

PART THREE

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Introduction

Having examined Fanon's work and his legacy in a variety of contexts the final part of this thesis now seeks to examine Fanon's contemporary relevance.

First it returns again to Algeria as a starting point. Early in 1992 Algeria stood divided between a secular minority, who were the beneficiaries of the revolution, themselves divided between those who wanted genuine democracy and those wanted to return to the previous status quo. Both the FLN and the democratic opposition feared the Islamists but they were equally fearful of the military's new resurgence. On the other side stood a militant Islam calling for a social renewal based on the Shari'a and a return to authentic Muslim values. This side was made up of Arabic speaking young men of recently urbanised families for whom Algeria's 'socialist' project had brought poverty and alienation. The army and the secular middle class that are the main beneficiaries of state planning form an uneasy alliance. The ruling group consists of many competing interests. The middle classes do not agree on the role of the public sector versus the market economy, the status of linguistic groups or the equality of the sexes. The army is divided between former French-trained officers (Belkheir, Nazzar) and Algerian officers previously marginalised under Bendjedid. None of these groups has stability and there are regional alliances and interests that cut across the formal hierarchy (Harbi 1994: 152).

Since the 1980s after a period of liberalisation following Boumediene's death there emerged a political crisis. Since the military coup in 1992 a civil war has been raging between the Islamists and the military government which has resulted in more than 65 000 deaths (about 20 or 30 people per day). Using Fanon's three stages of cultural response it charts a path through this period and assess what Fanon's analysis from Wretched of the Earth might say about this new Manichean situation. The women's struggle is a microcosm of this wider struggle which warrants separate analysis. While sympathetic to Fanon, Algerian feminists' chief response to him is that his nationalism helped create a myth that the national liberation struggle would lead to women's liberation. While he certainly has his limitations his analysis remains useful in at least two respects. Firstly, Fanon's analysis interrogated the specifics of women's oppression but was not women-centred; he seeks the abolition of sexism as part of bringing about human freedom, of moving women (and men) from being objects to subjects of history. Also his idea of three cultural stages charts a course through a complex situation and identifies resources for a post-nationalist feminism.

Next there is some assessment of Fanon's contribution to the role of class and gender in liberation struggles, outside of Algeria. Chapter Thirteen begins the assessment of the relevance of Fanon's work in terms of class. Fanon was the first to introduce class analysis into Africa and that, in general terms, aspects of his work proved accurate. His warnings about the bourgeoisie and the importance of the peasantry as well as the need for a political program that went beyond nationalism now seem confirmed. Others were participating in these same debates and this chapter draws

together the conclusions from Part Two. Then it examines these debates as they were debated by the revolutionary Marxist movement. The revolutionary Marxist critique of Fanon (including that of Cabral) has important insights even if it is not sufficiently aware of its Eurocentrism.

Chapter Fourteen examines the question of gender. There is quite a range of feminist responses to Fanon's work. Drawing on the discussion of Algeria it examines the response of Arab feminists to his work, which is on the whole sympathetic if critical of his assumption that nationalism is sufficient for women's liberation. Here the work of Cabral and the PAIGC shows the type of direction that is necessary. Another group of feminists touched on in Part Two were the black radicals. This chapter examines the work of one such person who had continued to draw on radical thinkers, particularly Fanon and Freire, namely 'bell hooks'.¹ Finally it examines the response of liberal and radical feminists to Fanon's work. It is this group who has set the terms for the debate on Fanon's work in the Western Academy by their portrayal of him as a 'black patriarch'.

The final two chapters return to the question of violence, a Fanonist psychology and the analysis of his relational view of consciousness. Chapter Fifteen elaborates his views on violence and the Manichean psychology on which it is based. It begins with the early liberal responses to Fanon, which were largely a reaction to his views on violence. It discusses his argument in detail drawing on his philosophical assumptions (especially Hegel) and his clinical work. The chapter concludes by inverting the focus of the self/other binary and examines the effect of violence on the coloniser. One section deals with France during the Algerian War of Independence. The final section looks at recent controversies over the veil within the French education system. Finally Chapter Sixteen returns to a focus on the individual, to elaborate Fanon's ideas of the self and sociogenetics.

¹ bell hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She took the name of her maternal grandmother as her pen name. The lower case spelling is deliberate.

CHAPTER XII

Fanon and Contemporary Algeria

Background

After the revolution, apart from the formidable economic problems, the Algerian government faced the task of building a consensus around the nature of an Algerian culture. The FLN, in effect, adopted the reformist Islamic credo that 'Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, Algeria is our fatherland.' While this was all encompassing it was thin on detail - what sort of Islam? Was Arabic to be classical, indigenous or Modern Standard Arabic? Who was included in the Algerian Fatherland? What was the role of non-Arabs? How was Islamic *umma* [community] a part of this? What about non-Muslims? For Ruedy (1992: 224):

The problem of defining Algeria's identity within the framework of Islamism, Arabism, and Algerianism was made all the more difficult by the cultural disjuncture between the national political leadership and the rural or recently urbanised masses. As much as 95 percent of the political leadership and virtually all of the technical and scientific leadership had been educated in France and shaped by wide exposure to European values, systems and ideologies. The rhetoric of class conflict jarred Islamists, for whom the ideal community was one of brothers; assuring the rights of women ran counter to deeply ingrained patriarchal tradition; invoking individual rights threatened the authority of the group, especially the family.

The leadership tried to show how socialism and Islam were compatible. It devoted resources to Islamic education and the clergy and incorporated religious observance into public life.

The problem of marrying socialism and Islam was closely tied to the problem of Arabisation. The affirmation of Algerian national identity required the affirmation of Arabic as the national language. The problem was that the legacy of colonial period meant that French was the language of the revolution in general and of the technical and qualified people in particular. The first problem was that Arabisation held up development plans especially since the return to Arabic meant a decline in educational standards. The maintenance of Francophony was a more direct route to modernisation but opened the door to the West and to values which the population became increasingly suspicious of as neo-colonial and anti-Islamic. The second problem was that Berbers saw Arabisation as a threat to their culture. As Ruedy (1992: 226) put it:

In spite of the disadvantages of Arabisation and in spite of the attachment of political and intellectual elites to the French language, irresistible sociopolitical forces after independence favoured Arabisation. Proficiency in French was associated with privilege. Whether it was the bureaucrat, businessman, or professional who had prospered under the French, the revolutionary Marxist who had fought them, or the new generation technocrat in SONATRACH and SONACOME² who was building Algeria's future, the individual who could read and write French was almost invariably better off than the one who could not. For reasons explored earlier, Kabyles also belonged to that group. They exhibited highest rates of Francophony than the rest of the population and, while there were poor Kabyles as a group they enjoyed higher living standards than Arabs. They were disproportionately

² SONATRACH and SONACOME are acronyms of the State corporations in charge of hydrocarbons and construction respectively.

represented in the central bureaucracy and in better paid private jobs, especially in Algiers.

The key arena in which this was played out was in education. At independence educating Algeria was an enormous task. Less than twenty percent of primary school aged children attended school, most teachers had left the country and there was a shortage of equipment. While Algerianisation proceeded rapidly at primary level, at higher levels the pace was slower. By 1978 eighty-two percent of secondary teachers and sixty percent of university staff were Algerian while at upper levels the foreigners still outnumbered Algerians.

In 1979-80 the elitist French system of education was reformed. Teaching Arabic was made compulsory at all levels and lower levels were quickly Arabised, but at secondary level there emerged a two-track system - one Arabic and one bilingual. In the former all subjects were taught in Arabic with French as a foreign language. In the latter, scientific subjects were taught in French, with better materials and more qualified staff. The other subjects were in Arabic this stream had a better chance of obtaining government and industrial jobs which operated largely in French.

Naturally

enough the number of Arabised students in technical areas began to decline and all this enforced disadvantages felt by those of rural or recently urbanised backgrounds relative to the Berbers and the children of the middle class. In this way Arabisation tended to widen social cleavages. In this respect, without disregarding the class position of the new ruling class, it is the cultural effects of oppression that are the topic of this section. Accordingly it shall return to Fanon's ideas about national culture and rework them to analyse a new situation of oppression.

The Current Crisis

From the early struggles with the French the fight between various FLN factions saw the leadership attempt to legitimise itself in the language of 'the people'. Even for the FLN religion provided a common vocabulary for national liberation. In this way a religious discourse became the common political language of Algeria especially after 1965. The regime increasingly sought to control religious expression. Qu'ranic schools were nationalised and *imams* were appointed by government. In response ways were found to resist, for example even though the government restricted building new mosques Islamic militants ignored the law and built makeshift buildings which were consecrated before applying to the authorities for official permission (Mortimer 1991: 577).

While Islam became the legitimating ideology of the regime it also provided the basis for criticism. It provided grounds to argue that the regime was in one way or other 'unorthodox' and needed to return to different values. Modernisation by the ruling class saw a practical secularisation that has met with a counter-Islamisation by the lower classes. As early as January 1964 there was an incident that showed the centrality of Islam and Arabisation for the bulk of the population which shocked the progressive forces who had underestimated it. About 3000 members of *Al Qiyam* (Values) met at *Maison du Peuple* in Algiers to noisily denounce 'unbelievers' and 'enemies of Islam.' They were critical of teaching in French and use of foreign programmes on the radio. They demanded that shops be closed during Friday prayers and that jobs be given only to Muslims. By 1964 no progressive dared break the Ramadan fast in public as they had the year before.

As change continued, more peasants fled to the city, the majority lived in the city cut off from their roots and traditional culture. This modern urban lifestyle created demands, there were no

democratic structures, state security was widespread, censorship common. The only avenue for dissent was in the form of Islamic centres like mosques and *madrassahs* (colleges). It was here that the process of 'immersion' in the past that Fanon's describes began. The rapid social change, population explosion and high fertility rate (the *average* family has seven children), and with half the population under twenty tensions grew. This scenario provides a classic scene for the rise of modern Islamic fundamentalism. Contrary to Western media images of the typical fundamentalist as an uneducated, uncultured gun-toting terrorist who is both misogynist and Anti-American, none of these things is generally the case. This new social type, the 'fundamentalist', generally comes from a stable family, is university educated, probably a high-achiever. He is probably also of rural background recently moved to an urban setting with access to mass education, a distinctly modern phenomenon. Mernissi (1987: xxi) has summed this up:

Militants can be expected to be found in two kinds of places: urban slums and expanding provincial towns in economically stagnant areas. But you need the combination of two factors: unplanned rural migration coupled with the mushrooming of state-funded universities.

This being the case it is no surprise that political Islam found fertile ground in Algeria as it had in Iran. In the face of growing social tensions the regime met protest with repression.

Increasingly the focus of government policy was on competition - a free market would deliver prosperity especially when combined with an oil bonanza. By now two-thirds of the population were born in a 'postcolonial' Algeria and knew nothing first-hand of the colonial past and the struggle for independence. While some grew rich, there were privileged youth, and the *apparatchiks* who bought luxury cars, drank whisky and listened to US music, the majority had little future, no work, money or houses, and earned the nickname *hittistes* [wall props]. Drugs and crime spread and much of the hostility was directed at the 'corrupt' youth. Apart from the rise of neo-liberalism the 1980s saw growing civil unrest across the Islamic world as Islamism grew. In Egypt Anwar Sadat was killed, clerics took power in Iran and threatened to do so in Afghanistan. In Algeria there were demonstrations but the government ignored the fighting between Islamists and progressive students.

The Bendjedid Years

In December 1978, Boumediene died. The 1979 party congress was intended to be a revitalisation of an increasingly bureaucratic FLN but instead it focused on selecting a new president. From the contenders the army selected Colonel Chadli Bendjedid on February 7, 1979. His first five-year plan (1980-84) refocused priorities away from basic industry to consumer goods. His second plan (1985-89) continued this trend with an increasing focus on the private sector and efficiency. The implementation of this plan was in its early stages when the oil price fell by two-thirds plunging the economy into crisis. The social tensions expressed themselves increasingly in opposition to the FLN's monopoly on power. While liberal and leftist factions joined the struggle it was Islamism that provided a main focus of opposition.

While the emphasis was on continuity with Boumediene's rule, Bendjedid quickly set out to consolidate his position. Only six of the new cabinet ministers had served Boumediene (Ruedy 1992: 233). He was critical of the deliberately unbalanced development strategy. State industries were bureaucratic and a drain on investment capital. Unemployment was still a major problem and development was located in a few major cities. In 1980 an extraordinary FLN congress adopted a new plan focused on agriculture and light industry and consumer goods. The focus moved away

from ‘austerity’ of the Boumediene years and its focus on heavy industry to a focus on the private sector was given the slogan: ‘towards a better life’.

The economic liberalisation did not mean that the state relinquished its control of the economy but moves were made to decentralise and break up the massive state companies into smaller ones. This undermined the position of the technocracy in favour of the bureaucracy and the private sector. Since most of Algeria’s foreign exchange came from hydrocarbon sales, and petroleum reserves would be exhausted by 2010, efforts were made to diversify into natural gas. While industrial growth was high at 9.5 percent the results of the plan were disappointing. Other sectors stilled lagged - 4.2 percent jobs growth was not enough to support the 700 000 new people entering the workforce each year. In terms of social infrastructure housing remained a critical need with an average of 9.5 individuals per housing unit. Agriculture remained in the doldrums. In foreign policy Algeria moved closer to the United States and France and away from the Soviet Union. Boumediene had supported of independence for Western Sahara and recognition of Polisario almost to the point of outright war with Morocco. In 1983 Algeria saw the Saharan independence movement (Polisario) admitted to the OAU as a means of pressuring Morocco and Libya, though later (1988) Benjedid restored diplomatic ties with Morocco, dropping the demand that King Hassan negotiate with Polisario.³

The economic crisis, the absence of a ‘better life’ and lack of cultural consensus all came together rapidly. In winter of 1979-80 there was a two-month strike at Algiers University by Arabised students, who were about 25 percent of the student population, against preference given to Francophone students. Bendjedid tried to head off Islamists, he ‘Arabised’ the justice system, appointed a new head to the education department who was known to be sympathetic to Arabisation. Arabisation was accelerated despite the fall in standards this entailed. From the university centre of Tizi Ouzou in the Kabylia a student strike in March 1980 over the banning of a Berber poet, Mouloud Mammeri, spread to high schools and by mid-April was effectively general. Security forces attempts to clear the university triggered the worst rioting since independence. The protesters labelled this the ‘Berber Spring’ (after the Prague events twelve years earlier). While the government made some concessions it was effectively committed to Arabisation and from this time on demands became more strident and demonstrations more violent.

Bendjedid’s plans required that he overcome the ‘leftists’ still active in unions, campuses and youth as well as the Berbers who had ties in this direction. Much as Anwar Sadat had tried to use Islam to counter the Left, Bendjedid turned to the Arabists whose concerns were cultural and who were politically conservative. Islamic revivalism found its roots in the widespread disillusionment with the nationalists and as a protest against Westernisation. This was seen as a failure both of the regime and of the foreign ideologies on which it was based. It was especially true among the disillusioned young people who saw less opportunity for themselves and had less reason to find solace in independence. In the highly authoritarian state of Algeria it was the mosques that served as a vehicle for voicing discontent and opposition.

As early as 1979 militant Islamists clashed with Berberists and Marxists on university campuses. Female students were harassed for not veiling. Campus facilities that served alcohol were attacked. By 1981 Islamists began to organise ‘informal’ mosques in the streets and evict ‘official’ *imams*

³ For further information on the struggle for Western Saharan independence see West (1997) and Smith de Cherif (1991).

from mosques. This was a threat because regime's Ministry of Religious Affairs had maintained loyal organisation men in such posts and these began to be displaced.

In 1981 women had forced the shelving of the Family Code. When drafts had begun to leak it became clear that, contrary to constitutional guarantees of equal rights, the legislation would turn women into legal minors. Outside the FLN-controlled UNFA (*Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes*), women built an impressive rally in front of the National Assembly declaring the proposed code unconstitutional and the government backed down. This proved to be a high water mark. During 1982 there were increasing calls from Islamists for an end to the National Charter and establishment of an Islamic state including changes to the secular university curriculum, elimination of women from secondary and higher education and the prohibition of alcohol. Islamists used physical as well as moral means of persuasion.

During October violent clashes increased until in November the killing of a 'leftist' student provoked the arrest of 400 Islamists. In response some 100 000 Muslim demonstrators converged on the city mosque for Friday prayers. Several hundred were arrested and jailed including Abbassi Madani, one of the key leaders, a Professor of Education at Algiers University. By 1983 and 1984, in an attempt at conciliation the regime began paroling or releasing them. Nevertheless, on the death of one of its key leaders, Shaykh Abellatif Sultani, in March 1984 around 400 000 people rallied to the funeral procession. Meanwhile small numbers of activists like Moustapha Bouyali, an ex-*wilaya* four *moujahid* formed a guerilla group called the 'Group for the Defence against the Illicit.' It operated for two years before most of its members were killed or captured. Bouyali himself fell in combat in March 1987. Its significance lay in that this was the first time an Islamic group took up arms against the 'corrupt' state with the intention of replacing it with an Islamic one. To this end they planned assassinations, bombed the UNFA and demanded the removal of all French people from Algeria.

The conflict over Arabisation was prompted by attempts to outflank the Islamists. Ironically it also led to massive increased funding for religious schools and cultural centres in each province, including one of the largest mosque universities in the world named after Emir Abd al-Qadir which opened in 1984. By July 1984 the government presented a new Family Code in an effort to appease the Islamists, which was more reactionary than the 1981 drafts. Women were made wards of the family until marriage when they became wards of their husband. Women could not marry non-Muslims or divorce their husbands and could only work if given permission. Polygamy was recognised and men could divorce their wives without grounds and evict them from the house.⁴ After a long struggle and long delays the 1984 Family Code was finally promulgated based on Islamic Law which institutionalised women's inequality, in order to prevent the destruction of 'Muslim' identity. This identity is strongly buttressed by the authority of the father in the home. The FLN leadership increasingly alienated from the population and generally lukewarm about women's rights has repeatedly failed to challenge these patriarchal norms. With the tide of protest from militant Islam the Family Code was passed with little opposition. With the exception of the *Reassemblément pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD), all major opposition parties continue to support the 1984 Family Code.

⁴ This enforcement of traditional rights now occur in a context in which women have no traditional extended family to rely on for support. Many divorced woman are forced into the street where they become targets for the armed Islamic groups on the suspicion of being prostitutes.

By 1984 external debt stood at US\$ 14, 766, 000 this combined with a fall in the price of oil from US\$ 30 to US\$ 10 per barrel, provoked a sharp devaluation of the currency. It was this currency that was needed to pay for imports. A couple of good harvests bought some relief in 1984-85 but it became necessary to slash imports - basic foodstuffs were needed but 'luxuries' like coffee and meat were slashed while consumer goods and capital goods were in short supply. Investment fell by one third and the foreign debt soared, GDP growth was negative, unemployment was 25 percent and inflation hit double digits. Faced with this crisis, in late 1987 the government, following IMF advice, began dismantling the state economy and moving in the direction of a market economy. The Ministry of Planning was abolished and, beginning with agriculture, each sector was to be privatised. State enterprises except core industries became public companies. Private investment in banking began and in August 1990 the state trade monopoly was abolished and in the same year a new wage system was introduced abandoning the principle of equal pay for equal work and allowing the market to determine wage rates.

When university returned to classes in 1986 there was a series of demonstrations in several cities in Algeria, the most serious threat to the regime since 1982. On November 5 in Constantine *lycée* students launched a protest against new religious and political requirements and disorder spread quickly to university students who were brutally repressed. The next day tens of thousands marching in silent protest at their treatment were met with even greater force. This triggered an attack on FLN party headquarters and every visible symbol of state authority. The riots then spread to Sétif. All protesters were labelled vandals and criminals. The earlier protests in 1986 had involved mainly students and while there was labour unrest it was in 1988 that the two came together and shook the regime.

Black October 1988

With the economic malaise, jobs increasingly insecure, a visibly more affluent merchant class and a rise in speculative investments in which public opinion implicated the government made the situation dire. During September, strikes became endemic and repression increased. On October 2, postal employees walked out and the strike threatened to become general. Students walked out; young people and the unemployed rallied. On October 5, thousands of young men stormed the centre of Algiers attacking government buildings including at least two ministries and party property as well as property associated with the lifestyle of the well-off. Over the next few days the fighting spread across the country drawing in all sectors of the population. On October 6 the government declared a state of siege and the repression began. Resorting to live fire, thousands of arrests and torture, order was restored by the October 10 with the loss of hundreds of lives.

'Black October' resulted in a wave of popular anger directed at military security. The army once seen as the makers and guarantors of the revolution, present in every major political institution, now stood exposed. Popular anger was directed at the whole system of centralised power, at corruption rather than lack of democracy. The repression did not, as it had in the past, silence the opposition but galvanised it, as all classes clamoured for change. In many places the Islamists already controlled the streets and Bendjedid went on television promising change. In the Western press this was painted as the picture of a liberal reformer versus socialist hard-liners with Chadli Bendjedid as an Algerian Gorbachev (Roberts 1994: 155). He sacked his second-in-command and the head of military security as well as promising reforms to the constitution.

The government conceded and allowed the right to demonstrate, a free press, free expression and political debate for the first time. The repressive apparatus of the FLN was exposed, including allegations of torture. Women mobilised for equal rights and the right to work as well as against sexist violence and the Family Code which they declared unconstitutional. The uprising had created a space for political changes but at the beginning of 1989 the FLN was still firmly in control and Bendjedid was elected unopposed for a third term by the party congress. The National Assembly was still composed of FLN members whose terms ran until 1992 unless the President decided otherwise. In February 1989 a new constitution was approved. This was new in several areas. Algeria was no longer defined as 'socialist' but as 'democratic and popular.' It guaranteed not the rights of the people as in 1976 but the 'rights of man and the citizen' including freedom of expression, assembly and association including the right to form 'associations of a political character.' This victory for the 'liberals' stood in contrast to concessions made to the Islamic nature of the state for example, the guarantees of women's rights disappeared completely.

As in Eastern Europe the one party state was dismantled, the National Assembly produced enabling legislation, the state security court was abolished and the written, if not the electronic, press burgeoned with a range of views. However, the economic situation continued to deteriorate. The new political freedoms saw the recognition of three religious parties and thirty secular ones. Most had personal or regional interests but others were broader. The Berber-based *Front des Forces Socialistes* (FFS) was legalised and Aït Ahmed returned from 23 years exile to lead it. The FFS has maintained a liberal position towards Islamists and the military. The militantly secular *Reassemblément pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD) that emerged out of the Berber Spring saw itself as defending Berber cultural rights as well as the rights of the individual, both male and female.⁵

It was the formation of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) in February 1989, that would prove the most important. The use of the word 'front' and the fact that the acronym FIS sounds like the French word *fil*s [son] were an attempt by the FIS to position itself as a saviour and as a successor to the FLN (Stone 1997: 147). To control the state, the FIS concluded it would be necessary to first seize control of nationalism. By praising the spirit of the revolution - which the FIS argued originated with Ibn Badis - and simultaneously criticising those running the state as not being true to this spirit, the FIS shifted the popular notion of nationalism to its benefit. Internally its leadership council was called the *Madjlis ech-Choura* the term first used by the Prophet Mohamed (Stone 1997: 163). Where the FLN had employed nationalist rhetoric for political and economic gain, the FIS used it for their cultural and ideological programmes. The FLN was not seen as the arch enemy, but rather as the national hero who had gone off the rails back in the 1960s.

Although contrary to the provisions of the new constitution Bendjedid recognised the new party in the hope that he could play off his Islamist opponents against his military ones. Abbassi Medani, a university professor and a former FLN election candidate and Ali Belhadj, *imam* of the al-Sunna mosque and a fiery popular preacher led the party. The later success of FIS in the elections was not without good reason. The Front had established an extensive network of services and its members dedicated themselves to assisting the economically pressed Algerians. Mosques were turned into educational and vocational training centres and special committees for social welfare and medical attention were formed and supported throughout the country. An environmental conservation campaign successfully turned trash-dumping locations into parks and daily missions were

⁵ After the FIS election victory was annulled in 1992 the RCD shifted closer to supporting the military government.

performed to clean streets and neighbourhoods. The FIS set up cooperatives which provided customers with commodities at low prices, and during the fasting month of Ramadan, during which prices of meat, chicken, vegetables and fruits usually rocketed, such essential consumer products were heavily subsidised by donations collected from the rich. Thousands of unemployed men and women were paid to serve their own people through the 'salvation' programs drawn and implemented by the Front. In the Klef earthquake it was the FIS, rather than the government, that were first on the scene organising relief efforts. Comparing FIS voluntary and free services with the inefficient state bureaucracy, Algerians saw real salvation in the Front.

FIS wins Regional Elections June 1990

With calls for new elections to the National Assembly being made repeatedly, Bendjedid refused early elections and scheduled local and provincial elections for June 1990. None of the secular parties had been able to build grassroots networks in this time and there were calls for a boycott by Aït Ahmed and by Ben Bella's new party, The Movement for a Democratic Algeria (MDA).⁶ Apart from the FLN it was only the FIS that had any effective political organisation through the 9000 mosques. The FIS slogan was 'to vote against the FIS is to vote against Allah'. Partly as a result of the boycott only 65 percent of the voters went to the polls and when the votes were counted the FIS emerged the clear winner. They received 54 percent of the votes (compared to the FLN's 28 percent), and controlled of 850 of the 1500 municipal councils including those of the major cities and 32 of the 48 *wilayas* (compared to the 14 for FLN).

The FIS then pressed for parliamentary elections that were eventually scheduled for June 1991. As FIS took control of councils there was conflict between its Islamic agenda and statutory requirements. Many of these newly elected councils closed theatres and co-educational schools.

The harassment of women in Western dress increased:

To many Algerian men, the unveiled woman represented a capitulation to the European and his culture; she was a person who had opened herself up to the prurient stares of the foreigners, a person more vulnerable to rape (Moghadam 1993: 83).

For Islamists the unveiled or modern woman is, to borrow the term from Iran, 'Westoxicated' - a sexual object, prey to make desires and also a traitor, selling out to Western imperialism (Moghadam 1993:143).

There were growing fears about whether the FIS were prepared to work within the system. It was also unclear whether the FLN would give up power to the FIS, or to anyone else. The outbreak of the Persian Gulf war saw the FLN government adopt a positive stance towards negotiating a settlement as they had earlier brokered the Iranian hostage crisis. The FIS posture was much more militant. Madani made calls 'to form an Islamic army' to defend Iraq.

In April 1991, Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche steered legislation through parliament that flagrantly gerrymandered the electoral process in favour of the FLN. The FIS decided to challenge the new law and called for a general strike on May 25, 1991, demanding the repeal of the law and general elections. While the strike itself was not especially successful, illustrating the weakness of the FIS in the trade union movement, they did mobilise a powerful force. On May 25 tens of

⁶ Ben Bella did not return until September 1990.

thousands marched protesting westernisation, moral corruption and demanding an Islamic republic. This was tolerated for five days before the army opened fire, triggering a three-day hunt for fundamentalists and a bloodbath. Bendjedid declared martial law on June 5, this move signalled the re-emergence in the public arena of the military. The FIS leaders Dr Abbassi Madani and his Deputy, Sheikh Ali Belhadj, (and hundreds of others) were arrested making them ineligible to stand in the elections. A State of Emergency was declared in Algiers.

Though no consensus could be achieved on new electoral laws, the date of elections was set for December 26, 1991 with run-offs on January 16, 1992 if needed. The FIS, with its leadership jailed, appointed a provisional executive and debated how to respond to the government jailing of its leaders. On December 16, 1991 they announced that they would participate and called on their supporters to vote. It was not until the 1992 coup that Islamist organisations abandoned their basically peaceful approach.

Ruedy (1992: 254) sums up the results of the poll:

The results of the December 26 elections were a shock to the mostly westernised elites who had ruled Algerian since independence. Although the balloting was characterised by an extraordinary abstention rate of 39 percent, 47.54 percent of people who did go to the polls voted for FIS candidates. The FIS won absolute majorities in 188 of the 430 electoral districts, while the FLN clinched only fifteen races. In fact it ran behind Hocine [Aït] Ahmed's FFS, which swept the Kabylia with twenty-six seats. Government and FLN spokesmen immediately alleged massive voting irregularities; more than 400 complaints were filed for investigation by the Constitutional Council. Within days it was evident that even with the maximum allowance made for reversals, the FIS stood to hold majorities, after the second round, in as many as two thirds of the electoral districts.

The FIS had counted on winning 25 percent of the vote and then forming a block with the old FLN against the military. In that sense the 'victory' was something of a strategic problem. Though Bendjedid made it clear that he wanted to see the process carried through, it was almost inevitable that the secularised (military) elite would not tolerate losing its power to the FIS. As the former colonialists had said to the nationalists, independence had to be opposed or otherwise the country would return to the Middle Ages, now the military hierarchy accused the FIS of the same thing.

The Military Steps in

In the second week of January, 1992 the cabinet confronted Bendjedid and demanded he dissolve parliament and resign. The results of the December poll were declared void and the second round cancelled. An emergency body called the High Security Council created a five man *Haut Comite d'Etat* (HCE) which included the Generals Nezzar and Belkheir, the former defence and interior ministers. Boudiaf, one of the historic chiefs was recalled from exile to head the council. The FIS, joined by the FLN and FFS, declared the Council's action illegal and demanded the completion of the electoral process. The Council refused to back down and issued a new ruling making the use of mosques for political purposes illegal. When activists ignored the ruling they were met with waves of arrests. In February Islamists took to the streets, violence spread across the country, scores were killed and hundreds wounded. On February 9 the government declared a one-year state of emergency and occupied the FIS headquarters. The FIS announced its willingness to negotiate with the authorities and enjoined members to have patience. Boudiaf declared that Algeria has been saved from 'Islamic dictatorship', thousands of Islamists were detained in desert camps.

In March the FIS was banned. Boudiaf declared ‘the FIS is gone for ever’, and promise elections by end of 1993. Soon after on June 21, Boudiaf was assassinated. While he survived the bullets in the panic there were delays and the ambulance mysteriously got lost on its trip to the nearby hospital where he was pronounced ‘dead on arrival’. It remained unclear for a long time exactly who was involved - most assumed that Islamists were responsible although it later became clear that Boudiaf’s anti-corruption campaign had been too much of a threat to the military, who planned the assassination. In July the Interior Minister ruled out dialogue with the FIS, and reiterated that it was finished. The Consultative Council abolished the Arabisation law; riots ensued. FIS leaders Madani and Belhadj were sentenced to 12 years in prison. The High Council of State again excluded FIS from any national reconciliation offer and in August the authorities ordered the demolition of Al-Sunnah mosque.

The constitutionalist wing of the FIS⁷ now found itself discredited, with the more Radical Islamists prepared to carry the struggle forward using violence. Many FIS members joined the ‘conservative’ HAMAS, (*Harakat El Mujtamaa El Islami*) [Movement for Islamic Society]. Others turned to a radicalised Islam and the armed groups and the remnants were either sent to desert prison camps or worked with the FLN (now just another opposition party) to paint the military regime as illegitimate. The FIS occupied the centre of the Islamist spectrum in Algeria. It is a modern, popular, urban descendant of Ibn Badis that actively pursues the control of the Algerian state. The military coup put an end to the conservative nationalist Islam. With the FIS poised to win control of parliament through relatively free elections, constitutional means were blocked by the ruling elite, leaving Islamists the ‘choice’ between collaboration and *jihad*.

From his prison cell Belhadj realigned the FIS away from its previous constitutionalist position to a more radical one. It was to become a ‘front of *jihad*’. The first militias formed in March 1992, named after Bouyali, in 1994 they would become the *Armée Islamique du Salut* [Army of Islamic Salvation] (AIS), (allied with the FIS). The AIS strategy seems to have been to use violence to pressure the regime into recognising the election results, though it was forced into largely rural areas. The FIS has justified its killings arguing that ‘what is happening is not bloodthirsty terrorism, but a holy war...it is a legitimate fight against those who denied the choice of the people’ (Essoulami 1994: 144-5). The FIS program, like that of any broad front, remains pretty sketchy apart from ‘Islam is the solution.’ They seek to create an ‘Islamic economy’, which is not capitalist or socialist while the market place would play a central role. They projected a huge new Islamic capital city. Women were to wear *hijab* [modest dress, usually the veil] and apart from a few exceptions be confined to the home. They planned to segregate schools and universities. Alcohol and any non-Islamic press would be banned (Stone 1997: 172).

The second armed group is the Salafiyist *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA).⁸ This predominantly urban group formed in 1989 by former Bouyalists and swelled after the coup by Afghani veterans who had been trained by the CIA in Pakistan to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan (Stone 1997:

⁷ The moderate Arabo-Islamic nationalist wing was called the *Djeza’ara*, an Arabic acronym for ‘Islamic Association for the Edification of Civilisation’ (Stone 1992: 164).

⁸ This is a oversimplification, each side of the AIS and GIA is factionalised and covers different geographical areas. At times the positions of the factions leading the respective groups is almost the same leading to speculations of a merger, at other times, hostility within between the groups has led to clashes in the street resulting in many deaths (Stone 1997: 188). The point is that the AIS is generally more moderate than GIA, though not opposed to armed struggle, it is critical of the GIA’s terror tactics against civilians, but sympathetic with their goals and shares a common enemy.

182). Numbering about 2 500 they are extremely conservative and bent on overthrowing the state and replacing it with a Caliphate based on the supremacy of Allah on earth as in the early days of Islam, 1300 years ago.⁹ Fellow Muslims (who are seen as unbelievers) are legitimate targets leading to the deaths of about 50 government *imams*. Journalists, university lecturers, labour leaders, actors and pop singers and members of the elite more generally are all targeted as a means of destroying not so much the state as its personnel. This has led to comparisons with the Khmer Rouge (Stone 1997: 193). Those who seek to negotiate a settlement are targeted. Women have been raped and murdered, even the wife of a non-fundamentalist *imam* was raped by members of an armed group. There is a ban on attending schools. They have bombed the Paris Metro. Infant boys have been killed since there are to be no circumcisions during *jihad* and several hundred women have been abducted for *mouta 'a* 'marriages'.¹⁰ All this dubiously performed in the name of Islam.

At first violence was directed at those who represented the state - the police, army bureaucrats, journalists who had written in favour of the banning. This then broadened to 'collaborators' of the post coup (that is, February 1992) government. Doctors, teachers, poets, foreigners, singers, women were all targeted. Some Islamists have attacked trains because there are no separate sections for men and women. Smoking is viewed with suspicion by some groups. Shops refuse to sell French newspapers for fear of reprisals. The FIS press has been shut down but even the secular press is under pressure both from armed groups and the state security forces. Threatening letters have been sent accusing journalists of being an 'enemy of Islam and the Qu'ran', 'traitor', 'extremist of the Francophony' and 'communist'. The Islamic groups have called for a strict observance of a curfew. Pamphlets like the following were pasted up:

Read this leaflet and go on your way. By continuing to work, you are helping the Pharaoh [the secular government]. Do not bring the wrath of the *mujahdin* down on your head (Zoubir 1994: 137).

Major roads are patrolled and identity checks carried out. The army and Islamic groups impersonate each other at 'false' checkpoints. Terrorism mounted with the level of state repression, civilians were murdered often in front of their children. As the situation deteriorated into a veritable civil war many Islamists took up arms. Men, women and children have been targeted by both sides. In March 1994 the GIA posted notices that they would kill any woman who did not cover her head. Soon schoolgirls were killed for not wearing the *hijab* and others, gunned down or stabbed, even if veiled, in retaliation for Islamist attacks.¹¹ As Lemsine (1994: 149) put it 'suddenly it was not only women journalists and writers - 'modern' women - who were being targeted; simply to be a woman was enough'. Algerian women, with the support of other left groups, have fought back in a campaign of peaceful resistance culminating in a huge demonstration against violence in March 1994.

Both sides exploit the fears and concerns of women. The 'democrats' play on the fear of women who have lost relatives in the fighting. The Islamists, in a country where the majority of women see

⁹ Sections of GIA have made declarations on these lines in the Algeria *maquis*. The *Salafiyya* is a revivalist movement in Islam that exhorts a return to the pure Islam of the first four Caliphs in seventh-century Arabia, taking from the West only what is consistent with the Qu'ran (Stone 1992:146).

¹⁰ These are 'convenience' marriages authorised during *jihad* for the *moujahadin*, amounting to sanctioned rape and prostitution.

¹¹ Not surprising the wearing of the veil has increased if only as a form of self-defence. Ironically the *hijab* is similar to that used in Iran and has no basis in the historical past of Algeria.

themselves as deeply Muslim, pose as defenders of the faith have been condemned by Muslims elsewhere particularly for the killing of women (Lemsine 1994: 150). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the FIS could mobilise women in far greater numbers than other women's groups. These women from traditional lower middle-class families are denied access to education and French language skills (needed for work in the bureaucracy). The *hijab* saves on fashion and allows them anonymity that they find empowering - for example they cannot be monitored in public by their relatives.

On the other side the army openly expresses its mistrust of other sections of the government. The military ruling elite is divided between 'eradicators' and 'conciliators'. The conciliators have tried to deal with the crisis by negotiations and setting up some kind of representative body to move towards elections without much success. The former has reacted to the present crisis with widespread arrest and use of torture, bodies are disposed on the street and blamed on Islamists, prisoners are killed 'trying to escape, or are gunned down shortly after release by balaclava-clad internal security officers (nicknamed *ninjas*). The armed groups have been infiltrated by the military to gather intelligence but also as provocateurs to commit crimes to blame on the Islamists (Stone 1997: 187-8). Mass torture, extrajudicial executions and media censorship that treats all violence as a product of FIS activities is routine.

Bombings are met with repression, thousands of Islamic militants have been arrested and tortured, sent to camps in the southern Sahara. Emergency 'terrorism prevention' legislation was extended at end of 1992 with a new anti-terrorist law doubling penalties and capital offences for 'terrorist' acts. The death toll has reached 150 000 and hundreds are being killed every week. Massacres of numbers of civilians are being reported on a daily basis. Apart from physical violence the economic violence continues unabated. Something like 300 000 - 400 000 jobs have been lost annually, the country now only produces 10 percent of what it consumes, most state revenue come from oil and even that is no longer sufficient to service the national debt. The army contains about 170 000 people but only 30 000 are considered reliable, the armed Islamists probably number about 10 000. Since 1995, the army had set up local militias to free paramilitary police for battle but opening up the possibility of vigilante groups, contrary to state policy.

The Rome Accords January 1995

The four major opposition parties (FIS, FLN, MDA and the FFS) along with some smaller ones (but not the GIA or RCD) met at the Sant'Egidio monastery in Rome and in January 1995 signed a 'Platform for a Political and Peaceful Solution to the Algerian Crisis'. The Rome Declaration called for pluralism and the renunciation of terrorist acts (but not armed struggle) by all parties leading to a truce. They planned an interim military and civilian coalition government being formed subsequent to the truce, which would then prepare for fair and democratic elections. They also recognised the long denied rights of the Berber minority to their own language. The Accords give credence to the idea that it is the military that stands in the way of a peaceful settlement.¹²

¹² In the same month the GIA put the Algerian struggle in the spotlight by hijacking an French Airbus and threatened to crash it and the 177 passengers on board into Paris. The four hijackers were killed by French security forces. Days later four Catholic priests were killed in Algeria in retaliation.

The then President Zeroul had a series of ‘national dialogues’ with the FIS leadership which continually are announced as having ‘failed’. Instead Zeroul announced that elections would be held in November 1995, making it clear that the regime no longer sought legitimacy in dialogue. Candidates would be required to collect 75 000 signatures to be eligible. Since many areas of the country - lower class suburbs and rural areas - are under Islamist control (and the FIS remained banned) it is difficult to see how such elections could achieve much except for some legitimacy for Zeroul in the eyes of the West. The military rejected the Rome Accords outright and tried to split the Rome parties, urging them to run in the Presidential elections. HAMAS, representing ‘conservative’ Islamists withdrew from the Rome talks declaring them ‘one-sided’ and participated in elections between the HAMAS leader, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah and the military’s candidate Liamine Zeroul. Apart from splitting the Rome opposition Zeroul has also moved against the ‘eradicators’ in the HCE, who had brought down Chadli Benjedid. The state of play is none too clear though neither conciliators nor eradicators have been entirely successful in their projects while Zeroul’s manoeuvring gave him some legitimacy, particularly in the eyes of the USA and IMF, who are organising loans. The FIS labelled these elections ‘illegal and unconstitutional’, HAMAS accepted some posts in government as a transitional measure arguing that while imperfect it is the best road to a peaceful settlement. The FIS for its part refuses to negotiate with a military that massacres civilians and monopolises the state. They declared a unilateral cease-fire in October 1997 for forces loyal to the FIS and are calling for an investigation into the massacres of civilians and a condemnation of the coup by the regime.

In recent months, there has been further rounds of elections. The military set up a new party, the RND. Religious parties (that is, the FIS) remain banned - HAMAS changed its name and produced a secular constitution. Zeroul announced that he would step down opening the way for Presidential elections in April, 1999. Seven candidates emerged including Ait Ahmed for the *Front des Forces Socialistes* (FFS) and for the government Abdelaziz Bouteflika (whose attempted removal by Ben Bella had triggered Boumediene’s coup in 1965). Presidential elections were held on April 15 although two days before the poll six of the candidates withdrew citing irregularities in the electoral process leaving Bouteflika to be elected unopposed.

The Relevance of Fanon

While Fanon could not have foreseen all this Algeria seems an appropriate place to begin the process of assessment. This chapter expands on his analysis of the immediate postcolonial period (dealt with in Chapter Seven) using his dialectical analysis, his three stages of culture providing a template for analysing cultural processes in contemporary Algeria.

The particular context of Fanon’s work was a situation of colonial oppression by the French with an African focus. The ‘postcolonial’ situation is different in that national claims do not have to be established in the face of an occupying power, which was Fanon’s major concern. Fanon warned of the rise of a group within the population, namely the ‘native’ bourgeoisie, who would emerge as oppressors after the French. The situation of oppression has indeed re-emerged and many have turned to violence as a solution. In many ways the economic situation of the mass of the population is the same as under the French and in social division lies the seed of a new Manichean situation like the one Fanon describes in Wretched of the Earth.

In his discussion of culture Fanon describes the search for a ‘national’ culture and it is this struggle, not so much now over the existence but over the meaning of Algerian identity, that is contested.

On one side is a Francophone ruling elite occupying the same position as the former colonialists drawing on Islam, socialism and the revolution as legitimating mechanisms. They see themselves as modern and secular, in relation to public life. When these mechanisms fail they have readily drawn on the military to secure their position. On the other side is another 'species' of human being, the 'fundamentalist'. In this kind of Manichean situation Fanon described three responses. The first is assimilation of the culture of the occupying power, in the pre-independence stage this lead to explicit demands for assimilation by the French and the widespread adoption of French as the 'official' language by the new ruling class. The second is a process of immersion in the traditional Islamic culture but cut off from the people, based on the past and the old Islamic civilisations. Finally there is a 'fighting phase'. Instead of being absorbed by the people and valorising them, the intellectual emerges as 'awakener[s] of the people' (Fanon 1965b: 179).

In the discussion of Wretched of the Earth it will be recalled that Fanon describes the colonial situation as Manichean and it, and by extension other situations of oppression, as a form of violence. It is easy to see that the current crisis in Algeria is Manichean. Once again the national territory is divided, the elite rules by day and the resistance by night. The military elite looks to the West, particularly France, as its point of identification seeing their role as secular 'defenders of democracy.' The Islamists look to the East, to Iran and Afghanistan, seeing themselves as religious 'defenders of freedom'. Like the French the military are seen as foreigners - they speak French and live an affluent lifestyle. Initially the violence is directed inwards - crime increases, drug use rises but then this almost intolerable situation is crystallised around some act of repression that pushes the oppressed person beyond the point of no return. In Black October, the repression instead of cowering the population drove consciousness forward, the military losing any legitimacy it had and this paved the way for what was to follow. The regime attempted to create legitimacy based on an electoral democratic process but when the result was incorrect the military resorted to direct force.

Lacking any means of assimilation inside the oppressed groups leaders emerge that begin a search for a mechanism of resistance, lacking economic and coercive means they begin a search not so much for a national culture this time but for a cultural means of resistance. There are attempts to compromise but when these are rebuffed there is a reaction, a retreat into the past. They draw on the great Islamic civilisations of the past that is in stark contrast to the present reality and this is the starting point for resistance. The Manichean retreat is most evident in the GIA, they are fighting to establish not so much an Algerian tradition as an Islamic one. They hearken back to the early days of Islam and attempt to impose ancient rule and customs onto present day reality, with shocking and reactionary results. They try to establish a Caliphate based on a pan-Islamic *umma* [community]. They condemn the 'Western' morality of the elite but engage in enforced prostitution and rape.

Though each side had its conciliators the Manichean divide opened up with each side moving further and further into violence. The FLN has its version of the past. They pose as guardians of the revolution and as modernisers. Like the colonialist power they accuse the Islamists of wanting to take the country back to the Middle Ages. It is crucial to challenge this and so the Islamists advance not just national but international claims, for the original FLN it was socialist internationalism, for the Islamists it takes the form of the Islamic *umma*. The FIS describes the War of Independence as usurped by 'ex-officers of the French army'.

Fanon argues that eventually the 'wretched' turn to violence as a solution and in the colonial context he thought that this was a good thing. Armed struggle was the way to liberation and the

spontaneous upsurge of the people sufficiently directed against the French was what was required.¹³ In Algeria there is a colonial history of resorting to violence as a solution. The *moudjahid* [guerilla] is an important symbol in Algeria representing armed struggle as an honourable path to social justice (Stone 1997: 179).¹⁴ As the situation polarised any aspect of life that was associated with the elite came to be rejected - the education system, alcohol, 'modernised' women. There was a retreat into a created past. The veil, with its origins outside Algeria made a resurgence as it did in response to the French. Islam, not the Sufi variety that was dominant until the 1930s, but a rigorous theocratic variety was called into service as a rallying point against the regime. In its defence the regime alternated between defending its right to interpret Islam and defending traditions of democracy and liberalism, even if this required the banning of elections and use of torture, much as the French 'civilising project' had done.

Fanon warned that while such a move into the past might be necessary it is a blind alley politically as 'every culture is first and foremost national' (1965b: 173-4). While Muslims may face a certain commonality as oppressed by the Western imperialism, they also have different histories.

Nevertheless, the mosques serve as a vehicle of protest. Initially this process is a recovery of a dead past, a nostalgic look back but it is the beginning of a political language. Fighting on the cultural front alone is not enough. The French ignored Islamic culture while the new nationalist ruling class has made some effort to pay it due regard, at the same time explaining that the 'traditionalists' do not really understand Islam. When the struggle is taken up by the people the situation begins to change. As Fanon (1965b: 180) points out 'custom is always the deterioration of culture' but in the final stage 'the significance of tradition changes'.

History and tradition are re-worked to deal with the new reality around which the popular will can crystallise. Writing in the colonial context Fanon describes this process as revolutionary as it is a necessary step in overthrowing colonialism. Dominant groups claim that if they left the country would fall into barbarism. Thus the rediscovery of the former culture is a necessity for any program (1965b: 171). But this is not sufficient, the population can be rallied against oppression without this leading to their liberation. It is at this point that some of Fanon's limitations become evident. While there may be 'no other fight for culture that can develop apart from popular struggle' (Fanon 1965b: 188) it does not follow that such a struggle is progressive. Part of the limitation of Fanon's work was that though he warned of the dangers of the native bourgeoisie, he saw the struggle for the nation as unifying the 'people'. This is a danger in a term like 'culture' it tends to elide the question 'whose culture?' In Algeria there is an Islamic resistance that does have some popular support (as does the military) but the vast bulk of people are excluded from civic life (especially women). The peasants are not the force now that they were in Fanon's time but the *lumpenproletariat* - the young urban unemployed are marginalised or draw into reactionary politics. The regime's attempts to control religious expression by forbidding the use of mosques for political purposes provoked a reaction. While it necessary to challenge the falsification of the past by the ruling class and to be involved in popular struggles to change it, Algeria shows what a 'blind alley' a retreatist response can be. At the present stage there is no national culture in Algeria.

¹³ He saw it as liberating at an individual level though aware that it was also psychologically damaging. This shall be discussed in Chapter Fifteen.

¹⁴ The next section shall examine the importance of this symbol in relation to women.

Fanon argues that:

[A] national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence (1965b: 188).

All that there is, in the public voices that speak for Algeria, is an 'abstract populism.' This draws on a set of traditions that serve the interest of various petty-bourgeois leaders of different parties but are not expressions of a popular culture.

While Arab countries may have a common destiny, Fanon would argue, their Islamic cultures do not. They have a common oppression by imperialism, but following Fanon, it would be a mistake to try and set up Islamic republics. Fanon pointed out that many politicians would speak on 'cultural' solidarity and the oneness of Black cultures but vote against Algeria in the United Nations. Likewise in Algeria today, both sides of the Manichean divide make their claims in terms of culture and identity, not in terms of material interests. Issues like Berber rights and woman's rights ally one with the 'democratic' pole of the political spectrum in Algeria. This pole cancels elections to defend democracy and has never been a promoter of Berber rights (although many of the elite proportionally are of Berber origin) or of women's rights as evidenced in their support of the Family Code.

The retreat into tradition is seen by the ruling class as resistance, but such a retreat cannot build a new culture - material poverty and cultural poverty are all that remains. The negation of culture breeds hostility as the population rises to combativity, national consciousness returns albeit dimly (Fanon 1965b: 192). Being an Arab and Algerian takes on a new sense. Appeals stop addressing the oppressor and begin addressing natives. At the level of oral tradition, the stories of the people are taken up and re-worked. No longer simply stories of the past, the traditions come to life and the communities sit and listen. Abd al-Qadir emerges not as a distant cousin of the real nationalists but as the father of the real nation. Universities take his name. Those who presently claim to represent the nation (ie the FLN or the military) are seen as usurpers of a tradition of resistance that began a century before they came on the scene.

Fanon sees the emergence of nationalism as progressive though he warns of the dangers of 'spontaneity'. When he raises the key question 'what are the relations between struggle and culture?' his answer is that.

The conscious and organised undertaking by a colonised people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists (1965b: 197).

While this is true in the context of a struggle against the French it is also the case that the 'nation' is contested but not just by the French. In the present context (nor in the earlier one as Fanon's warnings have made clear) it is not enough to 're-establish the sovereignty of the nation' without knowing the kinds of social relations that will exist afterwards. None of the parties in Algeria seem interested in spelling these out because they would lose 'popular' support. Fanon argues that the struggle for freedom aims at a new set of social relations that changes the form and content of the culture. True enough, but it does not follow that 'after the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man' (Fanon 1965b: 197). While colonialism may have gone, in the broad sense there was still a ruling class and a mass of

people that were ‘colonised.’ Fanon (1965b: 199) defends the ‘national phase of consciousness’ as a preliminary to more universal forms arguing that ‘It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the only source of all culture.’

While it is true that this *may* be the case it is important to recognise that the claims to the nation are contested by different classes and that it is in this contest that liberation must be sought. Fanon’s analysis of three stages of cultural resistance is illuminating in showing cultural responses to oppression and the limits of such responses. In contemporary Algeria there is among the mass of events little public evidence of a genuine fighting stage. While the Rome Accords were something of a milestone it is the need for a fighting stage in which the culture becomes more than customs and a genuine popular struggle crystallised. There are some trace of this in the public discourse in the FIS Parliamentary Delegation Abroad has released documents detailing the FIS position on the current crisis.¹⁵ The analysis offered here examines the ways in which the FIS casts Algerian history and contrasts it with the GIA’s retreat into the idea of an Islamic Caliphate.¹⁶

For the FIS the French invasion marks an interruption into a process of high Islamic culture that had spread across North Africa. The French aimed to destroy not just the people but the ‘ultimate target’ was the Islamic identity of Algerians:

The Algerian ‘became’ European and his mosques were converted to churches. The French colonialist attempted to de-establish Islam, destroyed public institutions and replaced Islamic Law with colonial ones. In the midst of these difficult times, North African Muslims never surrendered. In Algeria, Ameer Abd-Elkader, Sheikh El-Mokrani, Sheikh Bou Amama, and other Muslim scholars waged a continuous armed struggle against the French oppressors.

Apart from the struggles of Abd al-Qadir the FIS focus on the role of Islam in cultural resistance and in the birth of nationalism under Ibn Badis in the 1930s. They see his role of preserving the true Islamic personality as complementary to the nationalist movement. They note that the war was fought by the FLN to restore the ‘Algerian independent state within the framework of the Islamic principles’. However, they go on that after independence:

a military group, ex-officers of the French army who joint the war of liberation just before its end, took over and imposed socialism and one party rule. The authoritarian rulers consolidated their power by physically eliminating anyone opposed to their rule. Under the successive military regimes, Algerians experienced religious, social, as well as economic hardship.

This group has bankrupted the country and lives as a privileged caste of five percent of the population who earns 45 percent of national income. Thus the FIS see the current struggle as a fight for ‘the right of the Algerian people to get back their Islamic State, a State of Law and Justice, lost to the French colonialism more than 160 years ago.’ Their demands are placed in the context of the declaration of the War of Independence. This declaration ‘stipulates the restoration of the Algerian State, sovereign, democratic and social in the framework of the principles of Islam.’

¹⁵ These documents are available on FIS webpage (at <http://www.fisalgeria.org/>) see Appendix One.

¹⁶ The assimilationist stage is enacted by those in a position to learn French and find work in the civil or military bureaucracy.

The constitutive elements of the Algerian personality are Islam, Arabism, and Amazighism¹⁷ [Berberism]. The statement goes on that ‘the culture and the two languages contributing to the development of this personality must be promoted without any exclusion or marginalisation.’ This recognition of Berber ethnicity is a new development but other than a more consistent Islamic focus and a critique of the FLN as ‘usurpers’ there is not much to distinguish the religious nationalism of the FIS from that of the FLN. The consequences of ignoring Fanon’s warnings about the need to develop beyond national consciousness are illustrated in the current crisis. The need to develop a ‘social and political consciousness’ (1965b: 161) and a political program that serves the needs of the majority of ‘wretched’ Algerians are still a long way off.

The Gendering of the Three Cultural Responses

This section focuses on the role of gender in the current crisis in Algeria. The FLN did lip service to women’s rights and the process of modernising the country did bring changes. However, the revolution proved a mixed blessing for women. Millions received an education for the first time and there were jobs for some 200 000. Nevertheless, women are still treated as minors and Islamism is increasingly able to draw on the Muslim mandate to reinforce patriarchy. In many respects this is a product of the unresolved issues at the end of the national struggle. The current conflict has its origins in the attempt to create a modern ‘socialist’ state and to resurrect a culture, denigrated by the French, that was essentially Arab and Islamic. As is now clear the contradictions that emerged in trying to carrying out this project widened the gulf between the elites and the masses, each side seeing the other as a threat, with women as the victims of this tension and a symbol to be fought over. As Knauss (1987: 96) remarked ‘the root of women’s oppression in Algeria is not so much Arabo-Islamic values as such. It is the fact that Algerian women are required to be the custodians of those values.’ In addition they are unable to participate as citizens in the very nation whose values they are supposed to embody.

Algerian feminists like many other nationalists were understandably disappointed at the outcome of the struggle. This disappointment is well documented in the work of Bouatta (1994) who focuses on the experiences of the *moudjahidates*. She notes that women’s participation in the struggle was not premised on a ‘feminist’ agenda, nor was the FLN behind such an agenda, nevertheless, the *moudjahidates* serve as a reminder that women do struggle and thus serve to counter the Islamist push to exclude women.

Helie-Lucas’ (1987) analysis of the effects of the nationalist struggle is very pessimistic. Her account reflects the disappointment not just of the aftermath of the war of national liberation but also of the failure to defeat the new Family Code in the face of the rising tide of Islamism. She argues that that women’s role in the war was largely symbolic. While there is some truth in this she underestimates the importance of such symbolism. There is a strong tradition of female resistance in Algeria. Apart from the *moudjahidates*, the warrior queen Kahina and Zaynab Lalla who ran the Rahmaniyya Sufi order in the 1890s are honoured, though at present it is the safety of woman that is prime focus.

¹⁷ ‘*Amazigh*’ is the name of the unwritten language of the indigenous people of Algeria, who now form a linguistic community based on the language. Comprising about 30% of the population they are generally referred to as Berbers or Kabyles (the latter being the name of one of the large Berber clans).

A more recent analysis from Doria Cherifati-Merabtine (1994) pursues a more optimistic history of Algerian women's liberation. She opens with the key question of effect of the war of national liberation on women. She notes its character as a mass event that aroused global admiration and asks whether it is the case that the FLN simply used women without considering them as agents. She seeks to locate the effect of the war not simply in the light of the optimism of the 1960s but of the concrete needs of the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism in the 1990s.

In this context Cherifati-Merabtine (1994: 41) argues that the answer is not so straightforward. Islamism seeks to abandon references to the war of national liberation and in particular the important symbol of the *moudjahidat* - the female freedom fighter. This image has become a crucial site of struggle in forging a new public identity for women and is based on the historical experience of women in struggle. Though she does not refer to Fanon there is a clear parallel with his project. Both Fanon and Cherifati-Merabtine are concerned about liberation and the importance here of symbolism and history in building a fighting culture.

Traditional patriarchy was undermined by colonialism and in reaction women took on the function of protecting the biological and symbolic reproduction of the community. The key effects being a resurgence of veiling and a stricter separation of the public and private spheres. Fanon also noted the effect of the veiled woman on the colonial imaginary as the 'matriarchal essence' of the society, a sexualised image that needed to be conquered for assimilation to take place. The 'Algerian women' represented a traditional backwardness at the heart of Muslim society that has to be modernised.

Cherifati-Merabtine challenges the traditional image of Algerian women as silent and passive. She provides an outline of a women's history. With the rise of colonial capitalism, trapped by illiteracy and unemployment women became day workers or wives of unemployed husbands, or husbands who had immigrated to France to work. In 1954 there were more than 37 000 Muslim working women, most of them domestic housekeepers. A smaller group of 'factory girls' worked in the small workshops that were regarded as 'lost places'. This led Mohammed Dib to comment that 'the seclusion of Muslim women is a myth' (Cherifati-Merabtine 1994: 44) or as Fanon put it 'Algeria is not a womanless society' (1965a: 67). In factory work or in domestic service women lived with a series of contradictions moving from the poor conditions of Muslim districts to the wealth of the European ones, accepted by neither. Thus Fanon's Manichean division of colonial society can be seen as gendered.

The consensus view on the role of women in the War of Independence is that of Amrane who carried out the survey work cited in Chapter Seven. She states that 'the armed woman combatant was certainly not a reality, but rather a myth, perhaps based on a few individual cases which struck the popular imagination' (Cherifati-Merabtine 1994: 47). Even so *moudjahidates* in other roles carried out tasks at the expense of their lives. The small number of urban activists inspired others and showed by example that women could play an active role. In effect the war saw women conquer public space for themselves as Fanon richly described. They did this 'instinctively' and without role models (1965a: 50).

It is important to note, as Cherifati-Merabtine points out, that those women who went unveiled for the purpose of the struggle did not do so because unveiling per se was liberating or a revolutionary principle. In and of itself it did not indicate a political stand on the issue of women's liberation. But it did mean that the young *fidayat* [urban guerilla] 'did not owe her emancipation to the coloniser; she owed it to her commitment'.

Re-affirming Fanon's argument Cherifati-Merabtine (1994: 48) continues:

This woman became an individual thanks to the perilous mission she had chosen, which led her to suffer imprisonment and repression. For this group of militants, this double reality diminished the significance of the veil when it became an element of differentiation, opposition, and struggle for the great majority of women. The veil became a symbol. Its *ritualisation* divested the militants of anonymity. They became subjects of history.

No women occupied leadership positions in the FLN or *Algerian Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN)*. Although the leadership was forced to mobilise women in the struggle this did not stem from a political commitment to women's liberation. Even though the Soumman Charter glorifies 'the exalted revolutionary courage of the girls and women, the wives and the mothers, of our sister *moudjahidates*, who actively participated and, occasionally with weapons in hands, sacrificed themselves in struggle for the liberation of the homeland' there is no specific commitment regarding women (Cherifati-Merabtine 1994: 50).

Nevertheless, young women acted in accordance with such pronouncements. Fanon makes clear that women responded vigorously to the FLN call for support. They found heroines in the traditions of the pre-colonial period and refused to have relationships with non-militant men. This refusal of relations is read by Cherifati-Merabtine (1994: 50) as a reconfiguration of the national honour of Woman-Algeria as resistance and a reclaiming of the history of women's struggles. The war provided a basis for the construction of a new image of women. The traditional role of supporting men was given a new meaning in supporting men in struggle and created a new status for women. Thus the traditional image began to break down and be replaced with a *historically legitimate* new image of women. This developed out of the traditional role of women and in opposition to the coloniser.

In the post-war years thousands committed themselves to building a new future out of the wreckage. War widows were the first to suffer, many were forced to become domestic servants. Having supported their husbands and sons (now martyrs) in the struggle they now found themselves forced to provide for their family due to inadequate government support. There was a great revolution in education for women even if only a few reached the professional level. The image of the heroines in the war legitimated women's participation in the public sphere and in development of the country but it ran into contradictions when the state was called on to legislate a Family Code. The traditional and modern image of women and the family were in conflict resulting in a Family Code that set out secular tasks for women but located male-female relations in the patriarchal mode. The constitution established civil rights for women but these have been eroded with the rise of Islam with the *Sharia* expected to govern private and public spheres.

In the 1950s there was a group of mainly middle-class women who assimilated French values. Beyond this group there were women prepared to use the 'French' legal system to obtain a better deal than the one they had under Algerian patriarchy. This group saw veiled women as victims and unveiling as modern and liberating. On the other side of the Manichean divide stood those in reaction to the French, the nationalists who retreated into a 'cult of the veil.' Women here were seen, and saw themselves, as guardians of tradition and custodians of the nation, even if this was felt ambivalently given the weight of traditional limitations that went with it. Fanon describes how there emerged, at least among a small group of women, a fighting culture that rejected the idea of women as passive and the veil as a static custom. They sought to re-work the tradition as a means of self-liberation forging in the process the symbol of the *moudjahidat*. It was this process that

Fanon tried to capture in 'Algeria Unveiled'. In retrospect, he was too optimistic but the movement's symbolic legacy lives on.

By the 1990s another Manichean situation had emerged between the moribund FLN urban elite, who had increased work and educational opportunities but had led the country into crisis. The symbol of the *moudjahidat* provided a rallying point for women to improve their social standing, although this was very difficult given the weight of forces against them. Chief among these was the Islamist reaction which rejected the modernised, Western elite and sought a return to Islamic values. They called for women to be re-veiled and excluded from education. Importantly they have been forced to take up the symbol of the *moudjahidat* trying to recast it as the custodian of Islamic tradition using examples from elsewhere in the Islamic world. At present the struggle for women's liberation centres on the meaning of this symbol and the progressive forces capacity to reclaim its revolutionary potential.

The rising women's movement that emerged to contest the Family Code in the 1980s drew the *moudjahidates* back into the struggle after a long absence. As leaders the *moudjahidates* embodied the new public role of women and drew heavily on female martyrs outside the FLN and female heroines of the past to legitimate the project. In response the Islamists developed an alternative model of women and have created the image based on the Afghan *moudjahidat*. Moghadam (1994) points out that this image does not have the historical basis as in Algeria but is mythological. It is, nevertheless, crucial in the Algerian context as so many of the radical Islamists were connected to the Afghan struggle against the Soviet Union.

The Afghan *moudjahidat* is a 'sister in Islam', a fighter but in the traditional roles of nurse and religious teacher. This had required a depreciation in Islamic discourse of the war of national liberation such that 'modern' women and the Algerian *moudjahidates* image are re-positioned as 'neo-colonialist' in their attempts to unveil women. Islamists argue that the *moudjahidates* are westernisers since Islam already gave women their rights, thus the *moudjahidates* are merely seeking rights claimed by women in the 'corrupt' West. This association with modernism undermines the *moudjahidat* model. Alternative models too are positioned as anti-Islam. By occluding history and not attacking the *moudjahidates* directly Islamists have created a counter model. The *moudjahidat* model, itself a reworking of the *moudjahidat* herself, now represents a 'female specificity in line with the egalitarian claim and with universality'. The Islamist model represents 'a refusal of otherness in its national and universal dimensions' (Cherifati-Merabtime 1994: 54)

It is one of the contradictions of modern Algeria that women in the Islamic movement are called on to publicly protest and participate in mass demonstrations despite their reliance on an discourse that positions women as belonging in the private sphere, a common contradiction faced by right-wing women. In recent years it has been Islamist actors who have occupied the streets with spectacular actions centred on the mosques. Here is a movement that challenges the status quo from the right and at its centre is the symbol of the Muslim woman. Women are once again called to conquer public space with a highly ambiguous agenda.

In the debate over women's right to vote which was denied in the electoral redrafting (men were allowed to cast votes for their female kin) the modernist women's movement demanded the repeal of the article. The Islamist trend argues that women should not occupy positions of power or use the vote. Many women support women's right to vote but assert that they prefer to occupy positions that allow them to teach and leave the leadership to men. This gives rise to a range of contradictions. Women are expected to be educated and to maintain their religious calling. Islamist

women identify with 'Mohammedan' female role models which portray women as passive, even though the Prophet's companions were knowledgeable and participated in the *jihad*. If they are to pursue the study of the Qu'ran, reading classical Arabic requires that women receive a better education which the Islamists would deny them (Cherifati-Merabtine 1994: 58). Increasingly visible Islamist women seek to diminish the visibility of women and merge society with the *Sharia*. On the modernist side women see gender as an issue that requires a reform project. These modernist women, the majority of whom are older university-educated women, face a different set of contradictions. Seen as Westernisers (and cultural traitors) by the Islamists they are also at odds with the nationalists (and socialists) who deny the specificity of women's issues.

The assertion of the women-individual in current climate is very problematic in many respects. It challenges patriarchy via the visibility of women. By weakening men's position it threatens to accede to greater symbolic and political power. It is important to note that positioning oneself as 'modern' is not necessarily to place oneself outside the Muslim tradition. The wives of the Prophet are a reference point for both sides. On the Islamist side they cross over - supporting the modern demands of the right to work and education. This complex interaction is essentially denied by Islamists who seek a return to pure authentic tradition, which it turns out, is very different from traditional society.

This analysis makes clear that the current democratic movement must take a clear position on the position of women. Unlike in the past a women's project exists in Algeria and should serve as the basis to redefine power relations both in the economic and symbolic realms. In relation to Fanon while he may be fairly criticised for underestimating the influence of Islam and overplaying the strength of a small trend in the national liberation movement his analysis in fact highlights the role of women as actors and the need for self-liberation. Its focus on the symbolic importance of the veil has also been useful in thinking about the current struggle in Algeria and the ways in which the symbol of the *moudjahidat* is now at stake in the struggle.

Summary

Fanon's observations about the dynamics of a Manichean situation giving rise to a process of change are still relevant. The Manichean divide is now between a Francophone elite and a radical Islamic populism. The present cultural battle is centred on a struggle over the meaning of the past. Though Fanon saw the 'retreat' stage as progressive in the context of the War of Independence it is not necessarily the case. It is Cabral who makes it clear that the 'retreat' stage is only important if it leads to the petty bourgeoisie identifying with the struggle of the masses. It is difficult to see this in relation to the 'retreatist' opposition of the Islamists. Likewise Fanon advocated violence as a means of struggle. Again in this context it is hard to see violence as liberating, though Fanon assumed that it after the spontaneous outburst it would be properly directed. Subjectively it may be the case that radical Islamists feel liberated when engaged in such violence, whether they really are is another matter. This shall be discussed in Chapter Fifteen.

In a sense the women's struggle is a microcosm of the wider struggle. While sympathetic to Fanon, Algerian feminists' chief response to him is that his nationalism created a myth that the national liberation struggle would lead to women's liberation. While he certainly has his limitations his analysis remains useful in at least two respects. Firstly Fanon's analysis interrogated the specifics of women's oppression but was not women-centred; he seeks the abolition of sexism as part of bringing about human freedom, of moving women (and men) from being objects to subjects of history. Secondly his idea of three cultural stages can chart a course through a complex situation

and identify resources for a post-nationalist feminism, a fighting culture with the *moudjahidat* as a symbol.