

Algeria Unfinished: Honor Killings and Women's Rights from the Black Decade to the Hirak Movement

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Abstract: During and following Algeria's Black Decade, women suffered inordinately. Incidents of honor killings and femicide were rampant. However, despite their societal constraints, these women did not suffer quietly. They marched in the streets and demanded justice—a novelty at the time in the Maghreb. Still, not soon after the dust settled, women's demands were shoved to the back burner and honor-related brutality continued relatively unabated. Indeed, violence against women remains deplorably high throughout the country, and even though changes to the "Family Law" have been addressed, they are nowhere near sufficient. The Hirak Movement presents a new window of opportunity for the advancement of women's rights in the country. It also presents its own challenges. This paper will address the efficacy of women in the movement, taking into consideration the socio-political realities on the ground in Algeria. Ultimately, this work focuses on these three, interrelated inquiries: Can the Hirak Movement provide a channel for fulfilling the unfinished work of women's rights in Algeria? What does the movement actually portend in terms of finally addressing honor violence and femicide in a legitimate and applied manner? What are the challenges and outlooks moving forward?

Keywords: Algeria, Honor Violence, Black Decade, Women's Rights, Hirak Movement.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The dream that these revolutionaries once had [for Algeria] was not really achieved as they'd hoped it to be. It's almost like a broken promise."—Nahla Naili (Bendimerad, 2020)

In 1962, a young woman by the name of Djamila Bouhired became a legend in Algeria. At the age of 25, Bouhired (or the Joan of Arc of Algeria, as she is affectionately known) became a revolutionary force in terms of human and women's rights in the Maghreb. From the Algerian war for independence to the "Black Decade," Bouhired's voice would not be silenced. With the dawning of the Hirak Movement, her voice still resonates. As she declared in March 2020, "It is up to you all to draw your future and shape your dreams. Do not let them ruin your noble fights. Do not let them steal your triumph" (Bendimerad). Nahla Naili has taken the baton handed to her by her great-aunt Djamila. A respected activist in her own rite, Naili carries on the fight of those who came before her. However, Naili's position is more guarded, as is evident in the above epitaph.

Naili's frustration is palpable, particularly for Algerian women and girls who still face high levels of violence in the name of family honor. Despite attempts at addressing these issues, women's and girls' rights are merely cloaked underneath a façade of governmental action, meant only to placate those who attempt to seek justice in the short term. However, violence against women in Algeria is not, nor has ever been, a short term problem. Steeped in historical tribal and socio-religious practices, honor killing, femicide and violence against women has been, and continues to be a long-term challenge. These issues have been addressed by foremothers such as Djamila Bouhired, and the Black Decade presented itself as an avenue to address the plight of women in the country. However, the movement that it inspired fizzled. The Hirak movement, carried on by Nahla Naili and countless other unnamed women, presents a new opportunity. Is it

possible that the movement can finally address, in a meaningful way, an end to endemic violence against women in the country? We begin with an historical-sociological background of the issues of honor killings and femicide in Algeria. This step is imperative because in order to cognize the prospects of the future, we need to first have a deeper evaluation of the past.

2. HONOR KILLINGS AND FEMICIDE: AN HISTORICAL-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In Algerian society, the community is essentially defined by a normative structure strongly based on religion and family ties; and in these societies, Islam dominates human interaction, and its teaching impacts all aspects of life. As both a religious and social guide, the Quran defines individual and family relations that govern all the members of the *umma* (extraterritorial community formed by all Muslims) establishing a close link between religion, family and community as basic pillars of social cohesion. The Quran also establishes the network of the community and smaller nuclear family, which is an extremely important social structure of Muslim society.

Algerian society is patriarchal. It is a society where men are regarded as the ultimate authority within the family and society, and in which power and possessions are passed on from father to son. So, just as the family represents the main pillar of society in the Muslim community at large, the male represents the pillar of the smaller nuclear family. As such, the importance of the male head-of-household cannot be underestimated. In Muslim communities, the man is responsible for upholding family cohesion as it relates to the community in general. Furthermore, he is responsible for maintaining cultural, religious, and social practices, as well as maintaining family honor within the community.

In terms of family honor and gender roles, it is important to remember that purity is ultimately tied to the woman, which helps to explain why male heads-of-households go to extreme lengths to ensure that their daughters remain chaste. Concerning the man who is seeking a bride, it is incumbent upon him, for the sake of his own family's honor to marry a pure woman that will raise an honorable family. As such, in Muslim society, a woman's virginity upon entering a marriage is not only desirable; *it is a prerequisite*.

Sex outside the marriage is referred to as *zina* (fornication), is forbidden by Sharia law, and is severely punished. Sexual issues notwithstanding, marriage also provides a means for men and women to build lasting relationships and to carry out their socially proscribed roles as men and women. As dictated by Islam, men are responsible for upholding religious and social values, and are charged with maintaining society. As Andrew March, Associate Professor of Political Science at Yale University correctly argues, "The duty to avoid association with sin is usually linked to a concomitant duty to promote virtue and morality. The bare minimum required by this positive duty is to guarantee that one's children will be raised in an Islamic environment and that they are not in danger of straying from religion (March, 2009, p. 113).

As such, the role of religion cannot be discounted entirely, as cultural values and religion are typically intrinsically married. However, when one discusses practices such as honor related violence (HRV), it is irresponsible to simply "blame" religion (i.e., Islam) based on general stereotypes. Rather, particularly when one reviews the historical context of honor killings and HRV, we can begin to see that the practice was first grounded in secular, tribal traditions.

Predating the revelation of Islam in Babylonia and Mesopotamia, Hammurabi, King of Babylonia, drafted a series of 282 civil and criminal laws, which not only systemized the "Talion Principle" (eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth), but also addressed the treatment of women. The Hammurabi Code (1700 BCE), as it is known, ordered that an adulterous woman should face death at the hands of her husband, unless the husband chose not to carry out the task. According to Law 129 of the Hammurabi Code:

(§129) If a married lady is caught lying with another man, they shall bind them and cast them into the water; if her husband wishes to let his wife live, then the king shall let his servant live
(Translated by L. W. King, 2008).

As a secular judicial instrument, the Hammurabi Code was essentially a product of cultural norms and values that prevailed in ancient Babylonia and Mesopotamia, whereas women were deemed as subservient to men, thus solidifying an already patriarchal society. As such, any action that was deemed dishonorable to the man and his family name should be punished accordingly. And as both a judicial instrument and a guide to moral behavior, the Hammurabi Code laid the foundation for social interaction and acceptable gender roles for centuries to come.

Transitioning into non-secular discourse, religion has indeed played its role—justifiable or not—when it comes to the practice of honor violence. Indeed, each of the monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) proffers social and moral prescriptions, including when it comes to gender roles. By all accounts, each of them have received criticism for their treatment of perceived moral and sexual deviants, and the violence they seemingly promote.

Given this background information, we can now begin to discuss the matter of women’s rights in contemporary Algeria and the prospects for actualizing the protection of the rights of women. The next section begins with the narrative of the women’s movement from the war of independence to the Black Decade.

3. THE BLACK DECADE: FROM AN AWAKENING TO SUPPRESSION

“To hear veiled Moslem women call out “*kif-cif la francaise*”—strife-torn Algeria’s latest war cry—may have a bloodcurdling effect on alien ears, but there is, in fact, nothing really sinister about it. Liberally translated, it means, “Let us be just like the French lady!”—a sentiment that is menacing only to the immemorial superiority of the Moslem male. The sentiment is not new; for the walls around Algerian women have been gradually crumbling since the end of World War II” (Lehrman, 1958)

Writing for the *New York Times* in 1958, Hal Lehrman remarked on the status of women in Algeria and the hope for change during the war of independence. While women’s voices began to emerge, they were soon drowned out by a war-torn society that would pit the secular government against Islamist extremists. During what is commonly referred to as the Black Decade of the 1990s, the civil war took the lives of over 200,000 civilians, and women suffered inordinately.

For many historians, analyzing the devastating civil war can be simply reduced to the rise of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and its vengeance on Algeria’s secular military regime. To a great extent, this is true. However, such a simplification fails to address what the GIA stood for, and why it was so disastrous for women. As the Council on Foreign Relations correctly notes, part of the goal of the GIA was to target women whom the group perceived as being unchaste or “liberated”. Writing a background paper for the Council on Foreign Relations, Lauren Vriens notes the following,

Women not wearing the hijab, or headscarf, women in professional careers, or women who refused *mu’ta*, the practice of temporary marriages of pleasure, were often murdered. The GIA was especially known for—and received much criticism for—killing the female relatives and children of the military. The group justified this by citing an extremist concept called *takfir*, which is a form of excommunication (Vriens, 2009).

What the Black Decade presented, at the hands of the GIA, was a renewal and strengthening of fundamentalist ideals of female inferiority, all the while providing a “pious” justification for honor killings and femicide. For decades to come, violence against women in all forms once again became the norm. Succinctly stated by Rashida Manjoo in her “Addendum to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences,”

Algerian women have been particularly affected by these historical developments, and their status in the family and society today needs to be understood in the light of the legacies of the past. The contribution of women to the most crucial stages of the history of the country remains unquestioned. The vital role that women played in the war of liberation against colonial occupation and during the Black Decade was not only a struggle for freedom and justice, but also a rebellion against deep-rooted patriarchal mentalities and structures that relegated them to a subordinate position. Their participation in the struggle for democracy, coupled with the impetus given to education after the war of independence, gave them a new sense of their own identity and status in both the public and the private domain. The strengthening of religious identity politics since the 1970s and the rise of Islamic extremism were accompanied by the resurfacing of patriarchal discourses and practices that perpetuated women’s subordinate position in the family and society, thereby increasing their vulnerability to violence and exploitation once again (Manjoo, 2011).

4. CONTINUED VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE

Violence directed at women remains a serious problem in Algeria, as the Algerian government registered over 7,000 complaints of violence against women in 2019. The women's rights group Femicides Algeria reported 75 known killings of women in 2019, and 41 killings as of October 23, 2020. (The New Arab, 2020). Femicides Algeria argues that this number is most likely low. Amnesty International agrees, and notes that due to social taboos of reporting such incidents within Algeria's highly patriarchal society, the actual number of abused women is likely much higher. Adding to the picture, *Afrik News* documents the following:

Cases of women abused by their husbands and disowned by their families are prevalent in the Algerian Society in which the male sex is thought superior mainly in Islamic circles. More than 1,000 sexual assaults on women are recorded per year in Algeria, according to the National Gendarmerie services. Experts say that these figures do not reflect the reality because many victims do not reveal what is considered to be a "shameful crime" in Algerian society in which Islam is the religion of almost all of the Algerian people. This Mohametan religion provides the society with its central social and cultural identity. Indeed, the number of the declared rapes achieved, in the first quarter of last year, reached 229 according to the department of the Algerian national Gendarmerie. According to other figures issued by the Algerian police one year ago, more than 7,500 women have experienced various forms of violence, only during the first ten months of 2010. This violence against women takes many forms – physical, sexual, psychological and economic. Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence. The situation is dramatic, and the phenomenon is not confined to a specific region but occurs throughout the whole nation. In the absence of complaints by the victims who avoid being the laughingstock of the neighborhood, this perceptible fact remains a serious, present-day terror affecting, primarily women and girls (Afrik News, 2012).

The U.S. State Department also notes that while violence against women is widespread both in urban and rural localities, women in general face discrimination and harassment in the workplace and in their communities. In its 2019 Human Rights Report, the U.S. State Department notes that, "For the first quarter of the year, the Ministry for National Solidarity, Family, and Women reported that there were 1,734 logged cases of violence against women. According to statistics from women's advocacy groups published in the local press, between 100 and 200 women died each year from domestic violence" (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

It is important to note that proving domestic violence is difficult, and socially stigmatizing. The State Department continues to argue that, "Domestic violence remains a society-wide problem. The law states that a person claiming domestic violence must visit a 'forensic physician' for an examination to document injuries and that the physician must determine that the injuries suffered 'incapacitated' the victim for 15 days" (U.S. Department of State, 2020). For many women, the fact is that they are not willing to visit a "forensic physician" in fear that they will be shown to be "un-clean" in the eyes of society. As such, for many women, even attempting to seek justice becomes prohibitive on a sociological level.

In recent years, women's rights workers have urged the Algerian government to take notice of the plight of women, and while a few instances of progress have been documented, authorities and police agents continue to fail to protect women. According to *We the Women*, Algeria has come under fire from rights groups who say poor treatment of women persists. "Primarily, the Algerian government has failed to protect women against sexual molestation, assaults and pervasive legal and economic discrimination" (We the Women, 2006). Adding to these findings, Yakin Erturk, Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council on Violence Against Women argues that while inroads have been made, "taboos and the lack of a sufficient institutional response and support for victims of violence silence the victims and perpetuate the violence... Recent surveys reveal that violence against women is a major concern in Algeria in both the home and the public space, and that that many women also endure sexual harassment in their workplaces" (U.N. News Service, 2007).

Others argue that while women are allowed into the workplace, it does not necessarily mean that women are treated with equality and respect. For example, Saliha Larab from the women's rights group RAFD, warns individuals not to be fooled by appearances. "Algeria remains a very conservative society that considers women as second-class citizens... The big problem is most victims don't complain. They stay silent, fear reprisals by society. A woman does not have the right to complain" (Reuters, 2007). Providing an example of Larab's findings, a Reuters report documented the following:

At a centre for women in distress in Algiers, Lamia, 35, said she had endured five years of beatings from her husband in front of her young children before he threw her onto the streets. She fled her village to escape a barrage of persecution and insults from her husband and neighbors. Destitute, she appealed to her own family but they rejected and abandoned her. Lamia received no support and for a while lost custody of her children. When they were returned to her she found they had been sexually abused by one of her husband's relatives. "I made a complaint but all I got in return was another beating from my husband, who is a police officer" (Reuters, 2007).

The narrative depicted by Reuters is indeed the reality in Algeria facing all women. Moreover, Algerian laws do not adequately protect women and girls from domestic violence and rape. For its part, Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a 59-page report, entitled "Your Destiny is to Stay with Him: State Response to Domestic Violence in Algeria," notes that although the government has adopted Law no. 15-19 in December 2015, which specifically criminalizes *some* forms of domestic violence, sociological barriers effectively block women from seeking justice. According to HRW,

"Victims of domestic violence have long faced the double injustice of abuse at home and then a meager response from the government," said Sarah Lea Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Algeria's new law on domestic violence is only a start." Survivors of domestic violence face various hurdles when they try to leave abusive relationships, including social pressure to keep their families together. Even though they have serious injuries, several women told Human Rights Watch that their relatives encouraged them to reconcile with their husbands. The police often gave them the same advice, telling them that it is a "private matter" and ignoring the legal provisions criminalizing the abuse. Several lawyers told Human Rights Watch that because of these and other hurdles, most survivors do not press charges or drop their complaints at the investigative stage (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

In preparing its report, HRW interviewed 20 women survivors of domestic violence in order to get their views on how domestic violence is treated in Algeria. In one of its many examples, HRW provides the following:

Hasna, a 31-year-old mother of four, told Human Rights Watch that her husband started beating her when she was pregnant. In September 2014, during a dispute, he threw her against the wall, and slapped and punched her in the face. She went in her pajamas to a police station, where a policeman told her, "This is a family matter. This is not our business. This is your husband. Maybe he was angry. He will come back to his senses. Go and find some elders who can calm things down (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The problem with addressing domestic violence in a meaningful way is that that violence against women is deemed to be just that—*domestic*. In Algerian society there remains the widely-held view that violence against women is somehow acceptable. In Algeria, (and the region) honor killing is still deemed as an acceptable recourse for restoring the name of the family. According to a report released by *The New Arab* in September 2019:

The criminal act of honor killing is one in which relatives kill a family member, most typically a woman, for allegedly bringing dishonor onto the family, shaming its name and reputation among society. Though it is difficult to locate accurate and up-to-date statistics on the number of honor killings committed in the region, a recent opinion based survey showed what Arabs think of the punitive criminal act in 2019. The figures, found by the largest and most in-depth survey undertaken of the Middle East and North Africa for BBC News Arabic by the Arab Barometer research network, showed honor killings were considered acceptable by 27 percent of Algerians, 25 percent of Moroccans, 14 percent of Sudanese, 21 percent of Jordanians and 8 percent of Tunisians, Lebanese and Palestinians (Uqba, 2019).

In terms of the law and honor killing in Algeria, we see that there exists somewhat of a convoluted relationship between rape and honor violence. Nadia Marzouki, a scholar on Algerian society, explains the situation as follows:

Article 336 of the penal code does not specifically define the crime of rape. The French version of the code uses the word *viol* (rape). However, the Arabic text uses the phrase *hatk al-'ardh* (attack on honor) rather than the more explicit *ightisab* (rape). This alters the character of the crime from a violent sexual

offense against an autonomous individual to an offense that primarily affects family honor. Consequently, if the victim is not married, the rapist may avoid punishment by marrying her and expunging the dishonor. In keeping with this view of women's autonomy, spousal rape is not outlawed (Marzouki, 2010).

Furthermore, while honor violence is usually deemed to be a "family matter," it is important to remember that violence directed at women in general does not merely come at the hands of family and community neighbors, but increasingly at the hands of religious extremists and terrorist groups who attack anyone they deem not following fundamentalist teachings. These are a few of the issues that were reawakened during the Hirak Movement.

5. THE HIRAK MOVEMENT

In late February 2019, when Bouteflika was nominated for a fifth term as president, a peaceful, pro-democratic youth protest movement (known as the Hirak) galvanized the populace. People, including many women rushed to the streets *en masse* to protest not only Bouteflika, but also the military and systemic governmental corruption. Given mounting pressure, Bouteflika was forced to resign his post as president in April 2019.

Following the ouster of Bouteflika, Army Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaid Saleh assumed the role of caretaker, and a presidential election was scheduled for December 12, 2019. Given a field of candidates that seemed to be aligned with the Bouteflika establishment, the Hirak boycotted the December 12, 2019 election and sustained their protests. Still, the vote was held as promised, and Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected president. Although Tebboune pledged to carry out necessary reforms, he faced serious challenges in winning over the public trust. Tebboune did little to win the public trust, as many still see him as an operative of the old regime. According to a report released by the Brookings Institution,

The military's retreat behind the scenes, where it had been under Bouteflika, suggests one success for the movement. But the army remains the center of power behind a civilian façade led by Tebboune. There have been no meaningful changes to make the electoral system more credible, and no empowerment of the parliament or the judiciary to constrain the presidency. Meanwhile, the prosecutions of regime figures have been limited to the Bouteflika clan. The Algerian regime has thus far survived the protests by using a combination of divide-and-rule tactics and targeted repression. It initially sought to polarize protestors along ethnic lines by arresting protestors waving the Amazigh flag. When that failed, it arrested prominent opposition figures, along with hundreds of other protestors. The regime also pursued December presidential elections despite public rejection and tried to co-opt certain opposition groups into its plan (Grewal, 2020).

Indeed, the government has been particularly draconian in dealing with protestors. According to a report by Human Rights Watch,

Algeria's authorities have jailed dozens of people for peaceful protests in the six months since the beginning of a wave of street demonstrations that forced the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The authorities have arrested people for peacefully carrying a flag or a protest sign. They jailed a veteran of the independence war for criticizing the army, shut down meetings by political and other nongovernmental groups and blocked a major news website. While large street protests have continued every Friday, police forces have deployed massively in Algiers' central streets and squares and at checkpoints, effectively limiting the number of people who can reach the march, and then tightly controlling those who do (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

As protestors refused to give up the fight, President Tebboune proposed changes to the constitution, and a referendum was put up for vote on November 2, 2020. The changes were passed with nearly 67 percent of voters approving the initiative. However, according to the National Independent Elections Authority (ANIE) chief Mohamed Charfi, turnout for the vote was a paltry 24 percent (Al Jazeera, 2020). The low turnout was due in part to the fact that the Hirak boycotted the vote, claiming that the changes in the document do not represent true changes on the ground. For example, under the new provisions, Tebboune will continue to enjoy much the same prerogatives as Bouteflika, including remaining as the president of the High Council of the Magistracy, which has the power to appoint and dismiss judges at will. Tebboune also maintains the power to be able to vote down any law passed by the senate. According to Mustapha Buchachi, a former member of parliament, "So the president is directly involved in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of

government. What's more, Tebboune would also be in charge of all regulatory bodies, including those responsible for auditing government expenditure. This constitution gives the president the powers of an emperor" (Al Jazeera, 2020). Echoing Buchachi, constitutional researcher Massensen Cherbi of Sciences Po Universite' in Paris argues, that if passed, it will be "The most authoritarian constitution in the entire Mediterranean" (Al Jazeera, 2020).

The Hirak Movement also ushered in a revival of strong young female activists who saw it as a chance to complete the unfinished business of their foremothers in the fight for women's justice. Writing for *The Slate*¹, Samira Houari Laplatte describes the re-emergence of the feminist aspect of the movement as follows:

The Hirak, a popular protest movement in Algeria, brought feminists of a new genre to the fore. Their ambition is to go beyond the work carried out by their elders to denounce, via this pacifist movement, the iniquities of the Family Code also called the Code of infamy, that Algerian history has sedimented. Like every Friday since February 22, 2019, they gather in family, between friends, ready to face the army and the capacity. These Algerian women, who number in the thousands across the country, parade through the streets of Algiers, Oran, Tlemcen ... Hair in the wind or veiled, standing among the crowd, in a mix of generations and cultures, they compete in ingenuity to reject the fifth term of the outgoing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, severely weakened following a cerebrovascular accident (stroke). "There is only Chanel to do the 5", is one of their slogans (Houari-Laplatte, 2021).

Echoing these sentiments, and highlighting the groundbreaking work of those such as Djamila Bouhired, Malia Bouattia of the *Middle East Eye* notes that,

Algerian women were, in so many ways, betrayed in the aftermath of the revolution and independence, as the regime consolidated its power across every institution. The demands and critique of leading female activists were pushed aside and denounced as being counter to the "national interest". The contributions of former female revolutionaries were, at best, selectively taught in schools, often consigned to obscurity in public national archives. Outside of some oral and written accounts, along with videos of speeches that have resurfaced thanks to the internet, you would hardly hear of the likes of freedom fighters such as Djamila Bouhired. But activists like her - who were tortured, imprisoned and faced the death sentence for opposing French colonialism - keep the fire of the liberation struggle alive in the collective memory of the people (Bouattia, 2020).

Given this renewed push for ending violence against women in Algeria, to what extent can we expect the Hirak Movement to fulfill the unfinished business that started with the revolution? What does the movement actually portend in terms of finally addressing honor violence and femicide in a legitimate and applied manner? The following section will address these issues and the challenges facing women's rights moving forward.

6. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Without question, the first four months of 2021 finds Algeria in a precarious situation. President Tebboune, still attempting to get the government in order, has struggled to meet the demands of the people. Beginning in January and strengthening through February, March and April, Hirak has continued to organize mass protests throughout the country. Although the numbers of protestors gathering at these almost weekly events do not match the volume of people that gathered at protests last spring, they still number in the thousands.

The government is still in disarray. On January 1, 2021, President Tebboune freed top officials that were jailed during the 2019 protests that led to the ouster of former president Bouteflika. One of the men released was Bouteflika's brother, who was deemed to be the "might" behind the Bouteflika regime. The release caused outrage among protestors who deem the past and current regimes as corrupt.

The following day, on January 2, 2021, President Tebboune signed the new Constitution into law. We remember that the document received little support when it was pushed forward via a November 2020 referendum. Under the new

¹ The article has been translated based on the content of Slate.fr by www.slate.fr.

Constitution, Tebboune retains many of the powers that his predecessor, Bouteflika, often abused. This has led many to believe that business will continue as usual.

Amidst continued weekly protests, and frustrated with criticism since he took office, Tebboune decided to dissolve Parliament on February 17, 2021. He set a goal of 48 hours to fully reshuffle the government. New legislative elections are scheduled for June 12, 2021, followed by local and municipal elections. Tebboune promises that there are new safeguards in place to ensure fair, corrupt-free elections. We will wait to see how this pans out, particularly given the widely criticized elections of 2017.

In terms of women's rights, there have been significant developments. For example, there are now currently 30 organizations in Algeria that are specifically devoted to women's rights. Additionally, women have an equal opportunity to hold public office. According to the Borgen Project, "In 2012, about 30% of seats in the government's cabinet were held by women, and again in 2014. Women also make up half of the judges, 44% of magistrates and 66% of justice professionals in lower courts" (Lebedun, 2021).

Despite these advancements, there is still much work to be done. In the midst of a renewed social justice movement in Algeria, combined with a global pandemic, Kahina Bouagache wrote a piece published by the Wilson Center in combination with the Middle East Women's Initiative on March 8, 2021, which summarizes the ongoing violence against women:

Unfortunately today, women are still struggling to ensure their fundamental right to life. In fact, emerging data shows an increase in calls to domestic violence helplines since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of 2020, over 50 women in Algeria have been victims of femicide, and the death toll is expected to rise due to the silence of the authorities and a society that regards domestic violence as a private, household matter. Considered men's 'property', women are expected not to complain about their situation. On paper, Algeria's laws appear ideal. The constitution clearly states: "*All citizens are equal before the law. No discrimination shall prevail because of birth, race, sex,*" etc... However, despite advancement in the letter of the law, women's footholds have been shirking for over two decades – becoming nearly non-existent – fed by poverty, femicide, domestic and sexual violence, social inequalities, and more. These persistent injustices are fueled by traditional and cultural beliefs that men have a right to control women and girls, making them vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Women who manage to stand for up their rights very often find themselves disfranchised economically and ostracized socially (Bouagache, 2021).

Fleshing out the picture a bit more, Dalia Ghanem, resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, reminds us that femicide remains a serious *current* problem in Algeria:

On Jan. 26, an Algerian journalist from the public channel TV4 Tamazight, Tinhinane Lacob, was murdered by her husband. Just two days earlier, on Jan. 24, Warda Hafedh, a 45-year-old mother of five, was murdered by her spouse. Warda was hit in the head three times with a hammer and stabbed in the heart five times. The attack took place in front of her six-year-old daughter. Tinhinane and Warda are but two victims among many. Last October, the story of Chaïma, a 19-year-old who was kidnapped, raped, beaten, and burned alive in the small town of Thénia, made headlines. The poignant video of Chaïma's mother calling on President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to order the death penalty against her daughter's killer gave rise to a debate on social media over its use. The death penalty is still on the books in Algeria but has been suspended since 1993 following a moratorium. According to local media, President Tebboune called for the application of a "maximum sentence without the possibility of relief or pardon." Chaïma's murder and other recent killings have sparked outrage across Algeria. Many Algerians have expressed their anger on social media over this dangerous trend of violence against women, with the hashtag #WeLostOneOfUs trending on Twitter. In Algiers, Béjaïa, Constantine, and Oran, hundreds of women defied pandemic lockdown restrictions to protest and voice their anger over the increase in femicides in the country and the state's inertia. Femicide and other gender-based violence are turning into a real public-health crisis (Ghanem, 2021).

Ghanem presents us with the contemporary facts on the ground in Algeria when it comes to continuing violence against women. Bouagache reminds us that issues of honor violence and femicide are not novel in Algerian society; rather, they are products of a culture that has long treated women as sub-human. True, some progress has been made. Pioneers such as Djamila Bouhired paved a narrow path toward promoting awareness of the plight of women. Others, like her great-niece, Nahla Naili, widened the path a bit more. The women of the Hirak Movement have a unique chance to pour the road into concrete. However, they face many challenges. Only when society can actually come to terms with its past, seriously reflect on its views on women, and fully reconcile the notion that women's rights are human rights, can we expect the unfinished business began by those such as Djamila Bouhired to become a reality.

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