

'THIS IS NOT A WAR'
liberation of mind and
land, in ink and in
action

curators: Emilia Epštajn and Ana
Knežević

Речник колонијалиста је био и остао исти

Једном лишена француских посела и економских извора у Африци, читтава западна Европа биће извргнута великим економским кризама и утицају совјетског империјализма.

ALGER LA BLA

Voici le paysage que de
avec stupeur en abondant
africaine les centaines de
de jeunes français app
Algerie : cette splendide
européenne de plus de 40
bitants étalée sur ses

PHOTO MAURICE JARROUX

'THIS IS NOT A WAR' liberation of mind and land, in ink and in action*

The Algerian War was one of the longest and bloodiest wars of decolonization partly because Algeria was considered an integral part of France. For a long time it was referred to as "the war without a name", „a war which dared not speak its name", or labelled "armed action", "police operation", "operation to restore civil peace", or "peacekeeping operation" - anything but war; anything but the actual revolt of indigenous populations trapped in a racist society dominated by the exploitative attitudes of colonists towards a Muslim population; anything but the grand deception of claiming equality within the great European nation. Therefore, "This is Not a War" also figures as an exhibition-document of "a film that is not a film", its after-life and contested destinies of this specific Third Cinema representative in the European, US and (divergent) Yugoslav contexts.

*For the first time, the exhibition was presented at the Students' City Cultural as part of the *Alternative Film/Video "Non-Aligned"* festival, on 8 December 2021 - Frantz Fanon's 60th anniversary of death, upon the invitation of Ivan Velisavljević, DKSG archive program editor.

PROIZVODNJA:
CASBAH FILM
IGOR FILM

REŽIJA:
GILLO
PONTECORVO



ALŽIRSKA BITKA

J. MARTIN

S. YACET

T. NERI

B. HAGGIAG

DISTRIBUCIJA:
VESNA FILM

NOTICE :
NOT EVEN ONE FOOT OF NEWSREEL OR
DOCUMENTARY FILM IS INCLUDED IN THIS
PICTURE!

Ana Knežević

The Liberation of Mind and Land, in Ink and in Action is mediated in this exhibition with one of the leading – film – torchbearers of the idea of liberation: scenes from *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), an Italian-Algerian co-production. The notice at the very beginning: *Not even one foot of newsreel or documentary film is included in this picture*, was added as prefix, before the start of the film, primarily for US audiences.¹ This film, which provokes a shocking and incredible feeling of realism, a film that one can easily describe as 'heart-stopping', was made only a few years after the liberation of Algeria from French colonial rule, declared on 5 July 1962, following 'a war fraught with more atrocious events than any other war a people fought to break up colonial slavery'.² Rebellious 1961 Algeria became

¹ S. Daulatzai, *Fifty Years of The Battle of Algiers*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 22.

² F. Fanon, „Peta godina Alžirske revolucije“ u: *Sociologija revolucije: ogledi o alžirskoj i afričkoj revoluciji*, Beograd: Radnička štampa, 1977, 72. The Algerian War lasted from 1954 to 1962,

one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Yugoslavia recognised its independence on 2 February 1962, five months before France did it.³

The Battle of Algiers, one of the greatest political films of all time, a film of radical universality, the most discussed film in the history of political film, which invented new ways of writing history, is the collaborative work of Yacef Saadi, leader of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the founder of the Algerian production company *Casbah Film*, Italian film director Gillo Pontecorvo, and scriptwriter Franco Solinas. According to the testimony of

beginning as an uprising following the end of World War Two, when Algeria, fighting at the side of the French, was left without the expected 'reward' - gaining the independence. More information on the position and discrimination of North-American troops can be found in the film *Indigènes/Days of Glory*, 2006, directed by Rachid Bouchareb.

³ The French government reacted by withdrawing its ambassador in Belgrade. Find more information in: <https://www.noviplamen.net/tekstovi/izvoz-jugoslovenske-revolucije-u-alzir/> (Accessed: 26.11.2021).

Saadi, who passed away in September 2021, the inspiration for the film script were his memoirs written in prison, while the idea of the Italian-Algerian collaboration emerged thanks to a newspaper article stating that Pontecorvo intended to make a film about the liberation of Algeria, which was supposed to follow the story of the main protagonist, a photojournalist reporting about this war.⁴ Instead of this film, another work was created, known today as one of "the first European commercial feature films on anti-colonial wars"⁵ and one of the first films produced in independent Algeria, also screened in Yugoslav cinemas.

Unlike the one that had never been made, this film - as *Third Cinema* representative - broke from conventional Hollywood and First Cinema practice by focusing not on the singular protagonist, but on the

⁴ A. O'Leary, *The Battle of Algiers*, Mimesis International, 2019, 47.

⁵ R. Stam, „Fanon, Alžir i film: politika identifikacije" u: *Kolo 1*, 2005, доступно на: <https://www.matica.hr/kolo/300/fanon-alzir-i-film-politika-identifikacije-20364/> (Accessed: 26.11.2021).

collective character - the Algerian people.⁶ And not only that. It disturbs colonial representations of "otherness" eliminating habit and routine, as well as *boredom* caused by the depiction of this part of the world as "an exotic setting for Western love dramas, a tropical decor dotted with palm trees and lazily traversed by camels"; instead of a passive film background, in which the Arabic language is heard only as a "dull background murmur"⁷, we are faced with complex, dynamic, ambiguous and euphoric lives of female and male Algerians, dedicated to liberation from one hundred years of French colonial rule. In the words of Palestinian-American literary critic and theoretician Edward Said, the film abounds in *revolutionary optimism*,⁸ and although it "never caricatures the French, [it] exposes the oppressive logic of colonialism and consistently fosters our complicity with Algerians."⁹

⁶ S. Daulatzai, *op.cit.*, 23.

⁷ R. Stam, *op.cit.*

⁸ E. W. Said, „The Quest for Gillo Pontecorvo" in: *Reflections on Exile: & Other Literary & Cultural Essays*, London: Granta Publications, 2013, 26.

⁹ R. Stam, *op.cit.*

Yacef Saadi was a FLN leader in the autonomous zone of the city of Algiers, and numerous scenes in this film, based on his memoirs, were *historically accurate* and represent a living place of remembrance in the collective memory of the Algerian people. However, the novelty of this film does not lie in *the accuracy of history*, but "in application of cinematic mechanisms of identification on behalf of the colonized, presenting the Algerian struggle as an inspirational exemplum for other colonized peoples."¹⁰

It already noted, these film sequences function as an audio-visual reference to key excerpts from *The Wretched of the Earth*, as well as *A Dying Colonialism*,¹¹ from which the most relevant segment for the film is "Algeria Unveiled", Frantz Fanon's acclaimed and controversial essay. Fanon, psychoanalyst and philosopher from Martinique, who supported the liberation of Algeria both in *ink* and in *action*, actively helping guerrilla fighters

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Cited from: R. Stam, op. cit. Most of these essays were published in Yugoslavia in: *Sociology of Revolution: essays on Algerian and African Revolution* (translated and adapted by Vera Vratuša-Žunjić), Belgrade, Radnička štampa (Workers' Press), 1977.

and hiding them from the French authorities, was introduced to the issue of "Algerian nationalism" by Omar Oussedik, state secretary of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria and representative of the Algerian National Liberation Front in Guinea.¹² Both Oussedik and Fanon talked to Zdravko Pečar, a participant in these events and author of several books on Algeria (later the founder of the Museum of African Art in

¹² O. Hadouchi, *Images of the Fights of the Non-Aligned and Tricontinental*, volume 5, Belgrade: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016. On account of his activism, Fanon withdrew from the position of the hospital director in Algeria in 1956. In Tunisia, where he met Pečar, he collaborated with the magazine *El Moudjahid*, for which Veda Zagorac and Zdravko Pečar also wrote, and which was printed in Belgrade in March of 1962. He also held lectures for FLN cadre in Tunisia, and was a representative of the provisional Government of Algeria in Accra. Fanon died of leukemia in New York in 1961, while his attempt to *liberation of mind and land in ink* constantly provokes questions, the same ones that he defined: "Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?" or: "Have I at all times demanded and brought out the man that is in me?" Cited from: F. Fanon, "North African Syndrome" in: *Sociology of Revolution: essays on Algerian and African Revolution*, Belgrade, Radnička štampa (Workers' Press), 1977, 55.

Belgrade) - as recorded by the photograph displayed in the exhibition.



The strong influence of the cinema, based on the example of the Austrian-Yugoslav film *Die letzte Brücke* (The Last Bridge, 1954), which French censors released by mistake in Algeria, is also highlighted by Pečar: "Even today Algerian fighters clearly remember all the details from the film, pointing out that it was the most beautiful memory from civilian days, and 'the European civilization'"¹³ In *The Last Bridge*, a German nurse Olga and a Yugoslav partisan Milica cover themselves to slip away – veiled – from German army troops and to carry medical aid for wounded

¹³ Z. Pečar, *Alžir*, Beograd: Kultura, 1959, 22.

partisans, while in *The Battle of Algiers*, one of the *breathhtaking* scenes depicts precisely the unveiling and European-style camouflage of Algerian women, alluding to the revolutionary role in the Algerian war of the heroines Samia Lakhdari, Zohra Drif and Djamila Bouhired, whose personalities and work – not rarely omitted from official histories of Algeria¹⁴ – are also dealt with in this exhibition.¹⁵ Already in 1958, at the height of the war, Egyptian director Youssef Chahine made the film *Djamila l'Algérienne*, dedicated to Djamila Bouhired, the horrific time she spent in French prison and international pressure to abolish her death sentence.

Yacef Saadi plays himself under the name Djafar in *The Battle of Algiers*, while reports from the film shooting related that the Algerian extras identified themselves with

¹⁴ M. Bouattia, "Saadi Yacef Fought for Algeria's Freedom - Then Immortalized It on Film", available on:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/10/saadi-yacef-obituary-battle-of-algiers-casbah-revolution-fln-hirak> (Accessed 26.11.2021)

¹⁵ See the text by Emilia Epštajn in this catalogue.

the fight in the recreated sites to such an extent that, during acting, they truly cried from despair over the war shattered casbah. With its *barbwire* iconography, the film very clearly underlines the fact that "for the Algerians, the casbah is home; for the French, it is an outpost of the frontier."¹⁶

Nevertheless, for the needs of US audiences, this film acquired a prefix, claiming that the film screening that follows is a *feature film*, not a *documentary*, *reality* or *newsreel*. The dynamic life of this film is reflected not only through the complexities of its production, but also its reception in different parts of the world and at different historic periods:

In France, it was banned for a full five years following its release.¹⁷ For the entire decade after its premiere, it was rarely screened in Algeria, since the new regime feared demonstrations in support of Ben Bella, the former President who was

¹⁶ R. Stam, *op.cit.*

¹⁷ Similarly to the film ban, Pečar was banned from entering France from 4 April 1960 to 9 March 1984, on account of his participation in the Algerian events and writing about them.

held in detention. At the 27th *International Film Festival* in Venice, the film was awarded the Golden Lion, while the French delegation left the cinema hall and the award ceremony. In Lyon, ink was thrown on the screen, while in Saint-Etienne it was smeared with both eggs and ink. No major French TV station had shown the film until 2004. In Cuba, it was voted the best film in 1967. In May 1968, it was unofficially screened in Studio Luxembourg in Paris. In Rome in 1972, the audience of *The Battle of Algiers* was attacked, and the screening was stopped. In Namibia and South Africa, the Apartheid regimes absolutely banned this film. The screening of the film in the USA, at the Pentagon in 2003, raised a controversy and debates related to this film and terrorism continuing until today.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cited from: M. Bouattia, *n.d.*, S. J. Whitfield, "Cine Qua Non: The Political Import and Impact of The Battle of Algiers" in: *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, Vol X, no 1, 2012, 249-270; S. Daulatzai, *n.d.*, J. Dingeman and S. Yacef, "You Cannot Continually Inflict: An Interview with Saadi Yacef" in: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, fall

This exhibition aims to present *liberation of mind and land, in ink and in action*, by tracing anticolonialism through media migration – through film, essay, book, *action!*, and undertaking. It views *The Battle of Algiers* in the era of decolonization, revolutionary struggle and the emergence of Third Cinema, constantly detecting *the unfinished project of decolonization* in this film and asking central questions and concerns that

2008, Vol. 49, no. 2, 48-64. It is clear that *The Battle of Algiers*, as a film that does not conceal the horrid injustice of terrorism and succeeds in 'capturing' ambiguities in the historic reality, provokes conflicting feelings. Until 1980s, its screenings provoked violent attacks on cinemas, and it seems that even today the film successfully divides opinions. Following its screening at the Pentagon, the reception of this film was marked by heated debates on "film instructions on terrorism". A half a century after the release of film, taking into account its afterlife, the book *Fifty Years of Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue*, pointed out that film shows continuities between the present time and decolonization, and that it is a permanent reminder of a dream about freedom, which is not yet gained. Find more about different perspectives of this reception and interpretation of the film in the list of references and interviews with Yacef Saadi.

decolonization and the Third World Project sought to address: structural global inequality; wealth and resource exploitation of the non-Western world; continual foreign intervention into and destabilization of the Third World; and deeply entrenched asymmetries in diplomatic, political, and economic power between the West and the Global South.¹⁹ In addition, it is viewed as a film which 'accomplishes its contribution and relevance by complete impartiality, lack of moralising or romanticising and creating a feeling of very authentic *uneasiness*, confronting the viewer with what he actually does not want to see, not even in a historic-war film.²⁰

The exhibition interprets this *dangerous movie* through the prism of Fanon's "visceral, kinesthetic, sharply imaged, hard hitting, volcanic, incendiary, almost cinematic prose that undoubtedly impacts the very nerves of

¹⁹ S. Daulatzai, *op. cit.*, 10.

²⁰ S. Lendić, „Prikaz filma Bitka za Alžir (1966) ili La Liberté puškostrojnicom na Casbah način" u: *Essehist: časopis studenata povijesti i drugih društveno-humanističkih znanosti*, Vol. 4 No. 4, 2012, 95.

the reader"²¹ and proves the existence of disproportionate and asymmetric cruelty of colonialism as a violent phenomenon, currently increasingly spreading through routinised and normalised practices in the daily functioning of the empire.²² The same observation was made by Zdravko Pečar in *Algeria* (1959), quoting the FLN leader Krim Belkacem: "In the framework of their notorious actions of collective destruction and 'pacification', the French soldiers killed thousands of innocent Algerians in the villages. Then we responded by collective terrorism in the cities. Be assured that it was very difficult for us, but we were forced to do it."²³

As Larbi Ben M'hidi, one of the founders of FLN explains in the film to Ali La Pointe, a revolutionary fighter: true difficulties are yet to arise after victory and gained independence. The warning of the *national bourgeoisie betraying the will of the people* is one of the central and, apparently, prophetic fragments of Fanon's thought, confirmed by the contemporary moment and memories of

²¹ R. Stam, *op. cit.*

²² S. Daulatzai, *op.cit*, 21.

²³ Z. Pečar, *op.cit*, 19.

what followed after the liberation of Algeria: a *coup d'etat*, civil war the removal of the heroine Djamila Bouhired from official history, recent protests, a Yacef Saadi's critical approach, contemporary observations on the *liberation of mind and land* based on the example of Algeria, and on many *other* and *third world* countries. This exhibition is, therefore, a warning about a *war that is not a war*, a *film that is not a film*, and the culture of remembrance that diverts our attention to the fact that it is perfectly true that history is written by the victors, and that they are the ones who by whom it is most often forgotten.²⁴

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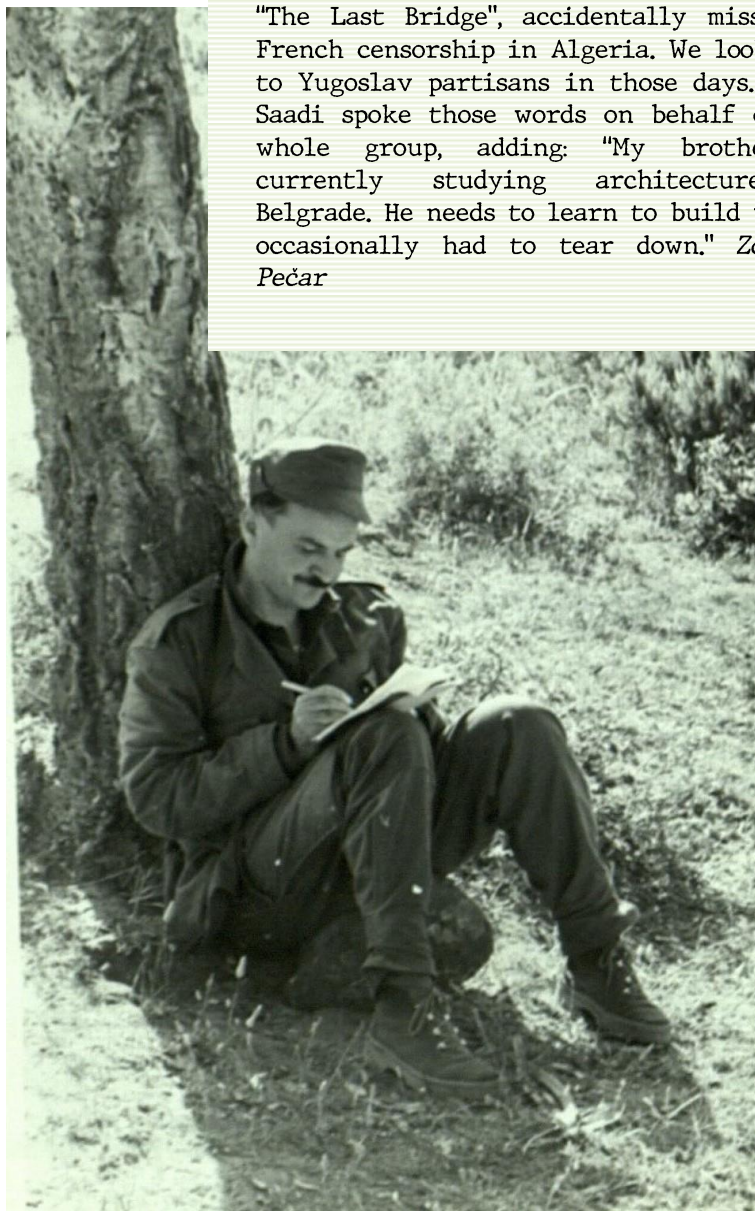
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On the eve of the uprising we went to see "The Last Bridge", accidentally missed by French censorship in Algeria. We looked-up to Yugoslav partisans in those days. Yacef Saadi spoke those words on behalf of the whole group, adding: "My brother is currently studying architecture in Belgrade. He needs to learn to build what I occasionally had to tear down." Zdravko Pečar



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
MINISTÈRE DE L'INTÉRIEUR
DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE DE LA SURETÉ NATIONALE

PROCÈS-VERBAL

N°

L'AN mil neuf cent

le

NOUS **soixante**

4 Avril

OBJET

En résidence à **CAPORICIC Raymond Commissaire Principal**
des lieux de service à l'Aéroport de MARSEILLE-MARIANNE
Officier de Police Judiciaire auxiliaire de M. le Procureur de la République : **«idem»**

AFFAIRE

Conformément aux instructions de la fiche
R-60/567 notifiées au nommé **ZORAVKO P E C A R**
né le 2-2-1920 à Okrovo (Croatie), de nationalité
Yougoslave l'interdiction de pénétrer et de résider
en FRANCE qui le concerne .

Le service des Etrangers à la Préfecture des
B.d.R étant à cette heure fermé, nous nous sommes
chargés de lui faire nous-mêmes cette notification.

L'intéressé est entré en transit de TUNIS à ORAN
et n'a pas séjourné en FRANCE.

P/le COMMISSAIRE PRINCIPAL
Chef de service

L'Intéressé:

Pečar Zdravko



Mod. 3 - Série 14

Cas de M. Pečar

The official ban on Zdravko Pečar's entry and residence in France from 4 April 1960 until 9 March 1984 when the ban was lifted. Like the film "Battle for Algiers", Pečar was denied access to France, as the documents state, because of his activities in Algeria at the time.

The Veilers and the Veiled

Emilia Epštajn

Many women - some of whom are remembered and some forgotten, those who survived the war and were recognised or those who disappeared and remain unknown - all took part in the War for the Decolonisation of Algeria (1954-1962). In the mountains, where most of the fighting took place, there were women who hid, helped and fed the ALN (National Liberation Army of Algeria) soldiers. These women suffered the fate of their people, family and land in other strategic points where battles were also fought. Veiled or unveiled, at the beginning they were witnesses, and later *moudjahidat* in the fight against the colonial project, or its implementation through violence and destruction - from the basest humiliation to the most grotesque destruction of spirit, mind and body, people and individual, man, woman, child, infant. Perhaps *the most dangerous* women - those through whom, along the

dark veil's trajectory of fear and perturbation the visions of terror(ism) of the Arab world are spread today - emerged at the moment when women from the casbah of Algiers, mainly educated at French schools, joined the ranks of the FLN (National Liberation Front, formed in 1954). Fighting alongside their fellow countrymen against the *terror* of colonialism, they entered the western mind through the *terrorism* of the revolution of the Algerian War of Independence and, even today, they remain part of the grand fiction that is at the core of colonial domination.

War - a *man's business*²⁵, the tension it creates, as well as subjection, appropriation of the authenticity of a nation, the theft of the masculinity of the colonised - all this amassed in the *veil*, or what is hidden beneath the veil (woman). Frantz Fanon, in his 1959 essay *Algeria Unveiled*, upon which

²⁵ M. Lazreg, "Nationalism, Decolonization and Gender," in: *The Eloquence of Silence. Algerian Women in Question*, Oxon: Routledge, 2019, 113

Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* is partially based, was the first who took into consideration Algerian woman, unlike other witnesses of events and learned men of the age. Algerian women are a part of the history of the war for decolonisation, and Fanon "related Algerian women's resistance in a way that can be remembered, recalled and corrected by women in their present quests for self-actualisation."²⁶

It is unfruitful, it seems, and unnecessary to critique Fanon's contributions from the contemporary feminist perspective. For the feminist idea, as well as post-colonial theory and the history of anti-racism, his essay remains one of the most relevant texts. However, it is also inspired by the unique power of the awakening of the oppressed, the unique moment in which a being is triggered in the struggle for survival and, to a certain extent it

²⁶ T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1998, 74

represents an expression of an enthusiasm of the romanticist's type that encourages a call to arms. Aaronette M. White calls it "optimism" which contradicts the position and role of women after the War. Fanon, claims White: "underestimated the strength of patriarchy as a component of the colonised mentality of men; its relationship to nationalism, violence and militarism; and its fierce continuity across precolonial, colonial, revolutionary and post-war periods."²⁷ Fanon was convinced that *the national* would be the principle of integration of the new African being, or in our case, of a new Algerian nation. Aware that colonisation and decolonisation share the same mechanism - violence, he regards it as the only response to self-destruction. War is perceived as a

²⁷ A. M. White, "All the Men Are Fighting for Freedom, All the Women Are Mourning Their Men, but Some of Us Carried Guns: A Raced-Gendered Analysis of Fanon's Psychological Perspectives on War," in: *Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights*, Working Paper No. 302/2006, 8

revolution, as an awakening, and violence implies the power of *transformation* for the colonised who, by *adopting* the external act of bloodshed, at the same time subvert the colonialist's own tools of destroying Algerian identity, and for Fanon, (caught in the moment), such violence takes on the power of salvation, since: "whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon"²⁸ and: "This recurring terror de-mystifies once and for all the most estranged members of the colonized race... Terror, counter-terror, violence, counter-violence..."²⁹ However, Fanon did not live to see the creation of a free and new Algeria, and therefore failed to see that nationalism or the project of nation-making is incompatible with the real liberation of woman in a world organised according to patriarchy: "As a cultural construct, a nation develops and lays claim to

²⁸ F. Fanon, *The Wretched on the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, 35

²⁹ F. Fanon, 1963, *op. cit.*, 8

certain ideas and values as culturally authentic, traditional, helpful in sustaining its very identity" - and women veiled or unveiled, are on the first lines, at once hidden and the most visible (and vulnerable) bearers of such values.³⁰

Let us consider the veil and interwoven associations between the West and "the Arab other" regarding what can be seen and what is hidden. The point of view is what matters. It matters who is looking, and more importantly, how they are seeing. For the Western World, the construction of the East and a woman behind the veil is the ultimate way of channelling violence and the erotization of "the other" (i.e., the female "other"). Men are denied masculinity by violent denial: "Let's win over the women and the rest will follow,"³¹ since "culture and identity are imagined as uniquely transmitted through women. The Algerian

³⁰ T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, 20

³¹ F. Fanon "Algeria Unveiled", in: *A Dying Colonialism*, New York: Grove Press, 1965, 86

woman becomes the symbolic repository for group identity."³² And winning over the woman, which at the same time represents the destruction of identity of the patriarchal man, is achieved by her "unveiling." The way in which colonial France "deprived" Algerian men of their tradition (de facto their identity), relies on the perfidious disguise of a saviour that offers the "emancipation" of women through the act of unveiling, freeing of restraints, "chains," the veil. Let us stop here for a moment. Imagine a



proclamation of the *semblance* of freedom at the expense of another's destruction.

³² T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, 58

Unveiling "leads to the crystallization of aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence before the Algerian woman... In a confused way, the European experiences his relation with the Algerian woman at a highly complex level... This woman who sees without being seen, frustrates the coloniser. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself. The Algerian has an attitude toward the Algerian woman which is on the whole clear. He does not see her... The European faced with an Algerian woman wants to see... Thus, the rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil... a double deflowering... utmost humiliation" [E. E. italics].³³ And in war, the stakes are different. The game is one and in this game of men, women always have more to lose. The soldier is seldom dishonoured, and his heroism actually increases with physical abuse and suffering, while the most excessive

³³ F. Fanon, 1965, *op. cit.*, 42-44

violence appears to be an affirmation of the soldier's courage. The honour of woman in (and out of) war is her first fear, and failing to protect it (since "honour" is a feminine category, as is "tradition") is not merely her own loss (shame), but that of the entire country.³⁴ In part this is due to one of the strongest bulwarks of the Algerian national being - *the family*. This was also confirmed by the heroines of the Algerian War, Zohra Drif and Djamila Bouhired, who, in the early summer of 1962 in Tunisia, after being released from prison, talked to Zdravko Pečar, their contemporary, witness and participant in the Algerian decolonisation events.³⁵ Pečar further explains: "in every way, the French policy of assimilation of the Algerian people was strongly opposed by the Algerian patriarchal and traditional society, its closed family, and

³⁴ For more on dishonouring see: F. Fanon, 1963, *op. cit.*, 254-259; and T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, 17

³⁵ Z. Pečar, *Alžir do nezavisnosti*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1967, 291

particularly by women, who never left their home, avoided contact with the French civilisation and its impact on the people, and [she] succeeded in maintaining at home the tradition of the Algerian people and their Faith."³⁶

Interestingly, the veil, as one of the key visible elements of traditional Algerian society, was rarely worn by Muslim women in rural areas (where most of the fighting took place), and before 1957, the veil had been almost abandoned in the cities.³⁷ The old part of the city of Algiers, the so-called Casbah, became at a certain point the place of subversive manipulation by means of the veil (and women) in war. In the revolution, Algerian woman, first by using the veil to conceal, then by "camouflaging" herself in European clothes, and finally by re-veiling - directly took part in the fighting. As "the most protected" in her culture, one to whom a passive role was assigned, women actively started

³⁶ Z. Pečar, *op. cit.*, 292

³⁷ T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, 60-6

meandering along the streets of the Casbah, veiling herself and the weapons she carried.

"Through its actions in cities - bombs, sabotaging power plants, transportation and other facilities, creating a general sense of insecurity, recruiting commandos in numbers matching entire quarters of the city (the Casbah of the city of Algiers), through the role of women, girls (Djamila Bouhired, Djamila Bouazza, Zohra Drif, etc), children in military actions - the Algerian revolution succeeded in highly developing its role and participation in military actions, as a real military power, the unarmed segment of the urban population" - Zdravko Pečar explains, adding that unarmed Algerians in the Casbah served as "bearers, the go-between and the unstoppable wheel in the large and complex mechanism of urban military actions, performing, in view of its results, the most typical functions of the armed forces, and, in the final stage,

taking over their role completely."³⁸
That was the *Battle of Algiers* - the fight of French generals against "commandos and underground fighters of ALN and FLN (from 1956 to 1957)."³⁹



On May 13, 1958, in the city of Algiers, French generals alongside local *colons*,⁴⁰ aiming to keep a tight grip on Algeria, and wishing to demonstrate to France proper that *Algeria is French*, in an incredible act of indulging the phantasmagoria of a symbolic and real act of destruction of the Algerian being

³⁸ Z. Pečar, *op. cit.*, 373

³⁹ Z. Pečar, *op. cit.*, 373

⁴⁰ European/French inhabitants of Algeria

- through the act of *public unveiling*, performed the ultimate act of violence. Parading the streets, they sang *La Marseillaise* and held a *ritual* ceremony for the world of the *uncivilised*. Algerian women from all walks of life, like marionettes, were exposed and "unveiled," exposed before everyone, their fellow countrymen, colonisers, men and women. And the project of colonial rule is such that it is conducted through both man and women - the hands of French women perform the actual act of violence,⁴¹ the act of unveiling. It is this scene, which is so truly and dramatically depicted in the writings of female Algerian (and European) feminists, that accomplishes the final

⁴¹ Not everyone in France supported the colonial state. The best-known examples are Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who provided support to Gisele Halimi, the lawyer representing Djamilia Boupacha, who was tortured in prison by French soldiers. For more information see:

„Fear of forgetting - heroines who changed history“, Open Democracy, 8 March 2018, available online: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/fear-of-forgetting-heroines-who-changed-history/> [accessed on: 26 November 2021]

"politicization of women's bodies and their symbolic appropriation by colonial authorities. It brought home to Algerian women their vulnerability, at a time when many of them thought they were making history and imposing themselves on men's consciousness as more than mere sex symbols. Their sexed body was suddenly laid bare before a crowd of vociferous colonist who, in an orgy of chants and cries of 'Long Live French Algeria', claimed victory over all Algerian women."⁴²

The chances for Algerian women in colonised Algeria had always been slim. They had already been created according to the model of the deeply rooted erotic fantasies of Western man, his determined gaze directed towards the East. Their veil had been removed long ago, which was, in addition to other things, demonstrated by a series of colonial postcards/photographs made in the first decades of the 20th century. Spellbound by the visions of veiled women in the

⁴² M. Lazreg, *op. cit.*, 127-128

East, western travellers and photographers created imaginary scenes, invented realities, images they saw in their reveries of the East. This is how a series of postcards, dating from the first decades of the 20th century, of a so-called *colonial harem*, was made.⁴³ In the postcards, women with bare breasts (apparently) dressed in "traditional" costumes are posing as models, paid to remove their veils, or to put them on, thus responding to the eroticised gaze of the white observer.

Everything here is a lie; everything is a construction and woman is non-existent.

What remains of women in texts written about them and their role in the Algerian war? One of them is Fatima⁴⁴ - the one that Fanon recognises in the eyes of the Algerian colonisers, who call all women by her name.⁴⁵ Fatima is the

⁴³ M. Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986

⁴⁴ Translated from the Arabic language it means "to abstain," "chaste," or "motherly."

⁴⁵ F. Fanon, 1965, *op. cit.*, 60

property of the one who is willing to be subjugated, Fatima is hidden, Fatima is impenetrable, as she is veiled; still, through a slit in the veil she can see, she is watching, she is a witness. On the other hand, powerful is the image that Fanon relies on when speaking about the father who, in the Algerian War, is transformed in relation to his daughter. When the father finds out that his daughter is taking part in the war, that is, when he is told that someone has seen "Zohra or Fatima unveiled, walking like a.... My Lord, protect us!," the father's fear of "dishonour," on account of her exposure to view, but primarily because of her stepping out of the traditional role of wife, daughter is, according to Fanon, transfigured into fear of his daughter's "death in battle or torture of the girl," since national pride and the whole nation "following in her footsteps," towards a new Algeria, converge in her.⁴⁶ This woman, however, is no longer Fatima - she is (a) "Djamila:"

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Djamila Bouhired

Djamila Boupacha

Djamila Bouazza...

Zohra Drif...

Algerian women...

Many families, after the war, named their daughters Djamila. Beautiful.

Djamila is a moudjahida who appears for the first time in the Algerian War for decolonisation. Djamila Bouhired, sheltered underneath the heavy soldier's uniform and with a gun on her shoulder, is waving to us from a completely different kind of postcard. For the *This Is Not a War* exhibition, the photograph of Djamila Bouhired is transposed onto a transparent fabric, barely the likeness of a veil, as is the *unknown Algerian woman*. The veil is a canvas, projection, the focal point of imagining (all) Algerian women. With Algerian men, fathers and brothers, in one historic moment, they become equal, visible in their soldier's uniforms and, in one

specific instance, at the precipice of destruction that emerges from fear, death - war, they found a crack through which they revealed themselves - they, who had always been the seeing ones, were now, *at that moment seen*.

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But deciding to incorporate women as essential elements, to have the Revolution depend on their presence and their action in this or that sector, was obviously a wholly revolutionary step. *Franz Fanon*

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Our actions were intended to bring war to them, to announce to the whole world that the Algerian people are waging a war of liberation against their European occupiers. This raises the question: what responsibility must each of us bear in this war for liberation, knowing that it is not a fight of equals? For this reason I always finish my mission without looking back at all those unimaginable things that can be many, as you well know. But I have no other choice. That is what France imposed on us! *Djamila Buhired*

P. S. Within the exhibition "Which side are you on?" in Skopje (2022) the exhibition is presented as a second, updated edition in the form of specific *performative archive*. Based on the archives of Veda Zagorac and Zdravko Pečar, but also the works made by a great number of other protagonists, this "performative archive" using dramatization, combination of words and images, and creating constellations among different actors who recorded, through different actions, the history of the liberation of Algeria seeks to represent the power of media in the war, as well as the position of Algerian women in the struggle, pointing out the unfulfilled promise of true freedom and emancipation.

The words and images are collages, a combination of the written, spoken and witnessed (and sometimes also un-witnessed, in the case of the historical record of Algerian female fighters), and found in the MAU archives, but also from without: in film, newspapers, books, notes, etc. We wanted to show a multimedia and diachronic perspective on the Algerian independence. This is a *visual essay* (Fr. *essayer* - to try) through which the archive is trying to speak with the help of our curatorial combinations and pokes, in order to open a space for authentic memory and the debate about freedom which we continue to search for.

Whatever happens, the fate of Algeria is in France, and this means that France has determined the path to the future, which is called - integration. Soustelle, Governor of Algeria (1955)

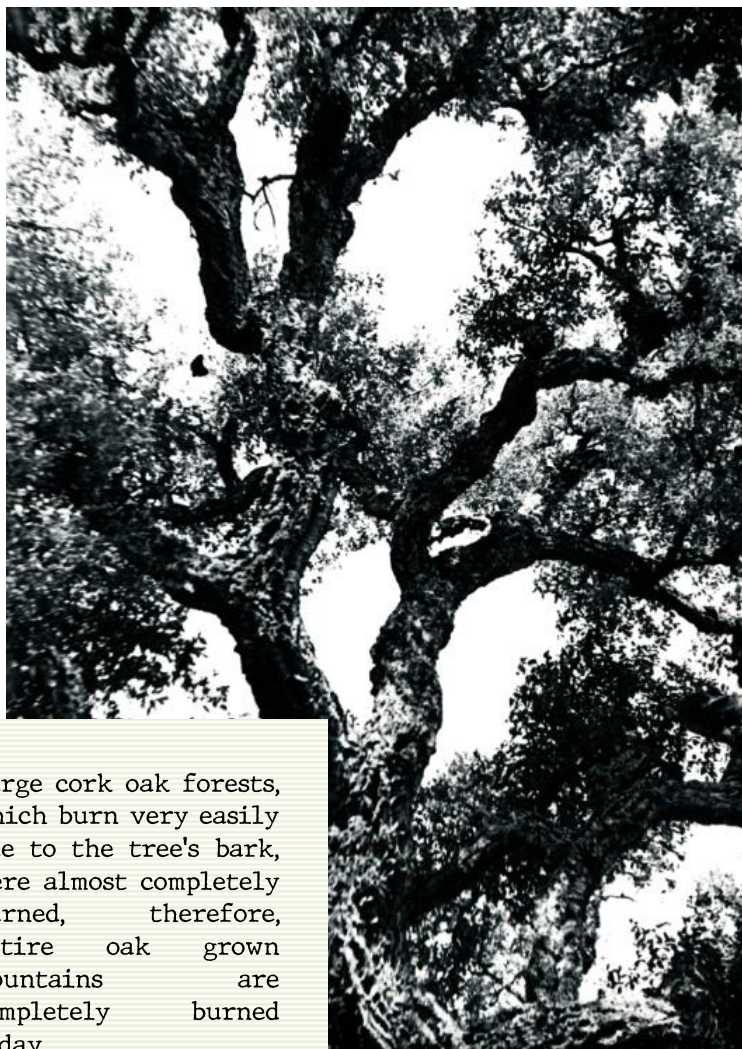


The favourite topic of the French press from Algeria as well as right-wing media in the metropolis, was certainly the so-called "pacification" which - allegedly - is almost compelled.

Veda Zagorac, attaché of the embassy in Tunisia. Important publishing work: three tomes of the *El Mujahid* journal, a gramophone record, a postcard series, a drawing map of "Algeria", in addition to her everyday work.



Dragan Savić spent 3 months with the Algerian Mujahedeen in the area of the Algerian-Tunisian border, transferring to his painting block the life he saw: columns on the march, battles, the life of the people in exile, the figures of children and fighters.



Large cork oak forests,
which burn very easily
due to the tree's bark,
were almost completely
burned, therefore,
entire oak grown
mountains are
completely burned
today.

Zdravko Pečar

We are grateful to Bojana Piškur and Ivana Vaseva for the invitation to participate in the exhibition "Which side are you on?" at the building of the National Opera and Ballet in Skopje, which persists (despite).

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The first edition of "THIS IS NOT A WAR' the liberation of mind and land, in ink and action", was held at the Student's City Cultural Centre, Belgrade, the Alternative Film/Video "Non-Aligned" festival (2021).

The second edition of the exhibition is set up at the National Opera and Ballet, Skopje, as part of AKTO festival's exhibition "Which side are you on?" (2022).

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