their way was to take part in secret missions, using the veil as an instrument of concealment. For the role of the veil in colonial history, I will consider the Algerian nationalist attitude toward women. For the place of the veil in the colonizers' attitude, I will examine the image of Algerian women in French at that time.

The first part of the paper will discuss the religious and traditional meanings associated with the veil. The second part will examine the political importance of the veil during colonization and its use as a tool for misleading the French authorities. I will restrict to the colonial time (1830 – 1962). While the traditional pre-colonial aspects about veiling are relevant to this study in order to make visible the new meanings of the veil during colonization, this paper will not cover the post–colonial feminist debates about veiling. I chose the Algerian case because it proved to have a special status among the North African colonies. At the time feminists from Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt struggled for emancipation from foreign and patriarchal power, Algerian women fought for the national cause. Under these circumstances, the battle for the veil became the metaphor of resistance to colonization[2].

Before starting the discussion about veiling during the French colonized Algeria, I consider it necessary to make distinctions between the paradigms that shaped the place of woman in Islamic society. Barbara Freyer Stowasser[3] mentions three paradigms: traditionalist, Islamist and modernist. First, the Islamist paradigm implies equality between the sexes, but demands different roles for each. The Koran prescriptions are highly regarded. Veiling was not a designated rule. Second, traditionalism rejects the Koran prescriptions about equality and enhances woman's subordination. The stress on veiling is a traditionalist product. Third, modernism reconsiders the Koran norms historically. In this context, women's political rights are promoted. Modernism, like Islamism, aims to achieve both an authentic and a Koran–centered Islam[4]. Modernism took an "activist" form in which Western feminism influenced the Islamic discourse. The veil became a highly debated issue. It was claimed to be a symbol of patriarchal oppression.

Although modernity emerged in 1940s Algeria, I consider that a distinction should be made between the modern period before independence (1940s – 1962) and the postcolonial period in respect to the veil. Even though it belongs to modernity, the use of the veil as an instrument during the war of independence is a particular moment in the modern history of the veil. The

present paper aims to consider three patterns, namely: the Islamist, the traditionalist and the "instrumentalisation" of the veil. Although any attempt to see them separately is artificial, for the purpose of being systematic, I will discuss them apart.

"Definitions"

A possible explication of the difficulties in understanding veiling may be found in the linguistic differences between Western and Islamic culture. A brief presentation of the English and the Arabic words will follow.

The veil is defined by Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary as a length of cloth worn by women as a covering for the head and shoulders and often for the face, a concealing curtain or cover of cloth. Another meaning refers to covering or concealing[5]. The etymology for the English word "veil" is Latin: *veile* (Middle English, 13th century) < *voile* (Old North French) < *vçla/ vçlum* (Lat.). The term has four dimensions of meanings: material (clothing, ornament), spatial (screen, division of the space), communicative (invisibility), religious (celibacy)[6].

With reference to the Islamic world, there is no Arabic equivalent for the Western word "veil". There are over a hundred terms for dress parts, many used for "veiling" (including dual – gendered and gender-neutral terms). A great part of the dispute around the veil is due to a linguistic difference between two Arabic terms: "hijab" and "Khimar." The "Hijab" is the word usually translated into "veil" or "yashmak". The etymology is Arabic: *Hijab* (Islam) < *hajaba* (Arab), meaning "to hide from view or conceal"[7]. "Khimar" means "cover"- any cover: a curtain is a Khimar, a dress is a Khimar, a table cloth that covers the top of a table is a Khimar, a blanket is a Khimar.

The usual "correspondent" word for veil in Arabic is "hijab". It is the term used by many Muslim women to describe their head covering, which may or may not cover all the face but the eyes, and sometimes also covers one eye (in certain parts of Algeria). In modern Islam, it refers to the modest dress worn by Muslim women that covers the head and body. The degree of concealment depends on the social and economic background of the woman. Additionally, cultural origin, demographic setting, the religious or secular educational background also contribute to the adopted form of veiling. The degree of veiling is most noticeable in the variety of colors and styles. In this paper I will refer only at the hijab as it pertains to Algerian Muslim women – usually black, covering the entire body (including the fingers) and the face excepting the eyes.

Two ideas will be of help from the above definitions. One refers to the linguistic difference between the Western concept of "veil" and the Islamic ones; the other refers to the differences inside the Islamic language. The first idea implies that the Western concept of the veil is monolithic and vague, unable to cover the original local meanings. The variety of terms regarding "the veil" in a society where "veiling" is a specific prac-

tice highlights the complexity of the matter, which cannot be attached to a single word. The second idea distinguishes between "hijab" and "Khimar", meaning the difference between "hiding" and "covering". This linguistic aspect will be of great importance when addressing the Koranic prescripts about veiling (section II).

Under these circumstances, I assume the linguistic difference as a major limitation of this paper. Although I will use the English word "veil", it is the Islamic polysemy of "hiding + sacred + modesty + privacy" which is to be signified. To understand the concept of hijab, it is necessary to review the Islamic justification for the female dress code8 . The Muslim world has two sources of revelation: one is religious, the Koran (the actual Word of God, recorded by Muhammed, 7th century) and the other is traditional ("Hadiths" and "Sunnah", second–hand reports of Muhammed's personal way of life). However, most of the time, there is no clear distinction between Koran rules and tradition in the Islamic world. In the following chapter I will present the prescriptions about veiling as they reflected in Koran and Hadiths.

II. THE RELIGIOUS MEANINGS OF THE VEIL

The Koran's Prescriptions about Veiling

The word "Hijab" appears in the Koran five times (7:46, 33:59, 38:32, 41:5, 42:51). However, in only one of these (33:59) does "Hijab" refers to what is considered to be the dress code today9 . Hijab as it appears in the Koran has nothing to do with the dress code for Muslim women. Most of the time, it was the misleading translation of "khimar" as "veil' (Engl.)/ "hijab"(Arab.) which created contradictions. There are three basic rules the Koran ascribes for dressing10 .

The first rule the Koran has for the women refers to righteousness as "the best garment" - what is inside your heart is more important for God that the dress you wear:

"O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is *the garment of righteousness*. These are some of God's signs, that they may take heed.

(Koran 7:26, emphasis added)

The second rule prescribes the way of covering the bosom (24:30; 24:31). It is important to notice that these norms refer to both women and men. However, when they are cited, the prescriptions about men's

clothing are usually neglected (24:30). Even when the Koran refers to clothing rules, hijab or any other way of covering the face is not mentioned. This supports the idea that veiling was not a practice stipulated for Muslim women.

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and conceal their genitals; for that is purer for them. God knows what they do." (Koran, 24:30)

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and conceal their genitals, and not reveal their beauty, except what does show, and to draw their *khimar* over their bosoms, and not reveal their beauty except to [very close kin]."

(Koran, 24:31, emphasis added)

The third rule includes the only[11] Koranic reference to the hijab as a cloth item. It sets the dress code for the Prophet's wives (explicit historical context):

"O, believers enter not the dwellings of the Prophet, unless invited… And when you ask of his wives anything, ask from behind a hijab. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts".

(Koran, 33:59)

This *Sura* (verse from the Koran) refers to a particular situation in the Prophet's home and does not imply any generalization. It is about protecting the privacy and the special status of the Prophet's wives. It does not regard veiling as women's clothing, but as a practical solution to deal with the afflux of visitors to the Prophet's place. Moreover, the Prophets' wives are attributed a higher status that ordinary Muslim women. It is possible that the relation between the hijab and high status (more common in modern times) has its roots in the Koran.

On the whole, there is not enough proof in the Koran to confirm the practice of veiling. In effect, it is the prophetic tradition that offers much more support for it. It is not the Islamic but the traditionalist way of thought that promotes veiling[12]. Next, I will briefly discuss the relation between traditionalism and the veil.

III. THE TRADITIONALIST MEANINGS OF THE VEIL

The Hadiths' Prescriptions about Veiling

An explanation of the way the traditional writings came into being is relevant here. The Hadiths were collected, interpreted and compiled in the 7th and 8th century as a political attempt to find religious legitimacy for creating a new type of society for the new Arab empire. An unequal distribution of power relations took the place of the Koran's prescribed equality. In this context, women's place became the most disadvantaged one. "Their Koranic status as moral citizens of the early Arabian [nation] enjoined to obedience to their husbands for the sake of family solidarity, was interpreted

(...) to mean their legal social dependency and political exclusion"[13]. The Hadith traditions proliferated; there were many authors and religious schools. Islamic feminists perceive these traditional sources as a contamination of the true Islamic religion.

The schools teaching Koranic law elaborated the "law of the veil", a very strict prescription whose validity is still recognized. Features such as the veil and face masks were subsumed under this law. The analysis of hijab as it appeared in these regulations would entail an extensive discussion. I will limit it to several citations:

The Prophet said: "The worst among women are those who freely leave their homes without hijab. They are hypocrites and few of those will enter paradise."
(Hadith - Sunan Baihaqi)

Prophet said: "What has been allowed to be shown is the hands, bangles and rings but the face must be covered.
(Hadith - Aisha)
"Jilbaab should fully cover the women's body, so that nothing appears but one eye with which she can see."
(Hadith - Tafseer Al-Qurtubi)

A selective use of the verses from Koran is typical of the traditionalist approach. For instance, only the first part ofthe following paragraph is usually cited:

"If any of your women commit fornication call in four witness from among yourself against them; if they testify to their guilt, confine them to their houses until death overtakes them or till God finds another way for them. '
(Koran, 4:13)
According to this part, confinement is justified, if the woman has committed adultery, and four witnesses testify against her. However, Muhammed added:

"And as for the two of you who are guilty thereof, punish them both. And if they repent and improve then let them be. Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful."
(Koran, 4:14)

For the Western eyes, the veil, segregation and seclusion in the house seem connected manifestations of the Islamic way of thinking. Relevant for the discussion of woman in colonized Algeria is to examine the private space. Does it really represent a site of segregation and seclusion? What is the woman's status in the private domain? How much of her condition is due to religion and how much to tradition?

The following section will be focused on the family in Islamic society. As in the case of the veil, when discussing the family in Islam, both Koranic and traditional sources will be considered. Even though many subjects such as inheritance, divorce, custody and other juridical aspects are very important, I will address those issues more relevant for the discussion of the veil, namely, familial values, patriarchy, and woman's status.

IV. THE TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC FAMILY

IV.1. THE ISLAMIC NOTION OF "PRIVATE" SPACE

To start with, what is the meaning of "privacy" for Islamic society? In particular, can we speak about a domestic sphere in the same sense it appears in the Western society? I argue that Western discourse transferred a concept into the Islamic world without being aware of the local way of constructing reality. As for the "veil", there is no Arabic equivalent for the English notion of "privacy". The English notion of "privacy" means the state of being apart from company or observation, seclusion, freedom from unauthorized intrusion and secrecy[14] . The Arabic concept referring to private space is "harim". Its semantic sphere is linked to the following paradigm: modesty + sanctity + forbidden[15].

It is important to notice that the Koran does distinguish between the private and the public domains and provides clear rules on the expected behavior in these two spheres of life. Architecture itself can be perceived as closely related with the concept of "harim" and through it, with women's position. Women are associated with the inside, home and territory. They lived their lives within the private enclosures of their domestic quarters. When they went out they veiled their faces, thus taking their seclusion with them.

Because the pride of the family ("hashama") demands intimacy and modesty, the house is closed from the outside world. The access to houses other than one's own, for example, must be restricted and only by permission of the inhabitants of the house. It is important to know that a traditional Islamic household may have almost fifty members living under the same roof. In order to avoid any potential sexual temptation, sexes are segregated as much as possible. For this reason, there is a delimitation of sleeping places, and meals are taken separately by men and women (the only man a woman is allowed to eat with is her son).

Taking everything into account, the meaning of "privacy" for Islamic society is different from the Western idea of private space as it appears in the highly disputed dichotomy of public and private sphere.

As the private sphere was one of the targets aimed by the French colonization, I will present some facts related to traditional familial values. Although the concept of "traditional family" is now highly questionable, I will present the recognized principles that were certainly valid during the colonial period.

IV.2. FAMILY VALUES

Islam creates and legitimizes patriarchy. However, the way the Koran addresses men's and women's status seems contradictory. On the one hand it claims equality, but on the other, it affirms man's superiority over

woman. There is an emphasis on the equality between man and woman before God.

"God created you from one soul, then of it He made its mate, and from those twain scattered many men and women".

(Koran, 39:6. See also 4:1, 49:13)

The only ranking of humans in the eyes of God is the one given by godliness and virtue regardless of lineage, wealth, power and gender (see Koran 9:71; 23:35). However, this stress on equality seems impossible to reconcile with the demand for woman's subordination to man. Generally, the Koran confirms and legitimizes patriarchal power. The man is placed at the head of the family:

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah had made the one of them to excel the other and because they spend their property [for the support of the wife]. So, good wives are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah had guarded. As for those whom we fear rebellious, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them."

(Koran, 4:38)

Woman's role and men's role are prescribed by the Islamic religion. As a consequence, any attempt for equality (in the way it appeared for Western women) would run counter to the religious norms. Ties between husband and wife are not expected to be more than sexual. The man is seen as being responsible for maintenance of his family. The wife is responsible for the care and welfare of children. Woman is charged with the religious education of the children. An Algerian proverb says: "if you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate an entire family".

On the whole, it definitely cannot be claimed that the Koran offers equality between man and woman. However, the relationship between the two sexes as depicted in the Koran is not one of extreme dominance and submission as it developed in the Islamic traditionalist discourse. Traditionalists enforced patriarchy and assigned new meanings to the Koranic precepts. The prescriptions regarding private space (modesty and obedience) were interpreted as both physical and political invisibility. Veiling was enforced as a symbol of women' separateness, a way for extending the isolation of the physical space in the public sphere. Inside the Islamic family, the veil was accorded social functions.

IV.3. THE VEIL AS A GENDER DIFFERENCE

Having the family at its center, Islamic society rejects individualism and encourages the control of its members' behavior. The good of the family comes before personal good. People are encouraged to view themselves as linked with and reciprocally responsible for family and relatives. Sacrifice by individual family members to benefit the family as a whole is expected.

As a consequence, women's behavior is subject to regulation.

Jealousy is a powerful force. The blood relationship is considered the main factor in establishing the right to property. For a wife, adultery is considered the most blamable act. In this context, the control of sexuality beyond the context of marriage and concubinage (for men) was legitimate. Man's motivation is the fear of humiliation. Islam perceive woman's sexuality as active, capable of disturbing the moral order, and so, threatening16 . One of the solutions for overcoming the potential disorder and for the control of private domain is veiling. Under the influence of the traditionalist discourse, anxiety about the wife's infidelity became of great weight. The link between veiling and seclusion is emphasized.

IV.4. THE VEIL AS A SOCIAL CONVENTION

The veil was also an important social convention connected with economic standing[17]. Veiling and high seclusion were the marks of prestige and symbols of status. Only the few wealthy families could afford the most elaborate measures for secluding women, such the grand architectural arrangements. In the houses of the poor, women and men were crammed together in the same limited space. However, when poor women went out - far more often than the richer ones - they too veiled.

In this context, it is relevant to know how women felt about veiling. Unfortunately, the surveys regarding this matter were made mainly after Algerian Independence. It can only be presumed that for the most part, the reasons for veiling were the same in the time before the war for Independence. Not to ignore the fact that some of the motives that made women veiling were a product of modernization.

According to ethnographical researches[18] , one of the most important reasons for the wearing of the veil was the religious prescription. The veil was considered not an option, but a privilege and a commandment from Allah. Islamic religion claimed that far from feeling subdued by wearing the veil, Muslim women perceived it as a religious duty. In Islamic culture the veil was a matter of honor, a special way to conform to God's will. It was not only women who were supposed to commit to a strict moral code[19]. Islam ascribes the veil for women and the beard for men, which is part of the call for the return to the traditional Sunna. The European colonists conceived of the veil differently. The following chapter analyzes the way French colonizers perceived the veiled women.

V. THE VEIL AS A MOVEMENT

V.1. THE VEIL FOR THE COLONIZERS

Barrier to Visual Control

Before discussing the colonizer's attitude towards the veiled woman, a brief overview of the modern discourse on transparency is needed. The 18th century brought the ideal of a perfect transparent world. Rousseau's ideal was a transparent society. In 1787, Jeremy Bentham elaborated the plan of the Panopticon. It was an architectural figure that consisted in a tower central to an annular building divided into cells. The occupants of the cells were isolated from one another by walls and subject to scrutiny by an observer in the tower who remains unseen. The Panopticon thus allowed seeing without being seen. For Foucault, such asymmetry of seeing-without-being-seen is the very essence of power because ultimately the power to dominate rests on the differential possession of knowledge[20].

The metaphor of the one that is seen without being able to see the observer turned to be the most dramatic frustration the French colonists experienced in Algeria. Veiled woman could see the foreign colonizer, but the colonizer could not see her. The veil became a barrier to the visual control of the Western eye. Anger, frustrated desire and fantasy gave a distinctive character to French colonization in Algeria.

The veil was seen as the concrete manifestation of resistance by the colonized to an imposed reciprocity: veiled women were able to see without being seen. Colonist desire was thus articulated as the desire to unveil Algeria, for women's insistence on wearing the veil meant the colony's resistance to the French authority.

French Men's Attitude towards Veiled Women

…the political doctrine: 'If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.'

Frantz Fanon. *A Dying Colonialism*.p.23

Why did "la mission civilisatrice" have women as the first "target"?

Since veiled women served as metaphors for Oriental culture, the political strategy did not have exclusively a military character. According to F. Fanon, the French colonizers perceived Algerian women as embodying the true and authentic self of Algerian culture. Since they represented the essence of the culture that was colonized, having access to them and their bodies symbolized the means for a successful penetration to the heart

of the colonized culture. As a consequence, a metaphorical link between "Woman" and "Colony" was established[21]. In this context, the veiled woman (the other sex) and the colony (the other culture) were related. Colonies themselves were idealized as female. Later, they were credited with the power of invigorating the greater France. The main question related to the Algerian case by the European colonizers was if there was any possibility for a complete assimilation.

The French colonizers were aware at the strategic importance of family in Islamic society. "French" education was introduced in order to emancipate woman and in this way to obtain control over the Algerian family. Native women were given the "historical" mission of changing the Algerian men. French authority set up Lycées and discouraged veiling.

General Melchior–Joseph–Eugéne Daumas (1803 – 1871) was the most prominent masculine voice of the time. His numerous publications shaped the European vision of Algerian women for almost a century. He was the first colonial official to establish woman as an object of systematic and scientific inquiry. His aim as a writer was "to tear off the veil which still hides mores, customs, and ideas". J. Clancy – Smith sees here a possible suggestion of rape[22]. F. Fanon broadly examined the same colonial desire[23].

Daumas examine the way "La Femme Arabe" was perceived by the French colonizers, with a great emphasis on her sexuality. By forcing women to unveil (as in the events of 13 May 1930), or by spreading studio-made postcards representing unveiled Algerian women, French colonizers emphasized the impulse to see what was concealed. With regard to the missionaries, Elisabeth Warnock Fernea highlighted[24] the main characteristic of their approach to the Orient: " Generally, travelers and missionaries sent home the accounts that the readers expected, accounts that only confirmed Western preconceptions". However, in the eyes of the colonizers, the Algerian woman remained unmistakably 'she who hides behind a veil'[25].

French Women's Attitude towards Veiled Women

Although French feminists did not perceived their "mission" in Algeria as different from the one of French men, there were specific issues French women were particularly interested in. The first feminist wave was shaped by the unquestioned belief in the superiority of "western" values. Feminists in France were generally happy for any recognition from the government of their causes, regardless of the effect such new laws had on colonized women. The European wives of colonial administrators had the duty to "civilize," educate and Christianize indigenous women. A few French women actually advocated for the rights of colonized women. Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914) referred to Algerian women as "our Muslim sister" but in fact remained most interested in using her Algerian experiences as arguments for the rights of women in France. She saw parallels between the French exploitation of its colonies and the exploitation of French women by French men.

Another French woman, Marie Bugeja was the wife of a colonial official and was born in Algeria. She wrote *Our Muslim Sisters* in 1921 and later several novels and articles. In spite of her book title, she did not see Algerian women in an egalitarian light, and subscribed to the familiar colonial idea that the key to "civilizing" Algeria was to give her daughters a French domestic education. She saw in the veil nothing more than a style that would disappear in time, like the corset in France.

"I have never approved of the veil nor fought against it because I believe that my campaign proves sufficiently that what I want to take away from Muslim women is the veil of ignorance and I have ignored a 'style' that has become an 'obligation…A style that can fade like any style."[26]

The concept of "the new woman" was often discussed. In the eyes of French feminists, the "new Algerian woman" was supposed to be educated, but maintaining the "feminine" virtues, Westernized and unveiled. However, she should not be over-Westernized.

"I don't want to see our North African Muslim sisters, without preparation, discarding the veil and plunging into the turbulence of life; they must first be initiated. Only the invigorating atmosphere of a well - established school will alow them to gain liberty wisely".

I consider that what colonists identified as the source of women's oppression was not always based on an accurate understanding of Muslim society. Europeans were making assumptions based on a superficial knowledge, and naively equating veiling with patriarchy. The assumption that Muslim need to abandon native ways and adopt those of the West was incorrect. It is true that androcentrism and misogyny must be opposed, but in the case of Algeria, unveiling the women did not necessarily meant destroying patriarchal power. The European agenda was wrong in the issue of the veil. As in the case of the French men, for the French women, the Algerian ones remained the "unknown other".

V.2. THE VEIL FOR THE ALGERIANS

In the situation when unveiling was the French political doctrine, the potential of the veil to acquire a political meaning was very powerful. From a religious symbol, the veil became charged with political meaning. It represented a political commitment to a different type of society than the French one, an explicit form of opposing colonization.

Algerian Women in the Public Space: the Veil as an Instrument

During the war for independence, veiled and unveiled Algerian women became linking agents, using the veil as a camouflage for carrying grenades, manifestos, revolvers and mines. According to the purpose of the military operations, Algerian women unveiled them-

selves, pretending to be Europeans, or wore the veil when French soldiers suspected unveiled women. This subversive acts were possible because authorities did not perceive the woman's potential for public action.

How was it possible for Algerian women to become politically active during the independence war? How can women's shift from domestic seclusion into underground political action be explained? What are new meanings of the veil during the war? This section attempts to examine to what extent women's involvement in the public sphere can be regarded as conforming to Islam.

A "public space" in the Western sense, does not exist in the Islamic world. The theocratic state, "umma" [religious community] reflects God's absolute will, so any attempt to achieve the "public will" (as in Rousseau's contract) is categorically excluded. Regarding the women, in order to build God's society on earth, their integration into the community is taken into account. It is for this reason that the Koran legislates the equality of the sexes in moral citizenship of the umma. On the whole, the members of "umma" are not seen as citizens, but as subjects in their relationship to God[27]. However, this submissive image is only apparent. As a matter of fact, the Koran does not designate civic obedience as an obligation imposed regardless of the moral character of the tenet of authority. On the contrary, the Koran speaks about the morality of opposing injustice (Koran, 9:17). Therefore, according to Islamic law, women's participation in the Independence war (as moral citizens of the umma), is legitimated.

Even before the War of Independence, women were not involved in public life. When contacts with colonizers took place, they were also victims of French domination. Unveiling and rape were the oppressive ways the French colonizers relied on women. In spite the image of Algerian women as secluded in their houses, without much contact with the French, their participation in the war demonstrate their awareness of the colonial exploitation. That the French colonization meant a terrible oppression was demonstrated by the extreme solutions found to oppose it. Under the circumstances, women's unveiling during the war and their turning into military agents was regarded as a necessity and a practical solution.

Taking everything into account, I consider that Algerian women were not apolitical. What the war did, in this respect, was to make visible women's potential for public activity. They participated in politics in specific ways, according to the circumstances. Under the French colonization, their way was to take part in secret missions, using the veil as an instrument. However, their importance in the war was not recognized. Under an exceptional situation, as the French oppression in Algeria was, women's military actions were perceived as a temporary deviation from their ascribed role. Their involvement in the war was necessary and strategic.

When independence was finally gained and their military help was not needed any more, it seemed legitimate for the patriarchal power to impose women going back. One of the first slogans proclaimed in Algeria during 1962 was *Women go home!* It seems that women

themselves did not perceive their contribution in the war as more than a duty under extreme circumstances. The war did not make women aware of their collective power. Their objective was subordinated to the national one and perceived as such. No attempt for a feminist movement was made after it.

Algerian Men's Position: the Nationalist Movements

At the turn of the century, as part of the strategy of resistance to colonial order, the Algerian nationalist movements instituted reforms. It is possible to identify two reform movements during that period – one secular (inspired by the French and the Young Turks) and one religious, inspired by the Arabs.

On the one hand, the Young Algerians (non-radicals, French educated), did not advocate a radical break with Islam. They argued that Islam was not necessary incompatible with Western models. For them, women's rights were a prime example of the internal virtues of Western modernity.

On the other hand, the religious reforms (Ulema) were successful in reaching and responding to the problems of Algerians whose religion and customs were under threat due to colonization. Ulema's credo ("Arabic is my language, Algeria is my country, Islam is my religion") had a large response. The movement advocated the improvement of women's status and defended their education, but only in strict religious schools. It was assumed that this would help women become the moral guardians of their families.

It was in the context of this moral guardianship that the veiling of women was promoted: it was supposed to protect women from the gaze of foreigners and also from the temptations of French fashion. Ulema was particularly conservative on the issue of veiling. Veiling became a reaction to the French administrators' attempt to encourage women's education and discourage them from wearing veils. The protection of women from such "French assimilation" symbolized (for the Ulema) the protection of their true identity. Up to a point, during colonization, women were caught between two forces: the one coming from the French administration, the other, from the nationalist movements.

One element that made the conservative and the nationalist discourse very popular was that it associated moral decay with contamination by French values. Another important component was the privileged role assigned to women. They were responsible for restoring the lost authenticity of the community. This anti-imperialist and populist discourse gave a new dimension to the veil and reconstructed the original patriarchy.

On the whole, the nationalist discourse can be considered a product of colonial hegemony. Embracing Islam was a response to the French "civilizing mission". The emphasis on veiling as a religious duty was a response to the colonial desire to unveil. As M. Lazreg notes, "before the colonial conquest, the Algerians perceived their Muslimness not very differently from the

way French conceived of themselves as Christians. However, with colonial subjugation, Islam achieved the highest importance in defining Algerian identity. In this sense, the nationalist project, including the issue of women's education, was an effect of colonialism"[28].

In 1950 the nationalist movement was generally in the favor of emancipation, but as far as the women were concerned, they were supposed to be the guardians of Algerian identity. What they wanted was a free Algerian Woman, not a free French women (David Gordon).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The paper analyzed the new meanings the veil acquired during the French colonization of Algeria. Recourse to the religious background and to the traditional Islamic family was needed in order to analyze the local significance of the veil before colonization. Under the French, veiled women were the concrete manifestation of the Algerian resistance. The desire to unveil them became the colonizers' political doctrine in Algeria. Under these circumstances, the potential of the veil to acquire a political meaning was very powerful. From a religious symbol, the veil became increasingly charged with political meaning. Because of the dispute around it, the veil acquired new meanings. It represented a commitment to a different religion and culture than the one of colonizers', an explicit form of opposing French authority. The battle for the veil put Algerian women in the center of French colonization. I argued that women were not apolitical. They participated in politics in specific ways, according to the circumstances. Veiling and unveiling was a strategy used in order to mislead the French soldiers and thus to take part in secret missions. However, neither Algerian women nor Algerian men did perceive women as a powerful autonomous force force. Women subordinated their aspiration to the national ones. The feminist movement became a presence only in the late 70s. Attempts to reconcile Islamic religion with feminism had the veil as an important issue. The story of the veil is still going on in Algeria.

Notes

1 David G. Gordon. (1962) *Women of Algeria. An Essay on Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press. p. 143.

2 When discussing Algerian women, I am aware of the risk of simplification. Both "Algerian women" and "traditional Islamic family" are abstractions. I assume the reduction of their cultural complexly to a single image as a limitation of the paper.

3 Barbara Freyer Stowasser. (1996). " Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an" in Amira El Azhary (ed). *Women, the Family, and Divorce in Islamic History*. N.Y. Syracuse University Press. P. 34.

4 ibid. p. 37.

5 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. (1991). U.S.A. Springfield Mass.

6 Fadwa El Guindi (2000). *Veil Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. London. Oxford International Publishers Ltd. p 6.

7 Idem.

8 It should be mentioned that there are authors sustaining the non-Islamic origins of the veil (Zuhur 1992 "Revealing Veiling: Islamic Gender Ideology" in *Contemporary Egypt*. Albany: State University of New York. It is claimed that veiling existed before Muslim society in Hellenic, Judaic, Byzantine and Balkan cultures with different meanings, purposes and, very important, not exclusively as a female attribute. However, many Muslims call "Hijab" an Islamic dress code, without questioning its origins.

9 There is a large dispute referring to the correct translation of the Arabic terms "hijab" and "khimar". Different English translations of the Koran offer different versions of these paragraphs. As my access to the original version is mediated by these contradictory interpretations and as the discussion of these verses is essential, I choose to trust the information most of the authors I wrote seemed to agree on.

10 There are many ways one can approach the prescripts about veiling. In the present paper, I choose to discuss it from a feminist perspective only.

11 There are authors (e.g. Masjid Tucson) sustaining that in this verse, "hijab" is not meant, but "khimar".

12 I am aware at the risk of generalization about Islamic societies. I choose to simplify many cultural differences in order to make the presentation more explicit.

13 Barbara Freyer Stowasser. (1996). "Women and Citizenship…" p. 36.

14 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

15 Fadwa El Guindi. *Veil*…p. 84.

16 Idem.

17 Huda Shaarawi, Margot Badran [trans. and ed]. (1986) *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. In *Feminist Press*. at http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/main.html (last accessed 19 Dec.2001).

18 Jen'Nan Ghazal Read and John P. Bartkowski. (2000). "To veil or not to veil? A case study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas" in *Gender and Society*.3. pp. 395–417.

19 Maha Azzam. "Gender and the Politics of Religion in the Middle East" (1996) in Mai Yamani & Andrew Allen (Eds). *Feminism and Islam: legal and literary perspectives*. NY. New York Univ. Press. p. 227.

20Michel Foucault (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York. Ed. Colin Gordon et al. p. 223.

21 ibid. p 142.

22 Julia Clancy–Smith. La Femme Arabe in Amira El Azhary (ed.). *Women, the Family*… p.56.

23 Frantz Fanon. *A Dying* …pp. 31-32.

24 Elisabeth Warnock Fernea. Foreword to *Women, the Family, and Divorce in Islamic History* ed. By Amira El Azhary Sonbol. 1996. p. x.

25 Meyda YeGenoGlu (1998).*Colonial fantasies. Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*. UK. Cambridge University Press. p. 36.

26 Marie Bugeja. *Enigme Musulmane: Lettres à une Bretonne*. Tangier and Fez. 1938. P.150 cited by Jeanne M. Bowlan *Civilizing Gender Relations in Algeria* in Domesticating the Empire. Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism, University Press of Virginia, 1998 p. 186.

27 Barbara Freyer Stowasser. " Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an" in *Women, the Family*… p. 26.

28 Marnia Lazreg, (1990) "Gender and Politics in Algeria: Unrevealing the Religious Paradigm*"* in *Signs,* 4.