

Edition Centaurus – Sozioökonomische  
Prozesse in Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika

Anne Laaredj-Campbell

# Changing Female Literacy Practices in Algeria

Empirical Study on Cultural  
Construction of Gender  
and Empowerment



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# **Edition Centaurus – Sozioökonomische Prozesse in Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika**

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Die Reihe, 1997 in Freiburg im Breisgau begründet, umfasst ein breites Spektrum aktueller Themen der Ethnologie mit interdisziplinärem Charakter. Im Mittelpunkt stehen kulturelle Transformationsprozesse und damit einhergehende Folgewirkungen von sozialem, ökonomischem, religiösem und politischem Wandel. Kennzeichnend ist hierbei die ethnographische Perspektive auf die regionalen Untersuchungsfelder Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika und deren interdependente Vernetzung in einer globalen, transnationalen Welt.

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Anne Laaredj-Campbell

# Changing Female Literacy Practices in Algeria

Empirical Study on Cultural Construction of Gender and Empowerment



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Doctoral thesis at the Philosophischen Fakultät der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität,  
Freiburg i. Br., Germany

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In many ways the idea for this study goes back to the year 2001 when I travelled to Tiaret, Algeria to visit my husband's "grande" family for the first time. Among the many impressions I had from the experience, the stark contrast in the levels of education between my husband's non-literate mother and sisters and their university graduate daughters intrigued me.

I was most inspired to write about women, literacy and empowerment by my Algerian mother-in-law (ajusa), "Mama Johar", who at the age of 72 decided to join a literacy class offered in one of the local primary schools near her home. Although she dropped out half way through the program her initial gusto to become literate so that she could read the Qur'an in Mecca "just like the women from Asia" during her pilgrimage inspired my dedication to follow the literacy class until the end.

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To Algeria and the Algerians, a majestic landscape inhabited by a most hospitable Muslim people with curiously overwhelming ways!

For  
Richard Zucker  
...originally from Brooklyn, New York.

## Preface

Women's literacy has increasingly become one of the primary objectives of developing countries since the *World Conference on Education for All*, which was held in Jomtien Thailand in 1990. However, the most common portrayals of Arab Muslim women by Western scholars today are those that still depict them as neglected in terms of education, lacking self-confidence, or simply as oppressed members of society. This is often related to the prevalence of Islamic law and norms in Middle Eastern societies (Mernissi 1987; Moghadam 1993). Among the intents of the following study is to reexamine these cultural stereotypes as they pertain to the current situation of female literacy and higher education in the province Tiaret, located in the northern High Plateau region of Algeria.

Since the country's independence in 1962, the numerous literacy programs implemented by Algeria nationwide reflect a general concern for the promotion and development of human resources. Nonetheless, all attempts so far at curtailing the problem of illiteracy among adults in a significant way have been classified as varying in effectiveness from inadequate to complete failures. Large segments of the female population are more severely affected by this, which is particularly due to low retention and high drop-out rates.

A regularly cited reason for failing female literacy programs has been the influence of rigid patriarchal social structures stemming from the "...Algerian male nationalists' needs to defend the family and 'reclaim' Algerian women" (Knauss 1987/*Preface*). At the same time, however, current trends for women university enrolment nationwide are at an all-time high. This has in part been attributed to pro-education policies and financial aid offered under the government of President Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika.

A recent trend in the area of literacy studies has been the concept of empowerment and how it ties into the range of activities undertaken by and for women (Stromquist 2009a (Empowerment discourse), 1997 (Brazil); Kagitcibasi et al. (Turkey) 2005; UNESCO 2005; Moghadam (Iran) 2005); Agnaou (Morocco) 2004; Egbo (Sub-Saharan Africa) 2000). This study endeavors to take a look at the literacy practices and their theoretical implications for empowering women in Algeria. The impact of functional adult literacy on the empowerment of women in the absence of formal schooling will be addressed.

One of the intentions of the inquiry was to determine whether participants showed changes beyond the regular benefits of learning how to read and write. These additional gains extend into the sphere of self-concept, family dynamics and social participation and are what current research in female literacy refers to as empowering.

The data presented here are based on ethnological fieldwork conducted on a women's literacy class in the province (*wilaya*) Tiaret, Algeria, during a 3-year period (2008-2011). Algerian informants, in-laws and friends have contributed greatly to the completion of this dissertation. For the sake of anonymity, most of them have been given fictitious names. Out of cultural respect for the people included in this study, I ask that all photo material not be reproduced.

So far, there exists little research on how educational systems and policies, instructional materials, and pedagogical practices best support the literacy and educational achievement of women literacy learners from a gender perspective. "Assessment of literacy program impact is particularly difficult given the irregular attendance and duration of enrollment of participants as well as the significant variation in levels of acquaintance with print that participants bring with them. Also, the content and intensity of literacy programs vary, making the aggregation of findings across programs difficult" (Stromquist 2009:2). Where women's recruitment and sustained attendance of a functional literacy class over time are problematic, I argue that the literacy courses in Algeria, as they have been constituted so far, still do not meet the needs of the learners.

The following is a qualitative study, which focuses on the needs of a small sample of women learners from their perspective. It recommends using a woman-positive approach, which considers the local culture-based Islamic practices such as female segregation. Other socio-cultural factors such as the value placed on privacy, the division of labor and gender-based inequality affecting adult female literacy are considered for crafting the progress of future literacy programs. Some ideas toward a concept of female literacy within an Islamic context are introduced. Before a workable gender-aware strategy for female literacy in Algeria can be planned, it is necessary to find out to what degree this problem can be traced to the literacy programs and to what extent the traditional patriarchal structures act as a barrier.

After having spent an ample amount of time in the Haut Plateau region over the past decade with various Algerian women, ranging from those who have never held a pen to a university professor, it is my personal ambition to offer some insight on the significance of gender as it ties into the traditional practice of Islam and Islamic guidelines as expressed in the Qur'an and Hadiths and thus contribute to the intercultural understanding of rural Muslim societies and their own perception about women, literacy, and higher education. In this process, I

hope that some common negative images about the role of women and education in Islam can be dispelled.

Although interdisciplinary in part, this study examines the educational situation of women in the Haut Plateau by using methods derived from the field of ethnology. One of the advantages this discipline has for researching topics involving other cultures is the importance it places on what Clifford Geertz (1973:5-6) referred to as the thick description of human behavior. This entails a method of doing ethnography that not only explains behavior but does so within its cultural context so that its meaning can become intelligible for the outsider.

To date, there are no empirical studies on adult female literacy in Algeria that focus on the cultural construction of gender and empowerment. A gender approach to education is committed to establishing reasons for the deficiencies of literacy among women. The present study is a conscientious effort to supplement the current scholarship and meant to be of use to policy makers and campaigns working toward the improvement of female literacy programs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region).

*The Haut Plateau Landscape dotted with Shepherds and Qubas (1+2)*



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# Introduction

## Research Background

By nearly every statistical measure, women, particularly women from developing countries, are trailing their male counterparts in literacy achievement. According to the latest Global Monitoring Report from UNESCO, there are approximately 781 million adults and 126 million youths who cannot read or write a simple sentence (Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2014). Statistically, two-thirds of them are women, a clear indication that literacy is a gendered problem.

Since the late nineteen-fifties an increasing amount of effort has been made to promote literacy by multilateral organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNDP. The World Bank has also proved itself to be a continuous source of financial support for literacy campaigns worldwide. Most often, the youth are given priority in the area of literacy attainment. Literacy for adults still receives less unanimous endorsement both at the government and local levels (Morsy 1994; Akkari 2004).

The formal recognition of the right to education was stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Shortly after, the circumstances surrounding women and poverty began to receive more attention. Since then, the focus in Third World development policies has shifted from modernization policies, basic needs strategies and redistribution, to structural adjustment policies. Alongside these shifts, policy makers have begun to thoroughly reconsider the role of women in development (Moser 1991).

Literacy has now been acknowledged as a central component in the process of enabling women to maximize their potential as citizens and attain gender equity. Numerous studies have demonstrated how literacy skills as an essential component of basic education contribute to poverty reduction and facilitate social, economic, technological and cultural development. Especially where women are concerned, literacy increases primary-school enrolment and has a profound effect on basic health care. A strong empirical link between literacy and improved health care has already been established in areas such as fertility, infant mortality, family planning, nutrition, immunization, cancer prevention, life expectancy, and basic hygiene. Most often, it is the literate mother, as primary

caretaker of her children, who passes these skills on and, in so doing, creates a standard for the future (see King and Hill 1993 for a comprehensive list of literature related to this subject).

Data in the fields of Adult Literacy and Women in Development (WID) that are gender-related are scant (Longwe 1991; Mendel-Anonuevo 1999; Carmack 1992; Kazemek 1988; Stromquist 1997). A recent development in literacy research highlights the importance of gender and empowerment issues in the design and assessment of literacy programs (see chapter 2). Researchers are increasingly drawing the source for empowerment from the ways in which literacy enables women to take control and make choices that affect their lives. Attributes such as self-confidence, assertiveness, and independence are increasingly being linked with literacy (UNESCO 1995; Agnaou 2004; Egbo 2000).

Literacy is a social practice produced by people whose identities are marked by race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, lifecycle, and gender. Women's literacies differ from the literacy practices of men because women occupy a different social position in their respective communities. Just as literacy is a social practice, so, too, is gender a set of social practices that people *perform* in their daily lives. People construct their gender identities by interacting with the cultural messages that surround them. Women are generally affected more strongly and directly by the specificities of their particular cultural contexts, the obvious of those being the traditional division of labor and patriarchal social structures.

Literate people possess the ability to be critically and politically aware. As such, literate women can inform themselves about their basic human rights and are better able to defend them. Empowerment may not be immediate, but once basic literate skills are attained, the possibilities for expanding one's knowledge are endless. Not only is literacy attributed to personal and intellectual growth, it is the foundation of all other advancement of people and their societies (Kassam 1994:33-34).

Gender discrepancies in education are often a direct reflection of the traditional attitudes about the role of women in society. The relationship between education and social status is an important concept in discussions about literacy. While inequality between men and women is a universal phenomenon, it is exacerbated in the context of illiteracy.

In general, men dominate positions of power and decision-making in fields of economic, social, and political activity. The area of education and literacy is no exception. Stromquist (1992), for example, explains the greater rates of illiteracy among women as a direct reflection of their subordination in society, which she argues as being achieved by the exercise of patriarchal ideologies.

The education of women in traditional societies has a strong implication for change in gender relations, which have continued essentially unaltered for centuries. In particular, through higher education, more women are entering the public sphere. More women are studying at universities, joining the work force, and becoming more interested and active in politics. Literate women (and especially those who are highly educated) are beginning to alter the status quo of traditional patriarchal social structures widespread in the Arab world.

### **Literacy and Gender Disparity in the Middle East and North Africa**

Predictably, the rates of non-literate adults aged 15 and over are highest in the least developed countries and represent the most underprivileged groups within those countries. Many Third World countries have acknowledged the overwhelming benefits of women's education, and the principle of ensuring equitable access to basic education has been central to educational development discourse and policies during the second half of the twentieth century.

It was once assumed that universal primary schooling would globally lead to a complete reversal of adult illiteracy. World illiteracy rates have indeed been dropping over the last few decades, which in part can be attributed to increases in primary-school enrolments. At the same time, data indicate that the actual numbers of illiterate people have remained relatively constant as a result of population growth (Wagner 2001:5). Though the intentions and efforts have been extensive, the proportion of women in the world's total illiterate population continues to grow steadily.

Algeria belongs to the Middle Eastern and North African region referred to as MENA. Although this encompasses a vast area, the historical and cultural experiences shared here are similar. Among the main themes forming its common identity are the religion of Islam and the Arabic language. Most of the region was under European colonization during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Colonial authorities used education as a tool for maintaining their superior position over the masses by limiting its access to a select group.

Even in the post-colonial era, the persistence of illiteracy serves the wealthy countries by helping them to maintain their economic and political stronghold over the poorer countries that suffer from low literacy rates. In fact, studies reveal that despite the implementation of mass literacy programs in post-independent nations, the content of the learning materials suggests the following conclusion: instead of preparing the non-literate adult learners to have access to new resources and opportunities, literacy instruction is rather used as a means of



reproducing and perpetuating their position of dependence, similar to how it was used under colonial rule (Aгнаou and Boukous, 2001).

During the second half of the twentieth century, governments and organizations have increasingly acknowledged the serious scope of illiteracy and recognize it as a critical factor for economic stability and expansion. Several measures have been taken such as establishing national councils, holding national and regional conferences, as well as designing policies and strategies towards resolving this problem.

The Alexandria Conference, established in 1964, symbolizes the joint efforts made by the governments of the Arabic region to develop all aspects of education, particularly literacy. The first conference set a preliminary framework for national literacy campaigns to be operated from the highest government level. In addition, many organizations focusing on literacy acquisition have originated from this conference composed of the Arab ministers of education. These include the Arab Literacy Organization (ARLO), which was established in 1972, and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO), which coordinates the Arab task forces in the area of literacy and adult education.

Since independence, free, public education is offered throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and basic education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years has become mandatory. According to the World Bank, primary enrolment drastically rose from 61 percent in 1965 to 98 percent in 1990 with a remarkable increase being made in oil-exporting countries (Akkari, 2004:145).

In Algeria, the schooling of children between the ages of 6 and 16 reached 97 percent in 2009 (the International Council for Adult Education, CONFINTEA VI Seminar, 2009). Some of the social outcomes resulting from these measures have been tremendous as well. Overall, infant mortality has decreased by more than half, and life expectancy has risen by more than ten years. In Tunisia, life expectancy has even increased by approximately 20 years, rising from 51 years in 1961 to 72 years in 1998 (Institut national d'études statistiques, 1999 In: Akkari, 2004:146).

Universal basic education has greatly increased in Arabic countries although this remains a challenge in countries with particularly high demographic rates and large rural populations. School facilities are characterized by double and triple shifts and over-crowded classrooms, which take a toll on the teaching staff and the quality of education. Furthermore, in the Middle East and North Africa, vast variations exist in the rates of literacy, and the gender gap between these levels is especially large. According to the Arab League (<http://www.arableagueonline.org>), Arab nations have more than 70 million illiterate people,

which represents a current illiteracy rate of 35.6 percent. This is nearly double the global rate of 18 percent.

Illiteracy rates are much higher in Arab countries with large rural populations and relatively high levels of poverty, such as Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, and Yemen. Approximately 39 million Arabic women can be classified as non-literate. Female literacy rates for age 15 and over range from 24 percent in Iraq to 85.9 percent in Jordan (Hammoud, 2007: Archive Nr. 66, [http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article\\_id=208&clang=1](http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article_id=208&clang=1)).

Girls out of school and illiterate women constitute the majority, particularly in rural areas and the mountain regions such as in Yemen and Morocco. An illiteracy rate of 76 percent in rural areas compared to 45 percent in urban areas has been established (Akkari 2004:147). Common reasons for this are poverty, the tradition of early marriages, the shortage or lack of segregated schools, and the long distance from home to school. Rural communities generally have a weak infrastructure and do not receive adequate education services such as easily reachable schools and properly trained teachers. They also typically have a chronic shortage of textbooks and other essential written materials.

Both the lack of any mechanism to enforce universal primary education and the high rates of failure leading to dropping out of school pose a serious challenge for literacy (Al-Nasser in: UNESCO, 1994:159). Rural households in which both parents are illiterate fail to recognize the benefits of a basic education for their girls because they do not see a relevant connection to their daily lives. Many girls are kept home to help out with housework. Others are urged to drop out around the age of 15 in order to avoid contact with young men and prepare for marriage.

In Egypt, 1.5 million working children between 6 and 14 years of age have been estimated, 13 percent of whom are boys compared to 12 percent girls (Zibani, 1994; See also Akkari, 2004:149). This phenomenon is not exclusively found in Arab Muslim societies. Similar reasons that girls leave school earlier than boys can be found throughout Latin America as well (see Lizzie Rolón de Zapata, 1990 for a case study about the education of women in Bolivia; see also Stromquist for Brasil 1997).

Adult illiteracy is most severe, approximately 50 percent and up, in countries with large rural populations, such as Morocco, Egypt and Yemen (World Bank, 1999). The problems surrounding adult literacy programs include the low importance ascribed by public authorities as well as a lack of support by the community and relatives of non-literate adults. An additional problem consistently mentioned by service providers and policy makers is the fact that participation levels drop off rapidly after only a few weeks or months into the program.

Many reasons for this have been cited, including inadequate program quality, limited materials, or an abstract pedagogy.

The most common reason given was the lack of learner motivation. A lot of adult learners are frustrated by their slow progress and drop out because their learning needs are not being addressed. Other often-cited reasons are lack of childcare facilities, low functional relevance of the lesson content, and the underrepresentation of women in decision-making literacy bodies. Wagner (2001) predicts that innovations in the ways and types of programs being offered will be central to the future success of adult education (see Wagner, 2001 for case examples).

Another potential challenge facing Arab countries in the teaching of reading and writing is the dichotomy between the spoken (colloquial) and the classical (literary) Arabic language. The former is the language used on an everyday basis in spontaneous, emotional, and cordial conversation. It is the informal language used in conducting the daily activities of life. The latter, however, is the language of reading and writing that is used in schools, government agencies, and other official or formal contexts. It is much more a literary standard than a spoken standard. Street signs are often in Arabic and Latin to ensure intelligibility among the largest group of people possible. Poster slots by numbers are still widespread in order to ensure that non-literate people can vote.

In Algeria this challenge is further complicated by large numbers of “trilingual illiterates,” whose lack of literacy is regarded as Algeria’s language crisis. This refers to the under-40 population who, according to Algerian business representatives, are “not literate in anything,” thereby rendering them “useless” in the job market and more vulnerable to extremist influence. They claim that Algerian workers are often left out because they are unable to function at a professional level in any single language.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the result of the Arabization campaign put into effect on May 22, 1964, also exposed a generational rift between the over-40s age group, who are generally fluent in spoken and written French, and the under-20s, who have been entirely educated in Arabic and have modest French skills at best. As a result, the 20-40 age group has a significant disadvantage in competing for jobs because its members tend to speak a confusing mixture of French, Arabic and Berber, a collage known as “Algerian”. More and more, English is being considered a “neutral, global language unburdened by Algerian history as the best way forward” (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/10/08ALGIERS1121.html>).

Aicha Barki, president and founder of the nationwide women’s literacy organization Iqraa, admitted that the Arabization process had made achieving literacy generally more difficult simply because Arabic is a more arduous language

to master than either French or English. She sees literacy “as the key to realizing the full potential of Algerian women and to fighting radicalization and extremist ideology, which feast on the illiterate” (Wikileaks, 08ALGIERS1121). Moreover, according to the Arab Human Development Report, the functional relevance of classical Arabic remains at best minimal for illiterate adults (AHDR, 2003:125).

The limited approach of functional literacy programs implemented in the Arab region so far have been strongly criticized for their emphasis on the vocational aspects of literacy rather than extending their topics to areas of cultural or social concern (Morsy 1994:159). In the future, programs will need to be tailored in order to address gender issues and local needs. Education must also be made available to the most excluded populations, such as women, the unschooled, those in rural areas, ethnic-linguistic groups, nomads, and the disabled.

The previous outline demonstrates that, after more than 50 years, adult illiteracy still persists to the degree that case study analysis becomes more and more significant. Aside from economic factors, not every country has low literacy rates for the same reasons. The rich research evidence of how education benefits women across diverse cultures in several socio-economic ways validates the promotion of literacy programs, which are gender-oriented. This gives merit to an ethnological approach that examines the specific cultural obstacles standing in the way of female literacy in Algeria.

## **Outline of Chapters**

In the introduction the problems underlying gender disparity in literacy were outlined, and the issues surrounding this inequality for women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) were reviewed. The persistence of the literacy gap in Algeria despite previous literacy campaign efforts (functional literacy) merits the ethnological approach used in this study, which examines the cultural barriers to female literacy. The remaining body of the dissertation is divided into three parts.

In Part One: *Context, Theory, and Method*, the foundation is paved for the analysis of the functional literacy program in the Haut Plateau region implemented nationwide in 2007. Chapter One is a geographic overview of the field-work setting. In this chapter the research objective, central lines of inquiry, and method of study are introduced. A brief review of the planning and organization of the current adult literacy campaign in Algeria is presented.

As the situation of women’s education has drastically changed since the 1990’s under the Bouteflika administration, the questions regarding access and

gender equity at the tertiary level are considered within the context of current female literacy practices and future educational trends in the Haut Plateau.

Chapter Two is a review of the current conceptions of literacy and related issues. The main trends in the way women's literacy has been conceptualized over the last three decades are introduced. These can be traced back to UNESCO'S functional literacy discourse in the 1950's, then to the context of women in development (WID) during the 1970s, and eventually to the current empowerment approach to literacy (Stromquist 2009, 1995, 1987; Longwe 1999; Molyneux 1987; Ramdas 1990) that was inspired by the critical literacy discourse after Paulo Freire (1970).

In each case the relationship in estimation of the scope of the problem and, by implication, of efforts toward its solution are examined. The *Framework for Gender Analysis* established by Sara Longwe (1992) as a valuable tool for analyzing both women's progress in literacy and empowerment, as well as the process involved in the evaluation of literacy reports, is introduced as a potential guideline for the development of a workable framework for assessing women's empowerment through literacy -- albeit in the cultural context of the Haut Plateau.

Part Two: *Women's Status in Literacy and Education: A Historical, Cultural, and Islamic Perspective* is a chronological illustration of the education of women and girls in Algeria dating before the advent of the French conquest. In Chapter Three a historical overview highlighting the effects of the French occupation on the state of female literacy and education up until the time of independence is revealed. The various approaches to literacy implemented since Algeria's sovereignty in 1962 and leading up to the present situation of literacy are also discussed. Finally, the current school system (primary, secondary, and tertiary education), including the enduring matter of female school dropouts, is addressed.

In order to provide the essential background from which to locate and understand the current state of women's literacy and education practices, the socio-cultural context of women's position in Algerian society and their valued traditional roles are contrasted with the role of women in Islam in Chapter Four. Chapter Five and Six address the process of women's empowerment in Algeria from a historical perspective and assess the current situation of women in higher education, work, and politics.

Part Three: *Empirical Case Studies of the Iqraa Functional Literacy Program and Ibn Khaldun University* constitutes the empirical foundation of the assessment of women's empowerment in literacy and higher education. The results of the participatory observation and in-depth interviews of the literacy

class participants, as well as the responses to the gender survey conducted among students at the Ibn Khaldun University, are revealed.

Chapter Seven introduces the literacy setting and describes the organization of the functional literacy program (Iqraa) in the Haut Plateau. The responses from the interviews conducted with the members of the local literacy administration and teachers reveal the challenges faced by both sides during the course of the three-year segment. The recruitment and training process of the literacy teachers, as well as the development of the instructional methods, are explained.

In Chapter Eight and Nine, the adult education participants are introduced. The method of observation from a gender perspective is explained within the rural Algerian context. Topics such as social-cultural barriers to female literacy and whether women's literacy needs and interests are being met are discussed.

The literacy questionnaire for adult learners focused on current literacy practices and their theoretical and practical implications for the empowerment of women. The responses were checked for indications of empowerment beyond the regular benefits of learning how to read and write. In conclusion the attitudes of the male and female learners towards women in adult education programs and higher education were compared.

Finally, Chapter Ten takes a side step from literacy to address the situation of gender equity in terms of women's access to education at the tertiary level and participation in employment in the Haut Plateau. In light of the global trend toward the massification of university enrollment, a group of male and female students at the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret was surveyed. Among the main aims of the gender survey was to capture the attitudes of parents and students toward changes in gender roles and women's status as a result of higher education and work.

The study concludes with a summative assessment of the research findings and theoretical implications of the trends and challenges facing rural women in literacy and higher education. From an ethnological standpoint, this study contends that the construction and implementation of a gender-based literacy program that empowers adult education learners in rural or semi-rural (hybrid) areas in Algeria must consider the context of the Arabic-Islamic tradition.

*Women participants learning to hold a pen and write (3+4)*



## **Part I. Research Context, Method, and Theory**



# 1 Geographic Location and Demography

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria is the largest country in Africa, having an estimated population of thirty-six million as of 2011 (Algerian Office of National Statistics). It borders on the Mediterranean Sea with a coastline stretching close to 998 kilometers between Morocco and Tunisia. The geography is diverse and can be divided into three zones by the Tellian and Saharan Atlas mountain ranges, which cross the country from the east to west: the fertile coastal plain in the north, the Haut Plateau region, and the desert. Nearly 80% of the country is comprised of desert, steppes, wasteland, and mountains.

Ethnically the population is made up of about 80% Arabic and 20% Berber. The Berbers were the original inhabitants of the region and can be subdivided in four main groups. The largest group, are the Kabyles, who mainly live in the Kabylia Mountains east of Algiers. The Chaouias live in the Aurés Mountains, the M'zabites in the northern Sahara and the Tuareg in the desert.

The state religion is Islam, and 99% of the Algerian people are Sunni Muslims. Islam forms the basis of religious life in Algeria and acts as an important unifying factor not only between Berbers and Arabs within the country, but with other Arab nations. The range of observance among Algerian Muslims varies from area to area; however, people from rural areas tend to adhere to their traditional practices more strongly.

Officially, Algeria is a multiparty republic made up of 48 provinces or *wilayat*, each of which is headed by a governor, or *wali*, who reports to the Minister of Interior. The governor serves as the primary liaison between local and federal government. In general, there is a sense of animosity felt by the majority of the population towards the political elite. To a large degree, people do not feel represented by their government. The level of social unrest is exacerbated by political repression, poverty and unemployment.

Currently, over 50 percent of poor people live in rural areas, and more than 20 percent of the total population lives below the national poverty level. More people tend to cohabitate in rural households than in urban ones, and, accordingly, unemployment is much higher there. From a geographical perspective, the highest incidence of poverty occurs in the northern part of the country, in the Haut Plateau or steppes region, where this study was conducted, and in the south

Saharan region (International Fund for Agricultural Development; <http://www.ifad.org>).

Well before Algeria gained its independence, a steady migration from the rural countryside into larger cities or “exode rural” had been in motion. The reasons for this are job scarcity, a weak infrastructure, the deficit of goods in local stores, poor hygiene, and a lack of schools in the nearby areas. As of now, approximately ninety percent of the Algerian people live along the Mediterranean coast, which makes up 12% of the country’s entire land mass. Despite government efforts to discourage mass migration, forty-five percent of the population is urban and urbanization continues. According to the United Nations Development Program, Algeria has an immediate shortfall of 1.5 million housing units due to the continued influx from rural to urban areas.

Among Algeria’s poorest people living in the country’s rural areas are smallholder farmers; pastoralists; female heads of households; and unemployed youth, the so-called *hittiste*. The Arabic word for wall is *hit*, and so the young dispossessed males aimlessly propping up against walls throughout the country have soon become known as *hittiste*. All of these people are most affected by illiteracy. They include the so-called regressive illiterates, who relapse into illiteracy through the disuse of reading and writing on a daily basis.

### 1.1 Current Functional Literacy Program in Algeria

In recognition of the disparity in education, the Ministry of Education in Algeria made a new conceptual attempt to address the problem of adult literacy, which it introduced on the occasion of World Literacy Day on January 8, 2007. One of its ultimate goals is to reduce illiteracy by fifty percent by the year 2016. This literacy campaign, headed by the nationwide women’s literacy organization Iqraa (the imperative of the verb “read” in Arabic) with the support of civil society associations, claims to direct its efforts towards women and girls as its focus groups. It aims to achieve an appreciable increase in the literacy rates of families living in rural areas and remote communities. Of the estimated 6,4 million non-literates in Algeria, 177,594 students attended literacy class in 2007/2008 and 85% of them were women ([www.magharebia.com/cocoon/2007](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/2007)).

Among its official strategies for motivating women to join the literacy classes has been the addition of vocational courses such as embroidery, sewing, hairdressing and small business training to the curricula. Furthermore, certificates of achievement are to be awarded to women at the end of each course in order to honor their accomplishment and encourage them to continue on with

their studies (Hammoud, 2007:Archive Nr. 66, [http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article\\_id=208&clang=1](http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article_id=208&clang=1)).

Two years into the program, Aicha Barki commented at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), held in Brazil in 2009, that a literacy strategy for Algeria must entail an innovative approach that mobilizes funds and sensitizes the government and affected populations to the severity of this problem. She used this platform to give an update on the situation of literacy and, more importantly, to take advantage of the opportunity to make a direct appeal to CONFINTEA:

Dear Colleagues,

Algeria, in the North of Africa, also has high rates of illiteracy. In fact, 21.36% of its population is affected by this. A state institution is in charge of the national strategy to combat illiteracy with the support of civil society associations. This strategy was adopted in January 2007.

Algeria aims at eradicating this problem by 2016 and is investing important human and financial resources. We must remember that schooling for children between 6 and 16 has reached 97% this year. Nevertheless, within the framework of this big operation, the method to take care of illiterate people faces problems in finding support from the affected populations; although this year more than 562.000 registered for literacy courses, we are still far from our forecast.

I take advantage of this space to ask from those of you who have made use of an innovative approach for mobilization and sensitization, those of you who implemented a successful experience, to contact us so that we can improve our own experience.

For CONFINTEA, we expect much more in terms of action. We all know the diagnosis, we must act. Communities are tired of unfulfilled promises, millions of boys and girls do not go to school, there are millions of young people exploited, millions of women excluded. How can it be expected that countries with schooling and illiteracy rates beyond any understanding invest in an operation for adult education?

If there is a message that must be heard it is that of Action. CONFINTEA must claim accountability from all those who have made commitments and have done nothing, who have not kept their word. We must Act, act...Africa suffers, under the eyes of all those who plunder their wealth and continue to do so.

CONFINTEA must look at countries in conflict, where education is the last concern, looking a bit to Palestina. I fear that this is going to be just another meeting. ([www.icae.org.uy/eng/icaeconfinteasemcomdiezonce.html](http://www.icae.org.uy/eng/icaeconfinteasemcomdiezonce.html))

In general, CONFINTEA VI gave women from different backgrounds a chance to have their voices heard within the parameter of gender justice. Among the main themes covered by the conference were adult learning, gender equality, as well as the empowerment of women.

### *1.1.2 Arab Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa*

The problems of illiteracy as linked with poverty and unemployment are not a phenomenon unique to Algeria. Also referred to as the Arab Spring, the revolutionary events in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010 are a direct reflection of this. The Algerians were captivated and inspired by the courage shown by their Arab counterparts, who during several weeks of civil uprisings and mass protests widely used Facebook and text messages in a “peoples’ revolution” for democracy set off by government corruption, human rights violations, inflation, extreme poverty and severe shortage of jobs. The televised demonstrations were closely followed until autocratic rulers were ousted from power after decades-long rule in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Similar protests soon followed and are ongoing in Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon and Syria.

On 12 February 2011, just a month after the president of Tunisia fled to Saudi Arabia and the day after Egypt’s president, Hosni Mubarak, finally loosened his 30-year-long grip of power, an estimated 10,000 Algerians demanding democratic reforms flooded the streets of downtown Algiers, gathering in the central First of May Square. Their actions defied the two-decades-long state of emergency, which bans demonstrations in the capital. As was the case in other protests in the Middle East, the presence of women who actively participated was high.

A major political slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world has been *Ash-sha’b yurid isqat an-nizam* (“the people want to bring down the regime”). The slogan, which first emerged during the Tunisian Revolution, has frequently been used by Algerian protestors along with “No to the police state”, “Make room for youth”, and “Bouteflika out”. The last slogan refers to President Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, who has been in power since 1999. Bouteflika, now in a somewhat fragile state of health, was re-elected in 2004, again in 2009 after revising the constitution to allow for an indefinite number of terms, and most recently in 2014.

However, anticipating the protests, the Algerian government sent out squads of heavily armed police. As the masses made their way towards the central square, they were confronted by 30,000 officers. Considering this overwhelming threefold police advantage, the demonstration was quelled before it could begin.

Many protests were met with violent responses from authorities. The government, however, immediately responded to the popular uprisings by lowering the prices of food and televising plans set in motion for political reforms.

Just prior to the demonstration in Algiers, several isolated cases of self-immolation attempts made by both men and women were reported as taking place near official buildings in form of anti-governmental protest. This form of protest has been traced back to Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, in protest of the confiscation of his wares because he did not have the appropriate permit for selling on the streets. This act became known as the catalyst for the Tunisian revolution that set off subsequent protests in several other Arab countries.

Many street vendors support their whole family, as did Mohamed Bouazizi, who also financed his younger sisters' way through college. In Algeria, some boys as young as 10 years old resort to this way of earning a living because it is the only way to survive. Others simply prefer to make money rather than go to school. Often their parents are illiterate and either underestimate the importance of an education or see how little difference a school certificate makes in the first place.

Renewed protests started up again a year later towards the end of January 2012. During this time a young street vendor set himself on fire in the wilaya Tiaret in protest of getting his wares confiscated. Other incidents of self-immolation have been reported throughout Algeria since then. Protests in Tiaret rallied against the ongoing deficit of apartments, which fail to match the steady growing demand of young families, who increasingly wish to live in their own homes separate from the husband's patrilineal kin group. Throughout Algeria families are forced to wait for 15 plus years for adequate housing (see also Le Suer, J. *Algeria since 1989: between terror and democracy*, 2010).

Similar to elsewhere in the Arab world where Western-supported dictators have abused their power, the Algerian people are fed up and frustrated. Theoretically, resource-rich nations such as Algeria have the means for building functioning societies that flourish. The number of the intellectually willing and able is high if only their leaders would invest in them instead of feeding corruption. However, the anti-governmental sentiment is not so much directed towards President Bouteflika as it is towards the age-old regime.

Although the opposition, which is largely comprised of the unemployed youth, is frustrated by poor living conditions, lack of housing, high food costs, a deficit of jobs even for university graduates, poverty and corruption, many Algerians, if not the majority, want to see in Bouteflika the man who intelligently and gracefully lifted them out from the decade-long blaze of civil war. Algeria is still

emerging from several years of internal conflict, set off by the military *coup d'état* of January 1992 that left over 150,000 dead and thousands wounded.

In the weeks surrounding the uprisings, one would often hear such remarks as “It is not the same situation as in Egypt or Tunisia” and “We have our freedom of speech and can wear our *hijab*” (Islamic dress and head cover). After randomly talking to ordinary Algerian citizens, one soon gets the impression that the men and women, whether they be professionals, farmers, students, elderly or non-literate, uphold a sense of pride and admiration when they speak of their president.

Added to the equation are the scars people still carry around from what Luis Martinez describes as “one of modern history’s most savage and incomprehensible civil wars. . .which put a sudden halt to the country’s incipient democratic process” (*The Algerian Civil War*, 2000. The French-Algerian author writes under the pseudonym Luis Martinez). His empirical analysis provides a solid account of the events taking place in Algeria during the 1990s. This decade-long war deepened poverty and unemployment in rural areas and contributed to the deterioration of the natural resource base.

During this time, thousands of people throughout northern Algeria fled from the countryside only to live in overcrowded households that rapidly emerged in squatter zones located at the periphery of cities. These settlements are characterized by astonishing density, decrepit housing structures, horrid sanitation, disease-laden water, minimal or nonexistent social services, and unemployment upwards of 50%.

The living situation is somewhat reminiscent of the squatter house phenomenon in Algiers, the first so-called *bidonvilles*, dating back to the 1930s. Although they resulted from different circumstances, namely, the population influx under the colonial regime, the living situations were similar to those seen today. Similar circumstances are also evident in cities in Tiaret, near the location of this study.

In 2010, just a year prior to the uprisings in the Middle East, 130 politicians and businessmen were imprisoned for fraud and corruption in Tiaret alone. Though this may be indicative of the government’s increased efforts to curb the widespread problem of corruption, the general sentiment among the people is that this is still not sufficient.

In April 2009, President Bouteflika made his way to Tiaret to oversee the official opening of a dry port that had recently been built in the area. On the eve of his visit, street workers hastily began paving roads until the late hours of the night, a task that should have been done years ago. The job was so poorly done, that within just weeks after Bouteflika had left, the once shiny new streets already began to crumble.

The corruption seems to have an effect on people's sense of common civic conduct as well. In Tiaret, several highly populated parts of town still remain unpaved. Underground pipe-laying projects, for example, are left half finished. The streets are dug up; pipes are installed and then carelessly covered with dirt. The job is apparently considered to be done. Then during the winter months when the rainfall is at its highest, the dirt roads soon turn into a disastrous muddy mess, making it impossible to drive and very difficult and unpleasant to walk through.

Among the most common sights in Tiaret are trees and barbed wire gates literally filled with plastic bags that have aimlessly blown about after being simply cast away. At the corner of almost every block are the uncanny piles of garbage, almost predictably scattered in the vicinity of large green public trash bins rather than finding their proper place within them. It is almost as if the careless way people litter up their towns and cities is a reflection of their resignation to ever attaining a more just way of life.

Reminiscent of Mohamed Bouazizi are scenes of young boys scrambling down an alley with their two-wheeled push-carts piled high with plastic wares that were made in China or with seasonal fruits and vegetables in desperate attempts to escape the police right at their heels. Without a school degree, they are working the only jobs available to them but constantly face the limitations of law. These are among the more unpleasant images that make up part of the rural-urban Algerian landscape today. One thing does deserve mention: the government briefly reversed its anti-street vending rule directly after the 2011 protests in North Africa reached Algeria.

Indeed, it would not be fair to exclude the fact that there are just as many, if not more, engaging scenes that counterbalance this picture. Some of the endearing day-to-day sights of Algerian people bring forth images of Pierre Bourdieu's early documentary snapshots taken during the 1950's of women scurrying through narrow streets in their white, one-eyed haiks; men in their camel-colored hooded burnouses carrying home bags full of groceries to their families; and the street vendor youth pushing the same home-made carts they use today.

The similarities between then and now are so striking that it sometimes seems as if time had stood still (see Franz Schultheis, *Pierre Bourdieu in Algerien* 2003). Overall, however, it can be said that the latest civil war placed an enormous strain on the infrastructure -- and thus on education -- and that this strain has left its marks for years to come.

Since 2010, Algerians avidly follow the events of the revolution spreading throughout the Middle East and North Africa. However, due to the violence they experienced during the Black Decade (civil war during the 1990s) of their own, the social climate is cautious. When asked whether they thought Algeria would

be next in line for a revolutionary revolt, many faces fell and paled at the thought of a similar crisis happening again so soon in their own country. The fear is especially written on the faces of people from the older generation, who experienced the mysterious loss of family members first hand.

The Algerians did not learn about the details of the events unfolding in Algeria from the local news channels, nor did they expect to since the government holds a monopoly over broadcast media. The news here is widely referred to as “*yateem*” – literally defined as *orphan*. It is an off-the-record term referring to the lack of truthfulness, exhibiting no basis in fact and having no integrity.

When Algerians really want to find out what is happening in their country, they either read one of the 45 daily newspapers published in French and Arabic or switch to *Al Jazeera*, the pan-Arabic news station based in Qatar, whose star anchorwomen, Khadija Bin Ganna, is an Algerian. In addition to her esteemed manner of presenting the news, Khadija Bin Ganna is highly regarded among men and women alike for her courage to wear a headscarf on an international news program. For other Algerian onperspectives why the Arabic Spring has not yet materialized, see “Algeria: The Revolution that never was” (<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2012/05/2012516145457232336.html>).

One of the immediate outcomes of the revolutionary wave that has rippled throughout the Middle East is that it has shown the world that Arabs are capable of much more than merely being pitiable statistics of unemployment and illiteracy. In Egypt, for example, both men and women took to the streets thus uniting together for the same cause and have proved their strength in numbers instead of being powerless subjects of ‘moderate’ but ‘strong’ leaders who are essentially modern-day dictators.

Though for now the anti-governmental protests in Algeria have quieted, a leader of the Movement of Society for Peace called for more opposition parties to join the alliance “to give the best possible chance for the Arab spring to happen in Algeria as well” (Ouali, Aomar (26 February 2012). “Algerian Islamists agree on alliance ahead of vote” (The Huffington Post/The Associated Press). Alongside all this, somewhere caught in between the layers of this diverse, complex, and sometimes seemingly irrational nation are the non-literate women, to whom little attention has been given so far.



*Street vendor (5); Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika presidential campaign 2009 (6)*



## 1.2 The Fieldwork Setting

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in an Arab community in the province Tiaret, located in the northern plateau region of Algeria. The province lies southwest of the capital of Algiers in the western region of the central highlands, in the Tell Atlas. This area averages 914 meters above sea level and is characterized by limited rainfall and great rocky plains. The region is predominantly one of agriculture specializing in wheat. According to the most recent demographic survey conducted in 2008, the town had a population of 178,915.

The community was chosen for various reasons. Primarily, it was due to the connection I have maintained with the family of my husband over the past ten years. This familial link proved to be invaluable in a study where close ties are central for establishing solid contacts in order to observe and interview informants over a long period of time. Another reason for selecting this area, as mentioned earlier, was that it belongs to one of the regions in Algeria where the rates of female literacy consistently remain among the lowest in country.

After 132 years of French occupation, Algeria was left with a dismally low level of educational development. By the time of independence in 1962, 85 percent of the entire population was illiterate. Since then, Algeria has made noticeable progress in raising these rates, currently at 79.6 percent literacy for men and 60.1 percent literacy for women. Again, it is the women who constitute the majority of the non-literate total. Wilayas consistently affected by low rates of literacy are Tamanrasset, Ain Delfla, Médéa, Chlef, Khenchela, Djelfa, Tissemsilt, and Tiaret ([www.ElMoudjahid.com/accueil/forum/10422](http://www.ElMoudjahid.com/accueil/forum/10422); [www.Algerie-dz.com/article14783](http://www.Algerie-dz.com/article14783)).

Originally, I planned to carry out my study in a smaller village located an hour away from the city where I lived in the Tiaret province. However, contrary to the claims of the literacy campaign launched in 2007, no literacy classes were being offered in the remote rural areas within the vicinity of Tiaret during the onset of my research in April 2008. Two years later, in the fall of 2010, a literacy class was offered in a local elementary school in one of the villages in question.

According to some local inhabitants there, only 4 or 5 women regularly attend these classes. I was informed by four young women and relatives of one of the participants in her late fifties that she dropped out for good after one year. The reasons she gave for quitting were that the classroom was too cold during the winter months due to lack of heating and because she was disappointed with her own rate of progress.

Even though I focused my attention on the literacy program in a city within the province Tiaret, I refer to the setting as *semi-rural* or hybrid (part rural/part urban) because it is located in the vicinity of a farming and wheat-growing re-

gion, and the city inhabitants maintain strong ties to the surrounding villages, which are known throughout Algeria for preserving their traditional way of life. Tiaret provided the optimal backdrop against which to trace both the changes and gains made by the female participants of the literacy program.

Traditional Algerian society has been well documented by Pierre Bourdieu's in-depth ethnographic research on Kabyle society (1958). His findings were corroborated by Miner and deVos (1960), who conducted a study of a small-scale traditional Arab community in Sidi Khaled near Biskra in southern Algeria. Both these social anthropological accounts serve as the basis for Peter Knauss' theory (1987) on the persistence of patriarchal structures in present-day Algeria, which he traces back to pre-colonial times.

The origins of modern patriarchy in Algeria can be found in the patrilineal, patrilocal extended family of the Berber and Arab tribes of precolonial Algeria, and in the Kabyle concept of male honor. The root of modern Algerian populism and socialism can be found in the egalitarian traditions of communal land tenure and the democratic principle of collegial decision-making in the Algerian tribes. Algerian Islamic doctrine, like Islamic dogma elsewhere in the Muslim world, contains important egalitarian moral imperatives as well as certain requirements that support patriarchal arrangements (Knauss 1987:1).

The central components of traditional Algerian society in the high plateau region include the patrilineal and patrilocal extended family, the sense of family honor as reflected by the moral conduct of women, and the religious adherence to Islam. Customarily rural women led their lives in the close proximity of their homes. Most were marginally schooled or illiterate, having dropped out after primary school. Some marrying as young as age twelve, they filled their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

During my fieldwork, I met several young women who were coaxed into dropping out of school between the ages of 15 and 17. The reasons for this were similar to those of their grandmothers, namely, to avoid contact with young men and thus uphold a good moral reputation before marriage as well as to help their mothers in the home.

At the same time, however, I noticed a trend that seemed to take root around the year 2000. This coincided with the end of the decade of terrorism and the time President Bouteflika was first elected to office in 1999. It seemed as though all of a sudden more and more young women were completing their secondary school level and continuing their studies at the local Ibn Khaldun University, established in 1980. A number of the university graduates whom I interviewed are now working as secretaries and teachers. One interviewee especially stands out over the rest. She is a professor of veterinary medicine and drives a car to work.

Although a clear improvement has been made in school enrolment for girls and the tendency for women with traditional backgrounds to attain higher education has widened, the ongoing gender disparity in adult literacy indicates the importance of reviewing the situation of education for women and its impact on their status both at home and in society.

### 1.3 Research Objective

This study attempts to examine the question of gender in adult literacy within the ethnological context of Algeria. It represents the first empirical study of its kind that analyses the role of gender within the framework of empowerment as it specifically pertains to rural Algerian women. It contends that the ethnographic data collected for this study can offer valuable insight into the current situation of female literacy and can be utilized for *improving* and developing literacy strategies addressing women's needs.

Although the literacy strategy implemented in 2007 is in the narrowest sense "only" a functional literacy program with no explicit objectives to address the issue of gender and disempowerment, it has described specific initiatives to furthering gender equality in education through its intention to target women and girls from remote areas. The recent claim by the literacy program in Algeria to include vocational courses in female literacy curricula has an obvious practical value. However, are these courses too narrow in scope in the sense that they focus on discrete skills rather than on the broader social context of the learners' lives?

The hypothesis that previous literacy attempts have failed because learners' literacy needs were not being met seems reasonable. The question then becomes, is the most recent literacy strategy implemented in 2007 to target women and girls effective enough in recruiting and sustaining female learners over a longer period of time? If not, in what ways could it expand its strategy to include issues of gender and empowerment and more importantly, what does "women's empowerment" mean in the context of an adult literacy program in Algeria, and how can progress in empowerment be measured?

This dissertation draws upon the notion that literacy is a set of cognitive skills developed within a cultural context imperative for understanding the written word (Stromquist 2009a). It discusses the theoretical and conceptual issues of empowerment arising from the practice of educating Algerian women. It is stipulated that the number of female literacy class participants, their long-term motivation, and their subsequent empowerment through literacy acquisition will

increase if policy makers design literacy programs that address gender issues and include the local traditions so as to meet the needs of the students.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First and foremost, it investigates the experience of a group of women over a three-year period as students in the literacy program Iqraa. It assesses who the learners are and probes what these women perceive to be their literacy needs. A closer look is taken at how the cultural structures surrounding this patriarchal society affect female literacy.

The pedagogical practices and instructional materials of the literacy program are analyzed for their cultural relevance and to determine whether they support the needs of the women learners. Aside from the obvious gains of learning to read and write, included in this work were the effects of the literacy program on women's empowerment in the areas of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics and Islam.

Throughout this study, literacy is considered a prerequisite for empowerment and educational advancement. As this topic correlates to and extends beyond female literacy, the experience of a small sample of students attending the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret was surveyed in order to help project future trends of women's education. An interesting parallel to the low rate of female literacy in rural areas is the fact that women now constitute the overwhelming majority of those who attend universities.

The current generation of Algerian women represent nearly 60 percent of the total university population nationwide (Altman *et al.* 2009:206). Similar trends have been observed throughout the MENA region as well (Akkari, Vol. 5, N°2, 2004; Moghadam Oct. 2003; Spratt 1992:121-132). This development is comparable to present rates found in Europe and the United States. Therefore, this study also examines female access and gender equity in higher education and employment. Among the intentions of the gender-survey was to determine whether rural attitudes toward women's education at the tertiary level and increased participation in the workforce have begun to change.

#### **1.4 Central Questions**

The questions central to this study have been divided into three parts: Female Literacy and Empowerment; Workable Strategies for Female Literacy; and, Access and Gender Equity in Higher Education and Employment. The first set of questions specifically addresses how illiteracy in the context of rural Algeria is essentially a women's issue.

By using the participants' personal accounts as primary data, one of its main objectives was to determine what kinds of adult education policies are relevant to the needs of rural women and in what ways do the functional literacy classes empower women. The overwhelming similarities in culture and ways of thinking among societies in North Africa suggest that the following questions related to female literacy and education could be relevant for policy formulations throughout the Middle East.

#### *1.4.1 Women's Literacy and Empowerment*

From the perspective of the women learners, how can or does literacy or illiteracy impact their daily lives? To what extent do rural Algerian women believe that literacy contributes to or illiteracy limits their ability to contribute to the wellbeing of their families and to the socio-economic progress of their community? Is it possible to determine a link between the access to literacy and the empowerment of rural women within their households and communities?

What are local attitudes towards women who aspire to join or who already attend a literacy class? What socio-cultural boundaries stand in the way of women becoming literate, and what are some of the strategies women develop to overcome them? To what extent can the problematic surrounding the attainment of literacy be attributed to patriarchal structures, and to what degree can this problem be attributed to political issues involving poor learning concepts and a lack of resources?

Other related questions focus on the classes themselves, the teachers, and the participants. Is Algeria's new literacy concept effective in targeting women in rural societies? Does the class content meet the socio-cultural needs of its participants? Who are the students, why are they illiterate, and what reasons do they give for wanting to become literate now? Who are the teachers and how are they recruited and trained? Does the discrepancy between the spoken dialect and classic Arabic pose a problem for literacy students? How are the courses organized didactically, and what is the program's ultimate objective? How do mothers manage to fulfill their household tasks in order to attend class on a regular basis? What are the most common reasons for being absent or dropping out altogether? How do women retain their literacy after the course has ended?

### *1.4.2 Workable Strategies for Female Literacy*

This set of questions probes possible strategies for improving female literacy and higher education within the context of a rural Algerian society. In what ways can traditional patriarchal families be sensitized to the importance of an education for girls and women? What is the Islamic perspective on women, literacy and higher education, and how does this diverge from traditional views? What kinds of policies should be implemented in future literacy programs in order to better suit the local situation. How can more women be recruited to attend a literacy class, and how can their motivation as long-term learners be sustained? How can the government support women in their basic and higher educational endeavors, thus contributing to the empowerment of women and the country's socio-economic advancement?

### *1.4.3 Access and Gender Equity in Higher Education and Employment*

The following questions correspond to the recent development of young women who are taking advantage of the opportunity for furthering their education. What do women hope to achieve by pursuing a higher education? How do rural Algerians and family members feel about and react to this trend? How are traditional female roles changed or challenged? What problems or conflicts arise? In what ways does going to the university alter women's status?

What is the pattern of female education within families? Do all female members get access to the same educational opportunities? What explains the apparent contradiction between a social reluctance to fostering (or even allowing) adult women to become literate on the one hand and the parallel boom in the number of female university students on the other? What factors enabled some women within the same setting and within the family to become literate or highly educated and entering the workforce while impeding others from access to similar levels of education? For example, why do some women remain illiterate while their sisters or daughters finish their studies and pursue a career?

## **1.5 Method**

The strategy implemented in developing the present work derives in part from a compilation of information focusing on women, gender, and literacy acquisition from earlier publications. Throughout this study comparisons of social change

among women within the region will be made and factors that best explain the differences in women's status through time will be emphasized.

The method of analysis of the functional literacy program in Algeria draws on data from recent research investigating the link between literacy and empowerment. As a main point of reference for conducting a gender analysis of the current functional literacy program in Algeria, UNESCO's guidelines for analyzing literacy programs from a gender perspective (1999) was put forward.

The historical method was used in order to better understand the developmental context of female education in Algeria. I have relied upon ethnographic monographs and evaluated other secondary sources about the education of girls and women before, during, and after the French colonial regime in Algeria. This in turn establishes a platform from which a culturally appropriate strategy for female literacy programs and projects that are gender based can be designed.

Fieldwork conducted over a period of three years (2008-2011) on a literacy program and community not formerly subjected to empirical analysis in this subject provides the primary data for this study. Quantitative and qualitative methods such as participatory and systematic observation were utilized. Controlled in-depth interviews were taken from all 17 members, aged 16-72 years, of a women's literacy class, which was held at a local grade school. Beginning with a brief family history, topics profiled family literacy and education patterns.

Other questions focused on their motivations and goals for attending. The participants' level of contentment with the learning material and style of teaching was assessed. Also surveyed were literacy activities on an everyday basis, health, culture, and religion, as well as family attitudes towards women, literacy, and higher education. Finally, in addition to the observation of obvious gains such as the attainment of basic reading and writing skills, subtle changes impacting the women's concept of self and of social and cultural status were measured throughout the length of the course.

In addition to this class, all 10 members of the adjacent men's literacy class, aged 32-73 years, were interviewed. Although the men's survey was not as comprehensive as the women's, the content of their questions centered around their attitudes towards the development of female literacy and higher education in Tiaret. The data from both classes were cross-checked and examined, and the answers pertaining to male and female perceptions about the role of women in education were highlighted.

Controlled interviews were undertaken with both directors of the literacy programs based in Tiaret. Their questions focused on the programs' objectives for targeting women. Regular contact was sought out and maintained with the female program director throughout the duration of the study. The programs were monitored for any possible changes of the class content or teaching strate-



gies during the course of the study. Additional interviews were made with four literacy class teachers, one grade school teacher, and one university professor, all of whom were women working in Tiaret.

Information was gathered through archival research at CRIDSSH (Centre de recherche en information documentaire des sciences sociales et humaines) in Oran. Informal interviews with local families and an ethnographic survey maintained throughout the study supplement the data. Descriptions of the present refer to the time of my fieldwork.

## 1.6 Adult Literacy Research in Algeria

It would not be within the bounds of proper scientific practice to discuss the kind or combination of literacy approaches and strategies taken into consideration for rural Algerian women without first reviewing the previous research on adult literacy in Algeria. However, this research is notably limited.

Academic investigations of adult education in the Arab region are meager. So far only UNESCO and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have published data specifically related to this subject. There are few ethnographic accounts on literacy in Arab countries and even fewer that deal with literacy as it pertains to the situation of women from a gender perspective.

Currently within the Maghreb region, the bulk of publications stem from research done in Morocco (Agnou, 2001, 2004; Belarbi, 1991; Spratt, 1992; Wagner, 1993). Previous research on literacy in Algeria has treated the subject in general terms, relying on statistics as a way for measuring the level of success or failure of previous mass literacy campaigns.

Although the topic of female literacy and higher education has not always been neglected altogether, it has only been modestly addressed as a sideline consideration in publications focusing on societal development and the position of women in Algeria (Bennoune, 1988; Gordon, 1968; Knauss, 1987; Leßner, 1978; Nestvogel, 1985; Széll, 1967).

Interest in adult literacy research in Algeria is very recent and quite sparse. One of the main reasons for the practical void of information about this subject most likely has to do with the fact that Algeria is still recovering from years of severe internal conflict sparked by the military *coup d'état* of January 1992. This civil war was prevalent during all of the 1990s with sporadic incidents continuing to occur during the beginning of this millennium.

The aftermath of the conflict considerably stalled literacy efforts, thus essentially halting programs and research altogether. As a result, cooperation in the area of adult literacy has only recently been initiated between the government of

Algeria and UNESCO. It was first in 2007 that Algeria officially announced the validation and implementation of a National Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy (SNEA), which includes among its recent claims the attempt to target girls and women living in remote areas.

The few available research works that have dealt with the topic of illiteracy consist of evaluations of the government's endeavor to nationally address this issue. These are largely based on official ministerial and national literacy strategy documents and brief updates commissioned by UNESCO. Due to the scarcity of information on adult literacy in Algeria, a small sample of reports published just prior to the decade of conflict in Algeria will be included in this review.

Ouane et al. (1987) addresses the issues of post-literacy and learning strategies based on the experiences from a series of case studies, including Algeria. Each report includes background information on the country and its educational system, a description of literacy and continuing education programs, as well as a discussion of the learning strategies used so far.

The results of these studies are meant to be of use for understanding the scope as well as the limitations of previous approaches and programs and for considering pre-conditions and possible obstacles in the design and implementation of appropriate learning strategies for the future. The case study of Algeria summarizes the stages of literacy and adult education implemented just prior to and after independence. It is a general survey that focuses on the problem of literacy retention among neo-literate adults.

The overall conclusion given for previous literacy campaigns in Algeria was that they had all been categorized as unsuccessful. A well-defined policy for literacy education, a correct estimation of the current situation, and a definition for a practical plan were deemed necessary and urgent. However, no future strategies were outlined, and the subject of female literacy was excluded altogether.

El Joundi et al. (1998) is a similar yet more updated monograph, which includes a review of past and current adult literacy campaigns in each country within the Maghreb region. It highlights the government's efforts to curb illiteracy in the region since independence. At the same time, however, the authors note that these efforts have been largely impeded by general, pedagogical, and financial obstacles.

The most current report on literacy for the Maghreb region is by Bougroum et al. (2007). This report, commissioned by UNESCO for the regional conference Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region, which was held in Doha in 2007, provides a recent overview of literacy policies and strategies and underlines the need for changes in current literacy approaches. It argues that recent political commitment towards literacy in this region must be backed up by the

implementation of realistic strategies linking efforts in both formal and non-formal education.

The contributing authors point out the urgent need to reconsider the quality and relevance of basic education currently provided whether in formal schooling or in the area of adult literacy. Other issues mentioned are the problem of relapse into illiteracy that has been observed in certain contexts, as well as significant disparities based on gender and income within these countries. Finally, it is argued that funding is one of the issues that are intimately related to institutional arrangements for literacy provision.

Other publications attest to the identified benefits of female literacy in North Africa and the Middle East in terms of better maternal behavior regarding child health, child rearing, and family planning (Allman 1978; King & Hill 1993; Beck & Keddie 1978). The Women's Fertility Survey (WFS) has played a significant role in making a connection between a mother's education and a child's well-being. Two facts common to other developing regions were confirmed for in the Arab world; namely, that the urban fertility rate is lower than the rural one, and that women's education, particularly post-primary education, is a factor of fertility decline.

As elsewhere, literate and educated Algerian women tend to have fewer children, lose fewer children to disease, and use more modern health care practices (Kateb 2003; Kouaouci 1993). A strong link between women's educational status and fertility has also been established in Algeria. Furthermore, as Vallin argues (Allman 1978:144), a woman's economic status, like her education, is a decisive element in fertility. Women with a higher education are more likely to marry later and make use of contraception.

The topic of the condition of Algerian women as linked with literacy is a relatively new phenomenon. The reasons that the discussion of women in public space and their role in society are still in its beginning stages may be partially due to the wave of the previous terrorist activity and partially due to the fact that minimal attention has been paid to the status of women in society. Meyer (1990) is among the only authors that solely address the issue of non-literacy as it relates to the position of women in Algeria.

In her report, *Analphabetentum und die Marginalisierung der Frau in Algerien* (Literacy and the Marginalization of women in Algeria), Meyer claims that Algerian women are marginalized in society as a result of their illiteracy. She argues that the educational situation of women relates to the social politics of the government, which in turn is a direct reflection of the values and attitudes of traditional societies in general and Muslim societies in particular. She attributes the failure of female literacy acquisition in Algeria in part to what she de-

scribes as its religious moral background as well as to a deficient concept of literacy for adult women.

Although the amount of research on adult literacy in Algeria is relatively limited, the authors cited above seem to arrive at the same conclusion as other literacy studies conducted in the Maghreb region do; namely, there is an urgent need for an adult literacy strategy that effectively recruits and retains participants, as well as addresses the issue of literacy retention. This is closely related to another aspect in the field of adult literacy, which has been virtually neglected until the nineties.

Current trends in adult literacy studies take a look at the problems of women's education from a gender perspective. Research is increasingly showing how women's access to literacy affects all aspects of their private and social lives in society from health and child welfare, economical, psychological to issues of empowerment and attaining power in the realm of politics.

## 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Overview of Literacy

The present chapter outlines the main current arguments circulating in academic discourses relating to important issues of adult literacy acquisition. This is followed by a review of the definitions and conceptions of adult literacy in general and narrows down to the role of gender and issues of empowerment in female literacy in particular. The purpose of this overview is to provide the necessary theoretical and methodological information about literacy from research-oriented findings made by previous scholars in order to set the stage for the approach taken for this study.

### 2.1 The Current Women's Literacy Debate

The disagreement surrounding female literacy centers on scholars who believe literacy, i.e., basic education, can bring about sustained improvement in the living conditions of girls and women and become a source of their empowerment in the domestic and public spheres (Agnaou 2004; Egbo 2000; Chlebowska 1990; King and Hill 1993; Ramdas 1990; Stromquist 2009a, 1990; UNESCO 2005, 1995) and on other specialists who have their reasons for contention.

The skeptics question whether literacy has done much to change the status and social situation of women. Although these scholars do not reject the necessity for literacy, they claim that in the case of members from lower-class or marginalized groups, it has even contributed negatively to their existing socio-economic situation, thereby doing little to promote gender equity (Longwe 1999:22; Medel-Anonuevo 1999:3).

From the critics' perspective, literacy attainment and the subsequent access to higher education, usually leading to economic and professional attainments, have thus far not transformed women's status in a significant way (Hollo 1998; Egbo 2000). To illustrate this fact, these scholars point out that even in Western societies, where equal access to education has a longer established tradition, women's social equality has still not been guaranteed.

Among the most commonly cited factors attributed to this problem are patriarchal structures and cultural norms that discriminate against women as well as educational systems that stem from Western patriarchal ideologies (Ramdas

1990; Stromquist 1992; Odora 1993; Egbo 2000). This in turn has been linked with preexisting power structures, where men benefit more because of their ranks in higher positions, which they are reluctant to share or mete out for the sake of equalizing the balance of power.

Some issues stemming from this current of the discussion extend into the literacy programs themselves insofar as they do not encourage women to increase their access to *new* knowledge, an important prerequisite for the process of emancipation. Stromquist (1992), for example, argues that literacy program curricula are designed along sexually stereotyped lines that emphasize women's roles as mothers and household managers. She claims that this solidifies the prevailing values and attitudes and causes women to accept current gender relations rather than to question and transform them.

In postmodern feminist discourse, the potential of literacy has similarly received modest approval. In their framework for measuring women's roles in development, known as 'Women in Development' (WID), literacy as an important component in the empowerment of women has been largely overlooked. Their paradigm focuses on issues related to the broader developmental needs of society where 'modernization' is automatically linked with the improved condition of women. This, however, has not gone without criticism. According to Etta (1994:58):

"Scant attention is given... to the multidimensional and complex ways in which education affects economic development ... WID and WIE (women in development and women in environment), two of the most favored conceptual platforms for addressing gender issues are insufficient to reach the desired result of gender equity".

A final issue, which requires mention here, has to do with the prevailing Eurocentric perspective of gender and its application to other cultural systems. In an effort to understand the universality of women's inequality and secondary status, many feminist social scientists adapt a pan-cultural approach, where Western notions of gender, related values, and priorities for social improvement are assumed to be relevant for all women worldwide. This is especially true in the context of Arab-Islamic societies, where a lack of understanding of Islamic laws, traditions, structures, and values that influence the situation of Muslim women contributes to this phenomenon.

For the most part, mass literacy programs still model their curricula after Western-based ideologies. However, in reality the importance placed on certain aspects of literacy such as ideas about what constitutes gender equity and when or how it should be implemented vary greatly among cultures. Some important questions that arise from this are who decides what aspects of a certain cultural

situation need to be improved and whether Western-styled literacy programs are relevant to women living in rural Algerian regions (Egbo 2000; Morsy 1994).

Despite the nuances of the debate, the majority of the arguments adhere to the first view, which considers equal access to literacy for women a prerequisite for the maximization of their potential on an individual, collective, and national level. Here, it is argued that social progress goes hand in hand with basic education, and anything less ultimately attributes to women's social distance from legislative and decision-making bodies, thus contributing to their gender-based subordination and marginalization in society.

The position sustained throughout this paper supports women's equal access to literacy as it affects all areas of their lives, including health issues and child welfare, as well as their social, psychological, political, economic, and cultural wellbeing. At the same time, it stresses that the input of the learner in the conception of literacy programs should be considered in order to ensure that their practical needs are met and to avoid the pitfalls of Euro-centric approaches, even when meant well.

Not only do scholars differ in the positions that they take to advocate for literacy in terms of its benefits, disadvantages, and application. As the following section will make clear, the discrepancies in the field of literacy extend even further to the very meaning of the term itself. What is literacy?

## 2.2 Defining Literacy

In much of the anthropological work during the early twentieth-century, literacy was considered the turning point that distinguished the "primitive" from the "civilized" as similarly expressed in the writings of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jack Goody, to name just a few. Although the central interest of these research concerns was to understand more about the diversity of learning and development across cultures, a variety of consequences resulted from such endeavors, not always positive.

One of the drawbacks for placing societies in either oral or literate categories was that it led to privileged assumptions about the "other", i.e., to the negative side effects of ethnocentrism. This, in turn, was easily used to benefit and justify the policies of colonial regimes, whose educational systems were racist towards the indigenous inhabitants and sexist towards the women and girls in those populations. Since then, scholars have re-examined the sentiment and consequences of equating literacy with civilization.

Although initially situated in the fields of psychology and education, current trends in literacy research call for an interdisciplinary approach drawing on con-

cepts from a broad spectrum of social sciences. However, as much as it has been analyzed and researched, literacy itself is still shrouded by conceptual ambiguity because the term has no universally accepted definition. The following is a brief outline of the diverse directions within the discourses related to the field of literacy. It should reflect the complex nature of this subject and offer some insight as to why this is not a straightforward task.

Several attempts have been made at finding a suitable definition for 'literacy'. Originally, the United Nations and other agencies interested in social change assumed one could infer literacy skills from a certain level of school attendance. In the meantime, due to the expanded scope that the study of literacy has undertaken, this definition and way of measurement have proven themselves rudimentarily inadequate.

The most commonly employed definition is the school-based acquisition of reading, writing and arithmetic, also referred to as the 3 R's. While most experts agree that literacy implies aspects of all these basic skills, the debate as to what really constitutes literacy and what its acquisition should do for beneficiaries has reached the point at which it is referred to as the 'literacy crisis' in much of the literature (de Castello, 1986).

The lack of agreement on a definition of literacy was early pointed out in the UNESCO monograph *The Teaching of Reading and Writing* (Gray, 1956). This publication was a significant contribution to the efforts to clarify and awaken interest in the need for literacy and a definition that would lead to the assessment of its attainment in a population. Some years later, Graff (1979) claims that "literacy is above all a technology or set of techniques for communication and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials; it cannot be taken as any more or any less".

More recent approaches, also known as New Literacy Studies, refer to "multi-literacies" and call for the recognition of the multiple levels and variety of literacies that people develop regardless of how much they take part in mainstream practices such as local or indigenous out-of-school contexts or more formal school-based environments (in Duranti 2004:246). Within this discourse, literacy is conceived as one part of a cultural complex and a process of interpretation, which varies greatly in form and meaning across societies.

Empirical studies support this view of literacy as a context-bound phenomenon. One commonly cited study where such uses of literacy have been documented is among the Vai of Liberia (Scribner and Cole, 1981). Additional ethnological studies exhibiting similar results are in Morocco (Wagner, 2001) and among American English-speaking communities (Heath, 1986). These studies explore the role of literacy in social development, the economic and cultural values of literacy, as well as the effects of literacy on cognitive processes.



Other recent works similarly characterize literacy in relative rather than absolute terms. Barton (2007) believes that:

“literacy is best understood as a set of practices which people use in literacy events; that literacy practices are situated in broader social relations; that literacy is a symbolic system used both for communication with others and for representing the world to ourselves; ...that issues of power are important; and that current literacy events and practices are created out of the past” (Barton, 2007:7).

He suggests the need for definitions of literacy that better represent the variety of literacy activities people participate in on an everyday basis. Furthermore, Barton advocates an interdisciplinary framework of literacy studies that he describes as an ‘ecological approach’ to literacy. This he defines as “one which examines the social and mental embeddedness of human activities in a way which allows change” (Barton, 2007:32).

Although the conceptual pluralism of literacy seems quite complicated already, there are indeed even more recent notions of literacy that have arisen from technological fields such as political literacy, computer literacy, and media literacy. Even if these recent notions are set aside, most scholars still acknowledge that a universal definition of literacy is problematic. Such a definition would have to be kept so vague that it would be useless as a conceptual or methodological tool. Accordingly, the idea of specific types of literacy or “literacies” has been developed, where definitions are context-bound in order to be meaningful.

While theories of literacy have, for the most part, been determined by the primacy of writing script, as this section has shown, more recent scholarship has served to challenge such limitations. Many contemporary perspectives on literacy view scripted text as one component of complex acts and practices of written communication that occur in social contexts.

Anthropological ethnographic studies such as this one examine such communicative acts in their local contexts. It argues that literate practices and texts that are produced or highly regarded are imbued with social and cultural values and traditions, as well as with the needs and desires of individuals. Likewise, theories of literacy themselves are embedded within the values and assumptions of individuals, institutions, and academic specialization.

The next sections elaborate a little on some of the different kinds of literacy that may have particular relevance to the issues of adult female education addressed in this study. These are functional, critical, and gender literacy.

### 2.3 UNESCO's Adult Education and Functional Literacy

Parallel to the diligent literacy research carried out in the academic fields is the extensive contribution made by the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, UNESCO. Since its establishment in 1946, one of this institution's primary areas of concern has been literacy.

Throughout the post-war years, when many new nations were caught up in the process of decolonization, UNESCO promoted literacy as a catalyst for economic development and for the overall prosperity of developing societies. Although adult education, as a practice and a concept, has been around for centuries, UNESCO played a big role in making literacy, within the framework of adult education, a global concern through its modernization policies during the period of 1945-1964.

During the 1950's, whether someone was literate or not hinged on the self-assessed question: "Can you read? / Can you read or write?" (UNESCO, 1957:36). Shortly after, UNESCO (1958) stated that "a literate person is someone who is able to read, write and understand a brief and simple statement in relation to his or her everyday life". The definition expanded its content to differentiate between illiterate and semi-literate people who can read but not write and excluded numeracy.

This narrow concept of literacy stressed fundamental education, the need for community development, and the promotion of non-formal programs for adults and children. Despite the fact that many aspects and questions surrounding literacy still remained unclear, this approach has been adopted by most developing countries, including Algeria, and has been used as the basis for designing the majority of literacy campaigns worldwide.

Several years later during the period of 1965-1974, the concept of *functional literacy* with its link to economic growth and returns was developed. This new concept of literacy originally evolved from the *World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy*, held in Tehran in 1965. Shortly after, *functional literacy* was further refined to be work-related and put into practice through the *Experimental World Literacy Program* (EWLP) from 1966 to 1974. The UNESCO *Committee for the Standardization of Educational Statistics* currently defines *functional literacy* in terms of the activities that people perform within their community:

"A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his or her group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development" (Morsy 1994:121).

This definition suggests a causal relationship between literacy skills and socio-economic development. In essence, *functional literacy* is literacy for everyday use with the added potential for socio-economic benefits since literate people are presumed to be more employable. It emphasizes the community as the main beneficiary, thus neglecting the value of literacy for the individual. Wagner (2001:9), in reference to his observations in Morocco, claims that the concept of *functional literacy* is too general because it fails to specify what kind or level of functioning is suited for all members of a given society. It is important, therefore, to subsume this concept under that of adult education in order to provide enough specificity so that educators apply the concept in a more meaningful and effective way.

The branch with particular focus on questions concerning Adult Literacy has been the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE). To date, UNESCO has sponsored four international conferences dedicated to the subject of adult education (UNESCO 1949, 1963, 1972, 1985).

On International Literacy Day, which is celebrated annually on September 8<sup>th</sup>, UNESCO globally highlights women's empowerment through literacy by paying tribute to the women and men who work behind the scenes to help others acquire literacy skills. The majority of the policy initiatives labeled as basic education, adult education, functional literacy, and lifelong learning originate from this international organization.

Additional interest in adult education evolved from the early seventies, and it became increasingly necessary to specify what it encompasses. In the widest sense, adult education includes any form of learning adults engage in beyond the traditional school setting. In the narrowest sense, it refers to literacy. As such, adult education includes everything from basic literacy skills to personal interest-building as a lifelong learner to the attainment of degrees in higher education.

In several UNESCO publications, various authors have tried to formulate a workable concept of adult education. In one UNESCO document, for example, the following definition from C.D. Legge (1962) is quoted:

“We interpret adult education to mean simply the education of adults, i.e. all the educational experiences of an adult and all the educational influences which bear on him. Our definition therefore includes formal classes in any subject, informal adult educational work in clubs and associations and all the direct or indirect effects of the mass media; it includes liberal adult education, technical education, craft education, etc., in the more developed countries and community development, literacy and health education, etc., in the less developed areas” (Morsy 1994:119).

In a glossary of terms published by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education, Titmus et al. (1979) defines adult education as the education of “those

who have terminated the initial cycle of education commenced in childhood and ... those who have never passed through such an initial cycle” (Morsy 1994:120). Over the years, the concept of adult education has expanded to include almost every possible activity, including adult literacy, post-literacy, farmer’s training, health and nutrition education, as well as vocational and technological education.

UNESCO has evolved, making a continual effort to adapt its approach for measuring, addressing and understanding illiteracy in an attempt to coincide with contemporary academic discourse. One of the most significant turning points of UNESCO’s history remains its international conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. Here, many participants openly acknowledged the failure of the previous decades, describing the efforts made during that time as lacking in substance and effectiveness. A variety of new initiatives and programs aiming to counter the problematic trend of illiteracy through to the next decade was formally introduced. These all focused on a social view of literacy, including concepts such as Education for All (EFA) and the importance of placing an emphasis on women and adult education (Barton 2007:191).

Since its establishment, UNESCO’s concepts of literacy and *functional literacy* have undergone a process of transformation. One thing that has remained consistent throughout the entire time is UNESCO’s goal of finding a workable definition of literacy for the standardization of educational statistics that will lead to a valid assessment of literacy attainment among populations all over the world. Unfortunately, the data still rely on measures of literacy ability as it correlates with the level of primary school or on information gathered through so-called self-assessment questionnaires. Both sources, as stated earlier, are highly unreliable (Wagner 2001:10).

Despite the political and ideological criticisms of UNESCO literacy programs and perhaps because UNESCO has acknowledged and tried to correct the short-comings of its programs, the term *functional literacy* and the idea of literacy being an essential catalyst for development remain at the forefront of most mass literacy campaigns throughout the world.

The question, which must then be raised, is whether this concept is adequate to reach and empower marginalized groups such as women in rural Algeria. In retrospect of previous mass literacy campaigns put into practice in Algeria since 1964, including the implementation of the EWLP from 1967-1971, all which have been regarded as flops (Meyer 1990; Ouane et al. 1987), the concept of *functional literacy* is insufficient to generate the kind of social-cultural change that can benefit women in these areas long-term.

It is not the intention here to disregard the concept of *functional literacy* altogether. Indeed, it encompasses several honorable and useful characteristics in

that it denotes the importance of literacy acquisition, regardless of how much or little, as essential for a meaningful and complete life on an everyday basis in all societies. But, in the case of rural Algeria, this concept alone has proven itself insufficient to engender and sustain a passion for acquiring and increasing literacy skills.

One of the reasons for its persisting popularity has been related in part to its seemingly apolitical content (Ouane et al. 1987). However, this is also why it has been the subject of intense criticism by other scholars of literacy (Freire 1970; Lankshear & McLaren 1993; Street 1994; Wagner 2001).

## 2.4 Critical Literacy after Paulo Freire

Literacy first began to be critically reviewed and redefined after the UNDP's and UNESCO's evaluation of the *Experimental World Literacy Program* (EWLP) in 1976. This was largely due to the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's radical pedagogical movement of the 1970's. Freire and other critical theorists, aiming for social justice and transformation, strongly criticized the 'UNESCO view' on literacy for treating literacy as a measurable variable related to development and placing a causal link between literacy and modernization. Freire also challenged UNESCO's methods, referring to them as passive for the way that literacy was *imposed* on only a select group of society, i.e., those who were most likely to be productive in the first place (Barton 2007:191).

Freire shifts literacy discourse from an academic to a political realm. His critical theory and pedagogy in the field of adult literacy research are outlined in his studies *The Adult Literacy Process as a Cultural Action for Freedom* (1970a) and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970b). He believes literacy acquisition should start from people's own perceptions of their literacy needs and be an active process of critical consciousness, which he calls '*concientizacion*'. Part of his literacy methods includes the production of texts by students themselves.

From his political point of view, adult literacy should bypass the simple technique of reading and writing and become a tool for social criticism ultimately leading to liberation and radical social change (Street 1984:186). That is to say, critical consciousness is not ideologically neutral, and adult literacy programs, as Freire conceives them, should be a form of political training. Ironically, then, the curricula of adult literacy programs, on this view, should promote linguistic literacy only to the extent that it develops the students' social consciousness -- or what might be called their political literacy.

Other critical approaches to UNESCO literacy programs are summarized by Carol and Lars Berggren in a pamphlet entitled *'The Literacy Process: A Practice in Domestication or Liberation?'* (1975). These writers similarly argue that literacy should not be a neutral phenomenon: it is either an instrument for liberation or domestication and contains the moral philosophy and educational system of a particular society.

Other authors claim that the concept of *functional literacy* disguises the relationship of a literacy program to the underlying political and ideological framework. Overall, UNESCO's concept of literacy has been criticized for being subservient to the hegemonic interests of capitalist states who invest in the Third World on the premise that higher levels of literacy ultimately raise productivity and profits (Street 1984:184).

Among the most steadfast supporters of critical literacy are Lankshear and McLaren (1993). They consider it to be:

“The extent to which, and the ways in which, actual and possible social practices and conception of reading and writing enable human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more truly democratic social order” (Egbo 2000:25).

From their perspective, critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development. Freire and other critical discourse analysts sought to provide a definition of literacy geared towards people's own interests rather than commercial interests. As Shor (1997) notes, whereas “*functional literacy* can be understood as social action through language use that develops us as agents inside a larger culture, *critical literacy* can be understood as learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson and Irvine, 1992:82). The actual implementation of such a definition, however, remains difficult to realize because the teaching of critical consciousness tends to assume an anti-state bias.

With regard to women, several scholars view critical literacy as a potential solution to the problem of their subordination in society (Egbo 2000; Ramdas 1990; Stromquist 1992). They claim that this subordination has taken place on two levels: first when women are denied equal access to literacy opportunities and, even when they are offered opportunities, such opportunities consist of domestication pedagogies that further contribute to their secondary position. Commenting on how women in Sub-Saharan Africa have been marginalized, Egbo (2000) argues that:

“Critical literacy may offer women the possibility of questioning both the ‘existing social order’ and the colonizing effects of conventional literacy practices. Further, it provides a dialectical notion of literacy in which women, as marginalized social actors, are seen as agents, capable in their own right, of changing the status-quo” (Egbo 2000:25).

Although this may hold some implications of truth, one thing that seems to fall by the wayside is any consideration of the cultural framework of the society at hand and the important role culture plays in literacy activities, i.e., the cultural context of the people involved. Women are not an isolated group nor are they a homogenous one having exactly the same needs. They are individuals who, at the same time, are part of a larger socio-cultural whole that share common beliefs and practices with their families and communities. It cannot be lightly assumed that a critical literacy program rallying for *radical social change* for its *oppressed* female learners will automatically work just because it is supposed to be good for the lot of them.

The concept of critical literacy seems to argue in an all-or-nothing way and suggests that there are only two mutually exclusive possibilities from which to choose. When literacy programs are classified as “either an instrument for liberation or domestication”, it is as if teachers and educators were either with the oppressed or against them. The overtly politicized perspective reflected in the works of Freire proceeds from an assumption of exploitation and abuse of power.

In other words, a Freirean literacy program that embodies a neo-Marxist stance that propagates radical social change, if set against the backdrop of a democratic Muslim nation such as Algeria, is just as unlikely to find consensus among the Algerian government as it is among its pious tradition-oriented rural inhabitants who are wary of change to begin with. In fact, it runs the risk of facing strong opposition, thus curtailing all attempts to recruit and maintain women as long-term literacy students.

Speaking of criticism, it seems inevitable for Freire’s concept of critical literacy not to escape its share of scrutiny itself. One of the main critique points comes from Taylor (1993), who, for starters, questions the originality of Freire’s contribution and the extent to which the structure of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* echoes Kosik’s *Dialectic of the Concrete*, published prior to his work in Spanish in the 1960s.

Furthermore, Taylor argues that “Freire’s approach differs only in degree, but not in kind, of the system which he so eloquently criticizes.” (Taylor 1993:148). One could say it would seem as if Freire and other critical literacy theorist have lost perspective. They profess to love the masses but appear not to care about individuals. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) speak of “human sub-

jects” not persons. They come across as social engineers for whom people are the subjects of a grand social experiment.

Despite the disapproval, Paulo Freire established a connection between empowerment and the literacy process. The content of literacy programs should incorporate the social experiences of the learners so that their needs can be identified and assessed. This form of participatory evaluation represents a holistic approach where the learner becomes the evaluator and the evaluator the learner. Acting as “advisor to UNESCO” from 1968 until his death in 1997, Freire is regarded as one of the pioneers of the UIE. In 1996 he was awarded the “UNESCO prize for Peace Education” (UIE 2002:30).

There are two aspects of Freire’s concept that are relevant for this study. These are how it prescribes focusing on the literacy needs of the participants and its emphasis on targeting marginalized groups, e.g., women. Critical literacy is a good starting point for teaching, but overall its approach is too politicized to work within the context of rural Algeria.

Although the literacy strategy has to be potent enough to recruit and maintain women participants while empowering them in the process, at the same time, it may not be so “radical” that it becomes incompatible with their cultural framework, threatening to undermine their world-view or devalue and negate their indigenous ways of life.

## **2.5 Gender, Literacy and Empowerment**

The following is a historical overview of the conceptual shifts related to women and development that have led up to current research practice in the field of literacy as it pertains to gender and empowerment. It provides the theoretical framework relevant for the analysis of the current functional literacy program implemented in Algeria in 2007. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for future literacy programs aiming for the empowerment of women.

The gender gap in literacy has been an established fact for quite some time. Literacy as related to gender and empowerment can initially be traced back to women’s movements, which began to catch momentum in the mid-1970’s. The United Nations’ 1975 International Women’s Year Conference in Mexico City was a catalyst for subsequent pleas for the promotion of equal rights for women. As a result, the years 1976-1985 were declared the United Nations’ Decade for the Advancement of Women with the official aim to further equality, peace and development (Tinker 1990).

Over the past five decades, the ways in which women’s role in the process of development has been understood and addressed have undergone a transfor-



mation. In sum, Moser (1991) classifies this transformation (or evolution) of thought as conceptual shifts that can be characterized in terms of three distinct approaches to women's development: the *welfare approach*, dating back to the 1950's, where programs primarily considered women in their reproductive role as mothers concentrating their efforts on immediate needs such as food aid and other measures against malnutrition; the *equity/efficiency approach* in the 1970's, which incorporated the gained awareness of the importance for women's active participation in the planning and implementation levels of development programs; and the recent *empowerment approach*, which involves the promotion of women's empowerment by transforming social systems and addressing their "needs" rather than "concerns". All of these attempts have aimed at furthering the advancement of women in society but not all have properly addressed their issues -- and in some cases have had an adverse effect on them.

### 2.5.1 *Women in Development (WID)*

The gender empowerment approach to literacy locates its origins in the Women in Development (WID) movement, which is based on the recognition of the importance of the roles and status of women in the process of development. The phrase itself "women in development" was drafted in the early 1970's by a network of female development professionals situated in Washington. They drew their conclusions from the evidence they collected during overseas missions. It became apparent that women were primarily seen as mothers and considered in their reproductive role rather than recognized for their productive potential.

As such, these WID advocates began to challenge the "trickle down" theories of development, claiming that modernization was impacting men and women differently. Their main argument was that the efforts limited to meeting women's practical needs contributed to a deterioration of their status because it increased women's dependency instead of enabling them to become independent (Razavi & Miller 1995:2).

Translated into adult literacy programs, women's learning was primarily seen in relation to their children. The so-called *transmission model of literacy*, beginning in the mid-1980's, operated under the assumption that women's educational role was as carriers of literacy for their families (Auerbach 1989; Carmack 1992; Luttrell 1990).

A widely cited slogan was "teach the mother reach the child" (Cuban & Hayes 1996:7). As a result, learning activities designed for children were stressed and women ended up as passive recipients of literacy education rather than active participants. Most often they transmitted knowledge, which was

prescribed to them. Knowledge that supported rather than challenged the status quo.

As the focus on women in Third World countries shifted from viewing them as passive beneficiaries of welfare assistance to active contributors to development, the enhancement of women's status through gender equity became the central theme (Moser, 1991:59). The gained awareness of women's role in the development process through the emerging body of research on women in developing countries laid the foundation for the WID *gender equity approach*.

Among the goals of WID were to increase women's status relative to men by reducing women's subordination. This highlighted the need for women to be involved in the planning and implementation stages of development projects. Another important aim was to raise women's legal status and include women in decision-making bodies (Moser 1993).

Here the work of the Danish economist Ester Boserup was most influential. In *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), Boserup highlighted the importance of women's contribution to the agricultural economy in Sub-Saharan African (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 4). Her work provided an academic basis that had a lasting impact on WID arguments. The subsequent *efficiency approach* emphasized women's importance for economic development. It soon became clear, however, that this did not automatically lead to women's increased status or equity. More often than not, structural adjustment programs such as those launched by the World Bank in the 1980s have become a double burden on women, especially among the very poor.

Another unexpected fact that became increasingly transparent was that women-headed families were a common feature of rural societies. Oftentimes these women do not have the extra time or energy to participate in such programs because their own household duties are so time-consuming in themselves. As Moser (1993) points out:

“As fewer resources are allocated to meet their practical needs, women are also expected to work harder and longer. In this way the efficiency approach does not only ignore women's strategic needs but also places an extra burden on them.”

An additional shortcoming was that WID often relied on examples from sub-Saharan Africa where women are responsible for the family's food provision and have been drawn into agricultural labor. The empirical findings from this region were used to back up their claims that resources directed to women will enhance economic productivity.

However, this did not hold true for much of the region stretching from North Africa to the Middle East, referred to as the “classic belt of patriarchy”.

Although women here are not absent from agricultural production altogether, men traditionally assume the main responsibility for household food provisioning, making it more of a challenge to direct resources to women (Razavi & Miller 1995: 10).

The combination of equity and efficiency discourse in WID policies provided the basis for a political strategy. Although the efficiency-based arguments were effective in drawing support by donor agencies interested in women's issues, it has been criticized for focusing on women in isolation. Women's subordination was a central concern of the WID approach, but it failed to explore the nature and reasons for their subordination. The role that gender relations play as a barrier to women's access to resources had been overlooked.

### 2.5.2 *The Anthropology of Gender in Gender and Development (GAD)*

During the late 1970's, the direction of policy discourse and social science research was changed, and the importance of power, conflict, and gender relations in understanding women's subordination began to be explored. A complementary approach arising from the shortcomings that surfaced in the WID paradigm has been formulated under the heading Gender and Development (GAD).

GAD is more radical than WID because it challenges prevailing power relations involving the transformation of power structures and elitism. Several writings about the distinction between biological sex and social gender emerged during this time (Edholm et al. 1977; Rubin 1975; see also Razavi & Miller 1995). Another significant point of analysis that began to be considered was the conflictive and co-operative dimensions of the interrelations between men and women.

The anthropology of gender, which emerged from feminist anthropological theories related to gender identity, has contributed greatly to the approach adapted by GAD. This field has been of considerable influence in highlighting the cultural representation of the sexes – the social construction of gender identity and the ways it determines the relative position of men and women in society. A standard work in the discipline is *Feminism and Anthropology* by Henrietta Moore (1988).

Not only does Moore examine ways in which women have been studied and represented in anthropological writing, she argues that the value of a symbolic analysis of gender lies in understanding how men and women are socially constructed and how those constructions are powerfully reinforced by the social activities that both define and are defined by them (Moore, 1988:15-16). From this premise, the deviation of status and power between men and women cannot

be automatically inferred from their respective positions within the relations of production.

Contemporary anthropologists interested in the analysis of the position of women in society are almost automatically drawn into the debate concerning the origins and universality of women's subordination. However, not all scholars, most notably neo-Marxist anthropologists, maintain that women's subordination is universal (Leacock 1978; Etienne & Leacock 1980).

GAD advocates, for example, approach the problem of gender relations by emphasizing what men and women "do" rather than through an analysis of the symbolic valuations given to women and men in any given society. They are much more concerned with the sociological explanations of gender. This approach raises questions about the sexual division of labor and the related division of social life into 'domestic' and 'public' domains, women's and men's space respectively (Moore 1988:31).

UNESCO has both influenced and been influenced by the different streams of feminist thought maintained by WID and GAD policies. The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) marks a shift from the WID equity approach of targeting women separately to the GAD paradigm, which calls for a holistic approach to gender awareness involving all social, political, and cultural aspects of human development. At this conference UNESCO introduced its new approach to policy objectives and expressed its commitment to gender in its Agenda for Gender Equality. These included:

Mainstreaming as a gender perspective - UNESCO aims at mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policy-planning, programming, implementation and evaluation activities.

Women's participation, priorities and perspectives – It promotes the participation of women at all levels and fields of activity giving particular attention to women's own priorities and perspectives in redefining both the goals and means of development.

Specific programmes, projects and activities – It aims at developing specific programmes and activities for the benefit of girls and women, that promote equality, endogenous capacity-building and full citizenship (UNESCO 1998:2).

The first steps taken by UNESCO in the implementation of the GAD approach to literacy programs have been the introduction of gender mainstreaming tools such as gender-neutral terminology and other means to eliminate sexist stereotypes, the use of sex-disaggregated data and statistics, and the development of gender-sensitive indicators. In summary, UNESCO outlines the fundament of GAD policies as follows:

- Recognition of women's and men's different and special needs.
- Women are not a homogenous group but every individual is crisscrossed with identifications of race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual preference and other factors.
- Women are often disadvantaged in terms of access to and control of means of production and other welfare factors.
- Gender differences can also imply that men are disadvantaged, but in most parts of the world today women are the ones who are disadvantaged (UNESCO 2000:6-7).

A valuable contribution to gender literacy research has been UNESCO's gender evaluation concept, notably the *Checklist for the Integration of Gender Issues in the Evaluation of UNESCO's Programs* (UNESCO 1999). The evaluation issues on this list will be used as a reference point in the analysis of the current literacy program in Algeria (see Appendix A: *UNESCO's Checklist of Gender Issues*). This study refers to it to the extent that it applies to the cultural context of rural Algerian women and as a source of inspiration for the development of future literacy strategies that are gender-based.

UNESCO views literacy as the key objective in the alleviation and eradication of poverty where women and girls are identified as priority groups. The UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE), with its headquarters in Hamburg, has emerged over the past two decades as one of the leading organizations in the field of adult literacy and has played an important role in mainstreaming gender. Since the 1980s the UIE has been committed to the concept of life-long learning, and a lot of effort has been made in researching and promoting literacy projects to ensure equal access to education for all people (Medel-Anonuevo 2002).

The UIE organizes workshops on a regular basis, such as the International Conference on Adult education (CONFITEA), where ideas are generated and disseminated among a range of people from NGOs, government departments, and universities. More recent UIE research in adult literacy focuses on the *empowerment approach*.

### 2.5.3 *The Empowerment Approach to Literacy*

The empowerment approach to literacy can be traced back to Third World feminism, which began to play a considerable role in women's development discourse in the 1980's. Originating from women's experiences at the grassroots level, this approach arose out of the concern for the subordinate position of women (Moser 1993).

The notion of empowerment found here distances itself from the conception of power and subordination found in Western feminist discourse. Third World feminism endeavors to empower women through the redistribution of power structures within. It involves the process of empowerment of the entire group as opposed to an individual (Moser 1991).

Central to the empowerment approach is that the analysis of the situation needs to take place from the perspective of the people living there. It would be false to assume that what men and women from Western countries consider empowering is the same as what people from other societies do. Only the inhabitants can truly determine what changes need to be made before a consensus can be reached as to the kind of society that is aspired to. The same holds true for the kinds of empowerment women from different societies aspire to attain.

An important influence in the equality and empowerment approach to literacy that began to resonate among scholars of gender studies in the eighties was Paulo Freire's *liberatory* concept. As indicated earlier, Freire's approach examines the oppression of marginalized groups and women's position in society. Through his work, several authors began to recognize a link between literacy and gender equity, which then swayed inquiries towards the kinds of issues that affect women's literacy and education the most (Molyneux 1987; Rockhill 1987).

In her work on gender and literacy, Maxine Molyneux (1987) distinguishes between women's condition and women's position, which she respectively terms '*practical gender interests*' and '*strategic gender interests*'. The former refers to short-term goals pertaining to women's immediate needs that affect the livelihood of their families and children, such as employment, household responsibilities, and health issues. The latter addresses issues related to women's empowerment on a larger scale. It aims to redress their situation within and outside the family, such as the sexual division of labor and the promotion of political participation. Other incentives are to combat discrimination, oppression, and violence against women. In other words, long-term structural changes are sought after.

Several research endeavors refer to and draw on Molyneux's schema of *gender interests* as a means of redressing women's condition and position and as a way for attaining justice and gender equity. What most of these studies have in common is that they argue that literacy can empower women in such a way as to significantly alter their marginalized condition if they learn to think, read, and write critically.

Several scholars of literacy support Freire's theory of change and social transformation and claim that it should be adopted by gender studies to address women's issues. Furthermore, they advocate its implementation in the design of gender-specific programs that are based on emancipatory learning (Carmack

1992; Agnaou 2004; Chlebowska 1990; Egbo 2000; Ramdas 1990; Stromquist 1995).

Lalita Ramdas, an educator and activist for gender sensitivity from India, similarly questions the relevance of current literacy programs addressed to women. She points out that since literacy campaigns are largely comprised of male-dominated policy makers, only transparent issues of management and technology are addressed while the complex ones of structural analysis that involve attitudes toward women and women's education are avoided. In her opinion:

“...any crusade for literacy, and especially for women's literacy, will have to be considered as an educational as well as a political project...The implications of patriarchy as a political ideology militating against women's quest for justice can no longer be ignored or under-emphasized” (Ramdas 1994:21).

Ramdas sees a relationship between women, literacy, and justice. To her it is not a matter of why literacy is needed but rather what kind of literacy is essential for women. In her view literacy must mean the capacity to empower women in ways that will meet their fundamental developmental needs. Although she believes that the link between literacy and justice applies to both men and women, she also believes that it assumes particular significance in the case of women because they are the ones most affected by patriarchal oppression.

In favor of Molyneux's *gender strategic interests*, Ramdas argues that literacy must be defined to include and go beyond the skills of reading and writing:

“...literacy programmes for women must include a drastic revision of content and materials so as to make them consciously ‘emancipatory’ as opposed to propagating a ‘status-quo’ approach” (Ramdas 1994:21).

As a strategy for addressing the problematic of patriarchal structures surrounding female literacy, Ramdas argues that men and women need to heighten their awareness about their own deep-rooted traditional values and attitudes toward women's roles as related to literacy and education. She contends that men especially need to be sensitized to gender issues so that women's voices and real-life problems no longer appear as an “embarrassment or a nuisance”. According to the numerous case histories from Indian informants, women want literacy that is practical and relevant to their lives and needs. These include on-site childcare facilities and more women in decision-making bodies who both understand and are most likely to enforce their needs (Ramdas 1994).

Among the scholars who most consistently write about the effects of gender on literacy and higher education is Nelly Stromquist (2009a, 1987, 1992, 1995, 1997). Based largely on her fieldwork in Latin America, Stromquist specializes

in issues related to social change and gender, which she examines from the perspective of critical sociology.

The framework presented by Stromquist focuses on aspects that affect women's ability to become literate. She attributes women's reduced availability for literacy participation and the greater rates of illiteracy among them to their subordinate position in society. Stromquist (1997) explains women's subordination in society as being achieved by the exercise of patriarchal ideologies that, according to her, operate through two essential ways: the sexual division of labor and men's control of women's sexuality.

Other research on gender and literacy examines the ways in which literacy in itself is a highly gendered activity in Western societies. Barton (2007) outlines some of the ways that the literacy activities pattern differently according to gender from early on. He claims that literacy practices reflect gender differences and power relations in society.

Literacy practices do not reflect abilities per se but rather what people feel is or is not appropriate. This is evident in the ways families and schools introduce certain reading subjects to girls that are deemed inappropriate for boys and vice versa. These in turn develop into literacy practices that are carried on into adulthood. To demonstrate this, Barton uses the conventional example that more women become language or literature teachers whereas men predominate in the scientific fields.

Women tend to write more in the personal sphere, keeping in contact with family and friends, while business-related tasks such as writing bills and doing taxes are typically designated for men. To demonstrate this common role division in literacy, Barton cites a newspaper headline of a survey entitled "Wives write Xmas cards . . . Husbands write cheques" (Daily Mirror, 17 April 1989 in Barton 2007:40).

Barton points out that in visual depictions of literacy, men are posed in serious and dominating positions whereas the literacy images of women are more domestic. Also cited are ethnological examples such as the Vai, where some literacies are traditionally available only to men, and parts of China where only women have access to certain secret scripts (Barton 2007:64-65).

To date, most adult literacy studies are census-based. However, gradually more and more scholars are realizing the significance of learner-centered studies about women in an empirical context (Agnaou 2001, 2004; Egbo 2000; Stromquist 1997). Egbo's (2000) study of rural Nigerian women is a research-based inquiry that focuses on the views of the women themselves. It documents the accounts of the women's own literate and non-literate status and the ways they believe the value of literacy can increase their life options. Her study also



analyses the interplay between gender, state social policies, and the options that are available to women in society.

Scholars are beginning to stress the importance of taking women's needs into consideration in their literacy research (Carmack 1992; Agnaou 2004). In her study about women, gender, and literacy in Morocco, Fatima Agnaou (2004) draws on the principle of Molyneux's (1987) *gender interest* issues and investigates the relevance of women's literacy needs by taking a closer look at their representation in the designed textbooks, their level of literacy attainments, and the literacy barriers that the women experience.

In a previous study, Agnaou and Boukous (2001) seek to investigate the extent to which non-literate adults are prepared to operate functionally in the literate ecology in which they have so far been marginalized. Although their study does not specifically address illiteracy as a gender-based issue, the results show that instead of preparing the non-literate adult learners to have access to new resources and opportunities, Moroccan literacy instruction is rather used as a means of reproducing and perpetuating their position of dependence.

Molyneux's schema has been a source of inspiration for the analysis of gender adapted by UNESCO. It also has been instrumental in the development of its *Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework* (GMIF):

Gender analysis is the first and most critical step forward towards gender-responsive planning and programming. It involves the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. It examines the differences, commonalities and interactions between women and men. Gender analysis examines women's and men's specific activities, conditions, needs, access to and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making. It studies the linkages of these and other factors in the larger social, economic, political and environmental context.

Because men and women both perform different roles, they may have different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so policies, programs and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women (<http://www.unesco.org/women> - GMIF 2003:10).

The conceptual nature of empowerment as linked with literacy has proved itself to be almost as difficult a task to measure and define as the term "literacy" (see chapter 2.2). Current work published by the UIE presents some of the strongest voices on the subject of gender equity and empowerment (Medel-Anonuevo 1995; Ramdas 1994; Stromquist 2009a; Longwe 1991).

During the International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment held by UNESCO's subsidiary, the UIE, in Hamburg in 1993, the 16 participants, consisting of women educators and researchers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds (Africa, Asia, Arab States, Caribbean, Europe, North

America, and South America), collectively reflected on the theoretical and conceptual implications of the term "empowerment" based on their experiences. The general objectives of the seminar were:

- To exchange experiences in promoting the empowerment of women through different educational programmes, both formal and non-formal;
- To discuss the theoretical issues arising from the practice of the education of women;
- To develop research designs on women's education and empowerment for possible collaboration in selected areas; and,
- To explore ways and means of operationalizing the term "empowerment" (Medel-Anonuevo 1995:6)

Among the primary goals that were to be achieved by the end of the seminar were the development of a definition of and conceptual framework for understanding women's empowerment, a list of indicators outlining processes and mechanisms for empowerment, and proposals for future action focusing on effective procedures and mechanisms for empowerment (Medel-Anonuevo 1995:6).

The participants argued that literacy was to be given priority in promoting women's empowerment. As main topics that should be included in education programs that are potentially empowering, they listed the promotion of gender awareness; lessons on health and nutrition; integration of technical, entrepreneurial, cultural and communal aspects; information and lessons on politics; and provision of planning and thinking skills. Here the most important objectives to consider were:

- to eliminate illiteracy;
- to develop self-esteem and self-confidence;
- to have knowledge about their bodies and sexuality;
- to have the ability to make their own decisions and negotiate;
- to raise the women's awareness of their civil rights;
- to provide skills for income generation;
- to make participation in community/society more effective; and,
- to prepare them to be good women leaders (Medel-Anonuevo 1995:7).

All acknowledged a perceived gap between the rhetoric and policies of decision-makers of literacy programs. Although the term "empowerment" has become the most widely used in development-related programs, it remains one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured and observed. At the same time,

the participants pointed out that it is difficult to come up with a general definition of empowerment because it is determined by the respective cultural contexts. Some development programs refer to it as a goal to achieve while others conceive it “as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes” (Medel-Anonuevo 1995:8).

One of the seminar’s participants, Lucy Lazo, described empowerment as “a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to a control over such means and resources.” Elsewhere, another seminar participant addressed the notion of empowerment at a more individual level. For instance, Namtip Aksornkool cited Paz’s definition of empowerment as “the ability to direct and control one’s own life” (Medel-Anonuevo 1995:9).

Nelly Stromquist, who also took part in the seminar, defines “empowerment” as “a process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society” (in: Medel-Anonuevo 1995:9). She describes empowerment as “a socio-political concept that goes beyond ‘formal political participation’ and ‘consciousness-raising’.” Furthermore, Stromquist believes that the full definition of “empowerment” must include cognitive, psychological, political, and economic components. In sum, Stromquist characterized the four components in the following terms:

- The cognitive component refers to “women’s understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations as well as destroying old beliefs that structure powerful gender ideologies.”
- The psychological component includes the “development of feelings that women can act upon to improve their condition. This means formation of the belief that they can succeed in change efforts.”
- The economic component “requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning.”
- The political component, which includes the “ability to organize and mobilize for change. Consequently, an empowerment process must involve not only an individual awareness but collective awareness and collective action. The notion of collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social transformation” (Stromquist 2009a:2; also in: Medel-Anonuevo 1995:15).

A consensus among all participants was reached that empowerment should target the marginalized groups such as the poor, the non-literates, and indigenous

communities, where women consistently cut across each category. (See Appendix B for an outline of the Concept of Empowerment discussed at the International Seminar on *Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy*, Hamburg 1993.)

#### 2.5.4 *A Framework for Women's Empowerment.*

At the front end of the gender-awareness discussion is the "Women's Empowerment Framework" developed by Sara Longwe, the chairperson of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), based in Zambia. Highly reminiscent of Freire's critical approach, Longwe's discourse of women's empowerment begins with the transformation of existing social structures. Going beyond welfare, economic development, and increased productivity measures, her approach involves increased participation by those who are most disadvantaged - women and the poor (Mitchell 2003:29).

Longwe's framework was first outlined in an essay, "*Gender awareness: the missing element in the Third World development project*" (1991). It was created for planning, monitoring and evaluating literacy programs with a gender perspective. Along with other models and methodologies designed for conducting a gender analysis in development-related fields such as the Moser Framework and the Harvard Analytical Framework, the Longwe approach has been designed as a tool primarily concerned with the promotion of women's empowerment while furthering gender awareness for development programs in general and literacy programs in particular (March et al. 1999).

Longwe recognizes three essential aspects for furthering women's development: 1) women have different and special needs, 2) they are disadvantaged in terms of welfare, access to and control of factors of production relative to men, and 3) to increase women's equality and empowerment relative to men. In addition, Longwe's framework is based on the notion that there are five different levels of equality in terms of progress towards women's development. These are welfare, access, conscientization, participation/mobilization and control.

Placed in hierarchical order, with welfare at the lowest and control at the highest level, these criteria represent the extent to which women have attained equality and empowerment (see Appendix C: *Sara Longwe's Framework for Women's Empowerment*). The framework assumes that projects operating only on the welfare level are less likely to address issues of women's empowerment than those working on higher levels. As such, literacy projects should aim to address the issues leading to the upper levels involving conscientization, participation and control of factors of production (Longwe 1991:150).

The five “levels of equality” in the Women’s Empowerment Framework can be defined as:

- *Welfare*, which entails the improvement in women’s socioeconomic status, such as income and better nutrition. (This level does nothing to empower women.)
- *Access*, which refers to women’s increased access to resources.
- *Conscientization*, which involves the recognition of structural forces that disadvantage and discriminate against women coupled with the collective aim to address these discriminations.
- *Mobilization*, which involves the implementation of actions related to the conscientization of women.
- *Control*, which refers to the level of access reached and the control of resources that have shifted as a result of collective claim-making and action. (Longwe 1991)

Another point that Longwe addresses is how development programs often reinforce women’s subordinate position in society rather than lead to their development. Literacy projects in the 1970s tended to only address women’s concerns rather than women’s issues, consequently leaving the question of inequality out altogether. Longwe distinguishes between the two:

“Women’s issues” deal with equality with men in any social and economic role, and involve any of the five levels of equality: welfare, access, conscientization, participation, or control. “Women’s concerns,” on the other hand, are due to women’s sex roles, traditional and subordinating sex-stereotype and gender roles. The main idea with the five levels in the Women’s Empowerment Framework is to uncover whether we are dealing with “women’s issues” or “women’s concerns” (Longwe 1991:152).

Upon application of Longwe’s model, March et al. (1995) came to the conclusion that the degree to which a project can be determined potentially empowering depends on the extent to which “women’s issues” are addressed. They argue that the recognition of “women’s issues” in literacy project designs can be measured on three levels: on a negative level, a neutral level and a positive level. They classify these three levels to mean the following:

- Negative level: “Women’s issues” are not recognized or mentioned in the project objectives. Most likely women will be left worse off than before by such a project.
- Neutral level: “Women’s issues” are recognized but the main aim is to ensure that women are not left worse off than before.

- Positive level: “Women’s issues” are recognized and the objective of the project is to address these and to increase women’s equality relative to men (March et al. 1999:99).

Longwe’s discourse, like the approach initiated by Paulo Freire in the 1970’s, takes a clear political stance in that it links women’s inequality and poverty to structural oppression. As Mitchell (2009:24) points out, it also seems to imply that women are aware of their gender discrimination and are willing to work together collectively to transform the patriarchal social system, which oppresses them and stands in the way of their empowerment.

Within the context of a literacy class, the main issue of concern here is whether the program is designed to enable female participants to adapt to the preexisting patriarchal mold or to liberate them from it by raising their consciousness, thus mobilizing them to challenge current traditions. Longwe (1991) argues that literacy programs that are empowering cannot address the gender gap in literacy without addressing its underlying causes. Due to its explicit political nature, one can easily assume that Longwe’s model, like that of Freire’s, is more difficult to implement in traditional societies where household heads are more likely to feel that their roles are being challenged and ultimately hinder women’s participation in women’s groups altogether.

So far, studies that have been conducted in the areas of adult literacy and “women in development” have paid scant attention to the gender perspective of literacy in terms of what kinds of gender differences exist in literacy acquisition and what kinds of literacy programs are effective. One of the problems facing literacy projects targeting women is the need for an agreed understanding of what “women’s empowerment” means and how progress in empowerment can be measured (Medel-Anonuevo 1999; Mitchell 2003). Stromquist (1999:29) signalizes that the positive impact of a literacy program on women’s self-confidence and self-esteem should not be confused with political empowerment.

International organizations are showing more of a commitment to an approach to literacy that mainstreams gender. However, when it comes down to evaluating the quality of a program, the question of gender and the role of women seems to fall by the wayside. Several development organizations proclaim to target women, even empower them, but then either fail to follow through or do not give much thought as to how to achieve these aims in the first place.

UNESCO’s approach to gender analysis and discourse gives a point of reference to consider the current literacy program in Algeria in terms of the guidelines and standards set by an international organization dedicated to the advancement of women and literacy. Longwe’s model is useful in determining the level of empowerment achieved at each particular stage of a program. It helps to

establish whether “women’s issues” are being addressed. Her framework offers a tool for planning, monitoring, and evaluating literacy programs by helping to understand their potential of transformation while exposing those programs that are only empowering in their rhetoric and not in action (March et al. 1999:99).

## 2.6 Summary of Literacy Discourses

Literacy is no longer linked to a single threshold that separates the literate from the non-literate or, for that matter, the “primitive” from the “civilized”. The foregoing overview of adult literacy research demonstrates how this subject has been claimed and defined by a variety of practical and theoretical fields. Different theories about literacy have changed and developed over time. Some of the most commonly employed dimensions that have dealt with this subject outside Algeria so far will be briefly summarized here.

These include education, where literacy has been investigated in terms of the acquisition of basic reading, writing and numeracy skills based on standardized tests of achievement (Beder 1991; Lytle and Wolfe 1989). Cognitive psychologists take a look at how literacy contributes to the cognitive and psychological faculties of non-literate people and examine the importance that has been ascribed to literacy as a skill (Goody 1968; Scribner and Cole 1981; Vygotsky 1962).

In the field of linguistics, the study of literacy analyzes the problems that arise in societies where the colloquial dialect differs from the national language taught in adult literacy classes (Dumont 1973; Duranti 2001). Statistical assessment specialists measure the level of literacy attainment based on the number of years spent in school, the number of enrolled students, the drop-out rate, and number of graduates, as well as through self-evaluation (UNESCO reports, national census accounts). Closely related to this research area are scholars who assess the effectiveness of literacy campaigns implemented worldwide (Arnové and Graff 1987; Bhola 1984; Wagner 1993).

During the 1970s, research began to shift its perception away from seeing literacy in terms of development and economic gains, and more emphasis was placed on literacy as a social practice. Adult literacy was given priority, and studies focused more on how investment in education contributes to the socio-cultural wellbeing of societies. The field of anthropology observes the cultural constructions of literacy and its social practices among culturally defined groups of people (Heath 1986; Wagner 2001). The ethnographical current of literacy demonstrates how behavior, including that which takes place “around” literate

communication, is an integral part of the socio-cultural meaning of the activity or ritual that is being performed (Duranti 2004:137).

Other literacy concerns question whether the individual should be educated to the extent to which he/she becomes an economic contributor and self-supporting agent within the existing structure or whether literacy should contribute to one's ability to become an independent thinker who may contribute to or instigate significant social change. Along these lines, politicians of education and pedagogy critically approach the question of literacy. They see literacy as a prerequisite for addressing the problems of social stratification and, in the process, for liberating the oppressed masses (Carol and Lars Berggren 1975; Freire 1970; Lankshear and McLaren 1993).

The Freirean approach to literacy served as a source of inspiration for scholars active in the field of gender studies during the eighties. From that evolved an emphasis placed on gender as it relates to literacy. This field has experienced a shift in the way international organizations such as UNESCO have perceived the role of women in gender equality and development. The predominate approach laid out by WID, with a tendency for addressing women in isolation, has given way to the GAD paradigm, which implies a more holistic approach to gender awareness and competence by means of integrating women into the process of mainstream development.

Recent gender scholarship looks at literacy in terms of redressing the situation of women and their position in a particular society with the ultimate aim of attaining social and judicial equality and as a means for empowerment (Stromquist 2009a; UNESCO 1995, 2003; Agnaou, 2004; Egbo, 2000; Chlebowska 1990; Ramdas 1990).

Since the *World Conference on Education for All* (WCEFA) in 1990, women's literacy has been given priority, and additional efforts have been made to ensure and promote girls' and women's education in developing countries. However, twenty years later, female illiteracy has decreased only moderately, indicating that the recognition of this predicament alone is insufficient, and alternative literacy strategies for rethinking women's role in development are needed.

To date, UNESCO's checklist for gender and Longwe's framework for women's empowerment are currently recognized as the most promising methods for planning, monitoring, and measuring the impact of female literacy programs in terms of empowerment in a gender-aware manner. The question remains as to what extent the guidelines of gender outlined by UNESCO's checklist and Longwe's framework can be integrated in a literacy program targeting Algerian women living in rural regions where patriarchal traditions are most strongly maintained. Another important point of consideration is how to implement issues that address women's equality without running the risk of their being rejected by



Algerian society as Western feminist imports that challenge their traditional roles of authority.

Current scholarship perceives literacy to be closely connected with the cultural and social characteristics of each society and, like many other aspects of human existence, as part of the complexity of activities through which people organize themselves (Duranti 2001:138). Yet despite this realization, what most of the previous approaches to literacy seem to have in common is that they continue to make the same fundamental error of striving for a universal definition and conception of adult literacy.

A general concept of literacy applicable to societies across the world would indeed be practical and a lot less time-consuming -- not to mention, extremely less costly, especially in the case of mass literacy work. However, it remains problematic because it glosses over the detailed grit of the cultural foundation underlying each society.

By theorizing about the marginalized masses, in this case rural women in Algeria, we risk losing sight of the complexities of actual classroom situations, of individuals' unique pedagogical needs, their particular status as it pertains to their lifecycle, and the role gender plays within the cultural context of society. It is precisely this cultural "grit" that literacy programs should anticipate and respond to in order for them to be truly effective in the long term. This is where an ethnological perspective of literacy, one which considers the "native's point of view", becomes useful if not imperative.

## **Part II. Women's Status in Literacy and Education: A historical, cultural, and Islamic perspective**

The right and access to literacy and education for Algerian women throughout time have been influenced by various factors. The current socio-economic and demographic profile of Algerian women is a strong indication that rural societies are undergoing a process of change. Yet, despite numerous post-independence campaign efforts to reverse the number of non-literate adults, women continue to fall into the category of those most affected by high levels of illiteracy.

The prevailing barriers to women's education in Algeria have been patriarchal practices, cultural-based religious patterns, gender roles, and societal attitudes. In order to better understand the persistence of this problem, it is prudent to take a closer look at the role that education played for women during Algeria's eventful history as well as at the diverse socio-cultural aspects currently underlying the situation of women's education.

Throughout this study, special consideration has been given to relaying a "thick description" of the Algerian way of life. This is a notion that Clifford Geertz has borrowed from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle to describe his own method of doing ethnography, which he explains in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). The approach taken in this analysis of women's literacy draws from Geertz's (1973) interpretive concept of culture. Geertz writes:

"The concept of culture I espouse . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" (Geertz 1973:5).

To demonstrate how this functions, he examines a scenario of two boys, one who is signaling to a friend by winking and another whose eyelid is twitching, i.e., undergoing involuntary rapid contractions. To a casual observer, the eyelid movements of the two boys appear to be the same action. Geertz points out that one must move beyond the isolated action to the context in which the action

occurred or was performed and to the particular social understanding of the action as a gesture from the standpoint of the agent or actor as well as how his or her audience construes the meaning behind the action itself. The “thin description” is the rapid eyelid contractions, whereas the “thick description” is the meaning behind it and its symbolic import in society or between actors (1973:6-7).

Thus, a thick description entails more than mere data collection. The ethnographer must strive to understand human behavior as “symbolic action” in all its “strangeness” and “irregularity”. In regard to the specific situation of literacy in Algeria, one must consider the significance of the historical, cultural, political, and religious “webs” that have patterned women’s literacy practices. Only then can we understand how Algerians have perceived and dealt with the education of women and girls in the past and proceed to shape how they view and practice it in the future.

In the pages to follow, a historical outline of the changing trends over the past decades in literacy approaches leading up to the functional literacy program implemented in 2007 and an overview of the socio-cultural context of women’s position in Algerian society contrasted against the role of women in Islam provide essential background information from which to locate and understand the current state of women’s literacy and education practices.

As is argued here, literacy for empowerment is a strategy for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women and therefore must address the historical, socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that have acted to deprive women, especially the poor, of access to education. The preceding chapters are meant to serve as a point of reference from which a gender-specific literacy strategy that addresses Algerian women’s issues and empowerment can be designed. An important finding should be to establish just how receptive Algerians are for a gender-based literacy program.

## 3 Historical Retrospective of Women's Education in Algeria

### 3.1 Women's Education Prior to the French Conquest

According to “the legend of the fly-whisk”, the last Ottoman ruler of Algiers, Dey Hussein Khodja, struck the French consul Pierre Deval in the face with a fly-whisk on April 29, 1827, during a dispute over unpaid French debts in purchasing wheat from Algeria. At that moment the country's fate for the next 132 years was sealed. This incident of insult became a pretext for the French invasion of Algeria in June 1830.

However, literacy education in Algeria did not begin with the establishment of French schools. Well before the French take-over, teaching children to read and write belonged to an age-old tradition dating back to the Umayyad expansion into North Africa during the seventh century (647-709), which resulted in the spread of Islam, hand in hand with the Arabic language.

The migration of the Beni-Hilal tribes during the eleventh century (1051) had important consequences for *Ifriqiyya* (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) as well by further contributing to the linguistic Arabization and religious Islamization of Algeria's countryside. The various dialects still spoken in different parts of Algeria today are attributed to the Beni-Hilal. (See Mouley Driss Chabou, *Die Elementarschule in Algerien*, 1969:30).

Written by a native Algerian, Chabou's (1969) account is an excellent comprehensive analysis of the development of the elementary school in Algeria beginning prior to the French conquest until just after its Independence. It includes valuable sources from Arabic scholars and European statesmen about the educational situation of Algerians throughout its history.

Very little is known about the extent to which education was allotted to girls and women in Algeria during earlier times or the importance this was given by the Arabic- and Berber-speaking groups. Several authors agree that despite the linguistic differences between the Arabs and indigenous Berbers, the population as a whole shared a relatively common culture (Bennoune 1988; Gellner 1973; Hermassi 1972).

“The social units . . . whatever their degree of segmentation and marginality, are part of a larger Arab-Moslem civilisation. They participate in a universalistic system of values and norms, and they perceive themselves as an integral part of a vast community. Even the tribe's decision to declare dissidence attests to the fundamental reference of the larger community, regardless of the particular regime” (Bennoune 1988:20).

More detailed information is available about the learning situation in Arabia prior to the first Arab expansion to North Africa. According to the *Hadith*, which is the authentic prophetic traditions collected by the Persian Muslim scholar Sahih al-Bukhari (810-870), the prophet Mohammed (570-632) worked very diligently towards combating non-literacy. In the early years of the Islamic revelations, priority was given to adults, both men and women, to learn to read and write. Later children were encouraged to take part in Qur'an lessons taught at nearby mosques.

There are interesting accounts of how prisoners from the Battle at Badr during the second year of Hijra (624) could be released from detention. Each prisoner was assigned 12 boys to teach how to read and write. As soon as this task had been accomplished, the prisoners were set free (Chabou 1969:25-27). This indicates how literacy was highly regarded during the beginning stages of Islam and also alludes to how religion plays a motivational role for people in becoming literate (see case studies in Part III).

It has been well established that Algeria had its own school called the “Masjid”, “Maktab”, or “Djema” long before the implantation of French elementary schools following 1830. According to the Arab historian and polymath Abd ar-Rahman Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406), the first mosques were built soon after the Arab expansion to North Africa under Idris I (1227-1232). Ibn Khaldoun describes in *al-Muqaddima* (also known as the *Prolegomenon* or the *Introduction to Universal History*) that it was common practice for mosques also to be used as centers for learning. Ibn Khaldoun recorded that in his time during the fourteenth century, children were instructed in the Arabic language in schools in Spain and Tunis even before they were taught the Qur'an in mosques (Chabou 1969:27).

Interestingly, in 1375, Ibn Khaldoun either took refuge or was imprisoned by the Berber tribe Awlad Arif in the present town of Frenda, located within the wilaya Tiaret, approximately 50 kilometers near to where this study took place. During the four years that he spent in the castle Qal'at ibn Salamah, he wrote his masterpiece *al-Muqaddima*. This is also the place where he developed his ideas for his social cohesion theory *Asabaya*. The local university is named after him, and the stone remnants of the castle and caves where he stayed is now used by several Algerian families as a frequent backdrop during picnic outings on the weekends in spring and summer.

As the *Reconquista* gained momentum in Spain, several Muslim scholars from Andalusia fled to the Maghreb, where they spread their tradition of teaching Islamic rituals, training new scholars in the process. When the French arrived in 1830, they discovered a firmly anchored system of Islam education that remained virtually unaltered since the Almohaden movement during the middle of the thirteenth century (Chabou 1969:30).

The Almohad caliphate (1121-1269) was a dynasty, which originated with Ibn Tumart, who belonged to the Berber tribe, Masmuda, of the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. His primary matter of concern was to bring back the original state of Muslim orthodoxy, which in his view had anthropomorphized and become warped through time.

To date, boys and girls all over Algeria attend djema for Qur'an lessons in recitation and to learn about Islamic duties, such as how to pray. They have also maintained the very same methods for learning even though the implements have been modernized. Instead of writing on wooden boards with self-made pens that contain ink made from wool, the students now use tiny blackboards and chalk or the most recent additions to the classroom, whiteboards and markers.

The historic Arabic sources on the educational situation in Algeria around the time of colonization are fragmentary, especially in the case of women and girls. Therefore, it is necessary to reference European publications where the existence of Qur'an schools in pre-colonial Algeria is better documented. More information can be gathered from surveys by European dignitaries who travelled to Algeria despite the fact that they are somewhat laced with Eurocentric sentiments. So, although the reports often refer to the situation of pre-colonial Algeria as being "backward" in comparison with the European capitalist nations of the time, the efficiency of its educational system was indeed acknowledged.

In an account written in 1738, the British physician and consular chaplain at Algiers Thomas Shaw stated:

"The sons of the Moors and Turks were sent to school at the age of six, where they learned to read and write (the Bedouin children usually were exempt from receiving a school education . . .)" (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:31).

However, the notion that the Bedouin children lacked an education was subsequently refuted in 1785 by the French priest Poiret, who also includes having seen girls in the school setting:

"I was a little astonished when I stumbled upon a public school in a Douar (*a village composed of tents*) of the Aly-Bey (*name of a tribe in Constantine*), which, in addition to that, was led by a blind schoolmaster. In a tent, he was surrounded by approximately a dozen children comprised of both girls and boys whom he taught to

read and write . . .” (Translated from German by author. Italics added by author. Chabou 1969:31).

In further reference to the role of education for girls, the Arabist Louis-Adrien Berbrugger (1801-1869) documented having witnessed Qur'an schools just for girls:

“In addition to schools for boys, there were also places where ‘Mouallemat’ (female teachers) taught girls” (Translated from German by author. Chabou pg. 47).

The relatively widespread phenomenon of home-teaching boys and girls, which belongs to an old tradition implemented by the Arabs, has also been mentioned in several accounts. The division of the sexes as is prescribed by the Qur'an was an equally common practice among the Berber and Arab tribes in Algeria during the nineteenth century.

Girls were often taught to read and write by their fathers or brothers. Wealthier families hired a private teacher who was associated with the nearby mosque. These teachers were carefully selected by the head of the family because they would be allowed regular entrance to the harems (rooms reserved for female members of the family) in order to give lessons to the children (Chabou pg. 47).

The recognition of the status of Algerian schools goes even further. The French general Pellissier de Renaud remarked that:

“Primary education was as widespread as in France. There are schools that provide basic instruction in most of the villages and *douars*” (Bennoune 1988:28).

The historian Marcel Émeret (1899-1985) suggested that all children received primary instruction in innumerable establishments when he described the situation in Algeria as follows:

“A school was built next to every mosque, every tower, and every gravestone of a sacred ancestor” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:47).

In 1834, General Valze reported:

“Almost all the Arabs know how to read and write” (Bennoune pg. 28).

The French journalist and interpreter Ismael Urbain (born Thomas Urbain 1821-1884) made a particularly interesting assessment of the situation of higher education in rural areas in Algeria around the eve of conquest. Urbain converted to

Islam shortly before he took up a post as a military Interpreter in Algeria. He is known for defending the rights of Algerians against the repressive behavior of the colonists. His conversion to Islam and advocacy of the Algerian people may explain why his statements about the state of things in Algeria at the time are especially astute:

“Primary instruction was, in 1830, much more widespread than we generally think. The average number of male individuals who know how to read and write was at least equal to that of rural France . . . Between 2,000 and 3,000 young men were studying in the *madrassahs*, a sort of high school in each province, and 600 to 800 were studying sciences, law and theology in some establishments of higher education” (Bennoune pg. 28).

According to an account written in 1833 by Baron Pichon, the French administrator who was based in Algiers:

“When one includes all of its indigenous schools, Algiers most likely has more schools at its disposal than several European cities having the same size” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:31).

Summarizing the stand-point of education in Algeria at the time of colonial conquest, M. Rozet, a French army officer, wrote in 1833:

“The Moorish people, in their entirety, are likely more educated than the French people are. Almost all men can read, write and do some math; there are several public schools near the administrative district in Algiers where the children are taught at age four” (Translated from German by author. Chabou pg. 46).

Other French officers made similar comments on the situation as well. Both General Walsin Esterhazy and Ismail Urbain claimed that more Algerians than the French could read and write. They pointed out that forty-five percent of the French population was illiterate at the time of conquest. Esterhazy even argued that the percentage of non-literate people in Algeria was much lower at only forty percent. According to an official departmental survey conducted in France in 1830, the average percent of male students who could read and write from the provinces of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine was at least the same as if not higher than that in France (Translated from German by author. Chabou, 1969:46. See also Benachenhou, 1978:37 and Colonna 1974:179).

The accounts on the situation of education in Algeria also make reference to the instruction of teachers. According to several sources, the method of training varied from area to area even though a consistent requirement throughout Alge-



ria was for each teacher to have memorized the entire Qur'an and be able to recite it to a class. A report dated 1789 documents the existence of teaching seminars in Algiers.

In some instances, smaller rooms were built near a mosque where young male apprentices attended lectures before they were assigned to teach in one of the four provinces in Algeria (Algiers, Titteri, Constantine, or Oran). For the most part, they studied the Qur'an and Hadith. According to these sources, the young men received a modest monthly salary and a place to live while undergoing training. In total, six teaching seminars had been documented, where as many as 200 students per class were in attendance (Chabou 1969:44-45, 51).

Compensation also varied depending on the region. In the cities teachers received a monthly fee, which depended on the income of the parents. In rural areas teachers were compensated with natural produce such as grain or sheep meat that was provided by the parents living in the douar. The Algerian people highly supported an Islamic education for their children. The Qur'an schools were financed by foundations, *Habus*, which were constituted by donations in favor of religious institutions.

In their view, the mere existence of a Qur'an school was a blessing for all the inhabitants living in the village. As soon as such a place was established, they became nontransferable, meaning they could not be sold or confiscated (Bennoune, 1988:25). Furthermore, it is important to point out that these Qur'an schools provided the student with solid background knowledge, making it possible to continue one's education at one of the "Medersas" or "Zawiyas", i.e., Islamic middle or high schools (Chabou 1969:52).

The Zawiyas deserve somewhat further mention here. These were not insignificant in their function as a place of education for children, both boys and girls. Essentially a small mosque, they belonged to the mystical Muslim brotherhood. The Zawiyas were mainly located in rural areas or in the Oasis of the Sahara. Seminars were taught by a *wali*, who was the most accredited male member of the local patriarchal group. According to reports, there were 355 Zawiyas having a total of 167,019 male and female members, as well as 168,974 people who were affiliated with them at the time (Chabou 1969:46).

Currently, Zawiyas and the Muslim brotherhood are on the decline. One of the main reasons for this is the influx of Islamic programs aired on television. In these shows, Muslim scholars talk about a variety of topics ranging from women's rights to traditions gone astray. The tradition of honoring a Marabut has been clearly ruled as *haram* (unlawful and a sin in Islam).

During an annual celebration called Taám (literally, couscous or food), families make a pilgrimage to the grave referred to as Marabut of their deceased wali or mystical ancestor. Most often these were pious members known for their

religious knowledge or mystical abilities. Today this practice is almost only continued by members of the older generation. It is customary for an elaborate bowl of couscous to be prepared and placed inside the Quba (a tiny whitewashed construction made from clay and covering the grave where the wali has been buried) during such a visit.

This tradition, having the die-hard nature that traditions commonly do, has been the source of plenty of heated arguments between parents and their adult children. Some members of the older generation strongly defend this practice, viewing it as an "Islamic duty" to pay homage to their Marabut, whom they often refer to as Sidi (as in Sidi Rabah), one of the walis still acknowledged around Tiaret.

During the duration of this study, the author was informed about cases where young married women still spend the night in a Quba praying to the deceased wali for either a boy or a girl. However, this practice is on the downtrend, and for the most part, the non-literate elderly are eager to orientate themselves to what the Qur'an and Hadith say about such matters.

As explained above, the schools, constructed within the organization of Habus, were a well-received concept both in the cities and in the countryside. In Algiers one hundred such Qur'an schools were reported, and the same volume of school attendance was recorded for the other cities as well. Referring to this matter, Èmeret noted:

"There are countless primary schools (Masjid, Maktab) set up in small buildings that belong to the 'Habus'; every mosque has its own . . . We know that in 1837 in Constantine there were 86 Qur'an schools, which were attended by 1350 students. Tlemcen, a city with 12 000 to 15 000 inhabitants, had 50 schools . . . In each 'Douar' there was a tent, the 'Cheria', that served as a study room, with an instructor 'Mu'addib' who was selected by the Scheik of the 'Douar' or 'Djema' (group of notables)" (Translated from German by author. Chabou pg. 46).

The information in the European literature concerning female education in Algeria around 1830 is almost as meager as its Arabic counterpart. One can only speculate whether it truly was such a rarity or whether it was simply "overlooked" when one recalls the fact that it was not customary for women in Europe to receive an education during the mid-nineteenth century. For the purpose of this study, it is not so important to prove whether and to what extent women and girls were more educated than the women in France prior to the French conquest.

However, due to the ethnographic fact that enough cases of girls who received an education could be documented, even if moderately, it can be argued that this is a clear indication that female literacy was very much socio-culturally valued. Finally, establishing a link to the status of education for women during

the beginning stages of Islam as well as prior to the French invasion of Algeria could be useful in developing a strategy for recruiting more women from rural families to participate in literacy classes today.

### **3.2 The Effect of the French Occupation on Women's Education**

In contrast to the situation of education prior to the French invasion of Algeria, the documentary sources on the effect of the foreign occupation's makeshift plans regarding schools for the indigenous population in general and for women in particular are more extensive. The analysis of the colonial system of education in Algeria is mainly based on a variety of smaller articles or studies dating back to the time of conquest.

More recent studies on this subject include once again the historic-pedagogical analysis from Mouley Driss Chabou (1969). Chabou reveals significant details about the wary response of the Algerians towards the French politics of assimilation and the reorganization of the Islamic movement during the final stages of foreign occupation. His analysis is useful for the purpose of this study because it sheds light on the Algerians' perception of Islam as a reliable source of strength and a highly valued component of their educational heritage.

Other more current studies, though of a more limited historical nature, include the work by Yvonne Turin (1971). Turin reconstructs the development of education for Algerians between 1830 and 1880 from official documents stemming from the French colonial archives. Finally, the analysis by Fanny Colonna (1975) focuses on the socio-historical aspects affecting teachers of elementary schools during the time of the establishment of French schools in Algerian society between 1883 and 1939. Her subject of inquiry involves the relationship between education and society and demonstrates how the main interest of the French schools was to produce an intermediary segment of society, which would serve in an interceding role between the dominating French and dominated Algerians.

To begin with, it would suffice to say that the colonial dislocation of Algeria's century-long, culturally sophisticated system of education in its own right belongs to one of the crudest and long-term infringements imposed upon this country's culture and society. This is by no means to say that the colonial circumstances surrounding literacy in Algeria are unique. Several similar situations of mass illiteracy can be linked to imperial invasions in other countries as well (see also Egbo 2000 and Smock 1981). In the case of Algeria, however, the implications of the French foreign policies concerning the education of the Algeri-

an youth were so far-reaching that even roughly fifty years later, it still has not been able to recover completely.

In the beginning, the Algerians resiliently resisted the ferocious attempts made by the French military to spread deeper into their country. Not only did the Qur'an schools contribute to the relatively high levels of literacy among the Algerian people, those schools gave them the spiritual drive that enabled them to withstand the foreign influences for a significant period of time. Mahfoud Bennoune (1988) illustrates the social dynamic that took place among the Algerians during the time of conquest as follows:

“Although all segmentary patrilineal societies contain inherent structural sources of friction that generate internal conflicts, their multiple cross-cutting kinship networks through a common dynamic ideology of descent act as a unifying force when the society is faced with a threat from without. As demonstrated by the stiff resistance against the invading French army (1830-71 and 1954-62), the apparent organizational weaknesses that initially encouraged the external aggressors to encroach upon the segmentary groups were transformed into highly cohesive, ramifying, voluntaristic, and resistant structures. In other words, in the face of a common enemy, the segmentary units act centripetally: the various social levels coalesce, while status and territorial distinctions fade” (Bennoune 1988:21).

### 3.2.1 *Emir Abd el-Kader (1808-1883)*

Accordingly, several authors argue that the actual seizure of Algeria happened seventeen years later, in 1847, when the leader of the opposition, Emir Abd el-Kader (1808-1883), finally had no choice but to surrender to General Lamoricière, after which he was sent into exile to Damascus (see Bennoune, 1988; Chabou, 1969; Herzog, 1995).

Up until this point, Abd el-Kader, a compelling figure and humanitarian stemming from an influential Zawiya-affiliated family, played an instrumental role in unifying the forces of various tribes for the single cause of defending their country, culture, and religion against French imperialism. Today he is still highly revered as one of the first freedom fighters, *Mujahiddin*, for Algeria's ultimate sovereignty. Numerous monuments of him on horseback, waving his sword with dignity, have been erected in most major cities.

On June 14, 1830, the French troops landed in Algiers. Already within one month's time, the city had been entirely occupied, thereby obliging the Pascha-Dey, Hussein, to leave the country in exile indefinitely. The remaining major cities, such as Blida, Medea, Constantine, and Tlemcen, followed soon after. They were all subsequently colonized through pillages and depopulation by the

troops before they systematically made their way towards the rural areas by means of scorched-earth tactics.

The methods employed by the military raids of the Algerian cities have been “characterized by unusual violence rarely seen in the modern history of colonialism” (see Bennoune, *“The making of contemporary Algeria”*, 1988, for a comprehensive monograph on the colonial upheavals and post-independence development). Although this is not the place for a detailed historical account of the severities that were imposed during the military conquest, a synopsis of the major events surrounding the methodic breakdown of Algeria’s organization of education and schools will be brought to light. Furthermore, the consequences of the French policies on the education of Algerian women and girls will be highlighted where possible.

As soon as the French had begun establishing a colony, the commanding general of the military campaign, de Bourmant, issued a proclamation written in Arabic to be circulated among the people of Algeria. This text entailed an official guarantee regarding the future utilization of the mosques under the newly established French order:

“I promise you [the Algerians], and I give you my formal, solemn and unbreakable word that the larger as well as the smaller mosques shall remain open to be used just as they had been in the past and even more so than ever before, and that no one has the right to hinder the practice of your religion and culture in any way” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:53).

This, as the succeeding events revealed, could not have been further from the truth. From the outset, Algeria had not only been targeted for the economic, commercial, political and military potential it promised as a colony but had more significantly been regarded as an extension of France. Already during the same year that de Bourmant’s “promise” towards the Algerian people and customary way of life was issued, official decrees resulting in the initial confiscation of countless areas under the establishment of the Habus agreements were enacted. This “transfer” of land from the Algerians to the settlers was undertaken under the guise of diverse juridical actions in order to maintain a façade of legal propriety and justice (Bennoune 1988:43). In reality, however, their land was almost literally pulled out from underneath their feet.

One of the primary aims of this rude and abrupt expropriation of land was to reduce the influence of the native chiefs and thereby break up the strength of the tribes in the process. The French understood early on that the pacification of Algeria could best be achieved by dismantling the tribal structures. Furthermore, France was interested in implementing the European market, where individual land was a commodity to be bought and sold and where members of a tribe

would eventually disengage themselves from their collective groups and begin serving the economy of the colony as individuals in the form of wage labor. In the end, the Algerians were reduced to landless laborers whose only way of supporting themselves was by selling their labor to the new settlers whose land actually belonged to them in the first place (Bennoune pg. 44-49).

The greedy confiscation of land, especially in the case of the inalienable religious lands, i.e., the Habus, which almost without exception were among the first to be appropriated, proved to be the most devastating for the Qur'an schools and other educational facilities. Above all, the Qur'an schools were viewed as an obstacle that stood in the way of the foreign occupation's political process of assimilation. Laws were soon enacted that required Muslim authorities, judges, and scholars to immediately step down from their positions and hand over all official documents and registers to the French authorities (Chabou 1969:53).

From then on, it was possible to teach only with a special permit that was granted strictly by the governing officials of the district. This stipulated that the teacher could give private lessons only in a family setting and was not allowed to open a school on his own. However, the bureaucratic process of getting such a permit was so foreign to most Algerians that they were too intimidated to try to obtain one. Furthermore, religious scholars were apprehensive about accepting any type of allowance from a *Kafir*, an unbeliever, at the risk of affiliating with the enemy. Gradually, several mosques were turned into quarters for French troops, transformed into churches, or destroyed altogether (Chabou 1969:54-57).

The results of the various French laws regarding the dispersal of Habus lands in the urban centers had been recorded by A. Devoulx. In charge of documenting the fate of all religious facilities in Algiers, Devoulx's findings were published in *Revue Africaine* (1858-1870). Here Devoulx documented that:

"In 1830 in Algiers there were 13 large mosques, 109 small mosques, 32 Marabouts and 12 Zawiya, making a total of 166 buildings affiliated with the Islamic religion .... In 1862 only 4 big mosques, 8 small mosques and 9 Marabouts are still standing, for a total of 21 buildings" (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969: 54).

What that essentially meant was that within thirty-two years' time, roughly eighty percent of all buildings associated with Islam and native schools were eradicated. Similar accounts of the situation of mosques in other larger cities throughout Algeria had been recorded as well. Basically, all religious buildings were drastically reduced in number, and those that did remain intact were put under the direct supervision of the French authorities.

With the transformation and destruction of the mosques, Algeria's century-long autochthonous system of education had been severely broken down. At the same time, no reports are available on the status of mosques in rural areas, lead-

ing most authors to assume that they were left untouched. This, as will become clearer later on, proved to be a fatal mistake made by the French.

During the beginning stages of the establishment of French elementary schools in Algeria, various streams of opinions circulated among the French settlers. On the far end of the spectrum were the extremists who saw no chance at civilizing the natives much less the necessity for granting them an education. The only solution to the questions concerning the politics of the Algerians in general and the "*instruction des indigenes*" in particular was to simply get rid of them. In 1845, Eugene Bodichon, a French physician living in Algiers, was quoted as saying:

"Without breaking the laws of moral and international rights we will be able to defeat our African enemies with gunpowder and steel, which will lead them to starve and through the use of alcohol, bribes and decay we will provoke inner conflict between the Arabs and the Kabyle Berbers, between the tribes of the Tell and those of the Sahara. Now it is the easiest thing in the world. Without spilling blood we can decimate them every year by taking possession of their subsistence and confiscating their food, blocking their way until even the fig trees and cacti flee" (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:63).

Others, on a similar tangent, reduced the Algerians to "wild animals, which were incapable of being "civilized" and therefore should be banned to the desert forever." Finally, another group of extremists, albeit on a more peaceful note, saw the solution in the fusion between the Arabs and the French through Christianization, which they believed could be easily achieved through mixed marriages. Yet these creative plans had to remain optimistic thoughts. The Algerians stood their ground with little interest in French-Arab marital unions and even less desire at the thought of switching religions (Chabou 1969: 63-64).

From 1840 until 1847, all Algerian schools were officially closed. However, the French knew that the Algerians could not be kept away from attaining at least some form of education indefinitely. It was clear that the only way to successfully assimilate "*les arabes*" into their French-Algerian schema was by teaching them the French language. With an official decree issued in 1850, lessons in French-Arabic were introduced. This, however, soon fizzled out due to a lack of funds (Szell 1967:24).

What followed next was a series of half-hearted attempts made by a governing body who was backed by next-to-no funding to engage the Algerian children in at least some schooling while they themselves considered the Arabs "*une race incorrigible et inéducable*". In light of this, the lack of motivation on the part of these officials to provide a decent education for their "hopeless secondary citizens" is not hard to imagine. With the Qur'an schools successfully subdued, the

French basically attempted to fill this gap with their own elementary school system, the *école française*, which was under the direction of the ministry of education in Paris (Chabou 1969; Colonna 1975; Turin 1971).

From the beginning, the children of the French settlers were given priority. However, due to the politics of assimilation, more efforts had to be made to integrate Algerian children into the French schools as well. The first attempt at a combined classroom where both French and Algerian children were to attend was made by Genty de Bussy. He opened three French elementary schools in Algiers, Oran, and Bone. Despite several tries, de Bussy himself finally had to admit that:

“Except for in Oran, where a limited number seem to attend, and in Bone, where we have not quite given up all hope, the Moors have left their school benches” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:66).

Due to previous experience made by the French authorities regarding which Algerians seemed more likely to attend school, they began to distinguish between the Arabs, Kabyle Berbers, Moors (Muslim ancestors of those who were banned from Spain during the *Reconquista*), Jews, Mozabites (or Ibadites from the M<sup>z</sup>ab region), Turks, and so on.

Of all the different groups of people, the Moors were deemed most compliant. This is why they were selected as the initial target group for aiding the process of integration in subsequent French schools. With that the *école maure-française* was founded. Special efforts were made to guarantee its long-term success, for example, by establishing the school in a mosque setting; including the Arabic language and the Qur'an in the lesson plan; as well as having two teachers, one French and one Algerian. Initially, sixty pupils were recruited (Chabou 1969:67).

Soon after in 1836, additional dual-language schools were tentatively planned for construction in Bone and Oran. However, again due to a lack of funding and the difficulty in finding Algerian teachers, this never came to be. Although it was certain that there would have been enough pupils to fill a classroom, the initiatives made by the authorities clearly began to dwindle.

For one, the French communes regarded the allocation of funds for the education of Algerians to be a “risky and dangerous financial experiment” (Szell, 1962:26). They were disappointed with the level of results achieved by the native pupils in Algiers. Another reason was that the pupils only seemed to be motivated to learn by force or through monetary bribes. As soon as the pressure lessened, the level of performance similarly weakened and decreased (Chabou 1969:68).



Another explanation was that those children who did attend school tended to stem from the lower classes and thus were of little use for the French colony, whose sole interest lay in building up an elite group of Algerians. These elites were to act as buffers between the two sides while maintaining clear loyalties towards France at the same time. Altogether the French authorities were not too interested in providing the Algerian masses with a comprehensive education. One must keep in mind that this was not even the case in France at the time. On this matter, the Minister of Education, Thiers, said:

“Elementary school does not need to be made available for the masses, as it is a luxury and is not befitting for everyone” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:78).

And so it was that an education was not intended for every Algerian either, but rather for those who proved themselves useful for the French colony as an elite group. The following statement made by the Minister of Education in Paris, Jules Ferry, accurately depicts this widespread sentiment quite well:

“Keep them [the Algerians] in the schools until they reach the age 14. That is enough, more than adequate. We do not intend to integrate them into our fine public school programs because we do not plan to teach them too much history or geography, just French, above all French, French and nothing else” (Translated from German by author. Szell 1967:25).

This also reflects the general view held by most French colonists at the time. In their own arrogance and greed, disguised as a “civilizing force”, they, as other imperialisms did, viewed their language and their culture as being far superior over that of the Algerians. Hence, by imposing their world-view upon the Algerian people, they felt that they were doing them a tremendous favor. However, despite their confidence and the conceptual attempts implemented by the French-Moorish school, the end results were at best minimal. By 1850, only 130 Algerian pupils of a total of 480,000 school-aged children had attended (Chabou 1969:73).

Here, the perspective of the Algerians with regard to receiving a French education deserves more attention. To better understand the circumstances surrounding the schooling of native children, one must take a closer look at the details of the situation at hand. Granted, most French colonists were not too concerned whether their “lower class citizens” attained a proper education or not. For this reason alone, the conditions needed in order to provide an effective environment for learning were amiss. On the other hand, the Algerians were not exactly keen about attending French schools themselves. This being the case, why were the majority of Algerians reluctant to partake of the French school system?

First of all, the people designated to teach Algerian children were French officers or former soldiers who had no prior knowledge or experience in the field of education. That is not to say that qualified teachers from France did not exist at all. There were in fact well-trained teachers; however, these teachers were reserved for instructing the children of the French settlers.

The teachers of the Algerian pupils lacked the methodical know-how as well as the necessary didactic skills in order to work efficiently. In the end, many teachers were completely overwhelmed. Without the ability to communicate with the pupils, they began to feel more and more isolated themselves, especially those who taught in rural areas. Several of them eventually returned to France, and their classes immediately dissolved (Chabou 1969; Colonna 1975).

In the rare case of a few teachers who did manage to successfully engage their students, it was required of them to teach the program that was imported from France. All books and pedagogical materials were exact replicas of those used in France. Because of this, the cultural background of the Algerian children was completely disregarded. In reference to the mishap nature of importing an entire pedagogical system from one culture to another, the director of elementary schools in Paris, F. Buisson, empathetically observed:

“The Arab child would be distracted at any moment by a single word, a phrase, a playful reference to facts, or a traditional custom while reading the content of a French school book, which would otherwise be completely comprehensible to us. He looks at the text with his great wide eyes, sparkling with intelligence, and is filled with despair, and because there is no proper way to reach him, he slowly withdraws. Truly no impression can be more painful than this” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:86).

Furthermore, the level of anxiety caused by the violence experienced by thousands of Algerians during the military invasion must not be underestimated. It is likely that this left a great impact on their minds and significantly contributed to their overall hesitant stance. Other reasons stemmed from a fear of being somehow indoctrinated. Referring to this subject, E. Foumestroux, a French author who closely followed the effects of the French public instruction of Algerians during the first phase of foreign occupation, wrote in 1850:

“Indeed the beginnings of the French-Moorish schools were very much met with prejudice by the natives. The fear of being converted through the schools was especially high . . . This fear was so excessive that it reached the point where young Moors actually rejected their school certificates, which they diligently earned with zeal, because they feared it would put them under the suspicion of having converted to Christianity” (Translated from German by author. Chabou 1969:68).

### 3.2.2 *First attempts to recruit Algerian girls in French Schools*

Religious beliefs played a big role in this matter, especially in the case of girls (Chabou 1969; Colonna, 1975; Szell, 1967). The instruction of Algerian girls warrants special mention at this point. In the beginning, between 1830 and 1850, no official efforts were made by the French authorities to recruit girls in their schools. In fact, it was first in 1845 that a French woman, Madame Luce, who was the wife of a soldier, took it upon herself to open up a private school for native girls.

Girls were taught to read and write French as well as how to sew and knit. Later in 1847, this school eventually became subsidized by the State. However, the number of girls who attended continued to remain very low. The French authorities explained away the low enrolment of "indigenous" girls by attributing it to the Algerian's inability to grasp the benefits of European values (Chabou 1968:71).

In 1850, the first official attempt was made to attract more Algerian pupils, this time opening its doors to both boys and girls. The former *école maure-française* was replaced with a new concept, which was called *école arabe-française*. The French authorities thought by stressing the Arab component in their new pedagogical plan, more Algerians would feel more inclined to attend. The school subjects were to include Arabic, French, arithmetic, and knitting.

Although Arabic was taught through the use of the Qur'an, all reference to the Islamic religion was strictly banned, and only two hours' time were allotted for instruction in the Arabic language whereas four hours were reserved for subjects taught in French. Ten schools in total were established: Six schools were for boys, which were located in Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Blida, Bone, and Mostaganem, and four were for girls, which were located in Algiers, Bone, Oran, and Constantine (Chabou 1969:78).

The girls' schools in Bone and Oran were both immediately shut down after it became evident that not a single girl was willing to attend. The schools in Algiers and Constantine, on the other hand, were far more successful. This had a lot to do with the fact that there it was arranged for native Algerian women to accompany the girls to and from school. Furthermore, the girls were awarded 2 Francs a month if they attended on a regular basis.

At first the school in Algiers had a total of 110 girls whereas Constantine recruited only 35. The schools were free of cost, and food and clothing were periodically distributed to the pupils. The majority of the girls either came from very poor families or were orphans. However, as the diverse benefits slowly came to an end, so too did the level of attendance. To the French officials, this was

a clear indication that the girls' interest in an education was at most marginal. Subsequently, in 1861, the girls' school in Algiers was closed down altogether.

By then the only remaining school for girls was in Constantine, which began to take on the sole character of a center for traditional arts and crafts, *arts indigènes*. The girls, who stemmed from poverty-stricken families, were taught how to sew, knit, and crochet. Their handicrafts were sold, and the money was reinvested in the school. Schools for girls continued on in this fashion for the rest of the duration of the French rule. In 1880, a boys' school in Bone included an annex for girls. Due to the efforts and pedagogical efficiency of the school director, Madame Dubois, 120 girls could initially be recruited (Chabou 1969:102-103).

According to the Ordinance of Education of 1892, girls' schools were to be established in every district where the resonance of the indigenous population was among the highest. These schools were obliged to spend half of the instruction time for artisan activities such as rug making and embroidery. The schools' emphasis on traditional handicrafts was generally met with approval by most Algerian families.

Many girls were able to contribute financially to their families by selling their works of art from home (Chabou 1969:136). However, at the same time, the children were continuously and consciously kept from learning their native language and denied any knowledge about their own background, i.e., their socio-cultural needs were never taken into consideration.

Between 1892 and 1914, the instruction of girls stagnated once again. For a population of approximately four million people, there were just seven girls' schools in total, which were attended by 1,179 pupils. On top of that, these schools were beset with all kinds of problems and deficiencies. For starters, there was a shortage of teachers, and those who were available did not have the requisite training to work with their foreign pupils.

The school facilities were in a shabby state of affairs with inefficient hygiene, lack of heating, and a shortage of materials. The didactic instruction plan was so poorly designed that the girls were not properly prepared to take their final exams (Chabou 1969:152). This downtrend of education for Algerians is not surprising when one compares the school budget of 2.5 million Francs granted to European children with the mere 450,000 Francs allotted for the education of Algerian children. This also explains why only 10,000 Muslim children, a mere 1.9% of the total school-aged population, attended school at that time (Szell 1967:26).

Towards the end of the colonial occupation, the French-Arabic schools experienced a complete and utter standstill. No additional French schools were built between the years 1914 and 1944. Not only that, the already existing schools slowly began to close down one after the next. The instruction of new

teachers completely halted as well. This was partly due to the circumstances surrounding the two world wars. It also has been attributed to the fact that the Arabic aspect of instruction in most schools had become neglected to the point that the so-called French-Arabic schools were really French schools solely designated for European children (Chabou 1969:179).

### 3.2.3 *Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis (1889-1940)*

The dire straits of public education for Algerian children under the French direction drew the attention of one Muslim scholar in particular, Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis (1889-1940). Having grown up in a scholarly and religious household, Ben Badis could no longer stand to watch how his fellow people were being reduced in status and condition to dispossessed and impoverished masses who were made ignorant of Islamic knowledge and hence denied their cultural heritage.

After completing his studies at the Zaytuna Mosque University in Tunis and after embarking on his pilgrimage to Mecca, Ben Badis returned to Algeria in 1913, where he founded the first reformist Qur'an school at the Sidi Qamouche mosque in Constantine. Men, women, and children received instruction in Islamic sciences, Arabic language, literature, and history.

In the 1920s, a network of independent schools attended by thousands of Algerian children and adults rapidly spread from the cities to the douars. By 1947 there were 90 such schools, and by 1954 the number of schools had increased to 181, which were attended by a total of 40,000 pupils. Furthermore, Ben Badis affirmed the Islamic principle of the importance of a solid education for girls. His efforts to bring back an Islamic education to the Algerian people and thereby redeem their integrity as Muslims became a great influence on the Algerian Muslim politics leading up to the Algerian War of Independence. However, due to the politicized nature of these schools, they were officially forbidden and subjected to closure or worse by French authorities (Szell 1962: 28).

In 1931, Ben Badis founded the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema (AAMU). Together with several other Islamic scholars in Algeria, he concentrated his efforts towards the correct practice of Islam. He and his associates worked against the saint cult of Maraboutism and mystic brotherhood, the Zawiya. Their unorthodox versions of Islam, by now ingrained in popular culture, began to dominate the countryside where the majority of Algerians lived.

By then the clergy had become official agents of the state, which supported them as a way of dissuading the natives from engaging in anti-colonial activities. Ben Badis' Association also published a monthly journal, the *Al-Shihab* (*The*

*Meteor*), which included topics on religious reform as well as political issues of relevance to the Algerians (Biography of Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, Encyclopaedia of World Biography, 2005-2006).

Several authors believe that it is mainly due to the efforts of Ben Badis and his followers that the concept of a distinct Arab and Muslim Algerian nation became a permanent element in the national discourse. The phrase that was once recited by the participants of his reformist schools later became the national motto of independent Algeria: “*Islam is our religion; Arabic is our language; Algeria is our fatherland.*”

Currently in Algeria, Qur'an schools are still committed to maintain his reformist practices of Islam. Another well-known phrase coined by Ben Badis was: “*Educate a boy and you educate one person, educate a girl and you educate a nation*”. Around Tiaret, the author observed some incidents where fathers were willing to drive their daughters clear across town on a daily basis in order for them to regularly attend a *djemma* (Qur'an school) that is structured after the ideas and teachings of one of Algeria's most prominent Muslim scholars, Sheikh Ben Badis.

After Ben Badis' death in 1940, a final and desperate series of school reforms were put into motion under General de Gaulle from 1944 to 1954. These aimed to reach the Algerian youth and strengthen the French regime. After the Second World War, first-time efforts were made in the area of adult education as well. In 1947, evening classes were offered three times a week. During these classes, the Algerian adult participants were taught how to read and write in French. The developmental trend of these classes between 1947 and 1954 have been summarized as follows:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Teachers</i>	<i>Number of Adult Students</i>
1947	706 Teachers	19,700 Students
1948	710 Teachers	17,600 Students
1949	970 Teachers	23,200 Students
1950	1,076 Teachers	28,100 Students
1951	1,283 Teachers	33,000 Students
1952	1,039 Teachers	26,700 Students
1953	1,472 Teachers	37,600 Students
1954	1,523 Teachers	40,100 Students

(Chabou 1969:195)

The results of the adult literacy classes were rated positively by the French officials. It had been reported that several adults were able to successfully read and write letters on their own and could read the newspaper. In other accounts it had

been claimed that these classes contributed to the improved social standing of some Algerians. However, the ratio of participants as compared with the entire population remained relatively low. There was approximately one participant for every 100 adults. It is also unclear to what extent these classes were offered or attended in rural areas (Chabou 1969: 195).

Much less spectacular were the results achieved by the school reforms aimed at the Algerian youth. The problematic here was similar to all other preliminary attempts made in the area of indigenous education throughout the colonial domination. Again the overall niveau of the schools was low. While the children of the settlers were assigned competent teachers, the children of the Algerians were stuck with an inexperienced "cadre special," who for their part were incapable of speaking Arabic, which of course precluded their being able to teach it to their pupils.

Furthermore, after the Decree of March 5, 1949, which oriented its content after the first principle of the constitution of Algeria and proclaimed that "Algeria is an extension of France," the policies of assimilation were enforced more strongly than ever. The schools that had been segregated for the native population and the European settlers up until then were now fused together. From then on all children were to be instructed in the same manner, without exception. Needless to say, the history, culture, traditions, and language of the Algerian people were ignored yet again (Chabou 1969:196-199).

Another familiar tactic implemented by the reforms under de Gaul was that the schooling of Algerian boys had continued to be prioritized. So just as before, the gender-biased focus on the males was justified by the colonial administrators in that men were the ones more likely to end up serving in subordinate positions such as clerical staff or as interpreters to the colonial administrators. In their view this was an essential way to achieve their agenda and thus sustain their regimes. As such, by 1945 the instruction of Algerian girls had fallen by the wayside.

During an entire millennium's time, a total of only 64 schools for native girls had been established under French occupation. These schools, in turn, were attended by 13,096 girls. As already mentioned, the girls' schools were essentially centers of traditional arts and crafts aimed primarily at the poorer classes and riddled with all kinds of pedagogical as well as structural deficits. By 1960, 35% of all school-aged Algerian children went to school. The ratio of boys to girls was 2:1 among the Algerian children as compared to 1:1 among the European children (Szell 1962:35). Aside from the quantitative differences, the schools also clearly varied in quality despite the denial of the French administration, who in the *World Survey of Education III* claimed otherwise:

“In Algeria and the French overseas départements all population groups attend the same schools in an atmosphere of complete equality. School attendance is compulsory and free of charge for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Education is organized along the same lines as in metropolitan France, and the basic legislative provisions are applied; however, necessary adjustments have been made at the various levels of education. The language instruction is French.”

“In the overseas départements, there are almost as many girls in school as boys, and the rate of school attendance is fairly normal. The percentage of adult illiterate remains rather high, owing to the rapid growth of population as a result of which there are still not enough schools. However, school building is being prosecuted with special energy and is gradually approaching the point at which the most urgent needs will be met” (Szell 1962:35).

The statement made about the dismal situation of adult literacy, however, had been accurately admitted. In the area of higher education, things were not much different for Algerian women. Rarely did an Algerian girl make it to the Lycée or college level. If she did, she most likely stemmed from a wealthy family, who was somehow affiliated with serving the French state.

A total of 256 girls from the “elite” group were documented as studying in a Lycée or college in 1945 (Chabou 1969:215-216). Of that number 17 Algerian women were enrolled at the University of Algiers: three studied Law, eight in Letters, three in Science, and three in Pharmacy compared to a total number of 480 men in these fields (Knauss 1987:48). By 1957, approximately 33% of the European students attending the University of Algiers were women; the number of female Algerian students was 8% (Szell 1962:33).

Although Algeria was not a sexually egalitarian country before the arrival of the French, the gender discrimination in the area education of Algerian girls exacerbated the situation of social stratification even more. Here it is important to recall that the widespread attendance of girls in some type of learning institution had been observed on several accounts prior to the French occupation.

Regardless of their social background, whether Bedouin or city dweller, many girls could read and write. Several authors have made reference to (Egbo 2000) the negative effect of the infiltration of Eurocentric ideologies into African societies. On the subject of the devaluation of women and their status under colonial rule in the Sub-Saharan region, Smock (1981) claims that:

“The development of Western education within the framework of a Victorian mentality and a dependent economy, consistently led to the exclusion of women from the education system. ... The European conception of females ... (as) a helpless homebound creature, inclined administrations to favour the admission of boys to the limited number of places available” (Smock 1981:254).



So, instead of improving the situation of women as many colonial powers claimed to have done, they in fact contributed to their gender-related oppression by divesting them of some of their former traditional rights and statuses. The introduction of a Western-style capitalist economy had an adverse effect on women as well. Within this framework, the emphasis was shifted away from the family as the primary unit of production to wage labor outside of the home. As such, the sexual division of labor became more rigid. Women were put at a severe disadvantage in cases where, for example, their role as cash crop producer had been shifted over to the men (see also Chlebowska 1990, 1992; King and Hill 1993; Smock 1981).

In the case of Algeria, Knauss (1987) argues that an increase in the isolation of lower-middle-class women occurred when the colony became integrated into the world market after 1900. This dilemma equally affected lower-middle-class men who faced bitter competition for better jobs in the civil service, education, and business sector from the French-educated elite (Knauss 1987:43).

As late as 1958, an official statement made by the French officials for the *World Survey of Education II* was that the dual system of schools for European children on the one hand and rural Muslims on the other was better suited "for the bulk of the Moslems, most of whom were illiterate and backward" (Szell 1962:29). Even at this point, their native Arabic language was considered an inferior "dialect".

According to a national survey in 1948, the rate of illiteracy among the European settlers was 8.2%, whereas among the Algerians it was 93.8%. Of that percentage, the male/female ratio could be broken down to 91% for Algerian males to 98% for females. Increases in Muslim enrolments were scheduled in the comprehensive 1954 Constantine Plan to improve Muslim living conditions. Despite these feisty last-minute attempts, more and more Algerian families kept their boys and girls at home. However, by then the national independence movements were well underway (Szell 1962:29).

This brings the topic back to the matter of mosques and Qur'an schools in rural areas. As was mentioned earlier, these institutions were, for the most part, left unscathed by the French military and civilian authorities. Looking back, the French colony underestimated the oppositional force that the thousands of pious rural farmers were capable of. The rural areas became the centers of the battle of opposition. Historians attribute the colony's negligence of rural areas whose inhabitants drew their strength and motivation from Islam and from religious and educated Muslim scholars such as Emir Abd el-Kader and Ben Badis to what ultimately led to Algeria's independence.

In summary, the legacy of mass illiteracy left by the French colony reached catastrophic dimensions. The sole beneficiaries of a French education were al-

most exclusively the Algerian males and of them only a select group of elites. The gender-biased system of education introduced by the French colony was in part modeled after the male-only institutes of higher learning dating back to medieval times in Europe.

The previous account illustrates how the people, especially the women, were made ignorant of their world-view and helpless in their quest for knowledge by the French colonial policies. Subsequently, the women could not read the Qur'an or Hadith, which taught them how to properly practice their religion and, within the context of Algerian culture, was the cornerstone for all other knowledge they could have attained.

### **3.3 Post-independence Educational Development and Mass Literacy Campaigns**

The “*mission civilisatrice*” of colonial French-Algeria, as envisioned by the administration in Paris, was primarily designed to meet the needs of the European population and to mold Algerians into the French cultural pattern. However, after 132 years of attempting to implement their form of education, which was geared toward a target group of “elite” Algerians and which denied the indigenous population their history, language, culture, and individuality, the state of education was in complete disarray.

For the most part, the foreign schools' policies were met with skepticism. By 1961, approximately 300,500 Algerian children between the ages of 6 and 13 attended school, leaving 1.5 million who were not receiving an education at all (Bennoune 1988:219).

An interesting first-hand account from Albert Camus *Algerian Chronicles* (2013), translated by Arthur Goldhammer from *Chronique algérienne 1939-1958* (1958), comments on the education of girls and situation of schools in Kabylia from 1913 to 1958. Camus observed the shortage of schools in Kabylia pointing out that the lack of schools did not stem from a shortage of funds for education.

“On February 7, 1914 Governor General Lutaud formally announced that 22 new schools and 62 classrooms would be built in Algeria every year. Had these goals been even half realized, the 900,000 native children who are today without schools would have received an education. ... For reasons that I need not go into here, the official plan was scrapped” (Camus 2013:59-60).

Camus' essay on education in Algeria depicts the overall dire state of schools with overcrowded classrooms and students sitting on the floors where dozens of

prospective students were regularly turned away, and how the schools did not meet the region's needs in the first place (Camus 2013:60-62). On this matter Camus quotes what one Kabyle man said to him, "Don't you see, the goal was to give us the smallest number of classrooms with the maximum expenditure of capital." In Camus' opinion, "...these schools were built for tourists and investigating commissions and that they sacrifice the basic needs of the native people on the altar of prestige" (Camus 2013:63).

On Kabyle attitudes towards the education of girls, Camus writes: "And Kabyles are not just worried about educating boys. I have not visited a single major town in Kabylia without hearing how eager people are for girl's schools as well." (Camus 2013:59). Camus underlined that Kabyles consider the education of girls to be extremely important and how they unanimously favor its expansion (Camus 2013:62).

He concludes by stating, "The Kabyles want schools, then, as they want bread... They will have more schools on the day that the artificial barrier between European and indigenous schools is removed – on the day when two peoples destined to understand each other begin to make each other's acquaintance on the benches of a shared schoolhouse" (Camus 2013:63-64). The latter as we know now never came to be.

By the time of independence in 1962, Algeria was left with the remnants of an educational institution oriented after the French school system. The school syllabi were largely conducted in a foreign language and the instructors were predominately French. Among the major hurdles standing in the way of the post-colonial development period in Algeria was the relic high rate of illiteracy inherited by all spectrums of society.

Over 90% of the entire population was non-literate, with notable discrepancies between males and females (86% of the Algerian men and 95% of the women were illiterate) and between urban and rural inhabitants (60-70% were illiterate in the cities as opposed to over 90% in rural areas) (Ageron Bd. 2, 1979:533). This was indeed a striking plunge in literacy rates when one recalls that the Algerians had managed to sustain a 45% literacy level through their tradition of Qur'an schools compared to the 40% rate in France documented by French authorities themselves before the 1800s and well before the time of conquest.

During the first years of sovereignty, the rate of illiteracy, which varied in accordance with age, sex, socio-economic status, and region, remained very high. In the 0 - 14 age range, 49 percent were illiterate, opposed to 95 percent of those 55 years of age and older. Furthermore, 63.3 percent of all males were illiterate, compared to 85.9 percent of females.

Finally, 89 percent of farmers were illiterate in contrast to 64.5 percent of industrialists, traders, and artisans. In 1966, nearly 6 million Algerians over the age of ten were entirely non-literate, still constituting roughly 75 percent of the total population (Bennoune 1988:219). The geographical distribution of illiteracy within the country in 1966 is depicted in the following table:

*The Geographical Distribution of Illiteracy in 1966*

<i>Province</i>	<i>Rate of Illiteracy</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Rate of Illiteracy</i>
Algiers	55.9	Oran	63.7
Annaba	---	Saida	85.1
Aurés	79.2	Saoura	80.4
Constantine	75.3	Setif	80.1
El Asnam	83.5	Tiaret	83.9
Medea	86.0	Tizi Ouzou	75.3
Mostaganem	77.8	Tlemcen	75.3
Oasis	77.5		

(Source RGPH (*Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat*), 1966. In Bennoune, 1988:220).

Initially, the post-independence era in Algeria was marked with optimism and high hopes for redesigning the system of education in order to better suit the needs of the Algerian people. One of the greatest areas of concern of the first Algerian party, the F.L.N. (Front de Libération Nationale), after independence was the forlorn state of education. Among the hallmark efforts of their educational endeavor were the indigenization and Arabization of all programs, again referring to the model conceived by one of the early leaders of the national movement, Ben Badis: Islam is our religion; Arabic is our language; Algeria is our fatherland.

Included among the principle duties of Algeria's new revolutionary plan was a socio-cultural conception of education within an Algerian framework, which placed an emphasis on scientific and technical studies. These aspects were unanimously declared in the Charter of Tripoli established in 1962:

“Algerian culture will be national, revolutionary and scientific.

FIRST, its role as a ‘national’ culture will imply above all that the Arabic language, which is the very expression of our country's cultural values, should be restored to its dignity and efficacy as a language of civilization. Algerian culture will therefore apply itself to the task of reconstituting, reevaluating and making known the national patrimony and its double humanism, classical and modern, in order to reintroduce them into intellectual life and the education of

popular sentiment. Accordingly, it will fight the cultural cosmopolitanism and western impregnation, which have contributed to inculcating into many Algerians a contempt for their language and their national values.

SECONDLY, as a revolutionary culture, it will contribute to the task of emancipating the people, a task that consists in liquidating vestiges of feudalism, antisocial myths and retrograde and conformist habits of mind. It will be neither a caste culture shut off from progress, nor a luxury of the spirit. Popular and militant, it will illuminate the struggle of the masses and all forms of the political and social struggle. Arising from its character as an active culture at the service of society, it will help in the development of the revolutionary conscience by increasingly reflecting the aspirations of the people, their real life and their new conquests, as well as every form of their artistic traditions.

THIRDLY, as a scientific culture in method and scope, Algerian culture should define itself according to its 'rational' character, its technical equipment, the spirit of research that animates it, and its methodical and generalized diffusion at all levels of society.

From this flows the need to renounce routine conceptions that could put a brake on creative effort and paralyse education by aggravating the obscurantism inherited from colonial domination. This requirement is all the more urgent, owing to the fact that the Arabic language has been subjected to such a time-lag as an instrument of modern scientific culture that it will be necessary to promote it, in its future role, by severely practical and perfected means.

Thus defined, Algerian culture should constitute the living and indispensable link between the ideological effort of the democratic, popular Revolution and the practical, daily tasks that the building of the country requires ... At this point it is appropriate vigorously to denounce that trend that consists in underestimating intellectual effort and in at times professing a misplaced anti-intellectualism ... This attitude overlooks the fact that Moslem civilization, from the point of view of the practical building of society, began and for long proceeded on the basis of a positive effort on the double plane of work and thought in the field of economics and culture. Moreover, the spirit of research that animated it; its rational attitude to science, foreign culture and the universality of the epoch – these made for a fertile exchange between it and other civilizations. It was, above all, these criteria of the creation and efficient organization of values and teaching that enabled Moslem civilization to participate widely in human progress in the past, and this conception should provide a point of departure for any true renaissance. Beyond this necessary endeavor, which should be undertaken, above all, on tangible bases, and according to a rigorously established procedure, nostalgia for the past is synonymous only with impotence and confusion.

Islam, disembarassed of all the excrescences and superstitions that have choked or altered it, ought to signify for us, over and above religion as such, the following two essential aspects: *c u l t u r e* and *p e r s o n a l i t y*” (Excerpt from the Tripoli Program, 1962. Szell 1962:41-42).

This excerpt from the Tripoli Program has been extensively referenced here because it reflects how the Algerians perceived themselves then and, as this paper argues, still see themselves today, especially in rural areas: namely, as Algerian Muslims who, within their socio-cultural parameter, are fully capable of being modern, intellectual, and cultural contributors to society. The socio-cultural aspects of education included in this Charter mirror what the people deemed befitting for their new sovereign nation and are consistent with those valued prior, during, and after the French occupation.

The paragraphs cited above have also been included in the Charte d’Alger published by the ‘Commission Centrale d’Orientation’ of the F.L.N. in 1964. During the post-colonial era, Islam continued to play an imperative role in the reestablishment of Algeria’s educational heritage. In addition, it outlines early post-independence efforts in the area of combating illiteracy:

“Elimination of Illiteracy and Development of a National Culture:

Before November 1, 1954, the Algerian people had shown their attachment to national values developed in the framework of the Arab-Moslem civilization by the creation and upkeep of free ‘medersas’ (Arab high schools), despite the colonial authorities’ opposition. In the course of the liberation struggle the leaderships of the ‘willayas’ deployed similar meritworthy efforts to bring culture within the reach of our people. In our country the cultural question involves the following:

- a) Restoration of the national culture and progressive Arabization of teaching on a scientific basis. Of all the tasks of the Revolution, this is the most delicate, because it requires modern cultural instruments and cannot be accomplished precipitately without risking the sacrifice of whole generations.
- b) The preservation of the national popular cultural heritage.
- c) The extension of the school system by making all grades of education universally accessible.
- d) The Algerianization of school syllabuses and their adaptation to the realities of our country.
- e) The extension of mass education methods and the mobilization of all national organizations for struggle against illiteracy so that all citizens may be taught to read and write within the least delay” (Szell 1962:42).

Again, this segment of the Charter of Algiers is indicative of how Islam was merited as an essential facet of their way of life and should continue to shape their system of education during the post-colonial era. All succeeding governmental documents and official reports, such as the 1976 National Charter, went far toward guaranteeing legal equality between men and women. The charter recognizes women's right to education and refers to their role in the social, cultural, and economic facets of Algerian life. However, in many areas such as female literacy and employment, the reality still shows a different picture (see chapters 5 and 6).

### 3.3.1 Primary Education

The process of Arabization was employed as early as 1962 at the elementary school level. With the help of instructors from Egypt and Syria, the Arabic language was successfully implemented into grades 1 through 4 by 1971. At the secondary and university levels, the curricula in the arts, including subjects in philosophy and letters, were fully conducted in Arabic by 1984. However, in technical disciplines such as math, natural sciences, and especially the field of medicine, French remains the primary language (Arnold and Bloch 1995:76).

The Arabization of all courses continues to pose serious problems for students. Among the main difficulties is the lack of scientific books and articles in the Arabic language. In general, there is a shortage of materials and books in libraries affiliated with institutes of higher learning. To date, students attending universities all across Algeria are required to deliver their final oral report and subsequent written thesis in French unless they study within the bounds of social sciences.

In addition to the emphasis placed on the Arabic language and Islamic heritage, the educational policies under the newly established nation were geared toward the *democratization of education*. That meant that all Algerian children without distinction should have an equal right to education. Regardless of gender (equal chances for girls and boys) or place of residence (urban or rural), all children were to be provided a free education and granted the same access to all stages of the educational system, including the university (Bennoune 1988:226).

Among the target groups who should benefit most from these democratic policies were girls and children from rural areas since they had been largely neglected in the past. This, as the results later confirmed, would be a vast undertaking, considering the various types of imbalances (social, economic, geographical) already present. Another challenge coinciding with the establishment of

these policies was the fact that Algeria experienced one of the largest population influxes in its history (Bennoune 1988:225).

During the decade of the 1960s, Algeria's population swelled by 50 percent. By the 1970s, the national annual growth rate reached 3.7 percent, making it one of the highest rates in the Third World during that time (Knauss 1987:112). Therefore, the scope of this endeavor would also entail a substantial financial investment to meet the needs of the rapidly growing number of school-age children.

The priority placed on education by the Ministry of National Education and its honest intentions to reverse the woeful situation are reflected by the considerable investments made in the area of human resources and by the allocation of large amounts of money. By the mid-1970's, approximately 30 percent of the national budget was spent on education and vocational training.

Between 1967 and 1979, the expenditures in this sector totaled DA 171 billion. Moreover, Algeria received generous assistance from the World Bank. From 1973 to 1980, Algeria drafted five loan agreements for education totaling 276 million U.S. dollars. Until fairly recently, the World Bank continued to provide funds and technical assistance to current educational reforms (Chapan Metz, *Algeria: A Country Study/Education*, 1994).

The increase in expenditures and determination to universalize education resulted in a substantial rise in the levels of school enrolment. In 1975, a law was passed, stipulating that education was compulsory for nine years for children between the ages six and fifteen. In addition to defraying the costs of school, ample efforts were made to assist the children from low-income families. Clothing, free meals, school materials, and scholarships were provided by the state.

The success in terms of an increase in the number of school-goers is at least comprehensible on a quantitative level. The rates rose from approximately 25 percent of school-age children between 6 and 13 years in 1962-63 to 71.05 percent by 1977-78. However, of that rate, 83.8 percent were boys and only 58.3 percent were girls (Bennoune 1988:224). Attendance climbed from approximately 900,000 in 1962 to nearly 4.8 million by 1983-84 and up to 6 million between 1987 and 1988. That meant that by the 1990s every fourth child was a school-goer.

The number of teachers multiplied as well. Of the 24,500 teachers in service in 1962, 9,000 were foreigners; whereas of the 167,700 teachers in 1983-84, only 4,300 did not stem from Algeria. During the 1987-88 school-year, a reserve of 228,000 teachers had been achieved (Arnold & Bloch 1995:77). The following table shows the developmental trend of school enrolment and the increase in the number of teachers between the years 1962 and 1988:



*The Development of the Algerian Institution of Education 1962-1988*

<i>Year:</i>	<i>1962/63</i>	<i>1968/69</i>	<i>1980/81</i>	<i>1983/84</i>	<i>1987/88</i>
<i>School Sector</i>					
Nr. of Pupils	939,500	1,763,000	4,148,000	4,790,000	5,885,000
Primary and Middle School (Grades 1-9)	869,000	1,586,000	3,921,000	4,464,000	5,293,000
High School (Grades 9-12)	70,500	177,000	227,000	326,000	592,000
Nr. of Teachers	24,518	46,169	129,618	167,671	244,962
Primary and Middle School	19,980	36,255	118,036	153,379	213,905
High School	4,610	9,914	11,582	14,292	31,057
<i>University Sector</i>					
Students	2,809	10,681	72,200	104,285	173,552
Instructors	316	1,865	7,903	12,509	12,970

(Source: *Annuaire Statistique* 1970, 1977-78, 1981, 1983-84, 1990. In Arnold & Bloch 1995:78)

Initially, Algeria was faced with a severe shortage of qualified teaching staff. In order to quickly meet the demands of the rapid growing number of pupils and students, teachers were hastily trained or recruited from abroad. Classrooms had to be improvised and many of the vacated homes of former French residents were utilized as schools. In an attempt to address the deficit in staffing, Algerian authorities felt compelled to sacrifice the prerequisites for becoming a teacher for the sake of upping the numbers. This undoubtedly had an adverse effect on the quality of education.

By the mid-1970s, the modified system of education proposed under the new government of Colonel Houari Boumedienne (1965-1978) consisted of six years of primary education followed by four years of middle school, three years of secondary school, and four years at the university level. However, despite Algeria's commitment to democratization, this system continued to be highly selective.

The examinations at the end of the year were in many cases so demanding that many students were unable to pass. This in turn resulted in a high rate of dropouts. In response to this, the primary and intermediary levels of education were reorganized onto a nine-year system of compulsory basic education, which has remained the same to date.

The secondary level was reshuffled into a three-track system: general, technical, and vocational, after which the baccalaureate examination could be taken before proceeding on to one of the universities, state technical institutes, vocational training centers, or moving directly into employment. This process of reorganization was only just completed in 1989. Despite these structural changes

aiming to produce better skilled technicians for the industrial sector, an acute shortage of personnel in all technical fields remained (Bennoune 1988: 218-220).

Another problem despite all efforts to reverse the situation was the ongoing regional disparities in education. During the 1983-84 school-year, a national average of enrolled six-year-olds totaled 86.6 percent. However, of the then 31 wilayas, only three reached an average enrolment of 64.69 percent and five attained 70-80 percent. Added to the equation were the educational deficits in areas where the proportion of nomads is higher and in areas of scattered settlements. Here, the percentage of school-going girls continues to remain low.

For example, in the more rural wilaya of Djelfa located in the high plateau region, 85 percent of boys and just 55 percent of girls were schooled in 1983 (Arnold & Bloch, 1995:77-78). In rural areas cases of girls who stop going to school around the age of 15 are not uncommon. However, in order to maintain a fair perspective, it must be noted that these girls are not forced by their parents to stop just because of their age or gender alone as was common practice in rural areas 15 to 20 years ago.

Halima, a woman from Tiaret now in her early forties, recalled her bitter experience of being forced to drop-out of primary school right after she triumphantly succeeded her final exams. She and her male cousin, who was in the same grade level, walked the distance to school together every day. However, when her cousin flunked his final exams he decided he would rather stay home and help his father around the farm than repeat the school year. Without her male cousin companion to accompany her to school, Halima was compelled to stay home. Although she can read and write, she laments not having been able to complete her education.

### 3.3.2 *Higher Education*

The disproportion in attendance among males and females at the secondary level and in institutions of higher learning remained high until 1977 although the educational opportunities of girls were drastically boosted due to the law passed in 1975 that made school obligatory for both sexes until the age of fourteen. Between 1966 and 1977, the total number of females attending schools and universities nearly doubled.

The number of women enrolled in secondary schools had more than tripled, and their attendance in institutions of higher education had risen by a multiple of twenty-seven. The increase in the number of Algerian women who attended schools and institutions of higher learning between 1966 and 1977 is summarized in the following table:

*Algerian Women Attending Schools and Universities (1966-1977)*

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>1966-67</i>	<i>1969-70</i>	<i>1977</i>
Primary	513,115	640,144	1,179,539
Secondary	38,854	55,194	110,509
Higher Education	553,820	698,302	1,344,728

(Sources: Vandeveldé 1971:85; and Ainad-Tabet 1980:245)

These numbers show an undeniable step forward in the area of higher education for Algerian women. The increase is even more remarkable when one considers that until 1962 a university education for women was an absolute rarity. Such was reserved for a fraction of Algerian pupils whose families attained their wealth and educational opportunities by collaborating with the French regime. In 1945, a total of 17 women were recorded as attending the University of Algiers, the only institute of higher learning in the country at the time.

By the time of Independence, Algeria was left with one university located in Algiers and two annexes, one in Constantine and the other in Oran. The university registrar documents that 3,718 students had enrolled in the fall of 1962. Until then, most students studied law and the humanities. In order to meet the rising demands of the economy, institutes of specialization and schools of higher education were created to train personnel in technical, administrative and managerial fields.

Among some of the establishments was the Algerian Centre for Hydrocarbons and Textile Studies and the Institute of Management and Planning in 1963-64. Other facilities of higher education included the Polytechnical School of Algiers, the National Institute of Agronomy, and the National School of Administration. In 1969, the regional annexes of the University of Algiers in Oran and Constantine were transformed into universities (Bennoune 1988:228).

The growing demand for higher education that followed spurred the creation of several other universities and institutions of specialization throughout Algeria, for instance, in Tlemcen, Annaba, Tizi-Ouzou, Setif, and Batna. Although more institutions of higher learning were being established, the organization and curricula remained virtually unaltered between 1962 and 1971.

This in turn induced the recently established Ministry of Higher Education to devise a comprehensive reform package, which adapted to the needs of the economic sectors and services. Some of the changes included increased time devoted to laboratory work and other practical fields as well as extending the duration of the academic year by two months. Priority was given to fields related to science and technology (Bennoune 1988:229).

Under the Boumedienne government, significant efforts were made to decentralize the regional politics in part by establishing a variety of universities

throughout the country. This was also meant to facilitate more access for women to attain a higher education near their families' place of residence.

It was also recognized that steps toward the democratization of higher education could be accomplished by providing scholarships and accommodations to students coming from poor families. Thus, by 1967 approximately 40 percent of all students received a governmental scholarship. This rose to 65 percent by 1975 when the expenditure on student scholarships totaled 280 million dinars (Bennoune 1988:230).

The number of women registered in national universities increased by a multiple of six in ten years (Bennoune 1988:230). In spite of these undeniable gains, in 1977 Algerian women still lagged behind relative to men as the next table shows:

*Distribution of Algerians by Gender and Level of Education (1977)*

<i>Level</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
Primary	1,179,539	1,672,785	2,852,324
Secondary	110,509	225,459	335,968
Total	1,344,728	2,073,577	3,418,305

(Source: Ainad-Tabet, 1980:245)

A decade later Algeria experienced a considerable stall in the enrolment rates among the male population, including a significant drop-out phenomenon between 1987 and 1998. According to statistics, this apparently has not affected girls, whose enrolments have steadily remained on course regardless of outside factors affecting the economy or social and political well-being. As such, female enrolment ratios have increased as follows:

*Trends in Enrolment Ratios in Algeria According to Census Data*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Population aged 6-14 years</i>					
	1948	1954	1966	1977	1987	1998
Male	13.4	23.5	56.80	80.80	87.75	85.28
Female	4.6	9.5	36.90	59.60	71.56	80.73
Total	9.1	16.6	47.20	70.40	79.86	83.05

(Sources: NSO 1999, RGPH results. In Kateb, 2003:2)

In an interview conducted by two French journalists in 1978, President Boumedienne was quoted as saying, "It will not be five or six heroines who will transform the condition of women in Algeria. I believe that the true revolution in this area will be made in five or ten years by the thousands of little girls who will go to the university" (In Knauss 1987:114).

Similarly, Nadia Ainad-Tabet, a specialist in Maghreb studies, projected the following for Algerian women in the early 1980s: "If one supposes that a large number of these women will accede to the work force and those who will follow them will break down remaining barriers, it is possible that by the law of numbers, by quantity, things will change" (In Knauss 1987:115). Upon taking a closer look at the development of women, higher education, and employment in Algeria today, the current rates give validity to the hypotheses made by Boumedienne and Ainad-Tabet a few decades ago.

According to a recent article in *The New York Times*, "A Quiet Revolution in Algeria: Gains by Women" (Michael Slackman May 26, 2007), Algerian women are "emerging as an economic and political force unheard of in the rest of the Arab world." With women constituting sixty percent of university students nationwide, serving 70 percent as Algeria's lawyers and representing 60 percent of its judges, and dominating the field of medicine, this could very well be true at least in urban areas. Future prognoses claim that if the trend continues, a new phenomenon of women in control of positions of public administration will materialize as well.

Furthermore, as stated by Hugh Roberts, a historian and the North Africa project director of the International Crisis Group, more men opt out of taking the university route because it no longer guarantees them a career or long-term economic stability. Women, on the other hand, very much welcome the opportunity to attend the university even if for reasons of getting out of the house and simply having something to do.

The impact of women continuing their education at a higher level has an effect on demographics as well. Sociologists remarked that women who pursue their studies marry much later on at the average age of 29 instead of at 17 and 18 as was customary in the past. As a result, birth rates have decreased (M. Slackman, *The New York Times*. May 26, 2007). The current situation of women and higher education in the wilaya Tiaret will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.4.

### 3.3.3 Adult Literacy

The remaining portion of this section will focus on the efforts engaged in the area of adult literacy in Algeria since independence. After 1962, when the nationwide literacy rate was lower than 10 percent, a series of adult literacy programs with the cooperation of UNESCO was initiated throughout the country. From the beginning, these programs were characterized by the Western model of development, which linked education with the process of industrialization, i.e., modernity.

Between 1962 and 1967, priority was given to the formal sector in the hope that this would translate into improvement in science and technology (Bennoune 1988:231). Initially, these programs were effective in reducing the rates of illiteracy among those who could not read or write in French or Arabic from 58 percent in 1977 to 47 percent in 1982. This comprised approximately 6.3 million people of a total population of 20 million, of which 61 percent were women (in Meyer, 1990:65). However, due to the ever-rising 3 percent annual growth rate and difficulty in enforcing the provision of mass education among the 6-14 age group in rural regions, the original goal of enrolling all school-aged children by 1980 could not be achieved (Arnold & Bloch 1995:77) and continues to pose a problem to this day.

Unfortunately, the information on strategies targeting women in literacy programs implemented after independence ranges from scant to non-existent, which strongly indicates that there were none. These include the mass literacy campaign launched in 1963 and the two-staged pilot project within the framework of the *Experimental World Literacy Program* (EWLP) from UNESCO implemented between 1967 and 1971.

The subsequent stage was concluded two years later (1972-74). The aim of this project was to provide vocational training for workers and their families in the agricultural and industrial sector. It also introduced skills within the concept of self-management in agriculture. Due to the low number of people who were recruited to participate in these projects, they have all been summarized as failures (Al-Nasser 1994; Meyer 1990; Fetni 1987).

The first campaign in 1963 failed after just six months. Authorities admitted that the program was not given ample priority by the nation. Only 5,000 of the originally planned 100,000 teachers were assigned a position. Furthermore, of the 5 million illiterate people, between 10,000 and 20,000 were registered in a literacy class (*Centre National d'Alphabétisation* 1966:4. In Meyer 1990:66).

Interestingly, the access of women to education in Algeria was discussed during the regional conference on the planning and organization of literacy programs in the Arab states held in Algiers and Tlemcen in March and April 1964. In the official write-up of UNESCO's Fifth Regional Conference of Arab National Commissions held in Kuwait in February 1966 it states "Adult education programmes should be used to make Arab fathers and mothers more aware of the responsibility towards the education of their daughters". (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001415/141545eb.pdf>).

However, the lack of success has been attributed to the absence of a clearly formulated strategy (Al-Nasser, 1994; Bougroum et al., 2007; Meyer, 1990). Meyer (1990) argues that these campaigns were destined for failure from the onset. Set within the revolutionary outlook of Algeria, which intended to com-

bine elements of tradition within an Islamic-Arabic framework with modernity, the goals and guidelines of what the mass literacy programs actually hoped to attain were too ambivalent. Meyer sees another problem contributing to its downfall in the way Algeria attempted to emulate the socialistic literacy campaign implemented in Cuba at the time and to adapt it to the situation of its country despite obvious cultural differences (Meyer 1990:66).

Generally, precedence was given to young adults employed in the 'organized sector' over adult education for reasons of technical development and rapid industrialization. In regards to women, Meyer (1990) claims that a literacy campaign promoting the emancipation of women would have undermined these political strategies while potentially antagonizing the pious-traditionalist streams in society. Indeed, there are a lot of inconsistencies in the formulations of official charters and speeches given by President Boumediene about the role of women in terms of education and work in society. This point will be elaborated on later in chapter 5.

The National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE) came into being in 1964 under the supervision of the Ministry of National Guidance. The NCLE adopted the concept of functional literacy education with the intent of providing social, political, and vocational education in addition to traditional reading, writing and counting literacy education. The NCLE assists in setting up programs for literacy and continuing education. Representatives of the centers located in the individual provinces are required to animate field-work at the local level. Theoretically, among their objectives in setting up programs are to:

- Provide learners with knowledge both fundamental and relative to their lives and widen their scope of culture and awareness.
- Provide learners with the necessary technical and vocational knowledge for their work and reinforce specialization in order to improve their performance standard, increase their productivity and encourage active participation in society. Motivate the learners to keep pace with the developments and changes which occur in production units.
- Provide learners with the necessary basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to enable them to profit from educational and training programmes as well as to augment general knowledge.
- Develop tendencies, inclinations, emotions, values, and behaviour.
- Develop the learners' esteem for work as well as their respect for others, opinions and order.
- Facilitate their adaptation to the working environment and to the economic, social and political changes occurring in his society" (Fetni 1987:27).

Until the Putsch in 1965 when Boumedienne ousted his predecessor, President Ben Bella, the attention paid to literacy was scant. Renewed efforts in literacy resumed in 1967. The project was financed by the UNDP (United National Development Program) and implemented by UNESCO in the following three regions: The agricultural region of Staoueli, the industrial region of Arzew, and the industrial-agricultural region of Annaba (Fetni 1987:16).

Similar to the literacy campaign of 1963, the focus aimed to achieve technical competence among a selective group of the working population. A specially trained cadre was chosen to teach workers from state-run facilities in the industrial sector to read and write. These specific job-related skills were meant to enhance human resources and productivity, i.e., were functional in the context of the work-place (Meyer 1990:66).

Although 100,000 workers were targeted, only 39,912 people were reported as having attained literacy in the agricultural sector and 13,954 in the industrial sector. With a total of 53,866 workers, just over 50 percent of the expected results were achieved (Abu Zaid 1989 in Al-Nasser 1994:158; Fetni 1987:16). Due to the confined nature and the meager outcome of the first phase of the EWLP, the second phase of the project reorganized its work-oriented methods and essentially became another mass literacy campaign. This time the goal was to reach a million illiterate adults on a popular scale and 100,000 workers on a functional scale (Meyer 1990; Fetni 1987).

The evaluations of this project, summarized by UNESCO in the "Estimation of the International Experimental Literacy Programme" (1976), are incomplete. Due to the vague and incomplete nature of the statistics, it was difficult to deliver concrete results. However, it was relayed that of the 100,000 workers in the functional sector, 74.3 percent were stated as having achieved literacy. In the popular sector comprising 1 million people, approximately 24 percent were reached. Fetni cites a plethora of problems that arose during the course of these programs. In summary, they include:

"The indifference of the concerned departments towards literacy education; considering illiteracy as a marginal problem; the oppression of bureaucracy over the administrations assigned to this operation; a continual and arbitrary lack of co-operation in the districts, provinces and popular organizations; delays in paying the salaries of animators; placing the burden of salaries on the National Centre for Literacy Education when it is not its responsibility; the interrupted support of the media (radio, television, press); the problem of literacy education not being regarded as having economic, cultural and political dimensions; campaigns organized only on International Literacy Day or for other celebrations; total lack of planning for the expenses of the operation; no supervision or evaluation of operations at the national level; no co-ordination between concerned departments; animators were too young



and ill-trained; participating teachers were too few and overworked; lack of financial and material resources and equipment; lack of participation among the vital capacities in literacy education; total lack of any form of stimulation or encouragement to convince adults of the importance of literacy education; non-implementation of the articles of the foundation decree of the National Literacy Centre with respect to national and local committees, the creation of local centres and the appointment of inspectors and advisors in every province to supervise literacy education; and non-contribution by university and research centres of studies concerning literacy and adult education.” (Fetni 1987:19-20)

In retrospect, the overall outcome of the successive literacy plans implemented between 1967 and 1977 was insufficient. The 1970-1973 plan aimed to reach 1 million people. The subsequent plan from 1974 to 1977 projected a target group of 300,000 participants. The results show a disconcerting picture. During the duration of all three plans, only 16.6 percent of all targets were attained (Bennoune 1988:131).

In reference to the results achieved in the area of literacy since independence, the Central Committee regarding the National Policy for Literacy and Continuing Education stated in the late 1980s, “The Algerian experience in combating illiteracy did not attain the expected objectives as a result of the lack of a clear and integral plan and the absence of a suitable climate for a generalized use of the national language” (Fetni 1987:37).

Among the main limitations of the functional literacy projects implemented in Algeria in the past has been their emphasis on the vocational aspects of literacy much to the detriment of the cultural and social concerns of the majority of the participants. The so-called traditional and popular literacy programs were limited to reading, writing and arithmetic. Not only did the previous programs neglect the socio-cultural aspects involved in literacy attainment, they failed to address women and their literacy needs altogether.

So far, Algeria's approach to education has been characterized by a steady, ongoing process with an inclination for experimentation, which is not a typical course for a developing country to take. Despite committed efforts on behalf of the state, Algerian women continue to be affected by illiteracy twice as much as men. However, amidst this ongoing pattern of illiteracy, an interesting development is already beginning to emerge, and that is the surge of women who continue their education in universities nationwide. The remainder of this chapter takes a look at the current situation of adult literacy practice in Algeria and narrows its focus on the kinds of literacy strategies that have been currently devised for women.

### 3.4 The Current Situation of Women's Literacy and Education

The previous account provides an overview of the events leading up to the current state of literacy and education in Algeria. As has been the recurrent focus throughout the study, this section centers on the present state of education as it relates to women in particular. Furthermore, it ultimately aims to explicate and utilize the background implications for the implementation of a gender-based literacy program, which facilitates women's empowerment.

The State has paid considerable attention to the development of education. Since independence Algeria has been devoted to making education democratic and free and thus available to all citizens regardless of gender or place of residence (National Commission for educational reform, 2<sup>nd</sup> session held from 27 April to 30 April 1970).

During the period between 1962 and 2000, school enrolment at all levels has risen dramatically tenfold. The number of pupils rose from 940 thousand in 1962 to 7.6 million in 2000. Though enrolment ratios have shown similar growth for both genders, by 1998, 85.28% of males were enrolled compared to 80.73% of females. At the same time, the leap in the overall rate of enrolment dating prior to independence to recent times is astounding. The following table shows how the rate increased from approximately 9% of the population (aged 6-14 years) in 1948 to 83% in 1998.

*Trends in enrolment ratios in Algeria according to census data (1948-1998)*

Gender	Population aged 6-14 years					
	1948	1954	1966	1977	1988	1998
Male	13.4	23.5	56.80	80.80	87.75	85.28
Female	4.6	9.5	36.90	59.60	71.56	80.73
Both	9.1	16.6	47.20	70.40	79.86	83.05

(Sources: NSO 1999, RGPH results, In Kateb, 2003:2)

Overall, the school building program has made it much easier for pupils to attend school close to where they live, especially in rural areas. The risk of illiteracy is clearly lower among people living in a wilaya administrative town; approximately one out of two people living in a remote area is illiterate compared to one out of four people living in wilaya administrative centers. The gender disparity is clearly compounded with the urban/rural dichotomy with the result that women are affected twice as much by illiteracy as men (Kateb 2003:3-4).

Despite previous efforts and ongoing stated aims of gradual decentralization, Algerian education, in general, remains highly centralized. Just prior to the

recent decade of civil unrest, Bennoune (1988) summarized the Algerian system of education as follows:

“Since the Algerian system of education was conceived by the political leadership as a state system, whose principal mission was to carry out a ‘cultural revolution’ within the country, it was expected either to transcend or minimize the negative influences of an underdeveloped socio-cultural environment characterized, among other things, by a retrograde and authoritarian power relationship at every level of society, a fact that made horizontal communication almost impossible. Under such circumstances, the educators themselves, who received an inadequate education, needed, first of all, to be educated. It might be that ‘the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice’. However, in the field of education, the social practice that prevailed in the country was, and continues to be, determined by an archaic ideology imposed in primary and secondary schools by some formerly influential members of the Algerian *ulamah* who became the principal theoreticians of educational philosophy in contemporary Algeria...

Consequently, this underdeveloped society, whose leadership was and continued to be incapable of comprehending the nature of education, affected the performance of the educational system. The second-rate quality of its graduates hampered their performance in the field of development; which shows how an underdeveloped country is trapped in a vicious circle“ (Bennoune 1988:235-236).

Now, nearly thirty years later, the added human and physical damage caused by the civil war in recent times continues to cloud every sector of Algerian society. The area of education is no exception. Though some have claimed that the driving force behind the ongoing crisis of violence is primarily a religious issue, the actual underlying problem has far more to do with the persistent power struggle between the classical military elite, who fiercely continue to resist cultural change (and not necessarily for reasons of sentiment), and the masses, who have been denied any real opportunity to get ahead. So, even though the scope of education has been greatly extended, many patterns laid down during the French administration continue on in the present system, which deeply affect the quality of education.

### 3.4.1 Primary Education

Public schools operate jointly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. Islam, as one of the required subjects, is taught for a total of 2 hours per week during primary school and 1 hour per week from 7<sup>th</sup> grade on. The primary focus of education is on Arabic and Mathematics.

Schools are free and attendance is compulsory for 9 years from age 6 on. Currently, approximately 96% of girls and 99% of boys attend school at the primary level (<http://i-cias.com/e.o/algeria.education.htm>). The following table shows more recent figures of attendance.

*Pupils enrolled in primary and intermediate schools, (2000 and 2003)*

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2003</i>
Pupils enrolled, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycles	4,720,950	4,691,870
Percentage girls	46,82%	46.98%
Pupils enrolled, 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle	2,015,372	2,116,087
Percentage girls	48.06%	48.04%
Total pupils enrolled, primary and intermediate levels	6,736,320	6,666,346
Percentage girls	48.19%	47.9%

(Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ALGERIA-English>, pg. 6)

Although the educational system in Algeria has evolved tremendously since 1962, the demographic explosion and civil unrest have severely affected the quality of education on all levels. Primary schools still implement the frontal fact-acquisition orientation to instruction and learning. This system of lecture-rota memorization has its roots both in the French and Islamic heritage. Despite the shortcomings in the current primary system listed below school is taken very seriously by parents, teachers and pupils alike. "School" is a common game played by children during the weekends (see photo).

Though it may be an effective skill for learning to recite the Qur'an, it is retrograde and detrimental in other fields, where higher order skills such as critical thinking are essential for grasping and applying knowledge. Examinations are conducted in a fact-recall manner, and as a result, most of the material, which is "merely" memorized, is soon forgotten after the exams are over (see also <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/28/Algeria-SUMMARY.html>).

Among the problems that continue to stall the progress of education are poorly qualified teachers and outdated methods and materials, which in part can be attributed to inadequate funding. Along with the provision of compulsory education arose the need for a substantial increase in the number teachers. From 1962 to 2000, there was a 13-fold increase in the number of primary school teachers (from 12,696 to 169,503), a 40-fold increase in lower secondary school teacher, and a 12-fold increase at the upper secondary level. These skyrocketing

boosts occurred at the expense of the level of qualification, especially at the primary level.

So, for instance, for the 1983-84 school year, the distribution of teaching staff according to their qualifications was as follows: Of 179,153 basic level teachers (primary and lower secondary school), 18.3% were entirely without qualifications, 3.4 % had attained their *CEP* (complete primary school), 34.1% had the *brevet d'études élémentaires* (elementary studies certificate), and only 18.8% the baccalaureate. Only 1 out of 6 teachers had actually received teacher training lasting from 1 to 3 years in a technological education institute (I.T.E) (Kateb 2003:4-5).

With all efforts concentrated towards increasing the number of enrolments, the qualitative management of the education system has dwindled. Although the State initiated a new primary school program in the fall of 2005, according to several school teachers in Tiaret, this program is not only faulty but culturally unsuitable. Apparently, the program was imported from Canada after it had been eliminated from the Canadian school system for its lack of effectiveness.

Since its implementation it has been the subject of deep scrutiny among teachers and parents alike, who are in constant struggle to engage children to keep up with the somewhat abstract material. For example, in one homework exercise, 4<sup>th</sup> grade children were required to write the sequence of events of the fairytale "Little Red Riding Hood" in Arabic. Many Algerian parents have never heard of the story. In the case of my son, I was able to tell the tale to my Algerian husband in German, who then translated it in Arabic for our son to write down as a dictation exercise.

In general, Algeria currently suffers from a great shortage of qualified teaching staff. In light of the recent pedagogical situation, teachers are overwhelmed. Most teachers barely cover 30% of the material in class, leaving 70% of the workload to be completed at home with the help of parents or siblings. During my fieldwork several schoolchildren relayed that their teachers were often unable to answer their questions concerning the learning material.

Some children reported having been struck on their hands or face for merely asking how to solve a math equation. The tradition of hitting pupils for inadequate behavior or poor results is still very common. Although this has been officially outlawed, the majority of parents support this method of obedience and encourage the teachers to strike their children "if need be". Teachers are highly respected and given full authority.

As a result of the insufficiencies in the classroom, many kids attend some sort of privately organized tutor sessions after school. These are often held in the homes or garages of retired teachers for a modest fee of 200-400 dinars a month (roughly equating 2.60–5.25 U.S. dollars). Those who cannot afford extra tutor

sessions are left to fend for themselves. School strikes are not uncommon. Teachers complain about being poorly paid, schools are overcrowded, and classes are often conducted in multiple shifts. In 2000, a total of 8.2 million pupils used 122,867 primary school classrooms, averaging approximately 37.8 pupils per classroom (Kateb 2003:4).

In 2010, teachers went on strike throughout the country on different occasions because, as one grade-school teacher in Tiaret said, "The pedagogical program imposed on us by the government is too rigorous for our pupils. We are underpaid and desperately need the help of parents to cover the curriculum". Just three weeks into the school year of 2011, teachers went on strike again for similar reasons. The author, whose two sons attended a local grade school in Tiaret during the entire duration of the study, was perplexed when her elder son informed her that they had been "babysat" by the cleaning lady for several days on end during the strike.

On the subject of school strikes, one informant, a 33-year-old mother of three, pointed out that when she went to school during the 1980's and 1990's, children were a lot more motivated to learn than they are now. She said, "Teachers were highly qualified, and we were a lot more ambitious to be at the top of our class... We were better at school in the past even though most of our parents were illiterate... With this new program most kids are at a loss, especially when their parents are incapable of helping them with their homework."

Under the current program, children begin learning French in the third grade alongside seven other subjects (Arabic, Math, Civic duty, Islamic religion, Geography, History, and Technology). The textbook load continues to expand with each successive grade level. For instance, in fourth grade, children have eleven subjects. Moreover, one gets the general impression that the children are selectively taught what the teacher chooses according to his/her personal preference or ability. Overall, unless children are getting support outside the classroom, the situation is critical.

Another negative aspect that continues to plague Algeria's education is the cumulative drop-out rate. In Algeria, Kateb (2002 & 2003) attributes this problem to the high level of unemployment, which produces a decline in salaries and encourages the development of "informal activity sectors". Most often this means that it becomes necessary for other family members to begin working.

*Cousins playing „school“ during a weekend outing on their family farm (7+8)*



Since women in Algeria are most affected by illiteracy and lack qualifications due to sociological features of society, women's access to the labor market is curtailed. As a result, children begin working in informal places in order to supplement the family's income. What this essentially translates into is that illiteracy continues to affect the new generations. According to census data in 1998, an estimated 1.134 million children between the ages of 6 and 14 were out of school as the following table shows.

*Out-of-school population (6-14 years) according to census data*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>1954</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1998</i>
Male	733,700	667,000	409,600	352,000	502,100
Female	793,000	915,000	822,800	777,000	631,800
Both	1,526,700	1,582,000	1,232,400	1,129,000	1,133,900

(Kateb 2003:3)

Although gender parity has reached equilibrium in urban settings and clearly improved in rural areas, the quality of education remains below par. One is led to wonder why the government would opt to implement a program that failed in a country that has a cultural background completely different from its own in the first place. In the future, Algeria will have to address the situation of improving the quality of education, emphasizing the development of new methods and educational materials, and will need to focus efforts on school drop-out prevention.

Kateb (2003) predicts that the demographic changes, especially the declining fertility rate experienced in the Maghreb as a whole and in Algeria in particular during the last two decades, will automatically address the weak points in the current system of education. In Algeria, for example, the crude birth rate of 50% and overall fertility rate of over 7 children per woman until the 1980s have presently dropped to 21.2% and to less than 3 children per woman.

Among the major consequences of this demographic decrease is the reduction in school enrolments. As a result, Kateb projects the current educational infrastructure will be able to better accommodate schoolchildren in the future. Furthermore, previous efforts that allocated the bulk of resources to meet the quantitative requirements of primary education could be channeled into improving the quality and development of new methods and educational tools, ultimately enhancing teacher's qualifications (Kateb 2003:5-6).



### 3.4.2 *Secondary Education*

Under the current system, secondary education lasts 3 years, ending in the *baccalauréat* degree. Students are given the opportunity to select one of two areas of study: technical and vocational; or general and specialized. The final exams follow a national standard and consist of a general exam in every subject studied. Students must earn a combined average of 50% and higher to pass. The exam is known for its rigidity and the rate of failure is high. On average approximately 1 of 3 succeed; the rest may go on to a second round of examination, where approximately only 5-15% pass. This means that less than half of the students completing their secondary studies actually succeed in obtaining their baccalaureate (<http://i-cias.com/e.o/algeria.education.htm>).

### 3.4.3 *Interviews with Female School Dropouts*

Informal interviews conducted by the author with different girls near Tiaret who dropped out after middle school revealed that they were not particularly good at school and in some cases even welcomed the chance to stop their studies to relax from the burdens of homework or to prepare for marriage. Several girls ended up dropping out after they had flunked their final exams and would have had to repeat the year.

However, one informant relayed the details of a particular instance when a girl had been compelled to drop out of school due to reasons of “naïveté”. Sabrina, age 16, was seen by her neighbor while holding hands with a boy after school. This neighbor, who happened to be a female relative of Sabrina’s family, discreetly informed one of her aunts of the incident.

Interestingly, all measures were taken to keep this information from leaking out to the girl’s father, brothers, or uncles. The aunt immediately told Sabrina’s mother what had happened, and both of them pressured her to stop her studies at once. They said it was her fault that she got caught and that the only consequence for nearly putting her father and their family to shame was to stay home. As it turns out, this boy had already been whacked by one of the girl’s uncles on a previous occasion after he was caught peering into the upstairs window of the house where Sabrina lived.

The fact that it was commonly known among her female cousins that Sabrina semi-regularly talked to this boy on her mother’s cell phone only added to the list of pressures for her to drop out. Apparently, the mother had no idea this was going on because she is non-literate and requires assistance from family members to make calls from her own phone.

In the end, Sabrina obliged her aunt's wishes although she later told me that she would have very much liked to continue her studies and that the first few weeks after quitting school were a big adjustment for her psychologically. Her aunt told me that Sabrina is too "naïve" to know where to draw the line in the matter of boys. Coupled with the fact that Sabrina was repeating the school year after flunking her exams, there was no doubt in the aunt's mind that this was the only logical solution.

One of Sabrina's younger cousins, age 14, also has been known to talk to boys. However, according to the aunt, "she knows how to handle herself and has better judgment of the situation at hand". Contact with boys, including telephone contact, which is becoming more and more common, especially with the mass circulation of cell phones among university students and the youth, is highly frowned upon. Nonetheless, it seems to be tolerated among female family members unless the contact risks getting too intimate and threatens the honor of the family.

I spoke with another young woman in her early 20's. She was once rather keen about dropping out ten years ago but now regrets it because while she sits idly at home waiting to be asked for marriage, her former schoolmates have gone on to study at the university and enjoy an active social life.

Other cases were observed where girls' parents would have liked to compel their daughters to drop out before or during high school but backed off once they understood their daughters' determination to further their education. A girl's level of success in school seems to have an influence over the amount of pressure parents exert on their daughters to discontinue their education in rural areas. And as is still customarily the case, in matters of pre-marital romance missteps, it is the young woman, not the equally involved man, who solely suffers the consequence in the end.

An interesting counter case to the above mentioned norm is the story of a young woman from Oran. At the age of 16, Zainab, one of 4 siblings, decided on her own to drop out of school. She was not particularly fond of school and would rather spend her time doing other things around the house. Her father, however, wanted very much for her to at least finish her secondary examinations. In an effort to motivate her not to drop out he made her the very rare offer of sending her to driving school to get her license. This, however, was equally uninteresting to Zainab and she declined his desperate offer eventually dropping out of school soon after.

In urbanized areas, the disparity between girls and boys has practically evened out, and the idea of stopping a girl from furthering her education due to casual contact with the other sex would be considered archaic if not absurd. However, well-noted, intimate contact between men and women before marriage

is just as taboo in larger cities as anywhere else, which explains why couples flock to diverse parks located on the opposite ends of town from where they live in order to anonymously meet up. Strolling through such a park on a sunny afternoon, you immediately see countless couples left and right occupying every last bench. Their faces turn red and gazes drop as one walks by.

Recent data documented in 2000 and 2003 paint a positive picture for the noticeably higher attendance levels of girls corresponding to figures for boys.

*Students enrolled in secondary schools, (2000 and 2003)*

Students enrolled	975,862	1,095,730
Percentage girls	56.15%	57.73%

The figures revealing the number of girl students who have successfully obtained their secondary school certificate is noteworthy.

*Number of girl students who received their baccalaureate in 2000*

Total students enrolled	445,468
Girls enrolled	250,321
Percentage girls	56.19%
Total No. obtaining a baccalaureate	119,325
No. of girls obtaining a baccalaureate	70,192
Percentage girls	58.82%

(Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ALGERIA-English>, pg. 6-7)

### 3.4.4 Higher Education

Currently, Algeria has 47 universities and university centers, 10 colleges, and a variety of technical facilities. The Algerian university system has recently undergone a series of reforms, which has brought the composition of degrees in accordance with American and European standards. Students can attain their bachelor's degree after 3 years and their master's degree 2 years later (<http://i-cias.com/e.o/algeria.education.htm>).

Theoretically, universities are open to all students who have passed their baccalaureate exams. Each student is entitled to a modest monthly grant and a free room in a student dormitory. However, the situation of higher education also faces its share of limitations. Institutions for higher learning were hard hit by the economic crisis caused by the turmoil experienced nationwide during the 1990s. Restrictive measures imposed on the operating and equipment budgets of the Algerian state by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank heavily

impacted higher education and scientific research (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/25/Algeria-ADMINISTRATION-FINANCE-EDUCATIONAL-RESEARCH.html>).

For the past decade, enrolments have been swelling. This is partly due to the post-independence baby boom. Another reason for the recent surge of students has to do with the fact that a lot more women are opting to continue their studies due to policies set in motion under the Bouteflika administration. According to university researchers, women now account for approximately 60% of the total student body in universities nationwide. The following gives an idea of the percentage of women enrolled in different disciplines.

*Women student enrolment in various fields, (2000)*

<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage of women students</i>
Humanities	70.43%
Natural sciences	62.17%
Exact sciences	42.17%
Civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering	21.68%

(Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ALGERIA-English>, pg. 7)

The first-year class at the university proves to be terribly overcrowded. First-year students who were poorly prepared by the *lycées* (secondary schools) are taught by the least competent staff. During the decade of violence, a mass exodus of fully qualified academics fled the country. The remaining staff consists largely of teaching fellows who began teaching while enrolled in graduate courses. With the exodus of skilled instructors, the teaching fellows automatically became permanent staff without completing their studies (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/28/Algeria-SUMMARY.html>).

Generally, in Algeria, the institutions of higher learning suffer from an overstressed infrastructure, inadequate or unskilled supervisors, insufficient and old equipment, and a lack of up-to-date educational and scientific materials. All these factors continue to have a negative impact on the quality of scientific research.

### 3.5 Adult Literacy

Overall, adult literacy rates (15 years and older) have steadily risen since independence, ranging between 62 and 72 percent in the year 2000. This divides into a gender dichotomy of an estimated 73-80 percent for male literacy and 48-63

percent for female literacy. However, these figures refer to “nominal” literacy rates, where functional literacy is often overestimated. In general, adults who acquire literacy through adult programs rarely are able to retain it, which is a problem that also affects early school dropouts. That is why post-literacy programs are an essential measure for ensuring the retention and stabilization of literacy skills (<http://meducation.edu.dz>).

As is the case in most Arab countries, adult education in Algeria is automatically equated with literacy. Literacy research in Algeria has usually been grouped together with the entire Maghreb region, which includes the following five countries located in North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania. Literally defined as the “place of sunset”, from an Arab perspective, the Maghreb is commonly referred to as “the west”. Throughout this region, literacy generally encompasses basic education for segments of the population who are outside the formal education system. Basic education was defined by the *World Conference on Education for All* in 1990 as

*“...essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem-solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, to continue learning”* (UNESCO 1990:3).

Although patterns of illiteracy vary widely from country to country within the Maghreb area, Bougroum et al. (2007) recognize certain literacy trends emerging from the national data reported over the past few decades. First of all, there is a steady and striking decrease in the level of adult literacy (15 plus). This is attributed to the expanding access to basic education since independence, which each country inherited from the colonial period and which, as a vestige of that period, still fosters low levels of educational development. Parallel to this historical decrease, however, are the absolute numbers of illiterate adults that steadily continue to rise due to the combination of high population growth rates and the ongoing difficulties in ensuring universal basic schooling.

Some of the Maghreb countries, such as Mauritania and Morocco, record among the highest rates of adult illiteracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) combined. Mauritania, for instance, is recorded having the highest rate of illiteracy within the Maghreb region, presently at 50 percent, followed by Morocco with nearly 40 percent, comprising some 9-10 million adults. Algeria was reported having an illiteracy rate of 26.5 percent (10 plus) in 2002, with an estimated absolute number of 6.6 million adults, of whom 4.2 million are women. Finally, the probability of relapse into illiteracy due to the absence of condi-

tions that help people sustain their previously acquired skills is high throughout the entire Maghreb area.

### 3.5.1 Distance Education

A significant portion of Algeria's adult education is conducted by way of remote education programs. This is especially appealing to women, who are traditionally more house-bound. The CNEG (*Centre National d'Enseignement Généralisé*) is in charge of all distance education programs. In 1997, 3.1 million televisions and 7,000 fax machines were utilized in connection with some type of distance course or program. One Internet provider with 2,250 Internet users was documented in 1999. Since the inception of CNEG's distance teaching programs in 1991, more than one million people have been recorded to participate in various distance courses and programs. A vast majority of those were women.

The activities and courses offered by the CNEG are controlled and organized by regional centers. The subject matter includes general and technical education, and attainable degrees range from baccalaureate to specialist training. Among the wide variety of courses available to study are arts, humanities, languages, social sciences, mathematics, economics, and medical fields. (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/26/Algeria-NONFORMAL-EDUCATION.html>)

Generally, the Maghreb countries adopt an *indirect measure of literacy* based on self-reported and population census data gathered during household health surveys. In Algeria, adults are asked to report on their own perceived ability to read and write during such surveys (UNSECO, 2005:285). The term *literacy* that is considered to be the most adequate in the literature about Algeria refers to the more traditional skills of reading, writing, and numeracy attained through non-formal education. Adult education is not limited to vocational instruction, and the State's ultimate aim is to facilitate progress in all fields.

Although the conceptualizations and measures of literacy seem similar throughout the Maghreb area, the operational definitions utilized within the context of each particular national strategy vary. So, in order to be considered literate in Algeria, an adult is expected to have acquired the skill levels equivalent to those expected at the end of the primary school cycle. Other countries, however, make no reference to these skills as defined by the formal education system. In Morocco, for example, an adult is considered literate when "basic competencies required for everyday life" have been attained (Bougroum et al. 2007:2).

### 3.5.2 Current Literacy Strategy

In general, efforts geared towards combating illiteracy among the adult population are at the low end of the education spectrum receiving governmental attention in Algeria. However, they do exist, and most recent attempts addressing women's education and employment are beginning to include terms such as "gender equality".

The bulk of the information referring to recent literacy strategies for women stem from interviews conducted by the media with the president of the Algerian NGO Association for Literacy (Iqraa), Aicha Barki, or by comments made by governmental representatives affiliated with the Ministry of Education or the National Office for Adults Literacy and Education (ONAEA), which are then published in brief 1-2 paged articles in online journals such as <http://www.magharebia.com>; <http://www.elwatan.com>; <http://www.femmesdz.com>; [www.elmoudjahid.com](http://www.elmoudjahid.com); <http://www.algerie-dz.com>; and <http://www.echourouk.com>; or aired on local Algerian television channels and radio on the dates surrounding Arab Literacy Day (January 8<sup>th</sup>) and World Literacy Day (September 8<sup>th</sup>).

Although these articles and local television/radio reports mention the "implementation of a national literacy strategy", the policy discourse fails to elaborate on what this "strategy" actually is or entails other than in financial terms. In regards to women, at most they confirm the persistence of gender inequality in literacy, especially among those living in rural areas and remote villages. For example, in an article published in the online journal *Magharebia* based in Algiers (<http://www.magharebia.com>) on 14/01/2007, the director of ONAEA introduces a "new strategy to eradicate illiteracy in the country".

However, he describes this strategy in monetary/chronological terms, stating that "the new 10-year strategy will be implemented by a number of ministries, with a total budget of \$55 million". The money will be invested in improving learning facilities as well as human and material resources needed to address this situation. The Minister of Education, Boubekeur Benbouzid, said that this "plan" would aim at halving illiteracy rates by 2017.

In the same article, Tallal Amara, the head of ONAEA's Research and Education Department, said, "The challenge Algeria and other Arab countries now face with regards to tackling illiteracy lies in raising the awareness of people living in remote areas regarding the damaging effects of not being able to read and write...an awareness campaign would target women, 63% of whom are illiterate". In 2007, ONAEA estimated that 177,594 students, of whom 85% were women, attended literacy classes ([http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/print/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2007/01/1](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/print/en_GB/features/awi/features/2007/01/1)). Nothing concrete is men-

tioned as to how people's awareness should be raised and what will be done to target women.

It is not uncommon for ONAEA to announce a series of "events or activities" that are to take place throughout the 48 provinces in the country, on the occasion of either Arab or International Literacy Day. From my own observations (2008 - 2011), these "events" consist of local media coverage of individual classrooms, where literacy students are filmed while being awarded a certificate of excellence or presented with gifts such as a Qur'an.

The ultimate goal of the increased media attention made during these dates is to encourage a greater number of adults to join literacy classes. Most recent themes focused on by the Arab Literacy Day have included "Literacy, a national duty and everyone's responsibility"; "Literacy, a factor of openness, dialogue and security"; and "Eradicating illiteracy is eradicating exclusion" (<http://news.marweb.com/algeria/social/algeria-celebrates-arab-literacy-day-4675.html>).

In 2009, the Algerian Ministry of Education renewed its commitment made to the international community for the progressive and scheduled elimination of illiteracy and reported that the government has allocated up to \$83 million within the framework of a "national strategy towards the elimination of illiteracy". This amount is to be divided into two periods, the first of which extends until 2013, where the objective is to lower the rate of illiteracy down to 10%. The second phase will extend to 2016, with an ultimate goal of eliminating illiteracy indefinitely. Graduated students with degrees in Arabic language will be recruited as literacy teachers for this mission.

### **3.6 Résumé: The persistence of non-literacy among women**

Adequate funding is an important prerequisite for the potential success of any literacy program. However, thus far no formal policies regarding women's issues/needs have been included in any of the literacy strategy documents. The closest official mention of a "strategy" that targets women's issues/needs has been cited by Hammoud (2007: Archive Nr. 66, [http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article\\_id=208&clang=1](http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article_id=208&clang=1)) who writes:

"A successful literacy programme in Algeria run by Iqraa aims to achieve an appreciable increase in the literacy rates of families in rural areas, and of women and girls in particular. Women were motivated to join the literacy and adult education classes, by adding courses such as embroidery, sewing and hair-dressing. These motivations were effective in drawing women from remote and rural areas. In addition the certificates given to women at the end of each course gave them a sense of accomplishment" (Literacy and Adult Education, Arab



Regional Report, CONFINTEA V Mid-Term Review, Bangkok, Thailand, 2003, p 14).

This may explain how women could be initially motivated to join a literacy class; however, it says nothing about their long-term retention as literacy students. In fact, as the case study of the literacy program in Tiaret showed, the advertisement of extra classes (or worse, an all-expense paid trip to Mecca for a Hadj or Umra) was merely a gimmick to lure students to join a class. In reality, during the three-year observation, classes in cooking and sewing, though briefly mentioned periodically during the course of the regular literacy class, never took place. The failed promise of a paid trip to Mecca was exposed on the first day as untrue and ended up having the reverse effect on potential long-term students who, experiencing a total breach of trust, were never to return again (see case studies, Part III).

In conclusion, a few words about the apparent contradiction in data concerning school enrolment, drop-out rates, and adult literacy for girls and women will be made. On the one hand, the statistics show that the overall trend in school enrolment for girls has increased tremendously. This has to do in part with the fact that school has been made mandatory for children aged 6-15. Furthermore, as the government and society continue to place more importance on the education of girls in rural areas, more young women are completing their baccalaureate and going on to study at the university. In general, this generation of girls and women has nearly reached education parity.

However, at the same time, the number of women who did not have the opportunity to attend school in the past or dropped out early on is still alarmingly high. Despite ongoing, though limited, initiatives to address the problem of literacy, the rate of illiteracy currently estimated at 6.6 million adults is, according to Aicha Barki, "worrying" (January 9, 2011; <http://news.dz.lesnews.tk/2011/01/>). Kateb (2003) argues that the few associations involved, (Iqraa), cannot meet such a demand without the involvement of society as a whole.

"The effectiveness of the fight against illiteracy depends on the motivation of those involved and the mobilization of human and material resources required for such a significant undertaking. In a country like Algeria and in the current political, economic and social context, total literacy among the population requires the mobilization of resources available for worship (mosques and imams). Promoting peaceful practices and social peace requires the depoliticization of places of Muslim worship, thereby restoring their original purpose – disseminating knowledge and fostering solidarity with the most disadvantaged sections of society" (Kateb K. 2003:7).

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In face of the persistence and continuity of illiteracy mainly affecting the adult female population in Algeria, it becomes relevant to look at the obstacles and barriers underlying this problem. The following chapters address the social-cultural issues and political circumstances surrounding women's education in Algeria in order to come up with some ways that literacy programs can better sensitize the population to the importance of female literacy and make them more receptive towards gender-based literacy programs, which are empowering.

## 4 The Status of Women in the Haut Plateau: Between Islam, Politics and Popular Perception

The status of women in the context of Islam throughout the Arab World remains among the most discussed topics by Western scholars today. While much has been written about this subject, some neutral and some favorable, a significant amount of the literature simply regards women's secondary role in Arab society to be rooted in Islam rather than in traditional customs. Stereotypes and fables regarding women and Islam in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) are abundant as it is, and the events of September 11 seem only to have heightened them.

This, at least in terms of the written work, is the posture predominately held for rural Algeria as well. Nationwide, the Haut Plateau region is well known by the Algerian people themselves for the way its inhabitants "cling" to traditions and for their strong resistance to cultural change (Bourdieu 1958; Miner and De Vos 1960; Knauss 1987). Why that is has a lot to do with its colonial past, especially in the way Algerians found themselves in a state of constant counterbalance with the French Occupation. More aspects surrounding this situation will be brought to light in further detail through the course of the chapter.

In what follows some of the more prominent and widely referred-to studies on the status of women in Algerian society will be outlined. The succeeding section begins with an overview of the family and social structure. One should bear in mind that the bulk of the information stated throughout this study stems from the observations made in Tiaret and thus best aligns with the current situation of Arab-Islamic women living in the High Plateau region.

Beginning with the matter of the banal insinuation that the evolution of Algerian women runs a more apathetic course, Alf Andrew Heggoy (1974), *The Evolution of Algerian Women*, quite eloquently made the following contention quite early on:

"The role of Algerian women in their own society has rarely been what it has seemed. Outside observers have often indulged in generalizations based on a lack of understanding, in judgements represented by only partial truths. David Gordon's recent pronouncement (1968) that 'women are the serfs of Algerian society' is, for example, a fair enough description of the position of the majority, but it is, in the end,

no more accurate than Jacques Berques' (1967) axiom that 'there were not even any bastards' produced by the temporary sexual relations between Algerians and European settlers in the 1930's. What is quite clear is that women have played and continue to play important roles in Algerian society although they have always suffered definite legal, social, and cultural disadvantages that have not been essentially changed by independence."

"Historically, Algerian women have enjoyed more freedom than is usually admitted by Western authors. In rural areas women were allowed to go about daily routines without hiding. Only in cities was the wearing of the veil normal, and even this practice can be easily explained. Germaine Tillion's interesting and convincing interpretation (1964) on this issue comes to mind: the practice of wearing a veil in countries bordering the southern shores of the Mediterranean is simply an attempt of basically nomadic peoples to maintain privacy in the crowded cities. Nor is this custom unique; Spanish women wear black, a practice that serves much the same purpose as the veil in Muslim lands." (Heggoy, 1974:449)

Here Heggoy makes mention of some other early writers on the status of Algerian women, including Gordon (1968), Berques (1967) and Tillion (1964). Granting the perception of women's status held in these works is stagnated to a certain extent, both Gordon's short study *Women of Algeria: an essay on change* and Tillion's *Les femmes et le voile dans la civilisation méditerranéenne* are regarded as important contributions in women's history.

Whereas the separation of men and women continues to be thoroughly adhered to in rural Algeria, much of what Tillion noted about female farm life along the Mediterranean shores in the 1960s could be corroborated in this study by the observations made of women living in the farming regions just outside of Tiaret city. On several occasions the author had the opportunity to assist in the annual gathering of olives, pomegranates and figs. It is notable that none of the female farmers wore an over-cloak (Djeleba) or covered their faces (Ajar) when going out on any of these kinds of outings, something considered inconceivable in the city.

In many instances during the early spring, the women would walk about an hour's distance from the farm settlement in order to dig up the bulbs of thistles known as "garnina". This is considered a highly revered vegetable similar in taste to steamed green asparagus. When men from neighboring farms or distant acquaintances happened to pass by during such an outing, the women would candidly exchange greetings before going on with their work. If these same women were to be greeted by a male neighbor or any other male acquaintance not closely related to the family while out in the city, they would blush in embarrassment.

Though many authors share the common misconception that the veiling of women indicates their suppression in society, other worthwhile studies focusing on Algerian women's status from the period of the 1960s onward include M'rabet (1979), *La femme algérienne suivi de Les Algériennes*; Vandeveldé (1980), *Femmes algériennes à travers la condition féminine dans le constantinois depuis l'indépendance*; Mincez and Fernissi (1978), *Algerian women Speak*; Nadia Ainad Tabet (1980), *Participation des algériennes à la vie du pays*; and Susan Marshall and Randall Stokes (1981), *Tradition and the Veil: Female status in Tunisia and Algeria*.

Marshall and Stokes provide a framework for theories of modernization and social change and explain in what ways these have increasingly been challenged by events in the Middle East and North Africa. They point out that as more and more leaders of oil-rich nations are choosing to industrialize without the aim of westernization, new patterns of Islamic revivals and political and social development begin to take form.

As such, Marshall and Stokes contend that improvements in female status no longer can be regarded as adjuvant with industrialization. In their viewpoint gender disparity is likely to be compounded by national reawakening of religious and cultural traditions, often coinciding with planned social change.

Newer studies dealing with different perspectives on the position of women in Algeria include one by the Dutch anthropologist Willy Jansen and another by the American political scientist Peter Knauss. Knauss's book *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria* (1987) is a study that focuses on women's status in Algeria from a sociopolitical perspective. His research analyzes Algerian class formation, ideology and, gender relations against the backdrop of the latest version of the family code, thus situating the position of women and men's attitudes within the context of a deeply rooted cultural tradition.

Jansen's study *Women Without Men* (1987) approaches the topic from a slightly converse angle. Her work researches "all those women who do not fit in neatly with the standard picture of Algerian women as demure, secluded, veiled, and powerless victims of men" (1987:xiv). Jansen introduces vignettes on women from the town she studied who are widowed, divorced, or orphaned, or whose husbands and fathers are ill, absent or otherwise incapacitated. She argues that since these women have to provide for their own livelihood, not only do they represent a marginal economic group but are marginal to the female role patterns in other cultural domains (1987:9-14).

Other more recent studies related to the status of women worth mentioning zero in on the changes in gender roles and refer to an Islamic feminist approach that has begun to stabilize in several societies across the Middle East and North

Africa: Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (1998); Moghadam, *Modernizing women: gender and social change in the Middle East* (1993); Coleman, *Paradise Beneath her Feet* (2010); Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (1987) and *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (2002); Badran, *Feminism beyond East and West* (1995) and *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (2007); and Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism* (1998).

So, for example, the subject of Valentine Moghadam's study *Modernizing women: gender and social change in the Middle East* is social change in Afghanistan and the MENA region. From a sociological perspective, Moghadam analyzes the impact on women's legal status and social positions as well as their responses to and involvement in the processes of change. Among her main focus is the construction of gender during stages of political and social change, the latter she defines in terms of modernization, revolution, cultural challenges, and social movements.

Contending that middle-class women are consciously and unconsciously major agents of social change in this region, Moghadam argues that women are in fact at the vanguard of developments for modernity, democratization and citizenship. A decisive point she aims to show is how women's lives are not only shaped by Islam and culture but also by economic development, the state, class location, and the world system.

Typically, studies conducted on the status of women in Algeria, with little exception, approach the topic from a Western perspective, which has a tendency to portray women from traditional Arab-Islamic societies as being oppressed. The last list of authors represents a solid exception to that and is something that will be elaborated on in more detail in the sections to follow.

Heggoy (1972) also rejected the routine Western stance towards Muslim-Arab women, long ago prudently acknowledging that Algerians were indeed well aware of the important role women placed in their own society:

"Contrary to popular opinion which has always tended to stress negative aspects of the question, women are all-important in the North African context, and they have been variously described as playing an essential role in assuring the permanence of tradition and also as potentially the best tools the French could use to break down the traditional Algerian society and assimilate its people into the French civilization." (1972:324)

In his defense Frantz Fanon (1962) argues that the mere fact that the colonizers were unsuccessful with the implementation of such a ploy made the Algerian people even more reverent of their women for greatly resisting such attempts.

So far, research on the status of women, whether in a Western context or that of other socio-cultural contexts, has been approached in two general ways: the Nature/Culture Dualism and the Social Evolutionary approach, which includes theories of modernism and development. However, the crux of the contrasting levels of interpretation on the position of Algerian women most likely stems from the fact that the situation of women in terms of their judiciary, religious, and traditional framework is comparatively pluralistic, thus rendering a description of *the* status of women an intricate and open-ended task.

#### 4.1 The Family and Social Structure: An Ethnographic Overview

At the macro-sociological level, the kinship family is a social institution present in societies worldwide. In general, families function to serve different needs in a variety of ways. Among the most common affairs are procreation, socialization, regulation of sexual behavior, division of labor, economic provision for family members, affective and emotional needs, and status-giving properties (Elaine Leeder, 2004).

Within a smaller socio-cultural context at the micro-sociological level, the family unit or *kingsmen* are a group of people who share a relationship based on biology, marriage or adoption. These members usually live together and fulfill the functions listed above. This can be subdivided into the family of orientation, in which one is born and raised, and the family of procreation, composed by marriage and having or adopting children. Depending on the number of generations sharing a household, ethnologists distinguish between nuclear family (a household composed of parents and children) and extended family (a family unit comprising additional relatives such as grandparents, siblings or cousins).

The prototypical Algerian extended family is depicted in *La Grande Maison* (1952), which is a realist novel written by Mohamed Dib (1920-2003). Part of a semiautobiographical trilogy (*L'Algérie*), the story is set in Tlemcen during World War II and focuses on economic hardship and hunger. In the High Plateau, as in societies throughout the Maghreb, the family is the most important unit of society and clearly defines social relations.

Algerian families are classically *patriarchal*, where the father has authority over the children, and the husband over his wife. The pattern of descent is *patri-lineal*, and inheritance is passed on to sons or relatives on the father's side. In the case of mate selection, *endogamy* is the ideal form, where potential spouses are selected from within one's extended family or social group. Another sub-aspect of this form is the preference of marriage to a woman from a lower social status,

*hypergamy*. This is meant to prevent the bride from feeling superior to her husband and family.

Germaine Tillion (1907-2008) was a French anthropologist best known for her work in Algeria during the 1950's. In *Republic of the Cousins (Le harem et les cousins, 1966)*, she adeptly describes the dynamic underlying the endogamous Algerian family. In an attempt to demystify the institution of the harem, Tillion analyzed the marriage patterns and the seclusion of women. She describes the "republic" as a construction of cousin marriage where "saving all the girls of the family for the boys of the family" is essential in matters of inheritance.

Tillion's thesis was that in societies where women have inheritance rights, something that first became possible under Islam, women were married off to their paternal cousins as much as possible. Through this, the family's land remained in the patrilineage. As such, the seclusion of women became necessary as a means to prevent exogamy.

The persistence of endogamic marriage ties continues to be common practice in Tiaret. Especially among wealthier families, e.g., gold store merchants, marriages are meticulously arranged among cousins. This begins early on when cousins are in their early childhood. Sisters may "jokingly" introduce the notion of reserving their daughters for their sister's sons. More often than not these cousins really do end up getting married.

Residence patterns are *patrilocal*, meaning that the newly married couple resides with the family of the groom. Some of the common components of the traditional family structure are clearly undergoing change. The author experienced a trend amidst the younger generation, especially among the women who studied or worked. More young women are declaring their preference to marry someone outside of their family and, in some cases, even take matters in their own hands.

According to a female informant who graduated from the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret 10 years ago, there was a common phrase widespread among female students back then, which accurately describes this latest novelty: "Diplom et l'Homme" (degree and a man). My informant disclosed that several of her friends had boyfriends during their studies, whom many married after graduation. However, it must be noted that a lot of these "friendships" fizzle out because the man loses respect and his trust in the woman for her willingness to befriend him before marriage. Now in her early 30's and still single, my informant told me that she is sometimes ridiculed by her friends and former classmates because she had been too "morally conservative" during her university days.

The classic pattern of living in the house of the groom is shifting as well. Many young brides gladly sell their little stashes of gold jewelry in order to help



their husband finance a home of their own, preferably in a different part of town from their in-laws. The majority of young married women whom I spoke with expressed a desire to live in their own households. The main reasons given included escaping the automatic restraints linked with household obligations, avoiding common conflicts centering on the relationship between the mother-in-law (*adjouzat*) and the daughter-in-law, and in general being free from the influence of the interventions and control of other members of the extended family.

With more young women opting to enter the workforce after marriage, friction with their *adjouzat* is anticipated in advance and is corroborated by stories from female friends and relatives who have gone through a similar situation. Camille Lacoste-Djuardin, a French anthropologist who specializes in the condition of women among the Kabyle Berber in their roles and household dynamics, provocatively writes about the position of “mothers against women” (*Des mères contre les femmes*, Paris 1985). Lacoste-Djuardin refers to the mother-son relationship as a dyad (two individuals regarded as a pair) and examines it from the perspective of the daughter-in-law. So often the bride finds herself stuck between her husband and the critical surveillance of her mother-in-law, who asserts her right of ascendancy.

On the one hand, there is the natural competition for the husband/son’s affections. On the other hand, Arab mothers tend to think the wife is never as good as they were. During the 4 years’ stay in Tiaret, the author participated in several summer/fall weddings, where female guests danced wholeheartedly to traditional songs featuring themes about the infamous relationship between mothers-in-law and the brides/daughters-in-law (*arosa/kina*):

*Place a blanket around your mother (mother-in-law)*  
*And sing lalalalala laaa lalalala laaa la*  
*Oh, but she is not (as “charming” as she originally led one to believe)*  
*So, sing lalalalala laaa lalalala laaa la*  
*Put her in the sitting room and beat her with shoes*  
*And sing lalalalala laaa lalalala laaa la ...*

During a family wedding, the author also witnessed an elderly woman of high status in her late 70’s, Hadja Fatma, silently break into tears as she listened to texts of a song portraying the difficult relationship between the new bride and the eldest sister of the husband (*hammati*). Some of her closest female family members relayed that this song brought back vivid memories of her hardship as a young married woman in the house of her husband. The author witnessed other accounts where the relationship between the bride and the sister-in-law could be just as tricky as the ever-famed one with the mother-in-law.

It is somewhat curious, then, that the same woman, Hadja Fatma, who once clearly suffered under the domestic antics of her own in-laws, is now renowned among her female family members for being the most stringent in upholding traditions concerning the proper conduct of young brides. This sort of matriarchal stance towards family affairs is especially common among widows.

On one occasion while the author was in the kitchen visiting with her recently married Algerian sister-in-law (*hammati*), the widowed aunt Hadja Fatma entered the room and immediately exclaimed, "What! You here in your mother's house already! ... I will need to speak with your husband about this!" Hadja Fatima was appalled to see her niece already out and about just 4 weeks after her wedding.

A few decades earlier in Tiaret, it was not customary for the bride to leave the house of her groom for up to a year after marriage. Though this length of time has drastically decreased, it is now typical for brides not to leave their new houses until at least 3 months after the wedding. When asked why that was, it was explained that it would be a sign of disharmony in the new family if the bride should want to return home so soon after the marriage. Another reason cited was that it is disrespectful because the bride neglects her household duties, thus leaving the brunt of the burden on her mother-in-law, who through the union would otherwise be entitled to a break.

Although the majority of women have somewhat suffered under the dynamic of living in the same house as their parents-in-laws, when these women reach a certain status with age, they assume the role of matriarch, especially if they have become widows (see below). So the process of marriage for the young women seems to be more like a "rite to passage" rather than a "rite of passage". From the perspective of the mother-in-law, it is perhaps seen along the lines of "I had to go through it, so now it is your turn". This perpetuation of discomfort and grief is certainly something that could be psychologically clarified (see also Lacoste-Djuradin 1985).

In the age of Internet, it is peculiar how many personal accounts are available online about Arab mothers-in-law. One blog in particular posted on May 11, 2011, from Hanitizer comes to mind: "6 Types of Arab Mothers-in-Law: The Auditor, The Friend, The One From Hell, The Passive Aggressive, The Indifferent and The One That Wants to Outdo You." Even more curious is the fact that the author had heard accounts in Tiaret fitting the descriptions of all six types [Source: <http://www.kabobfest.com/2011/05/6-types-of-arab-mother-in-laws.html>].

A plethora of films capture the theme of the domineering mother-in-law as well. The author caught glimpses of such Algerian-made films shown on local stations (Algérie 3 or Canal Algérie). In *Insch'Allah Dimanche* (*Sunday, God Willing*, Algeria/France, 2001, 98 min.), directed by Yamina Benguigui, the

story about the struggles of an Algerian immigrant woman living in diaspora with her mother-in-law in France is told. The role of the mother-in-law was played by a non-professional, who could not read or write and thus, according to the filmmaker, rendered the performance even more authentic. This is such a deep-rooted phenomenon in Algerian marriage-culture. The author has seen it bring women both to tears and laughter.

Finally, in conclusion to some of the most common hallmarks of Algerian social structure, Polygamy, the practice allowed in Islam where one husband can marry up to 4 wives, was never widespread to begin with and continues on the downtrend. In Algeria polygamous marriages may be legally contracted where a man may marry up to four wives. However, due to recent legislative amendments introduced to the Algerian Family code in 2005 it has become increasingly more difficult to contract such a marriage.

Reports of polygamous marriages occurring are rare and in neighboring Tunisia outlawed altogether. According to a 2010 report published by Freedom House, 3 % of all marriages in Algeria are polygamous (Marzouki 2010:37). The few cases of polygamous marriages observed in Tiaret took place in wealthier families where the couples were now in their early 60s. One exception was the case where a woman in her mid 30's married an older man in his 50's as a second wife. In this case she was a widow after her husband of one year mysteriously disappeared during the Black Decade. She only decided to remarry as a second wife after her husband had been officially declared dead under the Bouteflika Administration.

Despite some innovations of the Algerian family structure, within the larger unit, the individual still remains subordinate to the family or group. This is equally true for families stemming from larger cities such as Algiers and Oran. Regardless, the patriarchal structure prevails in Tiaret and the family comes above all else, which manifests itself in nepotism and the importance of honor.

As in other Arab societies, the concept of honor lies at the core of Algerian society. It is delicately intertwined with a family's good name or reputation. So, just as the individual's honor reflects on the honor of the family, the whole family is shamed if one member is shamed. In Tiaret there is a direct relation between the behavior of individual family members and the responsibility of the family.

Honor can be lost in several ways. Algerians will avoid turning down a personal favor from a friend or relative at all costs, believing that the other person would lose face or honor. That is also partly why Algerians are so timid and embarrassed to ask for favors to begin with. However, the most prevailing situation where Algerian families risk the loss of honor is linked with the moral conduct of their female family members.

## 4.2 Honor, Shame and Status in the Life-cycle of Women

The recent online reaction to the newspaper coverage (Saudi Gazette, August 2012) of the first two women ever to represent Saudi Arabia in the Olympic Games is an impeccable example of the importance of honor in the Arab world. After Sarah Attar ran the 800 meters on the Olympic Stadium track and Wojdan Shaherkani competed in judo earlier in the Games, a vicious Twitter campaign under the slandering slogan “prostitutes of the Olympics” went viral.

In uproar the father of Wojdan Shaherkani contacted the country’s interior minister demanding that action be taken against those responsible for publicly insulting his daughter. Under Saudi law, punishment for defaming a woman’s honor and integrity can be up to 100 lashes.

The maintenance of honor is one of the highest values in Arab society. At a basic level, a man must strive to maintain his honor come what may. This goes to the point that he may feel driven to fight, lie, or even kill to protect his honor and that of his family. “Mine honor is my life; both grow in one; Take honor from me and my life is done” (Shakespeare). The Irish literary critic and playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote, “The most tragic thing in the world is a man of genius who is not a man of honor”. Finally and perhaps more befitting of the region under study here, an authentic Hadith from Bukhari likewise asserts, “Truly your blood, your property, and your honor are inviolable” (Nr. 1739).

The above-mentioned belong to just a few cases in point demonstrating the crucial position of honor in both the European and Arab context. Nonetheless, the statements made throughout this work are based on the observations made in Tiaret.

As women’s misconduct in rural Algerian culture can do more damage to family honor than men’s, the concept of honor weighs heavily on the shoulders of women throughout their entire lives, gradually easing with increased status in advanced age. A man’s honor (*sharaf*) is dynamic, subject to change according to his deeds. A woman’s honor (*‘ird*), in contrast, is firm and permanent. She must therefore preserve it. Should a woman’s honor be lost, it can never be restored; and with that the man’s honor is badly impaired. As a result, clearly defined patterns of female gender performance have been developed to protect women and help them avoid situations that may give rise to false assumptions or unfounded gossip.

Where honor has been marred, one is logically led to ponder how, if at all possible, it could be redeemed. In *Crimes of Honor and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies* (2010), Lama Abu-Odeh contends that the most extreme case where the family’s honor can be besmirched is through the sexual transgression of a woman. As honor hinges on reputation, immediate action must

be taken to restore the family's honor should the breach become public. Honor can only be regained through vengeance or bloodshed, as was common practice in pre-Islamic times, or through "honor" killings by male relatives, who are typically the transgressing females' brothers.

Abu-Odeh explains the importance of a men's redemption as follows. "Male performance is equally sanctioned by penalties. If a man doesn't intervene by killing his sister/wife once she has shamed him, he suffers a loss of his gender: he is no longer a man (therefore, castrated, a 'bottom', a woman.) His performance has suffered a serious failure." (Abu-Odeh 2010:920-925). So, essentially, by ensuring the virginity of female members of the family, the man is guarding his own gender.

Written work about the importance of women's virginity before marriage in Arab countries is hardly rare. According to the ideal schema, Arab women are expected to abstain from sexual encounters before getting married. Within this framework women need to refrain from anything that might even remotely lead to sexual activity. Speaking of pre-marital sex from an Islamic viewpoint, this is something that equally applies to men.

Between 2008 and 2012, the author heard of only one isolated incident of an honor killing in Tiaret. According to a wide-spread rumor, a local woman was stabbed to death by her husband after apparently being discovered *in flagrante delicto* with another man. On the other hand, stories relating to the subject of honor or the lack thereof are plentiful. One evening, during a large dinner gathering, the author's curiosity was piqued by a loud discussion buzzing out from the kitchen. A group of women and teenage girls were heavily involved in a discussion about a young distant relative who got pregnant out of wedlock in a small town near Tiaret.

The female crowd seemed to unanimously take pity on the girl's father, who had been irreversibly shamed. It was obvious that the brunt of the fault befell the young woman and not her suitor. At most the women accusingly lashed out at the girl's mother, who "should have seen things coming". After the father banished her from his house and family, the young couple was briefly taken in by an uncle, where they were discreetly married under Islamic law. However, nothing seemed to remedy the defamation, and eventually the young man left his new pregnant bride to face the disgrace on her own. This account of dishonor clearly upset the women relatives, and they seemed to show no mercy towards the girl whatsoever.

In another account, not quite as tragic as the previous one, a young couple was happily engaged to be married. The bride price had been paid, everything was set, and both families looked forward to the upcoming wedding. Then one day while the engaged couple was agreeably conversing outside, they were ap-

proached by the groom's best friend. Apparently, the bride-to-be started in on a friendly conversation with the young man, talking and laughing as if they had known each other for a while. By that evening the groom-to-be had called off the wedding.

All the women I spoke with were in complete approval and understanding of the groom's actions and even expressed resentment towards the young woman for not returning the bride price, which in their view would have been the proper thing to do. This also supports other evidence that indicates how women themselves play a big role in preserving patriarchal practices in Arabic societies (see also Knauss 1987; Lacoste-Djuradin 1985; and Mernissi 1987).

The standards of honor and shame are bound together as complementary, yet contradictory concepts. Much of the Middle East and Asia is made up of so-called shame-based cultures. In societies underpinned by shame, i.e., where shame is a moral precept or a fundamental cultural value, individuals are kept from transgressing the social order by fear of public disgrace. So, in order for shame-based cultures to function, shame and honor are often attached to something greater than the individual. Thus, honor is mostly placed on a larger unit such as the immediate family, the clan, or even the entire nation (Bourdieu, P. 1966; Gellner, E. 1981; Gilmore, D. 1987).

Stemming from his theory on tribal cohesion in forming social community (*asabiyah*), Ibn Khaldun concluded that "the affection everybody has for his allies results from the feeling of shame that comes to a person when one of his neighbors, relatives or blood relative in any degree is humiliated" (from *al-Muqadimma*).

Al Jallal (2010) provides a theoretical framework for analyzing and describing the concept of shame in the Arabic language through the proposal of a specific linguistic, cognitive and cultural apparatus in defining culture-based concepts such as emotions. He uses a Natural Semantic Metalanguage-based system to define shame-words used in Arab societies. Al Jallal considers "using meta-language as a powerful comparative tool of analysis, studying the grammar of emotions to better understand their meanings and the situation, involving what triggers the emotion and the response to it, as essential components in the definition of emotions" (2010:34-35). Furthermore, he refers to *shame* as the general concept that also covers in its range *embarrassment*, *shyness*, *bashfulness*, and other shame-word variants.

### 4.2.1 *Haya and Good Shame in Islam*

Although exact counterparts do not exist in English, several concepts of shame in Arabic are understood in a positive sense as “good shame” associated with a good feeling and with an attribute of character that one should strive to develop and cultivate. In Algeria, for example, there is the concept of *haya*. If someone feels *haya*, (feeling “embarrassed,” “ashamed” or “shy”), the more intense the emotion is, the better. *Haya*, which is derived from the word *hayat* meaning *life*, plays an important role in the lives of Muslims. As such people are even praised for showing *haya*.

Many verses in the Qur’an and Hadiths allude to the reasons behind observing *haya*. Where women are concerned, modesty (*haya*) and maintaining one’s dignity are of primary importance in preserving the moral fiber of Arab society. This is also why modesty has been called the ornament of a woman, which has been made a part of her nature to protect her from being “abused” by immoral men.

According to a Hadith narrated on the authority of Anas bin Malik, the Prophet said: “When lewdness is a part of anything, it becomes defective; and when *haya* is a part of anything, it becomes beautiful” (Tirmidhi).

Several Hadiths refer to *haya* in connection with good faith as well: Narrated by Abu Huraira, the Prophet said, “Faith consists of more than sixty branches (parts). And *haya* is a part of faith” (Bukhari).

In Islam *haya* is not just something reserved for women but also an attribute deemed positive for men: Narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar, the Prophet passed by a man who was admonishing his brother regarding *haya* and was saying, “You are very shy, and I am afraid that might harm you.” On that, Allah’s Apostle said, “Leave him, for *haya* is (a part) of Faith” (Bukhari).

### 4.2.2 *Hishma and Good Shame in the Haut Plateau*

The above is just a small fraction of examples that can illustrate where and how the concept of *haya* is addressed within the context of Islam. Another concept of shame eminently widespread in Algeria is *hishma*. One will hear the term being used several times a day in a variety of situations. Like *haya*, *hishma* is another word representing “good shame”. This term is more strongly associated with how one feels in certain situations where the emotion of shame is induced. Both *hishma* and *haya* are sought-after characteristics that are rewarded with praise (Al Jallal 2010:9-10).

In the Haut Plateau, the Arab girl cycle begins with the good daughter. Dutiful and compliant, she is expected to be polite and quiet, even cautious, thus maintaining the image of her intact family. Throughout the duration of the study in the wilaya Tiaret, the author saw parents beam with pride when their children displayed shyness in front of other relatives or guests, saying he/she is “ashamed” (*hishma*). The child’s shame reflects positively on the parents and implies how well the child was raised. If a child acts out, is loud, or shows lack of restraint in the presence of adults, the child will be scolded by being told, “Have some shame!” or “Be shy!”

This type of “shame” can be seen on a regular basis. After a child has refused something to eat several times in a row, whether a piece a fruit, some chicken, or sweets, an outsider would be doubly and triply convinced that the child was not hungry, i.e., clearly not interested in food. An Algerian, however, knows that the child is holding out in order to show proper shyness. After further insistence the child will most likely cave in and accept the cake with a smile. Then, overtaken with shyness, the child will lower his/her gaze or vanish altogether.

### 4.3 The Algerian Girl

While growing up in Tiaret, young women learn to meet the expectations of clearly defined gender roles through an elaborate system of commands and prohibitions. This can entail the segregation of gender spaces, the active mobilization of the institution of social gossip and reputation, and the threat of physical punishment (see Abu Odeh 2011).

Girls and young women help their mothers with household tasks and aid with their younger siblings. As girls become teenagers, they no longer will go outside to play. This is to prevent them from being seen by strangers or interacting with men. Most families also dislike their daughters to interact with girls/women from unrelated families as well. Even grown women will not go over to a friend’s house to visit. The exception is on the occasion of a wedding, baby celebration, or funeral. In such cases she would go in the company of her mother or her mother-in-law if she is married.

In the majority of Muslim cultures, hospitality is among the foremost ways of displaying honor. Gift-giving is a well-known facet of Arab societies. If, for example, you remotely show admiration for something in an Arab home, more often than not you will find it neatly tucked in a bag, which is graciously given to you upon your departure. This goes hand in hand with receiving and serving guests.



Gift-giving demonstrates your hosts' willingness to honor you. On the flip side, if a guest comes calling on you unannounced and the potential "host" happens not to be there, both parties feel ashamed. That is one reason why Arab families in the Haut Plateau avoid leaving their homes completely unattended. Should one happen to drop by, at least there would be someone there to welcome the guest and serve him/her coffee.

The more girls and young women adhere to long-standing traditions, the higher their status becomes to the point of being renowned within their family. Especially in rural areas such as Tiaret, a young woman's level of pioussness also reflects positively on her. The adjective of *hishma* is *muhtashima* and solely refers to a personality trait. However, the adjective *muhtashima* is most often used to describe women in terms of how they are dressed in accordance with the Islamic dress code, social norms, and traditions (Al Jallal 2010). Other valued personality traits instilled in Algerian girls are patience and the capacity to endure (*sabr*). The girl/woman who accomplishes this is gracious (*sedgia*).

Here one particular young woman comes to mind. Khira has been well known in her family for her serious, dutiful ways ever since she was a child. This was enhanced even more by her strong faith in Islam and her *hishma*, modest way of dressing. When she decided to study law at the Ibn Khaldun University, her uncle exclaimed, "You could let her go to Algiers". What he was implying was that she is pious and *muhtashima* enough to be trusted to go to the capital city without casting any shadow of doubt on her family's honor. As it was, she ended up dropping out of the university on her own volition because the circumstances between male and female students on campus were "shameless".

Veritably, women's former limitation to the home is drastically beginning to change. With the onset of more women attending universities nationwide, more female students are bussing themselves to class and meeting up with girlfriends for cake and coffee in nearby patisseries during breaks or after class. This is equally true for rural areas. The universities are co-educational, and mixed study groups are becoming a lot more usual on campus. These changes, however, are much avoided topics conversation once the female student is back at home.

Another big change resulting from women's higher education is the way they communicate with their senior family members. In the past girls and young women would never contradict anything an elder family member would say although they certainly may have thought their own two-cents worth about it. Due to increased practice in critical thinking and argumentative writing, which stems from higher learning, the former reaction of shyness, which was almost automatic, is dwindling.

One of the author's nieces, Bakhta, age 22, who is an English student in the coastal city Mostaganem near Oran, shared one of her own experiences while visiting her mother's brothers in Tiaret. Her uncles were discussing the evening newscast concerning the Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. As she had been discussing this with friends at the university, she immediately joined in on the conversation. When she realized that she had indirectly disregarded their opinion, she was overwhelmed with shame and turned red. Her uncle, however, saved her face by saying she must not be ashamed because he knew that she was trained in the skill of disputation at the university.

#### 4.4 The Algerian Bride

The events surrounding a wedding follow such an age-old tradition of conformity that one tends to compare it to the precision of clockwork. All the steps involved in the preparation and execution of a marriage are meticulously alike. Without going into too much detail, the main aspects demonstrating the advancement of women's status through marriage will be included here.

The soon-to-be bride (*Arosa*) begins her odyssey of marriage by slowly but surely acquiring all the accessories needed to cover the traditional steps of the event. The steps also include the pre-wedding henna party, where the bride is adorned in a lavish gown while the eldest female member of the groom's entourage applies henna on her hands in front of a large crowd of women and children, who are sipping coffee or mint tea and eating cakes (*gateaux*). Each Algerian city is lined with rows of bridal boutiques, which are overflowing with standard bridal paraphernalia: suitcases, towels, toiletries and perfumes, henna, dresses, lingerie, high-heeled shoes, and cases with a lock and key where the bride's gold jewelry can be safely kept.

The sugar cone, made of hardened sugar, is given to the bride from the family of the groom during the henna ceremony. This is a symbolic gesture reminding the bride of the virtues of sweetness and graciousness that go along with being a good wife. In Iran sugar cones are ground together above the bride's and bridegroom's heads (over a silken scarf held over their heads) during the ceremony to shower them in sugar symbolizing sweetness and happiness.

The wedding in itself is a week-long event filled with several key rituals, marking the young woman's rite of passage into her next role as a wife and soon-to-be mother. The author experienced a heavy dose of *déjà vu* at each and every wedding she partook in. Save for the bride herself, everything from dresses to food (couscous) seemed identical!

Marriage is like an immediate relief of the family's duty of guarding a woman's virginity. In Tiaret the absolute majority of women are still relatively young, age 17, when they get married. The wedding night is the ultimate proof of the bride's virtue and her family's honor in the presence of the entire family of the groom.

It is still common practice for the female heads of family to "camp out" in front of the bedroom of the bride and groom during their first night together. All expect the young couple, who sometimes have never met, to consummate the marriage right away. Usually the mother of the bride proudly waves the blood-stained kerchief while the female guests break out in an ever-so-loud trilling (*zararit*) that can be heard from clear down the street. Needless to say, both the bride and the groom are under considerable pressure.

On two separate wedding occasions in Tiaret, the author was informed by the female guests immediately upon return of the bride the next morning that the grooms were unable to go through with it, such was the stress. The news quickly spread like wildfire.

More and more grooms are beginning to make arrangements for themselves and their brides to overnight in a separate apartment or house far away from the wedding party and guests. That way they can spend their first night together at their own tempo and slowly begin to get acquainted. Most Algerian women the author spoke with were unaware of the fact that some women do not bleed during the first time they have sexual intercourse. With wide eyes they listened in near disbelief as the author attempted to explain how in some women the hymen remains intact.

The next day the bride usually cooks her first round of tea as new wife and member of the groom's family. It is at this time that the guests can get a preview of her culinary abilities. This is followed by the tradition of tying the bride with a string to a fixed point in the house. This symbolizes that her place is now in the house of the groom and there she is to remain.

Where individualism is valued in the West, Arabs value conformity. Therefore, failure to conform could risk leading to a place of shame in the community. The importance placed on conformity could explain why the classical roles of Arab women seem to have remained rather fixed throughout time.

The bride feels obligated to fulfill the expectations that go along with being a "good bride and wife" although normally she had been preparing for this role for years. It is important that she knows how to "cook well". This may also be the rationale as to why Algerians are so meticulous about not only the preparation but the taste of national foods in exactly the same manner. Within several extended families with whom the author spent time, extreme importance was placed on the exact preparation of established dishes. All ingredients from the

number of particular vegetables to the spoon-full of spices were carefully measured.

Though it was not expected for the foreign wife (the author) to be able to prepare the dishes exactly in the same way as her Algerian counterparts, she clearly sensed a round of relief and delight by both the female and male relatives when she could master a couple of recipes that ended up tasting *just like the way they prepared those dishes*.

#### 4.5 The Algerian Mother and Mother-in-law

As the number of years of marriage increases, women gain status through having children. A lot has been written on how important it is for Arab women to have sons. Though this may be an issue if a woman has had 5 girls and counting, the author did not have the impression that having girls was considered negatively or seen as a disadvantage. It is, however, crucially important for the bride to become pregnant within a year after the marriage. Beginning at around 6 months after the wedding, at every single social function, women are constantly the subject of questions as to whether they are pregnant yet. As the months after the wedding extend to a year or more, one sees the strain written in their faces and even more so in the faces of their mothers-in-law.

Women who cannot have children suffer. However, none of the infertile women met by the author had been cast out from their families. Oftentimes they had ended up raising one or two children of a close relative and were thereby able to uphold some sense of pride and dignity. Though we are focusing on the status of women and mothers, it is interesting to know how matters are dealt with when the husband is sterile. One young couple, Miriam and Muhammed, found out a few years into marriage that the reason they had not had children so far had to do with the husband.

The mother-in-law, quite knowledgeable with the healing effects of certain herbs, immediately set to work concocting herbal sitz-baths for her son. One would think that the pressure on Miriam to have children would automatically lessen; however, she continues to be questioned by female family members during henna parties or weddings on her child-bearing status. The author asked Miriam if she ever considered re-marrying. She said that she gets along so well with her husband and his family that at this point she could not imagine it -- not even if it meant being able to have children with someone else.

In Tiaret married women tend to keep themselves even more under wraps than before. This is indicative in the way they veil their faces with an *Ajar* (traditional white laced face covering concealing the mouth and nose) or *Niqab*

(somewhat larger face covering extending down the front of the neck) when they go out.

Other situations arise in the home sphere where women make themselves scarce. For example, it would be appallingly embarrassing for a married woman to be seen by handymen who were doing household repairs. Women would sooner jump in a closet than be seen by a plumber or an electrician. They often cook for workmen while these men are in the service of the household. The food, however, is brought by a child, an elderly mother-in-law or male family member.

Before one knows it, there comes the time when one's own son marries, and the one-time bride becomes a mother-in-law. This, as we saw earlier, is quite significant in its own right. At this point, the woman is automatically given more authority over family affairs. She, first of all, is the one who selects the new bride and delegates the smooth transition into her home. Mothers-in-law, so to speak, rise from being a manager to a director in their family sphere. The role of mother-in-law goes hand in hand with becoming a grandmother, and this, too, is connected with a new set of responsibilities and a new status.

#### 4.6 The Algerian *Hadja* Widow and Matriarch

In Arab society in general, people of advanced age are highly esteemed and regarded as possessing wisdom. Both male and female elders are revered with utmost respect. In Tiaret, this is highly evident in the way people of the older generation are addressed: "*Hadja*" (for a woman) or "*Hadj*" (for a man), whether they have gone to Mecca on their pilgrimage (Hadj) or not. In fact, it is usually the elderly who finally take the liberty to embark on their Hadj although in Islam one should fulfill this duty, health and finances permitting, as soon as possible, regardless of age or sex.

Things tend to ease up considerably for elderly widows. At this point, older women living in rural regions, especially if they are widows, can assume a role much like that of a matriarch (see also Lacoste-Djuardin 1985). This, however, is more commonly the case for women who through time have become known for their bolder character traits. These women are often urged by their grown sons to come out and meet their friends or colleagues. At family gatherings where men and women dine separately, the *Hadjas* are encouraged to join their sons to take the meal together. And, it is these matriarchs who hand-deliver the handymen their lunch while enjoying compliments on the side.

After having briefly reviewed the general concept of honor and shame as it particularly pertains to rural Algerian societies and how this is interwoven with women's status throughout their life-cycle, the following vignette sheds some

light on how the status of women is becoming reconceived in light of the changes in women's daily activities as a result of literacy and higher learning.

#### **4.7 Cueing in on the Decline of Traditional Marriage Molds**

Whether women drop out of school at an early age or opt to go on to the university, the inevitable and much anticipated next stage in the life cycle of Algerian woman is marriage. Nearly without exception, every single woman encountered in Tiaret whether young or middle-aged, regardless of educational or professional background expressed the ideal wish to eventually get married and have children. Where this has consistently remained to be true, some interesting new developments related to women's marriage goals were observed during the investigative study and will be presently put forward.

Let us turn to the case of the young 16-year-old girl Sabrina that was introduced previously. She was caught "red-handed" or rather hand-holding with a young fellow one day after school and as a direct result was pressured to drop-out of school altogether by her aunts and mother as a safety precaution guarding the honor of the family. As it just so happens, about a half a year later, Sabrina received and accepted an offer of marriage by another man, who was, as is typical, a few years older than she. All the preparatory steps had been taken to officialize this union, including the final decisive marriage contract under Islamic law. So, as it stood, they were legally married. The only step left was the actual week-long festivity between the two families where the marriage is consummated.

Despite the fact that the dowry had been set, the gifts accepted, and the marriage legally bound, Sabrina suddenly changed her mind and decided against it. And since she was legally married, the only way to back out of the union now was to go through a proper divorce. Apparently, the entire family did their best to persuade her otherwise. However, her mother supported her decision, and as a result both of them were the subject of anger and shame in the family. Comments flew such as "Our family has never had to withstand something as humiliating as this!" and "She will not find a better husband and it serves her right!"

After the divorce had been finalized, the young man promptly found another willing young lady to take Sabrina's place. The reinstatement of regular family speaking terms, on the other hand, took significantly longer. After some time had gone by, the family eventually returned to their normal everyday associations although it didn't take long for the following event to quickly re-open old wounds.

Interestingly, Sabrina's decision to back out of her marriage agreement just prior to the wedding ceremony seemed to have a great influence over her two-year younger cousin Malika's resolution to break off her own engagement. Malika had been engaged to be married to her cousin, the son of her eldest aunt for about a year. The author recalls how the young woman initially hummed and hawed about whether it would be in her own best interest to marry a family member or more beneficial to branch out and marry someone completely unrelated, which would result in her having to be less rigid about upholding traditional customs and therefore in her being allowed a bit more freedom to pursue other things rather than just being a housewife.

Malika was still unsure whether she wanted to complete her secondary certificate and then go on to the university or even work or to drop out of school, marry, and tend to domestic affairs. Since her cousin stemmed from the same traditional-conservative family as she herself, her future would pretty much revolve around the customary roles and duties as a housewife. In the end she seemed quite certain she would like to marry this man after all and happily received the gold engagement ring and fancy dresses given to her from the woman who was both her aunt and future mother-in-law.

Just as in the case of Sabrina, the dowry had been set, and the dresses and other typical accessories bestowed. Dates when the legal Islamic marriage and wedding ceremony should take place were in the planning. However, Malika's decision in the end against the marriage completely frustrated the family, who felt outright thwarted. This time around, Malika's mother was clearly against her decision not to go through with it. Malika's mother is the youngest sister to the groom's mom, so the family ties are close. Similarly, as with Sabrina's situation, the family members are dismayed, shaking their heads in disbelief and saying things such as "Malika is naïve and arrogant" and "She has no idea what she is doing".

Both these cases show solid implications of how young women are slowly becoming bolder with regards to the oversight of traditional expectations. Sabrina and Malika expressed what they truly felt was right for them personally even at the cost of scrutiny from their families. It would be plausible to contend that more women are willing to suffer the brunt of their family's displeasure and chastisement even if their decisions risk tarnishing the family honor. Young women clearly seem to be starting to think more about themselves regarding circumstances more conducive to fulfilling their personal needs such as living in their own homes apart from the groom's parents, having the choice to attain higher levels of education, or even work after marriage.

During the duration of the study, several young women shared that they are extremely worried that their fiancés will back out of particular agreements

stipulated in the marriage contract. Things such as the right to be able to study at the university and work after getting married were cited most. Many of these women claimed to have already heard about actual cases where the bride was promised she could finish her studies or work and then was denied the original agreements after the marriage.

Apparently, it is not an uncommon thing for the groom and his family to have a change of heart just before the wedding. However, despite such great let-downs and breaches of trust, the majority of these women still presses on and goes through with the wedding in order to save face. Breaking traditional molds nearly always results in humiliation to some degree both for the individual and the family.

This leads to a somewhat related situation of an older cousin of Sabrina and Malika, Nasira, age 23, who experienced such disappointment just prior to her wedding. For the past decade, the author came to know Nasira to be an independent and outgoing young girl, whose character has remained constant throughout that period of time. She was the one in the family always asked by her aunts and female cousins to go out in the city to purchase their fabrics, sewing accessories, dresses, hair products, baby clothes and even fruits and vegetables. The latter outing at the food bazaar is usually a task reserved for the men and boys, but one could always count on Nasira to gladly take care of business.

Nasira recently completed her bachelor degree in history at the Ibn Khaldun University. Towards the end of her studies, she met a fellow student and they decided to get married. Among the very first gifts he gave to her was a cell phone and sim-card so that they could keep in regular contact until they were married. During the months and weeks before the planned wedding, Nasira and her fiancé were able to work out their personal conditions for getting married. Nasira made it clear that she would be able to go out to the local shops with her friends and above all continue to be able to work. After her graduation Nasira began working as a receptionist at the middle school near her home.

Initially, the groom agreed to this. However, after the dowry had been agreed upon by both families, and Nasira had bought nearly everything she would need for her future move (mattresses, blankets, dresses, lingerie, kitchen utensils, etc.), the groom called one day and retracted his promises. The groom pulled back on his generous allowances for her to go out with her friends in public and most of all decided against her being able to continue to work after the wedding. The couple had agreed that they would move into the house of his parents located in Sidi Hocni, a small village just outside of Tiaret. It is likely that his parents may have been influential on their son's change of heart.

Upon hearing this Nasira destroyed the sim-card by cracking it in two pieces, thereby severing the lines of future communication as well and any other deal



breakers to follow. Immediately afterwards Nasira wanted to call off the wedding altogether. Hearing of this her mother called her sister-in-law, the wife of her younger brother, to come and help changer her mind. Halima is a highly respected member of the family for several reasons. She represents a solid mix of tradition, morality with modern finesse, and is well known for her common sense, especially in family matters. She is generally admired by both male and female members of her family.

After a long weekend stay at her aunt Halima's, Nasira actually did conclude it would be best to marry this man despite his broken promises. Nasira is almost ten years older than her cousins and through her upbringing has been set more deeply in the mold of maintaining traditions. It may explain why she decided against making any potential waves in the family by calling off her wedding due to the broken promise of the right to work. She has been married now for about a half a year. According to both her male and female family members, she is struggling to get along with her mother-in-law. In the meantime she has a daughter. During a visit to Algeria in 2013 Nasira shared that she had left her husband's household twice, each time after a marital conflict involving her mother-in-law. Both times her husband came to her parent's house where she was staying to console her in coming back.



## **Vignette: On the Traditional Status of Women in the Haut Plateau. Non-literate Farmers Johar and Hannah**

In the past the cycles of agricultural activity, which constitutes the core of peasant society, were geared to the rhythm of the changing seasons. The seasonal cycles predetermined the rhythm and intensity of work as well as the size of the crops and animal life. With that said, rural women's status in High Plateau region was largely measured by how well they could keep up with the seasonal duties on the farm. In contrast to women in the towns and cities, who almost exclusively work in the home, it is common for women farmers to work alongside the men in the fields. As the workload was high, making ends meet came first and going to school was secondary, especially for girls.

Many families around Tiaret still have close relatives who run the farms that are spread out in the nearby countryside approximately 70 kilometers away. The eldest brother of the author's husband lives with his wife Johar throughout the year in Melaab on the land that has been owned by his family for generations. Often other relatives live nearby in clusters and help one another out during times of heavier workloads. Johar's cousin Hannah lives about a kilometer away with her family.

During the Black Decade, families fled to bigger cities around Tiaret, and several generations huddled together in a single house on the outskirts of a city in squatter-like zones. After things quieted down, the government helped farmers ease back to their land with house-building products and financial aid for livestock and equipment. Each household was given a rifle for protection as well. The farms are focal points for the rest of the clan that lives in the city and that often commutes on the weekends for a family picnic or during the harvest season to pitch in.

One of the main crops harvested in the Province of Tiaret is wheat. Depending on the weather, the crops are usually harvested in May when there are still streaks of green in the stems. This is because the main portion of the harvest will be used as a main ingredient in their cherished soup, *harira*. The division of labor is generally classically set; however, duties will overlap depending on the situation. Usually, the men gather the stalks of wheat in the fields with a sharp-

ened crescent sickle. The stalks are brought back to the courtyard in wheelbarrows, where they are bound together in bundles and threshed with wooden clubs by the women. The husks are winnowed from the seeds of grain with the help of the wind. Afterwards, the wheat is steamed and subsequently laid out on plastic tarps to dry before it is ground and bagged.

The late spring is also the time when herbs and flowers are picked, dried, and later ground into powder for making soups and medicine in the winter. The most versatile and valued herb used is thyme (*satar*). Hannah busily gathers wild-growing calendula and diverse roots and dries them in baskets in the sun in her courtyard.

The majority of food crops are harvested after the hot summer months. Tomatoes and peppers, grapes, figs and pomegranates are among the main fruits and vegetables grown. Figs spring up in such abundance that they are dried and eagerly dispersed among the family. Many of these fruits and vegetables are mentioned in the Qur'an, which adds to their popularity among Algerians:

*And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm trees, of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce] gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied. Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] its ripening. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe.* (Verse (6:99) of chapter 6 Surat l-an 'am, The Cattle).

Olives are harvested in the green-purple stage in late autumn, normally around November. Again, the whole family participates in handpicking the olives from the trees. A portion is crushed with a stone and soaked in salt water to be eaten with bread. The darker purple olives are dried in the sun on tarps and later churned and pressed to make olive oil. The Arab farmers in this area produce olive oil in much smaller quantities -- unlike the Berber, who use industrial presses for the mass quantities of olives harvested in the Kabylei. Johar shook her head in dismay when she described the lengthy process of squeezing out the bit of olive oil in her self-constructed press made of wood. The yielding result is modest and highly cherished by those lucky enough to get a small flask.

Johar and Hannah are admired in their families for the way they contribute to the preservation of longstanding traditions. They bake the much-loved breads in clay ovens over hot coals, which gives it that particular taste. In general, they provide the rest of the clan with the essential elements (grains, herbs, seasonal harvest) for upholding their culinary customs throughout the year. The annual shearing of the sheep is a whole process in itself. Cutting and deep-washing,

combing out the burrs and drying the wool so that every bride can be guaranteed her stack of handmade mattresses when she moves into the house of her groom.

The majority of female farmers like Johar and Hannah are non-literate, belonging still to the generation of women who did not attend school. A closely related issue extending from the dilemma of how to define literacy is the dichotomy commonly drawn between literate and non-literate people. Here the problem lies in the fact that non-literate people (or 'illiterates', a term commonly surrounded by negative connotation) are synonymously reduced to people having limited mental capabilities or with the inability to make sense of abstract concepts (Ramdas, 1990; Stromquist, 1992; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1991). Ramdas (1990), for example, contends, "...it is we the so-called "literates" who tend in our arrogance to equate illiteracy with ignorance, or worse with stupidity".

Johar and Hannah, both now in their 50's, however, uphold a special status in their families because they are part of an outgoing generation of women whose way of life revolved around the cycle of agricultural activity. Well aware of this, they frequently comment on how women's lives (work load) are a lot easier now than in the past. When asked if she regretted not having gone to school as a young girl, Johar said, "When we were young, there were no schools. It did not even occur to us to consider going to school. We had a lot of work to do at home and we accepted it. That is how it was." Interestingly all of these women's daughters attended school. One of Johar's older daughters, attended the University although she decided to drop out for religious reasons.

For the most part, Algerians in Tiaret are sentimental about farm life. Even now the younger generation looks forward to an outing at the family farm. Depending on the season there are always things going on, drying herbs and roots, harvesting olives and wheat, while appreciating the scent of fresh bread baking in the earthen oven. Children are always underfoot curiously looking on and eager to lend a hand (see photo series of traditional women's work in the Haut Plateau). However, the roles of women are undergoing rapid changes as a result of higher education. Although the older generation of women are highly regarded by their families for their knowledge of the old ways and traditional work, women's status is beginning to be measured by other factors than their previous agricultural abilities and efficiency in the domestic sphere.

*Photo series of traditional women's work in the Haut Plateau*

*Johar separating the wheat grain from the husks (9)*



*Grinding Stone for making flower from wheat (10+11)*



*Earthen oven for baking bread (12+13)*





*A day of making couscous (14+15)*



*The Olive Harvest (16)*



*Drying figs, flowers and roots in the sun (17+18)*



*Handmade beehives from mud and cane (19+20)*



*Haja preparing wool for making mattresses for a dowry (21); Washing the rugs (22)*



## 5 Understanding the Process of Empowerment for Rural Women

This chapter explores the status of women within a historical and socio-political context. An efficient way to understand the status of women and the process of gender empowerment is to delve into the key historical processes that have confronted Algerian women until now. To better understand the current process of women's empowerment in Algeria, the empowerment framework as outlined by the Beijing Platform of action and as analyzed by Moghadam (2005) will be presented (see chapter 6). To begin with, in order to properly grasp the situation and progress of empowerment for rural Algerian women, one must first look back and examine their changing role in Algeria's fight for national liberation (1954-1962).

### 5.1 Women's Role in the War of National Liberation

The role of Algerian women initially began to make waves during the War of National Liberation. Many accounts have drawn upon the case of women in the Algerian revolt against French colonialism in the 1950's, with particular attention to the politics of the "veil" (headscarf, face-covering [ajar] and/or outer garments [haik]) over the course of that rebellion (Amrane 1991, 1994; Fanon, 1967; Gordon 1968; Knauss 1987). Frantz Fanon's chapter "Algeria unveiled" contained in his book *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (originally published as *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* in 1959) is among the most widely quoted writings on the subject, thus elevating women's role in the struggle to an iconic status.

However, rarely has one captured the female perspective shared by *mujahida* (female combatants) about their own participation in the conflict so well as Djamila Amrane. For this reason Amrane's scientific study can be considered among the most authentic accounts of women's experiences during the War of National Liberation. Born in France in 1939 as Danièle Minne, Amrane lived almost all her life in Algeria and joined the underground struggle under the name of Djamila at the young age of 17.

In December 1957, Amrane was arrested and jailed and was later liberated during independence in 1962. Soon after she began working on her scientific inquiry on the participation of Algerian women in the war. Her work was a compilation of interviews conducted with eighty-eight former *mujahida* between 1978 and 1986. Her subjects included those women who participated in the actual “battle of Algiers”, the simple village women who supported the struggle by cooking and washing as well as some of the French women who joined the war on the side of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*). As a result, Amrane’s work gives a comprehensive account of events and forms the basis of her book, *Des femmes dans la guerre d’Algérie*, Karthala, Paris (Algerian Women in the War, 1991).

In Amrane’s account of the active role Muslim women played in obtaining Algeria’s independence, her overall underlying message suggests that the female militants later found themselves reverting back to the role of keepers of traditional Algerian identity. This is something witnessed over and over again in Tiaret today. Amrane traces these women’s original role as the guardians of tradition back to the time before the war when their lives revolved around marriage and when they were secluded primarily within the domestic sphere.

Interestingly, by the time the war broke out in 1954, 91% of the “French Muslim” population in Algeria was illiterate, and a mere 4.5% of these women could read and write (Amrane 1991:27). Of the 503 Algerian students attending the University of Algiers at the time, only 22 of them were women. Moreover, just 3% of women were engaged in some sort of employment outside the home at that time. In light of these meager numbers, an overwhelming 11,000 non-literate or moderately educated women joined the national struggle (Amrane 1991: 225-227).

The line of questions that logically follow include these: How did these women become involved in the political discussion that ultimately drew them into the war, and what did they hope to achieve? In considering how the roles of Algerian women have changed, what exactly motivated so many non-literate, simple village women to risk their lives by actively taking part in this battle? According to statements made by Amrane’s (1991) interview partners, the influence of the family was a decisive factor in framing the political scope of women’s involvement in the war. This took place mostly in the home setting where women and girls overheard male family members discuss the details of the war, especially in those settings where the males were militants.

At the same time, women’s involvement in the war was often frowned upon by their families and militants in the *maquis* (bases where militants devised their strategies). Either women were accused of “just wanting to find a husband” or scoffed at for attempting to participate in political matters out of their realm.

Amrane's study confirms that very few women actually fought as part of the armed organization of the FLN. Just a few were drawn into the intelligence sector or worked as urban couriers, either collecting money or carrying explosives (two percent are officially listed). The primary contribution of Algerian women (16%) towards gaining independence was in the form of civilian networks. These women served primarily as nurses or cooks in the *maquis*. These women hid, fed and cared for male urban guerrillas and rural *maquisards* (Amrane 1991:225-227).

The author's mother-in-law often recalled how she and her female family members would walk for hours in the High Plateau area during winter when it snowed without shoes to gather wood for keeping up a fire to cook for the militants. Many of their husbands were secretly called in by the FLN to set fires to the French farms. Many women voiced the hope that their fight would somehow facilitate a better life for the people living in the villages. In paraphrasing the general standpoint of the female urban civilian veterans, Vince observes that

...for the *mujahidat*, Independence was not about rejecting everything that originated from France. Whilst they refused to be assimilated into the colonial system, they had assimilated French liberal ideas. These women hoped Independent Algeria would be a country that put into action the Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Human Rights, which remained empty phrases for "French Muslims" under colonialism. Unfortunately, French colonialism left a poisonous legacy, particularly for Algerian women, by indelibly associating secular law and women's rights with the taint of colonial imposition. (Vince 2008:158)

In the summer of 2012, the author had the opportunity to visit an old home in the Casbah of Algiers that belongs to the family of former *mujahida* Jamila Bouhired. As part of a unique form of *medina*, or Islamic city, the Casbah was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1992. The frail male housekeeper, who was well in his 80's, showed us where the men were hidden in the ceilings of the house. We were told how the women scattered coffee grounds to obscure the scent of the militants and mask their traces from the search hounds belonging to the French soldiers.

The majority of the female veterans of the Algerian War interviewed by Amrane still do not belong to any political party today. Their efforts often fell in the shadow of the few urban women of the bomb network, nearly all of whom were captured by the autumn of 1957. The female urban bombers of the FLN (*fidaiyat* in Arabic) who played an active role in the "Battle of Algiers" between January and October 1957 mainly stemmed from a group of educated, franco-phone young women dressed in "Western" clothes. They included Djamilia Boupacha, Hassiba Ben Bouali, Zohra Drif, Baya Hocine and Djamilia Bouhired,



all of whom were subjected to torture and received the death penalty -- although all were later relieved.

The current status of the urban female veterans interviewed by Amrane had been recently re-investigated by Natalya Vince in her thesis *To be a moudjahida in independent Algeria* (2008). Referring to these female veterans as the “privileged outsiders”, Vince highlights these women’s place in the collective memories at national, local and familial levels. In Tiaret and the surrounding villages, these female veterans were courageous for safe-guarding their cultural identity and religion. To the women in the literacy class, these women were *mujahidat* in the sense that they fought in the name of God for Islam. Almost without exception all the Algerians to whom the author spoke seemed oblivious to and disinterested in some of the veterans’ aim to gain equal rights as women in Algerian society.

The recount by Baya Hocine sheds light on the difficulties these women faced to gain public recognition during and after the war. Born in 1940, Hocine stems from a very poor family from the Casbah. She began working as a courier at age 16. In her memoir of the work she did as a *mujahida*, Hocine recalls how she was also “doing everything: I washed the clothes, ironed them, went shopping and cooked. Meanwhile, the men did nothing, they were discussing” (Amrane 1991).

These women carried out vital and dangerous tasks on a daily basis and risked severe torture or death if they were caught. Many harbored combatants and worked as liaisons or propaganda agents. Others lent their support to prisoners by attending their trials and bringing them supplies or by attending public protests. Even while in prison, many women organized hunger strikes to demand recognition as political prisoners.

Initially women’s in-depth participation in the Algerian war caught the attention of the FLN, and official texts published just prior to independence stated that:

“The participation of the Algerian woman in the liberation struggle has created favorable conditions to break the age-old yoke which weighed on her and to associate her fully and completely in the management of public affairs and in the development of the country” (FLN, 1964, pp.81-82).

Frantz Fanon (2001[1959]) and other commentators optimistically forecasted something along the lines of an emergence of a “new society” and “radical mutation” in the role of women, gender relations, and traditional family structures. Although many official documents proclaimed that women had been granted full moral rights to post-independence equality, this was not the reality experienced by most.

In the end the overall sentiment of the former female veterans was that they, the Muslim women, including the women of the bomb squad, were encouraged to return to the domestic sphere, help rebuild their country and continue to guard their traditions and Algerian identity (Amrane 1991).

As soon as active steps were taken in the direction towards attaining equal rights for women in legislative discourse, they were nipped in the bud by politics and the Algerian society at large. Twenty years after Baya Hocine was liberated, she became a journalist and cadre of the Algerian National Assembly and the party of the FLN.

During the debates surrounding the introduction of a new Family Code, Hocine adamantly argued against the Code because it institutionalized gender inequality in that it reduced women to the status of minors for the duration of their entire lives. In voicing her opinion, she was booed and shouted down by a group of male deputies. Although this public act of disrespect towards a well-known figure of the anti-colonial resistance created a small scandal in the media, the Code passed in 1984.

Despite women's tremendous involvement during the war, most Algerians, male and female, could not and either still cannot or do not want to imagine women someday playing any kind of significant role in politics. The political domain is something that has traditionally always been reserved for men. Without exception all the women interviewed during the span of the investigation in Tiaret about female involvement in politics simply declared, that "politics was not meant for women". Surprisingly, several university students flatly rejected the idea as well and made statements such as the following: "If women are involved in politics, they must travel vast distances away from home for long periods of time"; "It is not Islamic for women to hold positions of high rule such as a president, or a queen"; and, "Politics is an improper environment for women".

## **5.2 The 1984 Family Code (*Code de Civil*)**

The change of gender roles brought about through women's progressive participation in the Algerian war caused policy makers to at least adjust the role of women in the charter. The need to examine a complex of factors from economic change, urbanization and female employment to access to education, housing, and health care was finally acknowledged. Initial signs of promise came from the first Algerian President, Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965).

The passing of the "Khemisti law" of 1963, which increased the minimum age of marriage for girls from 15 to 16 years, signaled a first step towards gender equity. However, the president later noted that the participation of women in

socialist Algeria could only happen “within the framework of our Arabo-Islamic values” (Borrmans, 1977:539).

In a speech made in March 1963, Ben Bella validated that “Women have already assumed their full and entire responsibilities. It would be a dishonor to forget [these women] today. We will block the path of false doctrines and destroy the false preachers of Islam and Arabism” (*El Moudjahid*, 23 March 1963). Women had gained civil and political rights during Ben Bella’s regime. During this period women were granted the right to vote and right to stand for political office. In Article 39 of the constitution, it states, “Any discrimination based on sex, race or occupation is forbidden.” Similarly, according to Article 42, “All political, economic, social and cultural rights of Algerian women are guaranteed by the constitution (Lazarus 2010).

However, the tone gradually reverted back after Boumediene (1965-1976) seized power through an army coup. In a speech made on International Women’s Day on March 8, 1966, he declared that progress “does not mean in any way imitation of western feminism. We say no to this kind of evolution since our society is an Islamic and socialist society...this evolution must not be the cause of the corruption of our society” (Vandevelde, 1980:374-375).

This statement alone does not explicitly announce that progress toward Algerian women’s equality would be impeded if it coincided with the model of the West. On the contrary, the statement is understandable and somewhat appropriate considering that French colonialism, especially towards the end phase, was both extremely violent and repressive towards Algerian women (e.g., destruction of villages, torture, and rape). However, what renders the restraining intent of Boumediene’s statement clear is the fact that the women in the audience who attempted to leave in protest were sent back to their seats by armed guards. Marnia Lazreg, an Algerian-born sociologist who was also present at the time, later gave an eyewitness account of the incident (Lazreg, 1994:151).

Among the influences significantly affecting the process of change for women in Algeria has been in its legislation. The 1984 Family Code and subsequent events of the Black Decade, a decade of terrorism (see chapter 1) were clear set-backs for women. The family law (*statut personnel*), based on a conservative interpretation of *Shari’a* law, legally obliged women to obey their husband, fixing in law repudiation and polygamy for men and severely reducing the grounds upon which women could demand divorce. Women, regardless of age, are required to have the consent of their guardian in order for the marriage to be valid (Charrad 2001, Lazreg 1994, Moghadam 1993).

Furthermore, the implications that women could lose all resources and end up in the streets with their children in the event of a divorce are high.

“In the 19 years since the Family Code came into force, Algeria has seen increasing levels of homelessness among women and children. Thousands of mothers wander the streets with their children; others sell their labour as domestic servants at very cheap rates. The streets of Algeria’s major cities are the homes of many desperate divorced women. Some of them have found shelter in the slums; others have sought refuge in the hostels run by the organization SOS Women in Distress. However, according to newspaper reports, this organization is unable to cope with the large number of requests it receives every day, because of its lack of financial backing” (Salhi 2003:30).

Until the Family Code of 1984, Algerian family law had been a mixture of French civil code and interpretations of Muslim law. It was thus heavily hinged on the subjectivity of individual judges. Marriage and family law was based on an enormous regional and even individual variation from customary law among the Kabyle people to the Ibadite code of the Mزاب and the minority Hanafi school of law. In the end, however, since the Maliki variant of Sunni law was predominant, this was what motivated the government to create a unified system of law.

The structure of the state has an effect on the status of women in society for a variety of reasons. Gender alliances can be interposed by the state through laws. In Algeria, since laws pertaining to the family are a key element in the regulation of marriage, divorce, individual rights, and the transmission of property through inheritance, it is apparent how state policy affects the status of women. Legislation can impose strategies that either foster or inhibit social change. Existing arrangements can be maintained or new ones can be promoted that facilitate greater equality for women in the family and the society, e.g., in education, employment, and politics.

Within this framework, Mounira Charrad (2001) examines the rights and status of women during the process of nation-building in post-independence Algeria. In a comparative study of state formation in 3 Maghreb nations, Charrad argues that the differences in outcome in family legislation among Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria can be traced back to the relative ability of central governments to impose political authority over traditional kin or clan-like groupings who maintained a conservative interpretation of Maliki law (Charrad 2001:179-82).

“In terms of social organization, the tribe or kin grouping is critical because it historically has constituted the basic community in the Maghreb. A feature shared by Maghrebi and other Middle-Eastern societies is their origin in a tribal structure. Tribal origins do not belong to a forgotten past. There are entire regions where individuals continue to identify themselves as members of a tribe. Tribal solidarities may overlap with linguistic, ethnic, or other identities. In the Maghreb as a whole,

however, significant local solidarities have rested primarily upon tribal roots” (Charrad 2001:21).

In the case of Algeria, Charrad contends that the newly formed state displayed strong discrepancies in its motivation for exerting national assimilation over and against local or regional interests, while allowing space for kin or clan-based groupings, which hindered progress to legislate family law and to assert control over the domestic sphere. She argues that the Algerian political elite used the different tribal affiliations to attain power for themselves (Charrad 2001:179-82).

During this struggle for power, the status of women remained ambivalent until the Family Code took effect in 1984. Although Algerian leaders repeatedly expressed their interest in changing family law so as to increase women’s rights, this was far from what happened. For the most part, the codification of family law in Algeria remains in accordance with Maleki legal principles. Among the only beneficial results of the new family code was that the minimum age of marriage was raised to 18 for women and 19 for men. Although there is a slight encouragement for the development of the conjugal unit, the male-based extended kinship structure, which makes women subordinate to men, continues to be sanctioned by Algerian law.

Interestingly, many of the women whom I have interviewed in Tiaret did not have an inkling of what the 1984 Family Code was. Very few faintly recalled something along those lines being mentioned at some point during their secondary studies. In general, most rural women are entirely ignorant of the state laws governing the family and what it entails for them.

Although several were unfamiliar with the code, many young women, including university students, voiced that they felt confident that their rights were adequately supported by *Shari’a* and that the Islamic rights benefitting women were being efficiently implemented by the courts. In the urban setting, on the other hand, studies conducted among educated professional women showed completely the opposite stance towards the 1984 Family Code – ranging from shock to utter disgust (Vince 2008, Vandeveldt 1980, Bouatta 1994).

### **5.3 Women’s Rights Activists, the Black Decade and the Arabic Spring**

To some degree the state enforces traditional patriarchal structures and is thus partially responsible for preservation of those structures. This common bond between the state and patriarchal kin has been the basis of the bulk of female activism in Algeria. Cheriet (1996) asserts that the state backed by the support of Islamists has placed women in a minority position: “The Algerian case demon-

strates that state and kin are not necessarily at odds when it comes to limiting women's legal status as domestic decision makers", and because of this Algerian women must "negotiate their access to the public sphere in a society torn between residual patriarchal reflexes of the modern state and Islamist revivalism" (Cheriet 1996:22).

The first women's movement in Algeria can be traced back to the late 1970's after Boumedienne's death. This was first sparked by the briefing of the Ministry of Justice on the creation of a commission for a new family code. The group of protestors was composed mainly of educated and professional women who took to the streets of Algiers in reaction to regulations under the Bendjedid government (1979-1992), which prohibited women from travelling alone without permission from a male guardian and allowed men to vote in place of their wives.

During the 1980s, the reform of the family codes was the subject of ridicule and demonstrations in the streets of Algiers once more. Among the protestors were the female veterans of the War of Independence as well as Algerian feminists and activists, including Khalida Messaoudi, who is one of Algeria's most outspoken and well-known feminists. Messaoudi made her political debut after collecting 10,000 signatures against the family law.

Since then Messaoudi has remained at the forefront of rallying for women's equality in Algeria. As a Kabyle Berber, she also backed the cultural movement of the Kabyles in their quest for the recognition of their culture and language. Among some of the many organizations she has founded and contributed to are the feminist association for women's rights (*Association indépendante pour le triomphe des droits des femmes*, AITDF) and the S.O.S. Femmes en Détresse.

Again, the same women who protested against the Family Code were also in the front lines of demonstrations against Islamic fundamentalism during the 1990s. In a speech held at the Simone de Beauvoir Convention in 1999 in Cologne, Germany, Messaoudi stated:

"We Algerian, Moroccan, Iranian, and Sudanese women have joined together to demand something that is a matter of course in the West: the universality of human rights that apply to all independent of gender, skin colour or religion. In my country however, the enemies of women always link the term universality to the attribute 'international', which at the same time means 'western'. Even the members of the United Nations appear to believe deep down that the suppression of Algerian women is founded on the culture of our country - and under the pretext of 'respect for other cultures'; one simply has to respect and accept the suppression of women."

"We Algerian women call that a 'cultural trap'. All the countries of the west have fallen into this trap. They believe that suppression is a cultural question - and refuse

to understand that it is a purely political question. The suppression of women can just as little be derived from our history and culture as it can from that of the western countries - even if some Algerian men would like it to be this way..."

"In the last years in Algeria there have been hundreds of dead of which many were women, journalists and simple folk; and thousands of raped and tortured women. In the last eight years 2,084 women have been abducted without one international committee protesting against it. Even worse: an Algerian woman has no right to political asylum in Germany if she is being persecuted by the GIA, the armed 'Warriors of God', because she is not being threatened by the state. In contrast, her torturers are given asylum, because they are threatened by the death sentence after all the crimes they have committed in their home country."

Messaoudi staunchly opposes Islamist ideology. According to her the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) exhibited virtually all the classic ingredients of a totalitarian-populist movement. In 1993, Messaoudi became the victim of an official death sentence, a *fatwa*, by the Action for the Islamic State. However, rather than fleeing the country, she decided to remain in Algeria and continue her efforts as a proponent for women's rights while living underground. Since 2002, Messaoudi has been the Minister of Communication and Culture, as well as the government's spokesperson -- the first woman ever to hold that job.

During the civil war of terrorism during the 1990s, Algeria was wracked by massacres of fanatical viciousness and unprecedented size. The attacks of violence against women for things such as not wearing a headscarf in public had a frightful silencing effect on both men and women nationwide. To be on the safe side, women stayed home, and the constitutional right for women to be granted an education and to work -- and, for that matter, all other rights -- fell by the wayside.

Finally, the latest event to potentially impact women's position in society is the predicted sequel to the Arabic Spring. Although the turmoil originally began in Algeria's neighboring countries, so far a near absence of support for the Arab Spring by Algerians has been noted. After Tunisia and Egypt, Algeria was the third Arab country that attempted to start a social and political revolution.

However, according to Algérie Presse Service the two marches of Feb. 12 and 19, organized by the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD) reportedly mobilized only 250 and 500 people respectively. These protests essentially demanded to repeal the 19-year state of emergency status and a "change of system". Other than the occasional food riots that followed, the anti-state response in Algeria has yet to match the dimension experienced in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

The brutal recollection of the Black Decade, which claimed the lives of at least 100,000 people, still hangs over the heads of most Algerians. Entelis (2012) argues that the lack of support is also an indication that Algeria is uncertain about its own future (John Entelis: “*The future of Democracy in the Maghreb: Algeria in a comparative perspective*”, Lecture on March 13, 2012, at CSID-Tunisia). In addition to this Algeria is known for its military’s awful determination to maintain its unrelenting stronghold over the people no matter what.

Overall, it is too soon to tell how female activists, politicians, professionals and rural women will react to something of this magnitude taking place in Algeria again. Until now a lack of female presence in the public arena and a conspicuous absence of their voice were noticeable (see Marnia Lazreg “*The Eloquence of Silence*” 1994 for an analysis of the socio-cultural circumstances underlining women’s silence in Algeria).

The most recent platform, which seems to increasingly play a role in women’s rights issues in Algeria, is the non-profit organization Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLUML). To date, WLUML provides support and assistance to women negatively affected by the stipulations of the 1984 family code.

As an international solidarity network based in London WLUML informs, supports and provides a collective space for women whose lives are governed and shaped by laws and customs deriving from Islam. In light of Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent promotion of stark interpretations of the Qur’an and *Sharia* WLUML aims to continue to address women’s rights within both religious and secular frameworks.

In 2011, WLUML was identified by experts as the top non-profit organization working in the international field of violence against women. WLUML links individual women (activists, politicians) and organizations and reaches women in over 110 countries, with networkers based in circa 40 countries and communities. It will be these kinds of “women’s spaces” that will continue to become instrumental for providing safe havens of dialogue and organization for the future “battles” facing Algerian women.



## 6 Pre-assessment of Women's Empowerment in Work, Politics and Islam

In chapter five the status and process of women's empowerment in Algerian society were explored by taking a look at the positions of women in a historical context. By examining the role of women in the fight for liberation and their ongoing struggles during Algeria's search for identity throughout the stages of national development, one can get a better grasp on the current situation of gender equity and women's empowerment in literacy and education and where it is likely headed in the future.

In many respects Algeria is not alone in its quest to forge a modern nation-state where rights and responsibilities are to be established and provided to all citizens. In the particular case of women in Islamic nations, Kandiyoti (1991:2) sets forth that the "political projects of contemporary states and of their historical formations" have to be studied in order to adequately analyze women's position in society. It is nearly impossible for women to overcome oppression and achieve equal status in society without the support from government, non-government and international agencies.

### 6.1 Gender Equity and the Beijing Platform for Action

This chapter takes a closer look at the current situation of women's equality and empowerment in Algeria in so far as the Algerian government's efforts are in line with the implementation of the guidelines outlined in the Beijing Platform of Action (1995). Moghadam's framework of analysis (2005) will be briefly referred to as an added perspective towards female empowerment in the MENA region.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China, in September 1995. As an international forum for assessing and empowering women worldwide, the United Nation's Mission Statement stipulates that:

*The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advance-*

*ment of Women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development. A sustained and long-term commitment is essential, so that women and men can work together for themselves, for their children and for society to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.*

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#statement>)

The Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world. In total, the Beijing forum outlines 12 main areas of concern regarding women's empowerment. Among these are included women's poverty, level of education, reproductive health issues, violence against women, employment and political participation.

Moghadam (2005) defines women's empowerment "as a multidimensional process of civil, political, social, economic and cultural participation and rights". Although the empowerment stipulations outlined in the Beijing forum had no legal backing, the fact that "it has been signed by the great majority of countries and has helped to develop a global consensus on women's rights" (Moghadam 2005:389) is compelling.

The U.N. Millennium Summit, held in September 2000, produced a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) covering a range of development issues, including reducing child mortality, fighting various infectious diseases, eradicating illiteracy, and empowering women. Two of the goals deal specifically with female education and women's empowerment:

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Target: Ensure that, by 2015, all children, boys and girls alike, will have access to a full course of primary education. Indicators for this goal: the net enrollment ratio in primary education; the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5; and the literacy rate of 15-to-24-year-olds.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Target: Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. Indicators for this goal: the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; the ratio of literate females to males among 15-to-24-year-olds; the share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector; and the proportion of seats in national

parliament held by women ("United Nations Millennium Development Goals". Un.org. 2008-05-20).

There is some debate surrounding the MDGs. Proponents, for example, argue that while some goals are difficult to measure, there is still validity in setting goals as they provide a political and operational framework to achieving the goals. Another step in the direction of attaining female equity was the implementation of the UN branch focusing on women's issues.

UN Women was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010 to accelerate progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Over the last two years, it has achieved results for women and girls by supporting efforts to end violence against them, bringing them to the center of peace-building, advancing their political participation and leadership and increasing their economic empowerment.

Moghadam's analytical framework of empowerment (2005) assesses women's participation, rights and capabilities as outlined in the UN study ("Concept Note on the Use of Gender Sensitive Qualitative Indicators for Monitoring Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action", 2004). According to Moghadam, if gender is to refer to meaning and roles attributed to men and women by a given society, then women need to be able to access resources and have opportunities made available to them by the government in order to achieve gender equality (Moghadam 2005).

Although Moghadam (2005) highlights seven sets of indicators for gender equality and empowerment beginning with socio-demographic criteria, this chapter focuses on three. For example, progress has been made by governmental action in Algeria to promote and ensure equal access for women in the areas of literacy and educational attainment, economic participation and political participation and rights.

The set of indicators for literacy and educational attainment, which includes youth literacy rates (89%), adult literacy rates (increasing), school life expectancy rates (14 years) and tertiary enrolment rates (37%), is important because the range of indicators reflects the situation of educational opportunities for women.

## 6.2 Women and Work: Recent Attempts for Upping the Quota

In recent years, the Algerian government has put several initiatives in place aimed at reducing the level of unemployment. A significant proportion of these initiatives is meant to benefit women. For an overview of the achievements and challenges relating to the promotion of gender equity and empowerment, this section refers to Appendix D: *Algeria. Reply to the Questionnaire to Govern-*

*ments on Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000).*

“In 2003, women accounted for approximately 20 percent of the workforce, and in addition, there are over 600,000 women who work in the informal sector. Available statistics indicate that 56 percent of all working women are younger than 40 years of age. Of these, half are between 24 and 29, while 21 percent are between 20 and 24 years of age.

It is noteworthy that women account for a large proportion of total employment in several sectors and professions. Specifically, 49.62 percent of all educational posts were filled by women in 2000, while 54 percent of the country's medical specialists, 73 percent of its pharmacists and 30.75 percent of its judges were women.” (See Appendix D:220)

As of 2007, sixty-five percent of university students in Algeria are women and 80% of those enter the workforce after graduation. According to the latest Human Development and Gender Gap Reports, 36.3% (2010) women over the age of 25 have received a secondary education and 37.2% (2009) women joined the workforce. Common areas of work in the past have been in the fields of teaching and healthcare. However, women are beginning to expand in the fields of medicine, the sciences and law. In urban centers an increased number of women enter in top fields – as teachers, doctors, lawyers and similar positions. According to a United Nations publication, the current proportion of women judges stands at 13%, which is comparably higher than is the case in most other developing countries (Progress of the World's Women. <http://progress.unwomen.org/pdfs/EN-Report-Progress.pdf>).

What is more, in Tiaret women from traditional-religious backgrounds are increasingly receiving encouragement from their families to continue their education and pursue a career. At the same time, certain jobs remain culturally frowned upon. For example, although more women are entering security positions in connection with the police force, the author both heard accounts of and witnessed how a female police officer directing traffic in Tiaret was accosted by a passing driver who rudely asked her whether she “had parents”. This driver was implying that only an orphan girl would be subjected to doing such an inappropriate job for a woman.

More recently, the government has embarked on a plan called the “joint program for gender equality and the empowerment of women in Algeria (MDGF-1630)” (*programme commune pour l'égalité entre les genres et l'autonomisation des femmes en Algérie 2009-2011*). The aim of the program is to support national efforts for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The program, implemented on February 25, 2009, intends to pay explicit attention to improving access to employment for women. The total budget is

USD 3,640,000 and is to be evenly disbursed in three installments. The first installment of USD 1,199,622 was made in February 2010 ([www.dz.undp.org/job\\_opportunity/INSAF/Consultant\\_national.pdf](http://www.dz.undp.org/job_opportunity/INSAF/Consultant_national.pdf); [www.un-algeria.org/pg%20conjoins/MDG.html](http://www.un-algeria.org/pg%20conjoins/MDG.html)).

The Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women and the Ministry for Rural Development committed themselves to women's equity by signing a cooperation agreement on March 8, 2004, aimed explicitly at promoting employment among rural women and integrating them economically in society (the data relating to these initiatives are listed in Appendix D).

At a local level, a number of social action *bureaux* have been set up in every wilaya in Algeria for the purpose of enhancing the situation of families in general and of women in particular. In the wilaya Tiaret, women are beginning to benefit from the recent implementation of policies to ensure equal access to the work force.

In Tiaret the author witnessed at least 5 cases where women readily got a job after finishing their college degrees. In the majority of these cases, the employment office in Tiaret helped women to enter employment primarily in the area of school and hospital administration. Just a few years back, finding a job in Tiaret in one's field of study took at least 3 years. One informant with a degree in forestry waited 4 years until she got a job in her field. She has now been working at the same place for 5 years.

Access to employment in professions such as teaching, medicine and law also seems to be on an uptrend. More women than men are quickly entering the work-force because, as many informants said, "Women can immediately apply for a job after their studies, whereas men often enlist in the army first only to find that there are no more free positions once they finish the duration of their term."

Another new development in Tiaret is that women are beginning to re-enter their fields of employment after a brief maternity leave. One woman in her early 20's who had a job in the court system went back to work just 6 months after having her first baby. She said this was only possible because her mother was willing to take care of her infant during the day.

A particularly interesting situation of a young university professor of veterinary medicine illustrates how the roles of women in pursuit of a career and family are beginning to change in Tiaret. Aquila, a 37-year-old mother of two, described how she managed to pursue her profession amidst raising small children (aged 7 and 9). One of the biggest initial sources of support was her husband, who backed her up when his own mother began to lose faith in the marital arrangement in which her daughter-in-law was to continue to work after the wedding and after the birth of her daughters. When his mother began placing

demands that she stop her work, her husband timely moved them out of his parent's home to avoid future conflicts.

Aquila's own mother, however, has also been very helpful by taking over the role as primary caretaker for both girls. The children live with her during the entire week and attend school near her home. The young family mainly spends time together on the weekends. This arrangement was the only way Aquila could maintain her position at the university. She is now pregnant with her third child and is working on her doctoral thesis on goat mastitis. She admitted that it was an enormous weight to carry and a common topic of concern among female colleagues at the Ibn Khaldun University.

Until now, this type of arrangement had only been more common in larger cities such as Oran and Algiers. While doing archival work at the *Centre National de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle* (CRASC) in Oran, the author met a young woman in charge of the archives. She would leave work every day at 10 a.m. for an hour in order to nurse her son, who was being cared for by her mother-in-law.

The main achievements so far in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Algeria have been in the reduction of non-literacy through universal primary education and through legislative measures to enhance women's health and ensure equal access to employment.

Although these are solid steps in the right direction, one has to keep in mind that the implementation of policies alone does not automatically facilitate women's empowerment. Despite these efforts, challenges clearly remain. According to the Algerian government,

“The main challenges confronting Algeria in its implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other initiatives that have subsequently been identified may be summarized as follows:

- Cultural stereotypes and restrictions that still prevail.
- The fact that in many instances, women are reluctant to participate positively in political life and appear to find their traditional roles satisfactory.” (Appendix D:211)

While women have indeed been successful in attaining and furthering their education, whether they have been able to use these skills to improve their lives in other areas still remains unclear. On the one hand, the previous barriers facing the poor have been alleviated through Algeria's school building programs. In remote areas near Tiaret, such as Sidi Hosni and Melaab, more schools have been built where the students receive a warm lunch without charge.

At the secondary level, the attendance figures for girls are noticeably higher than the corresponding figures for boys (see Appendix D:214). Universities of the State are free of charge; and ever since the government implemented a monthly grant given to every student, literally dozens of young women from poorer households commute to Tiaret from remote areas in order to seize the opportunity to finish their secondary education and enroll in a college program.

Despite their increased educational attainment and enhanced access to posts and functions, women still have not had equal opportunity to enter the work force and contribute to society to the same extent as men. In 2003, 20 percent of all women were economically active, compared to 12.61 per cent in 1998 (Appendix D:211). However, the International Labor organization data on female unemployment rates reveal that this rate has remained steady from 1991-2010. The main reason for this has been attributed to the social and cultural factors that continue to restrict women's entry in the public arena.

### **6.3 Women in Politics: The Feminization of Algeria's Political Situation**

After considering the recent results at the voting polls, one may be inclined to remark that a feminization of the political situation in Algeria could be on the move. On May 10, 2012, a total of 147 women out of 462 candidates were elected to the National People's Congress (NPC). Not only did this mark a turning point in Algerian legislative elections, it could be a significant step towards achieving gender equality.

This considerable step forward has in part been attributed to new legislation that was added to the constitution in November 2008. According to Law 31, it is a requirement for women to constitute at least 20 percent of the candidate list of every political party. In addition, any political party that fails to comply with these guidelines is to be entirely removed from the ballot.

Although it is a remarkable increase compared to the elections in 2007 when only 8 percent of the total seats in parliament were filled by female members, some women's rights activists remain skeptical. They claim that the representation of women is seen only on the surface (candidate lists) rather than actually acting within the NPC itself. They also point out that Algerian women are still marginalized despite holding key government positions (N. Hafid, "The feminisation of politics in Algeria" 12 June 2012). (N. Hafid is a human rights activist in Algeria. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews) <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=31523...0#>.)

It has been projected that the growing visibility and efforts of women's organizations will continue to contribute to the support for the notion of Algerian

women playing a more public role in society. Recent efforts include a project that proposes the development of marriage contracts that would help women set up conditions for marriage before the actual wedding, such as the right to work or to continue one's studies (Hafid, 2012). Because many young women in Tiaret have voiced how they found themselves caught in the middle of a similar kind of plight, such a contract would be a solid way for women to secure their education and enable them to realize their desire to work.

With more women in politics, the chances for legislative bills that promote Algerian women's political, economic and social development to be supported become greater. Another important result is that women's concerns are simultaneously being discussed by their male counterparts. This could act as a catalyst for ensuring gender equality, recognizing women's needs and sensitizing men to women's issues all at once (N. Hafid, "The feminisation of politics in Algeria" 12 June 2012).

### *6.3.1 The First Female Presidential Candidate in Algeria, Louisa Hanoune*

Women are allowed to run for public office even though such attempts are relatively rare. One woman who has made a nation-wide name for herself in politics and maintained a respectful image throughout it all is the former Algerian presidential candidate and current leader of the Workers Party (Parti des Travailleurs, PT), Louisa Hanoune. Before she surfaced as a serious political opponent, however, Hanoune was imprisoned by the government several times prior to the legalization of political parties in 1988.

After her first bid for the 1999 presidential election was rejected by the Constitutional Council, Hanoune ran as the first female candidate to seek office during the Algerian presidential elections in 1994. In 1999, she was one of eleven candidates who were nominated and won 4.22% of the vote, making her second runner-up out of six remaining candidates. She lost to President Bouteflika, who won a third term with 90.24% of the votes cast, upon which the election was immediately denounced as fraudulent.

In an interview published in the Pan-African News Wire April 07, 2012, Hanoune reflected on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence and how she made it to where she is today. Born on April 7, 1954, in Chekfa, Jijel Province, Hanoune and her parents, who were mountain peasants, were forced to leave their home after it had been bombed by the French army during the War of Independence after being branded as a safe haven for the Resistance fighters.

In Annaba she later benefitted from the new nation's system of education that made school free and compulsory for both boys and girls. With the support



of her uncle, Hanoune ended up being the first girl in her family to go to school. She went on to study law at the University of Annaba despite her father's reservations (Hanoune, 1997:69).

Today Hanoune ranks among the most prominent women within the sphere of higher politics. One of the reasons she is so highly regarded is that she belonged to the few opposition voices in parliament during Algeria's civil war of the 1990s. Although her party is based on secularist values, she was also a strong opponent of the government's "eradication" policy toward Islamists.

Her revered position as a politician was equally evident among the people of Tiaret. Even among the more traditional groups, Hanoune represents a woman of integrity, especially for her support of the Islamic Party FIS, for reasons that she elaborates on in *Une autre voix pour l'Algérie, Paris 1996*.

Hanoune has joined forces with other women's rights activists in the past. She called for the repeal of Algeria's Family Code in March 2010 because of its failure to provide adequate protection. Despite this, she has maintained her respect among rural traditionalists. In general, people in Tiaret seem to look beyond Hanoune's gender, admiring her for her political conviction to get rid of the single-party regime and for underlining the importance to conserve Algeria's sovereignty.

Indeed, the level of respect accorded to Louisa Hanoune remains unmatched by her contemporary female colleagues in the upper political realm. The Minister of Communication and Culture, Khalida Messaoudi, who stems from a respected Kabylie family (see chapter 5.3) is frowned upon by most rural inhabitants.

The negative resonance surrounding Messaoudi relates, in part, to her public sympathy for the cultural movement of the Kabyles (Berbers) who demand the recognition of their language and cultures first instigated during the French colonial rule. She also bears the brunt of some public criticism and disapproval for her staunch opposition to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and thus for her disregard of the integration of religion in politics.

In Tiaret and the surrounding rural areas, Messaoudi, who by now has become well-known through her numerous television appearances, is clearly disesteemed. Whenever she was featured in local news reports discussing upcoming events on behalf of the Ministry of Communication and Culture, the author noticed how people's faces physically cringed: either they rolled their eyes or shook their heads in distaste.

In general, traditional-minded Algerians feel like she has betrayed their country with her laicist position. Her attempted counterproposals for the Arabisation of the Algerian school system and Islamisation of the nation have led the inhabitants of Tiaret to accuse her of "trying to emulate a French [Western] woman".

#### **6.4 Women, Literacy and Higher Education in Islam: The Potential for Gender Equity and Empowerment**

For the remaining section of this chapter, the discussion will focus on the potential for gender equity and empowerment in women's literacy and higher education in Islam. So far, ample consideration has been given to the role of religion in literacy and education. For example, in ancient times literacy was a restricted novelty reserved for specific social strata such as clergymen and generally an important distinguishing mark of the elite. Before the invention of the printing press, the divine books (the Torah, Bible, Qur'an) and important scientific discoveries were written and copied by hand.

In *Ancient Literacy* (1991) William Harris addresses how widely the capabilities of reading and writing were diffused among the inhabitants of the classical Greek and Roman worlds: the rich and the poor, the free and the slaves, men and women, town-dwellers and country-people (Harris 1991:3). Although the extent of women's ability to read and write during this period lacks concrete information, one can assume that they were largely excluded (Harris 1991:48). Hence, one can infer that gender equity in literacy acquisition within classical Greco-Roman societies was limited.

The dearth of female literacy continued to prevail in educationally more advanced areas of Europe and North America from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (Harris 1991:8). The extent of women's literacy during the onset and within the precepts of Islam on the other hand, is a topic that has not yet been entirely explored. In this case the question that surfaces foremost is whether gender inequality in access to education in Arab societies stems from Islamic principles and the jurisprudence of the *sharia* or rather from the way that women's status within this context was perceived and is interpreted today.

As has been established from survey observations made by the French colonialists early on about the status of women in education in Algeria, the natives clearly surpassed their conquering counterparts. In Djemas (centers of Islamic learning or *madrassahs*) throughout the country, both girls and boys were being instructed to read and write in the context of the Qur'an (chapter 3.1). This is significant because it demonstrates that Algerians in rural and semi-urban areas valued the education of girls and thus female literacy within the context of Islam.

This openness towards female education was first curtailed by Algerians in their reaction toward the French colonial politics of emancipation and its opposition to the wearing of the hijab by women. In response to this, Algerians kept girls from attending schools and isolated women within the home more than ever. Because the family's honor is closely linked to female virtue, women fell victim to further restrictions, eventually resulting in widespread non-literacy.

Recently, more female authors have begun to delve into the enquiry of women's issues as advocates of Islamic feminism (Moghadam 2005; Coleman 2010; Baldran 2009, 2007, 1995; Davis 1983; Stowasser 1993; Rhouni 2010; Mernissi 1975, 1978; Tucker 1993; Kandiyoti 1991, 1996; Bouatta 1997). Although any generalizations about the position of Muslim women should be advanced with caution considering that they live under widely different conditions, and taking into account that their position and the influence they exert over their own lives changes considerably from one to society to another, these scholars recognize some common interpretational threads regarding gender roles and the status of women in work, education and politics present in the Islamic Middle East today.

In *Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought* (1993), Stowasser sees the variations in the Islamic interpretation of the status of women as being roughly dividable into 3 groups: the modernists, conservatives, and fundamentalists (see also Bo Utas 1983:12-21). Although her work is written in general terms, her data are based on research done in Jordan and Egypt in 1985. "The modernists among them perceive Islam as a "dynamic" religion, and they emphasize its "openness" and "permissiveness" as legislated in the scriptures (Koran and Hadith) which they allow them to consider the factors of time and societal change in their interpretation." (Stowasser 1993:3).

The modernists distinguish themselves from the other train of thought in that they underline the compatibility of modern social and political ideas with original Islamic norms. "To the modernists, therefore, contemporary social concerns are eminently compatible with the flexible blueprint of original Islam as realized in the way of life of the early Muslim community.

They distinguish this early, open, and pure Islam from its later manifestations which resulted from the wars of expansion, the internationalization of Islam, and a host of ultimately damaging acculturation processes." (Stowasser 1994:4). In order to demonstrate this, they support the individual interpretation of the scriptures (*itihad*) and deemphasize the content as well as the processes of consensus-building that led to the formation of the *sharia*.

The conservatives view the *sharia* as the core of Islam. "The conservatives' understanding of Islam, then, provides for some adaptation of the scriptures to the needs of the age; but the processes involved require consensus-building and institutionalization, not only individual effort, and thus have to unfold within the boundaries of Islamic law." (Stowasser 1994:4)

Finally, the fundamentalists view Islam as legislated in the Qur'an and Hadiths as the absolute truth both static and unchangeable through time. Instead, Islamic scriptures are translated directly into the contemporary framework. "According to the fundamentalists, then, social reality and social development have

no influence *on* religion, while religion unilaterally shapes and guides them from above. There is one holistic Islam which, revealed to and lived by the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad, is the final and all-inclusive religion of mankind.” (Stowasser 1994:4)

The underlying difference between the conservative and modernist approach are in their view of the issues of women's participation in the public sphere and women's right to work. Where the modernists rally for women's rights to attain a higher education and work on the basis that this was originally provided for by Islam, the conservatives categorically reject this citing moral issues to back their arguments. In order for a woman to work, there would need to be an established reason, such as divorce or being a widow.

Though all trains of Islamic interpretation differ in their doctrines and intentions, they share a common ethical-religious background in that they aim to relay an authentic approach to Islamic teachings on the status of women. Furthermore, all three groups of interpretation base their argumentation and paradigms on just a select number of the many verses of the Qur'an dealing with women's issues.

The most common among these verses include: Sura 2 (*Baqara*:228) and Sura 4 (*Nisa*:34) on women's status; Sura 2 (*Baqara*:282) on witnessing; Sura 33 (*Ahzab*:59) and Sura 24 (*Nur*:31) on clothing and public conduct; and Sura 33 (*Ahzab*:33) on segregation and staying in the house.

A growing movement among Muslim women, who are shedding light on the circulation of certain patriarchal-interpreted Hadiths that contradict the basic egalitarian principles of the Qur'an, is becoming more and more evident. This has been observed by several authors to be occurring in older Muslim societies as well as newer Muslim communities in the West (Coleman 2010; Baldran 1995, 2007; Moghadam 2005; Abu-Lughod 1998; Mernissi 1975).

Activists take this one step further by using egalitarian readings of the Qur'an and Hadiths to push for new practices within families and societies and to support reform of Muslim family laws as was the case in Algeria with the protests surrounding the 1984 Family Code. This combination of intellectual and activist work is what is referred to as Islamic feminism.

Among their aims is to raise awareness among more conservative- and fundamentalist-minded groups that their view of the role of women in Islam is not necessarily what is considered by Islam as is outlined by the Hadith and Qur'an. More often than not Islam is more flexible, egalitarian and otherwise lenient when it comes to the rights and duties of women. These Muslims' interpretations of what the Qur'an and Hadith recommend are based on an exaggerated sense of prudence that it is “better to be safe than sorry” so as to avoid any risk of engaging in conduct or action that might be deemed unlawful (*haram*) behavior.

Among the most active advocates of feminist Islam for the past two decades is Fatima Mernissi. In *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (2002), Mernissi uses the tools of classical Islamic methodology to examine the Hadiths relating to issues of women and gender equality. Her main intent is to demonstrate how many widely circulating Hadiths are weak or lacking authenticity and how others that are of more solid nature have been read out of context and therefore misconstrued.

As many Muslim conservatives and fundamentalists, both men and women, scrutinize the attempts to introduce feminism to issues related to women in Islam as being indoctrinated by Western infidels, more authors and activists respond by using historical evidence that portray Muslim women as equal participants in the making of their Islamic-Arabic identity.

“Any man who believes that a Muslim woman who fights for her dignity and right to citizenship excludes herself necessarily from the *umma* and is a brainwashed victim of Western propaganda is a man who misunderstands his own religious heritage, his own cultural identity... We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy, and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition.” (Mernissi 2002:vii-viii)

In her most recent book, *Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women are Transforming the Middle East* (2010), Coleman similarly claims that many progressive social movements are beginning to emerge within the Islamic world. In making her case for Islamic feminism, Coleman argues that far from oppressing women, Islam endows them with plenty of rights.

At the same time, however, Coleman and other Islamic feminist scholars clearly recognize that the problem lies in overcoming century-long patriarchal practices that constitute the social and political barriers to the implementation of these rights that were bestowed on women through Islamic scripture (Qur’an and Hadith).

Another staunch advocate for the potential of women’s empowerment in Islam is Valentine Moghadam. In *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (1993), Moghadam points out that in contrast to Western popular perceptions about women’s roles and rights in the Muslim world, several Islamic principles are clearly advantageous to women (Moghadam 1993:1-3). She highlights how Islam is in fact highly sensitive of and receptive to gender issues. One of the best examples demonstrating this is how Islam perceives men and women to be different but to be considered equal before God/Allah.

### **6.5 Résumé: Gender Equity and Female Empowerment in the Haut Plateau**

In terms of how early Islamic societies addressed and recognized the importance placed on gender, one could say that Islam was indeed ahead of its time. Today the enrolment of girls and young women attending schools and furthering their education in Islamic societies has significantly increased, resulting in a rapid and revolutionary impact on their lives. Access to education has changed how women view themselves, greatly altered fertility rates and made them more socially mobile (Moghadam 1993:129).

In the first half of the 1990s, Muslim women's enrolment increased by approximately 2 percent, four times the general rate for developing countries. Despite the fact that the female literacy rate in Arab countries is only 44 percent (compared to 68 percent for males), most Arab countries have succeeded in reducing gender gaps in enrolment and in increasing completion rates far more successfully than South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa (Watkins, 1999).

Dispelling the myth that there is an automatic negative correlation between Islam and gender representation in schools, education seems to have made more of an impact in changing the position and self-perception of women than employment (Moghadam 1993:131).

The realization of the potential of gender empowerment within the context of Islam for rural Muslim societies appears to be well underway. It has a firm theoretical (and theological) basis, as well as responsible advocacy and action directed towards raising awareness for gender equality in Muslim societies around the world. Continued progress, however, will depend upon each individual society's willingness to recognize and implement this potential.

The next section takes an empirical look at traditional-minded Muslims (conservatives) from the Haut Plateau region and their reactions to women's literacy, higher education and employment. The lines of inquiry include how rural women are being empowered through literacy and higher education and how this is viewed and accepted by the society. By surveying how the younger generation views and takes advantage of higher education and employment, one can begin to predict future trends for women's empowerment in rural societies.

### **Part III. Empirical Case Studies of the “Iqraa” Functional Literacy Program and Ibn Khaldun University Survey in Tiaret**

Part three forms the empirical basis for the present scientific enquiry on women, literacy, and empowerment. The observations and data presented here are based on a three-year fieldwork study (2008-2011) of a women’s literacy class in a semi-rural city located in the High Plateau region.

With an elevation of 4,300 feet, this area is inhabited by Muslim Arabs who adhere to a more traditional way of life. Many families living in the city are closely connected to related peasant farmers residing in the countryside. This area consists of a mostly rocky and dry landscape dotted with vegetation on which cattle, sheep, and goats graze.

Farmers usually specialize in the commercial production of wheat; however, several also harvest other crops, including fava beans, chickpeas, olives, figs and grapes for personal use. The older generation adheres to a traditional way of life in which many take part in the annual festivity surrounding the worship of a Marabut, locally referred to as *taám*, which literally means *couscous*.

Families who still practice this tradition visit the grave of an ancestor (*wali*). An offering of couscous is placed near the grave in hope of ensuring blessings (*baraka*) from Allah via the wali (see also chapter 3.1). This marks the time when male family members dress up in traditional clothes and charge on horseback, firing a single shot on their rifles while a traditional high-pitched tune is being played on a wooden horn in the background. It is also a time to commemorate one’s forefathers who fought against the French conquerors.

As was mentioned in the Introduction, Algeria has made a consistent effort to combat high rates of non-literacy through the implementation of functional literacy programs since its independence in 1962. Despite Algeria’s attempts to promote and develop human resources through literacy, the overall outcome of these programs indicated that the strategies and methods used to curtail this deficit so far have been inadequate or failed altogether, especially in regards to women and girls.

Overall among the main shortcomings of these literacy classes cited so far has been their inability to meet the needs of the female participants, resulting in

low retention and high dropout rates. This in turn has been attributed to the persistence of a rigid patriarchal social structure found in rural Algerian societies (Knauss 1987/*Preface*).

However, there may be more to the problem of literacy attainment than the literature suggests. An examination of a literacy class over an extended period of time is a good way to take a closer look at the entire dynamic involved in the process of adult literacy education from a variety of standpoints: the board of direction, the teachers, and the students.

In the chapters that follow, the respective case studies (women's literacy class, men's literacy class and university student survey) represent three different perspectives on the subject of women's literacy, higher education and empowerment. The emphasis of the study was placed on the women's literacy class. It assessed who the learners are and probed what these women perceive to be their literacy needs.

The participants of the men's literacy class adjacently taking place at the same grade school as the women's class were interviewed about female literacy patterns in their families and in general on their own personal opinions about women in literacy, higher education and employment. This made it possible to take a closer look at how the cultural structures surrounding this patriarchal society affect women's education and active presence in society.

A parallel trend running alongside the nationwide revival of literacy classes sparked in 2007 is the growing number of young women who complete their secondary school and go on to enroll at the university. More of these young women are entering the work-force after graduation.

To a large degree, this has been made possible by pro-education policies and financial aid (monthly student grants) offered under the government of President Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika since around the year 2000. Other factors have been recent policies implemented by the government to increase the quota of women in the work force.

In order to take a grass-roots look at current trends and attitudes towards women's higher education and employment, a small survey of male and female students attending the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret was included in the study. For updates on literacy program innovations and current statistics, the author referred to the daily and weekly press. Periodicals of most value were *El Moudjahid*, *Maghreb-Machreq*, *El Watan*, and *Eschourouk*.

As the brunt of this study circles around female literacy and empowerment, the next chapter begins with a description of the local context and framework for literacy attainment, followed by the in-depth accounts of the interviews with members of the literacy leadership team and teachers in Tiaret.



## 7 Organization of the Functional Literacy Program in Tiaret

An important source of background information aiding in the understanding of the local organization of the literacy program in Tiaret stemmed from the interviews conducted with the program's direction and literacy class teachers in Tiaret (see below). The NGO campaign Iqraa was originally founded in the 1960s. The current president of the national functional literacy program in Algier is Mme. Barki.

In the meantime, Iqraa literacy programs are now implemented in every wilaya of Algeria. Through the course of the years, several sub-branches have formed, and although they all refer back to *Jamaya* Iqraa (the Iqraa group), they slightly differ in approach and strategy for recruiting and teaching students, depending on the type of society or setting (rural, urban, factory workers, etc.) involved.

In Tiaret, for example, the following statement was made in Arabic by an Imam of a local mosque during the Friday prayer on Arab Literacy Day, January 8, 2010.

“Literacy skills are an Islamic duty for all men and women. It enables us to learn about our religion, which enables us to become better members of society. Literacy classes are being offered in nearby schools and mosques throughout town... The very first verse of the Qur’an revealed to the prophet Mohammed *s.a.w* begins with the word *Iqra*, that is, *read*. In the name of God, the Compassionate source of All Mercy: 1) *Read! In the Name of your Lord who has created.* 2) *He has created man from a clot.* 3) *Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.* 4) *Who has taught (the writing) by the pen.* 5) *He has taught man that which he knew not.*” Qur’an 96:1-5.

The content of this statement is in a sense somewhat ironic considering that the *umma* (Muslim community) who regularly frequent this mosque is made up of traditional-minded people (mainly men) living in and around this area. It is a well known fact among the clergymen, who are appointed to a wilaya by the government, that the majority of the male mosque goers in rural and semi-rural cities such as Tiaret generally approach the influx of literacy classes with some kind of reservation if not utter resignation.

This leads one to wonder whether the speech given by the imam was motivated by his own personal convictions or Islamic beliefs about women and literacy or whether he was instructed to draw peoples' attention to the importance of literacy within the context of Islam by some other source, for example, a governmental agency, especially since the statement was made on Arab Literacy Day. This in turn opens up the line of inquiry as to the government's motives for promoting literacy.

### **7.1 The Literacy Class Setting**

The actual classrooms for the various literacy classes in Algeria are located in several settings, including schools, mosques, cultural centers, universities, retirement homes, factories, and private organizations. However, in Tiaret they are most commonly offered in either one of two settings: the mosque or grade school. Depending on space availability and individual agreements made between the literacy program and school or mosque administration, classrooms are provided during the hours when these buildings are not otherwise being used, usually in the afternoons between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m.

In either case, classes are offered separately for men and women, i.e., male-female segregation is practiced. Men and women of all ages are allowed and encouraged to join and no division is made according to age or level of literacy. What that boils down to, however, is that classes are highly heterogenic and learners from all levels ranging from those who have never held a pen in their hand to those who can read and write simple texts are all mixed together, regardless of age, in one class. As you will see below, this is the first challenge facing both literacy class learners and teachers alike.

### **7.2 Literacy Program Direction: Interviews with Literacy Administration and Teachers**

In Tiaret, the head director representing Iqraa is M. Saidani followed by Program Administrator Mme. Ammari. Both M. Saidani and Mme. Ammari ultimately work for the same literacy organization, *L'Institution ou l'Administration Publique Office National de L'Alfabetisation de la wilaya de Tiaret*. However, after interviews with them and after conversations with three of the literacy class teachers, it soon became evident that the directors were somewhat at odds with one another. Although they both ultimately work for the same program, they clearly had different literacy objectives (see below).

### 7.2.1 Interview with Head Director M. Saidani

The author was first able to narrow down who some of the leading bodies of the local administration were after she signed up and attended one of the local literacy classes for herself. After receiving the contact information from the author's teacher, Zohra, an arrangement for a meeting could be made.

The interview with the head director in Tiaret, M. Saidani, took place in his office located in the city center (centre ville) on March 29, 2009, just about a year after the author began attending literacy class. The time that lapsed from the initial enrollment to the interview allowed the author to form some of her own impressions of the class and made it easier to formulate questions. Since locals are somewhat reserved about giving a formal interview with foreigners, the actual interview was administered by the author's husband, who grew up in Tiaret and is fluent in Arabic.

The content of the questions was divided into different categories according to subject matter: organizational/logistical, didactical, program goals, and socio-cultural issues (for example, public reaction to literacy classes and participant-teacher interaction). A summary of the answers is given here.

According to Saidani, the literacy classes are informally referred to as *mahua omia*, which literally translates into "erase non-literacy." The classes began to be offered nationwide in the fall of 2007. Ideally, participants are to complete a three-year cycle, after which functional literacy should be attained.

Throughout the duration of the course, statistics are maintained by special program agents referred to as "inspectors." At regular intervals during the year, these inspectors show up unannounced to monitor and record the number of class participants. The results are passed on to the office of demographics and statistics at the Ministry of Education in Algiers. At this time teachers are informed of upcoming meetings and have the chance to voice their assessment of the progress of the class or to report any problems that have arisen.

The literacy classes are advertised both in the media (television and radio) and through a door-to-door publicity campaign where literacy class teachers personally knocked on doors to inform and persuade people to enroll in a nearby class. In order to be eligible for a course, participants need a copy of their birth certificate and one photo. Usually there is no class fee and all materials (literacy and math workbooks) are free of charge.

Some of the problems Saidani has encountered during his position as director have been phone calls from class participants who were wrongfully charged money for their books. There had also been cases where teachers simply did not show up to teach and upon repeated offence were fired.

In regards to public reaction to the literacy classes, Saidani claimed that male family members are more inclined to let their wives/mothers attend a literacy class if it takes place in a mosque rather than a grade school or other public building even though all courses are divided into all-men or all-women classes. Despite these socio-cultural restrictions, more women attend than men.

According to Saidani, currently 20% of the entire population of 178,915 in Tiaret (demographic survey, 2008) cannot read or write. When asked what the primary goal of the program was, Saidani responded by saying that in addition to combating illiteracy, the program aims to integrate people more into the society by becoming active members of the community and not stay behind.

He claimed that once participants improved their literacy skills, they had the opportunity to open up a small business or micro firm of their own (handicrafts, sewing, cooking), which would be financially supported by the government. Overall, Saidani voiced his high impression of the working climate among colleagues and, in general, praised the literacy program for investing “large amounts of money in literacy” and being “one of a kind world-wide.”

### **7.3 Interview with Program Administrator Mme. Ammari**

The author also learned who one of the program administrators was from her literacy teacher, Zohra. At first, Mme. Ammari was reluctant to meet with the author because, as was later disclosed, “She is an Arab woman through and through” and therefore wary as to whether an American anthropologist would be able to fully understand or represent her point of view.

However, after Ammari heard that the niece of the author’s husband, Nassria, was close friends with her sister Wayfat through the Ibn Khaldun University and that the author was a Muslim, she changed her mind. This connection, though somewhat distant, formed a basis of trust and allowed the author to maintain good contacts with Mme. Ammari and her sister Wayfat, who was also a literacy teacher, throughout the duration of the study.

In total, the author was able to interview Mme. Ammari in person on two occasions. The first interview took place in May 2009 in her office of literacy located in a city building subsidized by the FLN political party. For the first interview, questions were formulated in German by the author and directly translated into Arabic by her husband.

The second interview took place on June 14, 2010, in the author’s home. This time the author was able to ask questions in the local Arabic dialect with the support of her sister-in-law and close informant, Halima, who speaks fluent English. Both Mme. Ammari and her sister Wayfat were present at this time. The

second interview primarily was concerned with finding out about the progress of the participants with a focus on women's empowerment. The results of both interviews are summarized here.

The answers to the first set of questions (background and logistics) corroborated those of M. Saidani. For example, the classes were commonly referred to as *mahua omia*, and women made up the majority of participants at 70%. The answers to general questions on the duration and organization of the course coincided as well. Their answers also matched those about teacher/student recruitment as well as those on class content and teaching methods.

According to Ammari, there are a total of 250 literacy classes being offered throughout the entire Tiaret province. In addition to the most commonly used settings, the mosque and grade school, literacy is being taught in the jails, to employees of the milk company and to the cleaning ladies of various factories. The ages of class participants range from 12 to 103. The younger students are primarily children who for several reasons (distance, disability, or poverty) missed the school enrollment date.

She knew of some cases where children who never enrolled in school went to literacy class and then entered the school system, becoming the best in their class. Another student who was 62 and non-literate made her way up to second year of secondary school. She also knew of cases where women had gotten financial support from the government to open a sewing business.

Ammari (age 35 during the time of the interviews) first became active with Iqraa after she flunked her secondary school exams. Not quite sure what to do next, she became a volunteer teacher after hearing about the opportunity to assist literacy classes through her sister's professor, who started a literacy course in 1999.

After a few years of diligent work, she was able to gain valuable experience. As her efforts became well known among her colleagues and literacy advocates, she was offered a position as a paid teacher. However, she did admit that she was often paid only a fraction (40%) of her set salary of 120,000 Dinars (approximately 100 Euros), which ended up being the equivalent of about 40 Euros a month.

Realizing the unsure future in teaching literacy, Ammari decided to go back to school. During a series of evening classes, she repeated her secondary exams, passed them in 2009, and then enrolled and attended evening classes in the law program of commerce and administration.

When asked what she thought about Iqraa and its literacy goals, Ammari was critical of the program for its strong political side, which she claims impedes women's literacy attainment. She accuses the program for serving the government's ulterior interests in matters such as voting. For example, she claimed one

motive for offering free classes and materials was in order to gain people's sympathy and persuade them to vote for a particular political party.

Participants of literacy classes who are primarily made up of older people are thus easy targets because they already sympathize with the current regime, which they praise for recent benefits in health care. Free literacy classes are an added bonus to them, swaying them to continue to vote accordingly.

Ammari was careful to answer the question about how many people were non-literate in Tiaret. She declined to give any official estimates because she said the government purposely over-exaggerates the numbers in order to boost their image and entice more people to want to join the program under the premise that high enrollment is an indication that the courses are well organized and liked. For example, she cited a misleading quote made by the government for the year of 2009-2010. The government stated that 6,000 students enrolled in literacy classes during this time when in fact only 2,000 students had been reported.

Overall, Ammari described the situation as a kind of juggling act between realizing her own goals for helping adults become literate and maintaining the support of the government by serving their program goals for literacy. If she doesn't comply with the government's agenda she may risk losing her position and financial backing. Ammari argues that the government strays away from just offering literacy classes centered on Islam because they want to avoid being compared to a backwards society associated with terrorism.

By teaching regular school subjects to adults they are upholding the image of Algeria as a democratic nation. Though she did mention in particular the support of one male political contact of the FLN through whom she is invited to participate in meetings in Algier, she admitted she walked a fine line between both sides. Eventually Ammari hopes to establish herself within the decision making circle and have more influence over the kinds of policies regarding adult literacy.

### 7.3.1 *Founding "The Good Way" (Subul Khair): Sub-Group Goals and Students' Needs*

In an attempt to liberate herself from this complex situation, Ammari came up with a strategy to implement her ideas and goals for literacy. Although officially acting within the guidelines of Iqraa, she developed her own branch of literacy education and called it "The Good Way" (*subul khair*).

Among the main goals underlying Ammari's literacy strategy is to model each class to fit the needs of its students. Because a pronounced majority of the

learners aim to learn how to pray the proper Islamic way, for example, Ammari wants to incorporate more lessons about how to read the Qur'an.

When asked what the students' needs were, Ammari stated that through her observations, she could distinguish among three groups in terms of their respective needs: (1) The older women who come to learn to read the Qur'an; (2) those who dropped out of school at one time and wished to repeat and finish their levels; and, (3) those who want to improve their base of knowledge in order to be able to learn independently and become lifelong learners.

Indeed, one of Ammari's main stated goals was to teach her students to teach themselves and thus become lifelong learners. She wants students to learn about their origin and national history so that they can feel proud about who they are and where they came from. This, she argued, builds people's self-confidence, thus allowing them to inform and question themselves about current events.

Another point she made was that literacy reduces people's fear to take public transportation. People become more independent and catch the bus to town because they can read roads signs and know how to get places on their own. Other goals she stated were to make people become more environmentally aware and not throw trash on the streets, to practice better hygiene, and to prepare nutritious meals.

Ammari admitted that her presence first comes across to the learners as rigid and strict. The author's initial impression of her fits this description well. Ammari is a tall woman of solid stature, not fat. She looks a person square in the face while matter-of-factly speaking in a low voice. However, due to her personal interaction with students and opportunities offered during the course, her classes, she said, are "full till the end." She recounted one student who continued to come long after she learned to read.

One of the highlights of Ammari's course is a day-long retreat to one of the nearby Hamams (natural hot spring bathhouse) in Tlemcen. Anyone who knows Algerian women knows that their love for a trip to a Hamam runs deep. Ammari organizes such excursions 1-2 times a year. She organizes a bus for transportation and pays the entrance fee to the Hamam. Women just need to bring their lunch. They arrange to meet in front of the literacy class at 3 o'clock in the morning and return in the late afternoon.

Ammari stated that many students participate in these outings. It was a good way to break the ice and help the women transition into the classroom, especially for those who never attended formal schooling. Furthermore, it brings about group cohesion so that students take the class more seriously. As students get to know the teacher on a personal level, they gain respect for the teacher and feel more comfortable in the classroom setting.

In order to ensure that her strategy is implemented in the literacy classes under her management, she maintains close contact with her teachers by holding regular meetings where teachers receive training and are prepared to work with adult learners.

### 7.3.2 *Challenges*

In fact, one of the main challenges Ammari cited with the literacy classes was working with adults, many of whom have never received any form of schooling before. “The older people are more difficult to teach because they are set in their ways and at times even childish.” Ammari said teachers are often unprepared to teach adults and assume it is the same as teaching children. She pointed out that children and adults learn differently. Children are more confident and flexible, and they tend to learn faster than adults.

Ammari criticized the program for implementing the same learning materials (textbooks) used in teaching school children for teaching adults. One also must consider that most of the teachers are not trained as teachers in the first place. Most teachers of literacy have just graduated from the university in fields quite remote from teaching (see below).

This often leads to situations of friction between teachers and some students, which is a problem because, as Ammari noted, “It is imperative for the students to like their teachers in order to be motivated to learn.” She recounted one story in particular where conflict between a teacher and student physically escalated. Apparently, a teacher was advising an older student in her 60s on her work. The older woman took it personally and struck the teacher in her face. In general, older students react nervously towards any form of critique coming from younger teachers, who are often in their early 20s.

Ammari also commented on challenges, which can arise unexpectedly. On Arab Literacy Day, Ammari makes a point of passing out small gifts in praise of student’s efforts. In 2010, she premiered a literacy contest between two classes, thinking it would be a good way for motivating students to become more ambitious about learning. However, it backfired when she noticed the negative effect it had on student motivation as they began to get jealous of one another.

Only a small transition was mentioned by Ammari with students switching between their own speaking dialect and learning to read and write in proper Arabic. Oftentimes students mix the two together. Many students of the older generation view the class as a place for sharing and discussing problems and do so by speaking in their local dialect.



On the topic of women leaving the domestic sphere, Ammari said husbands are initially reluctant to let their wives attend literacy class, but when they see the learning setting and meet her personally, they are quickly put at ease. Some men are worried that if their female family members begin leaving the house to attend literacy class on a regular basis, they will demand more liberty and want to take part in other activities outside the home and family circle as well.

Finally, the author asked Ammari about the problems underlying the high dropout rates of women literacy learners. From her standpoint, there are several reasons why students drop out of literacy class. These include the rapport between students and teachers, which often boils down to the proper training of teachers in the field of adult literacy; the inability of literacy classes to meet the students' learning needs; and, learning materials that are too difficult for students to keep up with, especially for older students who have no previous experiences learning in a formal setting.

Ammari also mentioned that many teachers "drop out" as well. First of all, they are ill-prepared for their position. Then although they are promised a salary, they either receive only a fraction of it or end up never getting paid at all.

The challenges seem to lurk around every corner. Alongside her many duties as administrator, Mme. Ammari takes evening courses at the university and teaches a literacy class of her own. She admitted that it is a lot of work with no guarantee of results, comparing it to "planting wheat." The last time she spoke with the author in the winter of 2012, she was beginning work on the development of a literacy program that structurally meets the needs of Muslim Arab women. It should differ from the western standardized approach to literacy, which she claims is one of the pitfalls of Iqraa.

#### **7.4 Résumé: Different Approaches to Literacy**

It became quite clear early on during the course of the interviews that M. Saidani's positive yet general account of the program contrasted significantly with that of Mme. Ammari's, which was more critical and reflective. In addition, Ammari shared a lot of information about her personal experiences during the ten years she has been working for Iqraa. This also explains the depth and length of the summary of her interview as compared to Saidani's.

During Saidani's interview, his conduct was first and foremost as an advocate for the Iqraa program, and as such he did not openly share any personal information about his background and thoughts of adult literacy attainment. The answers to the questions indicate that Saidani takes a more literal approach to adult literacy. In terms of class organization (high recruitment rates, 3-year

course limit) and course content (textbooks and exams), Saidani strictly adheres to the guidelines of the program as dictated by the head office in Algier. Indeed most organizations continue to base their evaluation on the quantitative rate of increase or decrease in the level of participation in adult education in terms of enrollment statistics rather than including qualitative aspects regarding the relevance of the gender question (CONFINTEA V-Arab Regional Report 2003b:5).

Initially, Ammari was cautious about meeting with the author; however, she eventually became very open about her views and literacy objectives towards the end. In her own words, Ammari described her own approach to literacy and that of Saidani as being “like two different rivers.” Aside from being much more personally committed to the cause, Ammari stated that her first and foremost concern is to meet the participants’ learning needs even if it conflicts with the program materials.

According to Mme. Ammari, M. Saidani is more influenced by the government. For example, the current national goal for literacy attainment has been set to be reached by 2016. This explains why the duration of each course has rigidly been reduced to three years, which Saidani strictly abides by. Ammari, on the other hand, contends that it is unrealistic to set a fixed time for literacy attainment particularly when students are coming from all ages, levels and backgrounds. She sets no deadline for her participants, stating that if the government should no longer allow her to teach, she would continue classes in a garage if need be.

Their differences of opinions have crossed paths more than once. Ammari disclosed that she personally put a stop to the extra curricular courses in handicrafts (sewing, cooking, etc.) advertised to the women participants during class times. In the first place, she was concerned that this would deter students’ ability to focus on literacy and would end up being counterproductive as the women would most likely end up sitting around and chatting rather than learning a new trade.

In addition, Ammari was suspicious of the government’s true intentions in offering a whole new set of domestic-related courses when the ones in literacy needed to be filled with more participants. Similar skepticism toward governmental ulterior motives for adult literacy classes as a means for reproducing and perpetuating women’s traditional roles as household managers and mothers or relegating women to other positions of dependence have been cited in other regions as well (Aagnaou, Morocco 2004; Chlebowska, developing countries 1990b; Longwe, Zambia 1991).

Another point of conflict had to do with the end-of-the-year exams. Usually, exams are to be scheduled in May when students are still regularly attending class. This allows for maximum attendance during the times of testing. However,

under Saidani's direction, the exam date had been set back to June for the past two years, resulting in low turn-out rates since most students had already left literacy class for summer break. In an effort to make the best out of this dilemma, Ammari suggested holding exams in one central school. Instead of keeping several schools open for just a handful of students, they designated one school as a testing center. It was an economical idea, which saved costs in the process.

Finally, Ammari mentioned her distaste for the way Saidani handles internal problems. She recalled the time at the end of the first year (2007) when Saidani cancelled the contract of two teachers after their teaching colleague had bad-mouthed them for their faulty work efforts. Instead of looking into the case personally, he fired both teachers. This condensed the number of women's literacy classes at that school to one since he neglected to hire any new teachers to fill their place. Another negative effect of this was that most of the students did not return the next year after discovering that their teacher, with whom they had formed a crucial bond, was not coming back.

Although Ammari sees the logic and usefulness in keeping the lines of communication open with the political dimension of the program, it is not to the extent of sacrificing her own literacy strategy (*subul khair*). She is, however, aware that this connection is almost imperative for her to get a foot in the door in the political arena in order to have more influence over the future development of literacy programs in Algeria.

In summary, due to the unbalanced nature of the comments provided by M. Saidani and Mme. Ammari during their interviews, it would be unwarranted to draw any definite conclusions as to whose strategy is more effective from the standpoint of the participants. What the differences in approaches do suggest, however, is the importance of placing more women in leading positions of literacy programs. The absence of women in decision-making positions in the field of adult education is widespread and continues to prevail (Carmack, 1992; Chlebowska, 1990a; Ramdas, 1994; Stromquist, 1992; Agnaou, 2004; Egbo, 2000).

The results indicate that Mme. Ammari's approach to literacy (*subul khair*) aimed to meet the needs of her female participants. She gave specific answers to what those needs were (learning Qur'an, developing group cohesion, and building self-confidence) and demonstrated a personal interest in her participants' progress and well being (paid trips to a Hamam). Saidani spoke of the program's literacy goals in more general terms (to reach full literacy nationwide by 2016) though both voiced a strong interest in continuing their efforts to increase the number of literacy class-goers.

Rather than merely anecdotal in nature, these two interviews can be seen as representative of two different perspectives on literacy. Saidani represents the

government's perspective that literacy is an indicator of the overall educational level of the nation and the efficacy of the government's programs. Ammari, on the other hand, expresses the perspective of women educators who regard literacy as the means of achieving emancipation. Saidani promotes and defends government policy; Ammari promotes and defends innovative methods and sustainable programs to provide women with the literacy skills that will improve their lives and their futures. Saidani comes across as the dutiful bureaucrat focused on statistics; Ammari as the reformer striving to change grass-roots institutions.

## 7.5 Interviews with Literacy Class Teachers

Over the course of the class observations, three literacy class teachers were interviewed on separate occasions. Two of the informants instructed a women's and a men's literacy class held adjacent to the women's class at The New Grade School, where the author attended. The third teacher taught a women's class at a school located on the other side of town. All teachers were available for questioning throughout the duration of the study.

### 7.5.1 Teacher/Student Recruitment and Training

In Tiaret teachers are most often directly recruited from the Ibn Khaldun University campus or by word of mouth from friend to friend. Originally, graduates from all academic backgrounds (language and sciences) were eligible to teach an adult literacy class. Some were even allowed to teach upon completion of a "bac" (short for *baccalauréat*, final secondary school certificate). However, in 2008, the program narrowed down its requirements and began accepting only graduates from the fields of Arabic or language arts.

In the beginning, there was a very large turnout of graduates potentially interested in the endeavor of becoming a teacher of adult literacy, especially with the prospect of being paid. Mme. Ammari mentioned that the number was more than 500. However, this optimism soon faded after it became clearer what this job entails. Some were disinterested from the onset but began teaching anyway for the sake of having a job. Others, discouraged and overwhelmed, later changed their minds and resigned or stopped showing up for class. In 2009, Ammari cited 147 teachers who remained on a consistent basis throughout the year.

In 2007 a brief introduction course in literacy teaching was offered, however, teachers were given free realm (and some complained that it was too much)

in how they chose to conduct their individual classes and what methods to utilize. As most participants stem from a farming community, teachers try to interact with their students in accordance with the students' traditional mindedness.

Beginning in 2008 organized teacher meetings were held three times a year in a town just outside of Tiaret. This ideally gives teachers the opportunity to talk about their problems and share their experiences. The meetings are primarily meant to update teachers of any program happenings or changes and to instruct them in different methods of teaching. Teachers share reports of the progress of their students and get feedback from the leadership team. Most often they are reminded that they must work towards the program goal of reaching national literacy and are strongly encouraged to recruit new students.

Teachers are instructed to teach students the Arabic alphabet and how to spell their names during the first year. Starting in the second year, they are to introduce basic math skills for everyday use, such as going shopping and paying bills. They also begin teaching sentence structure and grammar. By the end of the third year, students are expected to have attained "functional literacy," which means they are able to independently perform the tasks taught during the three years.

Student recruitment requires personal effort on the part of the new teachers. Teachers are in fact required to go door to door and personally recruit new students for their classes. All of the teachers the author spoke with confirmed that they were instructed to recruit 40 students each before they would be allowed to teach a class. Teachers are to collect the names of at least 40 people and write them down on a list. They are reminded that an inspector will come by to control the numbers of participants in their class.

It was disclosed to the author by some informants that teachers were told by certain members of the leadership (names will not be mentioned here) that they should have no scruple when coaxing potential participants to enroll. The informants claimed that it was even suggested to the teachers to tell lies, such as promising people an all-expense paid trip to Mecca for a *hadj* or *umra* (Islamic pilgrimage) if they enrolled and regularly attended literacy class.

The informants also stated that teachers were told to promise students money, which would be awarded to them by President Bouteflika himself if they joined. The informants argued that the latter would seem plausible and would appeal to the elderly since the government is known for giving grants to people suffering from chronic illnesses or conditions such as diabetes or allergies.

Granted these accusations are merely based on hearsay and cannot be confirmed as true, at the very least the fact that these rumors are circulating among students, teachers and members of the leadership team indicates a certain level of

disharmony and disorganization and a lack of cooperation that undermine the efforts to establish effective literacy programs.

Needless to say, joining a literacy class under false pretences is not exactly the best circumstance for ensuring long-term class participation. The teachers said many prospective students dropped out after the first day when they realized that the promises of an all-expense paid trip to Mecca was a hoax. Only a few dedicated learners remained despite being lied to although they were disappointed.

### 7.5.2 Women's Literacy Teacher Zohra

Of all three literacy teacher informants, the author's own teacher, Zohra, who spoke very good English, provided the most comprehensive information and generously supplied answers to her questions during regular class sessions and at other times. Classes took place twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays from two to five in the afternoon.

Zohra, age 23 and single at the time, was still enrolled at the Ibn Khaldun University, majoring in Arabic when she began teaching. She comes from a household where both parents were non-literate. Her mother died when she was 16 years old. She has five brothers and three sisters, two of whom are from her father's second marriage.

Initially, Zohra was discouraged by her father and brothers to continue her studies at the university after she finished her *bac*. They would have preferred her to follow a more domestic trade, such as becoming a seamstress. In spite of this and because she had always been a good student, she enrolled in the language department of the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret. She had no prior teaching experience, and teaching literacy was her first job directly after college.

In the first year of the literacy program, classes began on November 15, 2007, and went until mid-June 2008. Zohra either took the bus or walked, depending on how much spare change she had. At first she worked under the direction of Mme. Ammari, who was then still directly employed by *Jamaya* iqraa. She reminisced about her first year, describing it as a big challenge. She received no formal training and was therefore unprepared to teach adults. Zohra admitted that she falsely assumed it would be similar to teaching children.

On the first day Zohra introduced herself to her class as their "daughter" and explained to them that she would learn from their wisdom, and she in turn would teach them the alphabet. At first there were only seven students. The number fluctuated slightly during the year up to a maximum of ten. All were Arab women between the ages of 30 and 80 who came from the area. Running

parallel to Zohra's class were two other women's classes, which took place in the classrooms next door. Among the three of them, there was a total of about 40 students.

Although teachers were told they would be provided with supplies to hand out to their students, Zohra received none and ended up buying pencils, chalk and writing tablets for her class out of her own pocket. She knew that many of the participants were poor and would not be able to buy them. Zohra was also assured that she would receive a regular salary but did not get paid at all during the entire year.

Zohra admitted that she got easily frustrated with her students during the first year. She had set higher expectations than what the students could deliver. When she assigned homework or asked them to revise their coursework, most students did not comply. There was also a lack of concentration during lessons. Many of the older students used the time to chat about personal problems and thus distracted their classmates and disrupted the class.

At the end of the first year, a final exam was scheduled for all literacy class participants. Regardless of the end results, all students were passed on to the second year. Zohra claimed that the program made a point to pass all students on to the next level in order to encourage them to continue attending class.

Throughout the first year, Zohra was able to gain a lot of hands-on experience and therefore was much better prepared to teach the next year. She modified her methods and adjusted her expectations to fit the pace of the students better, which was slower than she originally anticipated. Overall, Zohra felt more confident and adapted a more patient style of teaching. She also gained sympathy for her students' personal history and individual learning needs.

Some unexpected changes did take place, however. According to Zohra, Mme. Ammari was fired from *Jamaya Iqraa* due to conflicting ideas and interests within the program leadership. As Zohra was not on agreeable terms with Mme. Ammari either, she signed over to teach the same women's literacy class under the direction of M. Saidani.

From the second year on, Zohra received a formal work contract, stating that she would be paid 12325, 50 dinars a month. Despite this, payment remained irregular and at one point she was not paid at all. When she went in to enquire about this with four other teachers, who had also not been paid, they were told that their paperwork (birth certificates etc.) went "missing" and that they could not be paid until these documents were found. So Zohra began a lengthy process to have new documents drawn up, which established who her father and grandfather were in order to be paid.

Beginning in 2008, math was to be incorporated in the regular lesson plan. Zohra explained that this ended up being a difficult subject because she was

provided only one math book from which to teach the entire class even though, according to the program's guidelines, each student should have received a copy. It proved challenging to draw complex models on the board and difficult for students to comprehend.

Among the main challenges was the fact that her class was composed of women of all ages, ranging from 16 to 80. The level of the students' literacy varied as well. Some of the elder women had never held a pen in their hand before, whereas others were already familiar with the alphabet and basic writing skills. The elderly women tended to hold the rest of the class back because they were unable to follow lessons at the same pace as their younger counterparts.

As a result, the older students began to feel easily discouraged. They were also usually the ones who distracted their classmates through conversations about their personal problems. Finally, the plurality of participants' learning goals, ranging from learning to read the Qur'an to aiming to complete their *bac*, played a crucial role as well. The heterogenic class constellation remained a hurdle until the end.

Zohra encountered other problems as well. She argued that her students were often not supported by their families in their quest for literacy and thus became easily discouraged, resulting in their dropping out. In general, there was a high turnover rate. Women often dropped out due to family-related issues such as a death, marriage, birth or illness. Sometimes women were absent for weeks and then turned up again without prior notice. This made it very hard to form any kind of solidarity among classmates and move the students forward as a group because these returning students always had to catch up.

Other women were pressed by their husbands or mothers-in-law to drop out because their absence at home was an inconvenience. This was either because their assistance was needed in the kitchen when guests arrived or because their children became a nuisance for the family members at home. Finally, only a few women were no longer allowed to go because it cast potential shame on the family (*hishma*) for regularly leaving the house alone in order to attend class.

When questioned on the subject of lying to potential students in order to recruit as many as possible, Zohra acknowledged that this was true. However, she insisted that she never recruited any of her students under false pretences. Furthermore, she expressed that it was a horrible thing to do. She also claimed that she received orders from one member of the leadership team to lie to students. Interestingly, during the author's interview with the leadership member whom Zohra referred to, the finger was pointed to the other leadership member as the one who ordered teachers to lie to students in order to persuade them to join a literacy class.



After having worked under both members of the leadership team Zohra described them as being in direct concurrence with one another “like two competing soccer teams”. According to Zohra, Saidani is primarily interested in delivering high numbers (students) to his superiors in Algiers in the hopes of getting promoted in return. She claimed that Ammari, on the other hand, was ambitious about getting recognition from Algiers for the quality of her literacy work. Zohra believes both were after more prestige and higher pay.

Zohra talked about an important literacy meeting held in 2009/2010. At that time teachers were informed about a new set of guidelines that would become relevant in the upcoming year. These would encompass the following conditions:

1. Classes must contain at least 10 students each
2. The classes should target three groups of women:
  - a. The women who have been attending literacy class since 2007
  - b. Children from outer rural areas who have never attended school
  - c. Children who have dropped out of school

Furthermore, the classes are to be divided by level (beginner, intermediate, advanced). On that note Zohra was told by Saidani to split her class up into three levels, making three separate classes. He said she could organize this the way it suited her best: either by teaching one class after the next, lasting about one hour each, or teaching two classes simultaneously, which would mean that Zohra would have to go between two classrooms for the duration of the lesson.

Zohra stated that Saidani was very adamant about the implementation of these changes and warned that teachers would be let go if they did not comply. To ensure this, the inspector had begun to check the class more regularly starting 2009/2010. Rather than hiring more teachers to assume the additional workload, Saidani expected the current number of teachers to teach more classes.

She also commented on the established course length limit of three years, stating it was an insufficient amount of time to get the participants on track and functionally literate at best. She reiterated how the class progress was slow and that many women still needed a lot of assistance in writing simple statements.

Another issue Zohra raised was that of childcare. Throughout the duration of the program, mothers would bring their young children with them to class. This made it difficult for the mothers to pay attention to the lesson and complete their class-work. Sometimes the mothers could leave their children at home under the care of their relatives. One mother, however, was urged by her mother-in-law to stop going to literacy class altogether because she was overwhelmed with taking care of her grandchildren ages 8 and under. Unfortunately, this woman did drop out for that very reason.

Throughout the duration of the course, Zohra said she found herself becoming more personally dedicated to the cause of teaching adult literacy. Her vocation as a literacy teacher was also respected by her family and friends, who viewed it as a noble and useful job because it supported women in their quest to gain knowledge about their religion. Overall, Zohra believes students would be better off learning in the mosque setting. This, she contended, would be more accepted by families and in turn facilitate more support for learning at home. As a result, students would be more apt to concentrate during the lesson.

Finally, when questioned about her views on the benefits of literacy and in what ways it has empowered her students, Zohra was optimistic. She pointed out that the change in women and the potential for their empowerment could not be measured immediately. Instead she highlighted that it was a process that may first become evident through the participants' children.

She gave the example of one student in particular who felt empowered by the fact that she could finally help her own children with their homework. Now that she could begin to understand what was going on in the formal classroom setting, she could better support her children's needs, which in turn boosted her own sense of self-confidence.

Zohra said literacy has improved these women's confidence in the area of religion as well. In the past many women were not aware how to pray properly. She claimed since Islam forms a significant part of these women's identity, learning the correct passages of the Qur'an for praying, as well as learning about the right times to pray without having to rely on others, is in itself empowering.

After the third year of teaching literacy Zohra left the program indefinitely to begin a new job as an English instructor at a middle school in a neighboring town about 40 Kilometers from Tiaret. She was to take the bus to work every day.

### *7.5.3 Women's Literacy Teacher Wayfat*

Wayfat, the younger sister of Mme. Ammari, was 21 and single at the time of her interview, which was conducted on April 20, 2009. This interview was brief since it took place during the wedding of the author's sister-in-law, who was also the cousin of Wayfat's friend, Nassria, the author's niece mentioned earlier. It was during this interview that the author received Mme. Ammari's current mobile phone number in order to make arrangements for further interviews.

Wayfat had been teaching a women's literacy class since the program's onset in 2007. She was enrolled at that time in the Arabic language department at the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret. It was her very first job with no prior

teaching experience. Although she was not yet a college graduate, she, too, had been assured a salary, which, in her case, was to be 1200,00 dinars a month. However, she had not been paid anything for the past six months.

Since Wayfat's sister works in the literacy leadership team, she felt up-to-date with the goings on of the program. She, like Zohra, rode the public bus to her place of work, a grade school located in another part of town. Her account of the first year of teaching began very similar to that of the other two teachers' accounts of theirs. Wayfat had to personally go door to door to recruit as many students as possible, ideally 40. She reported having recruited 35 students during her first year.

The majority of her students were married, and only a few had a job outside of the home. One student worked as a cleaning lady in an office complex, and another was a cook at the university cafeteria. Her students ranged in age from 21 to 68 years.

In general, Wayfat described the first year as being unorganized and lacking in terms of collective meetings and teacher training. The challenges she mentioned were also similar to the ones cited by fellow teachers. Several husbands were reluctant about letting their wives enroll in her class in the first place. Then she commented on the high level of nervousness and sensitivity among her adult students in the formal learning setting, especially among the older students who could barely stand to be criticized by their younger teacher.

Wayfat claimed that the program had begun to make some improvements in 2008 in terms of teacher support and training. One of the drawbacks of the second year, however, was that ten students failed to return. Three of those students had a baby, some got married, and others were overwhelmed with the learning assignments and activities. Wayfat stated that most of her students lacked motivation to practice what they learned at home.

At the time of the interview in 2009, Wayfat cited having a total of 15 students who regularly attended class. She reiterated what her sister Mme. Ammari and the other teachers said about its being imperative for the teacher to have a positive relationship with the students in order for them to enjoy coming to class and for literacy training to be effective. According to her, only a few diligent students made it up to the middle school level (the learning equivalent of 9 school years).

Wayfat mentioned that one of the hurdles that kept some of her students from moving forward was the issue of childcare. Some mothers had to bring their young children with them to class. This was not only a distraction to the mothers but to the other students as well especially when children would get off their seats and begin wandering around the classroom.

Despite the hardships, Wayfat claimed to enjoy teaching adult literacy. She feels supported by her family and friends although they are concerned about her irregular salary. Overall, she felt like the program was improving in its organization and efficiency in helping students learn.

#### 7.5.4 Men's Literacy Teacher Samia

Samia was the teacher of the men's literacy class, which ran adjacent to the women's class attended by the author. The interview took place at the grade school before class on October 11, 2009. At the time of the interview, Samia was 29 years old and single. She had completed her undergraduate studies in agricultural engineering at the Ibn Khaldun University.

Samia grew up in a household where both parents were non-literate. She has three sisters and five brothers. When asked about how she managed her schoolwork, Samia said that she counted a lot on one of her brothers to help her with her homework.

Originally, Samia heard about the possibility of teaching literacy from friends. In 2007, Samia began teaching the men's literacy class without any prior experience. It was her first job after college. Like the other two teachers, Samia rode the public bus to work. From the onset she worked under Mme. Ammari's direction, *Jamaya* Iqraa. Then from 2008 on, she continued teaching the same class under Ammari's new branch of literacy education, *subul khair*. She was paid 10000,00 dinars a month, her receipt of which, however, was irregular at times.

On the matter of M. Saidani's and Mme. Ammari's conflicting ideas and interests in literacy, Samia concurred that both sides acted within separate strategic circles. According to her, it was awkward to attend joint meetings where both were present. However, she also stated that Saidani and Ammari were capable of conducting themselves professionally in public despite their differences.

Samia, like the other teachers, recruited her own students by going door to door in Tiaret. In the beginning, she had only five students. The reason for the low turnout, she claimed, had mainly to do with the fact that men generally have less spare time than women since they go to work. And although there are many non-literate men, they either feel too ashamed or too proud to openly admit this by going out to attend a literacy class.

Samia described her students as shy and nervous in the beginning. In order to break the ice, she maintained a daughter-father-like relationship with her students and adopted a professional and respectful style of teaching. In the mean-

time, her students, who range in age from 30 to 70 years, feel relaxed in her class. The majority of students who join are older, age 50 and up.

Although the men's class is composed of all different levels, the students are serious about learning and consistently practice what they have been taught at home. The men are very upfront when they don't understand something, so Samia knows exactly where she stands with them. One of the most challenging subjects in her class is math. Samia claimed that the men enjoy learning passages from the Qur'an the most.

By the second year in 2008, Samia had up to 25 students. However, it ended up being an average of 15 who attended class on a regular basis. According to Samia, when the men did commit to a class, they attended more regularly because they had less home-bound obligations than women do, such as hosting guests, assisting with weddings, dealing with daughter-in-law/mother-in-law dynamics, etc. In general, Samia stated that male students focus better during the lesson than women do and that they never speak about family-related issues during class.

Overall, Samia spoke quite positively of the program and her experiences teaching non-literate men. Her friends and family admire her for doing a "good deed." She claimed the program had improved in its organization since its onset and that she regularly attends the meetings held three times each year near Tiaret.

Although Samia enjoys her job, she would prefer to be working in her field. If a job in the profession of agricultural engineering were to become available, she would apply. She also noted that she would rather teach children and the youth in the long term rather than adults.

From her perspective regarding her students, Samia cited the biggest challenges to be the content of the textbooks, which were too rigorous for her students to follow. As a result, it was nearly impossible for her to adequately prepare her students for the end-of-year exams. Another challenge was math. Most of her students were older and were interested only in learning the Qur'an.

When asked whether she thought literacy classes could change people's mentalities in favor of women's education, she was optimistic. However, she pointed out that it would be a slow-paced process. Samia believes that by teaching more Qur'an in literacy classes, traditional-minded people from rural areas would be more likely to be sensitized towards the importance of female literacy within the context of Islam. She claimed literacy classes were being met with less skepticism as before.

## 7.6 Résumé: Literacy Teaching Experiences

In summary, it is apparent that the experiences of the above-interviewed teachers have run a similar course. All three teachers were recruited from the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret and were either recently graduated or currently enrolled. None of the informants had had any prior experience teaching, and this was the first job they held. Unfortunately, the recruitment of non-skilled college graduates to teach adult education classes is common practice throughout the MENA region (CONFITEA V-Arab Regional Report 2003b).

These teachers were all expected to personally go door to door and recruit as many students as possible, preferably up to 40. All three collected the names of potentially interested students. However, by the time the literacy classes began in the fall of 2007, they had initially succeeded in recruiting between 7 and 15 students each.

Without prior teaching experience and very limited training from the literacy program, the teachers were ill-prepared to take on the multiple challenges that surfaced throughout the duration of the year. Each of their classes was composed of students of all ages and learning abilities. Another unexpected element that posed a problem was the difference in teaching adults as opposed to teaching children.

The formal approach to teaching adults is much different from that of teaching children. In a classroom setting, children more readily follow instructions and assignments in a uniform manner. Children are sent to school whether they care to go or not. Adults, on the other hand, have chosen to attend a class and have specific learning interests and goals they would like to fulfill or achieve. Many of the women felt offended when they were “told what to do” by their teachers. Oftentimes the adult learners felt easily frustrated when they were given an assignment that did not interest them. As a result, they dropped out (see Appendix E, see dates 19.03.2009 and 30.12.2009).

This held true especially in the case of the women’s classes. The elderly women reacted nervously against any form of criticism by their teachers. The story where a young teacher in her twenties got slapped in the face by an older student regularly circulated among the entire staff. Another hurdle was the fact that the older women learners had more difficulty focusing on the lesson and would often get caught up in conversations about personal problems at home. Due to the heterogenic makeup of the class, teachers had to alter their lesson plans and teach at a slower pace.

Teachers all commented on the challenge of meeting the benchmark of functional literacy within the stringent 3-year time period. The course content was often much too advanced for the learners, both men and women, to keep up

with, resulting in low turnout rates for the final exams at the end of the year. Teachers felt pressured to advance their students through the program without having properly met their individual learning needs. Many of the older women students were still struggling to learn the letters of the alphabet after two years.

All teachers made mention of being pressured to maintain a high number of students. They were criticized by the inspectors, who compared the low number of students with having a poor teaching strategy. One must not forget that teachers were recruited despite their lack of experience and were not given proper training after being hired.

Rather than being a source of support to the teachers, the inspector acted more like a controlling agent. The teachers admitted that they felt under constant scrutiny by the inspector's interrogation-like check-ups. One teacher confided in the author that it was of utmost importance to stay on the inspector's "good side" because otherwise he could speak negatively about the teachers to the director and they could lose their job (see also Appendix E, date 24.11.2008).

The results of these interviews demonstrate that the focus of the program was on functional literacy. According to the teachers of the women's class, most of the students barely learned the alphabet or how to sign their name by the end of the second year. Samia, on the other hand, claimed that the students of her men's literacy class had made steady progress in this area.

Another problem was the matter of payment. During the initial recruitment phase just prior to 2007, the potential candidates were told they would begin as volunteers but would eventually receive a monthly salary. Beginning in 2008, teachers received a proper contract wherein the monthly salary was fixed, ranging from 100,000 to 120,000 dinars a month (circa 100-120 Euros). Despite this, payment was either delayed by a matter of months or not made at all.

This clearly placed teachers at a disadvantage. On the one hand, they realized that what they were doing was a good deed for their fellow citizens. Many shared with the author that they were not just doing this for the money but out of Islamic duty towards their people. Although they were entitled to being paid by contract, many shared they would feel guilty if they complained. One teacher stated that she was scolded by her boss when she inquired about her salary, who reminded her that she started as a volunteer and was working for the good of her fellow countrymen.

Throughout the duration of the course, the program leadership and inspectors remained keen on the recruitment of as many students as possible. This was problematic since more students eventually dropped out than enrolled. However, a steady improvement in the organization of the program (regular meetings, more teaching training) beginning with the second year 2008 was noticed by all teachers.

One issue that was mentioned by both Zohra and Wayfat was that of childcare or the lack thereof. In both the women's classes, mothers would sometimes bring their children with them to class. None of the literacy classes had offered any form of childcare facilities for the children of regular participants. Both teachers remarked on how the presence of children distracted students from focusing on the lesson and doing their work.

Opening up some sort of program-led childcare facility would be something worthwhile looking into since at least in one case a mother was forced by her family to drop out indefinitely because her mother-in-law was overwhelmed with watching her grandchildren while their mother attended class. It is very likely that other mothers find themselves in a similar dilemma.

Finally, the matter concerning the recruitment of students under false pretences (promising participants an all-expense paid trip to Mecca or offering sums of money for regularly attending class) adds a new dimension to the pre-existing challenges standing in the way of literacy. Although the information was based on hearsay (the author did not actually witness a literacy student being lied to), it is unsettling that these rumors are widely circulating among leadership members, teachers and students alike and reveals that obstacles other than the often-cited social structural and cultural issues are hindering progress in adult literacy.



## 8 Case Study I: Women's Literacy Class Observations

The observations of the women's literacy class began on April 17 of 2008 approximately half way through the first year of the three-year span of the course. Classes took place twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The decision to enroll in the literacy class presented in this study was motivated by the fact that the author's mother-in-law had been a participant of the class since its onset in 2007. The familial connection with a student in the class prevented other participants from feeling too self-conscious during the observational study, thus facilitating prompt integration within the group. It also put the participants at ease during the personal interview phase of the study.

Although the class was observed in its entire context, the main focus of inquiry was on current literacy practices and their theoretical and practical implications for the empowerment of the female participants. It aimed to determine whether the participants showed changes beyond the regular benefits of learning how to read and write. Empowerment was measured in terms of how the effects of literacy extended into the sphere of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics (patriarchal social structure norms), and Islam.

### 8.1 Methods of Observation: A Gender Perspective on Literacy

From the first day of the class study until the end of the three-year program cycle in March 2010, the information was gathered via participatory observation and in-depth interviews. The author enrolled in the literacy class as a student completing the same tasks and assignments as her female literacy student counterparts. Also, a detailed account of the daily classroom lessons and activities was maintained throughout the duration of the study.

In general, the literacy classes coincided with the nation-wide school schedule, which began between the months of September and November, depending

on when the Eid celebration took place after Ramadan. Classes typically ran until summer break at the beginning of June.

The journal entries decreased in content during the interval of the in-depth interviews of the class participants, which took place from February until April 2009. By then, however, the author was familiar with the class dynamics and well situated amongst the students. In place of the regular class entries, a detailed protocol of the participant observations was kept during that period of time (see Appendix E and F: *Literacy Class Observations* and *Interview Protocol of the Women's Literacy Class* respectively).

While some attempts were made by the Ministry of Education in Algeria to address gender issues in the formulation and development stages of the literacy campaign, it became clear early on in the study that these efforts would not be sufficient to achieve the set goal of reducing the number of illiterate women by fifty percent by 2016. Among the main strategies mentioned were directing efforts to target girls and women living in rural and remote areas and introducing vocational courses (sewing, cooking, hairdressing and small business training) to motivate long-term enrolment.

Recalling also that two years into the program the president of the nationwide women's literacy campaign (Iqraa), Aicha Barki, made a desperate appeal to the members present at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) held in Brazil in 2009 to gather support from countries that had experienced success in mobilizing and sensitizing communities towards a gender approach to literacy (see chapter 1.1).

Although a gender perspective on literacy was lacking at the forefront of the Algerian literacy campaign, this study referred to the UNESCO Checklist of Gender Issues (Appendix A) for assessing whether the women's literacy class in the Haut Plateau met the learning interests of the participants and for measuring how the women were being empowered.

As a certain amount of regularity in the number of student drop-outs was expected before the study began, the intent was to find out whether the reasons that students frequently missed classes or stopped going altogether were related to social structure norms (patriarchal issues) and/or whether they were a result of program deficits, i.e., because the program failed to meet the participants' learning interests. Finally, the program (pedagogical teaching practices and instructional materials) was analyzed for its cultural relevance and to determine whether gender issues were taken into account.

## 8.2 The Literacy Participants and Class Dynamics

During the first year (2007/2008), there was a total of three parallel women's classes and one men's class, which took place simultaneously in different classrooms at the grade school under observation. Each of the women's classes originally consisted of approximate seven to fifteen participants, and around ten participants initially enrolled for the men's class. These numbers, however, fluctuated greatly throughout the three-year period (see Appendix E).

The first factor that contributed to the change in the number of female participants returning for the second year resulted from the cutback in the number of women's classes offered. Since the contracts of two of the original three literacy class teachers had not been renewed at the end of the first year, the number of female students returning in the fall of 2008 was considerably low. As no new teachers were hired in their place, the few students who did return joined the remaining class.

Interestingly, although several students from the other two classes did return, they immediately dropped out after realizing that their former teachers were not coming back. This corroborates the claim made by members of the literacy direction and teachers (see chapter 7) that the bond between the students and their teachers is a crucial factor that facilitates class retention and continued learning.

In hindsight, the number of participants who regularly attended class fluctuated in the beginning from seven to fifteen. After one year the class size fiercely dwindled down to a constant ten and reached a high point of 17 towards the middle of the course. The "core" participants consistently attended lessons for about two years. However, towards the third year of the course, the class shrank again to about seven, a trend that lasted for the remainder of the course.

It is important to note that the course fizzled out in March 2010, approximately two and half months earlier than anticipated. This was because the literacy instructor, Zohra, took up a position as a middle school teacher of English in a neighboring city. Towards the end, Zohra began to fall under the scrutiny of the program's director and inspector for the low turnout of students, which in turn motivated her to look for another venue of teaching. However, she returned to administer the final exam, which took place in May 2010 as planned.

*The women's literacy (Iqraa) class in progress (23+24)*



### 8.3 The Interviews and Questions

In total, 17 female literacy class participants were interviewed (see Appendix F: *Interview Protocol of the Women's Literacy Class* (February-April 2009)). The women's questionnaire was divided into 13 sections addressing gender issues related to literacy and empowerment (see Appendix G: *Oral Questionnaire of the Women's Literacy Class, Haut Plateau*).

Given each participant's particular situation, the questions employed how non-literacy in the context of rural Algeria is essentially a women's predicament. By using the participants' personal accounts as primary data, one of the main objectives of the questionnaire was to determine in what ways the functional literacy class empowers women. Empowerment was measured in terms of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics (patriarchal social structure norms) and Islam.

Due to the low retention rates exhibited by the women participants of the literacy class, some of the ways adult education policies could be changed in order to appropriately meet the needs of rural Algerian women were considered and will be discussed at the end of the chapter. The results of the interviews will be given in full summary here.

#### 8.3.1 *The Background of the Literacy Class Participants*

The first sets of questions (Background Information, Participant's Education, Husband and Family, and Children's Education) assessed who the students are, probed the socio-cultural factors (patriarchal social structure) affecting these women's literacy attainment, and took a look at the strategies they have adapted in order to overcome them. The women were asked why they wanted to become literate and were questioned about their views on higher education and employment for their daughters and for women in general.

The maximum number of participants ever reached within the three-year span of the course was 17. The majority of the class participants were marginally schooled or illiterate, having dropped out during or just after primary school. The older students had not received any formal schooling, and a moderate few of those briefly went to Qur'an school.

In the interim of the study, it soon became evident that many trends coincided with the students' backgrounds and age range. In accordance with students' social and cultural predicament, interests, and goals, the class was roughly dividable into four groups: Age 16-25; age 26-45; age 46-60; and, age 61 and up.

Almost without exception, the participants, ranging in age from 16 to 73 years, led traditional lives in the close proximity of their homes. Some married very young. (Those in the 61-and-older age group married between the ages of twelve and eighteen.) With the exception of Assia, who was the youngest participant at the age of 16, they filled their traditional roles as wives, mothers, or homemakers. On average the older women had more children, averaging 4.5 each. The number of children ranged from 0-11.

Khira, age 29, was the only woman who worked outside the home as a cleaning woman. Except for Khira and Assia, all of the participants were married, widowed or divorced. Naima, age 36, was the only participant who was divorced.

### *8.3.2 Social Cultural Barriers to Female Literacy*

The factors underlining the learning motivation of each individual student were revealed throughout the duration of the participatory observations and during the in-depth interviews. All of these women's goals were largely shaped and affected by their age and status within their individual life-cycle contexts though all expressed a strong interest to attend a literacy class. The attitudes and level of reception towards literacy from their families also had a significant influence on the progress of their learning.

Assia, age 16, was the outlier in being the youngest in the class by far. Assia originally dropped out of school just after four years. She suffered from a disability after injuring her legs as an infant and will always retain a strong limp when walking. According to Assia, the main reason why she dropped out was for being regularly mistreated (hit with a ruler) by her teacher for not bringing the proper supplies to class. She also mentioned that the teacher's general lack of support for her stemmed from a personal grudge held against her family, and she recalled how her teacher complained to her parents about her difficulty in making friends.

Looking back, Assia said she felt angry and sad about not having finished school because in her view she "did nothing wrong". She comes from a family who highly supports higher education, including that of girls. All her siblings, four brothers and three sisters, had finished school, some going on to the university. One of her sisters works in the courthouse in Oran. Assia's former struggles at school may likely stem from a lack of understanding and tolerance by the teachers and classmates towards her disability. Generally, children from rural areas with physical or mental disabilities are not schooled.

*The youngest literacy class participant (age 16) (25); Mother and child during class (26)*



Many of the married participants in the 26-45 and 46-60 age ranges had to work on persuading family members to allow them to enroll in the class. Indeed, the family members who typically had the most influence on the student's desire and ability to regularly attend class were the mothers-in-law and husbands.

A common factor hindering women's regular attendance in the 26-45 age range included their domestic duties at home. Household tasks such as cooking and cleaning, caring for children, and receiving guests were among the main reasons holding these women back from going to class. In this case it was usually the mothers-in-law who discouraged their daughters-in-law from attending class when the workload at home was high.

Aisha, age 33, for example, one of the most diligent students in the group, sadly informed our class in December 2009 of her having to leave after two solid years of regular attendance. The main reason she gave for dropping out was that her mother-in-law became overwhelmed watching her children at home. This was particularly regretful since Aisha had finally gained her husband's permission to enroll in a literacy class after already refusing her permission once before when the opportunity arose years back.

Aisha shared in her interview how elated she felt about the second chance to finally learn to read and write. For years she felt angry towards her father for not letting her go to school while she was a girl. She explained how helpless she would feel when her older son approached her for help with his homework and she was unable to support him.

Therefore, learning to read and write was a tremendous boost to her self-confidence and source of empowerment as a mother. Both she and the other women in this age bracket often ended up bringing their youngest children to class. The two remaining women without children were unmarried and divorced. Both these women still lived at home and could regularly attend class as they pleased.

Although the women in the 46-60 age range generally enjoyed more free rein to attend a literacy class away from their domestic duties than their younger counterparts, they, too, had to overcome their share of hurdles. Another case where the mother-in-law represented a potential stumbling block to the regular attendance of her daughter-in-law was Yamina, age 46. Her situation was quite peculiar. She was married to a high school teacher who also worked with Monsieur Saidani, the director of the literacy program in town, and all her children (four daughters and a son) were grown up and attended the university.

Despite Yamina's established position not only in terms of age but in social standing, she adamantly concealed the fact that she attends literacy class for fear that her mother-in-law would disapprove and cause problems. On one occasion she received a call from her mother-in-law during the middle of a lesson. In a



panic she hastily shoved her daughter, who happened to be present that day, out the classroom into the halls in order to divert the call and thus hide the fact that she was currently attending a literacy lesson.

The negative influence of husbands was the second largest factor that restricted women's long-term attendance. For example, Fatima, age 46, was finally able to convince her husband to let her attend a literacy class after 10 years. She claimed it was painful to be non-literate, while her sister-in-law and husband could both read and write. Before she enrolled in the literacy class at the grade school, she attended a class in a mosque. However, this class was no longer offered after three years.

When asked why Fatima's husband held out so long before he agreed to let her attend class, she said it had to do with his pride. To this day she would not leave the house to go to class until he first left their home. Otherwise, it would be an affront to his pride. This matter of men's pride getting in the way of women's literacy was something witnessed on several accounts by the author. A lot of men were more willing to allow their women to attend a literacy class if it was held within a mosque setting. Fatima ended up dropping out of class almost a year before it ended because of her duties at home.

In the oldest age range category, one woman waited until her husband had passed away before she attended class because she would have otherwise felt guilty. Another woman, age 51, was only able to convince her husband to allow her to attend literacy class after demonstrating that it was an Islamic tenet for women to learn to read and write the Qur'an. After her husband confirmed this with an imam, he allowed her to go to literacy class.

In general, the older women aged 61 and up, having attained the maximum level of status on the cultural barometer of the cycle-of-life, experienced the least amount of restraint, if any at all, to attend literacy class. Despite this, several of the older women decided to drop out of class midway, mainly citing that it was too strenuous for them to learn and comprehend the lessons at their age. "*Rasa bella*", they often exclaimed – their heads were full.

Some positive effects through the support from family members and close friends could be observed as well. Most often it stemmed from the women's grown children or female friends and relatives in their age bracket. It was evident that the women developed a sense of pride and accomplishment through the support and appreciation by their peers, which motivated them to continue to attend class.

The set of questions pertaining to the education of their children included what the literacy participants felt about the current educational trends of women. All participants agreed that it was imperative for women and girls to receive as much schooling as boys. The women under 61 were unanimous that girls should

complete their secondary education and believed that women should be at least 18, if not older, when they got married. Women in each age range, especially in the younger age brackets, expressed positive sentiments for women to attain higher education at the university. They did not distinguish between their own daughters and daughters-in-law with regards to age and rights to a higher education.

However, most women in the 61-and-older age range clearly differentiated between the education of their daughters and the education of their daughters-in-law. Many were not keen on their sons marrying women who attended the university in the first place. In this case, they believed that the young woman's image was negatively altered mainly because of the free association with young men on campus. Interestingly, this did not apply to their daughters. Many spoke proudly of their daughters who achieved their bac and continued their studies at the university.

The older women all were clearly against their daughters-in-law working after marriage. The older women also felt it was better for sons to marry younger women, around 17 or 18. It was evident that they feared that when their daughters-in-law studied or worked after marriage, it would impede on their domestic tasks and overall harmony in the home. For example, Bachtá, age 52, said "Who will watch the children? Who will take care of the house and cook the meals?"

In reply, Dunya, age 62, said if her daughters-in-law were employed outside of the home, it would be better if her son lived separately with his wife. She admitted that although she does not have anything against this theoretically, on a practical level she could see how this would cause substantial conflict. Dunya explained that she had been too conditioned to rely on her daughter-in-law to help her with the upkeep of the house. One of the elder women made reference to a common proverb from the Haut Plateau region: "When the *Ajusa* (mother-in-law) and the *Kenaa* (daughter-in-law) are on good terms, the devil will go to paradise".

#### 8.4 The Literacy Class Dynamics

The next set of questions (The Literacy Class, Literacy Goals, Literacy Activities, and Math and Numbers) focused on the learning dynamics of the class, as well as the participants' own goals and progress. These questions also aimed to find out whether the pedagogical practices and instructional materials used during the lessons were culturally and educationally relevant in meeting the needs/interests of the women participants.

The participants were informed about the literacy classes through T.V. reports or by the teachers who recruited them by going door to door. All the wom-

en expressed that they would have rather enrolled in a literacy class in a mosque setting. However, as no such class was possible in their area, they enrolled at the grade school.

Many of the participants, primarily the older women, shared that they initially felt nervous about attending “school” as an adult on a regular basis. These feelings of inhibition subsided as the students got more acquainted with the teacher and fellow participants. Some described how it felt to learn to read and write like “being reborn” or as if they were blind and had regained their eyesight.

The goals of the youngest participant, Assia, for attaining literacy were motivated by a variety of reasons. Among them was that of learning to read comprehensively for everyday use and lifelong learning. She was keen on strengthening her math skills and learning to read and write in order to support her hobbies, as well as for increasing her knowledge of Islam.

When asked about whether she noticed personal changes from attending class, Assia noticed that she no longer spends so much time watching Turkish soap operas on T.V. and is generally more in tune and interested in goings-on around her. Assia aimed to return to formal schooling and eventually seek higher education and employment. She dreamed of one day becoming a doctor in France.

The four participants in the 26-to-45 age range who regularly attended class during the time of the research study were interested in literacy for general everyday use such as reading and understanding street signs; reading texts during television reports; and supporting their hobbies and interests, including writing down recipes for cooking and baking.

However, both of the women with children voiced a strong interest in becoming literate in order to be able to support their children with their school work. The other two women, one divorced and the other still unmarried, entertained the idea of furthering their education by completing their secondary diploma through long-distance correspondence courses. All four women were interested in literacy for enhancing their knowledge of Islam.

The scope of interests pursued by the seven participants in the 46-to-60 age group was somewhat limited in their endeavors for literacy in comparison to the previous group. However, although the women in this age bracket were mostly interested in furthering their comprehension of Islam, they were also keen on literacy for everyday use such as reading road signs and understanding the text in television reports.

Several women voiced an interest in “catching up” in literacy skills with their contemporaries, most often sisters-in-law, who had the opportunity to at least complete primary school and possessed basic literacy skills. They strived to

attain the same literacy norm reached by most women in their generation because they otherwise felt somewhat put at a disadvantage and ashamed.

Finally, the five women in the 61-and-over age category were solely interested in enhancing their religious knowledge of Islam. They primarily wanted to learn to read and understand parts of the Qur'an so that they could practice verses for praying five times a day and for successfully completing their pilgrimage to Mecca.

Overall, the older women genuinely accepted the fact that they did not attend school in the past because that was simply how things were. Most of them dropped out after they felt they had reached the maximum level of knowledge attainment for their age.

#### *8.4.1 Meeting the Participants' Learning Needs and Interests*

Among the aims of the observational study was to take a closer look at the content of the learning materials to determine whether they supported the participants' learning needs and interests. In total each participant received a workbook for Arabic and one for math.

It was immediately apparent that these books were designed for students who had at least some prior knowledge of reading and writing in Arabic. Although pictures accompanied the exercises, the pages were primarily composed of lengthy texts printed in small font. After a brief introductory section covering each letter of the Arabic alphabet accompanied by photographs of single items to be labeled such as a fork, a curtain or a coffee pot, the remaining chapters comprised lengthy complicated texts.

Overall, the layout of the textbook had an intimidating effect on the participants' confidence to be able to work with the books long-term. According to the teacher, the workbooks were similar to those dispersed to grade school children with at least some prior experience recognizing word patterns in Arabic, and not designed for non-literate adults who had not properly learned the alphabet.

The workbooks covered a wide range of topics. Some of the texts made mention of the roles of women, alluding their heavy workload within the family. Other texts were more historical or patriarchal in nature, including accounts of famous Algerians such as Imam Ibn Badis and of former female freedom fighters. Overall, the learning content was culturally relevant and consistently related to common Algerian themes of traditions, foods, and geography. The sections most valued by the women were excerpts of verses (Suren) from the Qur'an.

Recognizing the participants' partiality to learning the verses of the Qur'an, the teacher began to implement more language lessons revolving around the

meaning of the Suren. Although this entailed a diversion from the teaching plan laid out by the workbook and the program, the teacher felt it was the only way to maintain the motivation of the students. If she strictly adhered to the exercises outlined in the book, Zohra feared she would run the risk of overwhelming the students, resulting in more drop-outs. The participants of all age groups appreciated the connection to learning how to read and write vis-à-vis the Qur'an.

Finally, approximately one year into the program, an additional venue of learning was advertised to the participants. This consisted of vocational classes (sewing or cooking-related), which were to be offered sometime in the near future at a separate venue near the school. Approximately one third of the women showed interest in signing up for one of the classes. The majority of the women age 61 and up saw no sense in attending such a course.

Several of the married women in the 26-45 age range claimed they would not be given permission by their families (husbands/mothers-in-laws) to attend an additional class though some would have been interested to join. In the end the offer to attend a vocational class was retracted because the director of The Good Way (*subul khair*), Mme. Ammari, voiced heavy criticism against its implementation because it was in the planning stages and would still be in a state of disarray by the time classes were to begin. She deemed it highly counter-productive to the participants' progress in literacy because it would divert their focus away from learning to read and write.

## 8.5 The Participants' Perspectives on Women and Education

The final set of questions in the survey (Utilities, Health and Hygiene, Medical Care, Traditional Arts and Crafts, and Islam) assessed the current living conditions of the participants while probing to what extent their views and choices regarding women and education were influenced and motivated by social structure norms, traditions and/or Islam.

All the women participants lived in households where there was electricity and close access to running water. Washing machines, though much more widespread than ten years ago, were still a rarity in most homes, meaning that a lot of the women's house-work consisted of the lengthy and strenuous process of washing clothes by hand. Though none of the women drove a car, they all had the means to be transported in a car by a male relative.

In matters related to health and hygiene, most of the participants consistently showed signs of poor dental care. The majority of women either already wore dentures, some as young as in their early 30s, or showed significant signs of tooth decay. The older women never learned to brush their teeth, and the young-

er women were not instructed to regularly clean their teeth while growing up. Assia, age 16, claimed to brush her teeth on a daily basis in part motivated by the importance placed on healthy teeth in tooth paste commercials on T.V.

Other common health issues included poor eyesight. Several of the older women had trouble reading the blackboard and were in need of corrective lenses. Two of the older women said they could not afford a decent pair of glasses. All the women in the 61-and-older age bracket suffered from some form of rheumatism. Some admitted that it occasionally kept them from attending class during the colder winter months. Many older women were diagnosed with high blood pressure and diabetes.

When the students were asked about their opinion of the situation of public health facilities in the near vicinity, the opinions were split. The older women were generally satisfied with the cleanliness of hospitals and clinics whereas the younger women were more likely to demean the poor state of hygiene. The public hospital did not meet Western standards. Among the biggest problems was the shortage or complete lack of water, which was especially critical in the delivery ward.

However, all participants were satisfied with the health care system, where medical fees were covered by health insurance implemented under President Bouteflika. Regardless of their age, they all used a combination of pharmaceutical medication and traditional remedies to cure common ailments such as a cold, headaches, or rheumatism.

The female participants all stemmed from similar social-cultural backgrounds. They all stated that Islam supported a woman's right to be educated. However, on the matter concerning women and work, the opinions greatly diverged. Overall, the older women tended to think Islam did not support the notion of women working outside of the home. The younger half of the women disagreed and claimed Islam advocates a woman's right to be educated and to work if the workplace/situation adheres to the moral guidelines of Islam. There was some slight discrepancy among the older women regarding their own daughters and work and their daughters-in-law and work (see 8.3.2).

## **8.6 Résumé: Challenges and Empowerment in Women's Literacy Acquisition**

This chapter addressed whether non-formal literacy acquisition benefits women apart from the regular gains of reading and writing. One of the primary aims of the study was to find out the ways in which the participants felt they were empowered through literacy. The definition of empowerment is relevant to and

determined by the respective cultural context. In order to shed light on a gender perspective of literacy, the results of the class observation were measured against UNESCO's Checklist of Gender Issues (Appendix A).

In the case of Algerian women living in the Haut Plateau region, empowerment was measured in terms of how the effects of literacy extended into the sphere of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics (patriarchal social structure norms), and Islam.

Complementary to the main line of inquiry was finding out whether the literacy program took initiatives along the way to implement and develop gender issues that promote the equal and long-term participation of women and men. This point of pursuit raised questions regarding the content and organization (by level and age range) of the class and whether the program responded to the participants' learning interests and needs. The former, as this study argues, hinges upon the length of participation and motivation of the women learners.

In the women's literacy class no solid efforts on behalf of meeting the participants gender needs could be perceived. Globally, most organizations still make no qualitative reference to the evaluation of adult education activities nor do they follow through with an approach for measuring the relevance of gender (CONFINTEA V General Mid-Term Review 2003:18-19; see also Medel-Anonuevo 1999:2; Stromquist 1990:5).

Throughout the literacy course, the administration made modest attempts to adjust the program's goals to meet the reality of the situation. It took about a year for the program to work through some of the bigger hitches experienced by the teachers. For example, annual meetings were implemented to help teachers become familiar with the program's expectations, as well as to offer basic training in adult education. Since the majority of the literacy teachers entirely lacked skills in the instruction of adults, they had to work through a lot of the complications on their own.

Among the main challenges facing the teachers were the heterogenic nature of their students. Classes were composed of learners from all age groups and varying levels of literacy. This continued to pose a challenge to teachers since no attempts were made by the program leadership to reshuffle the classes by age and learning level. Added to this was the narrow timeframe (three years) allotted by the program for participants to attain a level of literacy that would enable them to accomplish practical things in their culturally specific setting (functional literacy).

According to Zohra, the teacher of the women's literacy class, the meetings and inspector check-ups had the opposite effect from what she anticipated. Several teachers complained that the meetings made their existing burden heavier

because new expectations were continuously added to the list of program goals to be reached within the three-year time slot (see chapter 7). Zohra claimed that rather than being a source of support for the teachers, the inspectors served the role as controllers who were looking for flaws to report back to the direction.

Furthermore, no attempts were made by the program to alter the materials in order to better suit the diverse levels of learning. Although the content of the textbook assignments were culturally relevant, the level was too advanced for the majority of the participants to keep up. Other than the limited excerpts about the role of the women veterans during the "Battle of Algiers," the texts almost glorified the maintenance of the traditional status quo.

None of the program's materials or activities addressed or promoted ways in which women could participate in management and decision-making structures. Despite the mention of an upcoming vocational course, which could eventually enhance women's access to resources by helping them establish a small business of their own (seamstress, food vendor, etc.), such courses were never offered.

Several teachers took it upon themselves to modify the lesson plans, thus risking their jobs, for the sake of meeting the women's learning interests. They said if the students felt too much anxiety about their ability to keep up with the lessons, they were more likely to drop out. Most teachers included more topics and texts affiliated with Islam and the Qur'an in their lesson plans than was covered in the workbooks.

The discrepancy in age, motivation and level of learning considerably slowed the overall progress of the class. After two years into the course, the level of reading and writing in each age group was still at the beginning alphabet phase. Although there were a few exceptions, the majority of the class still required the support of family members to accomplish basic day-to-day tasks such as reading and understanding road signs, medical prescriptions, texts in television, and using cell phones to call out.

Another reason why students dropped out was traceable back, but not limited to, the inmost elements of traditional Algerian family structure in the High Plateau region. This includes movement patterns stemming from the patrilineal and patrilocal extended family, the sense of honor as reflected by the moral conduct of women, and the religious adherence to Islam (see 8.3.2). In many countries as throughout the MENA region finding learners and keeping them in literacy courses are common problems among adult education classes (Akkari 2004; Carmack 1992; Fetni 1987; Ramdas 1994; Stromquist 1992:54-65; Chlebowska 1990a, 1990b).

Closely related to the conformities of the family structure are the roles of the women as mothers and homemakers. This was also a frequent reason why



women were absent, especially during family gatherings such as weddings, births or funerals. On several occasions the participants brought their younger children with them to class. However, the children were a source of distraction to both their mothers and class participants, also disrupting the teachers and the flow of learning.

Although the mothers expressed their desire to leave their children at home, they often had no other option but to bring them along. The author suggested that the literacy program offer free supervised childcare during the class sessions so that more mothers would be encouraged to attend on a regular basis. The idea was well received by the teachers and participants alike. The author related this option to the local literacy direction, Mme. Ammari; however, no steps were taken to introduce in-class childcare to the program.

The worn state of the classroom furniture also added to the list of disadvantages. Although it was not a direct cause of the low turn-out rates, it did contribute to the reasons why participants failed to show up, especially during the winter. The furniture, which was the same used during the day for elementary school children (grades 1-5), consisted of low, shabby double desks and small chairs (desktops were no longer properly attached to the legs and would easily slide off).

Several of the older women with rheumatism would have been more comfortable sitting on the floor on rugs as is customary rather than squeezing their aching bodies into the creaky child-sized desks. Although they joked about the seating arrangements, it was inadequate and detracted from the quality of learning. Oftentimes the classroom heaters were not turned on or were defective during the cold winter months, which also kept many from coming.

Generally, the attention span was at the lowest among the older participants. Many of the women complained that their classmates stalled the lessons by engaging in personal conversation. The level of self-esteem in learning also tended to be lower among the 61-and-up age bracket than among the younger women. Several older participants dropped out half way through the course, claiming that their brains were incapable of taking in any more information. Towards the end of the last year, only 5-7 women attended class on a regular basis.

The findings of the three-year study in regards to the empowerment of the women participants showed that regardless of age or social-cultural standing (unmarried, married, divorced, or widowed), women were being empowered in two of the four areas under observation: self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), and Islam. A particular link between the attainment of the participant's learning interests (learning to read and understand the Qur'an) with empowerment could be established.

Several women shared that they felt a sense of accomplishment just by having the opportunity to attend a literacy class (intrapersonal empowerment). Over half the class remarked how their self-esteem had risen in the face of their peers and family since they began attending literacy class. One participant described how she felt as though she had been initiated into a previously unknown world of those who could read and write. Some participants used the euphemism of being blind and regaining one's eyesight through literacy.

Indication of empowerment in the other two areas of social participation (interpersonal empowerment) and family dynamics (patriarchal social structure norms), though not as pronounced as in the former areas, could be moderately established. For example, when participants were asked how learning to read and write has changed their lives, contributed to the wellbeing of their families and to the socio-economic progress of their community, most of the older women did not understand how their literacy could benefit anyone but themselves. The women in the 61-and-older age bracket answered with "alhamdulillah" (praise Allah) simply expressing their gratitude for the chance to attend a literacy class.

Participants in the younger age groups, however, cited concrete situations how these classes have changed their lives and helped them make a difference in the lives of their families. Two mothers in their 30's explained how coming to class has enabled them to become a source of support for their children with their homework assignments. Not only has this increased their self-confidence in their roles as mothers and educators, it has empowered them to model the ideal of becoming life-long learners to their children.

## 9 Case Study II: Men's Literacy Class Survey

In the previous chapter, the potential for women's empowerment in regard to literacy was shown to be very much influenced, as well as limited, by the support and attitudes of the families of the respective participants. Indeed, the restraining nature of patriarchal norms over women in Muslim-Arabic societies (fathers over daughters, husbands over wives, brothers over sisters and mothers-in-law over daughters-in-laws, etc.) has been well established in the research.

The observations of the women's literacy class revealed several other restraining factors of equal or comparable importance that also stand in the way of women's empowerment in literacy. However, as this study also aimed to investigate potential ways and strategies in which to sensitize traditional patriarchal families to the importance of gender equity in education for the benefit of Algerian society as a whole, a survey of the men's literacy class was taken.

The primary intent of the survey was to shed some light on what traditional-minded Algerian men, as literacy class participants, think about female literacy and higher education. It also aimed to find out whether the results showed any indication that men's attitudes towards women's education were beginning to change in the Haut Plateau.

The duration and depth of the men's literacy class survey was not nearly as extensive as the three-year study of the women's literacy class. As such, the results of the interviews are not conclusive enough to predict future trends. At the same time, however, their answers are representative of the ideals and opinions commonly shared among traditional male members of rural Algerian families in this region. Their reactions towards female literacy and higher education could be useful in coming up with strategies and approaches to help facilitate women in education.

The male participants consented to take part in the survey via their literacy class teacher, Samia (see 7.5.4). The interviews were conducted during two consecutive class times by the Algerian nephew of the author's husband. According to the nephew, though the men were eager to comply with the survey, their answers were brief.

*The male participants of the Iqraa Functional Literacy Program (27+28)*



## 9.1 The Literacy Participants

In total, ten participants ranging in age from 32 years to 73 years old were present for the interviews. According to their teacher, Samia, usually 12 students attended class on a regular basis. A common, apparent feature of the men's literacy class and the women's literacy class was that the participants were dividable into separate age groups. The men's class consisted roughly of three different age brackets: age 32-40; age 41-65; and age 66-73.

All the men originally grew up on farms in villages in and around the Wilaya Tiaret in the Haut Plateau region. Of the ten participants, six were in retirement (age 67-73). Two of the men were unemployed (age 39 and age 49). The majority of the men had worked or still worked as farmers. Many of them also worked as taxi drivers or salesmen during the slower seasons to supplement their incomes, which is very common among farmers in this region.

When asked how they initially found out about the literacy class, the men cited a variety of sources. These included: by word of mouth through a family member, a neighbor or friends; during Friday prayer at the Mosque; television; or simply on the streets during an idle chat.

## 9.2 The Survey Questions

The men's questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first two sets of questions (Background Information, and Family and Education) assessed who the learners are while probing the socio-cultural factors affecting their literacy and that of their female family members (wives, sisters and daughters).

Close attention was given to the men's perspective on women's literacy in their respective families. However, the questions about women in work and education were subtly woven into the body of the survey. The inconspicuous placement of questions about women's work and education was intentional. The author wanted to avoid drawing extra attention to the role of women so as not to raise suspicion and so that the opinions of the men participants would remain as authentic as possible.

### 9.2.1 *The Participants' Family Background and Education*

The questions in the first two sections covered a diverse range of topics, including place of birth and occupation, a family history of literacy and education, the participant's age and the age of his spouse at marriage, his father's thoughts on

the literacy and education of his sisters, and his own thoughts on the education and work of his wife and children with an emphasis on the status of his daughters.

Typically, the men's wives were younger than they were at the time of their marriage. The age gap between the spouses was much greater among the older participants (age 67 and up) whose wives were around 10 years younger than they were at the time of marriage. The wives of the younger participants (age 32-49) were around 5 years younger than they were when married. Two of the older men's wives were as young as 14 when they were married. One of the younger men's wives was 16, whereas the other wives of the younger participants were in their early 20's. None of the participants was married to more than one wife at the same time (polygamy).

The majority of the men had experienced a minimal amount of formal education. The main reasons cited for this were the lack of schools altogether or the distances from their homes to the schools (that is, the schools were too far away). Of all ten participants, only three had ever attended a formal school. The youngest participant (age 32) went to school for just one month. The second participant (age 67) had attended for one year, whereas the oldest of the three (age 71) attended for 6 years. Half of the participants had attended Qur'an school at brief intervals during their childhood. None of the participants' parents could read or write.

When asked about the education of the men's sisters, only two participants (age 32 and age 47) claimed that some of their sisters had attended school. However, it was unclear how many years they went in total. Two of the participants (age 49 and 67) admitted that their sisters regretted not having attended school, saying they felt left out. The remaining six participants claimed that their sisters accepted the reality of their situation, stating it was normal for their generation.

Without exception all of the participants' own children attended or were currently enrolled in school. Except for one participant who had only boys, all the other participants' daughters went to school as well. Of the ten participants, five felt that girls were better in school than boys, whereas three of the participants claimed boys were stronger at learning. One participant stated he did not know, and one participant felt that both boys and girls were equally good at school.

In the survey the participants were asked to state how many years of schooling they thought were enough for girls, and in particular for their daughters. All were in agreement that girls should finish school. Eight of the ten participants expressed their desire and support for their daughters to complete their schooling. Their reasons why they thought their daughters should finish were varied. Four participants (age 32, 67, 70 and 71) stated that it is important for girls to

complete school in order for them to be prepared for society. Another participant (age 39) said finishing school would improve their lives. Two participants (age 67 and 69) pointed out that since they did not have the chance to go to school, their children should have it better.

One of the participant's (age 67) daughters had already finished school and attended the university. Interestingly, the oldest participant (age 73) stated that it was important for girls to finish their studies because otherwise they would not find a job. Commonly, men from this region belonging to this generation preferred their daughters to drop out of school after they reached the age of 12 or 13. Currently, however, it is more and more common for girls to complete their secondary schooling and go on to the university (see chapter 10). Finally, the 49-year-old participant quoted a well-known proverb in the region, "Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness," thereby implying that girls are better off if they go to school.

### **9.3 Men's Literacy Class Dynamics and Learning Interests**

The second sets of questions (Literacy Class Dynamics, and Learning Interests) probed the pedagogical practices and instructional materials used during the lessons as well as whether the men believed their learning interests and goals were being met. To begin with, the participants were asked to explain how they felt about the opportunity to learn how to read and write as adults and to what degree they thought a literacy class could change or benefit their lives. This section also surveyed the participants' opinions about women attending literacy classes and especially what they thought about their own wives enrolling in literacy or other extra-curricular classes.

The participants exhibited beginning levels of literacy and many shared common literacy goals. The older participants were primarily focused on learning to read and understand the Qur'an, whereas the younger participants had other goals in addition to increasing their knowledge of Islam, such as learning to read road signs and books/newspapers and being able to fill out papers. All ten participants voted on a regular basis, and five of them owned a cell phone and could use the cell on their own.

Several men expressed similar sentiments about their status as non-literate adults. Many said they felt "ashamed" or "lost" because of not having learned to read and write and how this literacy class has helped them feel better about themselves. Some men pointed out that although they have noticed only a slight change in their literacy abilities, they feel a sense of pride since they attend class.

Others claimed to have experienced a big personal gain and are able to read on their own.

Overall, the participants were very pleased with their teacher, Samia, who, they said, accommodated their learning needs well by allotting a lot of class time for rehearsing verses from the Qur'an. In addition, the participants were optimistic that the literacy class would improve their lives. Some of the mentioned benefits resulting from attending literacy class were: "To make life easier", "To become a better person", and "To become modern". All stated that they enjoyed coming to class on a regular basis and expressed an interest to continue building their literacy skills as lifelong learners.

Another line of inquiry in these sections of the survey addressed the subject of women as literacy learners. In particular, the participants were asked to communicate what they thought about their own wives attending adult literacy classes. Of the ten participants, six clearly articulated that they thought it was a good thing for women to attend a literacy class. However, only three of these six men were in favor of their own wives attending such a class.

One participant was undecided and left the answer blank, while another stated he was against his wife attending a literacy class. Another participant said there was no need for his wife to attend class because she could already read and write. The sixth participant in favor of women's literacy classes shared that he encouraged his wife to enroll in a class but that she did not want to go.

The remaining four participants refrained altogether from responding to the question about women and literacy. Of the four participants, two were equally undecided about their own wives attending a literacy class, while one claimed that his wife was too busy to attend. Towards the end of the literacy course in March 2010, a new participant enrolled in the men's class, and his wife simultaneously joined the adjacent women's class across the hall. According to his wife, Fatima (age 66), her husband was very much in favor of her attending class and they both walked to the school together.

The participants were asked whether they believed literacy classes could change or benefit non-literate women's lives. Half of the participants thought literacy classes would have a positive effect on women. Their reasons included: "To help them learn to read and write" (age 71), "To help them gain knowledge and become better Muslims" (age 67), "To help them with their prayer and to read the Qur'an" (age 49), "So that they will become more intellectual (age 32), "So that she can become a human being" (age 69).

The majority of the men participants stated they would prefer their wives to attend a literacy class at a mosque. In conclusion, the participants were asked to state their opinion about additional vocational courses (sewing, cooking, small business skills) offered to women in the region and how they felt about their own



wives and daughters attending such a course. Seven of the ten participants reacted positively towards such classes, whereas three of the participants thought they were unnecessary and unimportant. One participant (age 39) stated that he disliked the idea because he already “provided his wife with everything she needs.”

### *9.3.1 The Participants' Perspectives on Women in Work and Higher Education*

The questions that followed focused on women in work and higher education and the participants' thoughts about a work-life balance concept, i.e., women who combine the priorities of “work” (career and ambition) with “lifestyle” (raising a family, leisure, health, and Islam).

To begin with, the responses to the question on how they felt about women going to the university were varied. Three of the participants stated it was “normal” for women to attend the university. Four of the participants expressed positive sentiments: “I have a good feeling about women going to the university” (age 67), “It is most important for women to study” (age 67), “It is a good thing” (age 47), and “Women need to finish their studies in order to find work” (age 71).

Less enthusiasm about women and higher education was shared by three of the participants. One (age 69) admitted his apprehension about the trend of more women going to the university. Another (age 49) felt that it was fine for women to study at the university as long as the academic environment adhered to Islamic guidelines. The oldest participant (age 73), however, stated that it was unnecessary for women to study at the university because “women did not have a need for it.” Finally, one participant (age 70) had nothing to comment on the matter and left the answer blank.

Nine of ten participants thought it would be a good idea for the universities to be split by gender. One of the participants stated it was not necessary to designate an all-men or all-women university. Some of the reasons the former welcomed the idea of a single-sex university were: “Women would be more respected” (age 69), “A non-mixed university would fall within Islamic guidelines and be accepted by Allah” (age 49), and “I am for a single gender university because it is very noisy if women are present” (age 67).

Other questions probed how the men participants felt about women and work and whether they thought women should discontinue working or drop out of the university after marriage or whether they thought women should be able to do both simultaneously. Four of the ten participants clearly stated that women should stop their studies and no longer work after they marry. However, three of these four thought it was fine for women to attend the university and work until

they started a family. One of these four (age 73) was against the idea of women attending the university but was fine with women working if the workplace adhered to Islamic principles.

Three of the ten participants were in favor of women continuing their studies and work even after marriage. Two participants thought it was fine as long as the husband and family of the woman were also in favor of her studying and/or working after marriage. One participant left the answer blank. Interestingly, the majority of the participants who were in favor of their daughters and of women in general studying and working after marriage were against the idea when it came to their daughters-in-law. In this case it was clearly better for them to remain at home and care for the family after marriage.

Finally, the participants were questioned whether they thought women in the Haut Plateau have changed. Furthermore, they were asked to elaborate whether they thought women have changed in a positive or negative way. The participants were all in agreement that women living in the Haut Plateau have indeed changed. Only three participants believed women have changed in a positive way; however, they did not explain their answer (ages 32, 47, and 67). Four participants believed women have changed in a negative way.

One of the participants stated that "woman now do what they want" (age 39). Another participant (age 67) cited a similar reason for the negative change of women stating that women have no *hashma* (shame/modesty) and are less inhibited to do as they please. The other 67-year-old participant thought women have changed for the worse because they no longer carry on their cultural traditions. The oldest participant in the group (age 73) believed women have morally changed for the worse. Three participants left their answers blank with no explanation (ages 49, 70 and 71).

#### 9.4 Health and Hygiene

The last section of the survey (Health and Hygiene) was a brief inquiry of the participants' general state of health. As was the case with the women participants, most of the men consistently showed poor signs of dental hygiene. Five of the ten participants age 60 and older wore dentures, whereas some women were already in their 30's when they began wearing dentures. This difference could be indicative of the difference in the make-up of male and female bone structure since both the men and women participants admitted to not brushing their teeth with a paste containing fluoride on a regular basis. Overall, the men did not elaborate on their health issues as did their female literacy class counterparts.

However, commonly mentioned ailments included high blood pressure, diabetes, headaches and leg pain.

### **9.5 Résumé: On Changing Attitudes toward Women in Literacy, Higher Education and Work**

As was stated in the introduction of the chapter, the men's literacy class survey was not intended to be as comprehensive as that of the women's literacy class observations. One of the primary intents of the interviews was to probe the views of traditional-minded men, as literacy class participants, on female literacy and higher education. The survey aimed to reveal common-practice attitudes towards women's education in the Haut Plateau and explore whether these attitudes are beginning to change. The results of the survey are also intended to support literacy advocates and policy makers in coming up with strategies that sensitize patriarchal societies about the importance and benefits of gender equity in education.

The following summary focuses on the responses given by the men participants to the questions regarding women in literacy, education and work. In general, the majority of the participants' female family members (mothers, sisters and wives) were non-literate. The exception was their daughters, who were either currently attending school or had already completed their secondary diploma.

One of the participant's daughters was enrolled at the university. Without exception all ten participants responded positively about the importance for girls to finish school. However, eight of the ten participants expressed the desire for their own daughters to complete their studies. In any case, the overwhelming positive reaction towards girls attaining their baccalaureate contrasted sharply with the common practice just a decade ago of pulling girls from school once they reached the age of puberty.

With regard to literacy, though six of the ten participants responded positively toward adult female literacy, only three of them were in favor of their own wives attending a literacy class. The remaining four participants left the answer blank, suggesting a degree of uncertainty on the matter. Overall, the responses reveal that despite shifting attitudes about the general prospect of women attending literacy classes, traditional mindedness continues to stand in the way of its actual implementation on a personal level.

One of the main hindering factors mentioned was the location of the classes. The participants would have felt more at ease if their wives could enroll in a literacy class located in the mosque instead of at a school or other "public" facility. When asked why they thought literacy was beneficial for women, half of the participants responded positively. Their answers often highlighted the im-

portance for women to learn the contents of the Qur'an so they could practice Islam properly.

The final sets of questions pertained to the participants' thoughts on women's higher education and employment. In order to put the participants' responses in context, it is important to consider that in rural areas the university has a tainted reputation as a place where young people foremost go to socialize or get romantically involved rather than as a place of serious study. As such, young women carry the risk and burden of being stigmatized as morally questionable if they choose to study unless they are otherwise known for their piousness and correct conduct in advance.

Several of the participants in both the women's and men's literacy classes alluded to local newspaper articles citing cases of unwed female students giving birth in the university lavatory. These so-called horror stories take on a die-hard dimension for traditional-minded families, thus making it difficult for those who already question the need for women to attain a university degree to look beyond them.

Overall, the responses from the men's literacy class showed that the participants differentiated between the rights and needs of women in general with the rights and needs of their daughters and daughters-in-law to attain a higher education and work. The majority of the participants stated that they felt women should have the right to higher education and to work, especially if their financial situation called for an additional income to help support their families. However, when it came to their own daughters and daughters-in-law, their answers were not as consistent.

Furthermore, the participants were more reluctant about their wives becoming literate and their daughters-in-law going to the university or working than they were about their daughters. Their responses indeed correlate with the typical stance of rural patriarchal societies on the rights and obligations of women, depending on their age and status (married, single, divorce, elderly or young). Moreover, this stance is even more clearly evident in the case of the older participants of the women's literacy class, who shared similar opinions with regard to the education and employment of their own daughters and daughters-in-law.

The women participants were equally more lenient about their daughters enrolling in the university and working than with themselves who were expected to remain in the domestic sphere and uphold the traditional roles of mother and home-maker. They themselves, as older literacy learners, had their own traditional hurdles to surmount: Whether their husbands' hesitancy to let them attend class because it was uncalled-for or a waste at this stage in life or whether their own inhibition to do something out of the ordinary.

In closing, although the male participants voiced definite opinions about the current situation of women's literacy, higher education and work, many of which falling within the predictable framework of traditional-minded societies, their responses were generally very positive regarding the prospective education and employment of their daughters. This is a clear indication of how the attitudes of traditional-minded societies are beginning to change.

The responses of the men's literacy survey also revealed that if Islamic guidelines were respected and incorporated in literacy classes, universities and places of employment, they would be much more at ease about their female family members taking advantage of educational and job-related opportunities outside the home.

So, for example, by changing the venue of literacy classes and arranging to have more mosques available for literacy courses, literacy programs would be more acceptable, more sustainable, and ultimately more effective. In particular, efforts to promote women's literacy would be more successful if for no other reason than that more women would likely enroll for literacy classes at mosques and would continue participation for longer periods of time.

Emphasizing the value that Islam places on the education of both men and women could be an effective way to promote gender equity in the Haut Plateau. However, as the following chapter illustrates, despite the stubborn attitudes commonly shared by rural families, women are going out and getting advanced degrees, and many of those are becoming professionals in their fields.

## 10 Case Study III: Ibn Khaldun University Gender Survey in Tiaret

Within the rural Algerian context, most literate women now acquire literacy well beyond initial alphabetization. However, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters, this was not always the norm. Until the 1990's the majority of female education, especially for girls living in rural and remote areas, ended with a grade school or, at most, a middle school certificate. Currently in the Haut Plateau, there is an upward trend of women attending local universities and subsequently entering the work force.

Women make up the overwhelming majority of those who attend universities, representing 61 percent of graduates of tertiary education nationwide (Amira El Ahl, Spiegel International Online 2008; National Social and Economic Council (CNES) July 2008; see also Altbach *et al.* 2009:206 who cite 59% of female students in Algeria in 2007).

The results of the CNES study indicate that women are becoming increasingly represented in elite professional fields. Women compose 37% of the justice sector, 50% of educators, 53% of health professionals and 32% of senior positions in the state. Similar trends in women's education have also been observed throughout the MENA region (see also UNDP Human Development Education Index; Agnaou 2001, 2004; Akkari, Vol. 5, N°2, 2004; Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine Moghadam Oct. 2003; Mernissi 1987; Spratt 1992:121-132 and the World Bank: *The Road Not Travelled*, 2011 <http://go.worldbank.org/JLMVU016R0>).

In Algeria, tertiary education is entirely subsidized, and the government has invested heavily in the creation of 25 universities across the country. Together with dozens of other establishments for higher education, they attract more than one million students (EACEA, *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique* 2010:11-13).

So far, literacy as a prerequisite for women's empowerment and educational advancement has been the underlying theme of this research. However, as higher education correlates to and extends beyond female literacy, this chapter takes a brief look at the current situation of a group of students enrolled at the Ibn

Khaldun University in Tiaret. The results shown here could impart reasonable clues on the progression of gender equity in work and education in Algeria.

In this survey, the educational experiences of 27 students were documented. Nine male students (age 21-25) and 18 female students (age 18-37) from various disciplines (French, English, Spanish, Math and Informatics, and Law) were assessed. Included in the sample was the background knowledge of a female graduate in the field of agricultural engineering (Kahina, born in 1978 in Tiaret). Kahina remained a consistent source of the current situation of women in work and higher education throughout the research.

### **10.1 Gender Survey Questions and Responses**

Among the main aims of the survey was to capture the attitudes of parents and students (both male and female) towards changes in gender roles and women's status as a result of higher education. In addition, the survey wanted to find out more about the kinds of on-campus experiences women, in particular, are having during their studies. Questions probed whether female students were content with the situation of higher education (quality of teaching and curriculum), what their goals were, and whether they felt their goals were attainable. The survey was compiled in English and dispersed among a random selection of students by an informant (female English student), who translated into Arabic when needed.

Although the survey was geared to both female and male students, the final sets of questions were divided by gender. In total, the survey comprised roughly 40 questions and included the following sections: 1. Family Attitudes and Educational Background; 2. Academic Field and Career Goals; 3. University Experiences and Critique on Campus; and, 4. Gender Perspectives on the Roles and Status of Women in Work and Higher Education. The responses of the male and female students will be discussed respectively and a comparison of the results will be summarized at the end of the chapter.

### **10.2 Female Students' Responses, Family Attitudes and Educational Background**

In the first set of questions, the female students were asked about the educational backgrounds of their families. In addition, they were asked to describe their families' attitudes towards women in work and higher education. Logistical questions regarding students' place of residence during the course of the semes-

ter session (campus dorms or commuting from home) and whether students held jobs alongside their studies were also included.

Of the 18 female students, 13 stated that both their parents attended formal schooling and/or Qur'an school and that both could read and write. Three students claimed that only their fathers attended some schooling and/or Qur'an school and could read and write. Just two students said that neither of their parents had attended any form of schooling and were non-literate. When asked who helped them with their homework, 14 students said close family members (mother, father, or sibling) helped them with school assignments. Three students stated that they completed their homework with friends or on their own. Only one student's parents hired a tutor to help her with school work.

Incorporated in this section were a series of questions probing the attitudes of the students' parents toward the trend of women attaining a higher education and pursuing a career. Questions were especially included to find out how parents felt about their daughters studying at the university and working after their studies. Almost all the female students (17 students) claimed their parents were highly supportive of them studying at the university.

Common sentiments relayed by students were that their parents were proud of them, that it was perfectly normal for women to attend the university, that it was good for their future, and that it helped build a sense of responsibility. One student expressed her parents' hesitant concern for their daughter's safety and well-being on a co-ed campus. However, she also shared that her parents were proud she was getting a higher education.

The families' responses regarding women in work after completing their studies were more differentiated. Four students stated that their parents felt it was counter-productive for women to work in terms of educating and caring for their own children and families. Two families specified that they felt it was better to remain home while one had small children but had no issues with resuming one's career once the children were more independent.

The remaining 14 students stated their parents supported the idea of women entering the workforce. Among some of the statements of support included: "Women need to work"; "Working helps improve women's status"; "Work helps women contribute to their families financially"; "If women invest so much time in their studies, they should be able to work"; and, "Work is a sign of women's success".

When asked, whether they felt their parents differentiated between them and their siblings in regards to gender, academic ability, and who could study or not, all the students claimed that their opportunities to enroll in a university were equal to those of their siblings regardless of their gender or academic status.



Some students, however, noted that their siblings were still too young to study and have not yet made a decision whether to pursue a higher education.

Half of the women lived at home with their parents and either walked or took a local bus to the university. The other half resided in student dorms on campus during the semester. On average, the latter half came from nearly 80 km away. One student came from over 150 km away. These students frequently commuted home by taxi or bus on the weekends and remained home during all the holiday breaks (summer, winter, Ramadan). In Algeria, there are no fees for a residence on campus for students who live at least 50 km from the university.

The responses to the inquiry about the day-to-day atmosphere in the dorms were generally very positive. The female students shared that they often gathered together in the T.V. lounge to watch Turkish, Egyptian or Syrian soap operas dubbed in Arabic during the class breaks or that they met up in one another's dorm rooms during the evenings to eat and talk.

Only the student of mechanical engineering spoke negatively about her experience living on campus farther away from her home. She claimed that many female students who resided in the dorms behaved immorally, would go out with male students in the evening, or drink alcohol. This made her feel uncomfortable and ashamed towards her parents to the point that she decided to enroll in a university in her home town so she would no longer have to associate with these issues. The last question in this section inquired whether the female students had a part-time job. Regardless of where students lived, none of them worked alongside their studies.

*The Ibn Khaldun University Dept. of Engineering and Computer Sciences (29);  
Inside view of a female student's dorm room (30)*



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### **10.3 Academic Field and Career Goals**

The students selected for the gender survey were enrolled in diverse academic fields of study. Of the 18 female students, 12 women majored in English, three studied math and informatics, one was enrolled in the Spanish department, and one majored in mechanical engineering. The oldest female student in the sample originally came from Baghdad with her husband and two teenage children and was studying to become an English teacher. This section of the survey aimed to find out more about what Algerian women are currently hoping to gain from a higher education and whether they felt they could achieve their academic goals.

The overwhelming majority of the students (17 students) stated that they wanted to work after their studies. Only one woman (mechanical engineering student) shared no interest in working after she finished her degree. According to her, although it was important for her to complete her studies successfully with high marks, she was ultimately finishing for her father's sake. Among the group of 18 women, this student placed a high priority on the Islamic role of women as educators of their children based from home. This is also why she felt it was counter-productive for women to work if they had a family.

Seven students expressed an interest in finding a teaching job in the field of education (secondary or university level), and eight students stated they would definitely like to work after their studies but did not specify in which field. The remaining two students voiced an interest in working in the business industry. Although several women expressed a level of uncertainty about the prospect of

getting a job in their particular field of preference, they stated they were confident that they would find something suitable after they finished their degree.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women in Algeria are entering the workforce more and more. This could be attributed to the labor laws passed in November 2011, which impose a minimum quota for the economic participation of women (*Les contraintes et opportunités pour l'emploi des femmes en Algérie*, ILO, Algiers, 2014, pending publication).

For example, in 2011 the workforce in Algeria was composed of approximately 17.7 percent women. Algeria, Syria and Iraq were among the countries with the lowest level of female economic participation in the world ([http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS\\_234011/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_234011/lang--en/index.htm)). Reports made by the National Statistical Office of Algeria show that by 2013 the female economic participation rate had risen to 19 percent ([http://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/Donnees\\_Stat\\_Emploi\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/Donnees_Stat_Emploi_2013.pdf)).

Women's confidence in getting a job after their studies stems to a large degree from their awareness of mechanisms put in place by participating governmental entities (*Ministères Délégué à la Famille et à la Condition Féminine*) to ensure improved access to and creation of employment for women. This, however, has had the reverse effect on men's prerogative to find work. More and more, men claim that women are taking their jobs. According to the CNES report, the current rate of unemployment among the youth has doubled and is even higher among university male graduates. In contrast, female students' long-term retention in tertiary education surpasses male students, who are leaving their studies to find work (Donnees Stat Emploi 2013).

## 10.4 University Experiences and Critique on Campus

Recently in Algeria, a global reform of the system of higher education was implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to meet the educational needs of the country imposed by the latest socio-economical data reports. The latest LMD-system (License/Bachelor - Master - Doctorate) was first launched at the University of Tlemcen in 2004-2005 and was offered only to newly enrolled students (Megnounif 2009:1-2). Since then the LMD-system has been adopted by most universities in Algeria.

One of the main areas of criticism shared among students on campuses nationwide is how this system negatively affects their prospects in finding work in their respective fields because it dilutes the value of their diplomas by giving equal status to less-qualified degree holders in the job market. The disfavor of

these reforms culminated in scattered strikes and protests during the wave of unrest in the Arab World in the spring of 2011.

In Algiers alone, 500 students gathered at this time to register their disfavor of the recent law. However, due to the year-long ban on public gatherings dating back to the decade of insurgency in the 1990s, students who protested were severely beaten with sticks by police. Throughout this time government opponents rallied in protests to demand jobs and democratic change. (Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/algeria/8339158/Algeria-students-protest-Algiers.html>).

Despite the Ministry of Higher Education's official efforts to update the role of Algerian universities to attain the goals outlined in the mission statements listed below, many students doubt the integrity of their government's intentions to improve the situation of education and employment. As is outlined in the guidelines of the Ministry of Education's mission, Algerian universities aim to:

- Provide quality training.
- Make a real osmosis with the socio-economic environment, developing all possible interactions between the university and the outside world.
- Develop mechanisms for continuous adaptation to changing jobs.
- Be more open to global developments, especially those of science and technology.
- Encourage diversity and international cooperation by the most appropriate terms.
- Lay the foundations for good governance based on participation and consultation. (Note d'orientation de Monsieur le Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique portant *mise en oeuvre de la réforme des enseignements supérieurs*, Janvier 2004.)

However, despite such confident claims, the Algerian youth have been disappointed too often by amendments promising progress and betterment in higher education and vocational training. Again and again, the Algerians feel they have been set up for failure by their own government. Since the 1970's, the Algerian university has also gone through a series of reforms, in accordance with the changing socio-economical needs of the country in the name of keeping up with the evolving state of science and technology (Bennoune 1988:231-234).

Although the achievements in the fields of education were quantitatively high in terms of an increase in the number of pupils, students and trainees, the meager quality of the pedagogy and training rendered the system of education incapable of adapting to the needs of the national economy, which ultimately led to redundancy or unemployment (Bennoune pg. 234-235). Already dating back

to the late 1980's, Bennoune (1988) recognized a gradual decrease in the turnout rate of male university graduates in the job market. Bennoune (1988) attributed this phenomenon to the poor quality of education and inadequate vocational training.

According to the UNESCO report on *Trends in Global Higher Education*, "The academic profession is under stress as never before. The need to respond to the demands of massification has caused the average qualification for academics in many countries to decline. It is possible that up to half of the world's university teachers have only earned a bachelor's degree (in China only 9 % of the academic profession has doctorates, 35% in India)" (Altbach *et al.* 2009:xv).

At the Ibn Khaldun University, several students expressed their disillusionment around the recent reforms of the university system in the survey as well. Many students claimed the LMD-System would be disadvantageous for them in finding a job in the competitive economic market. In concrete terms, one male student shared how his Magister degree in engineering would take a total of 7 years to complete. He explained that newly enrolled students now have to study only for 5 years to get a LMD (License-Master-Doctorate) Master's degree and still attain the same level as a Magister.

Other points of critique mentioned by students in the survey were a lack of student-teacher communication. A high number of students (15) complained that teachers seemed disinterested and unavailable. Many students (13) felt that this stemmed from the fact that professors were poorly trained and thus incapable of answering questions adequately. Some students (5) remarked that teachers/professors were unjust to the point of corruption and cited cases where teachers accepted bribes from parents to give high marks to pass their sons/daughters.

Kahina (born in 1978), who graduated from the Ibn Khaldun University in 2001 at the age of 22, described her own experience with corruption while studying engineering in agriculture. Kahina specialized in food industry science, completing her final thesis project on how to prepare foods by using natural emulsions such as olive oil and spices in products like mayonnaise, margarine and chocolate. She passed her finals with high marks and was ranked among the top ten of her class.

Due to her solid performance, Kahina's professor assured her that he would continue to endorse her work. This, however, was not the case. According to Kahina, after her professor became head master of the department, he neglected to follow up on his commitment towards her, and as a result she drifted out of her academic niche. Sometime later Kahina claimed her former professor took sole credit for her research findings and had been promoted on those grounds.

Since then Kahina tried to find a position related to her field of study. She took the entry exam to become a food inspector on two occasions, passing both

times. However, each time she applied for one of the four positions available in Tiaret, the job was given to someone else even though that person had achieved lower results on the exam. When she inquired about the job, she was told her name was not on the list. Somehow it had been mysteriously removed. According to Kahina, “The job was probably given to a friend or relative of the director. If you know the right person, you can inherit a good job regardless of your credentials and professional competence.”

Kahina admitted that being a food inspector is a challenging job for a woman in Tiaret. She cited accounts where female food inspectors had been physically assaulted after issuing a negative citation. One woman was stalked by a store owner, who slapped her in the face near her home in broad daylight for being given a critical citation for the state of hygiene in his store. Kahina said female food inspectors are often the ones sent out to control whether food guidelines have been properly followed. “Women are left with the dirty work. They have to write citations if the bread is stored next to the laundry detergent while the male colleagues sit back in the office and drink coffee.”

In general, Kahina argued that women are not taken as seriously as men are in such positions because male shop keepers, especially in rural areas, do not like to be told by a female inspector that they are not abiding by the guidelines. She also added that her main motivation for applying for such a position was simply to earn some money.

Kahina said she would have been willing to work as a representative for an American and French cosmetic company; but because the company was unable to pass the international clearance requirements, she never got the opportunity. In 2012, after ten years of trying to establish herself in her field, Kahina applied for unemployment, which would entitle her to a scant sum of around 1,000 dinars a month (less than one hundred U.S. dollars), and was rejected.

Since the World Bank has subsidized the Algerian government’s implementation of a gender quota in the economic market, women’s increased presence and achievements in the field of education and employment have been a widespread topic in the Algerian news: television, local newspapers and online journals. These reports often glorify the government’s efforts to promote women’s equality, offering a skewed picture of reality as Kahina’s experience shows (see also Magharebia *Algerian women outpace men in academic achievement*, by Said Jameh Algiers 31/08/08 [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2008/08/31/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2008/08/31/feature-01)).

Other sources of critique mentioned by the Ibn Khaldun University student survey included the lack of materials and literature in libraries and the state of technical resources (computers). Students resented not having any practical hands-on involvement in the learning process. Under the new system, student

involvement should be a high priority so that the students' spirit of initiative can be cultivated unlike the situation that prevailed under the previous authoritarian system where students were in a more passive role and were essentially spectators. The majority of the students surveyed (all nine male students and 13 of the 17 female students) expressed doubt about the integrity of the LMD-system and how it would benefit them in the long run.

## 10.5 Gender Perspectives on Women in Work and Higher Education

The final section of the survey was divided by gender. The main intention here was to find out more about the students' gender perspectives (male/female) on women's higher education and increased presence in the work force. In particular, the questions examined the male students' attitudes toward the changing roles and status of women as a result of higher education and work.

### 10.5.1 Female Students' Perspectives

From the perspective of the female students, the first set of questions probed what they believed their male student counterparts thought about women who studied and worked. Other questions inquired how the female students were experiencing their own roles as students of higher education and how they viewed themselves in terms of status change. As an increase in women's education is linked with lower fertility rates, the final questions surveyed what female students believed was an ideal age for marriage and how many children they would like to have.

Overall the female students expressed a sense of positive feedback from members of the community toward women who study at the university. Of the 18 female students, 13 said they felt as if they were highly regarded as people who knew what they were doing and as intellectuals whose academic training improved their status in society. Five students felt as if the community deemed it normal for women to attend the university, and only two students stated that they felt the community looked down on them as though their moral integrity had deteriorated.

When asked about their own view of themselves as higher education learners, all female students gave a variety of positive responses. Nine students stated that they felt a sense of pride. Others used terms such as *educated*, *confident*, *independent*, *responsible* and *strong* to express how they felt as university stu-



dents. Three shared they felt more included in society, and one said she was fulfilling one of her dreams.

So far, the women's perceptions of themselves as university students and their role within society were clearly positive. However, their responses to the questions concerning their assumptions of what their male student counterparts thought of them were markedly moderate. Here the women's replies ranged from positive to neutral to negative with more emphasis placed on the lower end of this spectrum. Beginning with the positive assumptions, three female students said men prefer it if women work because they are better prepared to contribute to the family income. One student claimed that men prefer to marry women who study and work because they are more intelligent and thus more compatible as a partner.

Some of the more neutral reflections given by the female students included that men should regard women who seek higher education as equals, i.e., as being entitled to the same rights to study as men. One student claimed that men were beginning to come to terms with the fact that more women are attaining university degrees and entering the workforce. Two students believed men's attitudes toward women in work and higher education varied depending on their family structure and own level of education. Three students admitted to not having any idea about what men think of women who study or work.

Outright negative presumptions of how men regard women who study and/or work were given by half of the female students surveyed. One student argued that male students were competitive and jealous of the achievements made by female students. Another female student believed that men thought women who studied felt superior to male students. More than half of the female students believed that men preferred it when women stayed home. The reason given for this was that men would think that women would become too liberal or even immoral (have a boyfriend) if they lived on a university campus away from home. As a result, the women felt they would not be respected by male students.

The question of a female student's morality was a frequent subject already among both the adult male and female literacy learners. Therefore, the survey also addressed the negative stigma of female university students transgressing on campus by regularly interacting with men or having a boyfriend. Of the 18 female students, seven openly admitted to currently having a boyfriend or having had one in the past. Of those seven only one claimed it was in alignment with Islam to have a boyfriend before marriage. Two students said it was Islamic to have a boyfriend if the relationship only went to a certain point (no physical contact). Two students said having a boyfriend was allowed in Islam if the woman planned to marry the man. The last two shared that they were not sure what the Islamic tenets concerning romantic relationships were.

The only married student, an exchange student from Iraq, stated that it was clearly *haram* (unlawful) for men and women to have a love relationship before marriage. The remaining students who had not ever had a boyfriend also stated it was *haram*. What these results show is that the stigma surrounding female students having close relationships with men (a boyfriend) is not completely unfounded. Nearly half the women surveyed were currently in or had been in a romantic relationship with a man.

Another question linked with the interaction of men and women on campus was what the female students felt about the possibility of attending an all-women's university. Five students welcomed the idea of a single-sex campus. Many cited Islam as the overriding reason for preferring an all-women's campus. Others said they would feel more relaxed studying just among women. One student expressed indifference and said she would equally enroll in either a co-ed university or one just for women. Five students shared clear disapproval toward an all-women's university. They felt it was important to interact with men in order to get to know the opposite sex better and understand how men think. Others said it was better to hear different perspectives during lectures. One described an all-women's university to be "like food without salt."

Finally, the survey wanted to establish what the female students currently thought what the right age was for a woman to get married. Until fairly recently the majority of women living in the Haut Plateau region married between the ages 17 and 21 years old. The age bracket given by the female students in the survey ranged from 25 to 30 years old as the right age for a woman to get married with the strongest tendency pointing to about 28 years old. Furthermore, the number of children they wished to have ranged from 1 to 2 children in contrast to much higher numbers given by women in this region ten years earlier (see also Spratt for similar results of education and literacy and its relation to participation in the labor force and health and fertility in Morocco 1992:121).

### *10.5.2 Male Students' Perspectives*

Similar gender questions were given to the nine male students surveyed at the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret. However, the main difference here was that they were asked what they thought about women in work and higher education whereas the female students were asked to project how they thought men perceived women who study and/or work in addition to what they thought about themselves. One of the main intents of this inquiry was to check men's reactions to the influx of women on campus and in the labor force and to determine

whether rural attitudes towards women in work and higher education were beginning to change.

In order to place the male students' comments within the context of their rural backgrounds, the first gender question inquired what their families thought about women in work and higher education. Four of the nine male students said their families supported the idea of women studying at the university and entering the work force. They said their families thought women who studied were responsible and were better off, i.e., were in the position to help support their spouses financially.

Two students claimed their families were indifferent toward women who studied or worked, and another student said his parents thought it was normal. Finally, two students declared their parents flat out rejected the idea of women attending the university and/or working outside of the home. All families thought women should discontinue their studies and stop going to work after they had married, especially after having children.

The next line of questions examined what the male students themselves thought about women who studied at the university and/or worked. The same four students whose parents supported women in work and higher education also answered positively. Their descriptions of women who studied included terms such as *ambitious*, *successful*, *intelligent*, and even *sexy*.

The remaining five students admitted they thought it was better for women to remain home until they got married rather than enroll in tertiary studies. Of those five, one claimed that women who studied exhibited bad behavior by freely intermingling with men, i.e., were immoral. As to women's status within the community, three male students thought that tertiary education improved women's position in society. One student saw no benefits for women who studied, and the rest left the answer blank.

Another question probed what men thought about the social interaction between men and women on campus. Four of the students asserted that contact among students was genuinely pleasant. Two claimed relations to be the same across genders as they were between male students. Three students thought the situation between male and female students was bad. One felt disrespected by female students on campus. Another criticized female students for being immature and not taking their studies seriously. In his view most women were enrolled at the university purely for social reasons.

In regards to women and work, six of the male students gave positive responses to women's endeavors to find jobs. Theoretically, they supported women's increased presence in the labor force and highlighted the benefit of women's ability to contribute financially to their families. At the same time, it was evident that although men expressed positive sentiments towards working women, the

majority of the male students gave certain stipulations for the duration and kinds of work that would be suitable for women and, in particular, for their future wives.

Of the nine students, only one expressed unconditional support for women to work, even after she married and had children. He explained that men need the financial support of their wives due to the ever-rising cost of living. Two students gave the green light for women to work but not to study and would prefer to marry a woman who stayed home altogether. Four of the male students expressed support for women to work even after they got married, yet not after the point of having children. Two students were against the idea of women working altogether, married or not, because it was *haram* for women to work outside the home with other men.

The men were questioned about the kinds of jobs or professions they valued most for women. Aside from one student, who contradictorily professed to want to marry a modern-looking (“European-dressed”) woman who stayed at home as traditional wives do, while at the same time expressing mostly admiration for professional female dancers, the remaining male students valued professions for women having a tradition of high status, such as educators, doctors or pharmacists on the one end of the working continuum and homemakers on the other. To them unless the women worked in a field that was respected by society, the only respectable alternative was for women to remain at home where they worked as the sole supporters and caretakers of their husbands and children.

Following the questions pertaining to work, the survey covered the topic of women in politics. Two students believed more women should become involved in politics. One of them mentioned that he admired Hillary Clinton, the US foreign minister during the time of the survey. Some students made mention of Lousia Hanoune, the leading member of the workers party in Algiers, albeit in a negative light and mostly referring to how she looked like a man rather than commenting on her political views and competence. One student was clearly against the idea of women entering into the political sphere because it was *haram*. The remaining students expressed indifference as to whether women were politically active or not.

When asked whether they thought women have changed and, if so, in what way, the responses were divided. Four students claimed women have changed for the better and cited characteristics such as being strong, independent, modern and European. The remaining five thought women were changing for the worse because they are becoming more European and less mindful of morals.

The same question addressing the implementation of an all-women’s university in Algeria was given to the male students. Their reactions were similar to those of the female students. Two of the male students rejected the idea, saying

that it would be boring. Three students considered it a positive alternative and referred to the Islamic aspect of a single-sex campus. Two students pointed out that women would fare better academically if they were to interact solely with women. Finally, one student thought it depended on the nature of the woman because if a female student tended to be more rebellious (for example, got involved romantically with men), then an all-women's university would be the ideal place.

Another line of inquiry, similarly given to the female students, was what the men thought about the ideal age for a woman to marry and how many children they would like to have. Overall, men's ideal age for a woman to get married averaged between 2 and 4 years younger than the ages given by the female students. The ages ranged between 16 and 30 years old with four of the students citing the age of 25, plus or minus one year. The male students shared that they would like between none to four children with a majority claiming to want to have 2 children.

Finally, the male students were asked about their romantic involvement with women and what they thought about it from an Islamic standpoint. Of the nine students, five admitted to having a girlfriend, one shared that he was friends with several women platonically, and two said they had no relations with women. The overwhelming majority claimed it was *haram* in Islam to have relations with women outside of marriage. Two students argued it was morally acceptable in Islam if one planned to marry the woman, and one said he was unsure what guidelines Islam has for extra-marital relationships and just prays for forgiveness.

### **10.6 Résumé: Access and Gender Equity in Higher Education and Employment**

The student survey summarized above aimed to assess the situation of accessibility and equity in higher education and employment in the Haut Plateau from a gender perspective. In light of the changes that have taken place at the tertiary level worldwide during the past half century, including the massification of higher education (Altman *et al.* 2009), another goal of the survey was to investigate whether changes in traditional attitudes towards women's increased university enrollment and presence in the labor force could be detected among students and their families in the Haut Plateau.

The results of the gender survey above show women's ongoing interest in attaining a higher education and suggest the possibility of change in women's status in the long run. At the same time, lower enrollment rates and the number

of drop-outs among male students reveal that men no longer equate a tertiary degree with the guarantee of finding a job in their field.

Although university tuition is entirely subsidized by the Algerian government, cost remains a barrier to many men attempting to complete their fields of study. Aside from the waved costs of tuition, students are faced with indirect costs such as living expenses while residing in the dorms and a loss of income during the semester. In this sense the increased number of women students in relation to men does not automatically reflect gender equity in higher education, nor is it an indication that women are becoming better learners as their male counterparts at the tertiary level.

Many male students expressed their disenchantment about the prospects of entering the job market in their fields because they simply are not finding suitable work after they finish their studies. One man described the situation in this way:

“If the boys leave the school or lycée or university, then it is because they have no interest in them once they understand that they are damned to unemployment from the very start. Many authors of online articles such as *Magharabia* attribute this decline to men voluntarily leaving for work or women outpacing men in academic achievement, but they are severely mistaken. The disgusted young people understand that they are damned to unemployment and prefer to put the apron on rather than spend years of hard labor only to find themselves being *hittistes* [Algerian street slang for a jobless young man who bides his time leaning against a wall] or simply just traffickers. It should be known that we are in a country where jobs are obtained not through competence or professional qualification, but through connections, corruption and regionalism. No one can ignore that certain positions are hermetically sealed off, for example: Sonatrach, Sonelgaz, ADE, wilaya and daïra government positions, etc.”

The survey responses made by both male and female students revealed that they thought it was easier for women to find a job after their studies (see also National Social and Economic Council (CNES) July 2008). Many students also cited the often-referred-to example of male university graduates in Tiaret who end up as taxi drivers despite having obtained a college degree.

One of the problems arising from a development like this, especially in more traditionally-minded areas, is that it might instigate a wave of resentment from males who are becoming chronically underemployed. This in turn could have an adverse affect on the social changes taking place as result of women's higher education and on attitudes toward gender equity.

If Algerians associate women's increased university enrollment and participation in the work force with men's decreased presence in these areas, regardless

of merit, they may be less likely to recognize these social changes as progress. In the most severe case it could create a backlash in the form of a restored inclination to return to traditional gender roles.

On the relation between gender equity and student drop-outs, Altman *et al.* (2009) point out that:

“Social equity will not be achieved through access to further education alone. In order to fully enjoy the benefits of higher education and to contribute to the society and economy in which they live, individuals need to complete their program of study. True progress depends on high levels of completion for all population groups” (Altman *et al.* 2009:45).

The results of the gender survey conducted at the Ibn Khaldun University verify that increased female enrollment at the post-secondary level has indeed become an established fact, with a strong tendency of increasing. However, despite women’s detectable increase in the job market, their long-term participation still remains a matter of debate. Although women have been able to make remarkable advances in the realm of higher education, their sustained economic participation from roughly 17% in 2011 to 19% in 2013 remains relatively low ([http://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/Donnees\\_Stat\\_Emploi\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/Donnees_Stat_Emploi_2013.pdf)).

Most women in the Haut Plateau, unless they are employed in more elite professions such as education, medicine or law, stop working when they get married or after they begin to have children. This correlates with the responses made by students and their families regarding women’s roles and work in the Haut Plateau.

According to Aquila, a married female professor of veterinary medicine (age 35) at the Ibn Khaldun University, if it had not been for her own mother who agreed to care for her two young daughters during the week, she would never have been able to complete her PhD thesis and continue her lectures. Her husband, who works full time as a secondary English teacher, decided to move his wife and children out of his parents’ house once a conflict of interest arose between his mother and wife about whether she should continue to work.

Originally, his mother agreed that Aquila would be able to continue her studies and work when they married. However, after their first child was born, the mother almost instinctively fell back into her traditional role-pattern (mother-in-law/daughter-in-law) and was frustrated by the situation. The mother-in-law is currently back on good terms with Aquila, who now has three children, is finishing up her PhD and working full-time as a professor.

In retrospect, this situation worked out positively for all parties because the husband supported his wife’s decision to work and moved his family into their own home separate from that of his parents. This in turn was only possible be-

cause he had a good-paying job and thus the means to finance such a move. Aquila's insight gave additional acuity to the situation of women and the common struggles involved with having a family while establishing a career in traditional-minded regions.

As the results of the student survey began to unfold, among the more interesting discoveries made were in the ways the opinions of the male and female university students varied depending on the educational background and attitudes of their parents and families. In many cases the students' responses regarding women in work and higher education mirrored Aquila's situation.

Beginning with the female students, the majority of the women surveyed stemmed from households where both parents could read and write. Nearly every student (17) was supported by her parents in her endeavor to study at the university. Furthermore, the majority of students (14) were backed by their parents in their interest in entering the formal job market after their studies (see 10.2). Overall, the women were aware of governmental policies designed to safeguard female representation in the work force and responded optimistically about the prospects of finding a good job relative to their field of study after graduation.

On the other hand, the majority of male students' responses toward women in work and higher education were much more differentiated, some to the point of contradiction. On behalf of their parents, most of the male students (5) initially related positive sentiments toward women who studied and worked after graduation. Only two sets of parents strongly disapproved of women who enrolled at the university and/or were formally employed. All parents, however, were in clear disfavor of women working after they had married and started a family.

The male students' own responses similarly resonated with the comments they relayed from their parents. Though four students responded in favor of women attaining higher education and working (the same four men whose parents theoretically supported women who studied and worked), the remaining five students were not convinced that women should continue their studies at the tertiary level. This also suggests that young men from the Haut Plateau tend to continue to entrust their mothers with traditional marriage role-patterns (see also Germain Tillion, *My Cousin, My Husband* 1966:198).

The survey specifically asked the male students whether they thought it was better for women to stay home after marriage. Five students answered yes. Two claimed it was up to the women to decide but added that women should stop working after they had children. Only two claimed to be comfortable with women working regardless of whether they were married or had a family. In general, the reasons cited by the young men why married women should not work re-



flected deep-rooted mentality of the role of women as caretakers of their husbands and families.

Several men specifically shared that they wanted to marry a woman who solely tended to their needs and cared for their children (see 10.4.2). One student explained that women who work or study were “not part of [their] tradition”: “That is not what my mother and grandmother did. Who will care for me and my children? Who will be at home if guests arrive?” Several men also expressed their concern about marrying a woman who wanted to work because it could potentially cause a rift between their wives and their parents.

Another issue concerning the male students and their families was the negative stereotypes associated with women who study and/or who work. Oftentimes women’s chances in marriage decrease if they study or work because their moral image is tarnished (daily interaction with men on campus, going out on their own). This is also linked with the growing commonality of men and women getting romantically involved during their studies.

Some men who were dating women at the university admitted to having no intention of marrying them later and that they preferred to marry a woman who never had a boyfriend (for similar patterns in Morocco see Susan Schaefer Davis, *Changing Gender Relations in a Moroccan Town*. In: Tucker, J. *Arab Women: Old boundaries new frontiers*, 1993:217-222).

In consideration of female access to and changing attitudes toward women in work and higher education in the Haut Plateau region, the university survey revealed slightly contrasting results. From the perspective of the female students and how they viewed themselves as higher academic learners and their participation in the formal job market, the responses were very positive. Almost every woman interviewed in the survey expressed optimism about her access to higher education and the future prospect of finding a job in her field.

Women in rural areas have been consistently enrolling at the university and these numbers are steadily rising. The survey revealed that parents’ attitudes have changed from allowing only a select number of boys in the family to attain a higher education to providing an equal chance for sons and daughters to enroll in the university and pursue an academic career. However, in the case of women’s participation in the work-force, both the male students and their parents expressed reservations, especially after marriage and starting a family.

Overall, the results of the student survey correlated with educational trends seen in other areas within the MENA region (Akkari, Vol. 5, N°2, 2004; Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine Moghadam Oct. 2003; Mernissi 1987; Spratt 1992:121-132 and the World Bank: *The Road Not Travelled*, 2011). In their report, Altman *et al.* (2009) cite an ongoing trend of the global massification of higher education, including the Arabic States since the 1998

UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. In subsequent declarations, equal access to higher education on the basis of merit, regardless of gender, was repeatedly emphasized (Altman *et al.*: Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution 2009:iv).

Although higher education has become globally more widespread and is generally described as a positive development leading to greater social mobility and increased access for more individuals, including rural inhabitants and women, Altman *et al.* (2009) point out some of the challenges that go along with this expanding phenomenon.

“In its simplest form, greater access to higher education means making it possible for more individuals to enroll. Despite many policy initiatives in recent years, broader postsecondary participation has not benefited all sectors of society equally. Research has demonstrated that the challenge is complicated by a large number of variables. Truly providing equal access to higher education means overcoming the social and economic inequities within each nation and the corresponding disparities that result” (Altman *et al.* 2009:39).

Equal access to higher education and women’s participation in the work force have been addressed by many nations. Policies have been deliberately put into place to counteract inequities at the tertiary level. In Algeria under the Bouteflika regime, similar implementations have been put in place by the *Ministères Délégué à la Famille et à la Condition Féminine* and confirmed by the National Social and Economic Council (CNES) 2008 and the International Labour Organization (*Les contraintes et opportunités pour l’emploi des femmes en Algérie*, ILO, Algiers, 2014).

Overall, women’s participation in higher education in Algeria has expanded greatly under president Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika since he was elected for the first time in 1999. This is among the many reasons why he has been the longest serving president in Algeria, surpassing Houari Boumédiène. Recently on April 17, 2014, Bouteflika was re-elected again following a second constitutional amendment allowing him to run for yet a fourth term.

Despite persistent traditional attitudes of disfavor toward women who work, Algerian women have attained equal enrollment in higher education, a trend with a strong indication for continuing in the future (Altbach *et al.* 2009:206). Pursuing a career while establishing a family, however, remains a constant hurdle for women in the Haut Plateau to overcome. This is a challenge more manageable when husbands, mothers and mothers-in-law, etc. provide support.



## **Summative Assessment and Research Outlook: Changing female literacy practices and the empowerment of women in the Haut Plateau**

Since the late 1950's, the concepts and policies concerning adult education have evolved from modernization policies to literacy and then to lifelong learning and empowerment through education. After the *World Conference on the Education for All* (WCEFA) in 1990, literacy programs throughout the world have shifted their focus toward gender parity and empowerment in education. UNESCO has been among the leading researchers in the field of literacy and gender equity, notably in its *Gender Checklist for the Integration of Gender Issues in the Evaluation of UNESCO's Programmes* (UNESCO 1999). Subsequently, literacy programs have begun to address gender equity and women's role in development.

In line with this course of action in 2007, the national literacy campaign in Algeria (Iqraa), led by its president and founder, Aicha Barki, claimed to achieve a significant increase in the literacy rates of families in rural areas and of women and girls in particular. Among Iqraa's official program strategies for drawing women from remote and rural areas and motivating their sustained participation in adult education classes was the adding of courses such as embroidery, sewing, and hairdressing (see 3.6).

The following is a summative evaluation of the objectives, the methodology, and the findings of the research. Some of the limitations of this work are considered, and its theoretical and practical implications for the design of gender based literacy programs in Algeria are discussed. The empirical ethnological data collected during this study are meant to be of use to policy makers for developing a gender-based framework for the evaluation of a literacy program that efficiently addresses women's issues/needs and empowerment.

The primary ambition of this study was to examine the impact of the current functional literacy program on female participants of an adult education class in a rural setting of the Haut Plateau region. It aimed to determine whether benefits of literacy extended beyond the usual gains of learning how to read and write into the sphere of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics, and Islam. Here empowerment

was defined in the context of adult literacy to mean the set of feelings, knowledge, and skills that produce the ability to participate in one's social and economic environment and affect the political system (Stromquist 2009a:2). On a local level, the correlation between gender, literacy and empowerment in relation to the efficacy of the adult education instruction to non-literate women was assessed.

In order to understand the present influx of women in higher education and increased participation in the formal work force and why, at the same time, the majority of the adult non-literate population in Algeria are female, a historical review of women's participation in education dating back to before the French invasion was related in *Part Two (Women's Status in Literacy and Education: A historical, cultural and Islamic perspective)*. Here the high value placed on the Islamic education of males and females prior to the arrival of the French was illustrated. The outcome of the case studies on women in literacy and women in higher education and employment was explained in *Part Three (Empirical Case Studies of the Iqraa Functional Literacy Program and Ibn Khaldun University (Tiaret) Survey)*.

While this study maintains that the sustainability of literacy greatly builds upon the evaluation of adult education programs in assessing their impact on learning acquisition, it became apparent early on during the class observations and interviews with members of the literacy leadership that specific guidelines for evaluating gender issues had not been set in place and thus were not considered by the Iqraa program.

Researchers of literacy have generally witnessed more commitment to an approach to adult education that mainstreams gender. However, although a positive trend in the expansion of learning opportunities for girls and women, as well as a sharp increase in the numbers of girls and women that take advantage of such offers, has been recognized, most organizations still make no qualitative reference to the evaluation of adult education activities nor do they follow through with an approach for measuring the relevance of gender (CONFINTEA V General Mid-Term Review 2003:18-19; see also Medel-Anonuevo 1999:2; Stromquist 2009a, 1990:5).

Similar findings have also been published in the *Mid-Term Report of Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab World* (2003). Upon closer examination of adult education opportunities in this region, it has become evident that the majority of Arab countries continue to base their evaluation on the quantitative rate of increase or decrease in the level of participation in adult education in terms of enrollment statistics rather than including qualitative aspects regarding the relevance of the gender question (CONFINTEA V-Arab Regional Report 2003b:5).

Notwithstanding the absence of a formal framework for the evaluation of gender issues in the Haut Plateau, this study aimed to identify the learner's profiles and investigate the circumstances surrounding their non-literacy. More specifically, the socio-cultural obstacles hindering their participation and educational progress were considered. The questionnaire also probed their literacy interests/needs and analyzed the effectiveness of the curriculum and class organization for literacy attainment.

The remaining summary is a recount of the results of the women's literacy program evaluated from a gender perspective as outlined in the *UNESCO Checklist of Gender Issues* (Appendix A). This is meant to go towards establishing a frame of reference from which to measure future women's literacy programs in the Haut Plateau.

In the Planning, Implementation and Participation stage of the program, several points coincided with the checklist. With regard to whether women were involved at the planning or formulation stage of the NGO campaign, Aicha Barki, president of Iqraa, was actively involved on a national level throughout the duration of the program in raising awareness for the current situation of women's education and in seeking advice from other countries in how to best support women's literacy (CONFINTEA VI). On a local level, one woman, who was both a teacher and the only female member of the program direction, played an influential role in the decision-making process affecting the program proceedings (see 7.3.1).

Prior to the implementation of the literacy program in 2007, sex-disaggregated statistics/data (data collected and tabulated separately for women and men) were available though only regarding the enrollment of women and men. Women and girls living in rural and remote areas were clearly outlined as target groups (see 1.1). However, no particular strategy on how to recruit and sustain this respective target group was mentioned or observed other than that the literacy teachers went door-to-door to inform the public of the program.

In terms of Relevance, i.e., whether the program identified and responded to the specific interests and needs of the participants, the results were varied. Although the textbooks covered a range of topics that were culturally relevant to traditional women's roles in Algeria (e.g., women as homemakers and women's role in the war of Independence), they failed to include examples of women's current involvement in politics and education and did not promote ways in which women could participate in their country's development.

The program's formal pedagogy was, for the most part, a replica of what is being taught in grade schools. However, the numeracy skills (math), language and grammar, and social science exercises exceeded the comprehension levels of the adult learners. As a result, the majority of participants, who were not con-

cerned about learning these subjects in the first place, felt overwhelmed. In response to the overwhelming interest of the older women participants in learning how to read the Qur'an, several literacy teachers under the direction of the female leadership member, informally altered the lessons laid out in the workbook by focusing on Islamic topics and verses from the Qur'an.

Overall, the older participants (age 61 and up) were interested in expanding their knowledge about Islam: How to recite and understand the verses in the Qur'an and how to improve their literacy for prayer. The learning interests and needs of the participants representing the middle age range bracket (age 46-60) expressed an ambition for a wider range of literacy activities. In addition to improving their practice of Islam these women were keen on learning to read newspaper articles, writing recipes for cooking, and understanding road signs or texts streamed in television.

The younger learners (age 16 and 26-45) exhibited the widest variety of literacy interests. Although they shared many of the same interests as their older female counterparts, including Islam, these participants were more inclined to get back into the formal system of education and, in some cases, continue their studies at the tertiary level and establish a career.

Other than the program's formal mention of the intended target group, no notice was taken of concrete attempts to contribute to achieving the objectives outlined in the *UNESCO'S Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework* (GMIF 2002-2007). For example, the program did not differentiate between the needs/realities/participation of girls, young women and older women (see 8.6). This posed an enormous challenge for teachers, who in many cases were teaching for the first time.

As regards to Effectiveness and Efficiency, the program responded poorly to the practical needs of the participants. Several participants would have clearly benefitted from the offer of an on-site, free-of-charge childcare option during class times. Most of the women with young children did not receive regular support from home, so they either brought their children along or missed class altogether in order to care for them.

The semi-annual meetings designed to provide training for new teachers and to update the staff on latest events regarding the program was open to both male and female staff members of the literacy team. However, many of the teachers complained that they did not receive the teaching support they anticipated. Furthermore, the majority of the teachers were not paid as outlined in their teaching contracts (see 7.5.1).

Many women voiced an interest in attending literacy classes in a mosque setting. This was mainly due to the fact that their husbands and families would feel less apprehensive about their meeting in a "public" place on a regular basis.

In some parts of town, arrangements could be made to accommodate these requests. However, this was not true in the case of the class under observation.

The majority of the staff members involved in the decision-making process related to the program were men with the exception of the only female member of the leadership, Mme. Ammari. Though it was possible to establish herself as a solid member of the direction team, her presence and influence were not always well received by her male counterparts (see 7.3).

The Recommendations and Lessons Learnt for future literacy programs included dividing classes according to age and level. The learning materials would then need to be coordinated to match the needs and interests of the participants in each respective class.

Other things to consider would be making more classes available in mosques and offering free childcare, both of which would facilitate higher enrolment rates and long-term attendance. As the mosque setting was culturally more accepted by families, they would be more likely to support their female member's literacy interests more at home. Furthermore, training procedures for teachers and the members of the leadership team would need to include topics related to gender issues.

The Composition of the Team members involved in the decision-making process of the program in the Haut Plateau consisted primarily of men (program director and inspectors). Though Mme. Ammari was not formally trained as a specialist in gender interests, she played an influential role in all major decisions affecting the organization of the program. Her dedication towards meeting the needs and interests of the women participants could not be overlooked.

The teachers of literacy were all women, many of whom lacked experience in adult education. Several teachers adapted a learning-by-doing approach. They, too, demonstrated an honest intent to meet their students' learning interests even if it meant deviating from the lesson plan outlined in the program materials. Their efforts are commendable when one considers the deficiencies they have to overcome and the number of obstacles stacked against them from the very onset of the program.

Many of these factors have been mentioned in Part Three and have been explicitly outlined in chapter 7. In summary, the main hindering factors include the inadequacy of teacher training. Teachers were not prepared to teach adults in various age categories with varying degrees of literacy. One may recall from the outset that the women's literacy class was comprised of a highly heterogenic group of learners from age 16 to 70 years old who not only exhibited diverse levels of literacy but asserted a variety of needs and interests as well.

As a result, the women employed a wide range of roles (daughter, mother, mother-in-law, etc.) and goals (religious, educational, career) according to their



traditional lifecycle and personal aspirations. These factors posed an unyielding challenge for the literacy teachers who, having minimal training in the field of adult education themselves, struggled to keep up with the multitude of demands inflicted by the situation. In some cases, teachers were not given the opportunity to create student-teacher relationships, which are imperative for providing classroom stability over the course of the three-year program as well as facilitating learners' long-term participation.

Finding learners and keeping them in literacy courses are common problems among adult education classes (Stromquist 2009a:2, 1992:54-65; Kagitcibasi, Goksen, and Gulgoz 2005; Akkari 2004; Carmack 1992; Fetni 1987; Ramdas 1994; Chlebowska 1990). The same held true for the female literacy class participants in the Haut Plateau. Learners were recruited by way of door-to-door invitation from the teachers.

During the three-year period of observation, the attendance patterns of the participants could be closely monitored. Several learners struggled to attend on a regular basis. Most often their absence was attributed to childcare needs, socio-cultural norms about leaving the home, domestic obligations to guests, family-related events such as marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a family member. The number of female participants steadily declined during of the three-year period from an initial 17 participants in 2008 down to three in 2011.

The factors underlying the retention and motivation of students in a literacy program necessarily involve the support and participation of the program/school, the learners themselves, the learners' families, and the community (Stromquist 1992; Agnaou 2004; King & Hill 1993). In some incidences, a network of support for the participants was detected. Those women who were supported by their family members attended longer and on a more regular basis.

Participants whose families held less regard for adult literacy attainment or disapproved of their female members leaving the home on a regular basis either missed class frequently or were among the first to drop out. In rural areas families are often bound by traditional roles for which the women are held accountable. Among the obstacles that stands in the way of Muslim Algerian women to this day is to reconcile the rediscovered Islamic right to education with the tradition of honor upon which the patriarchal society was built (Minai 1981:123).

The Impact of the literacy program on the women participants in terms of how women have benefited from the class was noticeable to different degrees in the areas of self-concept (intrapersonal empowerment), social participation (interpersonal empowerment), family dynamics (patriarchal social structure norms), and Islam (see chapter eight).

A sustainable impact on the target group was problematic inasmuch as the learning needs and interests of the participants were not being adequately met.

Other hindrances to women's long-term enrollment stemmed from patriarchal social structure norms and a lack of childcare.

The program's results with regard to human resource development and capacity-building of women showed no significant signs of change. However, the program did contribute to the educational enhancement of two younger participants. For the youngest participant of the literacy class, age 16, the re-entry into formal education after almost a decade was easily facilitated by her enrollment in the literacy program. One female learner, age 29, was awarded a scholarship to enroll in a long-distance course leading up to the baccalaureate, so she could continue her studies from home.

Although a list of vocational courses (sewing, cooking, hairdressing, and small business training) were initially announced to all women participants of the literacy program, their actual implementation was halted by members of the leadership for organizational reasons but also because it was feared those courses would hinder the women's progress in literacy (see 7.4).

So far, the current claims of a "literacy strategy" in Algeria are limited to the amounts of allocated funds, which are ultimately aimed at reducing the size of the non-literate population to a number adhered to by MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). The adult education program (Iqraa 2007) is, in a strict sense, limited to being just another *functional literacy* course. In the case of rural Algeria, this concept alone has proven itself insufficient to engender and sustain an interest in acquiring and increasing literacy skills long term.

The intention here is not to disregard the concept of *functional literacy* altogether. Indeed, it encompasses several honorable and useful characteristics denoting the importance of literacy acquisition, regardless of how much or little, as essential for a meaningful and complete life on an everyday basis in all societies. The *functional* approach to literacy is, however, insufficient to generate the kind of social-cultural change that significantly increases women's participation in decision-making areas -- whether domestic/familial or public/political.

The findings of this study support the research of women in adult education conducted in a variety of regions. A common claim is that literacy classes are intentionally used as a means of reproducing and perpetuating women's traditional roles as household managers and mothers or relegating women to other positions of dependence (Aagnaou, Morocco 2004; Chlebowska, developing countries 1990b; Longwe, Zambia 1991). Several authors also point out the added burdens that many women must overcome in their quest for an education, including physical and psychological factors such as subjecting themselves to becoming potential topics of ridicule (Ramdas, India 1994; Stromquist, Brazil 1997; Egbo, Nigeria 2000).

According to Sara Longwe, a feminist activist based in Lusaka, Zambia, women living in traditional patriarchal societies will begin to collectively criticize their respective situations if they are given the opportunity to widen their level of consciousness through critical approaches to literacy (Longwe 1999:22). She developed a method for analyzing gender issues popularly known as the *Women's Empowerment Framework* in the global feminist and gender literature. This framework has been used on numerous consultancies undertaken with African government gender departments, development agencies and civil society organizations on how to identify and address gender issues for sustainable women's empowerment (see 2.5.4).

In Algeria, the female literacy participants were clearly not seeking social change, nor were they interested in taking on a transformative role in the development process of their community/country. Aside from this, the Iqraa program has, however modestly, contributed to the achievement of gender equality by making literacy classes for women and girls from rural and remote areas more assessable. Furthermore, where the progress in learning was slow for most, solid indication of how the learners were being empowered through literacy could be established both via participatory observations and through the class survey.

Many learners shared their sense of empowerment simply by being part of a collective literacy campaign targeting rural women nationwide. In retrospect, the interview process was a positive experience for the learners because it was a tribute to their efforts and gave them the opportunity to reflect about their past. Through the process of inquiry, the women became consciously aware of their situation and were validated for their efforts to become literate.

At the most basic level, the questionnaire demonstrated that the learners have been empowered in terms of raising their self-esteem and confidence. Many learners expressed pride in attending a literacy class and interacting with written material on a formal and regular basis. Overall, the women were happy and eager to share their personal accounts of their progress and their impressions of the class.

The cultural benefits of literacy could be seen to encompass Islam as well. Women were empowered by learning how to practice their religion in accordance with the Five Pillars of Islam (declaration of faith, prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage). Islam continues to constitute a major part of rural Algerian's cultural identity, wherein learning to recite and write verses from the Qur'an is significant. Therefore, the ability to practice Islam in accordance with the Islamic principles fulfilled a valuable learning need and interest of the participants.

Central to the main theme of this study has been the notion that female literacy can be effectively promoted if the literacy programs meet the socio-cultural needs of the participants. Fundamental to this perspective is the recogni-

tion that the cultural context of particular social groups where literacy takes place, i.e., the ways participants in interaction employ literacy forms while engaged in meaningful activity, plays an important role.

This necessitates a strategy that implements cultural inclusivity practices in the class ranging from the class setting (mosque/ grade school/ factory, etc.) to the content of the literacy materials (Islam, cooking recipes, electric/water bills, reading road signs and newspapers, helping children with their homework, etc.). Campaign strategies need to underline how literacy enhances the existing traditions by falling within the guidelines of Islam. This, in turn, will help to sensitize traditional-minded Muslims to the importance and benefits of literacy for women as well as for Algerian society as a whole.

In the future, gender equity and the benefits of literacy within the Muslim Arab cultural context need to remain at the forefront of the adult education discussion in Algeria. Concrete evaluation plans such as the *Women's Empowerment Framework* by Longwe or the *Gender Checklist for the Integration of Gender Issues in the Evaluation of UNESCO's Programmes* will need to be put in place before subsequent campaigns are launched.

Despite the glitches that still remain in the area of adult education, Algeria has made substantial efforts aimed at reducing illiteracy rates. At the time of independence, approximately 90 percent of the country's population could not read or write. Statistics from 2002 indicate that 4,023 literacy courses were offered in that year. No more than 17.4 percent of the participants were men, while 82.6 percent of them were women (Altbach *et al* 2009:13).

In closure, this study extended the premise of adult literacy into the present situation of women's higher education and increased participation in the labor force. The educational and gender experiences of a total of 27 students enrolled at the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret were documented in a survey. The survey was intended to capture the attitudes of parents and students (both male and female) towards changes in gender roles and women's status as a result of higher education and work (see chapter ten).

The current generation of Algerian women comprises an outstanding majority (60 percent) of the total university population nationwide (Altman *et al*. 2009:206). Education patterns for young women have already begun to change in the Haut Plateau. Whereas until the late 1990's the majority of rural girls dropped out of school after completing their primary or middle level, a strong majority of young women now attend school until they are at least 17 years old. Due to pro-women education policies implemented under the Bouteflika administration, most women who finish their baccalaureate go on to the university.

According to the Ibn Khaldun University survey responses, it is becoming more common for women to attain a higher education and, albeit to a lesser

extent, to work. In contrast to the illiterate adult population, who solely define themselves through traditional roles, the younger generation of women is beginning to merge their conventional roles (as mother or housewife) with their new-found educational and/or work situation.

The results of the survey indicate change in the attitudes of parents and students, especially with regard to women in higher education. The responses show that the previous stigma for women to work for wages is beginning to recede as well. Traditionally, the stigma surrounding work existed throughout the MENA region regardless of the financial position or economic status of the family (El Guindi in: Iglitzen and Ross 1976: 227-228). In either case, it would be culturally interpreted to mean that if a woman worked for pay, then her kinsmen were either incapable of supporting her financially or did not meet their obligations to support her, thus reflecting negatively on the family's honor.

In light of the current economic situation and population pressures in Algeria, families are finding themselves having to come to terms with the trend of women furthering their studies and working. With the economy being as it is, a woman's financial contribution to the family income is becoming more accepted and welcomed (see 8.5, 9.3.1, and 10.5). Therefore, local attitudes are shifting to a large extent out of financial necessity.

The results of the student survey at the Ibn Khaldun University in Tiaret substantiates Moghadam's thesis that MENA women are using state resources to become educationally progressive (Moghadam 2003a). Although this does not automatically translate into women's increased work force participation or guarantee them greater importance in the public domain, women are becoming growing agents of social change and taking on more significant roles in movements for modernity, democratization and citizenship.

The outcome of the Arab Spring as a result of the poor economy and of the dealings of shady military and political members is still unfolding, as is the direction of change. Moreover, results may be different for violent and nonviolent uprisings. The power elites continue to fight to retain control over national resources, and discontented youth expresses its frustrations through a pattern of anti-regime protests. Within this context of poverty and turmoil, it is not hard to see why women have not been visible in any significant aspects of public discourse.

According to local inhabitants of the Haut Plateau, the Arab Spring did not impact Algeria due to the fact that the nation was not yet ready to deal with regime change because the memory of the civil war remains too vivid. Additionally, activists were not ready with a radical agenda for change, and the on-going struggle between the power elites and their tight control over the citizenry continue to halt political change.

Most recently, president Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika was re-elected for yet a fourth term. During the Bouteflika era dating back to 1999, women have begun to regain what they have lost under previous governmental administrations and during the Black Decade, in particular increased literacy and employment. Several Algerians shared their sense of relief at his re-election, in spite of his poor state of health.

The implications for women's empowerment in Algeria as a result of literacy and higher education are moving steadily forward. Worldwide the number of non-literate men and women is decreasing while the education of each new generation is on the rise. This is true to the extent that a global trend toward the massification of higher education has begun to become manifest (Altman *et al.* 2009).

In the Haut Plateau social change will come about through the new generation of women whose access to higher education and participation in the formal work force is becoming the norm. Gender equity or social change will not take place through adult literacy alone. However, the transformation of women's status and their role in the process of development are beginning to take hold for future generations of women.

*Street signs in Arabic and French (31);  
Poster slots for voting by number for non-literates (32)*



# Appendices

## Appendix A: UNESCO's Checklist of Gender Issues: UNESCO, 1999

### UNESCO Gender Lens

#### Planning and Execution of Program Evaluations

*The Units for the Promotion of the Status of Women and Gender Equality and Evaluation developed these guidelines as a follow-up to the house-wide evaluation of UNESCO's programs conducted in 1994.*

A gender perspective should be incorporated in the Terms of Reference of all Evaluations. The following issues should be covered in evaluations and, where applicable, reported upon in a sex-disaggregated manner in order to arrive at a realistic and comprehensive assessment of the program results

#### Planning, Implementation and Participation

- How were women involved at the planning or formulation stage? How were men?
- Were women's perspectives taken into account when developing the program?
- Were gender issues specifically addressed by the program? If so, how?
- How was the target group identified? Were specific groups of women identified as a target group?
- Did sex-disaggregated statistics/data exist on the situation before the program started?

#### Relevance

- How did the program respond to the identified specific interests and needs of women related to the program? To those of men?
- How did the program respond to the priorities of specific target groups among the female and male populations concerned?



- How did the program contribute to achieving the objectives of *UNESCO'S Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework*?

### **Effectiveness and Efficiency**

- In the case of gender specific objectives, to what extent and how were they achieved?
- How did women participate in program activities (including training programs, seminars and meetings)? And men? Were there any specific budget allocations for women?
- Did women face any particular constraints or obstacle in participating in program activities? Did men? If so, what kind?
- Did the program fully utilize the specific competence and experience of women as well as of men?
- How did women and men participate in the decision-making related to the program?

### **Impact**

- What is the impact of the program on women? Impact on men? How have women benefited? And men?
- Is the impact sustainable on the target population? On women?
- Have program activities promoted women's participation in management and decision-making structures?
- What are the program's results with regard to human resource development and capacity-building of women? And of men? Have women's situation and status been enhanced as a result of the program?
- Have program activities contributed to the enhancement of women's access to resources (education, training, credits, etc.)? And men's?
- Are sex-disaggregated statistics available to analyze how the situation has changed?

### **Recommendations and Lessons Learnt**

- How has the program contributed to the achievement of gender equality?
- Specific recommendations should be made on: (a) how to introduce or develop further a gender perspective in the program; (b) how to promote a more equal participation of women and men; and, (c) how to monitor and measure progress made in this direction.

## Composition of the Team

- A gender expert, or a person knowledgeable about gender issues, should be part of all Major Program Evaluation teams. An effort should be made to have both men and women represented on these teams.

<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/2.%20UNESCO%20Gender%20Lens%20for%20project%20design%20and%20review.pdf>

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## **Appendix B: Outline of the Concept of Empowerment. International Seminar on Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy, UIE Hamburg 1993**

The participants of the International Seminar compiled the following outline of factors and objectives that they believed to be crucial components in the process of women's empowerment.

**1. Definition of Empowerment:** The nature of empowerment renders it difficult to define. On the one hand, it is often referred to as a goal for many development programs/projects. On the other hand, it can also be conceived as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes. The definition of empowerment is relevant to and determined by the respective cultural context.

### **2. Indicators of Empowerment:**

At the level of the individual woman and her household:

- participation in crucial decision-making processes;
- extent of sharing of domestic work by men;
- extent to which a woman takes control of her reproductive functions and decides on family size;
- extent to which a woman is able to decide where the income she has earned will be channeled to;
- feeling and expression of pride and value in her work;
- self-confidence and self-esteem; and,
- ability to prevent violence.

At the community and/or organizational level:

- existence of women's organizations;
- allocation of funds to women and women's projects;
- increased number of women leaders at village, district, provincial and national levels;
- involvement of women in the design, development and application of technology;
- participation in community programs, productive enterprises, politics and arts;
- involvement of women in non-traditional tasks;
- increased training programs for women; and,
- exercising her legal rights when necessary.

At the national level:

- awareness of her social and political rights;
- integration of women in the general national development plan;
- existence of women's networks and publications;
- extent to which women are officially visible and recognized; and
- the degree to which the media take heed of women's issues.

### **3. Facilitating and Constraining Factors of Empowerment:**

Facilitating Factors:

- existence of women's organizations;
- availability of support systems for women;
- availability of women-specific data and other relevant information;
- availability of funds;
- feminist leaderships;
- networking; favorable media coverage; and,
- favorable policy climate.

Constraining Factors:

- heavy workload of women;
- isolation of women from one another;
- illiteracy;
- traditional views that limit women's participation;

- no funds;
- internal strife/militarization/wars;
- disagreements/conflicts among women's groups;
- poor adjustment policies;
- discriminatory policy environment; and,
- negative and sensational media coverage.

### **Future Strategies**

The participants came up with a set of strategies on education, research/documentation, campaigns, networking, influencing policies, training and media. (Medel-Anonuevo UIE Studies 5, 1995:7-12).

### **Appendix C: Sara Longwe's (1991) Framework for Women's Empowerment**

<b>Levels of Equity</b>	<b>Increased Equality</b>	<b>Increased Empowerment</b>
Control	High	High
Participation		
Conscientization		
Access Welfare	Low	Low

(Longwe 1991:151)

### **Analysis of Women's Empowerment as Linked with Literacy**

**Welfare Level** – The welfare aspect correlates with the level of women's literacy. Therefore, the level of women's literacy attainment relates to the percentage of female literates within the entire population of adult women.

Evaluation question:

- Has the program reached its target in increasing the proportion of literate women and in reducing the gender gaps in literacy?

The gender gap distinguishes whether women are addressed as statistics, i.e., passive recipients of welfare, or as active participants. At this level, empowerment refers to an increase in women's independence and self-reliance.

**Access Level** – This level monitors women’s access to resources. Women’s and girls’ access to primary schools and adult literacy programs is monitored.

Evaluation questions:

- What is the progress in women’s enrolment in literacy classes?
- What are the barriers to women’s access to literacy classes?

Longwe suggests that literacy programs need to be aware of these obstacles in order to come up with a strategy for making it easier for women to attend. This may include flexible hours and more convenient locations.

**Conscientization Level** – This implies that women need to be made aware that their subordinate socio-economic position is not a fixed status. Gender-based division of labor is a social construction that can be changed. Program content will be monitored to determine whether it maintains a discriminatory and oppressive world-view or supports women to become more critically aware of discriminatory practices.

Evaluation questions:

- Does the curriculum enable and facilitate the discussion of local gender issues?
- Have women increased their sense of injustice and their willingness to take action?

This entails taking a look at the literacy materials, methods of teaching, and attitudes of teachers. Literacy course content should ideally include gender relations, awareness of human rights, and realization that certain socio-cultural practices are discriminatory and can be changed.

**Participation Level** – This level calls for the mobilization of women as a group. The literacy class should be monitored to determine whether it contributes to women’s ability to take collective action against current discriminatory practices and help them overcome them. Progress in literacy acquisition should aid participants in the discussion of gender issues and mobilization, for example, in form of flip-chart discussions, records of meetings, and communication with other groups.

Evaluation questions:

- Are class members taking follow-up action outside the classroom?
- Has progress on addressing the gender issue become a focus of classroom discussion?

Literacy classes should ideally serve as a means to mobilize women to challenge and take action against current traditions that are discriminatory towards them.

**Control Level** – At this final level, a balance in power, i.e., equality of control between men and women, is implied. Ideally, women are in charge of activities going on in the literacy class and they determine the interests of the program. The material content should support the discussion centering on gender issues that extend outside of the classroom. This entails that women take charge of their lives by gaining more control over resources such as land and household income. Evaluation question:

In what way have women class members increased their control within particular aspects of gender relations outside the classroom?

To sum up, Longwe argues that literacy classes have the potential means for supporting women's action to achieve power in decision-making bodies in their communities. However, this acts under the assumption that women enjoy and feel comfortable with the newly gained decision-making power over the literacy curriculum. To Longwe, gender justice can only begin to be attained at the higher levels of her model. She suggests two prefatory questions must be asked before it can be determined whether a literacy class aims at women's political empowerment:

- Do the program's objectives also address the underlying gender issues that stand in the way of women's literacy and their retention of literacy?
- How is the objective of literacy related to the objective of empowerment? (Longwe 1991, 1999).

**Appendix D: ALGERIA. Reply to the Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)**

**PART I: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment**

The principles of equal opportunity and equality between men and women are enshrined in Algeria's constitution and laws. Furthermore, Algeria is bound by international principles and instruments eliminating all forms of discrimination. Accordingly, it has pursued its efforts to enlist women as participants in its national development with a view to achieving a balanced, stable society based on competence, fitness and merit.

The main achievements may be summarized as follows:

- Poverty: elimination of extreme poverty by 2005. The social safety net has been reinforced to assist excluded groups, especially women.
- Education and training: achievement of universal primary education. At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, enrolment was 100 percent, thanks to the fact that education is compulsory and free from the age of 6 to the age of 16, as well as the fact that educational institutions are located near communities. Higher percentage attendance rates were recorded for girls than for boys, especially at the secondary and university levels.
- Reduction of illiteracy. The illiteracy rate was down to 26.5 percent in 2003.
- Health: reduction of the under-five mortality rate. According to national statistics for 1998, the under-five mortality rate was 34.5 per 1000 live births (35.6 per thousand for male children and 33.3 per thousand for female children).
- Improve maternal health. As a result of access to health care services, maternal health has been improved during the prenatal and postnatal periods, as well as during childbirth.
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Action to this end has included improving means of prevention, ensuring comprehensive care for victims, and developing information and education activities, especially those aimed at young people.
- A pharmaceutical products policy has been developed, based on partnership and support for domestic and foreign investment for the production of basic generic pharmaceuticals, and essential medications are available free of charge to chronic patients.

· Health care in the area of reproductive health and family planning is provided free of charge by medical specialists for women in poverty, all costs being paid by the National Solidarity Fund. This service is in addition to the public health services provided by state-run health centers, where poorer patients also are guaranteed free treatment.

· The drinking water supply system has been substantially expanded: it served 79 percent of all dwellings in 2002 (94 percent of all dwellings in urban areas), up from 57.8 percent in 1987.

· Human rights and women: promote respect for women's fundamental rights, and create or strengthen institutional mechanisms for their advancement.

· The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been translated into practice mainly through amendments to legislation, including, in particular, the Family Code, and the possibility of withdrawing Algeria's reservations to the Convention is under consideration. Sexual harassment has been made a criminal offence, and special centers have been established to shelter women and girls who have been subjected to violence.

· The economy. The reform of the framework for economic growth has been completed. In that connection, Algeria has entered into partnership with the European Union and is negotiating with a view to joining the World Trade Organization. A General Directorate for Planning and Forecasting has been established. In addition, the framework for investment has been improved through partnerships or concessions. The economy grew at a rate of 6.8 percent in 2003.

· Programs and mechanisms to support youth employment and provide decent, productive jobs have been established, with the result that unemployment declined from 29 percent to 24 percent in 2003.

· Decision-making. Women's access to posts and functions has been enhanced. Women have entered the workforce in substantial numbers: 20 percent of all women were economically active in 2003, compared to 12.61 percent in 1998.

· The media. New information and communication technologies (ICTs) are regarded as making a meaningful contribution to economic development, and, consequently, the ICT sector has been strengthened by the establishment of an ICT park in the new town of Sidi Abdallah. The park offers optimal conditions for attracting pioneering ICT firms, developing innovations and providing opportunity for the creative application of skills.

· Institutional mechanisms. A Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women has been established.

· Community action has been encouraged and enhanced: there are now approximately 60,000 associations, including 890 that are national in scope.



- The environment. The legal framework and international partnership have been strengthened with a view to integrating the principles of sustainable development into Algeria's environmental policy and programs.

- The girl child. The rights of children have been strengthened, and legislative provisions relating to the protection of children have been reinforced (including prevention and measures to protect girls who are mortally endangered or at risk of any form of violence).

The principle of gender equality has been enshrined in the law.

- A National Committee on the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor was established within the Ministry of Labor in March 2003.

The main challenges confronting Algeria in its implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other initiatives that have subsequently been identified may be summarized as follows:

- Cultural stereotypes and restrictions that still prevail.

- The fact that in many instances women are reluctant to participate positively in political life and appear to find their traditional roles satisfactory.

## **PART II: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly**

The advancement of women and their enlistment as full, essential participants in development are a priority that is high on the agenda of the Algerian government. This issue is being addressed with a new vision aimed at reducing the gap between the respective roles of men and women in the development process, strengthening the role played by women and safeguarding their rights in society.

Algeria's efforts to protect women and enhance their role pursuant to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent initiatives are outlined below.

### **Women and Poverty**

In an effort to alleviate poverty, Algeria has adopted a strategy aimed at ensuring equal opportunity for persons of both sexes at all levels of social, political and economic life. The main features of that strategy include:

- Preparation of a "poverty map" of Algeria in May 2001 by the Ministry of Employment and National Solidarity in cooperation with the United Nations

Development Program (UNDP) and the National Preparation and Rehabilitation Agency. The map is a reference tool that will yield a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of poverty and facilitate the tasks of evaluating it, identifying pockets of poverty, and creating a unified effort to eliminate extreme poverty through the preparation and implementation of policies oriented toward comprehensive sustainable development based on the characteristics of individual regions.

- Preparation of a national plan to combat poverty and marginalization: the plan was prepared by the Ministry of Employment and National Solidarity in 2001. It reflects the government's determination to give material form to its efforts to upgrade the living conditions of excluded social groups. The plan has 12 objectives in all, including:

- Mainstreaming a gender balance at all levels of social, political and economic life. To that end, courses have been organized to provide gender training for senior officials;

- Measures to upgrade maternal and child health care services; and,

- Action to combat violence and discrimination against women.

- A national workshop on the elimination of poverty and marginalization was held in October 2000. The event afforded an opportunity of estimating the scale of poverty in Algeria and identifying priorities for practical action. Measures contemplated in that connection included the preparation of a national strategy to eliminate poverty and marginalization. In 2003, a second workshop on ending poverty through work was organized by the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity in partnership with the International Labor Organization's office in Algeria.

## **Challenges**

- Commitment to eliminate extreme poverty (most acute forms of poverty) by 2005: there are 1.2 million people in this category, and the task will require 13 billion Algerian dinars (DA), i.e., \$170 million, annually;

- Mitigating unemployment by means of renewed national economic growth to be achieved through mechanisms for supporting employment among young people, especially women, and fostering employment in rural areas, home enterprises and the like;

- Pursuing, in greater depth, the implementation of measures aimed at modernizing socioeconomic structures (the financial sector, justice, the basis of trade, and so on), in particular through privatization and fostering investment; and,

· Buttressing the social safety net designed to assist the poorest groups through the Social Development Agency and Social Activity Directorates, which will entail a 5 percent increase in outlays from the budget for social sectors.

In January 2004, a new legal framework was created by four executive orders relating to small loans aimed at encouraging unemployed persons or low-income persons to go into business for themselves, especially by starting home enterprises. Under this program,

- Bank loans in amounts ranging from DA 50,000 to DA 400,000;
- State assistance in the form of interest-free loans for projects costing more than DA 100,000; and,
- Interest-free loans or loans at below current bank interest rates for the purpose of purchasing raw materials to a value of not more than DA 30,000. A total of DA 21 billion has been allocated to support youth employment projects, and banks have been enlisted as participants in the program.

### **Integration of Women through Employment-creating Initiatives**

In recent years, the state has put in place a number of initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment, and a significant proportion of the beneficiaries have been women. Data relating to these initiatives are summarized below.

#### *Women's Share of Employment-creating Initiatives, 2002*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Total beneficiaries</b>	<b>% women</b>
Social utility activities (IAIG)	168,626	41
Labor-intensive public works (TUP HIMO)	203,632	-
Pre-employment contracts	9,022	65
Local initiative solidarity employment (ESIL)	141,000	45
Small loans	11,216	30.49
Small businesses	52,393	12.11

At the instance of the President of the Republic, with a view to fostering employment among housewives, markets have been established where women in this category can sell their products, and marketing services have been made available to them in an effort to raise their families' standard of living.

In a context of economic recovery and the first signs of renewed economic growth, these state-created initiatives have resulted in a significant decrease in unemployment. The most recent figures indicate that employment declined from 29 percent in 1999 to 23 percent in 2003.

## Education and Training of Women

Algeria has devoted great attention to education. Making education democratic and free has been a fundamental duty of the national education system, in accordance with the principle of equal opportunity for all, without discrimination based on place of residence or gender. At the primary level, 99 percent of all boys and 96 percent of all girls now attend school.

### *Pupils Enrolled in Primary and Intermediate Schools, 2000 and 2003*

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2003</b>
Pupils enrolled, first and second cycles	4,720,950	4,691,870
Percentage girls	46.82%	46.98%
Pupils enrolled, third cycle	2,015,372	2,116,087
Percentage girls	48.06%	48.04%
Total pupils enrolled, primary and intermediate levels	6,736,320	6,666,346
Percentage girls	48.19%	47.97%

At the secondary level, the picture is quite different, with attendance figures for girls noticeably higher than the corresponding figures for boys. At the threshold of the new century, the situation was as shown in the tables below.

### *Students Enrolled in Secondary Schools, 2000 and 2003*

Students enrolled	975,862	1,095,730
Percentage girls	56.15%	57.73%

### *Percentage School Attendance by Girls, all levels, 2003*

<b>Education level</b>	<b>School attendance rates for girls (%)</b>
Primary	46.98%
Intermediate	48.04%
Secondary	56.73%
University	53%

### *Numbers of Women Teachers and Professors, 2000 and 2003*

Total	327,284	239,605
Women	154,507	161,523
Percentage women	47.20%	46.01%

*Girl Students Successfully Obtaining a Secondary-school Certificate  
(Baccalaureate), 2000*

Total students enrolled	445,468
Girls enrolled	250,321
Percentage girls	56.19%
Total No. obtaining a baccalaureate	119,325
No. of girls obtaining a baccalaureate	70,192
Percentage girls	58.82%

*Women Students Taking Various University Programs, 2000*

<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage women students</b>
Humanities	70.43%
Natural sciences	62.17%
Exact sciences	42.17%
Civil, electrical and mechanical engineering	21.68%

Thanks to Algeria's school-building program, pupils can now attend school close to where they live, especially in rural areas. The purpose of the program was to raise school attendance rates and reduce the dropout phenomenon, especially in the case of girls. In addition, the state has devoted a good deal of care to the provision of social services in schools in order to enable pupils to continue their education, eliminate disparities resulting from social, economic and geographic factors, and make it easier for families to send their children to school. These services include:

- Health care (an estimated 68.41 percent of pupils use this service);
- School meals (an estimated 31 percent of pupils use this service);
- School bus transport in rural and remote areas; and,
- Allowances for school fees and free supplies for poor pupils.

There are also educational and technical training establishments that accommodate students who have dropped out of the system and provide opportunities for training and skills development tailored to persons interested in upgrading their capacities.

Vocational training is provided by a network of public institutions run by the Ministry of Vocational Training and Education, comprising 819 institutions and five support structures. At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, approximately 172 subsidiary establishments were opened in rural parts of the country in addition to the 391 that had previously been serving those areas. This

initiative targets primarily girls in rural areas and is aimed at giving them an economic role.

On March 8, 2004, the Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women and the Ministry of Vocational Training and Education signed a cooperation agreement aimed at the following objectives:

- Provision of opportunities for training and vocational skills development for all family members, subject to program availability;
- Preparation of training and skills development programs for women with a view to promoting their social and vocational integration;
- Reinforcement of training and vocational skills development for women, especially women living in rural and desert areas, by opening subsidiary branches and annexes to vocational training centers currently functioning in those areas; and,
- Preparation of vocational skills upgrading and training courses aimed expressly at women artisans and women interested in setting up small businesses.

Furthermore, under new draft regulations, there are various exceptional cases in which the age limit for admission to these training courses can be raised from 25 to 30:

- Women in difficult social or economic circumstances; and,
- Women living in isolated regions.

The table below presents some data on the numbers of persons who took training courses at vocational training centers in 2003.

Type of training	Residential training	Apprenticeship training	Distance training	Percentage
<b>Men</b>	91,684	83,834	4,254	56.44
<b>Women</b>	96,715	38,333	3,729	43.56
<b>Total</b>	188,399	122,167	7,983	100
<b>Grand total for all three training categories: 318,549</b>				

In the area of literacy and adult education, Algeria has made substantial efforts aimed at reducing illiteracy rates. At the time of independence, approximately 90 percent of the country's population could not read or write; by 2003, that figure had declined to 26.5 percent and is expected to continue to decline, reaching 24 percent by 2008, according to a report published by the Ministry of Health. Among women, illiteracy has declined from 40.33 percent in 1998 to 34.6 percent in 2003 for the 40-and-over age group.

Statistics from 2002 indicate that 4,023 literacy courses were offered in that year. No more than 17.4 percent of the participants were men, while 82.6 percent of them were women.

### **Women and Health**

Reproductive health and maternal and child protection are national priority issues in the field of health and population, and they are among Algeria's public health policy objectives. The focus is on family planning, maternal health, childbirth under professional supervision, and the elimination of sexually transmitted diseases and of waterborne diseases such as typhoid fever, cholera, diarrhea and hepatitis. Accordingly, the health and population sector and hospital reform are part of the effort to improve the situation of mothers and children. Measures to this end at successive life stages are outlined below.

### **Early Childhood**

Algeria has developed a national program aimed at combating childhood diseases and reducing mortality rates. Following independence, child mortality was 200 per thousand; after the program was launched, the infant mortality rate declined steadily to 34.5 per thousand in 2002, while the under-five mortality rate was 38.8 per thousand in that year. The national program comprises 10 subprograms, of which a national vaccination program is perhaps the most important. As of the beginning of 2002, 90 percent of all children between the ages of 12 and 23 months had been given all the appropriate inoculations (tuberculosis, triple vaccine for polio, whooping cough and measles). Furthermore, 97.1 percent of all children had an immunization record. Other subprograms are concerned with other diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory disorders and with good nutrition.

### **Children over the Age of 6**

For children in this age category, the main health-related measure is the provision of school health services, delivered through 1,000 centers in coordination with the Ministry of Education. The services include vaccination, dental care, and health education (such as efforts to discourage smoking).

## **Adolescence**

Programs for young people in this age category are delivered through information and activation centers located throughout the country.

## **Reproductive health**

In this area, the focus has been on women's health through monitoring during pregnancy and safe childbirth. In 2002, over 80 percent of Algerian women received pre-natal care, and close to 90 percent of births took place in a public-health facility. The country has 600 public-health clinics offering these services. An estimated 3.6 percent or more of all births took place in private health facilities in 2002.

In addition, there are a number of family planning programs. These were originally launched in the 1970s, and have achieved noteworthy results: 80 percent of Algerian women now use contraception, and 52 percent use modern methods (IUD, the pill and so on). In the early 1970s, the fertility rate was seven children per women, whereas today it stands at 2.4. The maternal mortality rate in childbirth was an estimated 174 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1996; it has now declined to between 2.15 and 2.25. Population growth, which was over 3 percent annually in the early 1970s, is now 1.5 percent annually.

It is noteworthy that all maternal and child welfare programs are delivered free of charge in public medical centers, of which Algeria has over 5,000 distributed throughout the country.

Algeria also has a program aimed at combating cancer, especially cervical cancer. This program is delivered at 20 centers distributed throughout the country.

The year 2000 saw the introduction of a country-wide "risk-free childbirth" program. In addition, Algeria has entered into a cooperation and partnership program with UNICEF aimed at promoting the survival, protection and development of children, as well as the care of mothers and children.



### Some indicators on women's health

#### Percentage of women who have taken iron, vitamin, calcium and magnesium supplements in tablet or liquid form or who have had anti-tetanus injections during pregnancy to protect their unborn child, by area of residence

Area of residence	Took iron supplements in tablet or liquid form	Took vitamin, calcium or magnesium supplements	Had anti tetanus injections during pregnancy to protect unborn child
Urban	43.5	42.5	51.6
Rural	38.0	35.7	35.8
Total	41.75	39.6	43.4

#### Percentage distribution of women by description of health status and area of residence

Description of health	Area of residence		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Status			
Good	47.4	39.9	44.3
Fair	47.3	55.2	50.6
Poor	5.3	4.9	5.1
Total	100	100	100

The most common chronic disorders affecting Algerian women are, in order, hypertension (with an incidence of approximately 5 per cent), arthritis (3.05 percent) and gastric ulcers (3.0 percent).

#### Percentage women who suffer or have suffered from chronic disorders diagnosed by a physician, by type of disorder and area of residence

Type of disorder	Area of residence		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Diabetes	1.7	1.3	1.6
Hypertension	5.3	4.4	4.9
Asthma	2.0	1.9	1.9
Arthritis	3.2	2.9	3.0
Peptic ulcer	3.1	2.9	3.0

### **Knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases**

The 2002 edition of the Algerian Family Health Survey found that 68.7 percent of women respondents were aware of the existence of diseases that were spread through sexual contact. If nothing else, they had heard of AIDS: 88.8 of women respondents stated that they knew it was a sexually transmitted disease, while 39.2 percent were aware that it could be spread by means of an injection, 36 percent knew that blood transfusion was a possible means of transmission, and 17.4 percent knew that not using a condom was a risk factor.

### **Violence against women**

Algeria has continued its efforts aimed at eradicating the phenomenon of violence (especially domestic violence, physical or psychological) that continues to affect women in some forms despite the severe penalties for which provision is made in the Constitution and the Criminal Code.

An obligation to protect women from violence is enshrined in the Constitution, most notably in Articles 32, 33 and 34, and in the Criminal Code, which specifies in Articles 264 to 267 that deliberate acts of violence shall be punishable by appropriate penalties.

The Code also includes provisions dealing expressly with persons who commit acts of violence toward minors (Articles 269-272). Such persons are liable to terms of imprisonment ranging from three years to 20 years, depending on the circumstances.

Moreover, under the Family Code, a married woman has the right to petition for divorce on the grounds of physical harm (Article 53).

In an effort to protect women from new forms of violence and excesses arising from changing relationships within society, new offences have been identified in the framework of the review of the Criminal Code. Sexual harassment is now a criminal offence, and on December 29, 2003, a call and assistance center was established. The center is administered by the Working Women's National Support Committee, which is an arm of the General Algerian Workers' Union (UGTA) and was established on March 17, 2002.

In addition, centers have been established specifically for battered girls and women or girls and women who are at risk of violence. The main functions of these centers are as follows:

- Temporarily to receive and shelter these women and girls and to provide them with medical, social and psychological care;

- To diagnose and assess nervous disorders in girls and women who have been received at a center in order to provide them with individualized care;
- To ensure that girls or women who come to a center are provided with training and/or placed as apprentices;
- To undertake, in cooperation with concerned institutions and organizations, activities aimed at helping these girls and women rejoin their families and society and providing them with legal assistance; and,
- Medical monitoring of girls and women received at centers by staff members of the health care structures within the Ministry of Health.

Battered women receive medical and legal care, including a meeting with a specialist in psychology and an examination by a gynecologist in cases of sexual violence, as well as supplementary examinations (testing for pregnancy and AIDS).

The judicial and security services also intervene effectively to punish perpetrators and assist their victims without discrimination. In addition, there are various associations that are very active in providing battered women with support and guidance and opening shelters for them. There are some 23 national associations that are concerned with women and eight that are concerned with human rights, as well as dozens that are active in various other fields.

The government has taken various encouraging measures, including the recruitment of women security personnel in an effort to support and develop neighborhood activities and provide women who are in difficult situations or at risk of violence with a sympathetic ear. Every police division has a contingent of women officers.

The Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women in coordination with two United Nations agencies, UNIFEM and UNFPA, is preparing a project aimed at contributing to the establishment of mechanisms and procedures for the care of women and children who have suffered from violence, publicizing the issue, working to amend legislation and change mentalities, and strengthening national facilities, technical or institutional, in that connection through close coordination among state agencies, civil society institutions and relevant United Nations bodies.

### **Women and the economy**

In quantitative terms, the numbers of working women in Algeria have grown considerably, although in percentage terms they still account for a relatively

small part of the total workforce. A gender-disaggregated summary of the Algerian working population is shown in the table below.

Category	2000	2001	Change
Total workforce	6,178,992	6,228,772	+ 49,780
Men	5,381,909	5,345,223	- 86,366
Women	797,083	883,549	+ 86,466
% women	12.89	14.18	+ 1.28

In 2003, women accounted for approximately 20 percent of the workforce, and in addition there are over 600,000 women who work in the informal sector. Available statistics indicate that 56 percent of all working women are under 40 years of age. Of these, half are between 24 and 29, while 21 percent are between 20 and 24 years of age.

It is noteworthy that women account for a large proportion of total employment in several sectors and professions. Specifically, 49.62 percent of all educational posts were filled by women in 2000, while 54 percent of the country's medical specialists, 73 percent of its pharmacists and 30.75 percent of its judges were women.

Both men and women have been able to take advantage of regional and sectoral youth employment programs and economic stimulation programs initiated in 2001, as well as a national agricultural development plan that was launched in 2000.

Women have shown themselves to be very interested in applying for small loans with which to start their own businesses. Demand from women has grown year by year, accounting for 19.99 percent of all applications in 1999, 26.59 percent in 2001 and 33.90 percent in 2002.

As regards the rural workforce, we find that 15 percent of rural Algerian women are either farm operators (59,721) or permanently or occasionally employed on farms (293,527), in addition to 41,793 housewives who engage in some income-generating activity at home (farming statistics from 2002, the latest available).

The economic role of women has been enhanced as a result of a strategy developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Agriculture Development Program and the National Rural Development Fund. Measures taken in the context of these three initiatives have included:

- Establishment of a gender-disaggregated statistical database incorporating the term "gender" as a discriminator;
- Workshops for brainstorming and exchanges of experience on the issue of the integration of rural women into rural development and agriculture;

- Preparation of a national training and skills development program aimed expressly at providing women with support and guidance;
- Socioeconomic research and studies on rural women and, in a related initiative, training of women specialists in the fields of gender, communication, agricultural extension and reproductive health;
- Support for and enhancement of a socio-cultural environment conducive to gender-based local development through establishment of the base structures essential for group activities, action to promote literacy, and a systematic information effort targeting families in the context of sensitization campaigns and meetings with the local offices of the various ministries in order to address the actual situation of rural women (with respect to health, education, measures to foster home-based work, and state financial support for farm women); and,
- Action to ensure that women are able to take full advantage of rural development programs and projects by integrating them into the set-aside land improvement program, the flatlands development program, the agricultural regime conversion program, agricultural programs and youth employment support programs. Rural works projects have included a number of activities that are administered by the Forestry Service and are funded by World Bank loans granted expressly for the benefit of rural women.

Thanks in part to this project, 1,386 women now have income from various activities. Under the second phase, the project will be extended to a number of wilayas and will benefit approximately 6,200 women.

On March 8, 2004, the Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women and the Ministry for Rural Development signed a cooperation agreement aimed explicitly at promoting employment among rural women and integrating them economically.

Turning to the legal aspect, Algeria's labor legislation (in accordance with the Constitution) prohibits any form of gender-based discrimination. The right to work is guaranteed for all, as is the equality of all workers, regardless of gender or age. The law states clearly that "workers shall be entitled to the same compensation and privileges for the same work, given equal levels of qualification and performance."

Algerian labor law includes measures expressly designed to protect women, notably provisions relating to maternity and women's role in the family unit. Among these measures are:

- Equality between men and women in the matter of employment and the enjoyment of the basic rights pertaining thereto, such as pay, social security, pensions and health insurance;

- Women may not be required to work at night or on an official holiday;
- Women may not be assigned to work that is dangerous, unsanitary or likely to be prejudicial to their health;
- Leave from work during the final stages of pregnancy;
- Leave at reduced pay to enable a woman to accompany her husband to a new place of work, or to care for a child under the age of 5 or a child with a disability such that he or she requires constant care; and,
- Nursing breaks.

### **Women in power and decision-making**

Participation by women in decision-making is safeguarded under the Constitution and the law. In practice, it appears that few women do actually hold decision-making posts, but an upward trend has recently appeared as is apparent from data relating to appointments of women to posts in state agencies.

#### **Women holding decision-making posts in the public administration**

Women now make a substantial political contribution. This marks an important gain in the current context of democratic openness and multiple parties. The most recent government (2004) includes four women members, and there are four women ambassadors. A woman prefect was appointed for the first time in 1999. Since that time, two women have been appointed as supernumerary prefects, one as a delegate prefect, three as secretaries of wilayas, four as inspectors-general of wilayas and seven as department heads.

As regards legislative elections, the changing situation with respect to women's participation is shown in the table below.

	1997		2002	
	Women candidates	Women elected	Women candidates	Women elected
Communal People's Assemblies	1,281	75	3,679	147
Wilaya People's Assemblies	905	62	2,684	113
	322	11	694	27
	-	-	-	3

Women have successfully assumed the posts of President of the Council of State (1) and President of the Judicial Council (2), and there are no fewer than 34 women presiding magistrates out of a total of 56. Women have thus come to account for a 60-percent majority of the members of this important professional body. There is one woman public prosecutor, and 846 women magistrates, out of

a total of 2,751. Women thus account for 30.75 percent, or nearly one-third, of all magistrates. Furthermore, there are 137 women examining magistrates out of a total of 404, or just over one-third (33.9 percent).

A woman now holds the post of Vice-governor of the Bank of Algeria; and the Bank's Currency and Credit Council, the country's highest monetary authority, has one woman member. In the area of national security, Algeria has a total of 6,973 women security officers, including a woman police brigadier, the highest rank in that service.

### **Human rights of women**

Gender equality and the protection of women from any form of discrimination are enshrined in Articles 28 and 30 of the Constitution, under which Algerian women enjoy full rights as citizens. Furthermore, Algeria's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women shows its determination to safeguard women's human rights.

By way of giving concrete expression to these principles, a presidential executive order has been issued acceding to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly by its Resolution 640 (VII), dated December 20, 1952. At the present time, moreover, Algeria's reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination are being reviewed with a view to their possible withdrawal. Algeria submitted its first report on its implementation of the Convention in January 1999 and will submit its second in January 2005.

In the area of domestic legislation, a national committee has been established for the purpose of reviewing the Family Code with a view to the incorporation of adjustments that are becoming necessary as a result of economic, social and even cultural changes.

The main provisions that appear to be in need of amendment are those dealing with marriage, support, women's work, reconciliation, dissolution of the marriage tie and its effects, polygamy, residence after divorce, assets of the spouses acquired before and after marriage, filiation and how it is confirmed, and guardianship within marriage.

The Algerian Women's Association, with the support and encouragement of the state, is working to enhance awareness with a view to changing people's mentalities as quickly as possible. The authorities, for their part, are enacting legislation aimed at moving society forward.

## **Women and the media**

The openness and diversity that have characterized the media in Algeria since the 1990s have helped disseminate information and research on the status of women. Moreover, women have been encouraged to enter the media field, including both the print media (Algeria now boasts more than 50 newspapers) and the audio-visual media. Women now account for over 50 percent of the personnel employed in the print media, including both state-owned and private publications, while according to statistics from 2002, the national broadcasting network employs 85 women journalists out of a total of 179, 12 senior managers out of a total of 43, and four producers out of a total of 17.

In television, there are 148 women journalists out of a total of 219, i.e., women account for 57.67 percent of all journalists besides women who are in charge of programs or segments.

Programming aimed at the family in general and women in particular has changed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and this has facilitated women's participation in the media, especially in view of the fact that a large percentage of the students enrolled at the Institute for Advanced Communication and Media Studies are now women.

## **The girl child**

In accordance with the principle of equality and equal opportunity, the Algerian girl child enjoys her rights without discrimination. Substantial progress has been made with respect to school attendance by girls at the primary level: 96 percent of all girls now attend school, and they have achieved higher pass rates than boys. At some levels, there are more girl pupils than boys. Furthermore, girls are entitled to complete health care both in the school environment and in the context of the public health system.

Algerian legislators have taken a number of measures designed to protect human rights and freedom in general and the human rights and freedoms of women and girl children in particular, in line with international criteria applied in that area.

Under the Criminal Code, trafficking in women and girls (Articles 342-349), immoral conduct (Articles 333-395) and rape (Article 336) are criminal offences punishable by terms of imprisonment ranging from five to ten years, and the penalty is doubled (up to 20 years' imprisonment) when the victim is a minor. The penalty is also more severe when the offender is a relative of the victim or a person having parental authority over the victim (Article 337).



We may note at this point that Algeria has ratified many international instruments aimed at abolishing trafficking in women and children, slavery, forced labor, involuntary servitude and the like. Perhaps the most important of these instruments are:

- ILO Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Convention No. 182), supplemented by Recommendation 190, under Presidential Executive Order 387/2000 dated November 28, 2000;
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949); and,
- United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three protocols, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

While the Criminal Code contains no provisions dealing with pornography as such, Algeria has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby committing itself, like other states, to protecting children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and to taking all appropriate measures to prevent the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (Article 34 of the Convention).

Furthermore, the Criminal Code contains a provision prohibiting actions and activities relating to the use of information and communication technology or the Internet for pornographic purposes (Article 333 (b)).

Indeed, combating the use, exploitation or presentation of children for pornographic purposes, combating all forms of trafficking in children, especially girls, and monitoring all media that encourage pornographic activities in which women or girl children are used constitute one of the priorities of the National Child Protection Office, which is directed by a woman with the rank of governor.

Battered children are cared for at special centers, including:

- Centers for children who have been orphaned as a result of terrorism; and,
- Open custody education facilities.

Obstacles and challenges encountered in the implementation of the critical areas of concern may be summed up as follows:

- Inadequate information and awareness, especially in the area of early disease detection;
- Lack of interest on the part of women in political party work, despite their extensive involvement with associations;

- The stereotyped education that boys receive in various environments;
- The stereotyped images that continued to be presented through the media; and,
- Difficulty in reconciling the competing demands of a career and family responsibilities.

### **PART III: Institutional development**

Concrete evidence of Algeria's concern with women's issues is to be found in the establishment of the Ministry for Family Affairs and the Advancement of Women, which reports to the head of government.

At the present stage, the Ministry's main function is to promote the evolution and remedial

development of the various government departments and agencies within a National Plan for Advancement of the Family and Women, within a context of integration and coordination with the several branches of government and a number of partners, notably civil society institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the area of women's issues, the Ministry's mandate comprises the following tasks:

1. To develop women's capacities and foster their participation in various areas of political life (through accession to decision-making posts) and of economic, social and cultural life;
2. To promote women's issues, notably by means of:
  - Action to enhance women's awareness of their rights;
  - Action to enlarge women's participation in economic, social and political activities;
  - Action to combat violence and discrimination against women and all forms of exclusion and exploitation;
  - Action to improve women's health conditions in the work environment;
  - Encouragement for literacy programs targeting women, especially in rural areas, and encouragement for the work of associations that are active in that field;
  - Preparation of development projects involving the agriculture and traditional craft sectors in rural areas; and,
  - Diversification of specialized training and education programs for disabled girls and women.

### 3. Promoting the gender issue.

At the local level, a number of social action bureaux have been set up in every wilaya in Algeria for the purpose of enhancing the situation of families in general and of women in particular. Algeria is a state that is committed to gender equality, and to that end has established a new institutional mechanism to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action and other initiatives.

The various ministries coordinate their efforts in pursuit of more effective integration of their respective programs aimed at the protection and advancement of women, especially in the areas of health, education, rural development, employment and solidarity.

As regards data and statistics, Algeria has created a national database that serves as a monitoring system or observatory on the status of women. The Ministry of Health has instituted a systematic data-gathering operation on violence against women and uses the resulting information in its publications and research. The same Ministry compiles statistics on maternal mortality in order to keep its data up to date.

Algeria cooperates with the ILO's Regional Office for the Arab States in implementing a project aimed at developing national gender-disaggregated statistics programs. In February 2004, a technical committee was established to develop an integrated information system and database to track the socio-economic situation of women and children, with members drawn from the relevant branches of the Ministry for Family Affairs and the Status of Women, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment and National Solidarity, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, besides representatives from the Islamic Scout Movement, the National Statistics Office, UNICEF and the Institute for Information and Documentation on Children and Women.

This "INFOCHILD" program will afford a means of gathering all currently available statistical information, sector by sector, and keeping it up to date from the results of field studies and research, analysis of the data and development of indicators, thereby providing government departments and agencies, scientific investigators and others with accurate data on issues of relevance for women and children, which they can use scientifically to help the wheels of socioeconomic life turn more smoothly.

This is part of a general trend aimed at adapting and developing the national system of information and statistics, both legally and institutionally, and establishing a permanent data gathering system covering all government departments and agencies in the interests of maximum reliability.

The various stakeholders will have different roles to play. Parliament, for example, will debate and enrich draft legislation submitted to it, ultimately producing proposals for provisions that will be beneficial to women in the Labor and Social Insurance Code, the Criminal Code, the Apprenticeship Act, the Health Act and so on.

NGOs will also have a role to play as essential partners in the task of promoting women's rights and working for gender equality. Their action will focus primarily on:

- Contributing to the formulation of awareness programs and activities;
- Contributing to the debate over implementation of international recommendations in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Copenhagen Declaration;
- Reaching out to victims of violence and caring for them with a view to rehabilitating them, facilitating their reintegration and developing their skills;
- Making the issues of citizenship and gender equality part of the debate over democracy that is currently taking place in Algeria;
- Calling for the repeal or amendment of the Family Code; and,
- Implementing state-funded projects in the areas of microcredit, literacy, training and the like.

NGOs working in the area of women's issues have contributed to the preparation of a document entitled "Elements of a Strategy for the Integration of the Gender Issue into Governmental Policies and Programs."

United Nations agencies and other bodies are participating in various activities as well. These include UNFPA, which, during the period from 2000 to 2003, implemented a project aimed at the integration of a gender perspective in the field of reproductive health. The project, which was funded by the Italian Government, significantly reinforced national efforts to introduce a gender perspective in the field of reproductive health, combat all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and enhance the status of women in society. Another organization that has been very active is UNIFEM, which has implemented two major projects in Algeria:

(a) A project on trauma management for women who have been emotionally damaged by violence, run by UNIFEM in cooperation with NGOs such as Help (*Au secours*) and Women in Danger (*Femmes en danger*). The project includes a study on violence and the preparation of guides containing advice on psychological problems and information on sexual violence.

In this context, the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the National Public Health Institute, has announced that it intends to distribute the above-mentioned guides to hospital workers as part of a course of training in caring for

battered women. In addition, there is a study currently under way, now nearing completion, on building national capacities for responding adequately to the economic needs of women victims of domestic violence. The aim of the study is to identify economic activities that will enable women at the shelter run by the *Femmes en danger* organization to earn cash income.

(b) A research project on internalization of the principles of equality among the population, which was conducted by the Algerian branch of the Collectif 95 Maghreb Égalité organization. The project has yielded a substantial quantity of data on social views of the situation of women with respect to work, education, political participation, domestic violence, divorce and civil status.

A third United Nations organization is UNDP, which in July 2002 joined forces with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to conduct a study on a strategy aimed at supporting the socioeconomic and political position of women in the development process. The study included, in particular, strategic factors for integrating a gender perspective in public policies and programs.

#### **PART IV: Main challenges and actions to address them**

There are a number of actions and initiatives that the government intends to take in order to implement in full the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (Beijing + 5) beyond 2005. Among the most important of these actions and initiatives are the following:

- Completing the review of the Family Code as soon as possible and also reviewing other relevant legislation;
- Developing more effective tools for investigating, enhancing and monitoring the family environment and women's issues by creating data banks and supplying them with data from relevant research;
- Advancing women's issues on a broad front by means of communication activities, including the use of printed information and publications;
- Implementation of international instruments and enactment of relevant legislation;
- Enhancement of participation and partnership in matters relating to the advancement of families, not only among various branches of the government and at the level of central and local state bodies, but also at the level of community organizations. This will yield more satisfactory returns in terms of the outlays involved and will also strengthen participation within society itself;

- Enhancement of the social situation of women, both as regards employment and the assumption of responsibilities in general and as regards their participation in economic activity;
- More adequate health care for women and children, combined with further action to heighten awareness in the family environment and among women in the matter of preventive health and encouragement for family planning, as well as literacy training;
- Directing and enhancing housewives' contribution to the creation of wealth and increased family income through microcredit facilities and other support mechanisms;
- Developing assistance and solidarity activities directed at women and children living in difficult situations;
- Preparation of a national new ICT development strategy, with updating and adaptation of training programs to accommodate these new technologies, and reinforcement of the network of academies specializing in that field;
- Extending the drinking water distribution system to give more people the permanent benefit of clean water;
- Mobilizing the forces of solidarity to mitigate social exclusion and poverty and working to reduce the incidence of extreme poverty to 2.85 percent and the percentage of the population living on \$1 a day to 1 percent by 2015 through the action of the Agency for Social Development and programs designed to reinforce the social security network;
- Reducing the maternal mortality rate from 117 for every 100,000 live births to 57 per 100,000 by 2015 and increasing the percentage of deliveries in a health care facility to 99 percent;
- Controlling the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS through a national program to combat these diseases, along with the development of a malaria monitoring strategy;
- Continuing vaccination campaigns and continuing efforts to sensitize people, especially in the school environment; and,
- Completing the work of reforming the education system, in particular by supporting teacher training and education reform (program review) and restructuring of the system, combined with the development of a network of basic education and skills development establishments based on needs; continuation of the drive to open cafeterias in day schools, residential schools and semi-residential schools, along with school transport services for the benefit of pupils, especially girls, in rural areas.

The time frame for attainment of these objectives is laid out in the five-year plan covering the period 2004-2009. ([www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ALGERIA-English.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ALGERIA-English.pdf)).

### **Appendix E: Women's Literacy Class Observations in Tiaret, Algeria Year 2007/2008: The Alphabet**

Due to the long-term duration of the observation the author was able to form friendship ties with the literacy teacher, Zohra as well as with the students of the class.

When I first joined the class as an observer alias fellow class participant greetings among students was a lengthy affair, as they generally are in Algeria, regardless whether you have known that person for years or just met them.

In addition to the initial handshake and kisses on the cheeks, one is obliged to reciprocate the questions about one's family, work, house, health and weather.

This all goes towards cementing the relationship and showing concern for others.

I notice now how beneficial it was for me to have joined the class for the length of time. I was able to observe a lot of different situations and overhear a lot of conversations the women had about a variety of subjects and concerns. I have a better idea how each person is like. I know what they are referring to when they talk about a particular person or topic during the class.

#### **Thursday 17.04.2008**

My first day. The teacher is named Zohra, 23 yrs. and a university student who will graduate in 3 months. We learned the letter "lem": la (Feta) lu (duma) lee (Kassra); laaa, luuu, leee; lan, lun, lin. At the end of the class Zohra passed out black coffee and a traditional dessert made from dates and semolina flour.

#### **Monday 21.04.2008**

Zohra passed out cookie wafers and chalk to the class members. I noticed how when one person brings water, she gladly shares with the rest of the class. It is almost self-explanatory to drink from someone else's water bottle. They simply pass the same cup around. My mother-in-law brought a vitamin drink (multi-vitamin tablet dissolved in water) and the other women were very curious. It was naturally shared with another elderly classmate regardless of its medicinal content. The woman treated is as a health boost drink along the lines "what the heck, it couldn't hurt to try".

**Monday 28.04.2008**

A regular day at literacy class it seemed until Omaria arrived almost 2 hours late, huffing and puffing and red in the face for having carried a steam cooker pot and three big ceramic bowls up the stairs to class. Her daughter-in-law had a baby, so she brought the traditional *Aisch*, large-grain couscous soup with chicken in tomato sauce to share with her classmates! She sat on the step and unscrewed the lid of the heavy pot with all her might and began ladling out bowls of soup without further ado and no introduction why. She would not have needed one anyway since everyone could tell by the dish that it had to do with the birth of a baby. This seemed very comical to me but also perfectly befitting of their style. That was it with learning for the rest of the class time. Ah, well sometimes a nice hot bowl of home-style soup is better than all the learning in the world.

**Thursday 8.05.2008**

When I arrived, the classmates asked for my mother-in-law, who was at her family farm in Melaab for the weekend. Then they began to chat a little with me, asking if I could cook couscous. I was not sure if they meant whether I could prepare it from scratch, which entailed forming globules from wheat flour and semolina flour or whether they meant if I knew how to steam it up in the double cooker. It was the latter, phew! Oh, how they were pleased when I said I could. This rang bells since I had often been asked by Algerians if I could make certain typical dishes. The traditional food is very important and of foremost concern to the Algerians I have met both living in France and in Algeria, although more so in Algeria. It seems to ease their minds thinking of me as a foreigner but yet being able to prepare the native dishes for my Algerian husband. They chuckled with delight and empathy at the thought of me preparing their food. "*Segia, Mesqina*" and of course endless thumbs up!

Zohra was not there that day due to illness, so we all went over to other teacher's classroom, Nassira. "*Arduwahu!*" (come!), she said. We totaled 27 together with the other class. Quite some work for Nassira. There was a lot of talking going on due to the merged class and longer waiting periods between exercises. Nassira went down the aisle of desks to each person and checked if she had completed the exercise correctly. Small groups of people were talking enthusiastically about different topics. Omaria held her ears and said, "*subhanallah*" (way too loud). She wanted to go home.

Dunya was sitting next to me and started to joke around with the teacher in order to compensate for not having quite followed the directions. She wrote on her chalkboard rather than in her workbook and played around with the few French words she knew as she often does during class: "*Tré bien, Oui, Non*", while laughing a little to herself.



**Monday 12.05.2008**

The students often refer to the teacher as *Scheicha* but interchange by calling her by her name or in terms of endearment such *Khalti* (my aunt/dear). My teacher has a somewhat “tough” approach. She is clear and stern. She likes to hold the typical instructor ruler stick and wave it around and sometimes directing it at students though always half joking. It appears as if she was trying to maintain a balance between consequence and humor, which seems to appeal to (and strangely not offend) the ladies in the class. It is definitely not my mentality although I can see where she is coming from. To me it seems almost childish if not slightly rude. Often she approaches a student who is chatting or taking too long to finish her work and pulls her *hijab* (headscarf) over her face. I shudder at the thought of her doing this to me and actually ended up telling her that would not be my kind of joke. Yikes!

In general, activities are simple and straight forward; however, oh so time-consuming. Most of these ladies never went to school at all, and it takes time for them to focus on the chalkboard and then transfer the letters onto their own paper, slowly and carefully forming each letter. Watching them brings me back to first grade when I learned to form the upper and lower case letters.

The older women in the class are quite impatient while waiting for Zohra to check their work. They wave their boards or booklets and call out “Scheicha” or “Zohra”. My mother-in-law is more impatient than the others and will not stop calling until she comes. A small discussion ensued how females should not teach males and vice versa. All the teachers are female, four in total. However, one of the classes held at the same time across the hall is just for men. Samia teaches them. When my mother-in-law comprehended this, she scoffed at the idea and gave a small lecture to our own teacher Zohra about how women should not teach men. Zohra explained that on the day teachers were hired only women were interested in the literacy teaching positions, and so Samia had graciously accepted to teach the remaining men’s class. Judging by their appearance, one would say that they are 40 and older, and I suspect Samia is in her mid-20s. My mother-in-law responded by telling how things were done in the past and held her hands up in the air as if to say “do as you like”.

I was slightly reprimanded by the teacher myself today. There are three workbooks to write in, and I did not understand the order since they all basically looked the same. I do not recall being told in which book to write what. Apparently, one is meant for just writing verses from the Qur’an, one is for writing exercises and letters, and the third is for exams. Mine were all a mix. Zohra said she was going “to hate me” if I didn’t sort it out, but what she really meant to say was that she was going to get upset with me. At least she spared me the insulting routine of pulling my headscarf over my head.

**Thursday 14.05.2008**

A day of cell phone interruption! For some reason the common cause of class disruption today were the incoming calls on the women's cell phones. Just a gamut of ring tunes, too! My mother-in-law was called by her 25-year-old grandson who works as a judge in a town bordering Morocco. He just called to chat and hear how she was doing. She talked so loudly and made no effort to keep her conversation to herself. I don't think it dawned on her how much she was disrupting the class. The next lady was called by someone while she was standing in front at the chalkboard writing down a dictation. She let it ring many times -- the theme song to "Bonanza" of all things! -- until she finally ran to her plastic bag and picked up. She said, "I swear by Allah, I am standing at the chalkboard this very moment!!" She, however, stepped down and walked towards the door in an effort to keep it down. The whole class laughed.

This made Zohra also laugh although she became a bit impatient. She pulled out her stick and slightly tapped Dunya on the shoulder, who was laughing harder and longer than the rest. Dunya and the woman at the chalkboard (Khadija) seem to have a somewhat antagonizing relationship. Later she interrupted the exercise again and Khadija told Zohra to hit her! The oldest woman in class, Haja, dressed entirely in white was called to write the letter "th" on the chalkboard. She started to write in a slant rather than in a straight line and did not seem to notice. Dunya noticed and laughed. "*Ja havidth*", she said. Then the rest of the class chuckled. Haja started to laugh at herself, too. Afterwards everyone broke into a round of empathetic laughter as if laughing at themselves.

So far the students seem flexible and to have low expectations as to "how" the class should be run. They show ambition to complete the task correctly and eagerly ask my niece Miriam to look over their work if Zohra is otherwise busy. In the background one hears the murmur of letters "raa, roo, ree" being sounded out.

It was a grey but windy hot day, and as time passed more and more ladies took off their outer headscarves still wearing their traditional bandanas underneath tied to the back of their heads.

**Monday 19.05.2008**

Zohra was not there today because of exams at the university. When I arrived this time I decided to greet each person individually, which is customary among the women. Until now I did not do this because once you pass that line of chumminess, there is no going back. I had been greeted by every lady as they arrived anyway, and it seemed like such a mumble jumble of greetings and repeating "How are you?" No, this time I was spontaneous and know I will pay for it since from now on I will be expected to always greet each lady, making my

rounds from row to row. They were overjoyed. Haja even remarked to her neighbor how I normally do not greet everyone personally "*mandeesh*".

When Zohra still had not arrived, Asma invited us to join her class "*arduwahu*". She is much different from the other two teachers: quieter, calmer and more patient. She has finished her studies as an advocate but has not yet worked in her profession. She has a much different teaching style as well although I think her class is more advanced than ours. We began by writing down words that she dictated. She wrote quite complex sentences in Arabic on the board and we were required to write the answers in our booklets.

My mother-in-law exclaimed it was way over her head. The writing font was much too small for her to decipher in the first place, the pace quicker and the exercises too trivial. However, she did not give up altogether, which is commendable. After a pause she would attempt to write down the sentence from the board. She also has difficulty writing in a straight line. She starts in the right corner and sort of winds down vertically. She looked over to another of the older women and asked her frankly how she is coming along with her writing. The lady said not at all "*walu walu*" (nothing, nothing) and then remarked that one has to patient. My mother-in-law explained that she was trying to learn a few words so she can read the Qur'an during her Haj next time after Ramadan. The whole class stopped what they were doing to congratulate her and wish well for her efforts "*Inscha Allah*".

#### **Thursday 22.05.2008**

Zohra was back again; however, this time almost everyone in the class did not come. There were just two in the higher level, Naima and Fatima and two in my class - Dunya and Khadija. I asked Naima whether she had prior schooling, and she said just a few years and the other lady said she had gone to djemma. In my class the ladies commented that they had not had any schooling. Zohra had me join the more advanced group today in writing dictation of the Qur'an. I did well and was glad to do something less monotonous than reciting letters. However, in spite of my personal joy, Zohra was extra impatient with me whenever I made mistakes.

When I commented on how few of us came today, Zohra said they are all making couscous "*taam*". I did not quite understand until she explained how it was "*haram*" (unlawful) to partake in this and that there is only one God. Khadija then commented about "*sidi Raba*", a forefather/saint whom her family honored. This sparked a large and loud discussion about praying and how it is "*Schirk*" (un-Islamic) to celebrate a Marabut. Zohra pulled Khadija's headscarf over her head and began telling her how wrong it is to believe in this. She recited the first line of a verse in the Qur'an, "*Quol hualahu ahad*". Samia the teacher

from the other class joined in the discussion as well. Khadija remained silent but did not at all look upset about being reprimanded so harshly.

Zohra wanted to accompany me to the door downstairs. Along the way I asked her what she studied. She said Arabic and would love to study and work in the Middle East someday. Her father did not allow her to study outside of the city for her current studies.

### **Monday 26.05.2008**

Zohra will be absent this week due to exams at the university. Today I joined Asma's class again. When I came in, I greeted the women and was motioned to sit down at a certain desk next to one of the older ladies. There were 11 women today in her class. Asma was busy passing out black coffee, mint tea and cake. After she passed out another piece of cake and offered cola. When I asked what the occasion was, they replied by saying "*havela*" (fest) and "*utla*" (holiday), so like an end-of-the-year party. At some point Asma left to pass out coffee and cake to the other classes. She was gone for over a half an hour. No one knew for certain if we were going to learn something that day, and only when Asma returned did it become clear we were not. She then passed out sweets and chewing gum, three pieces each and sat herself down next to one of the three groups of women that formed in her absence. My group first talked about whether I preferred Germany to Algeria and whether I had children or knew how to cook couscous. I answered their questions. One of the women said her son lives in Germany but returns for Ramadan. Then they talked more amongst themselves about who in their families lived in Spain or Germany.

I called Kader to pick me up early. Then I thanked Asma and said goodbye to the rest. Only then did I learn that this was supposed to be Asma's last day to teach. When I inquired about the next class, she said "*sai*" (done). The elder Haja from my class followed me downstairs to leave as well. She told me that Asma has already finished her studies.

### **Monday 2.06.2008**

Of all surprises today was Exam Day, i.e., the last day of the school-year! Now three months of vacation, like in any other elementary school. Not everyone showed up today. Just eight, including me, came from my class and three from the other class.

The exams were of the most straightforward sort I have ever experienced. Zohra came to each person and wrote down two letters to conjugate, already writing down how the letter should look like as well as a single word exhibiting one of the letters: alif, ba. We all passed and will move up to the second level after the summer break.

The other class was asked to write down a shorter verse from the Qur'an from dictation. Afterwards, we drank coffee and ate pastries. We must return briefly on Thursday with two photos.

I asked Zohra what she planned to do after college, and she said she is completing her apprenticeship as a seamstress on the side and would like to continue her studies or look for a job. She would love to study Islam in a foreign country but lacks the financial backing.

I asked her to please fill out the questionnaire I wrote up for the teachers. When I asked her to have Asma fill one out, too, Zohra said that Asma did not like the other teachers and that she thought she was better than them. Zohra said, for example, when Asma made a mistake she insisted she was right. Nassira studied the same subject as Asma, and Samia studied agricultural engineering.

### **Year 2008/2009: From Letters to Words!**

#### **Summary of first classes of the second year**

By now relevant questions are easier to come up with since I can understand more Algerian dialect, though there is always room for improvement. Overall, I feel more integrated into the class, which has a positive effect on my work.

Zohra's dedication to teach seems to be getting stronger. This must have to do with the fact that the program is much better organized. There are now annual meetings for teachers and administration where teachers get feedback on their work and are offered some form of training. The class inspector comes by more often to check the class and the number of participants.

Zohra has mentioned that she gets a lot more positive recognition for her efforts and the importance of her work from others. All this seems to have raised her level of self-esteem.

#### **17.11.2008 (15 students officially)**

After quite a long break, the classes started up again at the school on Monday the 10th of November. Apparently, classes at other schools and mosques had already started a few weeks earlier. I was late coming this week since I just learned about the class a few days ago from my Ma-in-law. She will no longer be coming. (She is thrilled to be going on her Haj next Saturday and will be gone for a month.) She is not particularly keen on the classes since they are not well designed for women in their early 70's - a bit fast-paced. I told her that when she returns she and I can go together and she begrudgingly said "*inscha allah!*"

Today I was two hours late from a 2½-hour long class. I thought it started at four p.m. Okay, when I arrived, it was so good to see the familiar faces although

less than half of the ladies returned, officially 15. My teacher Zohra came back and Samia, who teaches the men's class, which she said was also less full than the last year's class. One woman, Naima from the upper-level class was there and just five others from one of the other women's classes. I do not know yet how many returned in total. The two teachers Asma and Nassira, however, did not return.

It was review day! Zohra said if I am late again she will "kill me"! She was happy to see me and wrote an SMS to remind me to come today although did not include the time. I just had time to review the letter "B" and write the word *kitab* (book). Zohra asked why none of us reviewed our work during the break? Apparently, no one did. Class is on Mondays at 2 p.m. and Thursdays twice from 9:30 a.m. to noon and from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**Thursday 20.11.2008** - 9:30 a.m. We waited downstairs in the tiny heated room until Zohra arrived 10 min. late. The male students and school janitors, as well as some women who work at the school, waited outside talking. Then we all went upstairs to our classes. Zohra put on the white smock that signifies her being the teacher. Still not too many women attended but a few more than last time. In group 1: Omaria, Haja, Zaineb, Khadija, and a student from the other class. In group 2: Me and Naima. Zohra bumped me up in the higher group since I already know my letters and can form words. She referred to group 1 as the "children". Group 1 reviewed a few single letters in their three forms "b" (ba, bu, be) and many got them mixed up. They were confused by the shape of the letter at the beginning, middle and end of the word. Zohra called some to the board to write the letters.

More women came for the afternoon session starting at 2 p.m. Two women from the other women's classes joined our class, Fatima and Khira. Some women discussed why one student did not return. It had something to do with her husband and family wanting or needing her at home. Basically, we all repeated the same lesson from the morning. Group 1 practiced the letter "ta". Some students brought Zohra oranges and cake. Omaria gave her money after class in a discreet way.

Zohra told me to write smaller or else I will fill in my copy book very quickly and have to buy a new one. She still pulls the ladies' headscarves over their heads for talking out of line or making a lot of mistakes, all in fun. The women react very patiently. I would flip out.

The teachers come without any formal training, and either they adapt or do not. In Zohra's case, she is very successful with her students as opposed to Asma, whose teaching technique was more suited for advanced students. She wrote very small, did not explain much even though the content of her lesson was

above and beyond comprehension for someone who is still struggling to learn the letters.

The *asr* call to prayer came and many pray in the class room. They get up without excusing themselves and pray at the back of the room towards Mecca. It is not at all disruptive and seems perfectly natural and normal. The women seem serious about learning while they are in class. They sound out the letters to themselves in practice and ask other students if it is correct while Zohra is helping someone else.

### **Monday 24.11.2008**

I noticed Dunya right away when I entered the classroom. She was ecstatic that I remembered her name and appreciated my own happiness about her return after her absence. Two other ladies from the former classes also came today.

Many of the women have dentures at quite a young age. Some women must only be in their 30's and have false teeth, and the older women have quite a few gold or amalgam metal capped teeth. The ladies in group 1 were sounding out the letters to each other. Zohra began with the letter "alif" followed by writing simple words which everyone knew, such as "*borek*" for "ba". Six ladies in group 1 (Khadija, Omaria and Zainab were not there, as well as 3 others) and 3 came in group 2: Khira, Naima and me.

The inspector from the IQRAA direction came today to inquire about attendance. Zohra later told me that she wasn't up front with him saying that some were missing due to family reasons such as a death, etc. I asked why she did this, and she said because she did not know why the women were not present and feels it is their personal sphere as well as because she was concerned that the man would cancel the class and then she would be out of a job.

Zohra is beginning to share more about her own family. Last week she told me out of the blue that her brother lives in Spain, is married, and has two kids. She has not spoken to him in years. He does not fast during Ramadan and is not particularly religious. Today while explaining the word for "uncle" and "aunt", she remarked that she does not care for any of her aunts. She asked me if I knew that her mother died. I said yes. She said her father has remarried, has two small children with his new wife, and moved out of their family home. She also shared that her father never loved her mother.

Group 2 was given an exercise handwritten on paper. One was to copy the paper and then fill in the blanks with one of the words written above the text. Naima, Khira and I were struggling with this exercise. However, they at least recognized more of the words than I did. Zohra said she would dictate words from a text to me instead. I was in a good position today to watch the other stu-

dents complete their tasks. Once again group 1 repeated the letter "ba" in its 3 x 3 form.

The women were still mixing them up, and I am beginning to think that learning the alphabet has no relevance to their everyday lives. I think if there were more possibilities and places to go where they could utilize what they learned either in a library or reading the newspaper or participating in some sort of activity with words, they would be more likely to retain what they learned in class. So far, I see that the basic beginner skills are difficult to hold on to. Reading the Qur'an at home would be another possibility for them to practice; however, for group 1 it is too advanced at the moment.

### **Thursday 27.11.2008**

Today nine ladies showed up for group 1: Omaria, Dunya, Gesmia, Bachta, Khadija, Arbia, Sadia, Bachta and Zohra. Just Khira came in my class. Naima was there in the morning but stayed home to help out her ill sister. One woman will not return because she has problems at home with her daughter-in-law. She was even crying about it in class last season. Zohra said this was a common problem in Algeria. As the proverb goes, "When the daughter-in-law is on good terms with her mother-in-law, then the devil will go to heaven."

They practiced the letter "dgim" (dga dgu dgee) and got them mixed up even when they had the same pronunciation because the letter changes its form at the beginning, middle, and end of a word. Zohra spoke encouragingly when they did things right and they were delighted to be told "good job". It seemed to motivate them: alif, ba, ta, tha...

Samia was not there for her men's afternoon class. Instead she was at a gathering with her boss (Mm. Ammari) in the city center having to do with the FLN political party. Zohra said she does not belong to any political party and that she is liberal, free from any association. She said she respects Bouteflika but does not vote. She also said she did not care to go to a place where men and women are mixed. Zohra told me that her father forbade her to study English because it was only offered at universities outside of her city. So, she decided to study Arabic instead.

### **Monday 2.12. 2008**

In group 1 just eight women were present: Omaria, Bachta 2, Zohra, Sadia, Gesmia, Arbia, Dunja and Khira and Naima and myself in group 2. They went through three letters today. We did dictation. Common mistakes included wrong pronunciation of letters or writing them in reversed order. The women respond well to positive feedback and Zohra praises their good work on their little black boards with "*rabi noik inschah allah*". One woman arrived late with her little



daughter, who had a fever. Before she attended Nassira's class but will now join ours since the other classes are not scheduled. They practiced "h" and "del" and "thel".

There was a small discussion about the cleaning woman named Khira. She is a small petit woman in her 30s and is an orphan, having lost both her parents. She regularly cleans the school floors. Apparently, she was hit by her female colleague. I did not find out why because she left afterwards. It was unsettling and the women sympathized with her. I had noticed her before, and she seemed somewhat insecure but was very polite and happy to say hello.

#### **Thursday 4.12. 2008**

In group 1: Omaria, Khadija, Zohra, Dunya, Aisha, Sadia and Gesmia came. I was the only one in my group. They were given homework last week and almost everyone completed it. Zohra refers to Islamic history, the prophetic stories, and the students respond well to this because it is something they already are familiar with. When one woman asked whether she was to write down the words on the board, Zohra said no and that it was meant for the "bigger/older ones," meaning us. She laughed and said, "So so, we are the small ones?" Then she stated her age jokingly.

Zohra dictated a story from our textbook about a poor woman who just had a baby and is overworked. Her daughter thinks up a way to help her mother out and divides up the chores among her siblings. While doing this, Zohra commented on how "the character's husband is probably not very helpful just as most men are. They go out and do not understand how much work there is at home". She also said men look at other women. I added not all men do this. Then she said 50% -- even the conservative men. She said she speaks by Allah because her father does this, so she knows what she is talking about.

2 p.m. Major mud along the way to school and I sunk in deep at one point - ahhh! Fatma and Khira came, so Zohra repeated the text I worked on from the morning. She knows that I am here also to observe the others, so it was no problem. Ten came in group 1: Omaria, Khadija, Zohra, Dunya, Gesmia, Sadia, Bachta, Arbia, Schinaa, Aisha. Now they were to practice writing down complete words from the board. They practiced the letter "sod".

The women generously share their extra scarves for others to pray on the floor. It is an unofficial break. While some pray, the others quietly look over their work.

Zohra said the other two teachers, Nassira and Asma, did not return because they did not personally care for their students. They were interested in the pay and that was it. Zohra said she will be paid at the end of the year. She said she loves her students. She does this for Allah and to help the women.

The women sometimes confide personal matters with Zohra. Today Arbia, who was not looking her perky usual self (her eye makeup was slightly smeared from crying), shared that she is having problems with her husband. She also told Zohra to never get married. Arbia was slightly impatient to leave class early.

### 21.12.2008

Finally back after the *Eid al Adha* break and two subsequent sick days for me. It is winter vacation and the women meet daily during this time. Apparently, they finished all the letters yesterday. Zohra said she was tired. Today she gave each of them a textbook specifically designed for adults. Originally, the program planned for one textbook to be shared between two students. Zohra said she persuaded M. Saidani to give each student her own book. The ladies seemed to react calmly about the new book, no extra enthusiasm. Some of the photos in the book depict older people sitting in a literacy class, which would establish a connection between them and what they are doing.

There were 13 women today: 11 ladies in group 1: Aisha Khadija, Zohra, Dunya, Bachta, Omaria, Sadia, Gesmia, Arbia, Schinaa and Bachta returned!; and, three in group 2: Naima, Fatma and me.

Zohra prepared a piece of paper with all the letters of the alphabet in different positions as a general overview. Overall the class seemed charged with energy, perhaps only in contrast to me who am still feeling rather weak after having a bad case of the flu. Theoretically, they should have finished the letters last summer. They are about four months behind with starting the second phase: learning words to form sentences and math. Zohra began with the words: abi and omi starting with the letter alif followed by mama and baba.

Zohra has a full lesson plan. There are fewer long pauses between lessons than during the first year. The women complete the exercises faster, too, which means that Zohra must constantly be alert between the two groups.

Arbia is often called on her cell phone. Her cell phone seems to have a new Arabic tune each day. Dunya and Bachta started initially at the mosque and switched over to the school because the class was cancelled. The other Bachta has not come for a while and Zohra thinks she is ill. As it turns out, her mother-in-law was ill.

Zohra began talking about men and how she does not like them. She wants to finish her studies or work, and men stand in the way, like her father. She is working on her sewing certificate for February. She has received her license at the university but would like to complete her masters and PhD. Her father and siblings do not want her to leave the city for her studies because they fear for her living alone.

Samia's class - just one man came today. She said it must be because the sun is shining outside.

### 22.12.2008

NEW WORKBOOK. There seems to be a discrepancy between the program's goal and actual reality. The government doesn't distribute all monies, which is not uncommon to hear. In the case of the literacy classes, it may be trickling down the pockets of corrupt individuals in middle to higher positions. Many teachers I spoke with do not have sufficient supplies such as workbooks for their students, etc.

The inspector from the literacy program came today to check the attendance of Zohra's class. This is a fairly new procedure. He said they must make sure the teachers are actually present and not just pocketing their paycheck without teaching. He asked about the workbooks and the number of students – currently at 13. He asked if there were any problems and how my teacher and I conversed since I was a foreigner. The inspector informed her of a meeting coming up in Damouny, where teachers will be taught a new teaching strategy.

Zohra was angry at the inspector for coming into the classroom, thus showing no "*haschma*" (shame) or respect for the ladies who normally cover their faces in public. Zohra said she now feels obliged to teach the women because when she meets them in the street, they ask about the class. One even came to her door, asking if she would please continue teaching. She said they remind her of her mother, who died 10 years ago. Zohra is very aware of the rapport she has with her students and told me that it makes the students more inclined to work.

There were 10 ladies today. (Dunya, Bachta and Gesmia were not there.) One new woman, Khira, joined today. She was previously in one of the other classes. Group 2: Khira, Fatma and me. Basic supplies are paid for by the students: copy books, chalk, blackboards. Today Zohra wrote a verse from the Qur'an on the board, starting with "*bismillahi al rachmani al rachim.... Iqra...bismi rubika alla...*" and explained the context. It was the first verse of the Qur'an revealed to the prophet Mohammed by the angel Gabrielle.

Zohra requires three copy books just like the grade school system: for class work, dictation and exams. She is very strict about this order. She was rigid about writing the date in the upper left corner before the previous lesson had been finished. No one finishes the entire lesson before one puts the current date even if the date does not coincide with the same day the lesson was finished.

### 23.12.2008

Almost full house again: 11 ladies in group 1 (Bachta and Omaria absent at a funeral in Oran) and Naima, Fatma and me in group 2. The women started to

work from their new book. Dunya said she was absent yesterday because she visited someone in the hospital.

Zohra brought a folder of her certificates of excellence to show me. She is a member of Aren - a university organization supported by Bouteflika and one that anyone is welcome to join. She is part of a poetry group where she has won three awards, including first place. She writes about her mother. Zohra must be quite good.

Zohra told me about the meeting in Damouney last year - a four day workshop with a different topic each day. She said it is much different to teach adults than children. She also brought a woven piece of macramé she did and mentioned she knows how to do other things: sew, crochet.

First the women repeated the verse "*Igra*". They sounded out the letters of each word then returned to exercises in their workbooks.

Samia had three students today.

#### **24.12.2008**

Group 1 had ten students: Aisha, Khadija, Arbia, Schinna, Omaria, Gesmia, Khira, Zohra, Bachta, Sadia and Naima in my class. Zohra passed out notes for her students with the books they needed to buy for class, presumably for their literate family members to read. We had to write down a long story about the life of prophet Muhammed, which was very tiring since I did not know half the words I was writing down. But even Naima was tuckered out.

Today Samia had 7 students.

#### **25.12.2008**

Just seven students in group 1: Khadija, Aisha, Zohra, Omaria, Gesmia, Bachta, Omaria. Group 2: Naima and me.

#### **27.12.2008**

In group 1 there were nine students this time, including Bachta<sup>2</sup>, who was gone for a long time because her mother-in-law was ill she said. Group 2: Naima, Khira and me. Actually quite consistent attendance despite vacation times. Zohra's daily flipping over of the hijab. Yikes!

Today a political science student, Muna Backti, 22 yrs., came with a literacy teacher, Fatima, 26 yrs., who had a four-year university license in Arabic. Fatima teaches at a school in Wadtulba within the Haut Plateau. Muna is from this area but studies politics and international studies at the university in *Billabbas*. She interviewed Sadia and Bachta about their educational background, problems in general, problems with learning, family relations (for example, relationships with children), hobbies, health, money problems, transporta-

tion, who translates information for them in everyday situations, how she likes the teacher and her progress. She mentioned a woman she met who knew how to speak, read, and write in French but only how to speak in Algerian dialect.

Muna is interested in looking into the overall wellbeing of literacy students and relating it back to the big political situation in Algeria as a partial aspect of the whole picture. She is also interested in environmental issues, people's rights, democracy, diplomacy, media and international relations. Muna could speak some German because a relative of hers lives in Germany.

My teacher was clearly jealous of my interest in speaking with these two women. I gave Muna my tel. number and said she was welcome to come over to my house and have a conversation about her project goals. Zohra asked what I was doing and if I had a new best friend or what! She said that she would give me all the information I needed.

Zohra was a bit antsy while I was interviewing the ladies in our class, too. She would often approach me and say to keep my voice down, that our talking was a disruption to her class. When I offered to go to a different room, she declined; and when I explained to her that this is important for my work, she calmed down a bit and wished me luck. Zohra has been a big help so far, and I think she just felt a bit threatened that her role as one of my key informants was dwindling. I assured her that she was of the greatest help to me.

The visiting literacy teacher, Fatima, was a little overbearing for Zohra, too. She stood in front of Zohra's class for five long minutes lecturing the class about the importance of learning Arabic as the way to paradise and how the angels are watching their good deeds. Her visit was unannounced and indeed disruptive of the lesson. Zohra may have felt as if Fatima were taking over.

### **28.12.2008**

A new student came, Miriam, who was previously attending a mosque class and now wanted to join ours. She came without any supplies, and Aisha, without further ado, lent her a pen and three pages of paper. Dunya, Schinaa, Bachta were missing today. Fatma and Naima came in group 2. Bachta brought her granddaughter who politely participated in the class- she is quiet and raises her hand or approaches Zohra to whisper the answer.

Today Zohra immediately came to me with "very important info about the *problems* of Omia". I do think she was trying to compensate for yesterday's "intrusion on her territory" and regain hold of her informant position, but she was also genuinely disturbed by the news. She told me about the formal plan of the IQRAA program. First year for letters and 2nd year for learning words in association with building sentences in certain contexts as well as learning math.

The main problem is that her former boss, Mm. Ammari, and this year's male president, M. Saidani, have instructed all the teachers to bump every student up to the second level. Zohra said that this is detrimental for students such as Sadia who are still in the letter learning stage and have trouble moving forward at all. She said Sadia has eyesight problems and cannot afford to go to the doctor. As a result Zohra is teaching three different levels in a one class setting. She said that students such as Sadia need to be taught separately at their own pace, which requires more teachers. The class goes for 8 months (Nov.-July) this year.

Zohra also mentioned the student Khira in group 2, who has completed five years of school and how it would be more suitable for her to attend a foreign correspondence class from home. Zohra requested for a special certificate for Khira to attend such a class, costing 25,000 dinars but was denied and told they would only issue one after the second year is completed.

Another problem is with the distribution of workbooks. For Arabic the IQRAA direction wanted two students to share a book. For math they said Zohra was to teach the whole class from one single book without the students' getting one of their own. Zohra said it is impossible to write down all the exercises on the board. It requires her drawing several pictures and diagrams. They are much too intricate to teach without the students' having their own book of reference.

Zohra ended up teaching math for the first time today. She started with the basic shapes and their names, writing and drawing them on the board and having the students write this down in their copy books: rectangle, square, circle, semi-circle. Eventually, she had the ladies each come up to the board and draw the shape next to the word she dictated. The women were a little timid to do this but did well.

All in all the class was very talkative today much to the dismay of Zohra, who turned red and walked back and forth in disbelief. She told me she was angry and nervous and felt like crying. Zohra was frustrated for their lack of attention and said it was for them. I told her she needs to take a deep breath and try to calm down for her own peace of mind. She really takes this class seriously, which is commendable. Zohra commented today on how many children in parts of Africa like Somalia are in the same predicament as the illiterate women in Algeria -- perhaps a bit of a harsh comparison, but Zohra is at times dramatic.

### **29.12. 2008 /The Islamic New Year al Hijra**

Group 1: Khadija, Zohra, Miriam and Assia, Bachta and granddaughter, Khira, Bachta, Gesmia

Group 2: Fatma, Naima, Khira and me.

Today Naima's 18-year-old niece, Hiba, came to ask me to look over an essay she wrote for English class. She was preparing a report about illegal immigration world-wide and got her entire information from the Internet. Hiba makes a pleasant first impression as a bright and mature young woman. According to Naima, she wants to become a journalist. She asked me to define some terms she was unsure of. One topic she got from the net was about homosexual partners and how one tries to immigrate into the other's country. She did not understand the terms gay/lesbian so I explained it although it may be too risky of a topic for the Algerian classroom. When I asked her about going to the library to look at other sources, she said it would be too difficult and that there were not any up-to-date publications.

Miriam's granddaughter is physically disabled. I was told that Assia fell out the window from the second floor at age six. During the fall she injured her head and legs and walks slightly bow-legged with a limp. At first I thought she had contracted polio at one time. She dropped out of school after four years but is very bright and an exuberant learner. She seems confident about learning and directly approaches every class member, including me, to discuss the class work or to brush off the chalk from my coat. Assia will now attend our literacy class to catch up with her missed time at school. Perhaps she will go on to the university someday.

Zohra was kind to Assia. Today she said that she wants everyone to learn how to become independent workers in order to be competent in everyday situations as well as to be able to read the Qur'an correctly and pray right. The women responded positively to this.

Fatma leaves regularly around 4 p.m. in order to be home before her husband gets home from work. He said she may attend class as long as she is always home when he is. Today group 1 worked out of their workbooks. Miriam can recite Qur'an quite well. She first attended the class at the mosque before coming to our class. Gesmia sat at the back of the classroom and was in a nervous state for some reason.

### 30.12.2009

Group 1: Assia, Khadija, Omaria, Zohra, Sadia, Schinaa, Bachta, Bachta2, Bachita w/Grandd., Miriam, Arbia. Group 2: Fatma and me.

Assia is left-handed. It was a very nice day - sunny and mild - spring! Some local kids were playing ball in the school courtyard. I think since the workbooks have been passed out, the class has taken on a more authentic school-like atmosphere.

Gesmia, born 1932, made some mistakes while writing down the Qur'an yesterday. Zohra sharply pointed them out "*khadta!*" (wrong!), comparing her

work with the "good" job Khira had done. BAM! That was enough for her to blow her top. She hastily stood up and handed her workbook to Zohra. She then demanded Zohra get her documents and the two photos initially required for signing up. Gesmia said she will not be back! Later Zohra shared with me that Gesmia had given her pocket money before and upon leaving had said, "I give you money and you tell me I make mistakes!"

The teacher of the men's class, Samia, offered to accompany Zohra to Gesmia's house and invite her back to the class, but Zohra declined. She said she is too proud to do so and that her father brought her up not to back down in such matters. I think Gesmia felt as if Zohra disrespected her as an elder by having criticized her work. Zohra's style of teaching is to compare students as a way of motivating them to do better. This clearly backfired with Gesmia that day, who normally is familiar with Zohra's approach.

Fatma complained about the load of dictation of text we had without any explanation of its content. It did seem quite absurd. Zohra seems overworked and has to constantly shuffle back and forth between three class levels.

Today I photographed the women busy at work. Bachta wanted me to take a close up of her. After I left, Sadia asked Zohra if I was sending these pictures to President Bush! The others laughed but some became "hellhörig" (they pricked up their ears).

### **31.12.2008**

Group 1: Assia, Aisha, Khadija, Khira, Sadia, Bachta<sup>2</sup> with son, Zohra, Omaria, Arbia, Miriam. Group 2: Fatma, Naima and me.

Zohra mentioned a fest celebrated by the Berber in the Kabylei. I never heard of it.

Today Fatima suggested that we group 2 students should also work from the textbooks and join the rest of the class instead of being given separate exercises. Great idea, thought Zohra.

The Inspector came today to talk to Zohra about a new class being offered for non-literate women. It is for training handicrafts such as cooking, baking, sewing, and knitting. Zohra was very excited about this. The women could attend such a class at a nearby craft center. She must take down the names of those interested in participating.

The workbooks state clearly on the front in Arabic that they are free of charge. The inspector also told Zohra when the final exams would take place - on June 31 - and that a separate teacher will give the tests because she is more objective than the regular teachers and would not be tempted to give the ladies the answers.



Khira has to stand at regular intervals due to strong rheumatic pain, and the small desks meant for school children don't help. I forgot to mention that we ladies squeeze into the children-sized desks to learn.

Miriam came late; Assia jumped for joy. Zohra talked about a text on the Algerian flag in the workbook and also talked about some famous women such as "Hassiba ben Boueli". I asked her about Djamila Bouhired. A pregnant teacher from a mosque class came to offer to sell the women each a book containing Islamic information on religion and history. It seemed too advanced, just text without the feta/kessra signs. Zohra declined. Apparently it is on a disk made available to all teachers who can print out a copy to distribute among students at low charge.

### 1.01.2009

Group 1: Assia, Khadija, Zohra & granddaughter, Omaria, Sadia, Khira, Arbia. Group 2: Fatma and me. Today I noticed that many of the women's shoes do not fit them properly, often on the small side, even when they are new.

Zohra wrote a sentence on the board and then called each person to come and write a word of it. I took photos of this. They were not able to keep a straight line. Sadia and Omaria declared their heads were closed "*rasa bella*". A discussion ensued, and Zohra talked about how homework helps one to maintain the material learned in class.

Sadia said her daughter-in-law declines to study with her and actually makes fun of her for her interest in learning at her age. Omaria said her children practice with her at home, but it makes no difference. Arbia said her kids do the work for her. The talk led on to unrelated topics such as face tatoos - when and why - They told me that it was basically the makeup of the past - a beauty enhancer. Today it would not at all be considered as something worthwhile and is actually deemed "*haram*". My Algerian in-laws chuckle over this now as a blast from the past.

Then I asked about the women's loud shrill trilling during weddings, etc. (*zrait*), but no one knew its origin. Perhaps the women in the tribes trilled out to get the adrenaline flowing and to increase morale before a combat -- like a war cry.

Fatima can now only make it on Thursday afternoons because she has to care for her children during school session and take care of her family. Arbia's telephone rang again with yet another Arabic elevator tune - she barely picks up the call. When I praised her for her interesting choice of cell tune music she let it ring an extra long time just for "my benefit".

### 5.01.2009

Group 1: Assia, Khadija, Zohra, Sadia, Omaria, Aisha, Khira, Dunya, Bachta, Miriam, Schinaa. Group 2: Khira and me.

Assia did not do her homework, and so Zohra jokingly accused her of watching too many cartoons on Space Toon - that sure got her giggling.

We talked about fasting during *Ashura*. Muhammed a.s.s fasted one day and claimed if he lived to the next year he would also fast the day after. Today Zohra wrote the first verse from the Sura Al Alaq on the board and afterwards had the ladies read out loud. They did but not without chuckling. Afterwards Zohra asked questions pertaining to the text and they practiced the letter "ba".

The Inspector came and informed Zohra about the craft course being planned in February. He brought a handful of bonbons for her and the class much to the delight of Zohra, who suddenly took a liking to the man whom she formally dismissed for his lack of Islamic conduct regarding women's modesty. He also confirmed the meeting on Jan. 14 in Damouney.

The cleaning lady/door watcher came by. She attended the literacy class herself last year for a short time, and she came to inform the class that a fellow colleague had been robbed of her handbag at knife point near the school by a 20ish-year-old man. Zohra said there are no jobs and the youth turn to drugs out of desperation for money.

During the vacation class is held every day, which means Zohra, who lives quite far and high up in the city center near the public hospital, pays bus fare daily unless she decides to walk.

Samia had 9 students today.

### 8.01.2009

Group 1: Khadija, Zohra, Dunya, Omaria, Aisha, Khira. Group 2: Khira and me.

Khira arrived a tad late in tears, first greeted everyone and then explained what happened. She almost was not allowed in by the "gate-keeper" for being late. The cleaning woman was given the extra order by the school director (*mudir*) not to let people in after a certain time. Seems childish really since this is the type of procedure used for late school kids and our class is for adults! Clearly, the door keeper felt the need to underline the special authority given to her. In the end she let Khira in, but Zohra was very angry about this.

There was a big discussion among the women about the *mudir* and his "two-faced" employees, and then Zohra went downstairs to talk it out with the women at the door. The literacy women were wary. We heard loud excited voices downstairs. Zohra mentioned this later to the inspector, who said she should write a letter of complaint to Bouteflika. Bouteflika is respected as someone who listens to each person and takes action. Zohra thinks the *mudir* does not care for her because she doesn't chat with him or the other colleagues from the school.

She told me that she does not care for the way they interact with one another. She described it as improper flirtatious conduct. The *mudir* would not dare chat with the other ladies if his wife were present, she said.

Group 1 wrote words on their little blackboards today.

### 12.01.2009

Group 1: Assia, Khadija, Dunja, Sadia, Omaria, Aisha, Zohra, Khira, Schinaa, Bachta2, Arbia. Group 2: Naima and Khira came an hour late.

The inspector came to again talk about the craft course and that it would be held at a center for sewing not far from the school. He also relayed an apology from the *mudir* to Khira for almost not letting her in the school yard when she came late. Zohra was skeptical and rolled her eyes. Group 1 wrote the letter "del" and worked on the board, in their books and on their blackboards.

Samia - 8 students came

### 15.01.2009

9:30 a.m. Group 1: Assia, Dunya, Zohra, Sadia, Omaria, Bachta. Group 2: Khira and me.

The Damouney meeting was yesterday, so Zohra had a lot of information to tell me. She was energetic and very motivated to teach. The meeting went very well. The teachers were introduced to many new methods of teaching and had a lot of guest speakers, as well as a special guest, an older literacy student who demonstrated much of what she had learned. The woman attends class every day at her local mosque as well as at school. She can read texts without the *feta/kessra* and knows simple math skills due to her regular attendance.

Two teachers spoke in general about teaching literacy and how the goals have not been reached statistically. A new CD is available with two books, one for the teachers and one for the students. Math is now obligatory and should be taught from the first day on. They suggested writing a small text on the board and asking the ladies to summarize the content. They also suggested they break up the sentence in its parts and help students learn to distinguish verbs from nouns, past tense from future tense, etc.

Two young painters are now improving the interior of the school with different pictures, sayings, and letters. They have painted western themes such as Alice in Wonderland, Little Bo Peep, Mickey Mouse, as well as Islamic texts: hadiths.

Zohra taught math with new exuberance! She taught the concept "*arsharat*" (units of 10) and "*ahad*" (single digits) and placed them in a square on the board as a visual aid. She asked women to count the circles and pointed out the difference between dialect and classic Arabic. Zohra wrote numbers 1-20 on the board

and had the women count out loud. Sadia did well and recognized the numbers. Then they were to write down the numbers in their books, which took a very long time -- about 10 minutes.

Zohra introduced the mathematic symbols for plus (*zaid*), minus (*naqus*), and equals (*tusawee*). The women were each called to the board to solve an addition equation. Each took some time and got several numbers mixed up. Dunya wrote 1 plus 9 equals 01 instead of 10. Zohra is usually quick but took time to process the information. It was interesting to witness the initial learning steps of math. Zohra wrote 3 empty potted trees and filled them with circles, lines and triangles. The women were to count how many and write it down.

Samia had 5 students.

**2 p.m.** I took photos of the newly painted school; the painter asked for copies so he can make a portfolio of his work. Group 1: Arbia, Sadia, Zohra, Dunya, Assia, Omaria, Aisha, Khira, BachtaII, Schinaa. Arbia was missing this morning because her husband was ill. He ate peanuts and got stomach problems.

Aisha talked about how some women are ashamed to go to the writing store to buy their supplies. They fear being ridiculed by the salesman or nearby on-lookers. Comments like "ha ha ha *omia*" (literacy students)" "That is for kids!"

Zohra used everyday situations in her equations - 1 kilo potatoes plus 2 kilos equals 3. We wrote on our blackboards. Sadia wrote the number 5 backwards. They clearly have some idea about calculation due to shopping at the market and paying for things themselves. There was a lot of giggling going on today. They enjoyed themselves. Zohra used our pens as visual aids.

Sadia said Gesmia is waiting for Zohra to come to her house for an apology and invitation back. All the ladies begged Zohra to do this – Haja, etc. Dunya knew the answer for 15 minus 9 but did not remember how to write it.

### 19.01.2009

Lots of ladies today! Group 1: Bachta returned after a long absence, Miriam was very late (in Oran for a funeral), Khadija, Sadia, Assia, Aisha, Dunya, Zohra, Bachta2, Schinaa, Khira, a new person Khira, Omaria. Group 2: Me, Naima, Khira and Fatma (despite her asthma).

Aisha had her upper teeth all pulled out a few weeks ago although she is in her 30's(?). She is bashful and holds her hand over her mouth while talking. It reminds me of the USA during the 1950's/60's. My Grandmother was advised by her own dentist to have all her perfectly healthy teeth pulled so that she could have a Hollywood smile.

Dunya wears her first pair of glasses today. Perhaps a correlation between tending to one's eyesight and going to class. Zohra gave a brief intro to the class

of what she learned in Damouney and how she plans to use the methods in class. Today she wrote "*dua*" (prayer) on the board. What one says after completing Haj before heading home. "Allah gives us *hasanat* on earth so that we may avoid the fire (*rabana atena fi aldunya hasanata wa gena athaba alna*).” The women are quite slow at sounding out the text.

Sadia: "*wullahatheem*" smacks her hand on her forehead like this is all too much and declined to give it a try. Assia is perky as so often and reads well. The other women did fairly well. Miriam did great (was formerly in jemma for adults) Zohra was concerned that this method may be too advanced for her students and overwhelm them. The main problem was with sounding out the letters properly with feta/kessra/douma.

Afterwards Zohra read a text out loud and told the women to pay extra attention. She told about Muhammed's a.s.s. trip on the horse to heaven and the "*hasanat for dunya*": Health, *sadaqa*, knowledge, a good spouse, and paradise. She asked for verbs and nouns in the text and explained the difference between the two. This got the women talking about their own stories about raising children well. How in the past people were uneducated, but children were respectful and mindful not like today. They responded well to the lesson because of its connection to Islam.

## 22.01.2009

I missed the morning class due to Kader's absence. Group 1: Bachta, Sadia, Zohra, Khira np, Dunya, Aisha, Khira, Schinaa. Group 2: me

It snowed big time, so hardly any one showed up. I think it is quite a feat for the women to learn to read/write at their age. The letters in Arabic are complex: look differently in placement and can be sounded out three different ways. And there is a lack of positive feedback and support from their families and peers. They are not praised much for going (except from me!).

Math today! First a review of plus and equals as well as the numerals 0-10. Zohra will go to Gesmia's today with Samia to persuade her to return to class. She was talkative on a personal level again today. She talked about how she would fear being tied down to the house with kids and how one of the young painters asked her to marry him (they just met a few days ago!). Apparently, he is going to show her how to write calligraphy with a long wooden stick filed at a slant at the end like a metal nib. She said she cannot marry him although he is a fine person, and that someday she will tell me why.

She also openly inquired about a cream she saw advertised on a sales channel on TV: "**LUSH BUST**" for a firm naturally lifted bust. I was amused and surprised! She said it is from America and I told her I never heard of it, and it is probably only available through TV. I told her it was a waste of money and she

is much better off smearing freshly pressed olive oil on her chest! I explained how people in Europe pay a lot of money for creams with olive oil. She considered it. I felt a little embarrassed. When I looked around to see if people were getting wind of our conversation she said, "Oh no, this kind of topic is totally normal among women." We were interrupted by a student who impatiently told her to shut up and come over there to check if she wrote the equation correctly!

Zohra reviewed the blocks of 10 - concept of "*arsharat*". She requested that the women buy special learning sticks in different colors and number disks made from plastic. These are typically used by school children in first grade when learning to count and do simple math. Most of the students forgot to buy them. Zohra made a joke: "They either went to the *hamam* or took a nap". I saw some little disks on the school ground on my way home.

Dunya was called to the board to write the equation 1 plus 1 equals, and she wrote 11 for the answer. Then she told Zohra, "Patience, patience (*suberi suberi*)."

Another method of discipline Zohra uses is whopping the ladies with the chalk-filled eraser: on their cheeks or forehead mainly. The women almost always laugh when they are targets...good sports, I suppose. Not my thing, understatement.

We practiced subtraction. The women were disappointed when they did not solve the equation right. **They are developing *ehrgeiz*, ambition and a sense of caring about their work.** In the beginning many would quickly resign and give up, attributing their inability to having a "*rasa bella*" (closed head).

Khira said  $10-0=9$ . Our teacher, Zohra, bit her knuckles and whacked herself on the head. The inspector came to pick up the list of ladies interested in joining the arts & crafts class. They are all very excited about the new classes although not all will attend. Zohra said, "Go home and ask your husbands (*rajul*) if you can attend." To enroll one has to bring two passport photos and the carte national. The carte national requires that all women be pictured without a hijab.

### 26.01.2009

Group 1: Bachta, Khadija, Khira N, Dunya, Schinaa, Omaria, and GESMIA!!!, Bachta2, Aisha, Zohra, Miriam, Mimuna Khira's sister and little daughter. Group 2: Naima, Khira and me.

Zohra "forgot" her glasses at home. She seemed to have had her eyebrows done - they looked formed and blackened. She also wore black eyeliner. Gesmia sat at the back of the room next to the gas heater like before and elevated her leg on a chair due to rheumatic pain. It was a snowy day and the cold makes her bones ache. I told her I was very glad she returned, and Gesmia said that Zohra came and cried while asking her to come back to class. Zohra nodded her head to

me saying she begged her to return, and I am not sure if she was play-acting or truly became emotional while asking her back. Could be she thought about her own mother.

Zohra utilized the new teaching method and wrote a hadith on the board. The ladies came up to read aloud. Aisha read slowly but well. When Khadija came across a word, which sounded like "la tousche" she giggled and so did Bachtta. She taught the lesson from her new book from the meeting in Damouney. This includes Islamic teachings such as the five areas of *hasanat* from Allah: wealth, charity (*sadaqa*), knowledge, a good spouse and paradise.

Today she talked about the five pillars of Islam and described each pillar in depth. The women took very much to this and had a lot to say themselves about the content. It sparked their interest: belief in Allah, one God; Prayer; Hadj; Zakat; and fasting in Ramadan. They talked about getting up at *fajr* (sunrise) to pray instead of sleeping in. They also talked about the importance of thinking about other aspects than just cooking and food during Ramadan such a good will toward men.

Aisha talked about a rich uncle of hers during the topic of *zakat* (giving to the poor), and Zohra and Miriam became very impatient wanting her to be quiet. Zohra said, "Let her talk. I want to listen to her story." Zohra told me that it is important to give the students the feeling that she listens to them.

Zohra pointed out the verbs - to pray, to fast, go to Haj, etc. It was very snowy cold, but Zohra still constantly needed to open the doors or windows. She was very hot and the rest were chilled. The older women in the class, Gesmia and Sadia, wear a typical type of shoe I have seen made from plastic and lined with synthetic fur - sort of the "wind and weather" shoe – kind of outrageous. The women asked specific questions about the correct way to pray and how many units for which prayer. Also about what is forbidden and what is approved, etc.

### **29.01.2009**

Zohra was ill. No class.

### **02.02.2009**

Still ill. No class.

### **5.02.2009**

Many are not here today because they think Zohra may still be ill. Arbia is also back after many days of absence due to illness. Aisha, Khadija, Dunya, Omaria, Khira and Schinaa.

Apparently, Zohra had severe problems getting enough oxygen. She felt as if she could not breathe and was taken to the hospital by her brother and sister. She talked about another sick boy in particular whom she met and shared a room with. Also about the bad state the hospital is in: lack of hygiene, no water, overcrowded, not properly quarantined, etc.

We learned the comma, colon and semicolon. Zohra asked me to bring her 200 dinars for a literacy book which she would copy from the main CD.

Samia - 6 male students.

### **9.02.2009**

Aisha, Khadija, Dunya, Zohra, Bachtta, Omaria, Khira, Schinaa, Sadia, Arbia, Mimuna, and a new woman from last year returned (Halima). Group 2: Naima, Khira and me.

Khadija, still wearing her headscarf in support of Palestine, read a very long text at the board. Slow but well. She did not want to stop and was eager to read. In general, the ladies seemed to enjoy coming to the board to read the text out loud. After 4 ladies read the text, Zohra began to explain its content explaining the words from start to finish.

Zohra was very relaxed and patient today. She taught about referring to words in the singular, in pairs and more than two. Dunya did well and enjoyed naming things from the classroom in pair-form.

### **13.02.2009**

I had to miss class, no babysitter - Halima was off to a funeral in town, most likely to pitch in with the kitchen chores.

### **16.02.2009**

Zohra did not show up and her phone was off. Arbia called and so did Samia from the men's class.

Omaria did not come due to the funeral. Arbia, Sadia, Khadija, Zohra, Dunya, Khira with rheumatic pain, Bachtta and her 15-year-old daughter, Schinaa, Mimuna, Bachtta2, Aisha and 3-year-old daughter. Group 2: Khira came quite late.

The women began to write down the Arabic sentence already on the chalkboard from the school lesson for the children. Aisha informed us that Zohra was ill again and in the hospital. Samia came over from the men's class and asked us to read the text out loud. Then she explained what it meant. Before she returned to her class, she gave the ladies a lesson to work on and asked Bachtta's daughter to control our work and correct it.



Some of the desks would never pass a German TÜV. Heavy wooden desk-slabs not joined to the legs, etc.

Sadia showed me a document for her house where she was to pay a large amount of money by a certain date. She showed it to me upside down. I did not understand what she wanted until Khira and Arbia explained in more detail what it was about. Sadia was asking me for a money donation to help her with her payment. I told her I had none on me but would ask my husband, and she said yes ask him please. Arbia told her to go to the mosque to ask for money. Despite Samia's teaching, some women left early - Bachta<sup>2</sup> first and soon followed by the rest.

### **19.02.2009**

Zohra apparently returned, but I was not informed and her phone was still off, i.e., she had changed her telephone number all the while I thought she was in the hospital.

### **23.02.2009**

Kader went to see about the class and returned to tell me Zohra was there. I was overjoyed and went straight away. Group 1: Arbia, Khadija, Bachta, Sadia, Zohra, Khira, Schinaa, Aisha, Bachta<sup>2</sup>, Dunya. Group 2: Khira, Naima and me.

I got Zohra's new number. She changed it because a 22-year-old lad was calling her a lot in the evening to tell her how much he loved her, etc. Her brother accused her of giving this young man the number herself, but she claims she did not.

Gesmia is gone for good. I asked Naima, and she said she is ill and no longer wants to come -- plus the class is too difficult for her to follow. Zohra said the reason was rheumatism in her knees. True she sat the last few sessions in the back of the class next to the gas heater.

I was so very relieved that Zohra was well and teaching. I had visions of her being gravely ill.

Zohra said they have a new teaching method (yet again??). I think she has said this at least three times since the meeting in Damouney. The last method was too difficult for the women to comprehend. Zohra then just basically reviewed the letters ba, ta, tha, and nun and how they change according to their position in a word.

With us Zohra explained a little about the past, present and future tense in Arabic. There is no future tense in Arabic. Also how verbs have a meaning and nouns do not. Arabic does not have a progressive form corresponding to the present participle in English (the “-ing” form). It does not have the past form (“-ed”), rather the whole word designates the past.

The inspector came to discuss the long-talked-about plan for an arts class again.

Dunya practiced the letter nun at the board. Zohra mentioned that one studies the letters at the university level, and Dunya laughed at the thought of her studying at the university. Then the ladies wrote on their blackboards “la lu lee, laaaa, luuu, leee”, etc. It was like the beginning of literacy class all over again.

I asked Zohra how she was feeling, referring to her recent bouts of illness. She said much better, but she has problems eating. It sounds as if she is not doing well emotionally, and she admitted that her father’s leaving the family and her having to depend on her sister for money were a strain. Also that she cannot confide about her worries to any family members because they do not care to talk about personal things with her.

Samia had 14 students today.

### **26.02.2009**

I had to knock for a long time at the door before the director's "groupies" let me in. The same went for Samia, too, although she teaches! What's up?

I was apparently a half-hour late because Zohra wanted us to come at 9 a.m. from now on. Just Khadija was there when I arrived. Then came Dunya, Mimuna and Aisha with her little daughter. Zohra is not wearing her glasses and said that they started to make her eyes water. She will have her eyes checked soon. Dunya did not do her homework, and Zohra accused her of taking a nap and drinking coffee with friends instead.

Today I finally noticed that the men always leave class just before the *assr* prayer in order to go to the mosque to pray.

Group 1 Bachtā, Omāria, Zohra, Khadija, Bachtā2, Aisha, Dunya, Schinaa.

Group 2 Fatima, Khira, Naima and me.

### **03.03.09**

At 2 p.m. I interviewed Sadia and then finished with Khira who came late. Started interview with Aisha.

Class goes on as usual during my interviews. It is interesting to watch the class from this perspective. I also enjoy observing Halima’s (my sister-in-law and informant who helped me interview the women) facial expressions in reaction to Zohra's style of teaching: brusque and insulting at times, etc.

Zohra scolded Dunya for not paying attention again: "Do you want to remain stupid forever?!" Ouch! A bit rough I thought.

Miriam and Assia came after a long absence. Group 1: Khadija, Dunya, Bachtā & daughter, Zohra, Sadia, Omāria, Schinaa, Arbia, Aisha, Khira. Group 2: Khira and me.

Zohra showed Bachta's daughter how to do macramé while teaching.

Halima informed me that Miriam had come by my mother-in-law's house twice to inquire about a marriage between her son and Nassria (granddaughter). Why did they come to the grandmother instead of her parents? And why did they decide against the marriage? Halima said perhaps because Nassria is a student although the young man is a student himself.

### 05.03.2009

The weather is extremely windy today. Just Bachta, Zohra and Sadia came. Today I was given a dictation about the important role mothers play for their children. However, I mainly had a personal conversation with Zohra about marriage traditions in Algeria and her pre-plans for the pre-engagement to the young man of her choice. She has known him for 4 years - he is 33 yrs. An older man has asked her in marriage. Zohra likes him, thinks he would make a good husband and father and has a job. But she loves the other man who does not have a job yet. She asked me for my advice, and I said it sounded as if she preferred the man she knows from the university. She said she would tell him she needs 2 months to think about his offer and hope in the meantime that the other fellow gets a job. By now I think she has dropped her scheme and is set to marry the man, job or not. It seems as if arrangements are beginning to be made for a marriage.

He corresponds with her via cell phone and has requested that she wait 2 months for his mother to approach her family to ask for acceptance in marriage. Zohra will not tell her father that she knows the man already from her studies, otherwise he would refuse the marriage, believing that they already have a relationship. Her siblings know that she met the man at the university. As of yet the man has no job and is busy looking for one.

Zohra said the traditions are different from city to city even between those as near as Tiaret and Sougar or Damouney about 20 km. For example, in these towns first the father goes to the father directly instead of the mother going to the female relatives of the potential bride.

The "going price" in marriage seems to be between 8,000 and 10,000 Dinar plus gold. Zohra says she wants only 5,000 and is not interested in arranging a *henna* gathering where other gifts are brought from the family of the groom to the family of the bride while either lunch or coffee is served. Zohra said she is practical and Islam-conscious. No frills for the sake of showing off to others who gave/got what from whom. She said she would rather keep the money for things she needs instead of the hassle of receiving guests and bragging about presents. Her sister, however, wants very much for her to arrange a *henna*.

What truly got me was that this young man is already dictating whether or not she may leave her home to visit her girlfriend and even her father! He calls her and asks where she is. Then he orders her to call him should she consider leaving the house. Now all the while for weeks Zohra has been lamenting over how she never wants to get married because then she no longer can do what she pleases. And now not even officially engaged, she is interested in a union with someone who is ordering her around. Zohra said she likes for someone to set guidelines but that she is aware that he has no right to do this yet because they are not married. So, she does not call him and goes out where she wants too. I think she feels cared for and loved by this man when he tells her what she may and may not do.

**2 p.m.** Still very windy. Khira, Schinaa, Zohra, Dunya, Bachta (daughter worked on macramé).

I interviewed Bachta and started with Zohra. The Inspector came by and talked to Zohra about whether any problems had surfaced in the meantime, how many students she had, and for her signature as proof of their attendance. My teacher, Zohra, was interested in reading through the questionnaire. She came over a lot and sat down to listen and disturbed my interviews so I told her to get out of here! She took it well.

Samia had 4 students. She helped Bachta's daughter with her macramé after her male students left.

### **9.03.2009**

Bachta & daughter doing macramé, Zohra, Dunya, Aisha, Khira and her little daughter.

Zohra talked about what the city did on Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup>. There were some happenings in some major buildings: hospital, university, school, with small gifts for the women such as candy. Samia went for an outing to a Nature Park in *Rachwia* with her literacy group "*subul khair*", under the leadership of Mme. Ammari.

Zohra was helping the girl out a lot today - untangling yarn/rope while directing a lesson at the board. I heard some more information about why the former teachers did not return: Asma got married and Nasira had a possible difference of opinion with the director.

Dunya and Khira brought *aisch*, *magneta* and black spiced coffee for Mouled (The Prophet Muhammad's birthday) today. Apparently, Bachta has gone for good due to problems at home with daughter-in-law and watching over the house.

Samia had 6 students.

**12.03.2009**

Bachta2, Dunya, Naima, Fatma, Schinaa, Arbia, Khira.

Big *problemo* today - apparently one of the cleaning ladies snitched on Zohra for working with Bachta's daughter on macramé. The director Saidani called her and told her she may not continue doing this because she should be going to school or stay home instead of attending literacy class and disrupting the students with her artwork.

Most of the married women age 40 and under wear an *ajar* (traditional white lace face covering): Arbia, Aisha, Bachta, Bachta2, Schinaa, Fatma. Zohra and Samia were chatting and primping their hijabs, spraying on fresh *parfum* while waiting for us to finish with the interview.

**16.03.2009**

Assia, Bachta, Zohra, Omaria, Schinaa, Dunya, Khira, Bachta2, Miriam, Fatma, Naima, Aisha.

Today Zohra brought her half-sister Schaima, almost 10! Lovely girl. Zohra mentioned wanting to arrange an outing to a local *hamam* with the women for a change of scenery. She said she plans to talk to the university to try to arrange for a driver, etc.

The inspector came today to ask about attendance. Lately, he has been staying outside the class to finish his inquiry rather than coming in the classroom like during the colder months.

We learned about *haraket = feta, dauma, kessra*. Schaima sat next to me and told me not to show my answers to the other ladies. Zohra spent ample time scolding Assia today for not taking her studies seriously and watching too much TV at home. She was also annoyed with her red painted fingernails saying to me such things are unsuitable for a young girl. Zohra used herself as an example of things that are possible for her to do if she keeps up her studies: university, sewing certificate, etc.

Schaima's mom works at the local orphanage, which is run by a female psychologist. She said a lot of babies are brought in.

Ever since my interviews have begun, the women I questioned greet me with greater sincerity. Our relations have changed, become closer and personal.

Miriam upset Zohra today by not agreeing to do the exercises in her workbook. Zohra said she thinks she is too good for them and will ask her to kindly not return next time if she keeps it up.

**19.03.2009**

Again Zohra was not there at 9 a.m. but did not call this time to excuse herself due to a lack of money on her cell phone.

Naima, Fatma, Khira, Aisha, Khira, Zohra, Dunya, Bachta, Arbia, Miriam, Assia & sister.

Khira had a swelled-up foot with an infection of some kind. Zohra wrote a text on the board, and the ladies went up one at a time and sounded out the sentence, some better than others. The women all like holding the long ruler and pointing to the board while reading.

Miriam stood up all of a sudden and said "*sai!*" (finished!), waved her book and motioned over with it to Zohra. She packed up her bags, said "*salamualaikum*" and left. Ouch! Perhaps a small matter of disharmony between student and teacher.

The ladies worked on their blackboards while group 2 did dictation from a text in their workbooks. Fatma's daughters study at the University; one now teaches literacy nearby.

### **23.03.2009**

Zohra has a new tel. number **again** because her former telephone company, Djezzy, was unreliable. Naima, Fatma, Khira came late - Assia, Bachta, Zohra, Schinaa, Sadia!, Aisha, Khira.

Today Aisha brought a very tasty dessert *bissis* and pepper-spiced coffee, just because. Sadia drank her coffee and then all of a sudden bid her final farewells - she has moved to Sonatiba on the other side of town and will not return to our class. I told her to come again to pick up a bag of clothes for her grandson Musa. She cried when she left. The inspector stopped by today again and stood outside of the classroom to talk to Zohra. I interviewed Fatma and Khira.

### **26.03.2009**

Zohra was not there and no formal excuse. Later she shared that she had an important job interview, and a friend informed her about it at the last minute. She had to drop everything and finalize her CV papers.

### **30.03.2009**

Naima, Fatma, Khira - Zohra, Bachta, Khira, Dunya, Bachta2 and son, Arbia, Aisha, Assia.

Finished interview with Khira. Today I interviewed Naima.

It seems as if Zohra has her head elsewhere these days. She may be consumed by thoughts of her wedding. I assume so since she often uses "wedding topics" in her examples to the class. She is restless and impatient. She is letting it out on Dunya, and when I asked her about it, she said she likes to pick on others but not to be picked on.

Louisa Hanoune used to be more admired and respected before she ran for president this year. She was liked for her sympathy for the tragedy of the missing persons during the 90's and how she did not point fingers towards Islamic groups.

#### **2.04.2009**

Fatma, Khira, Zohra, Bachta, Omaria, Khira, Bachta2, Arbia, Aisha and daughter - Schinaa, Zohra's second half sister.

Zohra plans to take the ladies to a local *hamam*, about 50 km away in May when the weather is better. She said Saidani talks about the financial support offered to women who would like to start their own business, but this is yet to become a reality. Khira's sister has not come for weeks and Fatma left at 4 p.m. on the dot.

#### **6.04.2009**

Naima, Fatma, Khira - Assia, Omaria, Zohra, Khira, Dunya, Bachta2 and son, Schinaa, Aisha.

Rural Algerian women have a rich culture. Women's space is nothing new and a lot of their domain revolves around the cycle of life: marriage-birth-Haj-funeral, etc. Seasons are in direct relation to traditional handicrafts and foods (wheat: bread, harira. wool: rugs, mats).

Bouteflika raised student's financial support and elderly pension - a bribe (*rashuwa*) in connection with the oncoming elections, some say.

#### **13.04.2009**

Naima, Khira - Bachta, Aisha, Dunya, Arbia, Khira, Schinaa.

Zohra came for just a few minutes after all the ladies had already left. She is ill and was to be picked up by her brother, who will take her to Algiers. When he came, he let her know that their father would not help finance the trip and medical bills. He said she should let herself be treated here.

I interviewed Schinaa although no class took place. Arbia stayed on for a few minutes to talk and shared that all her sisters could speak French.

***Missed 2 classes - thought Zohra was ill and Halima's wedding***

#### **23.04.2009**

Naima, Khira came late. Group 1: Arbia, Bachta, Khira, Dunya, Assia, Aisha, Zohra, Schinaa.

Zohra has asthma and often suffers from lack of breath during the night. She got 2 inhalers from the hospital.

She talked about Naima, how she has a lot of problems, no parents and unmarried living at her sister's house. Naima almost began to cry. The married status is sooo important here.

We studied personal pronouns. I remembered the schooled book system: a copybook for each subject & exams, how to write the date with red pen and blue pen, etc.

Zohra commented how Dunya is clever while going to the market (knows the going price of vegetables) but has no clue in the classroom (this is not true). She was in a whip-whop mood today - impatient and snapping that stick on the desks to wake up the ladies. Later she informed me that there will be no marriage and that her first priority is to work! Ahaa, *daher weht der Wind*.

We heard the men's class reciting Qur'an in the background while we struggle on with our words! 12 men came today, said Samia

### **27.04.2009**

Naima, Assia, Bachta, Zohra, Khira, Omaria, Aisha, Schinaa.

We reviewed the personal pronouns from the previous lesson. I told Zohra about my meeting with her former boss's sister and said I plan to interview Ammari, too. She strictly advised me against speaking to her and her sister because they are "liars". Although also financed from the government, Ammaris group is more independent. Zohra said Ammari gets what she wants, has a lot of authority. Their program emulates that of the grade school, middle and secondary system. Something is going on for sure.

The women learn to recite verses from the Qur'an very quickly – after just a few minutes.

### **30.04.09**

No class. Zohra spent one night in the hospital due to asthma.

### **4.05.2009**

Khira, Dunya, Bachta2 & son, Schinaa, Aisha.

Talked with Zohra about women and work. She said "84%" of men do not want their wives to go to work. This was a figure she got from the top of her head, but it showed that she thinks most men think this way. However, she does want to work after marriage in order to help out her husband financially. She said if she had children, she would find a solution for childcare - one step at a time. Zohra remarked on the process of being prepared through her studies to enter the workforce but then being stopped.



She wanted to work as a receptionist in a local hotel - but when she saw unmarried couples come in to sit down for an alcoholic beverage, she changed her mind.

Her brother is getting married next week, and her other brother, formerly in Spain now in France, sent him an entire suit with shoes for the occasion. She would love to be able to speak to him herself after 13 years of no contact. Her older sister will also soon get married to a colleague from work.

Inspector came by today. Zohra asked him to go to Saidani and ask permission for taking the ladies to the *hamam*. He apparently did not give his personal consent in writing and said she may go but at their own cost and she must be aware that she is responsible for everyone. Zohra said fine and that she will try to go anyway.

About my inquiry on the topic of woman leaving the house after marriage, Zohra had clear ideas about what is proper. She said the woman should at least stay one month in the house of her husband. She referred to Islam, saying Muhammad said it is better to stay in your house. Then she went on about how it is not good to leave your husband alone: "Who will cook, make coffee, clean and care for him, and what if he is ill?" She also said it is important to bond with the new family and put your main loyalties in the house of your husband as to avoid conflict between the two families.

Zohra gave examples of her own brothers' wives and how one often leaves for a few weeks (homesick, ill during pregnancy, after baby was born, etc.) to visit her parents and said how that is not good. She said for 1-2 nights it is fine but not too frequently either.

**Haik** (traditional Algerian white overcloak): I was curious about the *haik* today and asked the women who used to wear one and for how long.

Dunya wore one, stopped at age 47, is now 63. She said she wore it for 12 years. Schinaa wore one but cannot remember when she stopped and for how long. Khira wore one and stopped after returning from Mecca at age 45. Bachta and Aisha never wore one (they are in their 30s).

Nowadays very few women wear them. My teacher, Zohra, said she is always curious and skeptical about those who do especially when the women are wearing high heels underneath and get into cars with single men. She said it could be a guise for prostitution. She once even recognized a woman who was married with kids. This woman dressed in a *haik* crossed to the other street side to obviously avoid her before getting into a strange car.

### 7.5.2009

I skipped class due to the roofers and Kader's being in stress.

**11.05.2009**

Assia, Bachta, Khira, Omaria, Aisha & daughter, Bachta2, Arbia, Schinaa, Naima.

A good day with good photos. (Omaria asked me if I was sending the photos to the U.S. government.) Khira brought *bissis* (dessert made from semolina flour) and coffee, saying she knew I was fond of it.

Zohra said many men came to Samia's class today. Then she talked about how men have no worries or are able to "forget" them while women must think and worry about everything.

As we got to work with dictation, Naima scolded herself for her mistakes and said that I was much more fit in my head. Then she praised all her sisters, how all of them went to school and worked. She listed off their jobs and is proud of them (mid-wife, engineer, sea-port employee who wears a sea cap). Naima told me and my teacher that she has bad luck in life: parents died, divorce, & another man who was interested in marrying would have taken her to the United States but fell ill shortly before the engagement.

Bachta's daughter is engaged to be married this summer (I asked whether she planned on returning to school). Zohra said girls who have older brothers often have difficulty completing their studies because they refuse to stop worrying about the moral wellbeing of their sisters. Zohra had to prove to her brothers that she was serious about her studies and not going to school to socialize: She showed her report cards as proof.

11 men came to Samia's class today.

**Year 2009/2010: Knowledge is light (*al almu noor*)****October 2009**

Official start date was set at 3.10.2009; however, no one showed up yet due to the Eid holidays and lack of advertisement in the media. I called Zohra in the morning to confirm the class, but when I arrived she was not there. I was a bit peeved because I had made extra hectic arrangements for childcare in order to be on time. All in vain. She said she missed the bus and had no minutes on her cell to call me and was looking for a phone booth.

**06.10.2009**

Apparently, Dunya and Schinaa showed up but left soon after when no one else came. I arrived after 2 p.m. It was a very good opportunity to use the time to ask Zohra about the latest news and happenings regarding the literacy program:

In June they had a quick 15-min. meeting with the director M. Saidani. He basically announced the next meeting to be set on the 2nd of Sept. just before Ramadan. Saidani suggested the teachers should go around and knock on people's doors during Ramadan to solicit new students as they did in the first year. This seemed unimaginable to Zohra who couldn't stand doing this the first time around.

### **10.10.2009**

Today Haja Khira and Bachta-um-Osama came to class. Although Dunya and Schinaa came last time, they were not here today.

Due to the low turnout, Zohra did not take today's lesson seriously and was on her cell phone most of the time. The lesson was cut short anyhow.

Her contract comes to an end in Dec., and if Saidani does not renew it, she said she will continue on without pay.

Khira's mother is ill, and her symptoms remind Zohra of her own mother's plight just before she died of cancer.

4 men came to Samia's class today.

### **13.10.2009**

Bachta, Schinaa, Aisha, Dunya and Haja Khira. They practiced connecting letters on the board to form words.

Zohra was met at the market and said she will come as soon as she helped her daughter get all the papers she needs together for getting a job. Naima said over the phone that her sister is ill and will return after she is well. Omaria is out and about at weddings, births and funerals, and Assia said she would come this week but still has not shown up.

Samia - 8 male students came

### **17.10.2009**

Aisha, Dunya, Bachta, Bachta2.

Women read sentences slowly at the chalkboard

### **24.10.2009**

I missed last class (Halima came to make Aisch, and Samir had the runs from eating dubious dates). Schinaa, Dunya, Bachta, Haja Khira, Naima and Aisha came. Today a new student joined, Yamina,

Zohra mentioned the upcoming meeting in Damouney. They will introduce the new book and some methods of teaching. She thinks it will be the same as last year.

Yamina is 46 yrs. old (born in 1964), went 5 yrs. to school, and got married at age 16. Has 5 kids, 4 daughters and 1 son, who works for Saidani in the office and is married.

I asked the older ladies about their thoughts on daughters-in-law working/studying before and after marriage. Bachta2 had absolutely no reservations - she is younger though.

Bachta said she did not care for this. Who will watch the kids? Most likely the mother-in-law. Who will take care of the house? etc. Her daughter-in-law studied before the marriage, but her son is against working afterwards and she said it is up to her son. If he had no problem with it nor would she but still does not think it is a good thing.

Bachta started up a conversation about how it would be better to learn in the mosque because then they could learn every day and study more Qur'an. All the ladies agreed.

### **27.10.2009**

A lot more ladies came today! Bachta, Bachta2, Aisha, Yamina, Haja Khira, Naima, Assia, Schinaa.

Omaria is done for good. She is frustrated and discouraged about not having learned the entire alphabet after 2 years and doesn't expect to improve, so dropped out. Besides, she has a lot of social engagements.

The inspector came today and said 10 ladies would be enough for the class to continue.

Zohra also will not attend the meeting this weekend because the teachers have to be divided into two groups due to lack of space at the meeting hall in Damouney. The men's teacher, Samia, will go and try to write notes for her. Another meeting should take place in Dec. and Zohra plans to go then.

Haja Khira often has to get up out of the little desks to stretch her legs and ease the pain of her rheumatism. All the women worked on the same dictation exercise today. The text was about the role of women during the time of independence.

### **31.10.2009**

Aisha, Dunya, Assia, Bachta, Bachta2, Haja Khira.

Dunya said she was gone at a wedding in Oran doing the *zararit*! Aisha said her mother-in-law asked for her help with making a batch of couscous for an upcoming wedding in the family.

I need to interview Assia. She dropped out of school after 4 years. Said her female teacher would often hit her for reasons such as forgetting school supplies such as a ruler (maybe they did not have the money to buy a lot of school stuff).

She also said the same lady would hit her brother later when he went to her class. She claimed the teacher had something against their family.

Zohra said this is common in the schools and recalled her own experience when she was 15. Her English teacher slapped her face 5 times -- and her girlfriend had to come to her rescue. The male teacher was so upset about her talking to her table-mate, even though Zohra claimed she was discussing the lesson on the board. She ran out of the class to the director and did not come back for a week. When she returned she asked for her teacher to please excuse her absence. Now when she runs into him in the city, she greets him very kindly with respect. She said she does not hate him, but it was clearly a vivid event in her memory.

### 02.11.2009

Bachta, Haja Khira, Bachta2, Yamina, Schinaa, Aisha.

The new text book! It is meant for the 3<sup>rd</sup>-year literacy class level. The book seems very unsuitable for the women in our class: too advanced, too much text, very few photos and visual aids, small font and no *haraket* over the letters. All in all, over their heads and not appropriate for an adult literacy class made up primarily of older women who have weaker eyesight and just barely know the alphabet.

Saidani stands strong to his initial goal of 15 plus women per class or it will be cancelled. The inspector came today with a frowny grave face when he saw the number of ladies and confirmed that if the attendance level does not increase the class is over.

Zohra said she found a free room in a nearby building where the ladies would be welcome to come every day to study Qur'an.

And once again the topic of children, how many I had and that I should have at least one more to get a girl: "A daughter is good. Get a daughter". As if they grew on trees!

Apparently, Assia cried about her brother almost not letting her come to class. She was absent today.

### 07.11.2009

Bachta, Assia (for the first time with headscarf!), Haja Khira, Dunya, Aisha, Schinaa.

Zohra talked about the meeting at Damouny and the hierarchy of the program: Inspector? - Director - secretary and teachers - students. Samia went and said they talked about the class size of 15 and over. She pointed out that some women are ill, at different social events, moved away, etc., but Saidani stands firm. They discussed how the class was to be organized just like an elementary

school class. The teacher is to keep a list of ladies and plan the class content in monthly blocks.

Zohra said she feels like crying out of frustration over the expectations. Said the women are at the level of refining their alphabet skills and learning to read Qur'an instead of complex text comprehension exercises with high level activities related to the text, noun/verb, etc. She fears they will all quit and go home.

Zohra said she heard a report on the radio about this year's literacy program and how a new text book and supplies will be passed out to students, but so far just the one challenging book and no pens, copy books, etc.

Text exercise today about a father who wrote his daughter a letter of advice regarding her upcoming marriage: that she should keep her *hasma* towards Allah, be respectful toward her husband and his family, and concentrate on the goodness inside instead of outward beauty. In closure he wished his daughter a better life than he had.

A colder rainy day and Haja Khira took more stand-up breaks to ease her rheumatic pain.

### 10.11.2009

Naima, Bachta, Khira (she came! and said she first moves to Rachma in Dec.), Schinaa, Dunya, Assia and a new woman (35 yrs, married with 2 kids, just went to first grade).

Interviewed Assia now with her headscarf! She did not let me keep her from her lesson but was cooperative. We will finish next time. The ladies practiced nouns and verbs and their placement in a sentence. Also, the elongation of letters *feee*, etc.

Zohra shared that her brother who lives with her has not spoken to her properly in 4 years. This began when she decided to study at the university. He was very against her even finishing secondary. She said he was pressured by such comments from friends as "your sister goes out to study!" He is just 1 year older than she. She said he even hates her for it. This is an example of the hardship some women endure in order to continue their education.

### 14.11.2009

Naima, Assia, Dunya, Bachta2, Haja Khira, Schinaa.

Inspector came today to check for attendance list. Zohra kindly asked him to remain outside of the classroom to discuss things, but he said no, he will enter. Some women wear face coverings in the presence of strangers and while in class, they take the coverings off. Also, Zohra is thinking about her upcoming marriage, after which she, too, will wear the *ajar* and maybe was thinking about this

as well. She was miffed at him for not respecting the women and said she would talk about it to Saidani.

He said she was to meet him at 2 p.m. on Monday to go out in the neighborhood and knock on doors to recruit more students for the class. Zohra was mortified at the thought and also said her fiancé would not accept this idea. Indeed, she was red and flustered and said she feels like quitting. It is degrading for her to go door to door.

Two of Bachta's children came along, the daughter to watch over her brother Osama. He was annoying her with the ringing sounds on the mother's cell phone.

Zohra had a new white overcloak on today.

### **17.11.2009**

Naima, Assia, Bachta, Haja Khira, Schinaa, Bachta2, and finally Arbia (said she did not know there was class - I wonder if she even came for the exams last fall).

Zohra said Saidani would talk to the inspector about not entering the classroom. She also convinced him about the number of ladies and how more would not be a good idea from a teaching/learning standpoint. He seemed to finally agree. Also how she feels uncomfortable about going door to door with the inspector. Zohra said he agreed to it all and she was very happy about the outcome.

Ladies practiced verbs, nouns, past and present tense.

Apparently, Samia went door to door to recruit more participants.

### **21.11.2009**

Naima, Bachta, Assia, Dunya, Haja Khira, Khira, Arbia and Schinaa.

Khira and Arbia came late and said the doorman took his time to open the front gate. Zohra said it is because he dislikes her for not chatting with him downstairs before and after class.

Zohra wrote a longer text from the workbook on the board and the ladies took turns reading it out loud. The text was about people who seek knowledge in Islam and how Allah rewards them.

Clearly, the women perk up when the content of the exercise has to do with Islam. They were giving more feedback and nodding their heads - actively participating.

Arbia said she was nervous about returning to class because she forgot everything she learned so far. She was interested to hear why my mother-in-law and Omaria decided not to return. She also said she has a lot of housework at home and no time to learn.

At one point all the ladies talked about the recent victory over Egypt. They were discussing the political background and why Iraq and Palestine were root-

ing for Algeria. Zohra said Khadaffi rewarded each player from Libya with a new car! And Dunya's self-confidence has clearly perked up since Zohra changed her teaching style, which is kinder and more encouraging than before.

### **24.11.2009**

Naima, Aisha, Bachta, Khira, Yamina.

I was thinking about how different people are albeit with many commonalities. We differ like written language does: some left to right, Arabic right to left, Chinese vertical etc.

Today we learned about singular, a pair, and plural.

I asked Zohra about her thoughts on the Family Code 1984, and it took a very long time with a lot of describing before she had even the slightest idea what I was referring to. This has been a very common reaction even from young educated women. Zohra then mentioned her sister referring to the current laws on divorce. Apparently, this code may not be discussed in the school. It sprang up around the time these young ladies were infants in the 1980s. Their mothers are non-literate, and so it seems to have piqued the interest only of intellectual women in larger cities (less than 10%).

The inspector came again. This time he went directly to the men's class and Zohra met him there. He wanted to see her schedule of teaching divided by month for the rest of the year. He also referred to the difficult sections in the new textbook and told Zohra she should search them out and come up with solutions on how to teach them. She was annoyed and said she did not even understand what the textbook is asking.

Yamina got a call on her cell phone. Her friend shared the daunting news about an affair her husband had with a much younger woman. The wife found them at their home *in flagrante* after having been sent off on a wild goose chase (i.e., in order to get her out of the house) to an alleged funeral. Apparently, he told the mistress his wife was crazy. Sigh! Another bit of random chat during class!

After that scandalous story, the ladies began talking about how nice it would be to stay single. A conversation ensued mainly among Bachta, Aisha and especially Naima, who listened carefully because she would in fact like to be married.

Bouteflika recently set up a new legal policy, stipulating that the woman keeps the house and children upon the event of a divorce! So, now you have it.

### **01.12.2009**

Bachta, Dunya, Shinaa, Aisha -- only the hardcore learners came since the weather was very cold with hail.



The ladies read a text on the board with Islamic content about how Allah created all different people (Asians, Africans, Native Americans, etc.) so that they would truly get to know one another. Zohra talked about the prophets and about Allah's creation of the world.

I asked the ladies what their age was when they began to pray since I often-times discovered that the non-literate adults were much older: Aisha was 15 years old (she is also younger), Bachta was 26 yrs., Dunya was 23 yrs., and Schinaa was 19.

This started up a big conversation about prayer among the women. Bachta and Schinaa, for example, talked about how they pray more than 5 times a day to make up for the ones they missed in the past. Zohra tried to explain to them how this is not necessary in Islam. They are not obliged since they were not informed "*djalalila*" (the era of ignorance resulting from the French Rule).

Then we looked over a text in the workbook. It was about pride for one's country and the colonial relationship between France and Algeria. It described how Algerians were promised their sovereignty if they joined the army to fight against the Germans in WW2. This was not granted, and 45,000 men died (Mujahidin) and a young soldier was assassinated after openly waving the flag and demanding independence.

### 05.11.2009

Khira, Naima, Assia, Bachta, Bachta2, Haja Khira, Arbia, Yamina, Aisha and daughter.

Zohra talked about the prophets Noah and Adam & Eve. She asked students if they could tell the story. Many did not know the details about them.

(Tuesday I was in Algiers getting my passport! Assia, Bachta, Arbia, Haja Khira, Bachta2, Naima, Khira came.)

### 12.11.2009

Dunya, Assia, H. Khira with granddaughter, Bachta2.

Heartbreaking news! Aisha must stop attending class. Zohra said that Aisha said her *ajusa* (mother-in-law) no longer wants to watch her children while she comes to class. This is very unfortunate to say the least.

One solution would be to set up a childcare alternative in one of the nearby classrooms. However, given the fact that some children come along with their moms and are tolerated by the class (e.g., Aisha often brought her little daughter), perhaps it is another matter. It could be that the *ajusa* dislikes the fact that her daughter-in-law goes out on a regular basis leaving the house with just her to tend to potential guests.

Yamina is missing because her daughter had a baby and she must help her out with the *gessa* preparing *aisch* soup for a throng of guests.

Zohra's sister has problems. Hardly married, now pregnant in the second month she has angrily fled back to her own house during the 2-week winter break. The problem is her teaching salary and that her in-laws keep pumping her for money. Her father-in-law now regularly asks for money to buy household items. Even her brother-in-law asked for money to buy shoes. Her *ajusa* asks for money to buy food. Now her husband requested she sign a document releasing full authority of her income over to him! That was it -- especially in light of the fact that she bought many big household items at the time of the marriage: oven, TV, loads of dishes, etc. Zohra mentioned that she often bought important traditional foods such as dates and olives during Ramadan because no one else bought them. These things just simply cannot be missing on the menu (from an Islamic point of view, it would be no problem). She called her sister in the evening, and she and her brother picked her up in a taxi bringing ALL of her things with her. Her whole family, including their father, is on her side. They also recognize that the in-laws have acted in a *haram* (unlawful) way. Her father stipulated at the time of marriage that his daughter would be able to continue working.

Zohra is busy again planning her future. She had an exam in English, which would allow her to teach middle school since she has a university degree, if she passes. A master's would allow for one to teach high school. Nowadays one has to complete a PhD to be able to teach at the University. The test focused on the theme of globalization and was difficult.

Zohra claimed that the dialect spoken in this area is more similar to classic Arabic than dialects spoken elsewhere.

She mentioned her plans for her Islamic marriage, *aqad*, set at the end of Dec. with the wedding following in March. Her fiancé's brother finally got a pre-paid apartment from the government. This means that Zohra and her fiancé could move into their tiny apartment: 2 rooms and a kitchen. He prefers to live alone with his wife away from his parents. Zohra said she does not mind either way because she knows his mother and likes her.

### **15.12.2009**

Bachta, Dunya, Khira.

We talked briefly about Khira's sister Mimuna and her divorce. Now her daughter is not going to school because she does not have all her papers and is hanging in limbo. Then Dunya told an overextended story about a couple who had a relationship before marriage. Then Zohra talked about her sister's divorce.

The workbook's text was about how children are different nowadays. Zohra said if one is too strict with girls now, they will be more apt to rebel in their style of clothes or by having a boyfriend.

**19.12.2009**

It's just Naima and me today!

So, Zohra talked more in depth (if that is possible) about her sister and the divorce. She is 29 years old and teaches third grade. Now her husband has called with the ultimatum that if she does not sign over her earnings to him he will go to the judge and have their marriage dissolved. They have been married just 3 months and 19 days. They met because he was the bus driver for the route to her school where she works. Zohra said he got to know her by asking casual things such as the time and what she does.

Her other sister worked for a German man at Sonacom. Apparently, he came on to her and after she refused his advances she was let off.

Then Naima talked in depth about her divorce. She mentioned that the *ajusa* held back the fact that her son suffered from a mental illness (anxiety attacks) for which he needed to regularly take medicine. The mother-in-law then blamed Naima for everything that went wrong in the marriage. ... so much for learning today.

**26.12.2009**

Khira, Naima, Bachta, Dunya, Yamina.

News from the headquarters: Saidani went to Algiers and was informed that the classes were to go just 3 years max per lady. It was decided that 3 years was sufficient time for the women to learn the basic skills needed to become "independent". Hmmm, they have not quite mastered their letters, which could mean a strong tendency for relapse into illiteracy.

Zohra said it is not good and she will place most women back in second year level so they can prolong their studies for at least one more year. She said it was a big mistake. Her students needed at least 2 years to master the alphabet! They do not review at home and need the motivation of a class situation to keep going. She mentioned the fact that they do not attend regularly due to their strong traditions. She also mentioned the complexity of some mothers-in-law.

Zohra found out about this through Yamina whose family is acquainted with Saidani's.

**29.12.2009**

Khira, Haja Khira, Bachta, Yamina.

Began to Interview Yamina.

**03.01.2010**

Class was cancelled due to Zohra's marriage!

**06.01.2010**

Bachta, Bachta<sup>2</sup> (was gone a lot because daughter was ill), Arbia finally came (was busy with weddings, funerals), Yamina, Shina, Naima, Khira. Assia has not been coming, apparently ill and in Oran with family.

And so it was that Zohra was standing before me with round cheeks having finally made her marriage Islamically official. She said they ate a lot of couscous and oranges and served turkey because sheep is too expensive.

Yamina is a serious learner and is a bit annoyed to be taken aside for my interview although she is kind. She is confident and has no problem telling me to wait until she has finished her exercise. They were quite surprised to hear that Zohra now wears the *ajar* (face covering). Yamina exclaimed that her daughter refused to wear one after her marriage and did not expect Zohra to wear one either.

Zohra still says "*sabachair*" (good morning!) in her exaggerated way to check if her ladies are keeping on track.

**08.01.2010 Arab Literacy Day!**

On Algerian T.V. and radio: Gifts and certificates of achievement were passed out to especially good students. The local news clips of students were shown from various provinces.

**In the Haut Plateau:** Nothing was going on officially; however, according to the author's husband the Imam from a local mosque included the topic of literacy classes and literacy in general in his *qutba* speech after the Friday prayer. He cited the sura "*Iqra*" and underlined that literacy is an Islamic duty for both men and women so that one can better their knowledge of Islam. Also, he mentioned that classes were being offered in all parts of town at local schools and mosques.

**On the Internet:** On Int. Lit day each year, UNESCO reminds the intl. community of the status of literacy and adult learning globally. Despite many and varied efforts, literacy remains an elusive target: some 776 million adults lack minimum literacy skills, which means that at least 1 in 5 adults are still not literate. 75 million children are out of school, and many more attend irregularly or drop out.

This is a renewed opportunity to highlight the achievements registered in this field as a result of efforts exerted by the state and civil society to reduce the illiteracy rate in the country and improve human development.

**Algeria celebrates Arab Literacy Day:** A series of events on the fight against illiteracy will be organized Thursday by the National Office for Adult Literacy and Education (ONAEA) on the occasion of Arab Literacy Day, celebrated every year on Jan. 8, the National Education Ministry announced. Organized in coordination with the local association, several activities are scheduled throughout the 48 provinces of the country, aiming at encouraging a greater number of people to join literacy classes, the organizers said.

Arab Literacy Day will be celebrated this year focusing mainly on 3 themes:

1. Literacy as a national duty and everyone's responsibility
2. Literacy as a factor that promotes openness, dialogue and security
3. How eradication of illiteracy is eradication of exclusion.

### 11.01.2010

Last class was cancelled due to mega-snowfall. Bachta Dunya, Haja Khira, Bachta2 and son, Schinaa and Khira (late).

Zohra arrived in a dark brown *djeleba* and black headscarf with *ajar* plus now officially wearing a golden ring! She looks more serious (change of status) and grown-up, and it is indeed a contrast to her former brighter colored headscarves and overcoat. She looks rosy cheeked and happy and is more patient with her students these days, even Dunya. Khira just noticed that Zohra now wears an *ajar* and exclaimed with surprise "you wear the *ajar*?!" She then said she is never getting married.

According to Zohra, neither Saidani nor Ammari organized anything for Literacy Day. Zohra said she heard stuff on the local radio about how gifts were given to students in Sougar and about an 84-year-old woman who received her *bac* in Aghwadt near Ghardia.

Dunya told a story about a caravan of travelers, in which one man cleaned his backside with a dry piece of bread and was turned to stone by Allah for his disrespect. Dunja is still struggling with the letters and proper pronunciation.

They talked about the different kinds of divorce in Islam: 1.) both people agree (they agreed it was the best); 2.) the husband initiates one; and, 3.) the wife has the right to request one (*chul*). Then they talked about "*idda*" (the 3-month time-span after a divorce).

Leaky school ceiling above the teacher's desk due to the heavy snowfall. Zohra talked about the miracles of various prophets: Muhammad & Qur'an; Isa (Jesus) could speak as a baby; Yusuf could bring the dead back to life. Finally, surat al Humahea and surat al Zinzela was mentioned.

**16.01.2010**

Naima, Dunya, Yamina, Haja Khira.

Samia said an average of 7-10 men are showing up to class these days.

Yamina asked me to look for a special teeth whitening product for her daughter as a result of asking her about her family's dental hygiene during the interview. Yamina said her husband was concerned about whether or not the information I asked would be made public on TV or radio. I explained it was for my doctoral thesis and names of people etc. would be changed.

Yamina was very surprised that I did not know how to prepare the innards of sheep.

The ladies talked about different reports they saw on TV about literacy classes in the Sahara and Bejaia -- they definitely pricked up their ears. They were very impressed about stories of women who now can read the whole Qur'an. Then they asked Zohra why we do not focus more on the Qur'an. Zohra replied by saying the inspector checks on the workbook progress, which is what the final exam mainly covers. She also said the main problem is the complete lack of review and motivation on the part of the ladies.

Yamina turned yet another suitor down for her daughter because he wanted to add the condition in the contract that she NOT work after marriage. She said her daughter went to the university in order to work afterwards, not to sit at home. Zohra commented on how women and men are now the same and not like in the past. She talked about her own condition for her marriage to be able to work.

Dunya talked about how she would prefer for her children to live in their own homes, to avoid typical *ajusa-keena* (mother-in-law/daughter-in-law) problems and conflicts. For example, her daughter-in-law often leaves the house and never asks her permission, which is otherwise customary. She just asks her son but not asking the mother-in-law is a sign of disrespect, disregard, etc. Dunya is so kind and patient, does not make an issue out of it but still feels the brunt admitting it is awkward and impolite, especially when the daughter-in-law's mother does not even stay for a cup of coffee when picking up her daughter from their house.

The lesson was about sentence structure, noun, verbs, etc.

**19.01.2010**

Bachta, Yamina & 11-year-old daughter, Bachta2, Shinaa, Khira.

The inspector came. Zohra does not put on her *ajar* for him. The first thing he asked was how many ladies came and said Saidani plans to come by some-time soon. She must set up a regular plan of her lesson content.

Zohra teaches 3 levels this year: 1.) Yamina; 2.) ladies; and, 3.) Naima, Khira and me.

Since her marriage, Zohra's outside movement has been limited by her husband. She no longer can go to the ladies' homes to ask why they did not come to class, etc. (though she never planned to). Now she reports to her husband via telephone before she goes someplace and is not allowed to visit her students. The *ajar* is a symbol of her restricted movement and of marriage.

Omaria showed up to give Zohra a wedding gift of "money" and was curious to see what we were up to since she dropped out. The ladies encouraged her to return and said she wrote well! I asked why Omaria pointed to her head and shook it. She said nothing remains in her head. It is stone.

**No-shows:** Assia (in Oran visiting specialist about medication), Chadija (ill), Saadia (moved), Gesmia (ill and insulted), M-johar (old age and haj), Omaria (fed up), Arbia (ill/unmotivated), Naima (sister was ill).

2 types of sentences in Arabic: those, which start with nouns and those with verbs.

### 23.01.2010

Khira, Bachta, Assia, Dunya, Yamina, Naima, Bachta2 plus 2 kids, Haja Khira, Arbia

Assia finally returned but now without headscarf.

*al jumlatu*= sentence, *al kalemat*=word; there are feminine and masculine nouns

The ladies love the *hamam*!

### 26.01.2010

I missed class due to Elke's visit. Dunya, Assia, Yamina, Bachta, Khira, Haja Khira, Schinaa came and practiced *surat al mulk*.

### 30.01.2010

Schinaa, Dunya, Bachta, Yamina, Assia, Naima, Khira (late).

Sometimes the women are absent for weeks/months before they come back.

Studied *surat al mulk* (creation)

### 02.02.2010

Assia, Dunya, Bachta, Yamina, Khira (late).

I asked Assia where her headscarf went, and she just shrugged her shoulders and smiled. Gone with the wind I suppose. Yamina mentioned how few they were today. Zohra said regardless what family situations arise, the ones who are really dedicated to learn will attend!

*Surat al mulk*

**06.02.2010**

Khira, Schinaa, Bachta, Dunya, Assia.

**09.02.2010**

Khira and Yamina.

Yamina was rung up on her cell phone during class. She hastily gave her cell to her daughter with strict orders to answer out in the hall. Yamina nearly swatted her daughter out of the class so the person calling would not become suspicious about her whereabouts. She was afraid it could be her mother-in-law who has not yet been enlightened that her 50-plus-year-old daughter-in-law attends a literacy class.

**13.02.2010**

Naima, Assia, Bachta, Dunya, Schinaa, Khira (late).

A wedding took place in the school classrooms during the weekend and things were being cleaned up by the *mudir* (school director) and some hired help.

Zohra came in and sat down at one of the desks and burst into tears. Naima rushed over to console her. Zohra had a row with the doorman because the *mudir* ordered for the desks from other classrooms to be stashed in hers. She said she would not be given orders by a simple doorman. If the *mudir* had said it should be so, then fine. The young man told her she is to teach in the other classroom across the hall (Zohra said it was too small but in reality they are the same size); and if she did not like it, she should leave altogether. I was asking myself what the problem is. Schinaa and Bachta were amused by the commotion and agreed with me that it was no big deal but just a power struggle between Zohra and the doorman.

**16.02.2010**

Haja Khira, Schinaa, Naima.

Haja Khira was helping her daughter out the past weeks because she just had a baby.

The inspector came. He always meets Zohra in the other classroom now. She told him about the "desk" problem and he said he would talk to Saidani about it. She asked him if she could change schools, but he said no.

**20.02.2010**

Kader returned from Germany, so missed class. (Assia, Khira, schinaa, Yamina, Bachta -- *Sura al alaq*)



**23.02.2010**

Assia, Dunya, Yamina, Haja Khira, Bachta, Bachta2, Schinaa, Arbia (had been ill), Khira (late). It seemed like a lot of ladies today.

Yamina talked about the teacher's strike in grade and high schools and how Bouteflika has agreed to give teachers a higher salary (3,900 dinars). In general the ladies talked a lot more today.

Reviewed sentence structure, comma, semicolon, etc.; *Sura al alaq*; Zohra talked about the history of the Prophet Muhammad and the Quarish tribe. Then she described how Muhammad received his first message from the angel Gabrielle, how the angel repeated three times to "Read", and how Muhammad replied, "I cannot". Then the fourth time the angel finished the rest of the Sura.

The men's class always ends their session by reciting a Sura from the Qur'an (the women do not do this due to *Aura*, their voices should not be heard by the unrelated men).

**06.03.2010**

Missed last 2 classes due to *gesaas* of Nefisa and Halima. Assia, Dunya, Haja Khira, Schinaa, Fatma.

Yamina hurt her back and will travel to Algiers with her husband and M. Saidani, who has business to attend. Zohra feels good and supported by the fact that one of her students has a related connection to her boss. It clearly boosts her confidence. Last week Zohra got the copy of the exam scheduled for the end of spring.

**A new student today:** Fatma, a sweet, quiet, mannered lady, born in 1944 (66 yrs. old), began coming because her husband now attends the men's literacy class across the hall. She would have come before but just heard about these classes. She never held a pen and now is learning the letters. Zohra frowned and sighed when she saw the new women cross the courtyard walking in the direction of her class. She knew right away a new pupil was coming which means extra work for Zohra.

Dunya talked about problems with her *keena* and that is why she has difficulty concentrating on the lesson. Apparently, the *keena* is beginning to order her son around.

Zohra has problems with her front teeth. Front 3 are a bridge that is slowly faltering. She will have to sell her 2 gold rings to finance the repair in Oran.

**13.03.2010**

Zohra was missing last week due to illness. Naima, Yamina, Khira, Fatma.

Basta! Zohra lost her front tooth and said "I am like my pupils now" She sold her cell phone and rings to collect money for the upcoming dental appointment.

Fatma said she feels a little scared about writing her first letters and wrote some in reverse order -- "wow". Also, Zohra steadily held her hand while writing. It was endearing to watch.

Studied *Sura al Rachman* (Allah's name). Zohra said if one reads this Sura frequently, then Allah grants that person a good spouse. *Sura al Yessin* is the heart of the Qur'an, one reads it at a funeral.

### 16.03.2010

Khira, Bachta, FATma, Dunya, Schinaa, Yamina, Assia, Naima (has asthma).

Zohra dressed in her brighter single-day colors and is limping today because she hurt herself on her sewing table and bruised her leg.

We studied singular, a pair and the plural form today: Book=*kitab*, 2 Books=*ketabeni*, Books=*ketabu*.

Naima left early, felt ill in her throat, took tablets for it this morning, but no improvement. Verbs in the past form.

### 20.03.2010

Naima, Assia, Haja Khira, Fatma, Bachta, Schinaa, Dunya, Yamina, Bachta & son.

The inspector came today and asked for the lesson plan. I asked Zohra about the dual Arabic form and potential difficulties for the ladies. She said the women can speak 90% classic Arabic, and 10 % of the time they mix it with local Algerian dialect, mostly vocabulary words, nouns.

Zohra asked the class to form sentences beginning with nouns and then the same sentence beginning with a verb.

**Damouney:** There was the annual meeting last week to discuss teaching methods. Zohra did not go, but Samia reported.

Zohra used Fatma in her sentence example, "Fatma is writing letters", and Fatma made a joke ("but not correctly!") and laughed.

### 27.03.2010

Missed last lesson. No babysitter and Kader busy with finance check.

Naima, Assia, Dunya, Fatma, H. Khira & granddaughter, Bachta and Arbia!

Zohra today with her new front teeth, smiled widely though was wearing 2 fewer rings. She said it was very expensive.

Fatma said she only wants to learn to read the Qur'an. Arbia brought coffee and cookies because Dunya boldly asked her to last week. Everyone knows her husband owns a coffee shop. Zohra said they have a lot of money due to this.

Naima suggested I wear *kohol* (black eyeliner made from charcoal). I said she looks great in hers and then she replied, "What, my eyes look pretty? But I have no luck [with marriage]". Then Zohra said to wear *kohol* is *haram* and her still-husband forbade her to wear it outside.

Dunya talked about a divorce in her circle of friends. The judge ruled for the man to find a new house within the *idda* period, but he still lives with his now-divorced wife. They agreed this is *haram*. Her daughter came briefly to the school and said hello. She actually came to speak to the *mudir* about a secretary job. (He only offered her a job as a grounds keeper.) Zohra just shook her head and said, "She has a license as a head secretary and he offers her a clean-up job". Then she said she would ask Yamina to ask Saidani if they had a job for her.

### 30.03.2010

Bachta, Fatma, Bachta2, Haja Khira.

Problem with the doorkeeper. It was the cleaning lady watching the door today, and she kept the people knocking before she got up. I arrived with Zohra, and we saw the woman ahead of us being made to wait. When we knocked again, the lady let us wait. Zohra was miffed and said to open the door. The cleaning lady replied, "Slowly now. Be patient". Zohra then said just open the door! The lady was clearly using the door to have a power-trip.

Samia teaches every day during the spring break. The inspector informed them that the exam is scheduled in May.

Zohra tested Fatma on the second letter of the alphabet, but she did had already forgotten.

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol of the Women's Literacy Class (February-April 2009)

### 26.02.2009

**1. Omaria** 2-4p.m. (long interview!) The interview was more personal since my informant, Halima, who is also my sister-in-law, is a close relative of her family, i.e., Halima's brother is married to Omaria's daughter. Omaria wore 2 silver rings (instead of gold), which is common among women her age.

Already after the first page was completed, she wanted to re-join the rest of the class and get on with her lesson. We had to disappoint Omaria by telling her

there were 13 more pages of questions to go. During the whole interview, she was eager to return to her seat and join the rest of the class. Half way through she got up to get her books in order to write down the exercises on the board while answering our questions.

When the class looked over at her, she replied, "Be patient. I am completing my *bac* in the English language right now!" Omaria was making a joke about the fact that Halima and I were speaking in English while she translated to me what Omaria said in Arabic.

The projection questions such as "How does this class benefit women, your children, Algeria, etc.?" were too abstract (irrelevant) for Omaria to make sense of and place in her own personal context.

Interesting was her comment on how she felt before the class: "She just sat and looked". She meant that she could see words/signs but had no idea what they meant. Important was what her husband thinks about her going to class and not the rest. Her facial expression was determined and confident when she said this. This signals a sense of personal gain of self-confidence.

She did not know how many years her children each completed in school. (it went over her head since she herself was never personally involved in the school system.) She also could not recall who helped her children with their school work.

When asked how many children she had, she said, "seven children, none died." I did not even have to ask whether any died it was automatic in her association of having children and some dying or not. This indirectly supports previous scientific evidence that infant mortality is related to non-literacy.

I was smitten with her answer as to whether she would mind if her daughters studied at the university: "Yeah, right! 'Study' at the university!" while linking her arm in mine. She then explained what she meant by telling me that she has seen what goes on near campus with her own eyes. She said her husband has also seen. Omaria was referring to couples standing around the campus arm in arm between class sessions, etc. However, it would be perfectly fine if her daughter wanted to go to work.

**2. Khira** from group 2. 4p.m.-4:20p.m. She was shy and skeptical at first but then soon relaxed during the course of the interview. We did not have time to finish.

### **03.02.2009**

2pm - We completed Khira's interview. All in all she is a young woman and regrets not being allowed to finish school. She works very hard at home, as well as having a cleaning job. Now she is determined to continue her education, saying she wants to learn "everything!"

**3. Sadia** Sadia was in a solemn state, having money problems in general and her house recently being broke into. Her daughter-in-law's gold jewelry was stolen, as well as the meticulously saved 1,000 dinars and the television. She began to cry when I asked her about her situation. Halima's consoling approach helped her to stuff the worries away and finish the interview although this remained foremost on her mind. She lamented about the hardships of the past when we asked about her going to school.

Sadia is against young women going to the university. She believes it be an immoral atmosphere - mainly promoting young lovers. She said she hears a lot in the news about unwed female students getting pregnant and cases of newborn babies being flushed down the toilet, etc.

Interesting is her strong sense of "right" for women to stay home after marriage, but yet, at the same time, she has no reservations about women working. In this case women are earning money and that means financial security for the family.

Her grandson, Musa, lost his mother at birth, and she feels very protective of him, having raised him as her son. He goes to Hakim's class. She said she is even "wary of the bees around him".

Sadia thinks this school is very beautiful, especially with the recent picture-painted depictions (little Bo-Peep, Mickey Mouse, etc.) on the walls.

Projection questions were difficult for her to comprehend. She ended up saying "*al hamdullilah, al hamdullilah*". The concept of oneself as a focal point is not in her way of thinking: Viewing herself as an asset/commodity and as a center of attention, (individualism) are more western capitalistic traits. This was refreshing to experience and think about.

She has developed a "scribble" with no recognizable letters to express her signature when needed. She was also embarrassed about the *anasheed* (traditional songs) question. That would mean admitting to singing/knowing songs with immoral content (amorous situations, songs about lovers, etc.)

**4. Aisha** She is enjoying her turn to be questioned very much. Aisha talks a lot during class in general, so it was of no surprise. It was clearly fun for me to question her because of her openness, honesty and detail! She explained how she used to mistake gas bills brought by the utility man for hidden love letters from secret admirers. She chuckled at herself while she shared how she was scared to show the bills (love-letters) to her husband! It was only after the penalty for not paying was imposed that she understood what those letters were for.

Her father did not let her go to school – the school was, Aisha said, still some distance away, and there was fear of her mingling with boys. She would hold him accountable for this and when she told him of her adult literacy class,

he was very relieved - as if his guilt was washed away. We ran out of time; interview to be continued.

### 05.02.2009

**5. Bachta** She "signed up" to be next last week so I called her to be interviewed first. Her daughter accompanied her during the last 2 times with her macramé accessories. She dropped out of school due to lack of interest, 15 years old. Her mother is not keen on this but has not given her any heat about it either. All her brothers go to the university.

Bachta is soft-spoken during class and the same went for her interview - at the same time I did not feel as if I were pulling answers out of her teeth. All in all, Bachta is pro-education for men and women but remained unemotional about it.

**6. Zohra** A spunky lady and is herself during the interview as well. She made a good point about the difference between today and the past when asked about her parents and who helped them read and write. Zohra noted how things were not so complex then, much less bureaucratic. As such, the paperwork was more straightforward.

Due to the sudden windstorm, the women wanted to dash home. Interview is to be continued.

### 09.03.2009

We finished Aisha's interview first. She was as pleasant as always, sharing a lot of information. Very descriptive about how she feels about being able to read a little and better understand the world around her. She pointed out the letters in the questionnaire and said out loud what each was to prove she can read.

I am assuming by now that projective questions (how can your literacy benefit your life and country) are not common for those who have not gone through formal schooling. She, too, did not quite understand what I was getting at.

Halima was hilarious to watch while we asked the women what traditional song texts (*anasheed*) the ladies knew. Halima loves a good old song herself, and with this personal interest she eagerly encouraged the women to go ahead and start singing some "*shufi shwia*" As if to say, "Go ahead, let me hear what songs you know?" Aisha gladly offered some more texts to our ongoing list, and the whole time they stopped to laugh and look around the classroom. It was as if they were in on a huge joke together. The traditional songs do not go by a certain title. One just starts off and the rest join in if they know it.

She said it is annoying when people begin to talk to her in French at public places such as the hospital as if assuming she could answer back in French!

**7. Dunya** Now for dear Dunya, who is her charming self - a talker, but in a slow way. I was so shocked when she said she was 12 years old when she mar-

ried and her first 7 babies all died soon after childbirth. I even cried. She said she was big = mature for her age (physically anyway). She, however, does not want her daughters to marry young.

We ate *aish* (large globule couscous soup) and *magneta* (roasted semolina grains with honey, butter and cinnamon), which Dunya and Khira brought, during the interview for *mouled* (Muhammad's birthday). My sister-in-law/informant Halima said she would like to come to every class from now on!

Dunya is for furthering one's education but not for her daughters to study outside of Tiaret. Her own sons sometimes follow the youngest daughter to watch over her safety/behavior. One of her sons used to bring home a girlfriend when the parents were out and go upstairs with her. They are now married after being together for 5 years. Apparently, the wait was due to lack of money.

### 12.03.2009

Dunya (continued). She began the interview by saying she will study until she reaches the university. Then she said, "No, let me change that -- until I reach my death!" A true lifelong learner!

Her children told her and her husband that celebrating *taam* and singing *anasheed* with over-the-edge texts were *haram*. Until now all the ladies turned red when asked if they knew any traditional songs. Dunya however, kindly obliged Halima's personal desire for this topic and sang some new texts to the same ongoing song about the "mother-in-law" from before, rounding it out quite nicely! Afterwards Halima showed Dunya the texts from Aisha and they laughed. The older women sing quite differently – they are clearly from a different era. This is also true in the case of the public call to prayer, *adan*. The older men have a style that is more twangy-sounding, which reminds me of older cowboy songs from the States.

Dunya has false teeth but they looked like her own because the dentist covered some of her denture teeth with amalgam. Halima said they made much better dentures in the past - better fit, more authentic looking - not a one-for-all style.

Dunya loves holidays. Even mentioned Valentine's Day. Said in the past they would celebrate their Marabut with drums, and men on horseback would be firing off their traditional rifles while the women were making their trilling sounds (*zararit*).

Fatima was to be next but declined timidly. She was unsure about the interview and how her husband would react. Dunya and Zuleha calmly tried to reassure her that it was just simple basic questions. She said she would ask her husband first what he thought about it.

**8. Arbia** 3:30p.m. Arbia was engaged at 13 and married at 15. Her husband was 20 years old. Now her Husband is about 50 years old. He is also quite

conservative about Arbia's activities and going out. She commented on Fatma's decline to be interviewed, saying that her husband can also be quite conservative, but not in this case because "they have nothing to hide".

Halima took personal interest in the reason why Arbia's children dropped out of school, citing a lack of clothes in the latest fashion and supposedly being laughed at for it by other school kids. Halima said Arbia seemed very materialistic in general - referring a lot of what she spoke about to money or lack of money. Halima said she, too, wore shabby shoes, etc. but never considered leaving school over something like that. She said in her usual lovely English, she would like to "catch the reason".

The span of educational background in Arbia's immediate family, among her siblings, is incredible, ranging from non-literate to college graduates and employed. She has 6 sisters, 4 are illiterate and the youngest 2 are from a different mother, both of whom went to the university.

Arbia said she knows some Qur'an verses by heart and has been to the capital to visit relatives.

### 23.03.2009

**9. Fatima** Nice woman, good informant. She understood the projective questions right away.

**10. Haja Khira** Very talkative, informed above and beyond the questions asked. She is a widow. Khira sometimes came early to sit with Zohra. She said she did not know how to make *aish* when she was first married.

Her daughter married a man who "saw" her at work - her son was nervous about whether his sister "knew" the man already - pride, good name of family, etc. It is not proper conduct to be acquainted with a man before marriage.

She had quite a colorful life. Her husband was gone for 11 years, working in France without returning once during that time. Her 22-year-old son saw his father one time in that time span.

Khira thought the reason why the other women from the two former classes stopped coming was because they lacked ambition and some were just too old. (Aisha, Schinaa and she were in Nassira's class last year).

She made a joke, saying that the literacy classes were designed to prevent friction among mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law because it gave them a break from each other!

### 30.03.2009

Haja Khira (continued). She also understood the projection questions. She belongs to the older group of women but is very peppy and witty. If her husband were still alive, she would attempt to learn French. She had been to Paris once



before for 1 month. Khira said she was frustrated during the visit because she could not go shopping due to the language barrier. She then proceeded to count to 30 in French. She can write her last name because her son taught her how. Khira can recite the last 3 Sure of the Qur'an. When asked about *anasheed*, she too was bashful but sung some more texts while holding her scarf over her mouth in embarrassment.

**11. Naima** 3:19p.m. She first asked whether it was *haram* to stumble over words while reading the Qur'an. Halima stated that in Islam you get 10 *hasanat* (blessings) per letter and it is the thought that counts.

She would love to read and write to be able to write down dessert recipes on her own when visiting friends or relatives.

### 06.04.2009

Naima (continued). She talked about the 12th of January "Lam" = New Year. It may stem from the Kabyle Berber tradition. The Laaredj family (husband's relatives) celebrated this, too, up until 4 or 5 years ago when they decided it was *haram*.

**12. Bachta2** She was with her little son today. Later her sister and elder daughter joined us while waiting for her to finish. Her 3-year-old son Osama comes a lot with his mom because he does not like to be away from her. She also mentioned funerals as a reason for not coming to class. It is just interesting to compare how many funerals and weddings take place within a rural Algerian family as compared to the considerably smaller families in the West. It seems I only ever attend a maximum of one every few years, if that.

It was very moving how she described how she felt about not going to school. The bleak expression on her face as she said she felt like she was dead!

Towards the end her son began acting up, restless go home, but she remained calm.

### 13.04.2009

**13. Schinaa** She is a very sweet looking woman, who by far looks 15 years younger than she is. Very seldom have I seen this. Usually, I find women look older due to their dentures or years of physical work around the house and on the farms. She commented about how many doctors are unskilled and give false diagnoses. We shared how women understand classic Arabic from watching Egyptian soap operas, the first of its kind. Now soap operas are aired from Mexico, China, Turkey and several other Arab countries.

## Appendix G: Oral Questionnaire of the Women's Literacy Class, Haut Plateau

(Interviews were conducted in Algerian Arabic dialect and translated into English)

### 1. Background Information

- الاسم؟
1. Name?
- كم عمرك؟
2. How old are you?
- مكان ولادتك وأين نشأت؟
3. Where were you born / Grow up?
- هل لك عمل خارج البيت؟
4. Do you have a job outside the house?
- هل أنت متزوجة؟ هل زوجك من أقاربك؟ وكيف تم الاختيار؟
5. Are you married? To a relative? Who chose your husband?
6. Age at marriage? / Husband's age at marriage?  
Husband married to more than one wife?
- من يسكن معك في البيت؟
7. Who lives in your house?
- هل اشتغل أحد من عائلتك بالخارج؟ أين؟
8. Has anyone in your family worked/ lived abroad? where?

### التعليم

### 2. Participant's Education

- كم مدة قضيتها بالدراسة/المسجد/متى؟ وأين؟
1. How many years of school/Qur'an school did you finish? When and where?  
لماذا لم تكمي دراستك؟ المدرسة/المسجد؟
2. Why did you not attend or finish school/ Qur'an school?  
كيف كان رد عائلتك على البنات اللاتي ذهبن للمدرسة في الماضي
3. What did your family think about girls going to school in the past?  
ما هو عدد إخوتك؟ هل درسوا من قبل؟ ما هو مستواهم الدراسي؟
4. How many siblings do you have? Did they go to school/Qur'an school? For how long?  
هل ذهب أولاد الجيران إلى المدرسة في الماضي؟
5. Did the neighbor children go to school/Qur'an school in the past?  
ما هو شعورك حول عدم ذهابك إلى المدرسة في الماضي؟
6. How do you feel about not having gone to school?

هل كان والديك يستطيعون القراءة والكتابة؟

7. Can/could your mother and father read & write?
8. Who helped your parents with reading/writing?
9. What did your parents do/work?

### عائلة زوجك

### 3. Husband and Family

ماذا يعمل زوجك؟

1. What does your husband do/work?

هل درس زوجك في المدرسة أو المسجد؟

2. Did your husband go to school/Qur'an school?

كم عدد السنوات التي درسها؟

3. How many years did he go?

هل يستطيع القراءة والكتابة؟

4. Can he read and write?

هل يذهب زوجك للدراسة في محو الأمية؟

5. Does your husband also attend an adult Literacy class?

ما هو تفكير زوجك حول ذهابك للمدرسة لمحو الأمية؟

6. What does your husband think about you going to class?

ما هو تفكير أصدقائك أو عائلتك حول ذهابك لمحو الأمية؟

7. What do your friends/family think about it?

ما تفكيرك حول ذهابك لقسم محو الأمية؟

8. How do you feel about going to literacy class?

ما هي نظرتك حول تفكير الإسلام لذهاب المرأة للمدرسة أو العمل؟

9. What do you think Islam says about women and going to school or working?

كيف تذهبن للمدرسة و تعودين منها؟

10. How do you get to class and back home?

من هو المسؤول عن عائلتك؟

11. Who is the main supporter of your family?

هل يستطيع القراءة والكتابة؟

12. Can he/she read and write?

ماذا يعمل أو ماذا تعمل؟

13. What does he/she do?

### الأطفال

### 4. Children's Education

هل لديك أولاد؟ ما هو عددهم؟ ما هي أعمارهم؟

1. Do you have children? How many? How old?

2. Have any of your children died? What was the cause of death?

- من يقوم بمراقبة أطفالك عند تواجدك في القسم؟
3. Who watches the children when you come to class?  
هل ذهب أولادك للمسجد من قبل؟
4. Do/did your children go to Qur'an school?  
هل ذهب أولادك للمدرسة؟
5. Do/did your children go to school?  
ما هو مستواهم الدراسي؟
6. How many years did they finish?  
هل تحبين أن ينهوا دراستهم؟ لماذا؟
7. Would you like them to finish their schooling? Why?  
من يساعد أطفالك في واجباتهم المنزلية؟
8. Who helps them with their schoolwork?  
هل تفكرين في أن المستوى الدراسي للفتاة أو الصبي واحد؟
9. Do boys and girls need the same level of education?  
ما هي نظرتك حول ما هو عدد السنوات الدراسية التي يحتاج إليها؟
10. How many years are enough?  
من هو الأحسن في القسم الفتاة أو الصبي؟
11. Who does better in school?
12. Would you prefer an all girls/boys school?  
ما هو السن المناسب لزواج الفتاة؟ وكذلك الرجل؟
13. What is the ideal age for a girl to marry? And a boy?  
هل أولادك متزوجين؟
14. Are your children married?  
من اختار لهم زوجاتهم؟
15. Who chose their spouse?  
هل هم من الأقارب؟
16. Is their spouse a relative?  
ما هو شعورك حول ذهاب ابنتك للجامعة؟ وكذلك للعمل؟
17. How do you feel about your daughters going to the University? And working?  
ما هو تفكير عائلتك/زوجك حول ذهاب المرأة للجامعة أو العمل بعد زواجها و حصولها على أطفال؟
18. What does your family/husband think about women going to the University and working after marriage?  
هل تغير تفكير الأقارب في هذا الموضوع عن ذي قبل؟ كيف ذلك؟
19. Do they think differently about this now than before? How?

20. Would you prefer an all men's/all women's University?  
 ما هي الحياة التي تحبها لابنتك؟ العمل أو أن تكون ربة منزل؟
21. What career do you prefer for your daughters?  
 ما هي الحياة التي تحبها لأولادك؟
22. What career do you prefer for your sons?  
 ما الشيء المهم لأولادك في هذه الحياة؟
23. What do you most hope for in your own life?

### قسم العربية لمحو الأمية 5. The Literacy Class

- كيف سمعت عن أقسام محو الأمية
1. How did you find out about this class?  
 من تصنين أنه قام بتنظيم برنامج هذه الأقسام بالجزائر؟
2. Who do you think organizes these classes in Algeria?  
 ما هو أول تفكيرك في هذه الأقسام؟
3. What did you first think about these classes?  
 هل سمعت عن هذه الأقسام في التلفاز/الأخبار
4. Have you heard about these classes on T.V. (news etc.)  
 ما هي ردة فعل عائلتك وكذلك زوجك؟
5. How did your family/husband react?  
 هل ألححت على زوجك بالذهاب للتعلم أو على عائلتك؟ كما استمرت مدة إلحاحك؟
6. Did you have to work on persuading your family/husband to let you go to class? How long?
7. Does your going to class cause problems/conflicts at home?  
 لماذا جئت للمدرسة/للمسجد؟
8. Why do you come to this school/mosque?  
 منذ متى وأنت تذهين للمدرسة؟
9. Since when do you attend?  
 كيف كان أول أيامك في القسم؟
10. How were the first days of class like?  
 ما هو الاختلاف الذي شعرت؟
11. What was difficult or strange or new?  
 كيف تشعرين الآن؟
12. How do you feel now?  
 هل تذهين باستمرار؟
13. Do you come regularly?

متى تتعبدن فف القسم؟

14. When do you miss a class?

15. Is it difficult to attend every class?

هل تحببن القسم، المعلمة، التلامبذ الذب بن درسون معك؟

16. Do you like the class, the teacher, the students?

ما هو الشفء الذب لا تحبببه فف القسم؟

17. What do you not like about the class?

هل هو سهل التعلم؟

18. Is it easy to learn?

هل تعلمبن ما تدرسببه فف القسم فف المنزل؟ من بساعدك فف المنزل؟

19. Do you practice what you learned in class at home? Who helps you?

هل تكلمبن عن قسمك مع أصدقائك وعائلتك؟

20. Do you talk about your class with friends and family?

هل تحسبن أن أصدقائك و عائلتك بساندونك بعذ ذهابك إلى القسم

21. Do you feel supported by friends/family?

### **الهدف**

### **6. Literacy Goals**

لماذا تربببن القراءة والكتابة؟

1. Why do you want to learn to read and write?

ماذا تعلمت لحد الآن.

2. What have you learned so far?

كفب عفرت القراءة والكتابة مجرى حباتك الوبوبفة؟ و ما الفارق الآن؟

3. How does learning to read and write change/benefit your everyday life; your country? What is different now?(Projection question)

كفب تحسبن عنعذ عم قءرتك على القراءة والكتابة؟

4. How do you feel/did you feel because you cannot read/write?

ما هفب أهوبفة هذه الءروس بالنسبة لك؟

5. How important is this class for you?

إلى أفب مءى تربببن الءهاب للمءرسة؟

6. How long do you plan to attend literacy class?

هل تحسبن أنك تصنعبن عففر بالنسبة لك و أولاءك و بءلك بءهابك للمءرسة؟ وكفب؟

7. Do you feel like you are making a difference in your life, your children's life and for Algeria by learning to read and write? How?

كفب بمكن النساء الجزائرباء القفام بعغفر إببافبا بءابه بلءهم؟

8. How do literate women make a positive difference for the country's future?

بمن تفخرين كقدوة في الجزائر؟

9. Who do you respect and admire (role model)?

### الأشغال الأدبية

#### 7. Literacy Activities

كم لغة تتكلمين؟

1. What languages can you speak?

تستطيعين القراءة و الكتابة قليلا؟

2. Can you read/write a little?

تستطيعين قراءة مؤشرات الطرق؟

3. Can you read road signs?

تستطيعين الإمضاء باسمك؟

4. Can you sign your name?

تستطيعين قراءة و كتابة القرآن؟

5. Can you read/write Qur'an?

بماذا تستعينين على القراءة في البيت، جرائد؟ كتب؟ قرآن؟

6. What type of reading materials do you have at home? Newspaper, books, Qur'an?

من يقرأها؟

7. Who reads them?

من يقوم بالقراءة و الكتابة لك؟

8. Who do you rely on most to read/write for you?

من يرتل القرآن في البيت؟

9. Who recites Qur'an at home?

10. Do you know any *anasheed* (traditional songs)?

هل عندك تلفاز؟

11. Do you have a T.V.?

ماذا تفضلين في مشاهدتك للتلفاز؟

12. What do like to watch?

في أي لغة؟

13. In which language?

كم مدة تشاهدين فيها التلفاز؟

14. How often do you watch?

توجهت بزيارة لمدينة كبيرة؟ أين؟ و كم مرة؟

15. Have you ever gone to a big city? Where? How often?

## أرقام\_رياضيات

### 8. Math and Numbers

1. Can you count money?  
تستطيعين حساب الدراهم؟
2. Can you read and write numbers?  
تستطيعين معرفة كم تدفعين عند شراءك لحاجة؟
3. How do you like learning math in class?  
تستدنين البائع في حساباته عن عدم معرفتك؟
4. Do you trust others to tell you the truth at the market etc?  
تخرجين لوحدهن؟ إلى أين؟
5. Do you go out alone?  
من يدفعها لغاتورة؟
6. Who pays the bills?  
من يشتري الأكل/الملابس للبيت؟
7. Who goes shopping for food/clothes?  
هل تشتري أدواتك المدرسية بنفسك؟
8. Do you buy your own school supplies?  
من يذهب للبنك، البريد؟
9. Who goes to the bank/post office?  
تنتخبين؟
10. Do you vote?  
عندك هاتف جوال؟
11. Do you have a cell phone?  
تستطيعين استعماله لوحدهن؟
12. Can you use it by yourself?  
في أي لغة هو مبرمج؟
13. What language is it programmed in?

## الأدوات

### 9. Utilities

1. Do you have electricity ?  
عندك كهرباء؟
2. Do you have running water?  
هل عندك ماء صالح للشرب؟
3. Do have a washing machine?  
عندك غسالة؟



4. Does your family own a car? عندكم سيارة؟

### نظافة - صحة

## 10. Health and Hygiene

1. Do you brush your teeth? تتظف أسنانك؟  
كم مرة؟
2. How often? عندك مشاكل مع أسنانك؟
3. Do you have problems with your teeth? من متى عندك أسنان مركبة؟
4. Do you have false teeth? Since when? هل ينظف أولادك أسنانهم؟
5. Do your children brush their teeth? كم مرة تذهين لطيب الأسنان؟
6. How often do they go to the dentist? ما هي قوة النبض عندك؟
7. How is your eye sight? هل تستعملين نظارة؟
8. Do you wear glasses? عندك مشاكل صحية؟
9. Do you have any health problems?
10. Do you take birth control?

### الطب

## 11. Medical Care

1. Do you go to the Doctor/Hospital when you feel ill? تذهين للطبيب عند المرض؟  
ترين أن المستشفيات نظيفة؟
2. Do you think the hospitals/clinics are clean? تذهين إلى الصيدلية لشراء الدواء؟
3. Do you go to the pharmacy to get your medicine? من يقرأ وصفة دوائك؟
4. Who reads the medicine instructions for the proper dose? تستعملين أعشاب تقليدية عند المرض؟
5. Do you use traditional medicine when you are ill?

- ما هي هذه الأدوية التقليدية التي تستعملينها؟ ولأي مرض؟
6. What types of traditional medicine do you take and for what?  
تحضرين الأدوية التقليدية بنفسك؟
7. Do you prepare it yourself?  
ما هي الأدوية الفعالة من الصيدلية؟ أو التقليدية؟
8. Which medicine works better traditional or from the pharmacy?

### الأشغال اليدوية

#### 12. Traditional Arts and Crafts

- هل لكم قطعة أرض فلاحية؟
1. Does your family have land in the country?
2. If so, when/how often do you go?  
تشاركين في ذلك:  
زراعة القمح صناعة الطعام صناعة الخبز  
الصوف/الخيطة/صناعة الكساء/كروسي/أعمال أخرى
3. Do you participate in:  
Wheat harvest making couscous making bread  
preparing wool sewing/weaving/crochet other  
ما هي الحرفة التي تتقنها ابنتك؟
4. What crafts can your daughter do?  
هل تشاركين في أعمال أو أقسام خاصة بالنساء؟
5. Do you participate in other activities or classes just for women?  
هل ترصدن أماكن خاصة بالنساء فقط للتعلم أو التمارين مثل المكتبة..؟
6. Would you like there to be more areas in Tiaret just for women? Sport activities, libraries, cafes etc?  
هل تذهبين هناك إن كانت متوفرة هذه الأماكن؟
7. If such areas were available would you go?  
هل ستشاركين في الأشغال اليدوية هذا الربيع؟
8. Will you attend the Arts and crafts class if it is offered this spring?  
في أي اختصاص؟
9. What will you specialize in?

### الإسلام

#### 13. Islam

- ما هي العطلة التي تحتفلين بها أنت وعائلتك؟
1. What Islamic holidays do you and your family celebrate?

- هل تؤمنين أنت أو عائلتك بالأضرحة؟ من؟
2. Do you/your family honor a marabut? Who?
- من يذهب للمسجد للصلاة؟ متى؟
3. Does your family pray regularly?
- هل ذهبت للحج؟
4. Have you gone on your Pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj)?

## Glossary

**Ajar** - Traditional Algerian face covering made of white cloth edged with lace concealing the mouth and nose.

**Ajusa** – The mother of one’s wife or husband; mother-in-law.

**Arosa** – The bride.

**Bac** – Abbreviation for baccalaureate, the certificate of graduation received at the end of secondary education.

**Baraka** – Blessings from God/Allah in Islam.

**Djeleba (Jilbab)** – Islamic overcoat worn by women when they leave their home.

**DJemma** – Qur’an school.

**Habus lands** – The religious foundations that constituted the main source of income for religious institutions, including schools prior to the French invasion.

**Hadith** - recorded teachings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions.

**Hadj/Hadja** – The way people of the older generation are addressed: “*Hadja*” (for a woman) or “*Hadj*” (for a man), whether they have gone to Mecca on their pilgrimage (Hadj) or not.

**Haram** – A deed or act that is unlawful or considered a sin in Islam.

**Haya/Hishma** - A positive sense of shame and modesty. In Tiaret several locals referred to haya and hishma as meaning the same thing.

**Hijab** - Islamic head cover i.e. veil or headscarf.

**Haik** – Traditional Algerian outer garment draped over the women’s head and body often revealing only one eye.

**Harira** – Traditional tomato based soup consisting of mixed herbs and spices (thyme, penny royal, cumin, saffran, garlic) and finely ground wheat grain.

**Keena** – The daughter-in-law.

**Yateem** - An off-the-record term referring to the lack of truthfulness in the local Algerian news. It insinuates that the information exhibits no basis in fact and thus has no integrity.

**Wilaya** – Province such as the wilaya of Tiaret.

**Mahua Omia** – literally translated it means “erase non-literacy”; local phrase used to refer to literacy classes and the eradication of non-literacy in Algeria.

**Maquis** - Bases where militants devised their strategies during the war of independence.

**Marabut** – Deceased wali or mystical ancestor/ divinely inspired leader; saint.

**Masjid** – Islamic mosque.

**Mujahid/Mujahida** – Male and female combatants during the war of independence.

**Quba** – Clay grave construction where a deceased wali or mystical ancestor has been buried.

**Taám** - Annual celebration (literally, couscous or food) where families make a pilgrimage to the grave their deceased wali or mystical ancestor often referred to as Marabut or saint.

**Wali** – Eldest and most respected ancestor; Arab provincial governor.

**Zawiya** – Center of Islamic education. Some zawiyas are linked with specific Marabuts.

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## Abstract of Dissertation in German

Laut dem Weltbildungsbericht der UNESCO 2013/2014 sind etwa 781 Millionen Menschen Analphabeten. Fast zwei Drittel von ihnen sind Frauen. Zwar haben die Staaten in Nordafrika und im Nahen Osten (Middle East and North Africa, MENA) in den vergangenen Jahren stark in den Bildungssektor investiert, die Analphabetenquote mit etwa 25 Prozent bleibt allerdings weiterhin hoch.

Schon seit den späten 1950er Jahren wurden Konzepte der Erwachsenenbildung bzw. Alphabetisierung von der UNESCO entwickelt. Zunächst wurden sie vom Streben nach wirtschaftlicher Modernität bestimmt und richteten sich dann allmählich auf ein lebenslanges Lernen aus. Nach der Weltkonferenz über „Bildung für alle“ im Jahre 1990 (WCEFA) hat sich der Schwerpunkt zunehmend auf die Geschlechterparität und die Stärkung der Frau (Empowerment) verlagert.

Anlässlich des Welttags des Analphabetismus am 8. September 2007 stellte Algerien mit seiner Alphabetisierungs-Kampagne (**Iqraa**/"Lies") eine Strategie vor, die bis 2017 die Analphabetenquote von 63 Prozent um die Hälfte reduzieren sollte. Vor allem sollte die Bildungssituation von Frauen und Mädchen in ländlichen Regionen im Fokus stehen.

Diese Arbeit untersucht im Sinne einer regionalen Studie die Alphabetisierung bei Erwachsenen und die Konsequenzen der Lese- und Schreibfähigkeit für die Situation der Frauen in Tiaret, Algerien. Sie basiert auf teilnehmender Beobachtung und Tiefeninterviews (2008-2012) von Lehrkräften und TeilnehmerInnen an Alphabetisierungskursen sowie von Führungsmitgliedern des **Iqraa** Programmes in Tiaret. Die Studie erforscht die auf Frauen ausgerichtete Programmstrategien sowie die Motivation und Lernbedürfnisse der Teilnehmerinnen und geht den kulturellen Faktoren nach, welche eine regelmäßige und erfolgreiche Teilnahme beeinträchtigen.

Obwohl die traditionellen Rollen von Männern und Frauen in vielen Gebieten Algeriens nach wie vor klassisch definiert werden, ist der Anteil von Frauen auf der höheren Bildungsebene seit der Amtszeit von Präsident Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika (1999 bis heute) deutlich gestiegen. Die heutige Generation von Frauen macht mit rund 60 Prozent die Mehrheit der Studierenden an algerischen Universitäten aus.

In Algerien ist, wie in anderen arabischen Ländern auch, allgemein festzustellen, dass Frauen zunehmend mehr Bildungs- und Arbeitsmöglichkeiten in

Anspruch nehmen. Etwa 25 Prozent aller jungen Frauen und Männer zwischen 15 und 24 Jahren bleiben in der MENA-Region ohne Arbeit (Arab Human Development Report 2011). Bei vielen jungen Erwachsenen ist die Arbeitslosigkeit im mangelhaften Angebot an weiterführenden Schulen und Hochschulen begründet.

Meine Untersuchung geht davon aus, dass die Teilnahme von Frauen an tertiärer Bildung und ihr Zugang zum Arbeitsmarkt zu einem wesentlichen Teil auch von den kulturellen, wirtschaftlichen, und politischen Gegebenheiten einer Gesellschaft abhängen. Dabei gehe ich der Fragestellung nach, inwieweit höhere Bildung in der Gesellschaft von Tiaret dazu beiträgt, die Stellung der Frau tatsächlich zu verbessern, und wie hier die Weiterbildung von Frauen aufgenommen wird.

Bisher galten alle Alphabetisierungskampagnen in Algerien als gescheitert. Empirische Studien über die Alphabetisierung von Frauen liegen in Algerien bislang nicht vor, und es gibt für die beiden umfassendsten Bildungskampagnen (1963 und 1967 bis 1971) leider auch keine gesonderte Angaben über die Wirkung auf die Situation der Frau (Meyer 1990:66; Fetni 1987:15-23). Die vorliegende Arbeit soll mit ihren empirischen Forschungserkenntnissen zur Region Tiaret der Reduzierung des Defizits bei den geschlechtsspezifischen Rahmenbedingungen dienen, auch im Hinblick auf künftige Alphabetisierungsstrategien für Frauen im Nahen Osten und Nordafrika.