

The Woman in Algerian Society: Between Social Domination and Empowerment as a Strategic Choice

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ABSTRACT

Women in Algerian society have experienced significant dynamism, closely linked to the changes and transformations that Algerian women have undergone in various fields, whether social, economic, legal, political, or even cultural. This has led to a shift in the status of women, shaped by the ongoing struggle between the inevitability of social domination and the strategic choice of women's empowerment in different areas, such as education and women's participation in economic activity. This article will explore these dynamics in detail.

Keywords: The Status of Women, social domination, empowerment, strategic choice.

INTRODUCTION

Women are an integral part of society and represent the foundational pillar as a building block, playing a significant role in the continuity of the larger social system, especially in relation to their functions tied to their characteristics.

Psychologists, anthropologists, and especially sociologists have shown great interest in studying and analyzing the role of women, each offering their own analysis and perspective, considering women as one of the essential components of the social system on which the family is built. However, they have not been able to fully capture the social realities of women's issues due to the varying roles women have played across different stages and the transformations that have impacted them, altering their lives within both the family and society.

Like other societies, Algerian society has undergone a series of transformations that have had a profound impact on its structure and characteristics, including changes in the roles of women and their family and social responsibilities, which have granted them a specific social status.

Various Algerian studies focusing on the sociology of family and women indicate that women in Algerian society are no longer under traditional social domination as mere dependents controlled by men. Instead, they have become largely subject to historical necessities, as sociologist Alain Touraine suggests. Women's roles are now closely tied to ongoing societal transformations and changes, which have led to the recognition of their social status, the importance of their participation, and the necessity of their empowerment. Women's empowerment has emerged as a key dynamic and a strategic choice that Algerian women strive to achieve.

In light of this, this article will address the major changes and transformations that have occurred regarding women in Algerian society through the following question: **Is the woman in Algerian society still subject to social domination, or has she been selected for an empowerment strategy? What are the key socio-cultural changes and transformations that have affected her?**

Women in Sociological Heritage:

Many sociologists have focused on the issue of women and their role in society, each offering their own analysis and perspective. Their research and studies serve as an important sociological foundation for addressing the issue of women sociologically, including figures such as: August Comte, Emil Durkheim, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Talcott Parsons.

(Ibn Khaldun) almost entirely omits discussion of women in his theory, as if society were entirely male. He mentioned women in only a few instances, reflecting a significant lack in his social and philosophical knowledge about women and ignorance of the structure of human society, which is composed at least half of the female gender.

The ideas of (Ibn Khaldun) supported philosophical thought and were influenced by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. His conception of women was based on the idea of female servitude and gender discrimination, filled with the biological human nature that created the woman as a woman and the slave as a slave.

(Ibn Khaldun)'s view of the nature of women is one of inferiority in relation to man, both in the family and in society, and she remains subordinate to the man and a vessel of the man. This is what Ibn Khaldun mentioned in his Muqaddimah when he said that seeing the sea in a dream indicates authority, and he said: "Because the sea is a great creation that suits being likened to authority, and likewise the snake suits being likened to the enemy due to the magnitude of its harm, and likewise the vessels are likened to women because they are containers."

(Ibn Khaldun) explained that the traits of women (or al-niswān, as he says) are cowardice and lack of the sweetness or traits of pride and 'asabiyyah, while the traits of manhood are those by which state and authority arise. As for the traits of femininity, they lead the state to decline, because they do not possess the qualities that qualify them to establish the state, as they lack courage or the ability to protect and defend themselves.

(Ibn Khaldun) sees that whoever holds authority in the state or in society must be (male), a man, and this is considered a basic condition for holding the position of imam. Women in the time of Ibn Khaldun did not have political power. (Nawal Saadawi, 2022, pp. 121–122).

(August Comte), the founder of sociology, believed that women are not equal to men, attributing gender inequality to biological differences, including physical, mental, and even personal characteristics. According to him, women are considered inferior to men and are entirely subordinate to them due to their physiological composition. He argued that women are physically weaker and mentally inferior, but nature compensates for this by providing them with feelings, emotions, and affections. Comte also rejected any participation of women in decision-making and political involvement, considering political participation to be opposed to nature, which would lead to the decay and destruction of society as a whole (Charles Jacquard, 1909, p: 2018).

In another statement, (Comte) discussed the woman's role, stating that her only role, as the emotional and passive being, is that of a wife and homemaker. She cannot, in any way, compete with men (Simone de Beauvoir, 2008, p. 48).

Comte's ideas about women became clearer through his study of society, its components, and ways to maintain its stability, which he believed could only be achieved through the stability of the family, with women being subordinate to men (Ismat Mohamed Housso, 2009, pp. 36-37).

As for Durkheim, he considered that both society and nature produced men and women, respectively. Society produced men, and nature produced women (Anthony Giddens, 2005, p. 707).

Durkheim did not discuss women specifically, except in the context of anomie and social cohesion or solidarity. He spoke of women in both positive and negative terms: the positive aspect relates to the woman's traditional role in marriage, which contributes to the stability of the family through her duties. The negative aspect, however, ties the woman's sexuality to social phenomena like divorce and suicide. He noted that women play a role in divorce, which can eventually lead to suicide.

Durkheim also connected his study of the family's development and the changing roles within it to the evolving status of women. He believed that stability would not be achieved unless the family structure, with clear roles for both men and women, was stable. He considered the family to be the domain of women (Ismat Mohamed Housso, 2009, pp. 38-39).

Through Durkheim's study of the division of labor, he clarified that the gender-based division of labor forms the foundation of the marital relationship, where each partner depends on and complements the other.

Meanwhile, both (Frederick Engels and Karl Marx) gave special attention to the issue of women's oppression and the discrimination between men and women in society. They attributed the concentration of power in the hands of men and women's subjugation to the economic development that human societies underwent across various stages of their development. Engels, in his works *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and The State*, which were based on the anthropological material of Lewis Morgan, attempted to provide comprehensive explanations of the factors that led to the emergence of gender discrimination, particularly through his interpretation of class exploitation and the rise of private property.

Engels explained that the confinement of women's roles to their status was a result of the development of production forces and the emergence of a system of labor division. As the system of labor division evolved with the development of production and the increased consumption of the community, and the need to exchange surplus production, the system of exchange emerged, leading to the birth of private property. This marked the first instance of class-based societies in human history, especially within the slave society, which not only witnessed the enslavement of women by men but also the enslavement of men by men.

Engels argued that the discrimination between the sexes is linked to the emergence of private property and class exploitation. He stated that women face exploitation, asserting: "The first contradiction and the first class conflict in history coincided with the growing hostility between man and woman under the system of monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression was accompanied by the oppression of women by men" (Adli Abu Tahoun, 2000, p. 200).

Max Weber's analysis of the issue of women is determined by three elements: class, status, and power. For Weber, class is the economic foundation for gender inequality, as it revolves around the owning class and the non-owning class. Accordingly, social status and the privileges associated with it are determined by family background, professional activities, and consumption patterns, which define the form of power whether male or female based on their rights and political power.

In Weber's view, women occupy a lower status due to their role and the lack of economic resources and political rights. Their role is confined to the family, and this role is often valorized.

Max Weber also discussed the patriarchal system in his study of women. According to him, patriarchal authority is one of the oldest forms of legitimate social power. In traditional societies, power is held by men, and the woman's role is confined to caring for her children (Ismat Mohamed Housso, 2009, p. 42).

Herbert Spencer also played a significant role in addressing the issue of women in his early writings. He argued that women should have equal rights with men and rejected the unequal marriage system. However, in his later writings, his views changed, and he suggested that women should focus on their homes and education to be wives and homemakers, rather than working outside.

Spencer considered both women and men as parts of society, each performing a specific role that contributes to societal balance and stability, based on the principle of membership. He also emphasized that a woman's primary function is to nurture and care for her children and husband, ensuring that she raises her children properly. This contributes to the family unit's integrity and stability, which in turn supports the overall stability and integration of society.

Spencer adds that women should stop demanding equality with men in jobs, professions, and positions, arguing that educating women to compete with men in areas such as trade and political positions is foolish. He attributed this to the woman's composition, claiming that she has a smaller brain and a weaker body compared to men, which results in her neglecting her home, family, and children (Ismat Mohamed Housso, 2009, pp. 42-43).

Talcott Parsons, in his theory, explains the importance of the division of labor between men and women, with men specializing in work and production, while women's role is limited to family work, such as

child-rearing, cooking, and so on. He views this division as a natural one that supports the family system in society and helps maintain a certain balance within the social system (Adli Abu Tahoun, 2000, p. 197).

Parsons emphasizes the necessity of separating the functions of men and women. The woman's role is seen as expressive, providing emotional support and caring for her family, while the man's role is instrumental, involving important, hard, and goal-oriented tasks. He focuses on the socialization of children, noting that the family's stability, in which children are supported, is key to successful socialization. The division of labor is based on gender, with women taking on expressive roles and men providing assistance. Parsons further explains that this integrated division of labor is based on biological differences, leading to the stability of the family and society as a whole (Anthony Giddens, 2005, p. 192).

Harriet Martineau made a significant contribution to the issue of women, recognizing their marginalization and oppression. She focused on women as an integral part of society, emphasizing that society cannot be understood or analyzed without considering women. Her contributions played a significant role in the Western feminist movement. Martineau argued that the home was the place assigned to women, where their roles were confined. She considered the home to be a school where women learn virtues such as nurturing and care. She believed that men must exchange roles with women in this "school" to learn these values and behaviors (Ismat Mohamed Housso, 2009, p. 46).

In conclusion, the analyses of these sociologists on the topic of women are based on their views of women and the roles women play in society, depending on the perspective of each scholar and the time period and nature of their societies. Some saw inequality between men and women, while others advocated for gender equality. (Ibn Khaldun) started from the necessity of gender distinction and viewed women as inferior to men, remaining subordinate to them. (August Comte) argued for gender inequality, stating that women are completely subordinate to men and that their role is confined to the home and family. (Durkheim) saw the division of labor as gender-based, discussing both the positive and negative roles of women. (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels) emphasized the importance of gender equality. (Max Weber) linked the issue of women to class, status, and power, stating that their role is confined to the home and family. (Herbert Spencer) initially advocated for gender equality, but later changed his view, stating that if women understood the world of the home, they would not accept it as a substitute. (Talcott Parsons) explained the importance of the gendered division of labor in the family and the roles of both men and women. Finally, (Harriet Martineau) emphasized the need to uplift women, as they complete society.

Socio-Cultural Changes and Transformations of Women in Algerian Society:

The issue of women involves a complex set of factors and intersects with various conditions and topics, whether historical, social, economic, or political. This makes the topic of women a comprehensive social phenomenon. This is what (Marcel Mauss) emphasized, stating that the phenomenon of women or the subject of women as a social phenomenon intersects with various levels, whether economic, social, historical, or political.

Algerian women have undergone many changes and transformations, accompanied by structural shifts in the Algerian social system. Some key features of this transformation and change include:

A- The First Stage: Women and the Domination of the Social Structure in Algerian Society

In traditional Algerian society, women were subjugated to men. The traditional society was male-dominated, where all decisions were made by men, and authority typically rested with the older men in the family (father, grandfather, older brother, husband, etc.) (Mohamed Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 90). Algerian women held a subordinate position compared to men within the social structure that prevailed in the family in traditional society. To understand the status of women in traditional society, it is necessary to start with the man, whether she revolted or submitted, accepted or rejected her position in a world created specifically for men and for their superiority. The father, brother, uncle, and husband are those who set the laws, and women's behaviors are merely reflections of the behaviors men directed toward them.

(Mrabet Fadila, 1967, p. 13). Pierre Bourdieu used the tribe society in Algeria as a model for a patriarchal-centered society to reveal some of the more hidden features within contemporary societies that still function based on male domination through symbolic differentiation between the masculine and the feminine, that is, between what is male and what is female. The biological differences between genders, according to him, particularly the anatomical differences, could appear to be a natural justification for the socially constructed differences between the two genders, especially the sexual division of labor (Pierre Bourdieu, 2009, p. 8).

The extended family holds great significance in Algerian society as the cornerstone of the traditional social structure, governed by a patriarchal system that is evident in various relationships, including the distribution of roles within the family. This relationship extends to mothers, who play a key role in the upbringing and education of children. A woman's social role as a mother is only complete when she raises her children to the point where they are capable of forming their own families.

In this context, "Mustafa Botfennoucht" emphasizes that a woman's status is not derived from her responsibilities or participation in productive work but from her role as a mother, daughter, or sister. She is like the land, a symbol of fertility, giving much more than she takes (Mustafa Botfennoucht, 1984, p. 79).

The status of women and men is no longer determined by biological characteristics but has shifted due to the developments and transformations within the social structure. Human history is no longer influenced by biological existence. The oppression and suppression of women are now linked to the social structure and the various changes and transformations that take place within it. While there may be a connection between a woman's femininity and the social difficulties she faces, this is ultimately just a transfer or transformation where the biological existence of women is used as a tool or means of expressing this social background. The social oppression women experience is not directly linked to their biological characteristics but is rooted in the historical and social transformations that have shaped women's roles in society (Samir Abdu, 1980, p. 17).

B- The Second Stage: Women and Colonial Domination

The period of French colonization had a profound impact on Algerian social reality, bringing about radical and deep changes across various social, cultural, and economic structures. The colonial sociological strategy was focused on women, considering them the central point of attention. They were seen as the key to changing the stereotypical image of the Algerian woman, removing her from the domestic space, and liberating her from the patriarchal system under which she was completely

subjugated to men. The aim was to empower women, who had previously been under male control, and to introduce Western values, enabling them to possess practical and effective means of dismantling Algerian culture.

The colonizer's objective was clear: "If we want to strike at the Algerian society in its structure and its resistance capabilities, we must control the women. We must look behind the veil that hides them, and the houses that the men keep them in." (Fanin Franz, 1975, p. 20)

However, the Algerian woman played a significant role in preserving the identity and values of the Algerian people, which the colonizers tried to erase by all means and impose their domination over.

Colonialism contributed to the deterioration of women's status, confining Algerian women to a state of ignorance and isolation, which hindered their ability to play any role in the development of society. This isolation was not merely based on the traditional family status of women, but was also evident in the condition of Algerian society under colonial rule. The seclusion of women became a refuge for the collective identity by keeping them in the background, away from education and work. Their confinement to the home and their absence from external activities was meant to prevent any confrontation with the colonizers and to avoid direct contact with the colonists, which led to their marginalization. This marginalization resulted in a decline in their social status and deprived them of education and employment opportunities (Boucebci M, 1987, p. 139).

C- The Third Stage: Women for Participation and Struggle

Women's participation in the War of Liberation marked a new beginning and a significant turning point in the history of Algerian women. It signified their transition from traditional roles and colonial domination to active struggle and participation in the war against the colonizer, paving the way for a new trajectory for Algerian women. This transformation granted women a distinguished social status, affording them a greater degree of freedom, participation, and social awareness.

Sociologist Frantz Fanon analyzed the status of women during the revolution in his book *The Sociology of Revolution*, stating: "The Algerian people's war is synonymous with women's freedom and their entry into history. These women are writing heroic pages in Algerian history, breaking away from the narrow and irresponsible world they once inhabited." (Frantz Fanon, 1970, p. 107).

Women fought alongside men in the armed revolution, respecting its principles and contributing across various fields of struggle. They became a powerful political and military force, especially after their recognition in the first political document of the Algerian Revolution at the Soummam Conference in 1956. (Anissa Barakat Harraz, 1985, p. 29).

The participation of women in the War of Liberation was a new beginning and an important turning point in the history of Algerian women. This phase represented a shift from the inherited traditional system, with women transitioning from their traditional roles to an imperative of struggle and participation in the liberation war. It also led to changes in the perceptions of women held by the traditional society during the revolution, marking a new chapter for Algerian women.

Algerian women recognized that the cause was a vital one, linked to a deeper change in the traditional social value system that maintained societal stability. Thus, it became a central issue directly impacting the stability of those cultural and religious systems, making it a pivotal issue in the context

of the revolution. As Mustafa Botfennoucht explained: "During this period, there was a psychological and social rupture that could not be reversed symbolically. The importance of this rupture for women is that it was so easy for the Algerian woman to transition from being a socially isolated element, confined to the home, to becoming an active social agent." (Mustafa Botfennoucht, 1984, p. 282).

D- The Fourth Stage: Women and Empowerment as a Strategic Choice

With the growing socio-cultural dynamics and transformations in Algerian society, these changes have significantly impacted the status of Algerian women. These transformations did not occur by chance, nor were they initially recognized by traditional society. Rather, they resulted from inevitable circumstances, efforts, and social changes that compelled Algerian women to enter the modern era and adapt to urban life. This shift has enabled women in Algerian society today to move beyond the inevitability and dominance of traditional social structures and patriarchal authority toward the necessity of empowerment as a strategic choice. This empowerment is systematically structured according to the concept of *Individuation*, which has garnered attention as it positions women as active social agents with the right to contribute to social and economic development.

As Boudon Raymond pointed out in his book *La logique du social*: "Choices are not always determined by the social field; the active individual social agent always maintains a margin of maneuver that allows them to exploit their personal choices." (Boudon Raymond, 1997, p. 117).

Women's empowerment is defined as the enhancement of women's role and participation in public life, as well as their self-reliance. It involves improving their status in society in social, political, cultural, and economic aspects, which constitutes the foundation for the advancement of society.

The focus on empowering women socially, politically, and economically has been a direction Algeria has pursued through the preparation of legal frameworks and their participation in governance, aiming to adapt to changes and grant them a social position. Women are considered a fundamental pillar of society, and their empowerment in various fields has become a central strategy to reduce various forms of inequality, ensure equal opportunities, and make them active partners. Women represent half of society, if not all of it, and possess invaluable potential and capabilities, as they play a significant role in development. Empowerment has crystallized as a strategy for general and inclusive development, relying on the strength of the agent and their ability to turn choices into effective decisions.

Manifestations of the Empowerment of Algerian Women:

Women's empowerment in Algerian society is defined through the process of integrating them into various social, political, and economic dimensions. Algeria has made significant strides on multiple levels and across various fields such as education, employment, and health, in order to strengthen women's status and integrate them into society. We will focus on the most important indicators that contribute to the enhancement and empowerment of Algerian women by examining statistical data and providing an interpretation of these indicators.

Women and Education:

Education is one of the most important areas that assist in the social empowerment of women. The Algerian woman's recognition of the role education plays in raising her status, as it provides job

opportunities and enhances her position, has led to greater self-confidence. This has allowed her to achieve personal fulfillment and change the stereotypical image of her role, which once confined her freedom and responsibility to roles imposed by others. Education provides greater opportunities to build a future, whether in scientific or professional fields, and enables her to advance to leadership positions.

Hisham Sharabi affirms this by stating: "In families where children have reached a certain level of education and acquired specific skills, they achieve independence and freedom as a result, no longer relying on their parents" (Hisham Sharabi, 1992, p. 50). This social, cultural, and economic situation that women have created for themselves aligns with their academic level, which has led them to acquire a position both within the family and outside it. Women have demonstrated their presence through varying success rates compared to men in different educational stages, often outperforming them.

To illustrate the development of the female enrollment index in Algeria, we will review the female school enrollment rates at different educational levels across a range of years.

Table 1: Evolution of the Number of Male and Female Students by Year

Years	Students	Female Students	Female Students%			University Education	Female Students %
			In Primary: %	In Intermediate: %	In Secondary: %		
2001/2000	7.712.182	3.726.603	46.81	48.05	56.14	541443	50.81
2004/2003	7.851.893	3.726.603	47.01	48.74	57.53	716452	53.83
2009/2008	7.381.962	3.639.469	47.29	48.72	57.87	1186046	59.87
2012/2011	7.614.477	3.765.924	47.47	48.43	57.22	1231576	58.72
2014/2013	7.835.740	3.892.379	47.67	47.61	58.21	1283707	59.49
2015/2014	7.989.546	3.959.101	47.7	47.55	57.63	1241550	-
2016/2015	8.074.799	3.976.721	47,69	47,72	56,72	1315744	-
2017/2016	8.204.191	4.033.973	47,65	48,00	56,64	1492247	-
2018/2017	8.412.162	4.095.248	47,76	48,05	53,44	1523985	-
2019/2018	8.716.159	4.258.080	47,84	47,95	54,82	1530953	-

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the website of the National Office of Statistics and the data found in the study (Mounira Salami, 2016, p. 193).

Based on the statistics, we observe that the number of female students varies from year to year, with women recording the highest schooling and success rates across different educational levels. The highest number of female students in primary education was recorded in the 2018–2019 school year, at 47.84%. This percentage increases at the secondary level, where the number of female students surpasses that of males, reaching 54.82% in 2018–2019.

At the university level, the highest rates of female enrollment are observed compared to males, as women pursuing university degrees actually exceed the number of men, reaching 60% during the 2014–2015 academic year.

The Algerian state focuses on education, as the advancement of education is one of the conditions for ensuring gender equality and women's rights, combating gender discrimination, and ensuring equal opportunities for both sexes. Women's education is considered an important capital that enhances their status and grants them independence within the Algerian family and even in Algerian society.

Additionally, families are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of encouraging and supporting women's education. Educating women represents a break from traditional rules and an important outlet for their liberation, and women strive to prove their capabilities through education.

Table 2: Distribution of Women by Educational Level According to Economic Activity Rate, Employment Rate, and Type of Degree for the Year 2019

Women's Educational Level for the Year 2019	Economic Activity Rate	Employment Rate
No Education	%4,1	%3.8
Primary	%8,0	%7.1
Intermediate	%11.3	%9.0
Secondary	%18.8	%15.3
University	%45.5	%34.6

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the data in the study (Manad Latifa: 2023, p. 294).

Based on the data presented in the table for the year 2019, we observe two curves, one representing the economic activity rate, which is increasing. As the educational level of women rises, the economic activity rate also increases. We note that the economic activity rate for women with a university level of education in 2019 was 45.5%, followed by 18.8% for women with a secondary education level, while 4.1% of women had no education.

Regarding the second curve, which represents the employment rate, we notice a significant increase. The employment rate for women with no education was 3.8%, and it rises to 34.6% for women with a university level of education. This will be further clarified in the table.

Type of Degree Obtained	Economic Activity Rate	Employment Rate
Without a Degree	%6.7	%5.7
Higher Education Degree	%62.2	%47.3

The economic activity rate for women with a university degree reached 62.2% in 2019, while the employment rate stood at 47.3%, representing women who hold higher education degrees and are employed.

We observe an increase in women's participation in the labor market compared to previous periods. This is attributed to the fact that educating girls has provided them with an economic role, allowing them to work, achieve self-fulfillment, and attain financial independence, while also meeting the needs of their

families through their participation in the economic activities they wish to engage in. Thus, women become productive members of society, which improves their status.

The focus on women's education at various educational levels is more evident in the relationship between their education and their contribution to economic activity. This was also explained by Ibn Khaldun, who stated that the pursuit of knowledge necessarily requires an economic surplus, which frees some individuals from activities related to economic production. Furthermore, social progress requires improvements in vocational methods, as the spread of education becomes increasingly complex. Therefore, it no longer aligns with traditional methods for its dissemination. Education and knowledge dissemination are closely linked to positive transformations in the social structure, emphasizing not only the economic factor but also the cultural factor. (Abd al-Ghani Maghribi, 1988, p. 191).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, we conclude that women in Algerian society were historically subordinate to men, under their control and dominance. However, their status changed as a result of the social transformations within Algerian society, particularly during the colonial period, which sought to alter the stereotypical image of Algerian women and liberate them from the social structure in which they were subjected to male authority. Nevertheless, women's participation in the War of Liberation significantly transformed their image and role in society. Their involvement alongside men in the revolution marked a break from the inherited traditional system, as they assumed a crucial role, shifting from colonial domination to active participation and struggle.

The changes and transformations in recent Algerian society show that women are no longer under male dominance. Instead, there is a focus on empowering and enhancing their role. Advancing women and focusing on empowering them across various fields is now a strategic choice that allows them to create a social position within the sphere they interact with. Empowering Algerian women in education has played a significant role in improving their status across various sectors and increasing awareness of their rights. Women have made great strides in education across different levels, with high enrollment rates compared to men, even surpassing them in some secondary stages and more so at the university level. The rise in women's educational levels has contributed to higher participation rates in the economic activity and increased access to job opportunities.

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