

## **Politics and Gender Bias in the Production of Historical Knowledge: Reassessing Muslim Loyalism during the Algerian War of Independence**

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**Abstract:** This article examines the different ways in which the engagement of Muslim political loyalists is represented in the historiography. Confronted with very few archives available to understand why some Muslim Algerians still supported French colonial rule up to its last days, historians have used a materialist lens, supported by gender conventions, to explain the incomprehensible: while the men were self-interested opportunists, the women were naïve and manipulated middle-class “évoluées.” The description of their activity in different locations (the men in newspapers’ current affairs pages and in military documents, the women in people magazines) has confirmed that assessment. This article argues that we should consider more critically the archives produced by the French state and medias of the time in order to understand the multiple ways in which former subjects negotiated the end of colonialism.

**Keywords:** French Empire, Algerian war, decolonization, political loyalism, gender, archives.

One of the most hotly-debated political and historical issues facing us today concerns the participation of colonised peoples in the construction and administration of colonial empires – a role commonly labelled as ‘collaboration’.<sup>1</sup> Whereas post-colonial states and the children of former colonised subjects argue about imperial legacies, and their pervasiveness and impact on identity politics, historians have disagreed about the extent of this participation; its importance in defining the nature of and support for colonial rule; and finally, on the social, political and economic justifications for this participation.

The dispute has been further intensified by the fact that this participation calls into question post-colonial nationalist meta-narratives which present the anti-colonial struggle as the natural response of colonial subjects, and the continuing historiographical concentration on anti-colonial resistance and nationalist movements.

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1. See Martin J. Wiener’s critical study on “The Idea of ‘Colonial Legacy’ and the Historiography of Empire,” *The Journal of the Historical Society* 13 (1) (2013): 1-32. See also Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122-9; Vivian Bickford-Smith, “African Nationalist or British Loyalist? The Complicated Case of Tiyo Soga,” *History Workshop Journal* 71 (2011): 74-97; and Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

The use of the term ‘collaboration’ to define the participation of colonised peoples in imperial governance raises further problems, insofar as it evokes a specific historical context, namely the active collaboration with Nazi occupation. The French historian Jean Suret-Canale warned as early as 1982 against the use of labels like ‘collaboration’ and ‘resistance,’ precisely because they were coloured by the history of the Second World War and they evoked ambiguous connotations.<sup>2</sup> The notion of betrayal which is inherent in the idea of collaboration begs the question: ‘betrayal of what?’, or ‘of whom?’, and the answer is very often the betrayal of a nation (either innate, waiting to appear, or perhaps yet to be born) – an anachronistic concept imposed by the present on the past.

Even today collaboration continues to be studied in terms of an ethical choice dictated by political and economic interests.<sup>3</sup> Yet, this perspective is inadequate for an accurate comprehension of less concrete forms of engagement with colonial authorities, such as everyday compromises, cooperation or even political loyalism. The challenge, therefore, is to find a vocabulary which embraces the efforts made by colonial subjects to explore the limits and the opportunities of their situation, and the strategies they employed to improve their lot and that of their communities.<sup>4</sup>

Having set out this historiographical and methodological framework, I would now like to turn to a specific case study, namely that of the Muslim Algerians who supported the French regime during the War of Algerian Independence. In my discussion, I do not consider the *harkis*, the Muslim military auxiliaries of the French army whose pre-independence experiences are still insufficiently studied, but I rather focus on five individuals who joined the political struggle alongside the French authorities during the last years of the war.<sup>5</sup> These women

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2. Jean Suret-Canale, “‘Résistance’ et ‘Collaboration’ en Afrique Noire Coloniale,” in *Études Africaines Offertes à Henri Brunschwig*, ed. Henri Brunschwig and Jan Vansina (Paris: École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1982), 319-31.

3. Marjorie Dryburgh, “Rewriting Collaboration: China, Japan and the Self in the Diaries of Bai Jianwu,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 68 (3) (2009): 689-714; Yumi Moon, “Immoral Rights: Korean Populist Collaborators and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1904-1910,” *American Historical Review* 118 (1) (2013): 20-44.

4. Historians Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have suggested using ‘contingent accommodation’ as an alternative formulation to define the participation, mostly political, of local mediators in the management of empire [Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 12].

5. On the *Harkis*, see Charles-Robert Ageron, *Genèse de l’Algérie algérienne* (Paris: Éditions Bouchène, 2005), 601-23; Tom Charbit, *Les harkis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Fatima Besnaci-Lancou and Gilles Manceron (eds), *Les Harkis dans la colonisation et ses suites* (Paris: L’Atelier, 2008); Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound That Never Heals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and François-Xavier Hautreux, “L’engagement des harkis (1954-1962). Essai de périodisation,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 90 (2) (2006): 33-45, and Hautreux, *La guerre d’Algérie des harkis*,

and men were respectively Chérif Sid-Cara (1902-99), his sister Nafissa Sid-Cara (1910-2002), Kheira Bouabsa (b. 1931), Rebiha Khebtani (1926-2006) and Saïd Boualam (1906-1982). All five were active in support of French sovereignty until they were removed from office on 3 July 1962, the day that General de Gaulle proclaimed Algerian independence.



Fig. 1: Chérif Sid-Cara



Fig. 2: Nafissa Sid-Cara



Fig. 3: Kheira Bouabsa



Fig. 4: Rebiha Khebtani



Fig. 5: Saïd Boualam

(Reproduced by permission of the Archives de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris).

These five individuals are not entirely unknown to specialists in the history of the Algerian War, but very few have paid them any attention. Political loyalism during the war of independence is by all accounts understudied.<sup>6</sup> Even fewer historians have taken these loyalists seriously and studied both their experiences and motivations. The best known are Nafissa Sid-Cara and Saïd Boualam – Nafissa Sid-Cara because of her role in the Debré government, and Saïd Boualam because of his role as a leader of a *harka* (auxiliary military corps) in the Ouarsenis region of north-west Algeria, rather than of his position as Vice-President of the National Assembly. On the whole,

1954-1962 (Paris: Perrin, 2013). On the post-independence period, see the recent book by Claire Eldridge, *From Empire to Exile: History and Memory Within the Pied-Noir and Harki Communities* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016). The review *Les Temps Modernes* published in 2011 an extremely valuable Special Issue Edited by Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, Liliane Kandel and Alain David, published by Gallimard: “Les harkis 1962-2012: les mythes et les faits,” (66: 5).

6. The recent and important historiographical assessment of the Algerian War prepared by historian Raphaëlle Branche does not address the question of Muslim political loyalism (see “Bilan historiographique de la guerre d’Algérie des années 2000 à aujourd’hui.” Report sponsored by the Institut de recherche stratégique de l’Ecole militaire, submitted on 29 March 2011, retrieved from: <http://raphaellebranche.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/RAPPORT-29-mars-2011.pdf>).

the historiography has been disdainful of these loyalists who are presented as “symbolic appointments” and “propaganda weapons.”<sup>7</sup> In this article, I will show that these conventional assessments result from a lack of critical engagement with the records produced since the Algerian War, as well as a yet pervasive historiographical unwillingness to take these loyalists, and the ideas that motivated their actions, seriously.

Confronted with very few archives available to understand why some Muslim Algerians still supported French colonial rule up to its last days, historians have used a materialist lens, supported by gender conventions, to explain what appears to be beyond understanding: while the men were self-interested opportunists, the women were naïve and manipulated middle-class “évoluées” (French-educated women who had supposedly turned their back on traditional values and behaviours). This general assessment is confirmed by the description of these individuals in different media: the men appeared in newspapers’ current affairs pages and in military documents while the women, showcased by the French authorities as empowered women paving the way for the emancipation of all Muslim women, were more often pictured in people magazines. Yet, the conditions in which these archives were produced need to be more fully explored and incorporated into our analysis of imperial loyalism and decolonisation. Historians have already investigated the use by military authorities of propaganda, and pictures more particularly, to undermine anti-colonial fighters and suggest wide support for French rule.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, this article calls for a broader engagement with the colonial archive. As Antoinette Burton argued twelve years ago, awareness of “the role of imperial archives in shaping the imaginations of historians” is critical to assess ways in which gender conventions influenced the production of documents, their circulation and scholarly engagement with those archives.<sup>9</sup>

Chérif Sid-Cara was a doctor who went into politics in the 1930s. As well as holding local office, he was senator for Oran from 1946 to 1953, then deputy for Oran between 1953 and 1955. He was elected both times on a combined Franco-Muslim list endorsed by the colonial administration. In the Senate, he joined the Democratic Left. After the insurrection broke out on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1954, Chérif Sid-Cara closed ranks with the French authorities and voted in favour of introducing a state of emergency. At the same time, he did not grant his support blindly but pushed forward a programme of immediate social and economic

7. Arthur Asseraf, “Weapons of Mass Representation: Algerians in the French Parliament, 1958-62,” in *Algeria Revisited: History, Culture and Identity*, ed. Rabah Aïssaoui and Claire Eldridge (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 79-98.

8. Recent important contributions to this topic include Marie Chominot, “Guerre des images, guerre sans image? Pratiques et usages de la photographie pendant la guerre d’indépendance algérienne, 1954-1962,” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Paris 8, 2008).

9. Antoinette Burton, “Archives Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories,” in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 281.

reform. In the period between 1955 and 1958 when Algeria was not represented in the National Assembly, Chérif Sid-Cara was appointed secretary of state for Algeria in June 1957, a portfolio he shared until April 1958 with Dr. Abdelkader Barakrok (1915-2006) and the socialist Marcel Champeix. Thus, Sid-Cara and Barakrok became the first Muslims to hold ministerial positions in the French state apparatus.

Sid-Cara played an active role in the *coup d'état* of 13 May 1958 which aimed at preventing the formation of a government favourable towards negotiations with the Algerian nationalists. A group of top military officials and political representatives that included Sid-Cara established a *Comité de Salut Public* (Committee of Public Safety), of which he became co-president. The *Comité* believed that only General Charles de Gaulle was able to maintain French Algeria within the Republic and they supported his appointment as Prime Minister – after claiming power back, De Gaulle organised a change of regime whereby the Fourth Republic gave way to the Fifth following the September 1958 referendum. Three months later, he was elected President of the French Republic.

Historians have in general overlooked the participation of this group of Muslim loyalists in the *putsch*, which they interpret as the expression of the frustrations of the army and the settlers combined.<sup>10</sup> Yet, their participation is extremely significant because, over and above the motives of each individual concerned, it aspired to become a symbol of reconciliation between the European population and Muslim Algerians, as well as of the consensus of both communities in favour of a new reforming regime.

When historians have bothered to concern themselves at all with Sid-Cara, their judgement has been unequivocal: he was nothing but an opportunist manipulated by the French.<sup>11</sup> Since Sid-Cara left no private papers to explain his motives, virtually any interpretation of his political stance has become permissible. As for the public archives, they disappeared when Chérif Sid-Cara, like most ministers in that period, took most of his files away with him when he left office.

In order to assess his motivations, we can currently draw on the following sources:

a. His public speeches in parliament and the media.

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10. Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 281-87; John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, 2nd ed), 172; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168; Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 232-34. French historians have generally similarly overlooked the participation of these loyalists to the coup.

11. See for example Bernard Droz, "L'élection législative du 30 novembre 1958 en Algérie," *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire* (358-359) (2008): 29-44; and Asseraf, "Weapons of Mass Representation."

b. A few documents found among the papers of his sister Nafissa, which are stored in the French National Archives.

c. A biographical notice in Wikipedia.<sup>12</sup> The sources cited in the Wikipedia notice include a summary of historians' verdict on these loyalists.

d. A website dedicated to the village of Misserghin, in the Oran department, where Chérif Sid-Cara served as a mayor up to July 1962. This site was created by his son and focuses on the Sid-Cara family.<sup>13</sup> It presents a peaceful and nostalgic vision of the 1950s, with photos of *colons* and Muslims together. The war is assiduously forgotten. Instead, we find a united village where children are going to school and people are enjoying a meal under Chérif Sid-Cara's administration.

e. Lastly, there is the website of Raoul Salan's friends, a leader of the 1958 coup to bring back General de Gaulle, and of the 1961 Algiers *putsch* to overthrow him. Salan was the director of the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète). The Salan website includes a biographical note that traces Chérif Sid-Cara's professional and political career. It mentions Sid-Cara's participation in the *coup d'état* of 1958, his close links with Salan and his testimony in favour of Salan when he was brought before the Military High Court.



**Fig. 6 and 7:** Screenshots from the Misserghin website.

Source: [http://www.misserghin.com/relance.php?nom\\_apel=http://www.misserghin.com/mis\\_p4.htm](http://www.misserghin.com/relance.php?nom_apel=http://www.misserghin.com/mis_p4.htm). Accessed 14 August 2019.

In addition to these sources, we have political articles published in contemporary newspapers like *Le Monde*.<sup>14</sup> They describe Sid-Cara's political

12. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A9rif\\_Sid\\_Cara](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A9rif_Sid_Cara).

13. [http://www.misserghin.com/relance.php?nom\\_apel=http://www.misserghin.com/mis\\_p4.htm](http://www.misserghin.com/relance.php?nom_apel=http://www.misserghin.com/mis_p4.htm).

14. *Le Monde*, 'Pour une classe moyenne musulmane,' 8 March 1955; 'M. SID CARA: la loi-cadre ouvre la voie de la fédération et laisse ouverte celle de l'intégration,' 31 March 1958; 'M. SID CARA: la rébellion c'est la destruction et la France la reconstruction,' 14 May 1958; 'SID CARA AURAIT ACCEPTÉ de présider le Comité central de salut public algérien,' 22 May 1958; 'Le général Massu

activity and public engagements. They add up to an image of a man loyal to the French State, but one who also distanced himself from the Debré government once the plan for self-determination was under way. We next meet him at the Salan trial characterised as a die-hard, unfailing partisan of French Algeria.

To fully understand his career, we must rather rely on his speeches in parliament and opinion columns he published in newspapers, and take the convictions he publicly espoused at their face value. If others wish to attribute beliefs to Sid-Cara which are not based on the oral and written evidence he himself produced, the onus of proof surely lies on them to demonstrate their case.

Sid-Cara's professional career is a key context to explain his convictions. He studied medicine in Algiers, Paris and Bordeaux. He worked as an intern in Oran, obtained his doctorate in medicine and went on to specialise in colonial medicine, hygiene, epidemiology, malariology and physical and health education in schools. He worked as a general medical practitioner in Oran during the 1930s and was appointed medical inspector of Oran's schools. In the 1940s, he became president of the three largest sports clubs of Oran (one Muslim, one European and one Jewish).<sup>15</sup> He clearly devoted his life to medicine and advances in public health. He campaigned for the welfare and social progress of his fellow Muslims most notably in the development of public education and hospital-building. He also worked to give Muslims better access to the public authorities. His attachment to France and his political loyalism can therefore be placed in the context of his devotion to the cause of social progress and public health. He believed that France possessed the technology and financial resources needed to pursue these ideals. In his eyes, France was a benefactor with the capacity to promote social progress.

The November 1958 elections marked the first instance of female Muslim participation in an election after they had been granted the right to vote four months earlier. On this occasion, three Muslim women were elected to the National Assembly. All three owed their nomination to the MSF (*Mouvement de solidarité féminine*), the Women's Solidarity Movement set up by Lucienne Salan and Suzanne Massu, the wives of the two generals who led the coup of May 1958. This movement was financed by the army and was intended to mobilise the support of Muslim women.

Nafissa Sid-Cara, Rebiha Khebtani and Kheira Bouabsa were elected on pro-Gaullist lists promoting national reconciliation. Nafissa Sid-Cara became

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et M. Sid Cara élus présidents du Comité central de salut public,' 24 May 1958; 'M. SID-CARA: le référendum est le premier pas vers l'intégration,' 25 September 1958; 'M. SID CARA: votre "oui" orientera la décision du chef du gouvernement,' 26 September 1958, etc...

15. For further biographical details see the Assemblée Nationale's website: [http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/\(num\\_dept\)/6828](http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/6828).

deputy for Algiers, Bouabsa for Mascara and Khebtani for Sétif. Nafissa was a single woman aged 48, eight years younger than her brother Chérif. She came from a family of schoolteachers and she herself taught literature in a *lycée*. In January 1959, she was appointed to Prime Minister Michel Debré's government as secretary of state for Algerian social affairs and the reform of the legal status of Muslims.

Rebiha Khebtani was 32 years-old, born in Bougie (Bejaïa), a housewife and mother of three children. She had a good primary school education (she obtained her *certificat d'études primaire* (primary school leaving examination) and attended two years of *cours complémentaires* (upper primary level). At the age of 15, she married Abdelkader Khebtani, the son of family friends, himself aged 17 and with a comparable education, who soon became a successful businessman. Rebiha and Abdelkader Khebtani joined the *Comité de Santé Publique* of Sétif from the outset, on 14 May 1958. Rebiha Khebtani was also appointed vice-president of the MSF of Sétif when the movement was established. Her husband stood for election in 1958 in the same list as her, though in an alternate position.<sup>16</sup> In April 1959, she was elected mayor of Sétif. That election was not planned by the authorities who took note of the way in which she imposed herself upon the other candidates even though they campaigned against her, pointing out that she was not a local.<sup>17</sup>

Kheira Bouabsa was 26 years-old, single, and a teacher in Mascara. She was the youngest deputy elected to the Assembly. These three women had thus received a fairly thorough schooling at a time when only 7 Muslim girls in 1000 attended French schools (as opposed to 84 boys per 1000).

Historians have remained sceptical about the election of Sid-Cara, Bouabsa and Khebtani. They interpret it as a propaganda coup for the French authorities. They speak of the political careers of these women in inverted commas and usually focus on their image in contemporary media.<sup>18</sup>

16. See the 'Fiches de Renseignements' (information sheets) produced by the Renseignements Généraux (Intelligence Service of the police) on Rebiha Khebtani at the Archives d'Outre-Mer (AOM), Aix-en-Provence (France), Préfecture de Sétif, 937//83.

17. Renseignements Généraux to the Sétif Préfecture, 23 April 1959, AOM, Préfecture de Sétif, 937//83.

18. The women's "political career" is mentioned in Ryme Seferdjeli, "French 'Reforms' and Muslim Women's Emancipation during the Algerian War," *Journal of North African Studies* 9 (4) (2004): 53, while Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954-62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 292 wrote about 'the photogenic Rebiha Khebtani [...] the Bardot look-alike.' See also Elizabeth Perego, "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) (2015): 349-73.



**Fig. 8** (left): Nafissa Sid-Cara in 1958. Credit: Corbis via Getty Images.  
**Fig. 9** (right): Nafissa Sid-Cara outside the Elysée Palace, September 1966.  
 Credit: Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images.

Nafissa Sid-Cara is seen as no more than a puppet, albeit an elegant one, manipulated and silenced by the government. Only her pretty white hat reveals her hidden presence in the official picture of the 1959 government.



**Fig. 10:** General de Gaulle, Prime Minister Michel Debré and the members of his government, 10 January 1959. Source: Archives nationales/ Service photographique de la présidence de la République/5AG1/1052/1226/8017.

She is yet more visible in a photo taken by the media:



**Fig. 11:** Same government, different angle. © Public domain. Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DACXfYCWsAA4qar?format=jpg&name=900x900>.

These two pictures, an official and a commercial one, illustrate Nafissa Sid-Cara's position at the time. She is hidden in the public record, or rather brought to light when appropriate, while visible in the private records, whether they are media reports, radio broadcastings, public speeches given at formal events, celebrations, visits in the metropolis or Algeria.<sup>19</sup>



**Fig. 12:** Rebiha Khebtani, deputy of Setif; **Fig. 13:** Kheira Bouabsa, deputy of Mascara. Source: Archives de l'Assemblée nationale.

19. *Le Monde*, 'Mlle SID CARA: persévérer dans la voie de la solidarité,' 14 May 1959; 'Mlle SID CARA: il faut des secours en espèces aux sinistrés de Melouza,' 27 February 1960; 'Cet acte de violence ne rapportera que honte et infamie à ses auteurs déclare Mlle SID CARA à l'Assemblée nationale,' 5 May 1960; 'Mlle Sid Cara: toute solution du problème algérien passe par la masse populaire,' 7 June 1960; 'Mlle SID CARA: abordons courageusement l'autodétermination,' 21 May 1960; 'Mlle SID CARA rappelle le rôle que doit jouer en Algérie la communauté européenne,' 07 June 1961.

Khebtani was presented as a blonde pin-up girl, with her bleached hair, her low-cut neckline and her leopard-skin blouse. The insistence of the media of the time on her appearance has even led a contemporary historian wondering “about her real role as deputy-mayor and as a deputy.”<sup>20</sup> However, the newspapers of Sétif reveal the political activity of their deputy: she promoted, for example, policies aimed at lifting the social and economic conditions of Muslim people; worked towards easing prison conditions for Muslim detainees through the distribution of food packages during Ramadan; and even obtained the early release of a number of F.L.N supporters of the Sétif region in May 1961.<sup>21</sup> It is nevertheless significant that such a reflection could be expressed, because it shows the deep scepticism of historians confronted to political choices they find hard to explain.

As for Kheira Bouabsa herself, she remained invisible as nobody mentioned her, not even her short hairstyle and her ruby lipstick. Even today, historians barely mention her other than to cast her in a passive role: “a schoolteacher in Mascara ... [she] was plucked out of obscurity and encouraged to run as a deputy.”<sup>22</sup> To understand these women’s choices, we need to take public and private archives into account. That is exactly where the problem lies because there are very few documents to work with.

Amongst these three women, Nafissa Sid-Cara is the one we know most about thanks to her position in government. In 2011, that is, ten years after her death, her niece deposited Nafissa Sid-Cara’s public and private papers in the French National Archives. This collection now gives us some basis on which to reassess Nafissa Sid-Cara’s career. Though the niece apparently also offered to contact Chérif Sid-Cara’s descendants to ask them to deposit his papers in the National Archives, the outcome of this request remains uncertain.<sup>23</sup>

Since the transfer of Nafissa Sid-Cara’s papers, an inventory has been drawn up by the archivists which highlights her activities and interests. The classification chosen by the archivists is however problematic because it downplays her agency. Indeed, even though they claimed to have divided the papers chronologically, the classification disconnects Nafissa Sid-Cara’s speeches from her activities; it also emphasises her loyalty to Gaullism as if she had been all along entirely driven by her attachment to de Gaulle and with no reference to her dismay at his treatment of the *harkis*.<sup>24</sup>

20. Seferdjeli, “French Reforms,” 49.

21. AOM, Préfecture de Sétif, 937//83; *Dimanche Matin*, 21 May 1961; *La Dépêche de Constantine*, 11 June 1959, 18 February 1961, 22 February 1961, and 22 May 1961; *Le Journal d’Alger*, 11 June 1959.

22. Asseraf, “Weapons of Mass Representation,” 84.

23. Pascal Geneste and Jean-Pierre Bat, *Archives de Nafissa Sid Cara. Répertoire numérique détaillé du fonds 103 AJ* (Paris: Archives Nationales, 2011), 6. Retrieved from: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/chan/chan/fonds/Inventaire-Cara.pdf>.

24. Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 270-1.

ARCHIVES DE NAFISSA SID CARA	Sommaire
Répertoire numérique détaillé du fonds 103 AJ	103/AJ/ 1 à 11..... 3
par	Archives de Nafissa Sid Cara (1910-2002)..... 3
Pascal GENESTE conservateur en chef du patrimoine	103/AJ/1..... 6
et	Famille Sid Cara..... 6
Jean-Pierre BAT chargé d'études documentaires	103/AJ/2..... 6
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Archives nationales	103/AJ/3..... 6
Paris	La secrétaire d'État chargée des affaires sociales algériennes..... 6
2011	103/AJ/4..... 7
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	La question des musulmans de France, harkis et rapatriés..... 7
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	Les photographies de Nafissa Sid Cara..... 8

**Fig. 14:** The inventory of Nafissa Sid-Cara's papers. Source: Pascal Geneste and Jean-Pierre Bat, *Archives de Nafissa Sid Cara. Répertoire numérique détaillé du fonds 103 AJ* (Paris: Archives Nationales, 2011), Photo by Author.

Given the limits of this methodological framework, the availability of Nafissa Sid-Cara's archives should have enabled historians to put her role under the spotlight. A few studies have appeared recently reassessing her participation in the state effort to reach out to Muslim women.<sup>25</sup> Most studies – and I should stress that their overall number is very limited and reflects limited historiographical interest in these women – have ignored Nafissa Sid-Cara's papers and still perpetuate a negative perception of her role.<sup>26</sup> These studies still advance the argument of manipulation for propaganda purposes, an argument which is supported by the interview given by Nafissa Sid-Cara's niece to historian Ryme Seferdjeli in April 2003, and which recent scholarship is still relying on, without questioning the witness's personal bias and confronting it with Nafissa Sid-Cara's own records, now made available.<sup>27</sup> These historians are still using theoretical parameters that emphasise cynical state intentions and overlook points of view of individuals like Nafissa Sid-Cara, who made as much use of their position as they could to promote the reforms in which they believed.<sup>28</sup>

25. Seferdjeli, "French Reforms"; MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*; Jaime Wadowiec, "Muslim Algerian Women and the Rights of Man: Islam and Gendered Citizenship in French Algeria at the End of Empire," *French Historical Studies* 36 (4) (2013): 649-76; Asseraf, "Weapons of Mass Representation"; Elise Franklin, "A Bridge across the Mediterranean: Nafissa Sid Cara and the Politics of Emancipation during the Algerian War," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 36 (2) (2018): 28-52; Saliha Belmessous, "Emancipation within Empire: an Algerian Alternative during the Era of Decolonization," *History Workshop Journal* 88 (Autumn 2019): 166-8.

26. See Ryme Seferdjeli's recent observation that "Nafissa Sid Cara failed to attract much interest in Algeria during the war, and historical accounts of the Algerian war reflect this by largely ignoring her," in 'A War over the People: The Algerian War of Independence, 1954-1962,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle-Eastern and North African History*, ed. Amal Ghazal and Jens Hanssen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199672530.013.22.

27. See for example Perego, "The Veil of a Brother's Life," 359-60; and Jennifer Kosniowski, "Between History and Fiction: The Destabilisation of Masculinist History in Contemporary Algerian Women's Fiction," (Unpublished PhD dissertation, King's College London, 2014), 36.

28. An important exception is Franklin's "Bridge" article.

As Nafissa Sid-Cara herself said, her political commitment derived from her belief that young Muslim women had the same right as boys to be educated and to improve their situation. Her father was an indigenous schoolteacher who did not hesitate to send his three daughters to a French school in spite of social pressure. Thanks to the education she received, Nafissa Sid-Cara learned independence and enough knowledge to become a teacher of French, despite the restrictions which both the French and Muslims tried to impose on her. She proclaimed publicly that education was a right and that right defined her and dictated her political options: ‘Nothing deterred me from exercising that right, not the more or less astonished looks I got from certain women teachers, nor the advice some people gave me to give up. Nothing! That right has shaped my life [...] that right led me to join the French government appointed by Michel Debré with the approval of General de Gaulle.’<sup>29</sup>

Nafissa Sid-Cara was convinced that traditional Muslim society produced stagnation whereas French education guaranteed social and intellectual progress. Those were the ideas that lied behind her political commitment. De Gaulle’s accession to power in 1958 acted as a catalyst. That was when, at the beginning of June, she asked to work with Lucienne Salan and was appointed Vice-President of the Central Committee for Social Action and Women’s Solidarity.<sup>30</sup> When the authorities were looking for an emblematic figure who could simultaneously represent both the new Algeria and the new France, she took the plunge and applied herself to the reform of Muslim women’s legal status, with particular reference to the family law code. She threw herself into the fray in the battle against conservatism on both sides of the Mediterranean. The legislation in its final form bore scant resemblance to the measures she had envisaged. She deplored the narrow scope of the law, and she had considerable difficulty in persuading Prime Minister Michel Debré and General de Gaulle to accept it. Their priority was to stay on good terms with conservative Muslim notables.<sup>31</sup> As a member of government, she could not express her disappointment publicly, but it was different for Kheira Bouabsa who took to the rostrum in the Assembly to roundly criticise the French government. She acted as the spokeswoman for her Muslim sisters sacrificed, as she put it, by a government which confused Islam with conservatism; and she went on to deplore the fact that ‘France’s reforms were more timid than those recently introduced by truly Muslim countries.’<sup>32</sup> Far from being puppets controlled by the French authorities, Nafissa Sid-Cara and Kheira Bouabsa were modernising women pursuing feminist goals which were far more radical than those of the French State itself.<sup>33</sup>

29. Archives Nationales (Pierrefitte, France), 103 AJ 8, archives de Nafissa Sid-Cara.

30. Fonds Nafissa Sid-Cara, 103 AJ 8.

31. ‘Je me souviens. Conversation téléphonique avec Michel [Debré],’ letter (n.d.) to Michel Debré, Fonds Nafissa Sid-Cara, 103 AJ 8-9.

32. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, no. 34 (11 June 1959): 862-3.

33. Franklin makes a similar point about Nafissa Sid-Cara in “Bridge.” The issue of women’s political participation and the extent of their inclusion in the public space were contentious in most colonial

As for Rebiha Khebtani, she clearly explained the reasons for her political commitment, if one takes her seriously and listens. She herself admitted that she abandoned the veil at the time of the un-veiling ceremonies organised by the colonial authorities in May 1958. In her speech to the National Assembly, she came forward as a symbol of Muslim women's recent empowerment and thanked the French government for the new prospects which had been opened up for her:

“Mister Prime Minister, my dear colleagues [she began], ‘a year ago, I was still a veiled woman. I am today the elected representative of a department of more than one million Muslim French people and only 24,000 European French. And, despite the opinion of our colleague Leenhardt, leader of the Socialist group, I regard myself as just as valuable as the other metropolitan deputies. ... I am proud to be, in the French National Assembly, the spokeswoman of all those who, in the department of Sétif, the rebel stronghold, have definitively broken with a time gone by, and have decided to build the future of Algeria through France, with France and within France.’”<sup>34</sup>

This speech clearly reveals why she and other women decided to place their confidence in the government: as a veiled woman, she had been restricted to the private space and her aspirations were constrained. Her un-veiling gave her access to the outside, and male, world, and enabled her to realise her true potential. This personal declaration of independence evokes the phrase of the pro-independence writer Assia Djebar, who compared a woman's veil to a shroud enveloping the female body and turning her into a ghost. Djebar welcomed the rejection of the veil as a re-occupation of her own body, a new feeling of freedom in both a sensual and an intellectual sense.<sup>35</sup> In Khebtani's case, these notions of freedom and female emancipation were also connected to loyalty towards France and its republican ideals.

The *bachaga* Saïd Boualam is another character whom historians have avoided discussing because of his apparently elusive personality.<sup>36</sup> He was born in Souk-Arhas, a Berber city near the Tunisian frontier built on the remains of the Numidian city of Thagaste, the homeland of Augustine of Hippo.<sup>37</sup> He came from an old family of marabouts and *qa'ids* and wielded great influence over his people. Boualam was a soldier – he had trained at St Cyr – who became a civilian

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contexts – see for example Mina Roces, “Is the Suffragist an American Colonial Construct: Defining ‘the Filipino Woman’ in Colonial Philippines,” in *Women's Suffrage in Asia: Gender, Nationalism and Democracy*, ed. Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 24-58.

34. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, no.34 (June 11, 1959): 870.

35. Assia Djebar, *Les impatients* (Paris: Julliard, 1958); *Ces voix qui m'assiègent: en marge de ma francophonie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999); and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

36. The indigenous leadership organized by the French administration and incorporated into the colonial chain of command included (from top to bottom ranks): *khalifa*, *bash-agma*, *agma*, *qa'id*.

37. Nacéra Benseddik, *Thagaste, Souk Ahras. Patrie de Saint Augustin* (Algiers: Éditions Inas, 2005).

administrator responsible for the Ouarsenis region in north-west Algeria.<sup>38</sup> In November 1954, he set up one of the first *harkas*, the military units that fought with French troops. The historian and ethnologist Jean Servier, who promoted the creation of indigenous military troops to pacify the country, was then sent to supervise Boualam's activity.<sup>39</sup> Boualam's military record during the years of the war was mixed. As a military officer in charge of what was known as the *harka* Boualam, he succeeded in creating a large unit of about 1,500 men who managed to protect successfully the isolated Ouarsenis from separatist attacks. He was also successful in dismantling, in 1956, a *maquis* (group of rural partisan fighters) created by members of the Algerian Communist Party. Moreover, very few Beni Bedouane people, Boualam's constituents, joined the ranks of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Boualam's success lies however less in his ability to instil enthusiasm for the French domination than in his prestigious and charismatic leadership. The French military hierarchy was suspicious of him and took a dim view of his exercise of power which they characterized as 'feudal.'<sup>40</sup>

Boualam supported De Gaulle's return to power and, in 1958, he stood for election as deputy for Orléansville. He was subsequently elected Vice-President of the National Assembly and held the post until 3 July 1962.

In June 1960, Boualam and his friends established the *Front de l'Algérie Française* (French Algeria Front) and he became its president. Its objective was to counteract the influence of the FLN and to prevent de Gaulle from negotiating with them. In October 1961, he declined an invitation from the FLN to join its ranks.<sup>41</sup> We cannot establish whether or not he joined the OAS – he told the army leadership he had not, although he may have been tempted by its illegal methods.<sup>42</sup> However, he certainly approved the formation of an OAS *maquis* in the Ouarsenis, which his son Si Mohamed joined.<sup>43</sup> After the war, Boualam, his family and the *harkis* of Béni-Boudouane settled at Mas-Thibert, a small village in Provence.

Historians have showed little interest in Boualam who seemed to them a feudal leader who lent some exotic legitimacy to a regime anxious to advertise the political inclusion of Muslim Algerians. Photos distributed by the government and published in the press show him dressed in a turban, *gandoura* (a long,

38. Bachaga Boualam, *Mon pays, la France* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1962), 119; [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche.asp?num\\_dept=1002](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche.asp?num_dept=1002).

39. Guilia Fabbiano, "Les harkis du bachaga Boualam," in *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale (1830-1962)*, ed. Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, Ouanassa Siari Tengour and Sylvie Thénault (Paris: La Découverte; Algiers: Barzakh, 2012), 635.

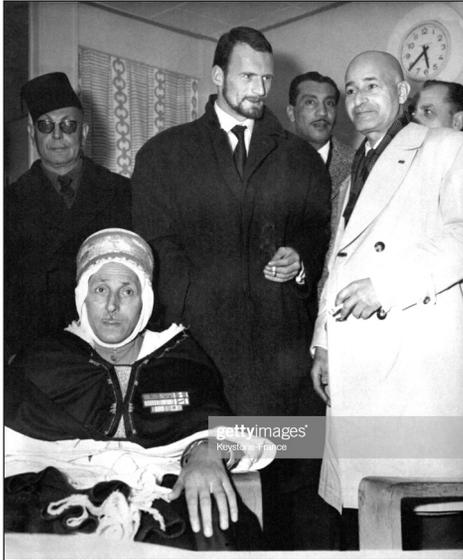
40. Général de Division Massu to Général d'Armée Aérienne, Algiers, 15 July 1959, in Services Historiques de la Défense (Paris), GR 1H 1397, folder 7-9.

41. Mohammed, F.L.N. political leader of the wilaya 4 (Algiers region), zone 3, region 2, to Bachaga Boualam, 22 October 1961, in Services Historiques de la Défense (Paris), GR 1H 2703, folder 6.

42. Général de brigade Boulanger to Général Charles Ailleret, 5 January 1962, Services Historiques de la Défense, GR 1H 2703, folder 6.

43. Michel Roux, *Les harkis ou les oubliés de l'histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 220-3; Olivier Dard, *Voyage au cœur de l'OAS* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), 266-8.

loose gown) and cape, parading his military medals in front of his constituents or presiding over the National Assembly. All that is really remembered is his leadership of the Béni-Boudouane *harka*, and that is usually assessed through the lens of French officers' opinions recorded in the military archives.<sup>44</sup> That is where the 'feudal' tag originates.



**Fig. 15:** Boualam, at Orly airport on 7 December 1958, with Sid-Cara standing on the right side. Credit: Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images



**Fig. 16:** Boualam, in Algeria, standing before members of his harka. Credit: Paris Match via Getty Images



**Fig. 17:** Boualam presiding the National Assembly in Paris, on 23 January 1959. Credit: Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

44. Fabbiano, "Les harkis du bachaga Boualam," 634-6; Hautreux, "L'engagement des harkis"; and *La guerre d'Algérie des harkis*, 131-33.

In recent years, anthropologists working on the *harki* communities and their memories of the Algerian War have become interested in him, by virtue of his influence over the group formed in 1962 and his political activism up to his death in 1982.<sup>45</sup> In order to understand Boualam's career, I propose to juxtapose his speeches to the National Assembly with the three books he wrote between 1962 and 1964.<sup>46</sup>



**Fig. 18:** Boualam's post-independence efforts to keep the voice of French Algeria alive [Photos by Author]

They reveal that Boualam's loyalist politics derived from his ancestors' capitulation to the French in 1847 after the surrender of Emir Abdelkader. Unlike Chérif Sid-Cara who identified France with the modernisation of Algeria, Boualam's allegiance was inspired by his commitment to traditional principles such as honour, trust and respect of one's word. Boualam believed that French and Muslim ways of life were compatible with each other, and that Muslim and European communities could peacefully coexist under French rule. Both he and his people were arabised Berbers to whom the Algerian nationalism proclaimed by independentist groups meant little. He believed in an imagined community which had an imperial structure, embracing a pluralistic society of citizens loyal to the mother country, motivated by shared ideals and defending the common good.

The main stumbling block which handicaps historians working on ways in which colonised subjects engaged with empire, and more specifically on those, allies and loyalists, who supported European imperial rule, is epistemological. Indeed, the problem stems from the malaise afflicting historians dealing with this question – a malaise which reveals the inherent moral and political dimension of the question itself. The profound politicisation of colonial history is an inescapable reality, even more since the September 11 attacks. On the one hand, there are those like the British historian Niall Ferguson who express nostalgia for a supposedly benevolent imperialism while, on the other hand, Edward Said, Nicholas Dirks, Richard Drayton and others claim that the historian has an ethical

45. Giulia Fabbiano, "Les harkis du Bachaga Boualam. Des Beni-Boudouanes à Mas Thibert," in *Les Harkis dans la colonisation et ses suites*, ed. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou and Gilles Manceron (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2008), 113-24; Fabbiano, "Les harkis du Bachaga Boualam," 633-37.

46. Saïd Boualam, *Mon pays, la France* (Paris: France Empire, 1962); *Les Harkis au service de la France* (Paris: France Empire, 1963); and *L'Algérie sans la France* (Paris: France Empire, 1964).

obligation to condemn imperialism and expose its injustices.<sup>47</sup> This ideological issue is responsible for the failure of historians to subject the archives produced by the State and contemporary French media to critical examination. As a result, the historical actors in the conflict, women and men, remain imprisoned within schematic interpretations which deny them their individuality and deprive them of personal agency. The production of scholarship on the participation of Algerian women in the war is particularly revealing of this weakness. Indeed, while a growing number of high-quality studies have investigated women's engagement on the nationalist side and brought to light ways in which they exercised their agency in difficult circumstances, very little is produced on loyalist women who remain symbolically disempowered and therefore still "hidden from history" to quote feminist theorist Sheila Rowbotham.<sup>48</sup> Yet, their experiences need to be recovered despite the constraints imposed by the colonial archive (as an institution and as a collection of documents) and the bias of our historical subjectivities. While Isaiah Berlin reminds us that we should be aware of, and address, the moral claims underneath historical experiences, it remains that, if we prefer understanding to ideology, only then will we succeed in considering, with nuance, the true complexity of colonial realities.<sup>49</sup>

47. See Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2002); Edward Said, "Always on Top," *London Review of Books* 25 (6) (20 March 2003): 3-6; Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 332; Richard Drayton, "Where Does the World Historian Write from? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and the Present of Imperialism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (3) (2011): 671-85; Timothy Parsons, *The Rule of Empires: Those Who Built Them, Those Who Endured Them, and Why They Always Fall* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

48. Djamila Amrane, *Les femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1991); Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (London: Routledge, 1994); Monique Gadant, *Le nationalisme algérien et les femmes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Diane Sambron, *Femmes musulmanes. Guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962* (Paris: Autrement, 2007); Feriel Lalami, "L'enjeu du statut des femmes durant la période coloniale en Algérie," *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 27 (3) (2008): 16-27; Natalya Vince, "To be a Moudjahida in Independent Algeria: Itineraries and Memories of Women Veterans of the Algerian War," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen Mary College, University of London, 2008); Natalya Vince, "Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion and 'Françaises Musulmanes' during the Algerian War of Independence," *French Historical Studies* 33 (3) (2010): 445-74; Martine Caillat, *Femmes berbères dans la guerre d'Algérie: récits de vie* (Lyon: Awal Grand Lyon, 2009); Zohra Driff, *Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN. Zone autonome d'Alger* (Algiers: Chihab Éditions, 2013); Claire Mauss-Copeaux, "Résistantes? Terroristes? Hadjira et Doukha, deux femmes parmi d'autres dans un monde dominé par les hommes. Algérie 1954-62," (Unpublished paper presented at the 'Analyse croisée des formes de terrorisme au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: structure, pouvoir' workshop, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales (IEP), Paris, November 22, 2018) retrieved from: <https://independent.academia.edu/ClaireMaussCopeaux>. On loyalist women, see footnote 25. On women being hidden from history, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against it* (London: Pluto, 1973).

49. On Berlin, see Joshua Cherniss and Henry Hardy, "Isaiah Berlin," in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab: Stanford University, 2018) URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/berlin/>; on understanding versus ideology, see Maya Jasanoff, "The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain (review)," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8 (2007). An example of this complexity is Keith David Watenpaugh's study of Syrian middle-classes' adoption of what they identified as Western middle-class modernity under the French regime. See his *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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العنوان: السياسة والانحياز النوعي للمراة في إنتاج المعرفة التاريخية: إعادة تقييم ولاء المسلمين إبان حرب الاستقلال الجزائرية

ملخص: يبحث هذا المقال في الطرق المختلفة التي يتم بواسطتها تمثيل مشاركة الموالين (المتعاونين) السياسيين المسلمين في الكتابات التاريخية. وقد استخدم المؤرخون زاوية نظر بحثية مادية بحكم ندرة الأرشيفات المتاحة لفهم الأسباب التي دفعت بعض الجزائريين المسلمين إلى دعم الحكم الاستعماري الفرنسي حتى أيامه الأخيرة. ودُعمت زاوية البحث هذه بمنظور نوعي، لتفسير ما يستعصى فهمه: وهكذا تم تقديم الرجال بصفة الأفراد الانتهازيين الذين لا يهمهم سوى تحقيق مصالحهم الذاتية، بينما تم تقديم النساء وكأتم تنتمي كافة إلى الطبقات المتوسطة "المتطورة" وفي الوقت نفسه كنسوة ساذجات يقع التلاعب بهن. ويؤكد وصف نشاط النساء والرجال في مواقع مختلفة (ظهور الرجال في كل من الصحف والوثائق، بينما النساء في المجالات النسوية) هذا التصور. وتدعو هذه المقالة إلى التعامل بصفة نقدية مع الأرشيفات التي أنتجتها الدولة الفرنسية ووسائل الاعلام المتوفرة وقتئذ، سعياً إلى فهم الطرق المتعددة التي تفاوض بها الأشخاص السالف ذكرهم في سياقات إنهاء الاستعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإمبراطورية الفرنسية، الحرب الجزائرية، إنهاء الاستعمار، الولاء السياسي، الجنس، الأرشيف.

**Titre: Politique et parti-pris de genre dans la production du savoir historique: réévaluer le loyalisme musulman pendant la guerre d'indépendance algérienne**

**Résumé:** Cet article étudie les représentations historiographiques de l'engagement des loyalistes politiques musulmans. Confrontés à une paucité d'archives permettant de comprendre les raisons pour lesquelles des Algériens musulmans ont soutenu jusqu'au bout le régime colonial français, les historiens ont utilisé une perspective matérialiste, favorisée par les conventions du genre, pour expliquer ce qui leur était incompréhensible: les hommes sont présentés comme des opportunistes intéressés et les femmes de naïves 'évoluées' de la classe moyenne manipulées par les autorités. Le compte-rendu de leurs activités dans des supports différents (les journaux et les documents militaires pour les hommes, les pages magazines pour les femmes) a renforcé cette perception. Cet article appelle à considérer de manière plus critique les archives produites par l'État français et les médias de l'époque. Cette mise à distance est nécessaire pour comprendre les différentes voies empruntées par les anciens sujets pour négocier la fin du colonialisme.

**Mots-clés:** Empire français, guerre d'Algérie, décolonisation, loyalisme politique, genre, archives.