

Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966–2002)

Maria Flood

Lecturer in Film Studies

Keele University

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both of the anonymous reviewers of this article, for their extensive and detailed readings of this work and their subsequent comments and suggestions.

*Abstract:*

This article charts the roles and representations of Algerian Women as both agents and victims of violence in the War of Independence (1956-1962) and the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s in which the role of women has emerged as a significant site of ideological, religious, and political struggle. This vision of Algerian Women, caught between models of participation and passivity, can be charted through a long imaginary of Algerian women as exposed to colonial, patriarchal, state or terrorist violence, but also possessing fortitude and resilience in the face of conflict. I examine the model of female agency through the figure of the bomb carrier in Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), illuminating the gap between the freedom depicted, and promised, and the reality of women's experience after the war. I then turn to the Algerian Civil War, considering one of the most enduring photographs to emerge from the conflict, Hocine Zaourar's *La Madone de Benthala* (1997), an image that inscribes a quasi-universal image of female victimhood. Finally, an exploration of Yamina Bachir-Chouikh's *Rachida* (2002) reveals a more complex staging of female resistance in times of terror. The film offers a delicate exploration of the emotional and psychological effects of political and symbolic violence, which troubles a more usual imaginary of Algerian women as noble, suffering and endlessly resistant or resilient figures.

*Keywords:* terrorism, Algerian women, *The Battle of Algiers*, *Rachida*, *La Madone de Benthala*, Algerian Civil War, Algerian cinema

*Word Count:* 10,795

Both the anti-colonial struggles of the Algerian War of Independence and the civil war of the 1990s highlighted women's participation as both agents and victims of violence. An examination of the discourse surrounding women's role in both conflicts highlights not only the significance of their participation, resistance, and socio-political symbolic capital, but also the specific vulnerabilities of women caught, in both cases, between predominantly patriarchal forces: the French colonial administration and the revolutionary FLN, and the Algerian army and state and the Islamic

fundamentalists. In an aptly titled article, ‘Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?’, Meredith Turshen asks ‘how is it that Algerian women – whose struggles became [...] the hallmark of a national revolution’s potential to liberate women – found themselves the target of a civil war in the 1990s?’ (2002, 890). Turshen’s interrogation implies that a neat dichotomy exists between the agency of women in the colonial liberation struggles, and their supposed victimhood or passivity in the decades following liberation. However, the role of Algerian women in both conflicts cannot be characterized by any facile distinction between activity and passivity or between agency and victimhood. Indeed, as the following discussion demonstrates, this distinction may have been perpetuated by certain representations of Algerian women, rather than being grounded in women’s concrete experiences.

In this article, I interrogate the representation of female agency, victimhood and resistance in three key works in post-Independence Algeria: Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Hocine Zaourar’s *La Madone de Benthala* (1997), and Yamina Bachir-Chouikh’s *Rachida* (2002). Throughout, I pay attention to the formal elements of each work, their historical situatedness, and the socio-political context of their creation and reception, in order to gauge the accuracy of their engagement with historical and sociological accounts of women’s roles in both conflicts. I have chosen these works because of their international availability and recognition, as well as their diverse receptions in Algeria: *The Battle of Algiers* offered an image of Algerian female bomb carriers that became known throughout the world, *La Madone de Benthala* has arguably become the defining photograph of the Algerian Civil War, and *Rachida*, the most recent work, garnered significant attention at home and abroad. Ultimately, I suggest that while *The Battle of Algiers* and *La Madone de Benthala* construct an image of Algerian women between the poles of political agency and passive victimhood respectively, *Rachida* dialogues with both of these works in order to offer a more complex picture of female resistance in the face of violence.

### **Women as political agents: *The Battle of Algiers* the War of Independence**

The role played by Algerian women in the War of Independence is, at once, both highly publicized and often ignored or underestimated. In 1974, The Ministry for Veterans’ Affairs reported that 11,000

Algerian women had fought for freedom from French control, although Djamila Amrane Minne regards this figure as a serious underestimation of women's participation (1993, 219). On the one hand, the *evoluées*, educated city women who fought alongside the FLN as militants and bomb carriers were immortalized by Franz Fanon and flaunted on an international stage by the FLN as an example of their progressive gender agenda. Conversely, the roles played by rural women, where they served not only as militants but also cooked, cleaned, and provided shelter for the *moudjahidine* have been much less publicized. As Marnia Lazreg notes, 'the history of women's lives during the war will remain incomplete because it does not include the standpoint of rural women – prime targets of military action' (2008, 169). Moreover, women were often exposed to forms of multivalent violence which did not touch male FLN members in the same proportion: rape by French soldiers, as a weapon of war, reached appalling dimensions, particularly in rural areas (see Branche, 2001).

Female veiling or unveiling became a complex and potent symbol of oppression and resistance in both French and Algerian discourses around the war: both the adoption or the forsaking of the veil can be read as acts of political participation in the liberation of Algeria. For the French colonial administration, the unveiling of women came to signify their political and psychic dominance over Algeria, the penetration of Western ideology into the sacred heart of the Algerian family. The unveiling ceremonies that took place in Algiers in May 1958 represent a potent manifestation of this belief. At one such event on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, 12 Muslim Algerian women appeared in the Algiers Forum and took off their large white *haïks*, burning them in front of an assembled crowd (Perego 2015, 362). Psychoanalyst, philosopher and FLN member Frantz Fanon comments on the reporting of these events in the colonial press, where they were depicted as the spontaneous unveiling of thousands of women as a demonstration of their loyalty to France. He writes that for the French administration, every Muslim woman that unveiled came to represent Algeria's submission to colonial rule: 'every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haïk* [...] was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and accept the rape of the colonizer' (1965, 42).

Yet from the perspective of the FLN, the veil could be employed as dual symbol. As *The Battle of Algiers* demonstrates, the women's Westernization of their appearances, their chosen and deliberate

unveiling, also allows them to act as active political agents. The scene depicting the female bomb carriers, from their transformation and Westernization in the private boudoir to the extended sequence, charting their movements through the city, can certainly be read as a representation of the pivotal role played by women during the conflict. The Westernization of the women's appearances allowed them to act as political agents, to pass unnoticed through French barricades: they cut and dye their hair, don make-up and Western clothes, and take enormous risks crossing the checkpoints that have been set up by the French. Yet according to Fanon, the veil could also symbolize tradition, and resistance to the unveiling policies of the French: 'the veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier *was bent on unveiling Algeria*' [italics in the original] (1965, 63).

While *The Battle of Algiers* certainly recognizes the achievements of female resistance fighters in its narrative, it stages a problematic disconnect between women as active agents in conflict, and passive, silent figures, while foreshadowing the exclusion of women from the national narrative. The fact that individual women in the film almost never speak, can, and has, been read problematically (see Amrane Minne, 2007). Even outside of the trope of the passive and suffering Algerian women, the silence of FLN women in opposition to the verbosity of their male counterparts seems to function to exclude them from political action. In the sequence where the women modify their appearances, Ennio Morricone's rousing military drum score overlays the image completely, and throughout the rest of the sequence, the women speak very little, in fact only in response to questions from either French or Algerian militants. Female silence and suffering is, in fact, a consistent feature throughout the film, from the adolescent FLN bride who wordlessly shields Ali and his compatriots, to the close ups of women who watch, noiselessly weeping, as their male family members are tortured in their own home.

In a film dominated by male discourse, from the imposing military rhetoric of Colonel Mathieu to the lofty Socialist expostulations of Jaffar (the fictional representations of Colonel Massu and Saadi Yacef respectively), the silence imposed on women stands in stark relief. Perhaps the most troubling instance of this forced or imposed reserve is a sequence depicting Zohra Drif, a woman whose vital role in the historical 'Battle of Algiers' is undisputed. In this scene, Jaffar and Drif have been captured and brought by car to the army barracks with Mathieu. As Mathieu and Jaffar engage in a calm and poised

conversation, each sizing up the character and designs of the enemy, Zohra turns from the front of the car and bursts forth with charged and angry discourse that is not translated by the subtitles, unlike all of the speech of the male FLN members in Arabic throughout the film. Nor was it meant to be – Mathieu turns to Jaffar for clarification, and thus the political words of an Algerian woman are mediated and translated by men.

While *The Battle of Algiers* and Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* helped to contribute to the image of the female bomb carrier as a self-emancipating female figure, the alluring implications of such depictions were quite far from the realities experienced by most women (see Lloyd, 2006; Ighilahriz, 2001; Smail Sahli, 2010; Turshen, 2002). While the FLN loudly promoted its strong female figureheads internationally, among them Zohra Drif, Djamila Amrane Minne, Djamila Bouhired and Djamila Boupacha, FLN documents from the 1956 onwards suggest that women's emancipation was always conceived of as a temporary measure. A note taken by a senior member of the FLN, Captain Si Allal in Wilaya V, supposed to have been made in 1957, confirms this: 'in independent Algeria, a woman's freedom ends on the threshold of her door. Women will never be equal to men' (quoted in Harbi and Meynier 2004, 607).<sup>1</sup>

This conservative element in the FLN, aligned with the military and led by Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumedienne, defeated the weaker socialist and liberal factions of the revolution in 1962. According to historians Jim House and Neil MacMaster, this government managed to instigate 'a long-term, post-independence mental association between almost any form of progressive agenda on women or emancipation, and the idea of an alien, western invasion and subversion of Algerian culture and society' (2009, 379). Women's liberation, their public prominence, and the recognition of their political achievements, once again became associated with a return to colonial rule. Within this schema, the notion of the silent, proud, and suffering Algerian woman emerged, which Zahia Smail Salhi summarizes in the following terms: 'women were quickly identified as [...] the guardians of traditions and customs, all fundamentally important components of the Algerian national identity' (2010, 116). To voice pain, suffering, trauma or discontent was therefore to be unpatriotic, and women therefore found themselves in the paradoxical position of desiring to speak about experiences that had contributed to the gaining of this

independence, experiences that they undertook often because of their patriotism, but finding that to voice such memories went against the dominant national narrative.

*The Battle of Algiers* implicitly points towards the possibility that images of female agency, particularly the female bomb carriers, can also block voice and speech. Yet for the most part, the film reinforces an image of Algerian female collectivity between the proud, emancipated and self-emancipating figure of the female bomb carrier, and the silent and suffering mother or wife, stoically supporting her male relatives as fought for national liberation. The false positioning of women between two extremes, one of total agency, the other of passive suffering, can limit or foreclose political recognition of their achievements, but also forecloses the identification of their heightened vulnerability during the war. As feminist sociologist Rebecca Stringer has pointed out, ‘not all images of women as agents are progressive and liberating’ (2013, 149). She proposes that the use of tropes of self-emancipation and agency in women’s rights can be used to foreclose and to shadow their real and actual vulnerability. Writing about rape laws, but referring to the legislation and language of female victimization more broadly, she suggests that, ‘one is a victim not in the moment of suffering a wrong but in the moment of being divested of the means to prove a wrong occurred’ (2013, 155). For Stringer, the core issue in the debate on violence against women is the acknowledgment that social, political, legal and representational discourses channel and skew perceptions of female agency and victimhood. Thus, inscribing women within a binary, as passive victims or proud agents, closes off the possibility of recognizing the differential structures through which exposure to violence is compounded by gender and socio-political circumstances.

The physical and social vulnerability of women in Algerian society following the war was painfully underscored by a series of legislative changes that foreclosed women’s rights in the public sphere. Islamic fundamentalists gained increasing influence under the rule of Chadli Bendjedid, who succeeded president Boumedienne after his death in 1978. In order to placate the Islamists and to assure the security of the one-party state, women’s rights were the first to be sacrificed. Echoing Partha Chaterjee's statement that ‘the story of nationalism is necessarily a story of betrayal’ (Chaterjee 1993, 154), the introduction of the Family Code on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1984 was foremost among these regressive

measures. The Family Code, which combined Napoleonic resonances with Islamic *sharia* doctrines, effectively reduced women to the status of minors in Algerian society. Its principal dictates legalized polygamy, allowed a man to divorce his wife at will while placing strict barriers against a woman initiating divorce procedures, prohibited adoption, and instituted the system of guardianship (the *wali*) for all women. As Smail Salhi writes of the Family Code, ‘women’s status as minors under the law prohibits the whole society from progressing into a democratic society, and makes them extremely vulnerable in front of the campaign of intimidation started by the [Islamists] against them’ (2010, 120). In the following section, I delineate the social and political conditions of the Algerian Civil War, turning to its impact on civilians, and particularly women, before examining one of the defining images of the conflict, Hocine Zaourar’s *La Madone de Benthala* [*The Madonna of Benthala*], also known as *La Pietá d’Alger* [*The Pieta of Algiers*].

### **Imagined mothers and passive victims: photographing ‘the invisible war’**

The Civil War began in Algeria in 1991 following the victory of the Islamist party, the FIS (Front islamique du salut), at the first round of general elections in the first democratic electoral process ever permitted in the country. The FLN-led government, with the backing of the army, effectively cancelled the second round of elections, ironically citing the threat that Islamic radicalism posed to ‘democratic’ values. This decision led to brutal reprisals from the Islamists and the concomitant state response, resulting in a decade-long civil war between the government and the army, and the various terrorist groups: the FIS, the MIA (Mouvement islamique armé), the AIS (Armée islamique du salut) and the GIA (Groupe islamique armé). The fundamentalists targeted high-profile political figures, intellectuals and foreigners in order to bring the conflict to an international stage. In contrast to this push towards international visibility, the Algerian state attempted to shield the conflict from international news media: as Lahouari Addi notes, ‘violence is erupting in Algeria in an almost total information blackout. This is hardly by chance; the regime has always preferred the clandestine to the transparent’ (1996, 45). The questionable role of the army and the state in responding to the Islamist threat, as well as potentially contributing to the on-going cycles of violence, may explain their reluctance to allow widespread media



coverage of the conflict. Many commentators suggest that the government responded to the Islamists with what has been called excessive force (Addi, 1996; Entelis, 2011) and more than 7000 people disappeared in police custody during the conflict (Entelis 2001, 659). Conspiracy theories abound in Algeria about the role of the state in covertly promulgating violence: Paul Silverstein documents the widespread theory that the government infiltrated the ranks of the GIA in order to increase the incidence of terrorist attacks, and underscore the role of the state in protecting its civilians (2002).

In this 'information blackout', one image emerged as a call for international attention to the conflict: Hocine Zaourar's *La Madone de Benthala*. It was the only picture to gain international recognition during the Algerian war, and it won the World Press Photography Award in 1997. On the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1997, about 100 insurgents in Benthala, a village about 15 kilometres south of Algiers, massacred 100 to 300 civilians. The next day, Zaourar, an Algerian photographer working for the Agence France-Presse (AFP), went to the local hospital where he took the photograph of a woman, crying out in pain. The image, initially untitled, was immediately placed on the front page of over 750 newspapers throughout the world, with *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* giving it the caption, 'a Madonna in hell' (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 117). In a conflict which historian Benjamin Stora has called 'the invisible war' (Stora, 2001), this image has become the defining representation of the Algerian tragedy, 'one photograph, a single fixed image that has become an icon' (2001, 7).

In the photograph, a woman of about thirty or forty years of age sits, leaning against a wall, her head thrown back, her mouth open wide in a visceral cry of suffering or pain. She is framed on all sides, as if hemmed in by the horror of circumstance. To the left, a human shadow is cast on the white tiled wall behind her, and to her right in the foreground, a woman comforts her, her form turned sideways to the camera. The women's bodies fill almost the entire visual field, constructing a dual image of sorrow and comfort. The woman who wails leans her head against the wall, her eyes half-closed, gazing without focus into the middle distance as the other woman presses one hand against the woman's heart, and supports the back of her head. In this utterly defenceless posture, the woman crying allows herself to be consoled, and in this vulnerable state she can resist neither comfort nor violence. Refusing the grand narratives and militaristic imaginaries of conventional mediatized images of war, Hocine's *Pietà* instead

petitions a recognition of the human cost of violence: a human cost that is represented by a passively suffering woman.

The image garnered far more attention internationally than in Algeria where it was one of many photographs distributed about the conflict, some of them evoking a similarly gendered register, and not the most widespread (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 117). Several factors contribute to the immediate and enduring appeal of Zaourar's work to global, if not Algerian, audiences. For Juliette Hanrot, author of the 2012 book, *La Madone de Bentalha: Histoire d'une photographie* (Paris: Armand Colin), the image achieved widespread acclaim in Europe because its appeal to an iconography of Christian suffering and Western pictorial representation (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 111). She cites intertextual works which reference this image of female suffering in the face of war, like Poussin's *Massacre des Innocents* (1629), Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), the sculptures of Julio Gonzalez, and the open, wound-like orifices of Francis Bacon's triptychs. Evidently, the association of the woman in the picture with a Christian imaginary of suffering points not only to the Eurocentrism of Western viewers, but also highlights a certain Occidental gaze on non-Western suffering, embodied, in this case, in the figure of the passive female victim. This is further underlined by a rumour that circulated about the photograph: it was stated that the woman had lost eight sons in the conflict. According to Hanrot, the source of this rumour is uncertain, but it encapsulates many aspects of the Western perception of Algeria, a 'Third Worldism' which imagines a country of female oppression, high birth rates and limited contraception. In reality, the woman had no children, and moreover, the birth rate in Algeria at this time was 2,9 children per family (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 117).

The invented maternal status of the woman at the centre of the photograph speaks more broadly to the affective appeal of the image. The image of a woman, 'who mourns, literally, the fruit of her loins' (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 115) evokes powerful feelings in the viewer, registering the abnormality of war, of violence, the terrible destruction of the regular cycles of birth, aging, and death. Although *The Battle of Algiers* and *Rachida* also carry images of the victims of violence (victims who are often maternal and female), they do not exclude images of bloodshed, gunfire, and corpses. Zaourar's choice to render not the graphic and gory image of blood spilled and severed limbs can be situated more broadly

within photographic representations of war, which choose to exclude many of its most horrific aftereffects in favour of an emotional, and universal appeal, often leading to wider distribution (see Sontag, 2003; Ndlovu, 2016). For Patrick Crowley, the importance of the image lies not only in its rarity as the defining image of an 'invisible war', but also as an image foregrounds the emotional anguish of the civilian victim of terrorist violence: 'the image of a woman's grief, captured by Zaourar's lense [sic], remains as an index of the suffering endured by ordinary people' (2007, 82).

The focus on the individual victim in Zaourar's photograph chimes with Adriana Cavarero's suggestion that the locus of the debate on terrorism be shifted to the civilian victim of violence. If the strategic choice of modern terrorism kills a few in order to terrorize the many, the target of this violence is physically defenceless, entirely vulnerable to random acts of unilateral hostility: 'it is the defenceless person without qualities, interchangeable and random, who takes the centre of the contemporary stage on which the specialists in violence against the defenceless perform' (Cavarero 2011, 74). Female victims of terrorist violence are privileged in Cavarero's imaginary, and she evokes a series of images that resonate with *La Madone de Benthala*, each depicting the female mouth, open in a cry of pain. Of an image of a female victim of the London 7/7 bombings whose face is obscured by bandages, but whose mouth gapes open in a cry of pain, Cavarero writes, 'she thus reminds us that the violence of horror always hits someone, striking each human victim separately, and that the victims of massacres are always singular creatures, each with a face, a name, and a story' (2011, 19). Cinematically, the female mouth, open in a cry of horror in the face of violence, has a long representational heritage, which can initially be traced to Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potempkin* (1925), where a woman's cavernous mouth visually echoes the bloody wound on her eye as the Soviet troop massacre civilians on the steps of Odessa. A comparable image of Rachida in close up, screaming in terror at an unknown enemy, is one of the most widely available stills from the film. This image chain can also be traced to the open female mouths of *The Battle of Algiers*. In this case, these women are emitting *youyous*, cries of triumph, following the liberation of the country in 1962 and once again, the movement between the War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War is from female political agency to victimization.

In each of these instances, the female body comes again to serve as an intermediary symbol

between conflict and triumph, or conflict and tragedy. Indeed, Western interpretations of *La Madone de Benthala* raise problematic questions about gender, mediation, and women's agency. Hanrot writes that just as the Virgin Mary is the intercessor between the suffering of humans and that of Christ, *La Madone de Benthala* becomes the intermediary between the West and Algeria, between the viewer of the photograph and the Algerian victims (Hanrot and Clévenot 2012, 117). This echoes Fanon's statement that between the resistance of the Algerian populous and the French administration, 'the Algerian woman [was] an intermediary between obscure forces and the group' (1965, 37). By transforming the woman into a mother and a passive victim, readings of the image (and images like it) shift the locus away from women, reading them merely as pawns, ciphers or intermediaries in a sphere where male violence and male victims retain priority.

Moreover, the construction of an image of passive female suffering thus ignores the multiple and manifold forms of female resistance to terrorism in Algeria in the 1990s, as well as the gendered specificities of certain attacks. Women were among the first sections of Algerian society to recognize the threat that Islamic fundamentalism represented. In January 1992, they staged mass demonstrations in major cities in Algeria against the FIS, displaying photographs of the victims of terrorism and distributing documents that outlined FIS leaders statements against democracy (Lloyd 2006, 121). These protests carried a weighty symbolic dimension, as they were an attempt to occupy communal forums that the Islamists were attempting to control, particularly in relation to female participation in the public sphere. The control of women's bodies became, as in all radical Islamists movements, a point of emblematic contestation, and women found themselves increasingly the targets of brutal and horrific attacks. Catherine Lloyd summarizes the extent of the violence:

Women teachers were beheaded in front of their pupils, women related to government officers or security workers were also targeted. In remote areas whole villages were massacred, young girls were kidnapped, gang raped and turned into sex slaves, divorced women or widows who lived alone were also targeted (2006, 120).

Therefore, without negating its importance as an image of human suffering arising from an underreported conflict, it is important to note that *La Madone de Benthala* does not register these specifically female vulnerabilities to attack, nor does it evoke female resistance to the conflict. Mediatized interpretations of

the image have compounded these absences, evoking a passive female victim who is channelled through Christianized Western figures of horror and violence. More troubling still is the invention of a false motherhood, which implies that female grief and suffering are rendered emblematic and visible only as responses to the loss of male lives.

For Stora, the dearth of images of the Algerian conflict ‘contributes to the derealization of Algeria’, constructing an image of ‘an Algeria which does not exist’ (quoted in Crowley, 82–83; Stora 2003, 8). Thus, in relation to images of female participation in Algeria more broadly, have European and male-dominated narratives contributed to a ‘derealization’ of women’s experiences? In short, between the stoical bomb carriers of *The Battle of Algiers* and the prostrate ‘mother’ of *La Madone de Benthala*, where might we situate the multifaceted realities of women’s agency, their heightened vulnerabilities, and their manifold forms of resistance? Yamina Bachir-Chouikh’s *Rachida* (2002) is a film that attempts to address precisely these complexities, offering a realistic and far-reaching exploration of the Algerian conflict in the 1990s that places the female experience of the Civil War at the centre of its narrative.

### ***Rachida*: Focusing on the female protagonist**

Yamina Bachir-Chouikh’s thirty-year long career in film began when she trained in the Algerian Film Center in 1973 and she has worked as an editor and scriptwriter for numerous documentary and fiction filmmakers, including Noureddine Mefti, Ahmed Rachedi, and for her husband Mohamed Chouikh. She began writing the script for *Rachida* in 1996, following the death of her brother to extremist violence. The film participates in the so-called ‘cinema de l’urgence’ [‘cinema of crisis’] movement, when Algerian filmmakers began to address the civil strife in the 1990s. Directors like Merzak Allouache and Djamila Sahraoui created cinematic works that stressed the problematic intersections of fundamentalist and state terror, and the position of the civilian victim of terrorist violence. Allouache’s *Bab el-Oued City*, for example, was made at the height of hostilities in 1994, and it explores the everyday resistance of a young man to the dictates of the fundamentalists. Sahraoui’s *Barakat!* (2006) focuses on two women who embark on a journey into the mountains to recover the younger woman’s husband, who has been kidnapped by extremists. Filmed in 2001 and concentrating on a female protagonist, *Rachida* stands

between these two works, its temporal urgency aligning it with Allouache's work and its focus on women prefiguring Sahraoui.

In line with much recent Maghrebi cinema of the twenty-first century, *Rachida* adopts a realist form, with conventional narrative structures, a concrete socio-political setting and minimum stylistic effects, in order to focus on the day-to-day lives of Algerians living amid the ever-present threat of terrorist and state violence. Throughout the film, Bachir-Chouikh's focus remains on the central female character, Rachida, a young primary school teacher from Algiers who is shot by a radicalized former student in the opening sequences and further exposed to terrorist violence throughout the film. While *Rachida* also explores the experiences on men in the conflict, the film privileges female characters, focusing also on Aïcha, Rachida's divorced mother, and a young girl, Zohra, in the village who is kidnapped and raped by the Islamists. This focus reflects the important place that women occupied in the symbolic imaginary of both the terrorists and the state, where women's bodies became, once again, a site of emblematic contestation in the conflict. As Smail Sahli outlines, the 'targeting women's bodies demonstrates that gender is at the core of the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and inflicting violence on their bodies is a means of controlling women and terrorising their community' (2010, 121). Unsurprisingly, given their increased exposure to threat, Algerian female activists were among the first to recognize the growing threat that Islamic fundamentalism represented to their freedoms and those of Algerian society as a whole and they organized huge demonstrations in all the major cities of Algeria on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1992 against the FIS, to protest their victory in the elections.

Although the 200,000 people who died in the conflict and the 7000 or more who disappeared were almost all men, some of the most horrific violence was perpetrated against women. Moreover, violence against women was not confined to the space and time of war, nor was it solely the preserve of the Islamic fundamentalists. Violence against women can be situated within a decades long framework, where symbolic and discursive violence restricted women's rights (for example, the Family Code), where incidents of domestic violence were rising, and where extreme physical violence against women was tacitly ignored or even sanctioned by government institutions who refused to adequately punish perpetrators under law (see Lloyd, 2006; Kristianasen, 2006). Smail Salhi perceives scant difference

between the discourses of the FLN and the Islamists around women's rights, given that both called for the return of women to the domestic sphere, while endorsing, or indeed legalizing, women's inferior status: 'it is important to emphasise that the discourse of the Islamists vis-à-vis women's roles is not very different from that of the FLN; the leaders of the FIS [...] often called for the return of women to their homes to produce good Muslims' (2010, 113).

These issues converge in a single horrific incident of violence against women in the new oil town of Hassi Messaoud on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, 2001. Three hundred men attacked approximately thirty-eight employed women, most of them single, who the imam had called 'prostitutes', menaces to local morality and employment opportunities for men. Lloyd summarizes the breath and depth of the violence, noting that the women were 'tortured, beaten, gang-raped, sodomized and mutilated with knives by a large group of young, mostly jobless, fanatically-enraged males' (2006, 458). It was reported that the police failed to intervene for several hours after the attack, and the prosecution of the perpetrators was seriously delayed. In the end, only three women testified, citing physical and verbal intimidation by perpetrators and their families, and the sentences the perpetrators received were radically reduced (Lloyd 2006, 458). This incident, which took place after the official cessation of hostilities, reflects a broader climate of female vulnerability to male violence, and underscores Judith Butler's statement that vulnerability 'becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defence are limited' (2006, 29). The Civil War thus marks a transition from the symbolic violence implied in the FLN laws and doctrines to the physical and sexually specific violence against women at the hands of the fundamentalists: women were already vulnerable, and the conditions of war could only increase their susceptibility.

As previously mentioned, Rachida, as a single woman, unveiled, and a teacher and government employee, is marked from the beginning as particularly exposed to fundamentalist violence. The initial sequence of the film highlights Rachida's social position in Algerian society through a focus on her dress and appearance. The opening shot is a close up of Rachida's bright red lips as she applies lipstick, which she wields definitively, almost as a weapon, and as the camera zooms out, we see that she is dressed in a casual pants suit, with her thick curly hair loose and flowing. Her colleague, who is dressed in an *abaya*,

looks on with a mixture of trepidation and disapproval as she applies her lipstick. This colleague later states that she does not want her photograph taken: as a woman who works, she is already in danger, and moreover, her husband would not approve of her being photographed. This concern is in no way misplaced: the events outlined in *Rachida* in fact reflect very closely the targeting of schools and colleges that employed women and that were seen as pedalling ‘Western’ style education. Under President Chadli, sweeping educational reforms were undertaken, and Islamic religious teaching and Classical Arabic programs, which had previously been confined to Koranic schools, became part of mainstream curriculums (Turshen 2002, 895). Fundamentalists also targeted schools that were perceived as pedalling a Western-style education, and headmistresses, teachers, and students were killed (Ahmari and Weddady 2012, 41).

Yet despite her increased exposure, *Rachida*, initially, appears unconcerned. The camera tracks her movements as she hums along to her Walkman, the music filling the diegetic space, making her way homewards through the leafy, blanched avenues and alleys of central Algiers and the *Kasbah*. As spectators, we are invited to dwell on her happy demeanour, her carefree attitude, a foreboding of the violence that will render her acutely aware of her own vulnerability. The following morning, she is approached by a group of young men, one of them an adolescent named Sofiane, her former student. The men try to force her to carry a bomb into the school, and *Rachida* refuses, repeating over and over again ‘No! No! Not the children! No! No!’. This scene occurs in the crowded city streets, and as the group hustle her into a less occupied alleyway, groups of onlookers acknowledge what is happening, but refuse to intervene. As *Rachida* continues to protest, one of the men produces a gun and shoots her in the stomach and the tense, energetic strains of the music cease as *Rachida* falls to the ground and a dense silence fills the audible field. The barrenness of this silence is reflected in the visual frame, which, as *Rachida*’s injured body convulses and the seconds tick by, remains empty: no one comes to her aid.

This silence recalls the empty audible field in *The Battle of Algiers* following the Milk Bar attack, the pause of shock that follows atrocity, and in many ways, *Rachida* dialogues with Pontecorvo’s film. The Italian director’s neo-realist style and his desire to map the revolution in Algiers with historical accuracy chime with Bachir-Chouikh’s realist stylistics and true-to-life narrative structures. The opening



sequence, where Rachida applies her lipstick and tussles her hair, aligns her with the agency of the female bomb carriers as they Westernize their appearances. The scene in which the youths tail Rachida is an inverse echo of the bomb carriers sequence in Pontecorvo's film, her insouciance mirroring Pontecorvo's close-ups of the victims in the Milk Bar, dancing in blithe ignorance of the explosion to come. However, Bachir-Chouikh's decision to focus on a single female protagonist, and an unveiled, single, and educated woman at that, diverges from the focus on female collective action depicted in *The Battle of Algiers*. Moreover, in contrast to the Westernized women depicted in *The Battle of Algiers*, Rachida's non-traditional attire in fact renders her more vulnerable to attack, yet, in both cases, the Westernization of their attire is associated with forms of female agency and resistance.

The fact that Bachir-Chouikh chooses to focus on a single female protagonist, and particularly one of Westernized appearance, might be read problematically as a reiteration of the notion that agency for non-Western, and particularly Muslim, women must be channelled through accustomed figures, where being unveiled and Westernized in clothing stand as markers of female political and affective liberation. Thomas Elsaesser's critique of so-called 'world cinema' trends might suggest that Rachida been chosen as a character to present an acceptable, or at least familiar, figure of female agency from the Arab World to appeal to Western audiences. He argues that worldwide film markets dictate themes and 'what matters is how well local/national provenance can communicate with global/transnational audiences' (2005, 491). Films are no longer (if they were ever) being made within a national context for display in that context; more and more, what has come to be called 'world' cinema addresses an international audience, particularly on festival circuits and in art house cinemas, rather than the local community they represent. According to Elsaesser, this is a cinema that 'others' the other, with the collusion of the 'other', engaged in what he calls 'auto-ethnography' and 'self-exoticization', portraying what the 'native' thinks the observer wants to see (2005, 491).

However, for non-Western filmmakers, material and financial constraints play a significant role in the funding, production and distribution of a film, and a large part of the funding for *Rachida* came from European sources: Arte France Cinéma, Canal +, and the Ministère de la Culture de la République Française. For many directors with limited financial means, the most pressing concern remains the

creation of films that speak to immediate social and political circumstance and that are designed to reach a broad spectatorship. Recognizable characters aid these processes, and this should not necessarily lead to the assumption that, in the case of *Rachida*, Bachir-Chouikh's vision did not prevail in the film. For if a character that is easily identifiable for both Algerian and non-Algerian spectators results in higher audience numbers, why should the director not use this to her advantage in narrating the story of a war 'without images', a conflict that was radically underrepresented? Finally, focusing on a woman like Rachida allows Bachir-Chouikh to address a confluence of societal factors around terrorism, and Rachida is by no means an 'unrealistic' character: there were, and are, many unveiled, single, working women in Algeria, and they were particularly vulnerable to attack by Islamic fundamentalists. As Lloyd summarizes, 'women who seemed to challenge accepted stereotypes became special targets: especially those who were public employees or who were unveiled. Women living on their own were particular targets [...] Young, educated women were a particular target' (2006, 457).

### **Degrees of vulnerability: a traumatized population**

The film's positive reception in Algeria suggests that audiences in no way perceived it to be alien to their experience, or a film that pedalled Western feminism or ideology. According to Mohamed Chouikh, in the first week alone, it attracted over 13,000 viewers, and women, in particular, flocked to cinema screens:

For the first time, Algerians found themselves gathered around a film that belonged to them, which told the story of their troubles. Women who had never seen a film in 35 mm came to the cinema, the elderly, children, entire families [...] Outside the cinemas, old women were selling tickets on the black market. It was really quite an extraordinary, everything that happened. And all that, for the work of a woman! (quoted in Belguellaoui 2007, 146).

Perhaps part of the film's far-reaching popularity and appeal perhaps lies in the fact that *Rachida* offers a broad panorama of Algerian society, examining life in both Algiers and in the countryside, and exploring characters from a range of generations and backgrounds. The film thus acknowledges the pervasiveness of the violence: as the doctor who treats Rachida notes, 'the whole country is suffering from Post-Traumatic Psychosis'. Even the countryside, where Rachida flees with her mother to escape further attacks in the city, is populated with terrorists. The terrorists are both inside and outside the community:

they pass quietly among the locals one day, and purchase goods in the local store, while on several other occasions they launch violent attacks on the village. The sense of unpredictability and the reduction of each individual to an undifferentiated mass of potential targets are, of course, central to the fear and vulnerability that terrorism creates, but was particularly heightened in Algeria where terrorists were not outsiders, but family and community members. Historians Martin Evans and John Philips reiterate:

By 1996 Algeria had become a murky place with no dividing line between truth and untruth. With no dates, no battles, no chronology, the dirty war on terror was shapeless, inchoate and never-ending [...] In this confused atmosphere Algeria became trapped in a series of mysteries [...] who was killing whom and why? (2007, 225).

While some families in the village have lost children, husbands, wives and parents to terrorist violence, other families harbour and feed the terrorists in their midst. One night, watching the news, Rachida and her mother hear that the bodies of the French monks captured and killed at Tibhirine have been discovered, and the news also mentions the muftis and imams who have also be targeted and killed by the terrorists. This points to a kind of generalized vulnerability in the Algerian population, and the seemingly endless terrorist violence and the violence of the state response leads Rachida to despair that ‘we are becoming a culture of hate’.

*Rachida* demonstrates how, both in terms of the state and the terrorists, the fear of violence creates a counter-balancing reaction of hatred, and more violence. In relation to the feelings of political and social vulnerability created in violent conflicts, Simone Drichel suggests that ‘the shoring up and defense of identity against putative threats from the outside presents itself as the favored political response to the experience of vulnerability’ (2013, 6). This refusal to recognize vulnerability, and the subsequent re-bolstering of religious and identitarian models of violent power, is what the film critiques, while refusing to completely vilify either the terrorists (or more accurately, those civilians who support them) or the state. The film also censures the Algerian state by dramatizing the experience of young men in Algeria, the generation crippled by a severe lack of employment opportunities and designated the *hittistes*, ‘those who hold up the walls’, because of the monotony of their daily grind. While the film does not go so far as to cite unemployment as a factor in the radicalization of young men, it does point to the ways financial insecurity creates vulnerability and anger, embodied in the slightly comic figure of young

man who ceaselessly pursues the girl he loves but cannot marry because he is jobless. He rages that 'the state has given up on us', and in this situation of subjection, it is easy to imagine the appeal of the power terrorism appears to bestow. In contrast to the silver pennies he cobbles together to telephone the girl's home, the terrorists simply march into the local store, seize lumps of cash, machine guns in their hands.

Bachir-Chouikh picks out characters that are particularly vulnerable through age, gender, or social circumstance. In this way, she intersects social and bodily vulnerability with the heightened exposure to violence that living in conditions of extreme state and guerrilla terror produces. In one of these attacks, an elderly gentleman who has been depicted as a peacemaker in the village (albeit one with a penchant for garrulousness) is targeted and killed. Bachir-Chouikh has made the spectator privy to this man's private life, in a moving scene with his wife, which highlights his age, his love for his family, and the trouble his loquacity has caused in the past. The camera dwells on the lines of his face, as he and his wife speak of their long life together, their thoughts about their child who is no longer in Algeria, their shared hopes for the future. The intimacy of this scene renders his subsequent death even more horrific. The widespread influence of violence and its consequences extends even to the local children, who play games at night, trying to identify the gunfire they hear, as AK 47s or Kalashnikovs. During recess at school, they sit around in circles, but instead of playing with marbles or sports cards, they gather bullets for trading, trying to identify the provenance of the ammunition, the categories of the weapons.

Yet, for the most part, Bachir-Chouikh's focus remains fixed on the particular vulnerabilities of Algerian women. The most moving depiction of the heightened defencelessness of women within the context of war comes through the character of Zohra, a local girl who has been abducted and raped by the terrorists. Zohra manages to escape, and the camera tracks her return to the village through the forest, her clothes torn, her hair a tangled mass, her feet bare and bloody. The alternating close ups and medium shots carry the viewer alongside her as she falters and stumbles her way into the village, where disorientated and exhausted, she drops to the ground. Zohra, terrified, refuses the arms of the men who attempt to lift her up, and attempts to cover as much of her body as possible by curling into a ball on the ground. At this point, several women in the village approach her, and undoing their brightly coloured headscarves, they drape the fine tissues of orange, blue, red and yellow over the trembling girl. Bachir-

Chouikh suggests that when we are at our most breakable, what may be needed is not a totalizing, controlling response, but merely the finest touch, a silky covering that recognizes our fragile state, and cloaks it in a light and delicate fabric of protection. The violence cannot be undone, but it can be acknowledged.

According to the Algerian Ministry of the Interior in 1998, more than 2000 women reported being raped during the five years of the conflict (Lloyd 2006, 458). In many cases, this trauma was compounded by social stigma's surrounding rape and the radical vulnerability of Zohra, whose rape has resulted in pregnancy, is compounded by her father's response to her violation: he refuses to accept her back into his family, saying 'I'd rather she was dead'. His argument is that because she is alive, she did not resist the rape, and Stringer echoes this conception in outlining society's problematic relation to agency and female vulnerability: 'the ideal victim [...] is *an agent who actively resists rape*, an agent whose identification as a "victim" will hinge on their ability to prove that they possess and did exercise resistant agency' (2013, 160). Part of the horror of the experience of rape is, in essence, the loss of agency, the control one has over the limits and uses of one's body. Yet narratives of female resistance to attack, prevalent in both social and legal structures, privilege female agency, even in the face of its negation. Thus, by refusing to acknowledge vulnerability, even if this is through a reliance on a model of female agency, we risk compounding victim's suffering by suggesting that blame can be ascribed to those who did not resist, or who did not resist *enough*. *Rachida* addresses this contradictory narrative around rape, by highlighting the inconsistencies in this model of agency in the midst of victimization and increasingly, women's organizations in Algeria, such as SARP (Association pour l'Aide Psychologique, la Recherche et la Formation), reject these narratives, foregrounding the prevalence of women's experiences of sexual assault and gender-based violence (Kristianasen 2006, 350).

The notion that resistance is necessarily physical and active is belied by the actions of the women as they drape Zohra with the shielding veils. In a context where the physical violence of the terrorists and the discursive violence of Zohra's father intersect, the recognition of Zohra's trauma and the care and attention required to understand her needs at that moment are not passive actions. The acceptance of her beleaguered body back into the group, even if this is only a female space, already move some way

towards undoing the damage the terrorists wished to cause, that of dividing the community as a whole. As Bachir-Chouikh notes, this scene ‘is something of a challenge to the fundamentalists [...] the veils the women cover her in have all the colours of life, it is as if they protect her [...] these fabrics are, by turns, symbols of happiness, prohibition or mourning’ (quoted in Charpentier, 2010).

This motif, of tissue or cloth as a means of protection, the shielding of a vulnerable woman by other women, recurs throughout the film and is, moreover, a recurring feature of Maghrebi women’s filmmaking (see Florence Martin, 2011). Like *The Battle of Algiers*, in *Rachida*, the veil is a flexible symbol, one whose meanings shift according to circumstance. However, while the veil was always tied to politics and the revolution in Pontecorvo’s film, in *Rachida*, the veil is tied to a more complex web of personal and emotional connections. While for Rachida’s colleague the veil signifies a more conservative approach to religion and a response to the attacks of the Islamists, for Rachida’s mother, a divorced woman who prays daily, the adoption of the veil seems tied to tradition as much as religion. The veil can also be a form of protection, of comfort, a means of recognizing the trauma or hurt of oneself or another: after Rachida is shot, the first attempt at recognition of her assault appears in the form of a sheet, weaving its way downwards from a third story window, thrown by an unknown woman.

Violence against women can take many forms, and Bachir-Chouikh explores the ways in which victims can internalize the logic of a society that views women as agents in their own violation. This is demonstrated in a scene where, before the village wedding, all of the women go to the *hammam*. Amid the muted light, the billowing clouds of steam, the softness of naked bodies, and the splashing of water, one might imagine that the all-female space of the baths would rock Zohra into a sense of security. Instead, the steam clears and the camera zooms in to reveal raw, bloodied patches all over her body, as she scrubs and scores her skin. This self-violence is an attempt to erase the skin and the body that rendered her susceptible in the first place, to rub away the feeling of vulnerability itself. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, by inflicting pain on herself, Zohra is trying to reassert mastery over a body that so violently betrayed her: at least she can control this pain. As Drichel notes, ‘the experience of vulnerability [...] generally results in pursuits of invulnerability, where invulnerability serves the function of restoring a sense of control and mastery over a threatening environment’ (2013, 5).

Zohra's pursuits of inviolability are underscored at the end of the film, when the terrorists enact a final and devastating raid on the village during the wedding, Zohra is shown as almost triumphant at the desecration of those who ostracized her. Shrouded in a black veil, an inverse evocation of the vibrant veils that previously sheltered her, she moves through the smoking ruins with an air of knowledge and inviolability: she has already reached the edge of pain, and has made herself invulnerable to the suffering of others. Zohra almost smirks upon discovering the terrorists, leaving only a white and gold sheath of fabric in their wake, have abducted the bride. The abduction of this girl, who has ceded to the wishes of her family in marrying a man she did not love, demonstrates what is perhaps most frightening about life amidst the threat of violence: we cannot shield ourselves from exposure to violence through adherence to social codes, patterns of behaviour, or even through the protection of a group or society.

In this way, Bachir-Chouik's exploration of terrorism in Algeria touches upon the societal response to terror, as well as reflecting on wider forms of social and symbolic exclusion and the intersections of patriarchal and political violence. She writes, 'I wanted to talk about kinds of violence other than terrorism. The violence of society towards divorced women. The couple problem. [...] The fact that there are girls who don't choose their own husband. The power of gossip' (quoted in Charpentier, 2010). Like Zohra, whose experience of rape and abduction are compounded by her father's rejection, Rachida also suffers from what Bachir-Chouikh calls 'the power of gossip'. She refuses to go to the *hammam*, in case that her scar is misconstrued as the mark of the delivery of a child by Caesarean section. The image of a bomb scar that could be the mark of birth resonates with the false mother of Zouarar's photograph, and speaks powerfully to the imaginary of an Algeria in the throes of massacring its own children. However, while the assignation of the status of mother to the 'Madonna' of Zouarar's photograph increases its affective appeal to an international audience, we see that in *Rachida*, motherhood is a binary status, one which necessitates strict conventions and social controls upon who is a legitimate and socially accepted mother and who is not. Being a mother is only praise-worthy when it is inscribed within socially acceptable norms of family and marriage.

While the victimhood of the woman in *La Madone de Benthala* was augmented and reinforced by her status as a mother, the scar of victimhood on Rachida's body rather leaves her open to further attack

if misconstrued as the sign of an illicit pregnancy. Furthermore, the image of thwarted Algerian motherhood conveyed in *La Madone de Benthala*, that of the radical denaturation of the biological cycles of birth and death, is disturbingly echoed by Zohra's pregnancy. Just as children should not die before their parents, so too should women not be inseminated by force and by rape, forced to produce offspring without fathers, infants unwanted by their communities. Guy Austin calls this depiction of Zohra 'enclosed in silence, pregnant with the child of her rape, the child of Algeria's trauma' one of the 'more cryptic, more troubling' images of the film (2012, 152). Zohra will give birth to an Algerian child, the product of two opposing forces, two separate factions in a divided society, and the fate of this child, rather like the outcome of the conflict itself, remains darkly uncertain. This reflects a concern voiced by many psychologists who treated women during the Civil War. The effect that the violence would have of successive generations of mothers was a concern for many women's associations working with victims. As Cherifa Bouatta, president of SARP (Association pour l'Aide Psychologique, la Recherche et la Formation) notes of the women she has worked with in the Sidi-Moussa area, 'our psychologists are worried about what will happen to the children of traumatised mothers. We think all this could repeat itself in another generation' (Kristianasen 2006, 350).

In contrast to Zohra, it is worth noting that Rachida herself never attempts to deny or repress her trauma. Although her fiancée gently tries to blame her for the attack, stressing the fact that as a woman she should not have been working, Rachida refuses to engage in self-chastising rhetoric or behaviours. While she does exhibit symptoms of PTSD, including fear of going outside, fear of light and noise, and self-soothing behaviours like rocking, she also attempts consistently to return to the everyday patterns of life. She goes outside, she dances, and she voices her anger and frustration at a society that is trapped in this 'culture of hate'. Even her refusal to go to the *hammam* is motivated not by fear, but by a practical recognition that she is unwilling, and emotionally unable, to expose herself to further censure. This is a context where everyone around her seems to be intent on denying their vulnerability and exposure; even the watchman in the village says that he can defend the people in the town from the terrorists with a collection of stones he has gathered. Perhaps this is why, as she suggests, she feels like 'an exile in my



own country'. She insists on recognizing and voicing their exposure to violence, but without reacting with anger or hatred.

At the end of the film, after the village has been desecrated, Rachida is the only adult who seems able and willing to continue with everyday life. Walking past the rows of bodies laid out on the ground and covered in white sheets, she arrives at the elementary school where she teaches, briefcase and chalk in her hand. Power covers the children's overturned desks, as outside plumes of smoke continue to rise from the rubble of damaged homes. Eventually a few students straggle in, and amid the smouldering ruins, Rachida begins her lesson. The film ends with a long, still take of Rachida in medium shot staring directly and defiantly into the camera. In this way, Bachir-Chouikh suggests that resistance to terrorism and the fear and vulnerability it creates need not be the counter-balancing reaction of violence. Instead, resistance is once again figured as the simple will to go on in everyday life – to show up to work, to continue to live. Smail Sahli reiterates this sentiment, suggesting that women's resistance during the Civil War was often constituted by small, everyday acts of normality, by striving to preserve the structures of daily life in a climate of generalized fear: sending their children to school, going to hairdressers and beauty salons, showing up to work. For Samil Sahli, 'these women stood for life and for the continuance of life in Algeria despite the roaming danger of death in an extremely dangerous and hostile environment. This in itself is an extraordinary act of resistance and societal cohesion (2010, 121). This contrasts sharply with the mode of agency depicted in *The Battle of Algiers*, where women's actions are situated within the dominant narratives of political insurgency of the FLN, and it also takes us beyond the image of passive victimization embodied in *La Madone de Benthala*. Instead, *Rachida* offers a model of participation and defiance that is not situated within codes of institutional or guerrilla violence, but rather, in the refusal to allow violence to control and regulate individual action. For, if terrorism strives to disrupt the space and time of daily life by making the threat of attack every-present, the will to overcome this fear and continue to live surely constitutes a powerful act of resistance.

In this article, I have charted an imaginary of female agency and passivity through three key texts, moving from a model of female resistance as political in *The Battle of Algiers*, through *La Madone de Benthala* as an image of the passive and suffering mother, to *Rachida*, a film which stages a dynamic and

diverse vision of Algerian society and one woman's negotiation of life in times of terror. Bachir-Couikh problematizes the false dichotomy of agency and victimhood, refusing passivity and offering a model for female resistance and agency that is not tied to male-dominated political movements, or indeed, to overt political action. As the director summarizes: 'to me, Rachida is not a heroine, she's a everyday girl, an ordinary citizen. She not a militant, She becomes extraordinary because of the tragedy that befalls her. Her character is not about militant resistance, but human resistance' (quoted in Belguellaoui 2007, 167). This is a model of female resistance that is tied to everyday acts, the recognition of others pain and vulnerability, and to the acknowledgement that political and institutional violence, particularly against women, are intertwined. It is, a Bachir-Chouikh writes, a human resistance, one that moves away from the grand narratives of the state and the fundamentalists, instead examining what it means to live, and continue to survive, in moments of extreme conflict.

## References:

- Addi, Lahouari. 1998. 'Algeria's Army, Algeria's Agony.' *Foreign Affairs* 77(4): 44–53.
- Ahmari, Sohrab and Nasser Weddady, eds. 2012. *Arab Spring Dreams: The Next Generation Speaks Out for Freedom and Justice from North Africa to Iran*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Amrane Minne, Djamila. 2007. Translated by Alistair Clarke, 'Women at War.' *Interventions* 9(3): 340–349.
- Amrane-Minne. 1993. *Femmes au combat: la guerre d'Algérie*. Algiers: Éditions Rahma.
- Austin, Guy. 2012. *Algerian National Cinema*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Branche, Raphaëlle. 2001. *La Torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Belguellaoui, Cheira. 2007. 'Contemporary Algerian filmmaking: from "cinéma national" to "cinéma de l'urgence"' (Mohamed Chouikh, Merzak Allouache, Yamina Bachir-Chouikh, Nadir Moknèche). PhD diss., Florida State University.
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Cavarero, Adriana. 2011. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Charpentier, Oriane. 2010. 'Yamina Bachir-Chouikh : "Je n'ai plus peur".' *Univers-ciné*, November 30.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1994. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Crowley, Patrick. 2007. 'Images of Algeria: Turning and Turning in the Widening Gyre.' *Expressions maghrébines* 6: 79–92.
- Drichel, Simone. 2013. 'Reframing Vulnerability: "so obviously the problem..."' *SubStance* 42(3): 3–27.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. 2005. *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Entelis, John P. 2011. 'Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived?' *The Journal of North African Studies* 16(4): 653–678.
- Evans, Martin and John Phillips. 2007. *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. Translated by Hakkon Chevalier. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Hanrot, Juliette and Dominique Clévenot. 2012. 'Fabrique d'une icône: *La Madone de Bentalha*: Entretien avec Juliette Hanrot.' *Écrire l'histoire* 9: 111–118.
- Harbi, Mohammed and Gilbert Meynier. 2004. *Le FLN, documents et histoire: 1954-1962*. Paris: Fayard.
- House, Jim and Neil MacMaster. 2006. *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ighilahriz, Louisette and Anne Nivat, 2001. *Algérienne*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Kristianasen, Wendy. 2006. 'Truth and Justice after a Brutal Civil War: The Women Speak.' *Review of African Political Economy* 33(108): 346–351.
- Lazreg, Marnia. 2008. *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lloyd, Catherine. 2006. 'From Taboo to Transnational Political Issue: Violence against Women in Algeria.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29(5): 453–462.
- Martin, Florence. 2011. *Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Murphy, Ann V. 2012. *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ndlovu, Stacy. 2016. 'Le droit à l'image devrait-il s'appliquer dans les conflits?' Final Year Honors Thesis, Cornell University.
- Perego, Elizabeth. 2015. 'The veil or a brother's life: French manipulations of Muslim women's images during the Algerian War, 1954–62.' *The Journal of North African Studies* 20(3): 349–373.
- Silverstein, Paul A. 2002. 'An Excess of Truth: Violence, Conspiracy Theorizing and the Algerian Civil War.' *Anthropological Quarterly* 75(4): 643–674.
- Smail Salhi, Zahia. 2010. 'The Algerian Feminist Movement between Nationalism, Patriarchy and Islamism.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 33(2): 113–124.
- Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Stora, Benjamin. 2001. *La Guerre invisible: Algérie, années 90*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Stringer, Rebecca. 2013. 'Vulnerability after Wounding: Feminism, Rape Law, and the Differend.' *SubStance* 42(3): 148–168.
- Turshen, Meredith. 2002. 'Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?' *Social Research* 69(3): 889–911.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is my translation and all translations hereafter will be my own.