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EMANCIPATION THROUGH SECULARIZATION: FRENCH FEMINIST VIEWS OF MUSLIM WOMEN'S CONDITION IN INTERWAR ALGERIA

Sara L. Kimble

Cet article examine la condition des musulmanes algériennes telle que vue par des féministes françaises entre les deux guerres mondiales. Une série de colloques nationaux et internationaux dans la région méditerranéenne analysa les limitations imposées sur les filles et les femmes musulmanes par la tradition patriarcale et s'adressa au gouvernement pour demander des réformes. Cet article démontre que ces féministes françaises approuvaient la « mission civilisatrice » de la France et conseillaient des mesures visant la modernisation, « le progrès » et la laïcité en Algérie. Alors que ces féministes orientalistes critiquaient le Code Civil de 1804 comme une source de l'inégalité des femmes françaises, elles préconisaient son imposition en Algérie pour supplanter les vestiges du droit islamique. Les tentatives de coopération entre les féministes de France et leurs interlocutrices algériennes furent gênées par des tensions irrécyclables entre laïcité et religiosité.

French feminists in the interwar period were turning their attention to the colonies with a new interest in cooperating with Algerian *évolués* or concerned *colons* to encourage social and political reform. Women's rights proponents within the preeminent liberal organizations sought out their counterparts in Algeria to address the inequalities faced by girls and women, and to reenergize the suffrage movement. The question of how to expand women's rights and opportunities in the colonies was central at the 1931 États généraux du féminisme in Paris, the 1932 Union française pour le suffrage des femmes meeting in Constantine, and

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the 1935 Alliance internationale des femmes conference in Istanbul. Women's discussions at these conferences and in the press point towards their collective conclusion that the majority of Algerians faced urgent problems associated with illiteracy, poverty, and legal inferiority. This present study will attempt to show that from the point of view of French feminists, the problem of Arab and Berber women's inferior status was seen as a consequence of the colonial government's failure to fully apply French law. These feminists, influenced by imperialist discourse, supported colonialism within a republican framework because they believed it was the most efficient way to bring individual rights to Algerians. To ameliorate conditions in Algeria, they proposed "modernization" based on a French model in the areas of citizenship and naturalization, literacy and education, secularity and religiosity.

The interwar period as a whole witnessed a marked increase in interest in colonialism among the French as a result of many factors, including the service by colonial soldiers in the First World War, the importance of colonial workers in postwar reconstruction, the Rif War (1919–26), and an emphasis on colonial themes in French culture. For millions of visitors, the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in the Bois de Vincennes showcased the diversity of the French overseas empire. Simultaneously, difficult questions were posed to all Europeans by the rise of nationalism in colonial states. In France, the interwar years were also a period of renewed agitation by suffrage rights activists who hoped to achieve political equality. As Women's rights activists contemplated the French Empire, they concluded that cooperating with like-minded Algerians might benefit them all. Cooperation, however, was an elusive goal as political, cultural, and religious differences kept these groups from fully understanding each other. The feminist movement in Algeria in the early twentieth century had difficulty developing among Arab and Berber women, as they faced extraordinary odds when they challenged traditional gender roles. Peter Knauss argues that Arab and Berber women who embraced feminism risked social exclusion, the dissolution of the family, accusations of betrayal, and threats of permanent ostracism.¹ Moreover, the Muslim *évolués* were wary about changes to gender roles, and prioritized nationalist issues.

During the 1920s and 1930s, feminists in the *métropole* were most likely to learn about the conditions of indigenous women in Algeria from academic studies, novels, the mainstream press and radio, or from direct experience as tourists. Closely connected to the social world of Parisian feminists was the prolific French Algerian writer Marie Bugéja, the wife of

a colonial administrator and a colonial apologist. In her lectures and publications, she underscored the deprivation in the Berber community, whose members suffered disproportionately from poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. Her most influential exposé on the condition of women in the Maghreb was *Nos soeurs musulmanes* (1921), which pivoted on the idea that women had “failed to modernize.” She characterized *Maghrébines* as “content” to live as uncultured, passive victims of their isolation within the traditional patriarchal family.² These ideas were widely publicized in the French women’s press—including the weekly *La Française*, edited by Cécile Brunshvicg, and the monthly *Le Droit des Femmes*, directed by lawyer Maria Vérone. *Nos soeurs musulmanes* was singularly important as a call to action and prompted a flood of praise from women, some of which was hyperbolic: a student called her a “prophetess,” and another anointed her a “messiah” for Muslim women.³ Bugéja’s rhetoric also functioned as a clarion call, urging women to join women’s rights organizations in Algeria, such as the Union française pour le suffrage des femmes (UFSF). She prompted bourgeois philanthropists to consider the necessity of building more girls’ schools, textile workshops, and hospitals in Algeria. Her work was reinforced by the more sympathetic sociologist Mathéa Gaudry, who wrote an intimate study of rural women’s lives entitled *La femme chaouia de l’Aurès* (1928).

The works of popular novelists Elissa Rhais, Lucienne Favre, and Isabelle Eberhardt reinforced stereotypes held by their readers about the separate spheres for men and women in the colonial context. Rhais wrote under a false claim of authenticity, as she was Jewish, but reinvented herself as a Muslim who had escaped the harem. Under this guise, she wrote sensational fiction that emphasized elements of the exotic, sensual, and violent in Algerian society while obscuring the colonial conflicts, and condemning intermarriage between French and Arabs.⁴ In 1897, at the age of 20, Eberhardt moved to Algeria, lived as a nomad, converted to Islam, and wrote about the clash of cultures. Her representations of Muslim women were sympathetic, though she emphasized their victimization at the hands of men and employed the Orientalist rhetoric of her time.⁵ The nature of girls’ and women’s inequality under Berber and Islamic traditions, filtered through the lens of European women, became increasingly familiar to the literate, politically conscious women in France.

French law was theoretically applied in Algeria, except to matters falling under personal status, including marriage, filiation, and inheritance.⁶ The fact that French colonial Algeria contained three judicial

traditions with separate jurisdictions seemed to exacerbate women's inequalities. Islamic Shari'a canon law courts served the Muslim community, Kabyle courts for the Berbers existed in the rural southeast, and French civil law was primarily applied in large towns. Under Shari'a, fathers maintained guardianship of their children, including the right to contract their minor male or female children and adult daughters into compulsory marriages, a practice called *djebr*. Islamic polygamous marriages permitted a maximum of four wives per husband. Once married, women owed obedience to their husbands in private and social life. Although a couple might seek divorce proceedings in court, repudiation through extrajudicial procedure was more commonly practiced. A rejected wife was required to return to her family, and the bride price reimbursed. In Islamic law, women could inherit, own property, and hold property in common in a marriage, though inheritance rights privileged patrilineal kin, and daughters were eligible for a third of a legal share. In the courtroom, women could testify before a *qadi*, though the value of a woman's testimony was half of a man's.

In Berber society, patriarchal restraints and the code of politeness (*hachouma*) necessitated female reserve and conformity to convention under threat of familial repudiation. Marriage among the Kabyles was arranged to strengthen kinship and economic security. Matches could be arranged by women, but the male head of the family authorized the exchanges of goods and people. A marriage payment given by the father to the groom was an essential element of the transaction in real and symbolic terms.⁷ Polygamy was permissible, but with no clear limit on the number of wives. Girls were often married at young ages in spite of French disapproval, prompting the government in 1930 to require Berber communities to respect 15 as the minimum marriage age.⁸ Inheritance among the Kabyles exclusively benefited male heirs, partly to preserve land holdings where arable land was limited. Both Islamic and French law had stronger bases than Kabyle customs for granting respect to women as individuals. The effort to impose Islamic law in Berber regions in the eighteenth century was rebuffed, and French law had fared little better.⁹

Controversies about the place of women in society evoked pointed questions about the regulation of marriage. In Islamic law, marriage took place in two stages: first with the fixing of the *sadaq* or dowry before marriage, and then with the celebration of marriage itself, which was supposed to occur only once both bride and groom had reached maturity. Nevertheless, marriages were arranged with minor girls and older men,

though the consummation of such a marriage was prohibited by Islamic law. Nevertheless, abuses did occur, and under pressure from French authorities during early colonization, Muslim legislators issued a recommendation in 1856 setting the minimum age for marriage as 15 for women and 17 for men. Local judges, informed of this decision by Governor-General Randon's circular the following year, were responsible for preventing marriages of those under the legal age.¹⁰ Media attention to child marriages during the belle époque prompted an outcry for government action.

Child marriage outraged radical feminist and journalist Hubertine Auclert when she lived in Algeria from 1888 to 1892. She publicized the legal and social disadvantages confronting Muslim women in Algérie française in the newspapers *La Citoyenne* and *Le Radical Algérien*, and in a book, *Les femmes arabes en Algérie* (1900). She blamed colonial and French authorities for their complicity in the conditioned subordination of women living under Berber and Islamic laws.¹¹ She was appalled to learn that colonial authorities refused to extend the same rights and opportunities to Algerians that were available in France. She petitioned the French government to apply the Civil Code to the colonial territories to provide children with primary education, workers with employment protection, and adults with civil marriage and divorce rights.¹²

Child marriage was also a lightning-rod issue in the legal community and in the press. In 1898 lawyer Alphonse Étienne lectured on "Le Droit de 'Djebr' et le mariage des impubères chez les musulmans en Algérie" to an audience of lawyers and judges in Algiers to prompt them to take action.¹³ Continuing in Auclert's tradition of protest, Maria Vérone, the most influential female lawyer in France and president of the vivacious rights organization the Ligue française du droit des femmes (LFDFF), urged the readers of her newspaper *Le Droit des Femmes* to join a letter-writing campaign in 1912 to stop French toleration of underage marriage in Algeria. In a case known as the "Zouina Affair," a prepubescent girl had been married off to a much older man according to her father's wishes and right of *djebr*. Publicizing this *cause célèbre*, Vérone argued that legal professionals and colonial administrators were obligated to stop marriages of girls under age 15 and to require spousal consent, acts which mirrored French practice. For Vérone, this child-bride case exemplified the urgent necessity of the application of French jurisprudence and the establishment of more courts.¹⁴ When traveling among the Mozabites in the mid-1930s, UFSF vice president Alice La Mazière reported that in spite of the Islamic

prohibition on child marriages, she met girls who had been married off before puberty and had children when still very young.¹⁵

The French Civil Code shared the principle of married women's inequality with the Shari'a and Berber legal traditions. Civil Code article 213 defined the relations between spouses as unequal yet reciprocal, where wives owed obedience to their husbands in exchange for protection. The Code also granted the husband tremendous legal authority over the person of his wife and their children, absolute authority in domestic matters, and the right to deny wives the opportunity to work, and it obligated wives to assume their husbands' nationality.¹⁶ Only in 1907 had married women been granted property rights over their own earned income, a result of activism by Anglo-French activist Jeanne Schmahl, lawyer Jeanne Chauvin, and others at *L'Avant-Courrière*.¹⁷

Native Algerians understood the power of legal discrimination. The infamous 1881 Code indigénat prevented most Algerians from enjoying equality under the law or equal citizenship, which was the birthright of those born under the Rights of Man regime. This special code gave the colonial administration extraordinary powers to extract unique fines and imprison Algerians without trial in the interests of suppressing resistance to colonization.¹⁸ European colonists generally supported strict naturalization requirements and other barriers to integration, a position that clashed with the assimilation approach advocated by many Solidarist leaders of the Third Republic. Support for special naturalization that would leave Muslim customs intact gained ground among Radicals and Socialists, including Georges Clemenceau, Charles Dumas, and members of the *Libre pensée*. This strategy was also endorsed by the former governor-general of the colonies Henri de Lamothe, Governor-General Jonnart, law professor and president of the Alliance franco-indigène Charles Gide, and the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*. Since 1911, Paul Boudarie, a French publicist, favored "demi-naturalization" that would have extend suffrage rights to Muslims and simultaneously permitted them to keep their personal status. These French reformers looked to the Senegalese model, where men in *communes de plein exercice* had been granted citizenship without requiring the abandonment of their Muslim customs since 1916. Liberal naturalization was a means to achieve peaceful coexistence of culturally distinct populations and encourage assimilation among the elite.¹⁹

Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and Governor-General Charles Jonnart catalyzed reforms to expand Algerians' access to French rights. The Jonnart Law of 1919 incorporated special naturalization and enfranchised

many Arab and Berber men, except the rural and urban poor without property. The law permitted unmarried men and those married to a single wife, with a stable residency of at least two years, to apply for full citizenship rights. One of the primary benefits of naturalization was improved job opportunities in civil service, and the law appealed to those who had studied in French schools with ambitions as bureaucrats or liberal professionals.²⁰ Naturalization, however, required religious abjuration, and few were willing to reject so much for French citizenship.

Although many individual feminists were politically allied with the Radicals and Socialists, they differed on the question of naturalization. They maintained that the twin causes of women's continued inferior status in Algeria were the influence of Islam, and French failures at colonization. They subscribed to an assimilationist approach, believing that Arabs and Berbers should gradually adopt the French language, education, and practices as their own. In short, they thought the *mission civilatrice* was incomplete. They argued that the dismantling of the Islamic courts was necessary because traditional Shari'a jurisprudence permitted the segregation of the sexes and differential legal treatment in family law, inheritance, and court procedures. When confronted with questions of how to solve the problems of illiteracy, poverty, spousal abuse, unemployment, and unequal citizenship, their solution was "modernization," generally meaning the application of republican ideals and law, particularly the recognition of individual sovereignty.

Feminists wanted to know how the Jonnart Law might facilitate women's access to French law, particularly in cases of intermarriage. In 1923, the Cour de cassation had decided that the 1919 naturalization law only applied to married women whose husbands acquired the *droit de cité* after their marriage. Until 1927, a Frenchwoman who had married an *indigène* would find her rights reduced, just as she would lose her nationality upon marriage with a foreigner. Vêrone extracted a statement from the minister of the Interior indicating his favorability towards a revision of the laws to permit the children of French mothers and *indigène* fathers to be full French citizens. Additionally, he approved of the application of French law to mixed marriages to bring the family under the relevant regulations concerning paternal authority (*puissance paternelle*), guardianship (*la tutelle*), and inheritance (*les droits successoraux des enfants*). Vêrone reported that Algerian authorities proposed a broadly envisioned law recognizing the rights of French women regarding their juridical and civil capacity, and expanding the rights of naturalized Algerian women so they

would be eligible for “all the new rights that may be extended to the French woman, notably in political rights.”²¹ Such a promise anticipated the possibility that the Senate and Chamber of Deputies were on the verge of making suffrage truly universal. By August 1928, women could apply independently for naturalization, though women’s right to vote was withheld until 1944.²²

The legal status of women in Algeria was a concern to Suzanne Grinberg, a Parisian lawyer, who argued that Women’s rights claims depended upon the legal recognition of their liberal equality. At the 1926 Congress of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, she declared that “in all countries where civilization is sufficiently advanced that the human individual is believed to have an inalienable, inherent value, woman, who also possesses intelligence and conscience, must be held as the equal to man in regards to laws and institutions.”²³ Civil equality for feminists in this era included the right to vote, equal educational and employment opportunities, and state-sponsored maternity benefits.²⁴ Under this philosophy of rights, only by replacing religious law with a secular one could a social movement for equality in Algeria move forward. The fact that Grinberg had traveled more in England and the United States than in Algeria was apparent when she characterized the movement for women’s equality in 1926 as an unstoppable, revolutionary force that would eventually reverse the traditional practices that subordinated women throughout the world.

It is ironic that the leading women’s rights organizations endorsed the application of the Civil Code in Algeria while simultaneously advocating for its overhaul in France. Grinberg and several leaders of the UFSF served on an interwar extra-parliamentary commission for Code reform, seeking to revise the articles that privileged men’s rights at women’s expense.²⁵ — With the flowering of the women’s emancipation movement in the 1890s, proponents had succeeded in shepherding legislation to permit women to serve as witnesses (1897), allow married women to obtain salary rights (1907), and legalize paternity suits (1912). They also kept women’s suffrage on the political agenda in the interwar years.²⁶ Women’s confidence in the Civil Code as an ameliorating mechanism for *Maghrébines* can arguably be seen as an expression of their republicanism. The belief that the proper application of republican principles of universal rights and French laws and institutions could perfect the human condition was also an expression of their commitment to the “civilizing mission” of imperialism.²⁷

While primarily concerned with the condition of indigenous women, French feminists also demonstrated some support for the European

women who engaged in colonial enterprises as farmers, nurses, doctors, teachers, and missionaries. V erone was convinced that the French should provide better assistance to women in the colonies undertaking entrepreneurial or professional activities. After attending the 1922 Marseilles Exposition nationale coloniale and hearing a lecture by a colonial doctor, V erone concluded that the colonies need more of the "air and esprit" of the *m etropole*. She learned about the experience of Madame Percha-Giverne, a French colonist in Senegal who endeavored to promote the industrial use of the *doum* palm, and whose ideas were understood by Senegalese merchants but resisted by Europeans. In this instance, she criticized the *fonctionnaires* and *colons* for failing to support women's initiatives, while calling on French women to consider becoming "sponsors" of female colonists by sending books, newspapers, and letters.²⁸

Although one might expect that feminists would be more culturally sensitive and thus less prone to racism in the early twentieth century than the average person, racial stereotypes crept into their reports. Writing about a 1929 visit to Algiers, V erone reveals an obsession with readily apparent cultural differences, especially clothing and public deportment. She wrote:

Muslim women, however, do not seem at all constrained. They scamper along, coming and going, gathering their provisions, with their happy and laughing *bambinos* surrounding them; or [they are] strolling, and affect an attitude of nonchalance that—I swear—is not altogether very elegant. I have been assured that their heavy and swaying gait is caused by their voluminous pleated trousers. I think that the men, in their *burnouses*, have a more graceful deportment.²⁹

V erone exposed how her Orientalist expectations of Algerian women as exotic models of quiet composure were shattered by this brief observation of street life. In a self-reflexive move, she acknowledged that Europeans considered themselves culturally superior to Muslim Algerians, and that ethnocentrism was a barrier to cultural understanding. She seemed ambivalent about the consequences of colonialism as she conceded that colonialists were to blame for exporting social problems such as alcoholism and prostitution, while she wanted to give them credit for improving the infrastructure and hygiene in conquered territories. V erone was, at the very least, conflicted about the consequences of French colonialism in North Africa, aware of its costs yet optimistic that a more thorough application of French laws would benefit the native population. Indeed, many

French feminists writing on the colonial question were emphatically pro-westernization, a position that was strengthened in response to improvements in Muslim women's status in Turkey and Egypt. They expected Muslim Algerians to likewise embrace secularization of public life as they became equal citizens.

The Turkish Revolution and the Egyptian women's rights movement were the influential models for French feminists considering how modernization might unfold in the Maghreb. When the Turkish Republic was declared in 1923, women were not granted equal rights, but the rapid institution of secular civil law was a bouleversement to the influence of the Shari'a. Marriage law became secular, the minimum marriage age was raised to 18 for men, and polygamy was abolished.³⁰ When Turkish women's right to vote was acknowledged in local and national elections in 1930 and 1934 respectively, Frenchwomen regarded their success with astonishment and jealousy, as they had yet to achieve so much. American suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt congratulated Turkish women and praised President Kemal Atatürk on the improvements at a meeting of the International Alliance of Women (IAW):

When we met in Washington, in 1902, Turkey was represented by Dean Fensham of the Istanbul Girls' College. Then Turkish women lived behind closed doors and no one knew to what they aspired. Now they vote and sit in the parliament. This, I regard as the most remarkable change in a century.³¹

Vérone likewise recalled that at the IAW Rome conference in 1923, she had believed that gender equality in Turkey was a "distant goal."³² Mervat Hatem argues that Turkish modernization of women's citizenship was part of a nationalist process, instigated "from above" by the state, and this impeded the "development of an autonomous consciousness."³³ Of course, cultural values in Turkey hardly changed overnight. The first female lawyer in Turkey, Beyhan Khanoum, presented her arguments from under a headscarf in a Constantinople court in 1928.³⁴ Nevertheless, Turkey had entered into the category of countries that formally recognized the political equality of its female citizens, unlike France in this era.

The Egyptian women's movement was likewise impressive to the Europeans. Egyptian feminist Huda Sharaawi traveled in France on several occasions and spoke in favor of suffrage in Rouen and Gratz in 1923 and 1924, returning with a delegation for a lecture tour in the 1930s.³⁵ French

observers of Sharaawi's public speeches readily identified with her priorities, which included improving national education, reforming oppressive marital laws, and addressing social ills. Translating the Egyptian's objectives into familiar terms, journalist Jeanne Canudo wrote that the women wanted to engage in "social combat" in cooperation with men, above all in "works of solidarity and to protect the weak, the children, the infirm, the elderly, and the exploited."³⁶ For their part, a few Europeans reciprocated Sharaawi's contribution by writing articles for *L'Égyptienne*, her French- and Arabic-language newspaper, and electing her to be vice president of the International Alliance of Women.³⁷ Western feminists saw Sharaawi as an exemplary "modern" Muslim, and praised her for removing her headscarf in public upon returning home from the 1923 IAW conference.³⁸ In an effort to globalize feminism, and drawing upon the experience of the leadership of the Turkish and Egyptian women's movements, Frenchwomen called for other Muslims to help lead a movement in Algeria. This invitation was perhaps issued out of recognition that the Europeans had a limited ability to speak to, inspire, and communicate with Muslim Algerians.

The first French feminist congress dedicated primarily to colonial questions was held in Paris in May 1931 to coincide with the Exposition coloniale internationale française. The *États généraux du féminisme*, organized by Cécile Brunschvicg, president of the UFSE, was attended by leaders of the international women's movement, a few politicians, and women working in the social, medical, educational, and scientific fields in the colonies. Less than a week before the opening of the conference, the colonial government had made several long-awaited and unusual interventions into Kabyle law. The new laws set a minimum marriage age at 15 for girls; wives were granted the right to seek divorce in cases of domestic violence, abandonment, or husband's imprisonment; and a repudiated wife and her family were relieved from the traditional indemnity owed to her former in-laws.³⁹ At the *États généraux*, members resolved that they must pressure authorities to enforce these laws. They also condemned the legal practice of privileging fathers in custody suits by arguing that mothers fleeing abusive husbands should be permitted to take their children with them. The conference delegates also called for the inclusion of Muslim women in all future government commissions charged with improving the moral and material conditions throughout French North Africa. Other congressional resolutions reiterated the importance of expanding girls' access to education, and requested that girls study civics to understand the contemporary laws and legislation that shaped the status of women and

children. For French republicans, knowing one's rights was an important part of identification with the nation. Knowledge of women's disabilities under the law also had the capacity to catalyze new membership in national and international women's-rights organizations. The demand for curricular reform was long-standing; it had previously been articulated by the Educational Committee at the 1914 International Council of Women Congress.⁴⁰ In the final resolution, delegates claimed the right to vote for women throughout the French Empire.⁴¹

Press coverage of the États généraux in the progressive French-language Algerian newspaper *La Voix Indigène* weighed in on the status of feminism in Algeria. M. Hassan argued that newspapers gave a false impression when they reported that the "emancipation of women" was the order of day among elite Algerians. The truth was otherwise, wrote Hassan, arguing that Algerian men were intransigent on the improvement of women's status, and they actually intended to keep their female relatives away from any contact with modern mores. He was also ambivalent about such change, asserting that Algerians were already suffering, "tormented," and "unbalanced" (though he did not specify how) because women had been prematurely given "too much liberty." The resistance to changes in gender roles was fueled by a multitude of sources: religion, old customs, and tradition. To this list of obstacles, editor Rabah Zenati, a former teacher and lawyer of Kabyle origins, added what he considered women's atavism, laziness, and apathy. Zenati insisted that men and women must evolve together as the "progressive and harmonious march towards the Future City could only be accomplished simultaneously and in solidarity."⁴²

Building on the momentum generated by the 1931 Paris conference, the Union française de suffrage des femmes organized another meeting for 1932 in the medieval walled city of Constantine. Organizer Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, a peace and suffrage activist, intended to bring together women from Mediterranean countries to continue discussing the possibilities for improving Muslim girls' and women's status. Malaterre-Sellier spoke of motherhood as the unifier among diverse women: "We have but one ambition: to work to improve the condition of Women of the Mediterranean with our only power: *la force morale*. We want to render the child happier, the home more developed; ultimately, we want to fight with all our heart and soul against social problems and above all against war, hated by all mothers."⁴³ Delegate Largech Hamed hoped to see mandatory schooling for girls, the diffusion of professional training schools,

divorce reform, the suppression of polygamy, and the establishment of the age of majority at 21. The UFSF Congress called for a wide variety of reforms in Algeria, including the abolition of prostitution among *indigènes*, the reorganization of hygiene services, the establishment of women's "laïque" mutual assistance, and the creation of new schools with mandatory attendance.⁴⁴

Jean Mélia wrote in *La France et l'Algérie* (1919) that political equality and primary education were the answers to the frustrations of the Algerian elite and growing nationalism.⁴⁵ French feminists supported such an approach while insisting that girls not be left out or kept at home by wary parents. Education was an essential tool of modernization and assimilation, yet it was inadequately funded in Algeria. During the period from 1919 to 1954, less than 12 percent of the colonial budget was devoted to education, and only 20 percent went to schools for Muslim children. Consequently, less than 10 percent of Muslim children under age 14 were exposed to primary instruction. In 1921, perhaps 46,000 Muslim youth attended European schools. A decade later, Muslim students numbered 69,000 of perhaps 104,000 children attending schools in Algeria. Of the minority of Muslims who attended school, approximately one-quarter of the students were girls. In academic year 1907–08, fewer than 2,700 Muslim girls attended French schools.⁴⁶ The government schools communicated the values and traditions of France, with some attention to native arts and crafts.

Girls who wished to attend school, or mothers who hoped to educate their daughters, confronted cultural as well as structural obstacles. The relative absence of women from French education in Algeria reinforced negative stereotypes about native Algerian women's intellectual capacity. In one of her more biting commentaries, Bugéja combined traditional charity with modern racialized stereotypes when she spoke at the 1932 UFSF conference. She said:

The uneducated woman has a primitive brain, incapable of experiencing the beauty of things of which she is ignorant. The current trend [among these women] is to conserve ancestral traditions without improvement because the Muslim woman has not followed the progressive steps of civilization. She is raised as a captive, resigned. She has no preparation in her milieu [for a life in the outside world]. She is less like a beautiful plant and more like one that must be pruned and trained in order to grow at all.⁴⁷

This bigoted, hyperbolic, and unsympathetic representation of Muslim women and the tradition of the harem was inaccurate; yet this static, essentialist conception resonated with her reading audience, who were familiar with such representations from the works by nineteenth-century anthropologists, historians, and travel writers. “Western civilization” was accepted as the force sufficiently powerful to transform the hearts and minds of Arab and Berber women.

Algerians who responded to the UFSF conference condoned the creation of new schools and job opportunities by French authorities, but differed on the content of the curriculum and the role of schools in assimilating Muslims into colonial society. The editors of *La Voix Indigène* supported the idea of “modernizing” Algerian society through education and other reforms in principle, but feared its consequences on religion and traditional gender roles. Zenati supported only those reforms not antithetical to Islam, and worried that French education for women could make them disinclined to marry, or at least disrupt wives’ domestic labor. Zenati also criticized colonialists’ efforts to solve unemployment by providing jobs in low-paying, labor-intensive workshops such as rug production designed for export.⁴⁸ One such protest fell on deaf ears. Immediately following the 1932 UFSF conference, French Algerian women established new handicraft workshops (*aiguilles musulmanes*) to instruct adolescent girls in the creation of woven and embroidered products for export, and to introduce them to the fundamentals of *puériculture*.

Muslim Algerian Madame Sehir Hacène also reacted to the conference by condemning the bigotry of the *françaises*. She argued that the French misunderstood the root of women’s social inequality in the Maghreb if they believed that the problem was largely religious in origin. Hacène insisted that women’s inequality was a result of cultural practices and the absence of educational opportunities. Hacène wrote poignantly:

Madames, what do you think you would have become if your mother and your father had been ignorant, without any formal education. . . . I hope that you know that our atrocious suffering and silencing . . . is a product of our morality that is not at all derived from religion. In fact, the Koran, that is the Muslim bible, does not oppose the education of woman; and to the contrary, it favors one law for both sexes. Polygamy, where it is authorized, exists because other Koranic guarantees are no longer respected. As a result, our men do not follow and do not want to follow the true directives concerning polygamy, and marry several women without concerning

themselves with the burdensome or even mortal consequences of creating a large family.⁴⁹

Hacène also argued that mandatory education would revolutionize and modernize the Muslim family, and to this end she called upon Frenchwomen to help Muslim women to “obtain satisfaction” from the “generous” French Republic, which “we love with all our hearts.” Hacène’s letter demanded compassion for the illiterate and declared her sense of belonging to the “imagined community” of an enlarged France.⁵⁰ Hacène’s critique underscores the Frenchwomen’s Orientalism when they explained many problems in Algeria with reference to Islam.

Progressive reformists Zenati and Hacène both defended Muslims’ right to their own religious traditions, while arguing for the possibility that Islam could coexist in French Algeria. This type of oppositional speech signaled the crucial tension: the need to accommodate religious difference while improving socioeconomic conditions and extending rights. Another sign of the inability of the Algerians and French to discuss religion in mutually satisfactory ways was in the meetings of the Congrès musulman général des femmes d’Orient that excluded non-Muslims. At the 1932 Teheran event, women discussed how to improve the equality of men and women, to make economic progress, and to promote legal reform within Islamic law in a conference community where their religion and their potential interest in national independence were respected.⁵¹ Religiously exclusive conferences permitted women living in colonial circumstances to open the possibility of rigorous criticism of colonialism with less fear of retribution by *colons*.

Energy for cross-cultural cooperation generally reemerged at the 1935 Alliance internationale des femmes conference in Istanbul, held to promote “greater East-West cooperation.” Participants affirmed their desire to work together to globalize their struggle for equality, justice, and peace. The French delegates were concerned about the rise of fascism and the degradation of women’s constitutional rights in Europe. One delegate from India praised the cooperation efforts and bravely pointed out that racism marred the European attitudes towards colonial peoples.⁵² Simultaneously, delegates made a special protest against the continued toleration of polygamy in those Islamic countries where it was still legal. Madame Lafuente, a French Algerian and UFSF member, hoped she would “gain strength from the example of Turkish women’s emancipation.” She said she needed new motivation to “provide her with the necessary perseverance for the task in

Algeria.” She also hoped to win allies among the other conference participants to catalyze a grass-roots feminist movement among Muslim Algerians. Speaking on behalf of an ethnically European population, she said:

In Algeria we live side by side with millions of Muslim women, who are the most backwards of any land. Since our arrival [in Istanbul] we have unrelentingly, immodestly questioned the Turkish, Egyptian, and Syrian Muslim women . . . we feel that the emancipation of Algerian women will come more quickly than one can believe if we help them, and above all, if you—Muslim women—if you help us.⁵³

For Vérone, the presence of women at the conference from Middle Eastern countries including Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Persia constituted new proof “of Islam’s awakening and the progress in the area of feminist reforms,” and she wrote expectantly that “someday North Africa will have to follow this movement.”⁵⁴

One of the most concrete events that developed out of the 1935 conference was the creation of a suffrage petition by a French Algerian delegation. Writer Lucienne Jean-Darrouy, president of the Algerian UFSF Federation, and Madame Ardaillon, president of the Algiers UFSF group, led a delegation to the Prefecture of Police to submit a petition expressing their desire to have greater political opportunities to improve the social, economic, and moral conditions of Algerian society. The petition, with more than 150 signatories, was addressed to the *Président du Conseil*: “The French women of Algeria, in their capacities as mothers and workers, contribute to the property of the colony, concerned with the dangers that threaten our country, ardently desire to be called upon to collaborate with male citizens to redress these moral, economic, and social problems.”⁵⁵ Writer Clotilde Chivas-Baron echoed the utility of extending voting rights to colonial women to grant “farmers” and “factory directors” a voice in local amelioration measures.⁵⁶ By this point, cooperative efforts had born little fruit, and the European women hoped that at least they might be designated to speak on behalf of all women in Algeria.

Both the French feminists and Algerian *évolués* agreed on the importance of transforming colonial subjects into citizens, but differed fundamentally on how this modernization would occur. In their newspaper publications and public meetings, mainstream French women’s rights organizations provided an institutional network that encouraged their

Algerian allies to support colonialism as the best means to achieve Muslim women's emancipation in colonial territories. Though at home in France, feminists, and particularly lawyers, voiced severe criticism about the shortcomings of the Civil Code, they advocated that it replace Muslim law in Algeria. Their message reiterated Auclert's argument from the *fin de siècle* that the Republic owed a debt of legal and moral guardianship to Muslim women in the French Empire, but their assumption of the superiority of European culture prompted unrealistic views of Algerians. The response to the French proposals from educated, urban Muslim women and men was defensive, as they raised their voices to oppose the rhetoric of cultural superiority and to insist on their right to the free exercise of religion. The French feminists were unable to accept this alternative view of change in Algeria, as their idea of citizenship was predicated on the assumption that profound religious and cultural differences must be deemphasized to permit the possibility of equal treatment. French feminist claims to equal citizenship necessitated the sublimation or abstraction of religious difference in the effort to unify the nation. Cultural differences, however, were no minor matter for Algerians, whose identity was increasingly forged in opposition to France after the birth of the nationalist movements in the 1920s. Algerian adherence to Islam remained an essential conflict in the arguments for their inclusion as equals in the French nation. French feminists supported an expansion of rights and opportunities for Algerian men and women, but vigorously rejected efforts to grant a higher degree of tolerance of religious difference in the Maghreb than existed in the *hexagone*. This investigation into liberal feminist attitudes towards colonial subjects during the interwar period demonstrates that their alleged universalism was actually Eurocentric.

NOTES

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3. Jeanne Bowlan criticizes Bugéja's ideas in "Civilizing Gender Relations in Algeria: The Paradoxical Case of Marie Bugéja, 1919–1939," in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Francis Gouda (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 175–92.

4. Patricia Lorcin, "Sex, Gender, and Race in the Colonial Novels of Elissa Rhâis and Lucienne Favre," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 108–30.
5. Hedi Abdel-Jaouad, "Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad," *Yale French Studies* 83, no. 2 (1993): 93–117.
6. Norman Anderson, *Law Reform in the Muslim World* (London: Athlone Press, University of London, 1976), 218 n. 57.
7. Anderson, *Law Reform in the Muslim World*, 11. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1932), 2–11.
8. Jeanne Bowlan, "Polygamists Need Not Apply: Becoming a French Citizen in Colonial Algeria, 1918–1938," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 24 (1997): 117.
9. Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy*, 6–21.
10. Allan Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts and the French Colonial State in Algeria* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 125–26.
11. Julie Clancy-Smith, "La Femme Arabe: Women and Sexuality in France's North African Empire," in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996): 52–63.
12. See Steven C. Hause, *Hubertine Auclert: The French Suffragette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), especially the "Algerian Interlude," 142–48.
13. Alphonse Étienne, *Audience solennelle de rentrée du 1^{er} octobre 1898: Le droit de 'Djebr' et le mariage des impubères chez les musulmans en Algérie* (Alger: A. Jourdan, 1898).
14. "Conférences mensuelles de la Ligue: La condition légale de la femme musulmane," *Le Droit des Femmes* (June 1912): 14–17.
15. Alice La Mazière, "Au pays où les femmes ne sortent jamais," *Journal de la Femme*, 31 August 1935, 8–12.
16. André-Jean Arnaud, *Les juristes face à la société du XIX^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), 143–46.
17. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand [hereafter BMD], dossier Schmahl.
18. Charles Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present*, ed. Michael Brett (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1991), 53 n. 2.
19. Vincent Confer, *France and Algeria: The Problem of Civil and Political Reform, 1870–1920* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 48–114.
20. Jean Paul Charnay, *La vie musulmane en Algérie d'après la jurisprudence de la première moitié du XX^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 251–54, 260–63.
21. Maria Vérone, "Les mariages mixtes en Algérie," *L'Oeuvre*, 7 October 1925.
22. Charnay, *La vie musulmane*, 257–60.

23. Suzanne Grinberg, "Le congrès de l'Alliance internationale pour le suffrage des femmes," *La Renaissance Politique, Littéraire, Artistique* (1926): 1. All translations by author, unless otherwise indicated.
24. Suzanne Grinberg, "Au congrès des femmes suffragistes," *La Renaissance Politique, Littéraire, Artistique* (5 June 1926): 4–5.
25. Paul Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic: Women's Political and Civil Rights in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 163–211.
26. See Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne: Histoire des féminismes, 1914–1940* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
27. Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–10.
28. Maria Vérone, "L'action féminine aux colonies," *L'Oeuvre*, 4 May 1922.
29. Maria Vérone, "Impressions d'Algérie," *Le Droit des Femmes* (May 1926): 433.
30. Serin Tekeli, "Women in Turkish Politics," in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 293–310.
31. Arnold Whittick, *Woman into Citizen* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1979), 120–21.
32. Maria Vérone, "Le féminisme en Turquie," *L'Oeuvre*, 23 April 1935.
33. Mervat Hatem, "Modernization, the State, and the Family in Middle East Women's Studies," in *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Margaret Meriwether and Judith Tucker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), 63–88.
34. Joseph Catagné, ed., *Le mouvement d'émancipation de la femme musulmane en Orient* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929), 170–74.
35. Huda Sharaawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, 1879–1924*, trans. Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986), 135.
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37. Odette Simon, "Les femmes françaises et le barreau," *L'Égyptienne: Revue Mensuelle: Féminisme, Sociologie, Arts* (January 1927): 16–21.
38. Sharaawi, *Harem Years*, 5–6.
39. *États-généraux du féminisme*, 30–31 Mai 1931. Salle des congrès-Cité des informations. Exposition coloniale internationale. Paris (Paris: CNFF, 1931), 110–12.
40. International Council of Women, *Women in a Changing World: The Dynamic Story of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 42.
41. Resolution 18, *États-généraux du féminisme*, quoted on 170.
42. Hassan, "La femme musulmane III," *La Voix Indigène*, 9 April 1931; and Rabah Zenati, "La femme indigène des colonies," *La Voix Indigène*, 9 July 1931.

43. *La dépêche de Constantine*, 30 March 1932.
44. BMD, dossier 53, *Congrès international des femmes méditerranéennes*. "Le congrès d'Istamboul: L'orient et l'occident coopèrent (VIII)," *La Française*, 15 June 1935.
45. David Gordon, *The Passing of French Algeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 22.
46. John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 126–29; and Gordon, *Passing of French Algeria*, 9.
47. Marie Bugéja, "Ce que fut le Congrès des femmes méditerranéennes," *Bulletin de la Société de géographie d'Alger et de l'Afrique du Nord* 37, no. 132 (1932): 544–68.
48. Rabah Zenati, "La femme indigène des colonies," *La Voix Indigène*, 9 July 1931.
49. *La Voix Indigène*, 21 April 1932.
50. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
51. See Joseph Castagné, *Le mouvement d'émancipation de la femme musulmane en orient*, extrait de *La Revue des Études Islamiques* 2 (1929) (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929); and Henri Massé, ed., *Le deuxième congrès musulman général des femmes d'orient à Téhéran (novembre–décembre 1932)* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1933), extrait de *La Revue des Études Islamiques* (1933).
52. BMD, dossier 59, *Congrès de l'Alliance internationale des femmes*, 1935.
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54. "Le Congrès d'Istamboul," *Le Droit des Femmes* (May 1935): 127.
55. "Union française pour le suffrage des femmes," *La Française*, 27 April–4 May 1935.
56. "La vote des femmes coloniales françaises," *La Française*, 30 November 1935.