

UNVEILING MARIANNE

Emancipation and Pacification in the Algerian War for Independence,
the Dawn of the Fifth Republic

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Abstract

This paper draws the links between France's psychological warfare strategies during Algeria's war for independence and contemporary French policies that exclude Muslim women. The colonial Fifth Bureau for Psychological Action engaged in 'pacification' initiatives that sought to remove any potential support base for the resistance. Framed as a 'conquest of hearts,' pacification programs tried to rally Algerian support for the colonial cause. The unit's 'emancipation' campaign instrumentalized an age-old belief that if Algerian women assimilated into the colonial fold, they would bring the rest of their society along with them. Thus 'liberating' Algerian women, and integrating them into a normative Republican femininity became a key component of pacification operations. Over one hundred years of French colonial discourse constructed the Algerian veil, or *haïk*, into a symbol of the 'uncivilized' nature of Algerian society. Its removal thus played a crucial role in pacification efforts. This French colonial logic, that unveiling Muslim women would integrate them into the Republican state, continues to influence France's policies towards its Muslim population. France's 'anti-separatism' bill is the latest iteration of this colonial practice. It seeks to ban minors from wearing headscarves, prohibit veiled mothers from accompanying their children on school trips and outlaw burkinis. As France's politics move towards the right it will be interesting to observe if other colonial conventions are recycled in the name of the Fifth Republic.

Introduction:

Conducting this research has been like piecing together the shards of a broken mirror. The process began with a deep dive into French colonial depictions of Algerian women and progressively provided insight into France's exclusionary policies regarding the Muslim veil. In a desperate attempt to hold on to its most prized colony, the French security forces instrumentalized long-held visions of Algerian women to justify repressive counter-insurgency tactics. This project began as an attempt to find a glimmer of myself in the archive. With every piece of colonial material, the image reflected back becomes both clearer and more perverted.

I grew up far away from Algeria, far away from that side of my family. My identity is therefore fragmented, built through family anecdotes and occasional visits. I am always on the lookout for additional facets, more pieces to glue together. The image reflected back in the archive is strangely familiar—the tropes and archetypes of French colonial discourse are alive and well. Despite its unsettling familiarity, the Algerian woman reflected in the archive is distorted and strange. She is woven into ethnography and policy, she is either a cloistered housewife or a housekeeper, her name is invariably *Fatma*. This reflection, pulled from the bits and pieces recorded on paper and print, is violent. It is what Saidiya Hartman might call *excessive*.¹ It smothers its subject.

But, this maybe is the challenge. I found that the subject of the archival material I was looking through is not the housekeeper or housewife. The subject is not Fatma. These records, like a

¹ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, n°2 (June 2008): 1-14, read.dukeupress.edu/small-axe/article/12/2/1/32332/Venus-in-Two-Acts?searchresult=1.

trove of archeological finds, form an image of their maker. This picture may *look* like Fatma but, but if we look a little closer, she is in fact a spitting image of *Marianne*— Marianne whose portrait is engraved on French Franc coins and printed on stamps, whose likeness sits in city halls across the country.² She is Eugène Delacroix’s bare-breasted *Liberty Leading the People*, completed in 1830, the year Algeria was colonized.³ In Algeria, France forged a picture of itself, gathered in novels, paintings, photographs, poetry, ethnography, numbers and policy. This picture is personified in Marianne, symbol of Republican values and “the embodiment of emancipated French women in contrast to the veiled woman said to be subordinated by Islam.”⁴ Marianne ties the French Republic to normative French femininity.

There are not many images of what happened at the Forum of Algiers in the afternoon of May 13th 1958, and those that do exist are bright, over-exposed. White faces are slightly washed out—teeth gleaming. They smile a desperate smile, a tense, hard smile. The Algerian faces are more difficult to read. A pair of photographs stand out in particular. They capture the same scene seconds apart. An Algerian woman stands at the center of a crowd of French settlers. She is flanked by two women, both grinning in that hard, tense smile. One of them seems to be restraining the Algerian woman’s arm, gripping it with her left hand, unveiling her with her right.

² Joan W. Scott, “The Veil and the Political Unconscious of French Republicanism,” *OrientXXI*, last modified 27 April, 2016, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-veil-and-the-political-unconscious-of-french-republicanism,1310>.

³ See *Figure 1*: French settlers unveil Algerian woman on May 13th 1958, image pulled from Jean Pierre Sereni, “Le dévoilement des femmes musulmanes en Algérie,” *OrientXXI*, last modified 13 September, 2016, <https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/le-devoilement-des-femmes-musulmanes-en-algerie,1466>; *Figure 2*: Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830; *Figure 3*: Joël Le Tac, Daniel Camus, “Today the women dare to show their faces!” *Paris-Match*, 30 May, 1958, HathiTrust Digital Library.

⁴ Joan W. Scott, “The Veil and the Political Unconscious.”

The other woman stands behind handling the meters of white material that make up the *haik*, or Algerian veil. They work as a team—one restraining, both unveiling.

The two photographs offer slightly different angles to the scene. The first is a tight frame, only five faces are visible with the three women crowding the middle. The Algerian woman looks like she *might* be crying. One of the French women forcefully grips the Algerian's arm, while pulling off her veil. There is something sinister in this image. The second photograph is taken at a wider angle. The crowd of settlers and paratroopers fill the frame. The Algerian woman looks like she *might* be smiling. The French woman's hold does not seem so forceful, it almost looks like they are holding hands. The headline for this second image is "Today the women dare to show their faces!"⁵ If we place these two images beside Delacroix's famous *Liberty Leading the People*, something unnerving comes to light. They speak to each other. The French settler holds the veil in her right hand, as Marianne holds the French flag—almost as if Marianne has unveiled Fatma. These three images show three of France's faces. The first is a portrait of a repressive, exploitative colonial state. The second, wider shot, is an image of 'emancipatory,' freedom-loving, liberal democratic France. The third, Delacroix's *Liberty*, is France at her proudest, leading the way. All three are portraits of Marianne.

Since November 1954, Algerians had been fighting to gain their independence from France, after one-hundred and thirty years of colonial rule.⁶ May 13th 1958 marked a turning point in the

⁵ See *Figures 1, 2 and 3*.

⁶ Not to say there had not been other forms of resistance to colonial rule. There were in fact many, see Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, Ouanassa Siari Tenhour, Sylvie Thénault, *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale: 1830-1962* (La Découverte 2014), <https://www-cairn-info.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/histoire-de-l-algerie-a-la-periode-coloniale--9782707178374-page-103.htm>.

Algerian war for independence. It was the first of many “fraternization rallies” that tried to demonstrate Algerian support for French occupation. These protests signaled a shift in counter-insurgency policies, integration of Algerians into the colonial fold became the key focus—a “conquest of hearts.”⁷ It also was a decisive moment in France’s political history—the dawn of a new Republic. As such, the visual and historical through-lines between these two photographs and Delacroix’s *Liberty* are significant. Delacroix’s painting commemorates the July Revolution that toppled Charles X of France. Liberty is personified as a woman, Marianne, leading France into a new political era, into a constitutional monarchy. In the photographs from May 13th, French women unveil the Algerian woman—‘liberating’ her—and leading France into the Fifth Republic, a Republic that dreamt of an integrated *French* Algeria.

France’s counter-insurgency forces used the word ‘pacification’ to describe their military actions towards Algerians. The word is present in both official documents and popular discourse about the war. During Algeria’s battle for independence, French officials used this term to describe counter-revolutionary tactics that had been deployed in the Indochina war. Their purpose was to remove any potential support base for the revolution.⁸ The French military displaced entire villages into secured camps, “*Centres de Regroupement*,” to prevent inhabitants from providing food and shelter to fighters; they also employed softer tactics “a conquest of hearts” that tried to rally support for the colonial cause, bringing Algerians onto the French side of the war in

⁷ Malika Rahal “Les manifestations de mai 1958 en Algérie ou l’impossible expression d’une opinion publique ‘musulmane,’” in Jean-Paul Thomas, Gilles Le Béguec and Bernard Lachaise, *Mai 1958: Le retour du général de Gaulle* (Presse Universitaire de Rennes 2010), 39-58. And Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State during Decolonization* (Stanford Scholarship Online 2014).

⁸ Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the ‘Emancipation’ of Muslim Women, 1954–62* (Manchester University Press 2012), 87.

Algeria.⁹ Pacification was thus a word that described French military actions in the Algerian war, and also more specifically referred to counter-insurgency strategies pulled from the war in Indochina.

Over a century of French preoccupation with Algerian women culminated in the unveilings of May 13th 1958, orchestrated by the colonial government's Fifth Bureau for Psychological Action. French colonial discourse constructed Algerian women as victims of their social fabric; and the veil carried the burden of representing the un-republican values of Algerian society at large. The impetus to 'emancipate' Algerian women in order to integrate Algerians into French citizenry first appeared in 1856 with Jean-Gabriel Cappelot's volume of essays entitled *Algérie Française*. Cappelot argued that in order to forge "Franco-Muslim unity" France needed to focus on freeing Algerian women from their 'backward' socio-cultural context.¹⁰

The 'liberation' of Algerian women, through assimilation, came to play a crucial role in France's military tactics. The role colonial authorities envisioned for them in transforming Algerian society dates back to the nineteenth century, but only gained political traction in the 1950s, with the war for independence. At that point, the word 'emancipation' came to describe French pacification strategies aimed specifically at integrating Algerian women into the colonial fold. The Fifth Bureau developed various highly sophisticated psychological warfare programs

⁹ For more on the *Centres de Regroupement* see Samia Henni, "Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Algeria, 1954–1962" (PhD diss., Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich, 2016).

¹⁰ Jean-Gabriel Cappelot, *Algérie Française* (H. Plon 1856), 245, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

*Note: the original is in French, from this point forward all translations are mine.

that would “*simultaneously* win the trust of the population and enable sound intelligence to be gathered.”¹¹ ‘Emancipation’ was thus a pacification strategy and a means of surveilling the Algerian population.

Leading up to May 13th, the Fifth Bureau had turned unveiling into a national campaign, with propaganda posters, radio shows, and social initiatives encouraging Muslim women to shed their *haïks*. To unveil Algerian women was to lead them into French femininity, turning them into ‘Marianne’s’. May 13th marked the moment this link, between ‘liberation’ and pacification, entered the Fifth Republic’s toolbox, cementing France’s use of emancipatory narratives to justify repressive practices.

After World War II the number of Algerians living in France increased exponentially. A need for flexible labour to help mend the recovering economy led to immigration policies bringing Algerians, mostly single men, to the metropole. In an attempt to subdue the “unstable” and “elusive” Algerian population, policy makers soon began allowing families to settle in France.¹² With Algerian independence in the summer of 1962, these numbers grew. France’s infamous assimilationist stance, first tested on the colonized Algerian population, was brought home to the metropole. In 1955 Alfred Sauvy, the director of the French Institute for Demographic Studies, wrote that “cultural differences constitute the most important obstacles” to Algerian “assimilation,” their “static life regulated by the past” prevented them from integrating into French society. Importantly, the veil as a marker of difference, of ‘uncivilized’ social norms, has

¹¹ MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 83 and Matthew Connelly, “Confronting the Empire of Islam,” in *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford University Press 2003), 89.

¹² Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission*, 31.

remained at the center of France's contentions with its large Muslim population. From the Fifth Bureau's psychological warfare programs in the 1950s, to France's most recent attack on the rights of its Muslim citizens, the framework of 'liberation' leads the way.¹³



*Figures 1, 2 and 3: 'Liberty' leading the people.*¹⁴

¹³ Like Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*.

¹⁴ *Figure 1*: French settlers unveil Algerian woman on May 13th 1958, image pulled from Jean Pierre Sereni, "Le dévoilement des femmes musulmanes en Algérie," *OrientXXI*, last modified 13 September,

Through the archives, the researcher performs a temporal translation—recasting the past into the present, reconstituting history in bits and pieces. Ann Laura Stoler notes that “to understand an archive, one needs to understand the institutions that it served.”¹⁵ Those who create the archives use a selective process that erases certain objects, certain narratives, and subjectivities while producing institutional ones. And so, “a critical approach to the colonial archives” involves “reading colonial archives ‘against their grain’” and requires us to “[...] read against the languages of rule and statist perceptions.”¹⁶ But what does reading “with the grain” reveal? What does a reading of the colonial narrative reveal about power and how it is enacted today?

The archive as site of translation is also a site of mutilation—“dismembering” the untold subjects— pulling them apart through space and time.¹⁷ These scattered limbs—or mirror shards— can be retrieved by putting the pieces together, looking closely then taking a step back, and considering the shape they make. When I look into this re-constituted mirror, assembled from the colonial archive, who do I see? Marianne, the French flag billowing over her head.

Section 1 — The *haïk*, a social fabric

The Algerian veil, or *haïk*, preoccupied early French depictions of Algeria. Its white outline haunted colonial discourse. From postcards to poetry, representations belied the duality between

2016, <https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/le-devoilement-des-femmes-musulmanes-en-algerie>, 1466; *Figure 2*: Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830; *Figure 3*: Joël Le Tac, Daniel Camus, “Today the women dare to show their faces!” *Paris-Match*, 30 May, 1958, HathiTrust Digital Library.

¹⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press 2008), 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Re-Membering Africa* (East African Educational Publishers 2009).

seeing and disciplining—surveilling and pacifying. Imagining Algerian women as ‘imprisoned,’ ‘locked up,’ and subjugated to the ‘medieval’ practices of their men, religion and society, these representations often used the veil to embody Algerian values— symbolizing both impregnability and backwardness.¹⁸ These discursive practices positioned women as victims subject to Algeria’s social fabric. The material barrier the *haïk*, presented to the colonizer’s prying gaze acted as an obstacle to their civilizing mission. As Frantz Fanon so aptly wrote, “the veil demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component.”¹⁹ It is no surprise then that its removal was integral to France’s counter-insurgency initiatives during Algeria’s war for independence.

Over one hundred years of colonial rule, French discourse constructed an image of Algerian women as sequestered and inaccessible. These representations relied on Algerians’ religious and social practices to explain the seclusion of women from public spaces. Depictions of interior, feminine spaces then gave viewers access to the hidden aspects of Algerian society. Eugène Delacroix, who in 1830 completed the famous *Liberty Leading the People*, developed an infatuation with the ‘Orient’ and Algeria in particular. His influential *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834), completed only four years after colonization, is a prime example. Before coming to Algeria, Delacroix had spent some time in Morocco where he sketched scenes of North African life. Depicting men and markets, decidedly “virile” scenes, he bemoaned his

¹⁸ See Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (University of Minnesota Press 1986); A. Gaël, “La Femme En Algérie.” in *En Algérie* (Librairie Centrale Des Publications Populaires 1881), 121–133; and Pierre Loti, *Les Trois Dames De La Kasbah* (Calmann Lévy 1896), gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, for some examples

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled” in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (Routledge 2008), 43–55.

limited access to interiors and the difficulty of finding Arab women willing to be sketched. Islamic customs, “closed” architectures and “withdrawn” women denied the painter’s gaze.²⁰ On his way to Spain he stopped in Algiers for a three-day layover. There, he met a merchant who, by chance, granted the painter access to his home. Cournault, a friend of the painter’s who accompanied him to the merchant’s ‘*harem*,’ wrote that Delacroix was “as if intoxicated by the spectacle before his eyes.”²¹ Delacroix’s first peek of Algeria’s feminine interior inspired years of sketches and paintings. He revisited *Women of Algiers*, recreating the scene he witnessed over and over again (See Figures 4, 5 and 6). *Women of Algiers* went on to inspire various iterations on the same theme, including over a dozen paintings by Pablo Picasso and Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s *Parisiennes in Algerian Costume* (1872) (See Figures 7 and 8). This repetition underscores a fixation with the access Delacroix was granted that day. *Women of Algiers* is as much a colonial depiction of Algerian women as it is a representation of the painter’s privileged access to these forbidden spaces.²² Entry into Algeria’s enclosed culture was an important aspect of France’s civilizing mission. Access meant visibility, and visibility meant control.

French women also played an important role in establishing discourse around Algerian women. Their womanhood afforded them a point of entry refused to their male counterparts. With the turn of the century came a growing concern over realism and French women were well placed to convey ‘real’ Algerian women to the French public.²³ Lucienne Favre for instance convinced her

²⁰ Assia Djebar, “Regard Interdit, Son Coupé” in *Femmes d’Alger Dans Leur Appartement* (Des Femmes 1980), 145-164; and Eugène Delacroix, “The Journal of Eugène Delacroix 1832” in *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix trans. Walter Pach* (Covici, Friede, 1937), 121, HathiTust Digital Library.

²¹ Djebar, “Regard Interdit, Son Coupé,” 145-164.

²² Cournault quoted in Djebar, “Regard Interdit,” 146.

²³ Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence, Algerian Women in Question* (Routledge, 2019), 41, Taylor and Francis eBooks.

maid Fatma (perhaps her name really was Fatma) to tell her stories, which she subsequently compiled in her 1930 volume, *Orientale*.²⁴ In her seminal 1933 novel, *Tout L'Inconnu de la Casbah d'Alger*, she spends three pages describing in great detail the “Moorish baths.” For Favre the naked bodies of Algerian women are “the most monstrous incarnations of feminine ugliness” while also being “angelic forms.”²⁵ Her lengthy description of Algerian women’s bodies is disturbingly voyeuristic and begs the question: who is it for? French women’s unique access to concealed spaces added essential material to the cacophony of Orientalist depictions of Algeria, ostensibly bypassing the customs that obstructed the colonial gaze.



Figure 4: Eugène Delacroix, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834).²⁶

²⁴ Fatma was a generic nickname French settlers gave to Algerian women, housekeepers in particular. See Nassima Mekaoui, “La domesticité coloniale en Algérie : la ‘fatma’, une ‘bonne de papier’ ‘indigène’ au XXe siècle,” *Le carnet de l’IRMC*, last modified June 2019, <https://irmc.hypotheses.org/>.

This anecdote is referenced in Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, 41.

²⁵ Lucienne Favre, *Tout L'inconnu De La Casbah D'Alger* (Bacconnier frères 1933), gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, 191.

²⁶ Image from Alain Galoin, “Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement de Delacroix” *L’Histoire par l’Image*, January, 2007, <https://histoire-image.org/fr/etudes/femmes-alger-leur-appartement-delacroix>.



Figure 5: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Parisiennes in Algerian Costume or Harem (1872).²⁷



Figure 6: Pablo Picasso, Femmes d'Alger (Version O) (1955).²⁸

²⁷ From The National Museum of Western Art, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.nmwa.go.jp/en/collection/1959-0182.html>.

²⁸ From Christie's, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5895962>.

If Algerian customs acted as a cultural barrier to the colonial gaze, the *haïk* was a material one. In 1921, Marie Bugéja, an outspoken advocate for Algerian women's rights, described her desire to *understand* these women; "Their garments, so different from ours, their veils that hide them from our eyes, envelop them in mystery. I would so much like to know them, to chat with them in the coolness of the patio's arcades."²⁹ For Bugéja, and many others, the *haïk* concealed Algerian women from her gaze. Cloaking them in "mystery," the veil was both a material obstruction and a marker of difference—"between two communities," between colonizer and colonized, between Algerian women and French women.³⁰

As a symbol of difference, the *haïk* carried the burden of representing both the 'cloistered' and thus 'oppressed' status of women in Algeria while also symbolizing the 'uncivilized' character of the indigenous social fabric. As early as the nineteenth century the veil was equated to the repression of women. In 1856 Jean-Gabriel Cappot, a well-respected lawyer and journalist, wrote "Polygamy and the confinement of the woman under veils or under locks can be maintained [...] only under the incessant and complete political and social despotism [of Algerian society]"³¹ The *haïk* represented the "political and social despotism" of Algerians. In a 1950 sketch of Algiers, Le Corbusier even depicted the Casbah *as* a veil (See Figure 7). The *haïk* thus demarcated both Algerian women and Algerian society at large.

²⁹ Marie Bugéja, *Nos Soeurs Musulmanes* (La Revue Des Études Littéraires 1921), 61, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

³⁰ *La Dépêche quotidien d'Algérie*, 19 May 1958. cited in MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 132.

³¹ Jean-Gabriel Cappot, *Algérie Française* (H. Plon 1856), 245, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 7: Sketch of Algiers, Le Corbusier (1950)³²

French discourse enabled the development of an ‘emancipation’ narrative that legitimized invasive military action. Algerian women were described as being ‘chained,’ ‘cloistered,’ victims of their ‘primitive’ patriarchal society.³³ Cappelot describes them as “poor recluses” who are oppressed by “the jealous domination of men.”³⁴ This of course cast France as a modern and

³² From Zeynep Çelik “Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism,” *Assemblage*, no. 17 (1992): 58–77, JSTOR.

³³ See Pierre Loti, *Les Trois Dames*; A. Gaël, *En Algérie*; Marie Bugéja, *Nos Soeurs Musulmanes*; Lucienne Favre, *Tout L'inconnu De La Casbah D'Alger* (Baconnier frères 1933), gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; Antoine Chollier, *Alger Et Sa région* (Arthaud 1931), HathiTrust Digital Library; and many, many others.

³⁴ Cappelot, *Algérie Française*, 285.

progressive state, and the achievement of the status of French women as the objective of ‘emancipation.’ Cappelot, in his 1856 publication predicted that “In a few years, the indigenous woman of Algeria [...] will advance in her turn with regards to her emancipation, and will thus become, in Africa as the woman has been in Europe, one of the most active elements of the civilization of her race.”³⁵ Emancipation thus entailed remolding Algerian women into an ideal of feminine French citizenship. This logic undergirded France’s civilizing mission; from the colonial perspective, “It is the woman then that will complete the Franco-Arab fusion.”³⁶ The veil then as the ultimate representation of Algerian despotism needed to be removed in order to incorporate Algerian society into the colonial state.

In 1957, Monique Difrane, a journalist for *Le Figaro*, wrote an influential article calling for the “liberation” of Algerian women and appealed to the French government to remove “the barriers erected by a facile conformism.”³⁷ In other words, she appealed to the state to take away cultural obstructions to the civilizing mission. The *haïk* symbolized these “barriers.” Unveiling thus performed three functions 1) It removed the material obstacle of the *haïk*; 2) It took away this marker of difference, ostensibly leading Algerian women into French citizenry; and 3) It symbolically ‘liberated’ Algerian women from their society, defending France’s ‘civilizing mission’ in Algeria. The perception of the veil as a symbol of the Algerian social fabric allowed its removal to perform multiple functions. When the Algerian war broke out in 1954, this logic both structured and justified the French state’s military actions.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁷ Quoted in MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 79.

Section 2 — Masking ‘Pacification’

The 13th of May 1958 marked a major shift in France’s political history. On the tail of the Battle of Algiers and the execution of two French paratroopers at the hands of the FLN, Pierre Pflimlin was nominated as France’s new prime minister. Pflimlin was willing to negotiate with the liberation movement, which was received with great hostility in Algeria. On May 13th, Pflimlin’s inauguration day, a general strike order was issued in Algiers. Paratroopers led the crowd to the General Government buildings at the center of Algiers, forming a Committee of Public Safety whose stated goal was “the maintenance of Algeria as an integral part of France.”³⁸ The French-Algerian cause and wide-spread dissatisfaction with President René Coty’s government converged in a series of events that began with a military putsch in Algiers, and spread throughout Algeria and France, ushering in the rise of Charles de Gaulle and the Fifth Republic. Because of the political significance of these events, historical interpretations rarely mention the public unveiling of Algerian women—that were in fact central to these protests. These violent gestures drew from over a century of discourse wherein the veil, or Algerian *haïk*, was woven into the colonial imaginary as a symbolic and material barrier to the civilizing mission. Its performative removal in the midst of the political chaos of May 13th was an expression of colonial desperation.

³⁸ Cited in Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State during Decolonization* (Stanford Scholarship Online 2014), 141.

For accounts of May 13th 1958 see Sylvie Thénault, “Le 13 mai 1958 est le tournant de la guerre” in *Algérie : des “événements” à la guerre. Idées reçues sur la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Le Cavalier Bleu 2012), 97-103; and Jules Bonnet, “Le 13 Mai 1958,” *Le Point*, 31 August, 2013, www.lepoint.fr/histoire/le-13-mai-1958-31-08-2013-1719733_1615.php.

After a humiliating defeat in Dien Bien Phu, the French colonial government concentrated its efforts on anti-guerilla warfare strategies in Algeria. French specialists in ‘revolutionary warfare,’ many of whom had fought in Indochina, centered their initiatives on taking away the support base of guerilla fighters by “winning the mass of the population over to the French side.”³⁹ Their hope was that by winning the hearts of Algerians, they could subdue insurgence, and keep Algeria French.⁴⁰ The Fifth Bureau for Psychological Action was established as a result of these currents. One of the Bureau’s earliest programs, in July 1956, involved teams of former prisoners from the Viet Minh camps, their objective was “disintoxication and re-education of the Muslim population.”⁴¹ It was with the arrival of Commander Raoul Salan in 1956 that counter-insurgency actions were geared toward Algerian women in particular. This ‘emancipation campaign’ followed the logic that freeing Algerian women from their enclosed and ‘backward’ culture would integrate Algerians into French society, and thus suppress growing opposition to the colonial government. Emancipation and pacification were made inextricable.

The international community looked on as France blatantly flouted human rights. The systematic executions and tortures of Algerians had become public knowledge, bringing into question France’s position as a bulwark of human rights. In late 1955 the United Nations General Assembly placed the Algerian situation on the agenda. This came as a shock to the French government, adding to its growing concerns over international condemnation of the colonial

³⁹ MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Villatoux and Villatoux, *La République*, cited in MacMaster, 88.

regime.⁴² It was a wakeup call. To add insult to injury, in 1956, Algeria's newly independent neighbors, namely Tunisia and Morocco, announced progressive legal codes regarding the status of women. France became concerned that it might be perceived "as more backward than Tunisia"—delegitimizing the colonial state.⁴³ External pressures piled up between 1955 and 1956, leading the French colonial government to instrumentalize its century-old narrative of emancipation—deploying it as a counter-insurgency tactic.

Meanwhile, women of the FLN were beginning to play a more important role in the war. The presence of women fighters in the resistance further complicated France's position. These women, often French-educated, bourgeois and *unveiled*, presented a paradox to the colonial government. They displayed all of the trappings of a successful civilizing mission and emancipation, while they actively mobilized *against* the colonial project. Yves Godard, a French army officer who fought in the Battle of Algiers, wrote a detailed account of his experience of the war for independence. In a chapter entitled "*Les Bombistes*" (The Bombers) he expressed his confusion over these women fighters. Describing Zohra Drif, the Milk Bar bomber, he wrote that "nothing in her language nor her manner differentiates her from a young European girl from a bourgeois family [...] It is nevertheless so very curious, the case of this girl!"⁴⁴ The paradox these women presented pushed against the logic that unveiling, or emancipating, served as an assimilating force. It contradicted the understanding that "the [emancipated] woman then

⁴² MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 83 and Matthew Connelly, "Confronting the Empire of Islam," in *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford University Press 2003), 93.

⁴³ MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 83.

⁴⁴ Yves Godard, "Dans Les Couloirs De L'A.L.N.," in *Les Trois Batailles D'Alger* (Fayard 1972) 342–43, 346.

[would] complete the Franco-Arab fusion.”⁴⁵ These pressures, both internal and external, undermined the colonial project, which depended on the image of Algerian women being oppressed by their *own* society. To be less progressive than Algerians themselves would be fatal. The ‘emancipation’ campaign, and thus unveiling, helped the colonial government appear progressive while also an essential element of the Fifth Bureau’s psychological warfare tactics.

Various programs, including radio shows, propaganda posters, and teams of social workers encouraged women to discard their *haïks* (See Figure 4). One of the first such initiatives began in 1957. The Fifth Bureau called it “Opération Pilote.” Pilote’s objective was to “prepare on a reduced scale the new physiognomy of French Algeria.”⁴⁶ Through this program the Fifth Bureau hoped to remodel Algeria’s social fabric. The initiative consisted of two phases. In the first phase, the army engaged in military offensives against the FLN. The second phase, “work of in-depth pacification,”⁴⁷ intended to infiltrate Algerian society by “military, political, administrative, cultural, social, and medical means.”⁴⁸ This second phase involved highly coordinated teams consisting of military escorts, psychological warfare officers, medical teams and finally the Equipes Médico-Sociales Itinérantes (EMSI). The EMSI were “mixed” units, each including one European woman and two Algerian assistants. Christiane Fournier, an impassioned proponent of the EMSI, described the primary role of the EMSI as “making contact

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁴⁶ Cited in Denis Leroux, “Algérie 1957, l’Opération Pilote: Violence et Illusions de la Pacification” in *Les Temps Modernes* 2-3, no. 693-694 (2017): 154, www.cairn.info/revue-les-temps-modernes-2017-2-page-146.htm.

⁴⁷ Jean Piverd cited in MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 93.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

with Muslim women who are always locked up as you well know.”⁴⁹ EMSIs sought to “free” Algerian women, to teach them “how to be who they are, taking them out of their medieval state.”⁵⁰ Later in that same interview, Fournier explained that the EMSI “patrol all of Algeria with a very clear goal, a goal of pacification, with extraordinary results.”⁵¹ Emancipation and pacification work in tandem to re-legitimize the colonial project through a sophisticated military apparatus.⁵²

By 1958 tensions came to a head. The Battle of Algiers had just ended, the government in Paris was negotiating with the FLN, and Algerian women were fighting with the resistance. The century-long image of oppressed and sequestered Algerian women—the image that *justified* the emancipation campaign—was faltering. This troubled the Fifth Bureau. Until 1958 the psychological warfare unit had kept its emancipatory actions secret. As Algerian women joined the resistance, the Fifth Bureau thought that making its campaign public would prevent the FLN from taking advantage of its initiatives by co-opting ‘emancipated’ women into the resistance.

A week before the putsch of Algiers, a letter was circulated among the putschists-to-be, namely General Jacques Massu, and the Fifth Bureau’s Raoul Salan, both of whom had fought in the Battle of Algiers. The note suggested that the Bureau’s emancipatory measures had inspired Algerian women to join the resistance, “The action undertaken in relation to women for over a

⁴⁹ Christiane Fournier, “Christiane Fournier Et L'action Sociale En Algérie,” interview, *Paris Club*, Office National De Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, 12 December, 1959, video, 00:24, www.ina.fr/video/I07106936.

⁵⁰ Christiane Fournier, “EMSI - Aide à L'émancipation Des Musulmans,” interview by Jacqueline Baudrier, *Magazine Féminin*, Office National De Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, 18 December 1960, video, 01:46, www.ina.fr/video/I05055918.

⁵¹ Fournier, interview, *Paris Club*, 00:38.

⁵² For detailed accounts of the Fifth Bureau’s programs see MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*.

year by the free medical teams, by the women's circles, and through propaganda, has obtained un-hoped for results." The letter proposed the Fifth Bureau "go public" to "prevent the rebels from profiting from the current change in [women's] state of mind..."⁵³ This note was shared with at least two of the key players of May 13th's putsch, Generals Massu and Salan. One week later, paratroopers led a coup on the General Government of Algiers and women were unveiled in cities across the country. General Massu, speaking from the balcony of Algiers' General Government building, declared that he was taking into his own hands "the destinies of French Algeria."⁵⁴ The architects of the Fifth Bureau's emancipation campaign were crucial to the events of May 13th, suggesting that the mass unveilings were coordinated acts of psychological warfare. Strategically performative, the mass unveilings made the Fifth Bureau's campaign public.

On the afternoon of May 13th 1958, paratroopers, French settlers and some Algerians flooded the Forum of Algiers. As the army charged the General Government building, French settlers converged outside in support. At some point, perhaps as it became clear that Algeria's General Government had been taken, that this was in fact a military putsch, Algerian women began unveiling themselves and being unveiled by their "French sisters." It is unclear whether women were unveiled by force, coerced into unveiling themselves, or if they willingly participated. There are photographs of women throwing their veils into bonfires. Others capture women being unveiled by French settlers. Neil Macmaster's detailed analysis of the events suggests that many of the Algerian women present at the Forum of Algiers on May 13th 1958 were either

⁵³ General Jacques Massu quoted in Macmaster, *Burning the Veil*, 102.

⁵⁴ "The French Revolt," New York Time, May 15, 1958, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/114579394/12C731130EA14BF5PQ/15?accountid=10226>.

housekeepers whose employers had remunerated them for their participation, or high school students who would not have been wearing *haïks* in the first place.⁵⁵ Either way, these unveilings presented to the world a unified French Algeria—revealing the face of France’s new Republic.

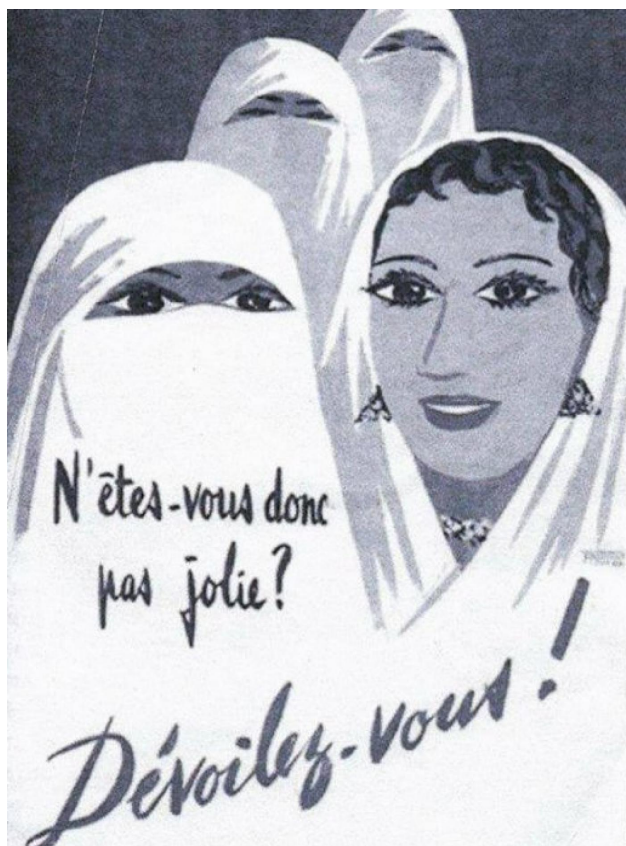


Figure 8: “Aren’t you pretty? Unveil yourselves!”⁵⁶

The right-wing French press deployed these events as emblems of a new, united Algeria. European women and unveiled Muslim women, celebrated hand in hand under the French flag. Paris-Match for example published two full-page spreads on May 24th and May 30th. Both spreads showed Algerian women being unveiled on one page and crowds of protesters on the other. The headlines centered on the presence of Algerians at the protests, and their support of

⁵⁵ MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 114-151.

⁵⁶ The Fifth Bureau for Psychological Action poster, “N’êtes-vous donc pas jolie? Dévoilez-Vous!” via <https://thefunambulist.net/history/state-misogyny-frances-colonial-unveiling-history-against-muslim-women/attachment/devoilez-vous-colonial-poster>.

French Algeria (See Figures 1, 3, 9 and 10). The May 24th issue for instance showed images of Algerian women preparing to throw their veils into a bonfire opposite photographs of protesters in the Forum of Algiers. The headline reads, “The Kasbah burns its veils and merges with the chain of joined hands” (See Figures 4 and 5).⁵⁷ These unveilings signaled that to join the Fifth Republic, to be admitted into Republican femininity, Algerian women needed to shed their veils. Through these events, French Algeria attempted to forge an image of itself as united, secular, and liberal, while in reality reinforcing its position as a repressive, colonial state.

The emancipation narrative was a useful device, allowing the colonial government to mask psychological warfare as liberation. Discourse around the *haïk* gave focus to the Fifth Bureau’s initiatives. Unveiling became synonymous with freedom, and with French femininity. May 13th 1958 unveiled both Algerian women and the Fifth Republic, forging a portrait of a French Republicanism incompatible with the *haïk* and establishing ‘emancipation’ as a quintessentially French security tactic.

⁵⁷ Daniel Camus and Joël Le Tac, “La Kasbah brûle ses voiles et se mêle à la chaîne des mains jointes,” *Paris-Match*, May 24, 1958, HathiTrust Digital Library.



Figures 9 and 10: “The Kasbah burns its veils and merges with the chain of joined hands.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Daniel Camus and Joël Le Tac, “La Kasbah brûle ses voiles et se mêle à la chaîne des mains jointes,” *Paris-Match*, May 24, 1958, HathiTrust Digital Library.

Section 3 — ‘Emancipation’ Unveiled

Following the Second World War, the Algerian population in France grew tremendously. Migration policies attempted to attract flexible labor to the metropole. Eventually, Algerian families were allowed to settle in France. Algerians were eventually joined by migrants from the rest of France’s former colonies, forming culturally rich communities in the *banlieues*, or *cités*, on the outskirts of major cities. A 2017 Pew Research study estimated that France’s Muslim population was 5.7 million at the time, or 8.8 percent of the country’s population.⁵⁹ Much of this population is concentrated in the *cités*, living in dilapidated housing projects on the fringes of cities country-wide. The *cités* are a testament to France’s failed assimilation project. This has not stopped the current French state from deploying some of the same tools it used in colonial Algeria, namely repressive and invasive security bills in the name of emancipation.

Amelia Lyons, in her 2014 volume, expertly exposes the colonial architecture of France’s expansive welfare system.⁶⁰ In the late 1950s, mirroring the Fifth Bureau’s initiatives, radio shows and social services teams encouraged Algerian women in France “to embrace France’s universal culture and to abandon any particularities that would attract attention.”⁶¹ This of course included veils. These social service teams, under the umbrella of the Social Action Fund for Algerian Workers and Their Families collected data on Algerians in the metropole during the war for independence, sharing this information with security forces.⁶² The extent to which these

⁵⁹ Conrad Hackett, “5 Facts about the Muslim Population in Europe,” Pew Research Center, last updated 29 November, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>.

⁶⁰ Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission*, 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 143.

practices carried on after the war is unclear. It is however an important precedent, explicitly linking emancipation to surveillance.

From the Vichy era's pro-natalist policies, to The French Family Medal awarded to "exemplary mothers" in the 1950s, French women have often been considered the foundation of the Republican state.⁶³ French women's femininity is itself entwined with their national duty. As Elisa Camiscioli puts it, "[...] fertility, childbearing, parenting, sexual practices, and ideologies such as 'Republican motherhood'—were deeply implicated with the processes of race making, nation building, and imperial rule."⁶⁴ This state-sponsored discourse established a normative Republican femininity, which rejected veiled, Muslim femininities. The public unveilings that took place at the Forum of Algiers in May 1958 represented the veil as unequivocally incompatible with France's Fifth Republic. Today, the veil continues to represent difference and continues to legitimize surveillance and pacification of France's Muslim population.

On July 12th 2003, in the midst of proposals to ban the Muslim headscarf in public schools, the "Marianne of Today" exhibition was inaugurated at the National Assembly in Paris (see Figure 6). Fourteen large photographs of young women, predominantly of North-African and African origin, were hung across the facade of the *Palais Bourbon*, promoted as "the women of the *cités*' tribute to the Republic." Wearing Phrygian caps, they were modern embodiments of France's beloved Marianne, uncontested icon of the French Republic. What emerged from "Marianne

⁶³ For more on the Vichy government's investment in women see Sophia Lamri, "'Algériennes' et Mères Françaises Exemplaires," *La Découverte* 2, n°199 (2002): 61-81, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-mouvement-social-2002-2-page-61.htm>.

⁶⁴ Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century*, (Duke University Press 2009), 6, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1215/9780822391197>.

d’Aujourd’hui” was a portrait of Republican femininity. Anna Kemp, in her analysis of the exhibition explains that this portrait of the Republic, was intimately linked to the debates, or *affaire*, around the veil:

[...] the specific values attributed to Marianne are ‘feminine’ ones of seduction, gentleness and motherhood, all in the service of the Republic. The Mariannes project demonstrates a key tenet of the feminist discourses that dominated the *affaire*, which is the expectation that women who are ethnically or culturally Other to a reified notion of French womanhood must re-republicanise by re-feminising.⁶⁵

The unveilings of May 13th 1958 were a precursor to “Mariannes d’Aujourd’hui.” Both events attempted to “re-republicanise by re-feminising” non-normative femininities. Both events tried to incorporate the femininities on the outskirts of French womanhood into a Republican fold, into an image of Marianne. In both events, Muslim femininities are equated to anti-republicanism, and the veil again carries the burden of representing the Other.

The exhibition was orchestrated by the organization *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*— Neither Sluts Nor Submissive (NPNS). NPNS was created in 2003, following the gruesome murder of Sohane Benziane, a French North African teenager, by her male peers. This shocking event intensified discussions over the perceived fundamentalism and patriarchal tyranny of Muslim communities of the *cités*. NPNS claimed to represent “the girls of the *cités*.” and demanded “freedom from the machismo of the men in the housing projects and the society that shut them in ghettos.”⁶⁶ From its inception, NPNS came under fire for its close ties to the French Socialist Party. Although NPNS’s founder, Fadela Amara, was of North African origin and grew up in the *banlieues*, the

⁶⁵ Anna Kemp, “Marianne d’aujourd’hui?: The Figure of the beurette in Contemporary French Feminist Discourses,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 17, n°1 (2009): 18-33, 25.

⁶⁶ Judith Ezekiel, “French Dressing: Race, Gender, and the Hijab Story,” *Feminist Studies* 32, n°2 (Summer 2006): 256 - 278, 271.

organization was mostly led by white middle-class women, not in fact reflecting the communities it claimed to represent.⁶⁷ It was also criticized for its close ties to the French Communist Party, granting NPNS virtually “unlimited access to public platforms (often at the expense of dissident feminist voices).”⁶⁸ The group denounced veiling, rallying behind the government ban. Some prominent feminists and public intellectuals supported both the ban and NPNS. Elisabeth Badinter, for instance wrote in *Le Nouvel Observateur*: “Listen to Ni Putes Ni Soumises. They are saying: ‘Free us from this familial, religious, and cultural hold. Our hope is to become French women like the rest. And stand firm on the values of the Republic. No veils in school!’”⁶⁹ The worn-out symbolism of the veil as an embodiment of uncivilized, anti-Republican values was deployed once again, justifying the French state’s policies towards its Muslim population.

Since the 1980s French politicians have engaged in debates around the Muslim veil in public schools. In these early conversations, Republican secularism, or *laïcité*, justified arguments to ban the veil. Only in the early 2000s, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, did the debate turn to feminist discourses, framing the ban as ‘emancipatory.’⁷⁰ During the *affaire* of the veil, between 2003 and 2004, the head of the French public schools’ principals union declared that schools should be “emancipating” and “liberating.” This familiar vocabulary mirrors the Fifth Bureau of Psychological Action’s pacification campaign in the late 1950s.

⁶⁷ There were and continue to be prominent North African voices supporting the ban on the veil and advocating for further legislation regulating Muslims in France, like Wassyla Tamzali and Fatiha Boudjahlat.

⁶⁸ Anna Kemp, “Marianne d’aujourd’hui?” 22.

⁶⁹ Elisabeth Badinter cited in Anna Kemp, “Marianne d’aujourd’hui?” 22-23.

⁷⁰ See Judith Ezekiel, “French Dressing;” Anna Kemp, “Marianne d’aujourd’hui?;” Joan W. Scott, “The Veil and the Political Unconscious of French Republicanism,” *OrientXXI*, last modified 27 April, 2016, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-veil-and-the-political-unconscious-of-french-republicanism,1310>.



Figure 6: “Mariannes d’Aujourd’hui” Exhibition at the French National Assembly, 12 July, 2003.⁷¹

Again, the veil was perceived as a barrier to the Republican mission. Public intellectual, Alain Finkielkraut, during legislative hearings around the veil ban, stated that “schools are temples of laïcité... And you remove your head covering in this temple... precisely to open yourself up to the great works of culture, the works that make up humanity.”⁷² This type of discourse, framing the veil as an obstacle to Republicanism, allowed the bill to pass into legislation in 2004 with wide support. The law prohibited various religious symbols, but was mostly geared towards

⁷¹ “Bilan d’Activité de la XIIe Législature, 2002-2007,” *Assemblée Nationale*, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/rapactiv2006/rapactiv2006-bilan12e.pdf>.

⁷² Alain Finkielkraut quoted in Judith Ezekiel, “French Dressing,” 267.

Muslim schoolgirls. The passing of the ban on Muslim headscarfs in French public schools relied on the veil's controversial place in the French imaginary.

Against the backdrop of growing alarm about Islamic fundamentalism, the 'emancipatory' character of the ban allowed security bills geared toward French Muslims to gain wide political and public support.⁷³ The terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 spread global fears of Islamic extremism and instigated the War on Terror, with increased surveillance of Muslims across the globe. In this climate, it was not difficult for the French state to garner support for the ban. Like in 1950s Algeria, France was steeped in an atmosphere of fear.

With the increasing number of terrorist attacks in France, the state became increasingly concerned with security. The French government relied on the veil to legitimize discriminatory security bills. In 2010 a law was passed banning "the concealment of one's face in public spaces." A 2010 Pew Research Center report estimates that 82 percent of the French public approved of some type of ban on full veils, again the political right and left joining forces. The ban impacted an estimated 2,000 women, or 0.03 percent of French Muslims.⁷⁴ The numbers clearly did not justify the ban, nor did they explain its widespread support. André Gérin, the deputy of the Communist Party at the time, in strong support of the bill wrote, "These women are the victims of a sectarian indoctrination which instrumentalizes Islam."⁷⁵ Framing Muslim women as the victims of their communities justified a move to free them. Perhaps it would be

⁷³ "The Islamic veil across Europe," BBC News, last modified 31 May, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>.

⁷⁴ Eric Nunès, "Le doute subsiste sur le nombre de femmes portant le voile intégral," *Le Monde*, last modified 28 April, 2010, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/04/27/le-doute-subsiste-sur-le-nombre-de-femmes-portant-le-voile-integral_1343410_823448.html.

⁷⁵ André Gérin quoted in Eric Nunès, "Le doute subsiste."

more accurate to say that these women were the victims of a Republican state that instrumentalized the veil to validate discriminatory policies.

There were, and continue to be, intersectional feminist currents that actively mobilize against the French government's aggressive policies towards Muslim women. In the early 2000s coalitions like *Une Ecole Pour Tout(e)s* engaged local organizations across France to "fight against laws of exclusion," as stated in the group's 2004 charter.⁷⁶ Today, prominent public intellectuals like Rokhaya Diallo, have been fighting mainstream French feminist views on the veil. In a much-cited article she penned for Slate, Diallo controversially wrote "The veil is not incompatible with feminism."⁷⁷ Since then, she has appeared on numerous talk shows, representing and defending various intersectional feminisms on mainstream French platforms. Other anti-racist, intersectional voices include Feïza Ben Mohamed, Sihame Assbague, Widad Ketfi and many others. Other, more politically inclined groups, like the *Collectif Féministe du Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* and *Lallab* continue to fight for the rights of Muslim women in France.⁷⁸ The battle between Republican feminisms that seek to 'emancipate' Muslim women, and dissident feminisms that fight for inclusivity, takes place on talk shows and twitter feeds.⁷⁹ It is an ongoing debate.

⁷⁶ "Charte des collectifs une école pour tou-te-s / contre les lois d'exclusion," Les Mots Sont Importants, last modified 13 July, 2004, <https://lmsi.net/Charte-des-collectifs-Une-ecole>.

⁷⁷ Rokhaya Diallo, "Le voile n'est pas incompatible avec le féminisme," Slate, last modified 13 March, 2018, <http://www.slate.fr/story/158851/voile-et-feminisme>.

⁷⁸ Lallab has ongoing programming, see: <http://www.lallab.fr/>. For more on contemporary intersectional feminisms in France see Kiran Grewal, "'Va t'faire intégrer!': The *Appel des Féministes Indigènes* and the Challenge to 'Republican Values' in Postcolonial France," *Contemporary French Civilization* 33, n°2 (2009): 105-133, <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress-co-uk.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/journals/article/46386>.

On February 16, 2021, France's National Assembly voted to pass the controversial 'anti-separatism bill whose object is to combat "Islamic separatism." The bill will make it more difficult for Muslim organizations and mosques to receive funding, requiring them to pledge allegiance to the Republic before receiving public grants. It will also place severe limitations on homeschooling, criminalize 'virginity certificates,' and polygamy. This is the most drastic move to limit the freedoms of France's Muslim population to date. Gérald Darmanin, France's interior minister, reassured the French public that the bill would ensure "better protection for women who are victims of religious obscurantism." In April 2021, the senate voted to prohibit minors from wearing veils in public spaces, and ban veiled mothers from accompanying their children on school trips. Muslim women's veils remain the key site on which the French government enacts its neo-civilizing mission, relying on 'emancipation' to get away with its aggressive policies.

The discourse that had been developed during colonial rule followed France back to the metropole, namely the construction of the veil as a representation of an un-republican, uncivilized social fabric. The "Mariannes d'Aujourd'hui" exhibition at the French National Assembly in July 2003 mirrored the practices of the mass unveilings that took place in Algiers on May 13th 1958. Both events set veiled women against Republican femininity. This age-old narrative legitimized France's ban on the Muslim headscarf in 2004, and again in 2010. The latest iteration of France's repressive policies is the anti-separatism bill, approved in February 2021. As French politics inch towards the right, and its policies towards Muslims become more aggressive, it will be interesting to see what other mechanisms France will recycle from its

imperial past and whether the Fifth Republic will continue to mask its surveillance and pacification tactics by unveiling French Muslims.

Conclusion:

Saidiya Hartman's seminal "Venus in Two Acts," wrestles with the absences of the archive, the holes within its "excesses." She writes of Venus, "an emblematic figure of the enslaved woman in the Atlantic world" and pieces together her story with the materials that "dictated her silence."⁸⁰ The work of reconstituting disappeared subjects is both delicate and brutal. It requires one to look at the violence of the archive, look at the "scenes of subjection" and softly stitch together the stories that were lost. Hartman, in her arresting reflections, asks: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?"⁸¹ The grammar of violence is embedded in the archive. To use the archive, to piece it together, is to enunciate that violence once more. But maybe to speak that violence in her voice fills the archive with possibilities. Maybe, piecing together the excessive elements of the archive, with our own hands turns the archive towards the future.

Hartman, of course, is writing about the unspeakable violences of the Atlantic slave trade. She rewrites Venus, discovering moments of speculation within the gaps. While the French colonial archive also has gaps, this paper does not have space to speculate. Instead, it tries to uncover what the holes reveal. What the archive omits brings to light the institutional priorities it embodies. The subject of France's colonial archive is not Fatma, it never was. The plethora of

⁸⁰ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

French accounts of Algeria reveals some of the mechanisms of colonial power, how it was enacted, and how it continues to play out in the Fifth Republic. The subject of the French colonial archive is France—is Marianne—written into novels and paintings, photographs and poems, ethnographies and policies that on the surface depict Algerians but in fact sketch out one of the many faces of the French Republic.

This paper revisits “scenes of subjection” not to unearth a portrait of the subjected, but to see with more precision the hand that strikes. This research follows Marianne, as she is embodied in nineteenth century discourse and current policies. When France colonized Algeria in 1830, an elaborate discursive regime took shape, framing Algerian women as imprisoned, victims of their society. The *haïk*, an obstacle to the colonial gaze, came to represent this society and all of its un-republican values. To remove the veil then was to remove a material obstruction to the civilizing mission. This logic entered into policy during Algeria’s bloody war for independence. The Fifth Bureau for Psychological Action instrumentalized emancipation and unveiling as a tool for pacification— ‘liberating’ Algerian women and leading the way into a new Republic, like Marianne in Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People*.

Today, France’s large Muslim population is subject to multiple repressive policies that mirror its colonial practices. As Pierre Bourdieu put it the affaires of the veil “places the prophecies of liberation at the service of new forms of domination.”⁸²The veil has remained an important point of contention. These laws are still enacted in the name of freedom. From 2004’s ban on veils in public schools to 2021’s anti-separatism bill, France has continuously framed repressive laws as

⁸² Pierre Bourdieu cited in Kiran Grewal, “‘Va t’faire intégrer!’ 108.

emancipatory. Marianne represents both the French state and French women. As the epitome of French femininity, she stands in opposition to veiled French women. As Joan Wallach Scott puts it, “the uncovered Marianne” of Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* embodies a normative French femininity that stands in contrast to veiled Muslim women.⁸³ This tension, personified in the emblematic Marianne, pits veiled women against French Republicanism.

So-called “burqa-bans” are wide-spread across European nations including Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and most recently Switzerland to name a few. These bans are often framed in two ways: they are both emancipatory bills and security bills. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the West has sharpened the state’s policies towards veils of various kinds. Of course the most recent iteration is France’s anti-separatism bill that hopes to prohibit veiled mothers from accompanying their children on school trips, to ban minors from wearing veils, and make burkinis illegal. These policies have their origins in France’s colonial past, tying ‘liberation’ to a contemporary brand of pacification.

These two characters, Fatma and Marianne have been pitted against each other—have been constructed in contrast to each other. French women of North African origin continue to fight for their place in the Fifth Republic, using colonial tropes to mobilize inclusive feminist agendas (See Figure 11). My hope is that this analysis helps us see Marianne more clearly. The shards of the mirror, glued together with these words, reflect a distorted image, but perhaps it is a little more complete than it was before.

⁸³ Joan W. Scott, “The Veil and the Political Unconscious.”



Figure 11: “Barbie Fatima [sic] doesn’t do housekeeping. She cleans up the broken pots of the patriarchy.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Lisa Bouteldja, @lisabouteldja. “Barbie Fatima ne fait pas le ménage. Elle nettoie les pots cassés du patriarcat.” *Instagram*, March 8, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/Buw7MOPDqMZ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

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