

# **A “New Man” for a New Nation: Activism and Physical Culture in Late Colonial Algeria**

**Jakob Kraiss**

## **ABSTRACTS**

Während französische Entwicklungsprogramme im spätkolonialen Algerien gut erforscht sind, haben einheimische Ideen über eine Transformation der Gesellschaft während dieser Zeit deutlich weniger Aufmerksamkeit erfahren. Der Aufsatz diskutiert die Gedanken zweier prominenter Intellektueller, des islamischen Reformisten Malek Bennabi und des Marxisten Frantz Fanon, zum „Neuen Menschen.“ Für den Zeitraum der beiden letzten Jahrzehnte französischer Herrschaft in Algerien (1942–1962) werden außerdem Prozesse der Schaffung des „Neuen Menschen“ in reformistischen und nationalistischen Kreisen analysiert, besonders in der muslimischen Pfadfinderbewegung sowie in Bezug auf Sport. Schließlich wird die Generationendimension des algerischen Antikolonialismus betrachtet, die Jugendaktivismus dem Traditionalismus „alter Menschen“ gegenüber stellte.

While French development schemes in late colonial Algeria are well studied, much less attention has been devoted to indigenous ideas around a transformation of society in this period. The article discusses the thought of two prominent intellectuals, the Islamic reformist Malek Bennabi and the Marxist Frantz Fanon, on the “New Man.” Looking at the last two decades of French rule in Algeria (1942–62), it also analyses processes of shaping “New Men” in reformist and nationalist circles, in particular in the Muslim scout movement and with regard to sports. Finally, it takes into consideration the generational dimension of Algerian anticolonialism, which opposed youth activism to the traditionalism of “old men.”

## 1. Introduction: Making "New Men" in Colonial Algeria

Colonial Algeria represented a place on which French planners and reformers of different political persuasions projected their visions for the future and ideas about shaping "New Men" from early on.<sup>1</sup> Already shortly after colonization had begun in 1830, the Saint-Simonians perceived the North African territory as the ideal site to realize their utopian socialism.<sup>2</sup> But it was during the late colonial period after World War II that development plans and grandiose designs for a transformation of Algerian society became ever more numerous. Over the last two decades of French rule, experts on urbanism and social scientists intensified their efforts to "modernize" the country and especially the indigenous Muslim population which they saw as "backward."<sup>3</sup> The latest phase of colonial rule, the war of independence between 1954 and 1962, witnessed a further proliferation of development schemes, which now were part of the propagandistic and psychological aspects of France's counterinsurgency strategy. Marnia Lazreg has argued that, during the war, the French military employed both violent and psychological means to make the restive "natives" into "New Men."<sup>4</sup> During this last period of particular uncertainty regarding the future of Algeria scientific planning was supposed to prepare administrators for all possible outcomes. Even when the prospects of keeping the colonial possession seemed more and more unlikely, plans were drawn up to salvage certain interests and bring about at least an "expert decolonization."<sup>5</sup>

The Constantine Plan of 1958, which General Charles de Gaulle had proclaimed in this eastern Algerian city shortly after the war had brought him back to power, promised an industrialization of the country, the creation of employment in the form of modern salaried labour for hundreds of thousands of indigenous Algerians and a partial Algerianization of the administration. The ambitious Plan aimed at nothing less than a complete "modernization" of Muslim society, which effectively meant forming "New Men." It stated explicitly: "*But only the transformation of man will make a decisive difference and will be able to make development irreversible.*"<sup>6</sup> At the same time, special army units, the *Sections administratives spécialisées* (SAS), were tasked with resettling large parts of the indigenous population in new model villages. This "resettling" combined the military

1 The term "New Man" here and throughout the article is meant in the gender neutral sense of "new human being" (as in the Arabic *insān*). Nevertheless, I retain the term "man" instead of "human being" because of its use in the sources from the period (in French: *homme*). On this question see also the introduction to this issue.

2 See A. Zouache, *Socialism, Liberalism and Inequality: The Colonial Economics of the Saint-Simonians in 19th-Century Algeria*, in: *Review of Social Economy* 67 (2009) 4, pp. 431-456.

3 See Z. Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 79-87, 143-179; M. H. Davis, "The Transformation of Man" in French Algeria: Economic Planning and the Postwar Social Sciences, 1958-62, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 52 (2017) 1, pp. 73-94.

4 M. Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad*, Princeton 2008, p. 72.

5 A. Asseraf, "A New Israel": Colonial Comparisons and the Algerian Partition That Never Happened, in: *French Historical Studies* 41 (2018) 1, pp. 95-120, at 106.

6 M. Davis, *The Transformation of Man*, p. 77 (italics in original). On the Constantine Plan see also M. H. Davis, *Restaging Mise en Valeur: "Postwar Imperialism" and The Plan de Constantine*, in: *Review of Middle East Studies* 44 (2010) 2, pp. 176-186.

dimension of control, to prevent guerrilla fighters from merging with civilians, and of “modernization,” to “win over” Algerians to the French side by an improvement of their living conditions. According to their instigators, the radical “compression of time” in these programmes would enable Algerians to overcome their retardation and become modern beings in just a couple of years.<sup>7</sup> Civilian and military planners and administrators accorded particular importance to measures targeting women and children who were viewed as being key to a transformation of society. Unveiling campaigns and other social reforms that were supposed to lead to an “emancipation” of Muslim women should convince them of the advantages of “modernization” and bring them closer to French culture.<sup>8</sup> The same was true of holiday camps and exchange programmes which would bring young Algerians to metropolitan France.<sup>9</sup>

While these colonial development schemes are rather well studied, anticolonial attempts at forming “New Men” during the later period of French rule in Algeria have received almost no attention so far.<sup>10</sup> Moritz Feichtinger and Stephan Malinowski even show a certain perplexity when asking for indigenous agency in colonial modernization projects.<sup>11</sup> This contribution aims at filling this gap by a change in perspective: it might be hard to gather traces of Algerians’ reactions to colonial development policies, but if we look at initiatives of the so-called natives themselves, the picture changes. Although most of the studies cited so far deal with the latest phase of colonial rule, namely the war of independence with its “compression of time,” it is worthwhile to take into consideration also the history of anticolonial discourses and activities in the decades before the war.

I will focus on the time between 1942 and 1962. The Allied landing in North Africa of 1942 and then the end of World War II mark a turning point also for Algeria: in May 1945, nationalist demonstrations on the occasion of Allied victory in Europe escalated into a riot that was then severely repressed by French security forces and settler militias. This event is often described to be at the origin of the radical independence movement, which would start the armed insurrection in 1954 and, finally, win national sovereignty in 1962.<sup>12</sup> True, when the French had celebrated their first century of colonial rule over Algeria, in 1930, North African Muslims had seemingly been broken up. Independence had appeared all but impossible for the foreseeable future. But at the same time Muslim civil society and new middle classes had begun to organize, reform efforts and political movements had been gaining ground. Since then, social reformers and activists started

7 See M. Feichtinger and S. Malinowski, „Eine Million Algerier lernen im 20. Jahrhundert zu leben“: Umsiedlungslager und Zwangsmodernisierung im Algerienkrieg 1954–1962, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 8 (2010) 1, pp. 107-135; Lazreg, *Torture*, pp. 34-76.

8 See e.g. R. Seferdjeli, French “Reforms” and Muslim Women’s Emancipation during the Algerian War, in: *The Journal of North African Studies* 9 (2004) 4, pp. 19-61.

9 See L. Hardt, Ferienlager gegen die Rebellion. Jumelages und Colonies de vacances im Algerienkrieg (1959–1962), in: *Journal of Modern European History* 11 (2013) 3, pp. 351-374.

10 On attempts at creating “New Men” from the side of late colonial planning see also Jerónimo’s contribution to this issue.

11 Feichtinger and Malinowski, *Eine Million Algerier*, pp. 129-130.

12 See J. McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, Cambridge, UK 2017, pp. 179-234.

asking how “New Men” could be formed, men who would be capable to shake off colonialism one day. Central in this endeavour were new initiatives directed towards the young, from a private Arabic education system to Boy Scout troops and sports clubs. Youth movements and athletic associations with their concern for physical strength became major pillars in anticolonial efforts for the reform of society.<sup>13</sup>

This article discusses the ideas of two prominent thinkers, the Muslim intellectual Malek Bennabi and Frantz Fanon, certainly the best-known theoretician of the Algerian revolution, about the “New Man.” Taking their concepts as a basic grid, it also examines the consequences of such notions in actual practice, as related mainly in autobiographical sources from the late colonial period. How were “New Men” shaped? What were the spaces and symbols associated with it, e.g. in the new youth movements? And what did it mean for individuals to become “New Men”? The following sections will show that both thinkers and activists advocated a new vitality, physical and mental, to overcome the perceived passivity of colonial subjects.

## 2. Bennabi and Fanon: History as Thought and Action

### 2.1 Decolonizing the Subject

Bennabi and Fanon both developed ideas about what it meant to decolonize the subject, and thus form “New Men,” in the late colonial period. Malek Bennabi was a Muslim intellectual trained in Islamic law in 1920s Constantine which was then a stronghold of the reformist (*iṣlāḥ*) movement around the renowned scholar Abdelhamid Ben Badis.<sup>14</sup> He left Algeria in 1930 to return only after independence and wrote most of his works during his stays in France and Egypt.<sup>15</sup> In his 1954 book *Vocation de l’Islam*, Bennabi made a withering assessment of the situation of his country and the Muslim world, in general. He regarded it as caught in chaos and stagnation and dominated by uncertainty. The central problem, for Bennabi, was what he called “colonizability”: a result of the “decadence” of Muslim society in the “post-Almohad” period, i.e. since the fall of the Almohad caliphate in the thirteenth century. Colonizability is not the same as colonialism; in fact, for Bennabi it precedes actual colonial rule, both chronologically and logically, and refers to the situation of society and the state of mind of individuals. According to Bennabi, with the end of the Almohad caliphate, which represented the last indigenous empire of North Africa as well as a religious movement of renewal and puritanism (the term Almohad is derived from *al-muwaḥḥidūn*, pertaining to the movement’s strict monotheism, *tawḥīd*), Islamic civilization lost all its creative vigour – since

13 For an overview see *ibid.*, pp. 134–166.

14 On this movement see J. McDougall, Abdelhamid Ben Badis et l’association des oulémas, in: A. Bouchène et al. (eds.), *Histoire de l’Algérie à la période coloniale 1830–1962*, Paris 2014, pp. 387–392.

15 On Bennabi see J. Kraiss, Bennabi, Malek, in: K. Fleet et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edn, vol. 2018-6, Leiden 2018, pp. 27–30.

then, Muslims had fallen back into a state of vegetative life with almost no culture left.<sup>16</sup> Colonialism, then, was not the cause, but the consequence of the bad shape the Muslim world found itself in. Accordingly, the aim should not be only the achievement of formal political independence – which in many cases, for Bennabi, was a mere appearance –, but rather thorough self-reform to overcome the condition of colonizability. To get rid of colonialism, the Muslim individual, “the disintegrated man [...] living in a dissolved society that no longer furnishes his existence with either moral or material base,” or, in one word, “post-Almohad man,” had to change.<sup>17</sup>

For Frantz Fanon, the Martinican Marxist who had come to the Algerian town of Blida as a psychiatrist in 1953, it was the process of decolonization which would bring about a new human being.<sup>18</sup> In his view, the liberation from colonialism constituted an absolute rupture with the past. In his major work *Les damnés de la terre* from 1961 he defined the decolonized country as a “kind of *tabula rasa*”:

*Decolonization [...] influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.*<sup>19</sup>

The “New Man,” for Fanon, came into being in an act of self-liberation. More concretely, it was violent action that enabled the colonized to “embody history in his own person” or – as the original text has it – “be history in actions” (*être l'histoire en actes*).<sup>20</sup> With this initiative the colonized could finally assume the history of their country – which until then had been occupied exclusively by the colonizers – as their own and bring about a new beginning. At the end of his manifesto for the Third World Fanon rejected all notions of catch-up development, because they would consist in a mere imitation of Europe and hence, we can assume, compromise the radical novelty necessary for a truly decolonized world. Instead, a “New Man” was needed to overcome the inferiority complex of the colonized. A decolonized person, then, was not someone mimicking the West, but a totally new being: “Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man [*l'homme total*].”<sup>21</sup>

16 See M. Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam* [Islam in History and Society], A. Rashid (trans.), Islamabad 1988, pp. 5-18.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

18 On Fanon see A. Cherki, *Frantz Fanon, portrait*, Paris 2000.

19 F. Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* [The Wretched of the Earth], C. Farrington (trans.), New York 1991, pp. 35-37.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 313; especially on the inferiority complex see also F. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks], C. L. Markmann (trans.), London 2008.

Whereas Fanon envisaged a "whole man," Bennabi talked about "integral man" as the ideal historical actor.<sup>22</sup> As for the revolutionary socialist, historical agency was a central theme for the Islamic reformer, too:<sup>23</sup> Bennabi's "New Man" was "the man in his plenitude who 'strains' himself, goes beyond his nature because he constantly modifies it. In such a case, his word is a will, an act that expresses a just relationship between words and realities."<sup>24</sup> Against the actual politicians of his time, whom he saw caught in pointless debate and mere talking, Bennabi imagined a man whose word was automatically translated, by his will, into action. For him, it was not need that should guide one's behaviour, but action itself, because only agency opened up new possibilities. Similarly, he claimed, before demanding rights, one should accept one's duties, assume one's responsibilities.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 "New Men" between Planning and Spontaneity

In their theories, both Bennabi and Fanon stressed time and again the prevalence of action. But how did this theoretical urge for action translate into practice, i.e. into actual action? In fact, the importance of action as such is also found in autobiographical accounts of the period that are dealing with young people's activism in political movements, scout associations etc. The historian Mohammed Harbi, himself a young nationalist activist in the 1940s, stressed the fact that his engagement in politics was "spontaneous, so to say natural," not motivated by ideological considerations. He even contrasted the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques, MTLD), the major nationalist party of the postwar years, as a movement of sheer, undogmatic activism with the ideology-based Algerian Communist Party (Parti Communiste Algérien, PCA):

*Contrary to the PCA, the MTLD did not have any doctrine. [...] There did not exist, at the MTLD, cadre training schools which are often, in ideological militant movements, schools to uproot and form 'new men,' mystic functionaries of secular religion. [...] The life of the movement depended entirely on the activities of its members.*<sup>26</sup>

Another young activist, Hocine Aït Ahmed, who would become one of the historic leaders of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN), recalled the enthusiasm of scouts for the demonstrations of May 1945, youngsters "who, from the beginning of their scouting activities, had had only one word on their lips: 'action.'" He concluded:

22 Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam*, p. 10.

23 On the similarities between Bennabi and Fanon see P. C. Naylor, *The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi* (Malik bn Nabi), in: *French Colonial History* 7 (2006), pp. 129-142.

24 Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam*, p. 34.

25 See *ibid.*, pp. 30-36.

26 M. Harbi, *Une vie debout. Mémoires politiques*, vol. I: 1945-1962, Paris 2001, pp. 75, 77. If not stated otherwise, translations are by the author.

*Relatively autonomous with regard to the PPA leadership,<sup>27</sup> we, the young militants from Kabylia, lived these exalting moments of accord between ideas and actions. From this time on, I have refused the priority of ritual over faith, of dogmatism over spirit, of talk over lived experience.<sup>28</sup>*

While Bennabi lamented the absence of planning as the cause for the chaos of the Muslim world, Harbi and Aït Ahmed rather emphasized the power of spontaneity.<sup>29</sup> The former aimed at “technically utilising man, soil and time for producing a social synthesis.” He even seemed to have in mind the notion of human material which can be examined and moulded accordingly:

*When one wants to find the flaws of a steel bar which is intended to serve as the central motor of a machine, one submits it to an analysis – for example, a mellographical examination, in order to study its internal structure. [...] Similarly when one wishes to know man as the motor of social life, conditions are such on the human plane that one must have recourse to a search of conscience that alone would reveal the intimate articulations of the human personality in its movement and action. Only by this method, one could explore the innermost recesses of the post-al-Muwahh̄id soul to know where the transformations are needed.<sup>30</sup>*

Opposed to such ideas that seem to echo the scientifically grounded development plans of colonial technocrats, Harbi rejected the idea of producing “New Men” in some kind of top-down process; for him, action had to spring up naturally from below. The difference here might have to do with the generational dimension, which set apart a more radical generation of 1945 (born in the 1920s and 1930s) from the rather intellectual and reform-oriented nationalist leaders of the interwar period.<sup>31</sup>

The common enemies for both generations remained – apart from France, obviously – the old notables, reproached with a fatalist reluctance to actively make history. The guerrilla fighter Zohra Drif described this attitude, with regard to the family of her friend (and soon fellow militant) Samia Lakhdari:

27 The PPA (Parti du Peuple Algérien, or Algerian People’s Party) had been banned by the French authorities in 1939, but continued to operate clandestinely, and finally reconstituted itself as the MTLD in 1946 (McDougall, *A History*, pp. 166–178; M. Rahal, *Du PPA-MTLD au FLN?*, in: A. Bouchène et al. (eds.), *Histoire de l’Algérie à la période coloniale 1830–1962*, Paris 2014, pp. 547–552).

28 H. Aït Ahmed, *Mémoires d’un combattant. L’esprit de l’indépendance 1942–1952*, Paris 1983, pp. 38, 69.

29 The value of revolutionary spontaneity is discussed at length in Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, pp. 107–147.

30 Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, p. 82.

31 See also O. Carlier, *Les générations PPA de la deuxième guerre mondiale: le cas d’Alger (1939–1947)*, in: O. Siari-Tengour and A. Kadri (eds.), *Génération engagées et Mouvements nationaux: Le XXe siècle au Maghreb. Hommage à Mahfoud Kaddache*, Oran 2012, pp. 25–51. Bennabi who was born in 1905, for his part, acquired his political consciousness during the early 1920s in the intellectual environment of Constantine, as he describes in his memoir (M. Bennabi, *Mémoires d’un témoin du siècle. L’enfant – l’étudiant – l’écrivain – les carnets*, N. Boukrouh (ed.), Algiers 2006, pp. 73–89; see also Aït Ahmed, *Mémoires*, pp. 44–46). On the other hand, the nationalist leader Ali Kafi, who was born in 1928 and was, thus, even a little younger than Aït Ahmed, also stresses the importance of organization and planning as a prerequisite for success (A. Kafi, *Du militant politique au dirigeant militaire. Mémoires (1946–1962)*, Algiers 2002, pp. 25–26).

*Samia's father believed neither in Man nor in his ability to change the course of History, let alone in the principle of free will. [...] For him, the colonial system with its host of evils inflicted on our people on a daily basis was a multitude of trials which Allah sent us to test our faith; our liberation was subject to divine will. This philosophy constituted a great point of disagreement with his wife and daughter.*<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to these men of the past, all reformers and independence activists considered themselves to be on the right side of history. If colonialism had succeeded in “halting the march of the peoples towards light” for a certain period,<sup>33</sup> this stage was now definitively over: colonialists might struggle as they liked, they were being surpassed, once and for all, by the progress of history.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. From Boy Scout to Leader: Preparing Youth for the Future

#### 3.1 Youthfulness and Social Reform

However, this progress was not something just to be waited for like “divine will,” it had to be actively made. Paradoxically, Algerian anticolonialists like Bennabi subscribed in principle to a colonialist discourse about the decline of the Muslim world and to Orientalist stereotypes about its fatalist passivity.<sup>35</sup> But, of course, these thinkers and activists had in mind solutions very different from the colonizers’ civilizing mission ideology. Bennabi, for instance, was clear about the potential of Muslim society and Islamic religion to create the “New Man” necessary for a recovery out of itself:

*[...] for reviving its vigour to the world [pour refaire une jeunesse au monde], there must be a new man capable of assuming the responsibilities of his existence, morally and materially, both as a witness and an actor. The post-al-Muwahh̄id man is certainly too old, too decrepit; but the Muslim world, nonetheless, contains a large share of this necessary youthfulness [de cette jeunesse nécessaire].*<sup>36</sup>

The term *jeunesse* (youth) might be meant metaphorically here, but all actual attempts at a reform of Algerian society had, at least since the 1920s, targeted the young sectors of the Muslim population in particular. The new spaces the *iṣlāḥ* movement created from the mid-1930s on ranged from a private Arabic school system and the scout movement to cultural associations and sports teams – all places where the youth would be prepared for a future leadership role.<sup>37</sup> As Harbi recalled, private schools (*médersas / madāris*) and,

32 Z. Drif, *Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN*. Zone Autonome d'Alger, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Algiers 2014, p. 195.

33 Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam*, p. 56.

34 See e.g. S. Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, Paris 1976, pp. 120, 190; Sh. Bin Jadīd, *Mudhakkirāt al-Shādhili Bin Jadīd*, vol. I: *Malāmiḥ ḥayāt*, 1929–1979, Algiers 2011, p. 57.

35 On French Orientalist discourse see E. Burke III, *France and the Classical Sociology of Islam, 1798–1962*, in: *The Journal of North African Studies* 12 (2007) 4, pp. 551–561.

36 Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam*, p. 92.

37 See B. Amouchi, *Mémoires d'un éducateur de la jeunesse*, Constantine 1991. On the reformist school system see also C. Courreye, *L'école musulmane algérienne de Ibn Bādīs dans les années 1930, de l'alphabétisation de tous*

even more so, scout troops were the main sites for the socialization of a new generation of nationalists: “The *medersa* stimulated me less than scouting with its open-air activities, its debates, the learning of patriotic songs with Abderrahmane Kerbouche who was in charge of the Wolf Cubs and made me head of a Six.” He went on to specify the importance of chants, in particular: “Through songs, scouting had taught us patriotism. They exalted the role of youth: ‘We are the youth. We are the future with its sacred glory. We have religion in our heart and light in our eyes.’”<sup>38</sup> Not only intellectuals like Harbi or Mahfoud Kaddache, who would gain repute as historians of the nationalist movement, started their careers as scout leaders, but also many of the active fighters in the independence war, such as Larbi Ben M’hidi who is today considered one of the central “martyrs” and national heroes in Algerian public memory.<sup>39</sup>

In 1948, the Algerian scout movement split: the more radical and activist strand, dominated by the nationalists, took control of the Algerian Muslim Scouts (Scouts Musulmans Algériens, SMA), while the more cautious Islamic reformist tendency formed the Algerian Muslim Boy Scouts (Boy Scouts Musulmans Algériens, BSMA), who continued on the allegedly nonpolitical path of social reform. Still, the members of both organizations were widely perceived by reformers and community leaders as the cadres of tomorrow.<sup>40</sup> Although Bennabi was not actively engaged in any of the initiatives mentioned, in a short remark in his book *Les conditions de la renaissance* from 1949 he saw the Muslim scouts as a sort of vanguard that could instil a new work ethic in a society held back by colonialism. There, he demanded from a scout:

*That he leaves behind electoral palavers, rolls up his sleeves and, silently and courageously, enters the building site where we have to lay the foundations of a civilization, starting from scratch [...]. The Algerian scout must become the instigator of a people that has unlearned everything, even how one laughs and how one walks the street. The Algerian scout must sow the seeds, promote the idea of knowledge.*<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2 Training Leaders

But how could this kind of vanguard of “New Men” who would simply “roll up their sleeves” and create a new society be formed? The notion of preparedness lay at the heart of the education of a new generation in the scout movements. After 1945, in a late co-

comme enjeu politique, in: *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 136 (2014), [remmm.revues.org/8500](http://remmm.revues.org/8500) (accessed 21 April 2019).

38 Harbi, *Une vie debout*, pp. 42, 45.

39 See J.-J. Gauthé, *Le scout est loyal envers son pays... Mouvements scouts et nationalismes en Europe et aux colonies (1909–1962)*, in: G. Cholvy (ed.), *Le scoutisme: un mouvement d'éducation au XXe siècle. Dimensions internationales*, Montpellier 2002, pp. 219–247; S. Watanabe, *Organizational Changes in the Algerian National Movement as Seen through the Muslim Boy Scouts in the 1930s and 1940s: The Struggle for Influence between the Association of Ulama and the PPA-MTLD*, in: *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 30 (2012), pp. 41–69.

40 See also S. Watanabe, *The Party of God: The Association of Algerian Muslim 'Ulama' in Contention with the Nationalist Movement after World War II*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50 (2018) 2, pp. 271–290.

41 M. Bennabi, *Les conditions de la renaissance. Problème d'une civilisation*, Algiers 2005, pp. 130–131.

lonial context where independence – or, at the very least, a thorough reform of political and social structures that would effectively end colonial domination – seemed all but inevitably in principle, being prepared for the new situation, which was deemed imminent, though its concrete outlook remained uncertain, represented a major concern for educators. The scouts, with their motto “be prepared,” were ideally placed to offer the sort of holistic education needed for young people who were expected to guide a nation one day.<sup>42</sup> In a publication of the SMA troop “Emir Khaled” from the Algiers neighbourhood of Belcourt (today, Belouizdad) the aims of the youth movement were summarized as educational, patriotic, cultural, and social. In concrete terms it was supposed to connect the ethical formation of character and a nationalist consciousness – both to a large extent through physical education – with the learning of the Arabic language and volunteer service in the Muslim community.<sup>43</sup> The combination of physical as well as mental fitness, the acquisition of knowledge, ethical character formation, the practice of solidarity and aid work, and, finally, the raising of political consciousness were all meant to prepare exemplary citizens who could also lead others.

A report in the SMA bulletin from 1951 gave an overview over the training of the older scouts (from age 18 onwards): they had to follow classes on religious, civic, and geographical subjects, practice several specific sports (*hébértisme* or gymnastics, swimming, cycling, and a team game), acquire the practical knowledge related to outdoor activity and camp life (such as orientation, cooking etc.) and be competent in first aid as well as in “general hygiene.” Through this programme, the young adults should strive to fulfil five ideals: the scouts were to have “noble aspirations” and a “noble mission” in society, they had to be “the model patriot” as well as “the example of the good Muslim” – in one word: they should become “a perfect man.”<sup>44</sup> In a Muslim context, the notion of the perfect man (or human being, Arabic: *al-insān al-kāmil*) evoked the Prophet Muhammad – although the term’s Sufist genealogy might render it a little odd in the *iṣlāḥī* context.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, scout educators often presented the Prophet as a role model for the young: they depicted Muhammad not only as the “original über-scout” (as Wilson Jacob has put it with regard to Egyptian youth movements),<sup>46</sup> but, in a sense, also as the first “New Man,” whose example just had to be followed.<sup>47</sup> The concomitant idea of a return to religious purity within concepts of shaping the “New Man” had its roots in the

42 Interestingly, the scout motto was translated differently into Arabic, according to the political tendency of the association: while the more nationalist SMA used the literal translation “kun musta’iddan” (“be prepared”), the BSMA, close to the Islamic reformists, employed a line from the Qur’an (verse 8:60), “wa-a’iddū” (“and prepare”).

43 A. Aroua and M. T. Illoul, Le groupe Emir Khaled de Belcourt. Un maillon des Scouts Musulmans Algériens 1946–1962, Algiers 1991, pp. 103–5.

44 S. Louanchi, La Route S.M.A., in: Bulletin d’Information – Scouts Musulmans Algériens 5 (1951), pp. 19–25, at 20–22.

45 See R. Arnaldez, *al-insān al-kāmil*, in: P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\_islam\_COM\_0375 (accessed 22 February 2019).

46 W. C. Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940*, Durham 2011, p. 109.

47 See e.g. M. Bouzouzou, *Le dernier messenger*, Algiers 1950; A. Baghli, *L’itinéraire d’un Chef de Meute: Khaled Merzouk. Scouts Musulmans Algériens, Groupe El Mansourah de Tlemcen 1936–1962*, Tlemcen 2000, pp. 19–21.

intellectual background of Algerian scout associations in twentieth-century modernist-Salafist reform.

The Muslim scout associations established different spaces – called “Preparatory Camp Schools” (*Camps-écoles préparatoires*, CEP) or simply *camps de formation* – with the aim of training young men and women and prepare them for their role as future leaders. The SMA summer camp near the Atlas town of Médéa in 1948 was fittingly entitled “Camp Future” (*mukhayyam al-mustaqbal*): under the general motto “the future to the youth” (*al-mustaqbal lil-shabāb*) the general educational aim was “brotherhood” (*fraternité*), with one daily subject being “discipline.”<sup>48</sup> A BSMA training camp that took place in Kabylia in 1951, on the other hand, put the emphasis on practical knowledge needed for the betterment of society or the construction of a new nation.

The BSMA leader Chikh Bouamrane detailed the activities during this “flying camp” (*camp volant*) in his report:

*The physical effort, 20 to 25 km of walking each day, corresponds to the necessities and the age of the youngsters in the middle of their development. Apart from that, the flying camp is the best way to discover a new country and an extremely generous population [...]. In general, we debated technical, cultural, economic, spiritual and other problems ... starting from a living and concrete enquiry. For example, before discussing the industrialization of the country, we visited extensively the new hydro-electric plant of Souk-Djemaâ. The study of Sainte Eugénie Hospital at Beni Meguellat preceded the question of first aid and the struggle against illness. Examining the School for Professional Formation of Oued Aïssi where qualified workers for carpentry, woodwork, mechanics, and electricity are trained ... was the starting point for a debate about workshops, professional orientation and unemployment.*<sup>49</sup>

The programme, thus, included walking for purposes of physical training, but the practice of hiking in the countryside was also meant to acquaint young scouts, who came usually from larger towns or cities, with the realities of their country. Part of it was certainly a nationalist impetus to make the nation (which was still being built) a tangible space. On the other hand, to get to know the living conditions of (presumably) poor peasants, who made up the vast majority of the Algerian population, would also contribute to an almost sociological or ethnographic study and lead to a sharpening of political consciousness, in particular regarding the socio-economic inequalities of the colonial system. The visit of plants, hospitals, and schools, finally, would prepare the young participants for a time when they would take over the posts of experts and planners from colonial administrators.

In fact, Bouamrane concluded his report with a definition of the sort of leadership qualities scouts were to learn:

48 Aroua and Illoul, *Le groupe Emir Khaled*, pp. 147-56. The nationalist party PPA-MTLD during these years also operated a school called “El Moustaqbal” (Kafi, *Du militant politique au dirigeant militaire*, p. 20).

49 C. Bouamrane and M. Djidjelli, *Scouts Musulmans Algériens (1935–1955)*, Algiers 2010, p. 309.

*The role of a leader is sometimes misunderstood. There are some who want to make of him an infallible, authoritarian, uncontested guide who alone is responsible for his subordinates. At the end of the camp, everyone recognized that a leader has to convince and resonate [rayonner], inspire initiatives and not turn them down and create executors. [... The camp] served the trainees to complete their formation, on the one hand, and, on the other, to acquire a consciousness of the huge tasks awaiting the men of good will to make out of this country and the Algerian youth a country and a youth worthy of fulfilling their obligations in a modern world and in the Islamic community.<sup>50</sup>*

The notions of modernization and development that the colonial state put forward during the same period were, thus, widely accepted among young scouts and activists. In retrospect, Harbi was able to put this drive into context:

*I was fascinated with the dream of modernization. My generation did not hesitate to try and engage our people, if necessary by force, against those who refused our cult of science, our belief in reason and progress. [...] It is no coincidence, then, that the idea of authoritarian modernization became integrated into the independent Algerian state. As a young man, I was unaware that this path suited perfectly the strata in the process of social ascension, all directed towards the future.<sup>51</sup>*

The Muslim scouts, "soldiers of the future," as Kaddache called them,<sup>52</sup> would effectively form the backbone of the militant independence movement that organized itself as the FLN with the beginning of the independence war in 1954. But even as they fought an armed struggle against colonial rule, the young were presented as always being ahead of their times: in April 1960 the FLN representative M'hammed Yazid addressed the African Youth Seminar in Tunis, detailing the role of youth during the war. The member of Algeria's government-in-exile asserted that "our Algerian youth, just as African youth, has already surpassed the present stadium of our national liberation struggle and dedicates itself to preparing the construction of independence." The new contact of young intellectuals and students with farmers and workers during the fight for independence had, according to Yazid, started a process of forming new cadres for the nation to build, which would essentially be "a country of the young" (*un pays de jeunes*). In short: "The future of Algeria will be what the youth wants it to be."<sup>53</sup>

50 Ibid., p. 310.

51 Harbi, *Une vie debout*, p. 81.

52 M. Kaddache, "Les soldats de l'avenir: Les Scouts musulmans algériens (1930–1962)," in: N. Bancel, D. Denis and Y. Fatès (eds.), *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie: La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940–1962*, Paris 2003, pp. 68–77, at 69.

53 M. Yazid, *La jeunesse algérienne dans la révolution*, in: *El Moudjahid*, 25 April 1960, p. 8.

## 4. Symbolic Bodies: Vitalism and Vitality

### 4.1 Organic Unity and the National Body

The idea of “a country of the young” certainly implied a country full of vitality: “New Men” with new bodies would form a reinvigorated national body. This also suggested a kind of organic unity of the youth, whose activism would also be directed against the political style of traditional notables or of liberal “moderate” nationalists. Both the technocratic and moralistic approach of the scouts – who saw experts and guides as the nation’s future leaders – and the underlying conception of history with its assumption of quasi-scientific laws of Progress led to a pronounced antipolitical stance: moral imperatives or the laws of history, in this view, would always override tactical considerations, pragmatic compromises, or the power struggles of plural party politics. While Fanon, for instance, proposed an organic popular unity of the nation against the partisanship of bourgeois politicians,<sup>54</sup> Bennabi referred to actual politics only in a derogatory way by the colloquial Algerian term *boulitique*.<sup>55</sup> His perspective always went beyond the vicissitudes of concrete political manoeuvres and compromises; in his memoir he defined his approach in opposition to that of a friend: “He saw things politically, I saw them in terms of civilization.”<sup>56</sup>

This is not the place to delve into the details of Bennabi’s elaborate theory on the rise and fall of civilizations.<sup>57</sup> What is obvious, though, is his organicist understanding of civilization and its evolution. Marwa Elshakry has shown that evolutionism was an important point of reference for Arab socialists and Muslim modernists alike during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> Bennabi was no exception: although he explicitly rejected social Darwinism, his analysis was based on terms from evolutionary theory (in the French-speaking context often associated with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, rather than Charles Darwin).<sup>59</sup> The Islamic thinker talked about post-Almohad man even as a sort of congenital disease, transmitted by “sociological heredity”:

*[...] the symptoms that could be discerned in urban or political affairs were but the expression of a nearly pathological state of the new man – the post-al-Muwahhid man who had succeeded the man of Muslim civilization, and who carried in himself the germs whence would sprout, in succession and sporadically, all the problems since faced by the Muslim world.*<sup>60</sup>

54 See F. Fanon, *Sociologie d’une révolution* [A Dying Colonialism], H. Chevalier (trans.), New York 2007, pp. 148–205.

55 See Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, p. 51.

56 Bennabi, *Mémoires*, p. 166.

57 The theory, which is inspired by Ibn Khaldun, is developed mainly in Bennabi, *Les conditions de la renaissance* and M. Bennabi, *Le problème des idées dans le monde musulman*, Algiers 1990 (first published in 1971).

58 See M. Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950*, Chicago 2014, pp. 161–260.

59 See Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, pp. 42–43; also Harbi, *Une vie debout*, p. 82.

60 Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, p. 13.

What was needed to overcome this situation and bring into being the next “New Man,” the “integral man” to revive the vigour of original Muslim civilization, in Bennabi’s words, was adaptation: “[...] man [...] adapts himself by an *over-effort*, that is, by a conscious and technical organisation of his life against cold, hunger and other contingencies.”<sup>61</sup> Another clearly detectable influence on Bennabi’s work is vitalism, more precisely the philosophy of Henri Bergson, with which the author came certainly into contact during his student days in 1930s Paris. For Bergson, “evolution is actualization, actualization is creation” (as Gilles Deleuze sums up his thought).<sup>62</sup> We have already seen that Bennabi stressed the creative force of actions over preexisting needs; he also contrasted the “entropic evolution” (which consumes without producing) the colonizable Muslim countries found themselves trapped in with the energy and creativity which would “render the civilised man superior.”<sup>63</sup> In this sense, “the necessary youthfulness” of Muslim society he talked about was a sort of Bergsonian virtuality which needed to be actualized by the creative spirit of “New Men.”<sup>64</sup>

Did these organicist and vitalist tendencies translate into a concrete propagation of vitality as a characteristic for “New Men,” into a practice of physical culture? In fact, in some sense “New Men” also needed new bodies. The doctor Fanon, for his part, saw colonialism, above all, as a system of everyday repression, affecting both psyche and body. Hence, the reaction of the colonized to break out of this system by vital force was natural:

*This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me.*

Fanon continued by asserting: “The native’s muscles are always tensed.”<sup>65</sup> This led to periodic outbursts of violence which, at first, were mainly self-destructive, though – the repressed energies present in the colonized body had to be channelled towards the right goals, “from the North African’s criminal impulsivity to the war of national Liberation.”<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.2 “New Men” and New Bodies

Where the right actualization of youthful potentials in this sense could lead, is attested in autobiographical sources from the period. They suggest that physical fitness was widely perceived, at the same time, as a marker for the new generation that would make his-

61 Ibid., p. 50.

62 G. Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme* [Bergsonism], H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (trans.), New York 1991, p. 98.

63 Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, pp. 32, 46.

64 There exist more parallels between the thought of Bergson and Bennabi’s theories, which cannot all be discussed here, e.g. the emphasis on the finality, rather than the causality in history or the call for a new mysticism (that the reformist Muslim intellectual formulates in spite of his strong anti-Sufist leanings).

65 Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, pp. 52-53.

66 Ibid., p. 293. Translation modified (the English translation here says “Criminal impulses found in North Africans which have their origin in the national war of liberation,” gravely distorting the original *De l’impulsivité criminelle du Nord-Africain à la guerre de Libération nationale*).

tory and as a prerequisite to overcoming one's colonized (or colonizable) condition and achieving independence. Ali Kafi, an important commander in the independence war (who thirty years later would even become Algerian head of state), pinpointed the qualities of the ideal activist, when talking about one particular fighter: "[...] she was a living example of dynamism, initiative, and selflessness."<sup>67</sup> Several authors mentioned the ideal of endurance which in the end made them superior to the colonizers.<sup>68</sup> Si Azzedine, another prominent commander in the independence war, related how taking to the *maquis* made him "a New Man." Apart from adopting a new name (Si Azzedine had been born as Rabah Zerari), this included the development of an almost superhuman physique that made possible several apparently miraculous healings after he had been wounded in combat: his utmost fear not being death but an invalidity that would prevent him from playing football, Azzedine succeeded, according to his account, in curing himself, to the astonishment of physicians, by sheer discipline.<sup>69</sup> His fellow guerrilla fighter Louise Ighilahriz recounted a similar tale of discipline and endurance: hit by five bullets, one of which had never been removed, she refused to use even a cane until relatively old age.<sup>70</sup> Before the armed independence struggle the scout troops, discussed above, and the new sports clubs, that emerged in large numbers all over Algeria from about World War I on and were also often connected to nationalist or reformist activities,<sup>71</sup> had offered a place to channel youthful energies and muscular tensions.<sup>72</sup> In a certain sense, the first Muslim Algerian sports stars who rose to prominence during the late colonial period were also the first "New Men."<sup>73</sup> Although intellectuals like Fanon and Bennabi did not have a particular appreciation for sports, successful athletes were actually the first Algerians to be accepted as achieving individuals on an equal footing by the French. Already in 1928, Ahmed El Ouafi had shaken colonial feelings of superiority, when he won the gold medal in the marathon at the Amsterdam Olympics.<sup>74</sup> After World War II professional athletes, such as cyclist Abdelkader Zaaf, boxer Chérif Hamia or footballer Rachid Mekhloufi came to be regarded as major stars of French sports.<sup>75</sup> As such, ordinary colonized people perceived them as potent symbols, breaking out of the seemingly eternal inferiority. The

67 Kafi, *Du militant politique au dirigeant militaire*, p. 158.

68 See e.g. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, pp. 65-66, 152-153; Drif, *Mémoires*, p. 55; L. Ighilahriz, *Algérienne*, Paris 2001, pp. 32, 94.

69 See Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, pp. 15, 52, 76, 252-253.

70 See Ighilahriz, *Algérienne*, pp. 105, 253.

71 See Y. Fatès, *Le club sportif, structure d'encadrement et de formation nationaliste de la jeunesse musulmane pendant la période coloniale*, in: N. Bancel, D. Denis and Y. Fatès (eds.), *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie. La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940-1962*, Paris 2003, pp. 150-162.

72 See e.g. Amouchi, *Mémoires*, pp. 10-13; Harbi, *Une vie debout*, pp. 68-69, 86-87.

73 See also S. Dufraisse, *Le champion, incarnation de l'homme nouveau soviétique: une genèse (1934-1953)*, in: Georges Bensoussan et al. (eds.), *Sport, corps et sociétés de masse. Le projet d'un homme nouveau*, Paris 2012, pp. 217-230.

74 See T. Terret and A. Roger, *Managing Colonial Contradictions: French Attitudes toward El Ouafi's 1928 Olympic Victory*, in: *Journal of Sports History* 36 (2009) 1, pp. 3-18.

75 See F. Chehat, *La fabuleuse histoire du sport algérien*, vol. 1: *Les moissons de l'exil 1912-1962*, Algiers 2016.

writer Kaddour M'Hamsadji remembered how, as an adolescent, he heard about the first Algerian cyclist to compete in the Tour de France (in 1947):

*For us, this was proof, once again, for the physical and mental capacity of the 'Arab' to rise, even regardless of his political stance to the Algerian problem, up to the sportive level of any French athlete of the colonial period.*<sup>76</sup>

This meant that successful self-reform was possible and that physical activity was a means to achieve it. Among those who regarded sports as a formative influence on their personal development was also Algeria's first president after independence, Ahmed Ben Bella. In his memoir (actually a long interview) he prided himself of having played briefly football with Olympique Marseilles, "at the time the champions of France and maybe one of the best teams at the European level." Ben Bella later hinted at his discipline and healthy lifestyle, which according to him, were necessary as much for sports as for political engagement.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the FLN's ban on smoking and alcohol cannot only be explained as a tax boycott or an instance of Islamic identity politics,<sup>78</sup> but also as a measure to promote health, fitness, and discipline among "New Men" against the decadence of the old guard.<sup>79</sup>

Maybe the best example for the juxtaposition of "new" and "old" men by their bodily shape is to be found in Aït Ahmed's memoir: he first described an informer of the French authorities and his ridiculous appearance, both physically and with regard to his – traditional – dress. He concluded: "If he had not been so resentful, this person would have been just grotesque. Of small height, always wearing large woollen *gandouras* and a camel-hair *burnous*, he displayed an enormous moustache." This description of the "old" man was directly followed by the story of a "New Man," the young nationalist activist Sid Ali Halit, incarcerated in Algiers:

*[...] the torturer on duty first refuses to open his cell, then he complies, as he does not have to fear an evasion, with Sid Ali in such a miserable state. He is not able to keep himself up, so running ... Well, he could run! He had finally found in his desperation – or hope – the willpower and the physical resources to leave hell. Zigzagging like crazy, he ran [...] at least three kilometres.*<sup>80</sup>

The insistence on bodily fitness did not mean, of course, that forming a "New Man" was simply about outward appearances. Bennabi, for one, was very clear about that, when he said with respect to post-Almohad man:

*One encounters this haunting figure of our past [...] also under the deceptive aspect of the son of a millionaire, of a diploma-holder, who has apparently acquired all the etiquettes*

76 K. M'Hamsadji, *Le petit café de mon père. Récits au passé*, Algiers 2011, p. 195.

77 A. Bin Balla, *Hadith ma'rifi shāmil*, M. Khalifa (ed.), Beirut 1985, pp. 45, 62.

78 Cf. Kafi, *Du militant politique au dirigeant militaire*, p. 156.

79 See also Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, pp. 41-42, 77.

80 Aït Ahmed, *Mémoires*, pp. 46-47.

*of modern life. His diploma or the wealth of his father gives him, at times, the aspect of a 'new man,' but if one scrutinises his manners, sentiments and thoughts, one would easily perceive that he is none other than the 'post-al-Muwahhid man.' [...] But it is evidently more difficult to know and make the man of a civilization than to manufacture a motor or to teach a monkey to carry a tie.<sup>81</sup>*

In a colonial situation of constant struggle with its permanent latent enmity between colonizer and colonized – as Fanon saw it –, physical strength was the necessary complement of new mental capacities: the sound body could not be separated from a sound mind. As a consequence, the “new bio-historical synthesis,” for Bennabi, was not just the way out of colonizability for Muslim Algerians, it was, in fact, intended to solve the problems of all humankind, not least of a Western world that might have been strong, but that over technological progress had gradually lost its soul and, thereby, its vitality.<sup>82</sup>

## 5. Generations: New Men and Old Men

### 5.1 Anti-Colonialism as Generational Conflict

As mentioned before, many thinkers and activists at the time emphasized the necessity of a clear break with the past, a rupture that would set apart the “New Men” not only from colonialism but equally from earlier generations of “old men” within their own society. Kafi, for example, saw the war of independence as “a decisive shortcut and a complete transformation in the middle of society.”<sup>83</sup> This terminology could well have been applied to the Constantine Plan by French technocrats, but now it was the revolution that would bring about a completely new society almost overnight. For Yazid, Kafi’s comrade in the FLN, the war was to lead to “a total break with the backward past,” as he put it in his Tunis speech. It was thus not only a struggle for liberation from colonial rule, but also a revolutionary transformation of society:

*The youth has benefitted from the exceptional circumstances created by the Revolution. The Revolution has broken up all colonial structures and progressively eliminated feudal structures and residues. For example, we have seen the young man leaving his family, escaping the traditionalist authority of his father, escaping the burden of family, insofar as this burden has been sometimes politically backward.<sup>84</sup>*

The FLN functionary here hinted at a phenomenon that Fanon analysed in more detail. He devoted a large part of his *Sociologie d’une révolution*, originally published in 1959, to the changing family structures and gender relations in Algerian Muslim society. For the Marxist-inspired thinker – again, not unlike the late colonial planners with their social

81 Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, p. 13.

82 See *ibid.*, pp. 9, 61-71.

83 Kafi, *Du militant politique au dirigeant militaire*, p. 155.

84 Yazid, *La jeunesse algérienne*, p. 8.

scientific expertise – social structures perceived as retrograde or even reactionary were a major obstacle for the progression of colonized peoples towards their independent future. It was the liberation war which would not only lead to freedom from colonialism, but also to a general liberation in society. Fanon, the psychoanalyst, described how sons would, for the first time, challenge the authority of their fathers by their political actions and thereby supersede the older generations that were stuck in traditionalist stagnation, on the one hand, and colonial subordination, on the other. Finally, all family members were able to break out of the restraining structures and to assert themselves as new persons:

*Individual persons have found themselves facing new choices, new decisions. The customary and highly structured patterns of behaviour that were the crystallization of traditional ideas suddenly proved ineffective and were abandoned.*<sup>85</sup>

In fact, there was a marked generational dimension in anti-colonial activism during the last two decades of French rule in Algeria. Fanon remarked: “It was the young Algerian who swept the family into the vast national liberation movement.”<sup>86</sup> Many independence activists in their recollections singled out the events of May 1945 as a point of no return and the moment of definite rupture with the legalist and compromising approaches of an older generation of nationalist politicians.<sup>87</sup> Harbi even connected the generational conflict in Algeria with a world-historical change of power: according to him, the challenge to traditional authority began after Operation Torch in November 1942, when Allied troops ousted the French administration loyal to the Vichy Regime. The entry of the United States, the future global power, onto the North African stage for the historian marked the beginning of a new era. With the demise of the ultra-conservative Vichy Regime, headed by 86-year-old Marshal Philippe Pétain (a hero of World War I), in the minds of young activists, it was time to go for other men of the past as well, namely the old Algerian notables and traditional leaders that had sustained the colonial order for decades.<sup>88</sup>

The “New Men” of the younger generation could also be “New Women.” According to Fanon, it was the female members of society that challenged traditional authority the strongest and brought about the most radical transformation: by assuming an active role in the national struggle, women would shake off traditional patriarchy and even acquire a “new personality.”<sup>89</sup> Drif described how her friend Samia (together with her mother) would defy the role of the father – a *cadi* (*qāḍī*) and thus a traditional authority well-established in the colonial system – by surpassing him in nationalist zeal and political

85 Fanon, *Sociologie d’une révolution*, pp. 99-100.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

87 See Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, p. 31; Bin Jadid, *Mudhakkirāt*, pp. 46-49; M. Boudiaf, *La préparation du 1er novembre*, suivi de *La lettre ouverte aux Algériens*, Paris 1976, pp. 10-25; Drif, *Mémoires*, pp. 45, 72. The events of May 1945 are described with great detail by Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, pp. 38-46.

88 See Harbi, *Une vie debout*, p. 43.

89 Fanon, *Sociologie d’une révolution*, p. 109.

activism.<sup>90</sup> Azzedine related the story of his niece Zehor who gained autonomy from her father (a patriarchal figure also for Azzedine) through her political engagement and her insistence on discussing important matters with all family members.<sup>91</sup> These autobiographical recollections confirm to a large extent Fanon's findings about the shift in gender relations.<sup>92</sup>

## 5.2 The Break with Tradition

The opponent in this fight for a "New Man" and a new society, which, in Bennabi's terms, would no longer be colonizable, was obviously "tradition," especially in the form of old notables, like Samia Lakhdari's *cadi* father, deemed too prone to compromise with colonialism. Interestingly, "tradition" acquired such a negative connotation not only for French developmentalists, and not just for the national revolutionary liberation movement with its socialist leanings, but also for distinctly Islamic thinkers and reformers. In Bennabi's eyes, it was one of the main problems that Muslim society held tradition in such high esteem, that it confused stagnation with religious authenticity. Just as the Muslim scouts with their reinterpretation of the Prophet's role, Bennabi, too, did not want to discard the exemplarity of early Islam, in spite of his critique of Muslims' "constant obsession with the past." Instead, he combined authenticity and modernization by the Salafist argument that a revolutionary renewal of Muslim society could only be achieved through a return to the purity of an original Islam, devoid of all later "superstitions."<sup>93</sup> The attack on tradition was all the more important, as the latter lay at the basis of colonial domination (as Fanon, too, stressed time and again):

*Colonialism is methodic: [...] It eliminates the veritable elite – not the one its particular favour has designated for representing the people – but the natural elite that testify to the highest virtues of a people. That it may not reform itself, that it may not emerge anew, there is installed a system of perversion, debasement and destruction directed against all dignity, all nobility and all modesty. [...] The Muslim renaissance, particularly since Afghani shattered the post-al-Muwahhid equilibrium, could not but excite its most passionate interest, and its unbounded power and ambition has inspired it with the mad and tragic idea of halting the march of civilisation in the colonised country. To counter tajdid it has set up an artificial archaism as a theatre scene wherein its puppets – marabouts,*

90 See Drif, *Mémoires*, pp. 64-66, 195.

91 See Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, pp. 203-232.

92 See Fanon, *Sociologie d'une révolution*, pp. 35-64, 105-118. It has to be noted, though, that Fanon's analysis remains firmly anchored in a male perspective and even a certain paternalism, which is very present in the whole discourse on women's "emancipation" (F. Lalami, *L'enjeu du statut des femmes durant la période coloniale en Algérie*, in: *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 27 [2008] 3, pp. 16-27). A similar attitude is present in Bennabi's writings (Bennabi, *Les conditions de la renaissance*, pp. 123-128; M. Bennabi, *Colonisabilité. Problèmes de la civilisation*, A. Benamara [ed.], pp. 200-213).

93 Bennabi, *Vocation de l'Islam*, p. 28.

*pashas, fake âlems or University degreeholders – must play the scene of the ‘Islamic tradition,’ – ‘tradition’ that has become the pass-word of the entire colonial policy.*<sup>94</sup>

For Bennabi, as for the religious reformists before him, the major negative symbol was certainly “maraboutism,” so-called popular Islam with its traditionalist authorities from the Sufi brotherhoods.<sup>95</sup> It should again be noted that the reformers’ impetus against “maraboutism” which was made responsible for Muslim backwardness, fatalism, and passivity was very much in line with classic Orientalist discourse about Islam – but now with an anticolonial twist. The general idea about the necessity of “modernization” was, thus, fully concordant with colonialist discussions around the transformation of an Islamic society that was perceived as being stuck in the middle ages into a modern French one.<sup>96</sup>

For the thinkers analysing Algerian society during the last phase of French rule, as well as for those actively engaged in the anti-colonial struggle, the break with tradition and all its old structures was at least as important as the actual fight against foreign domination. Maybe this is also a reason for the universalist impetus present in Fanon, who concluded *Les damnés de la terre* with the following sentence: “For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.”<sup>97</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The “New Man” appeared in late colonial Algeria explicitly in the programmatic writings of anticolonial intellectuals: for Fanon, it was decolonized man who, by liberating himself, would become whole and restart history from scratch. Bennabi, in a similar dialectic argument, called for a “New Man” to overcome colonizability in a creative synthesis of Islamic spirit and modern reason.

The reading of autobiographical texts on the period in light of these arguments has helped to connect the theories about “New Men” to practices of shaping them: the Muslim scout movement, in particular, combined in its outdoor activities physical exercise with an experience of the nation and a study of development problems. With an education that made them physically, mentally, and morally fit, young scouts would then be prepared to become leaders of the independent state. Although the three dimensions of fitness were inseparable, physical appearance distinguished “New Men” who were set to bring new vitality to society from the old men who were accused of having kept it backward with their traditionalist immobility. A strong body also reflected moral im-

94 Ibid., p. 56.

95 See e.g. ‘A. Bin Bādīs, *al-Islām al-dhātī wal-islām al-wirāthī: ayyuhumā yanhaq bil-umam*, in: ‘A. al-Tālibī (ed.), *Kitāb āthār Ibn Bādīs*, vol. II.1: *Maqālāt ijtimā’iyya tarbawiyya akhlāqīyya dīniyya siyāsīyya*, Algiers 1388/1968, pp. 240-242.

96 See Feichtinger and Malinowski, *Eine Million Algerier*, p. 126.

97 Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, p. 316.

provement. Accordingly, we find notions of the “New Man,” explicitly and implicitly, in autobiographical recollections: guerrilla fighters were considered to have become “New Men,” and the newness of the young generation of activists, as opposed to a traditional elite out of date, is very pronounced in all accounts. The young nationalists distinguished themselves by their action (almost for its own sake), just as athletes stood out for their sportive success. The “New Man,” then, combined strength and willpower, creativity and action with discipline, endurance, and reason. These attributes also pertained to “New Women,” whose move against patriarchy made the break with the backward past even more vigorous.

Although there existed a certain tension between young activists and their spontaneous creativity from below and planned reform efforts from above, the idea of shaping “New Men” in an almost scientific manner seems to have been more widespread. Youth associations like the boy scouts put great emphasis on the preparation of future leaders as the main goal of their educational efforts. And in the end, it was the generation socialized in these movements that actually brought about the transition from late colonial “modernization” programmes to postcolonial developmentalism.<sup>98</sup>

98 See also R. Gallissot, *Génération intellectuelle au Maghreb: existe-t-il une génération intellectuelle de l'indépendance avant le triomphe du développementalisme national après les indépendances (années 1960–1970)?*, in: O. Siari-Tengour and A. Kadri (eds.), *Génération engagées et Mouvements nationaux: Le XXe siècle au Maghreb. Hommage à Mahfoud Kaddache*, Oran 2012, pp. 37–54.