

## The Change in Power within the Algerian Family: From Male Domination to Female Power

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### Abstract:

The family is considered the primary cell of society, and it is a dynamic unit that changes with the changes of the society to which it belongs. The Algerian family has gone through many stages, and in each stage it experienced changes in its structure, composition, functions, relationships, and the distribution of power within it. It was once characterized by male domination, which gradually began to decline due to a set of factors, leading to the emergence of female power. This study is centered on highlighting the changes that have occurred in the aspect of power within the Algerian family.

**Keywords:** change, power, family, dominance, male domination, female power.

### 1. Introduction:

The family is considered the most changeable institution in society, as it is affected by all social changes occurring within it, leading to transformations in its structure, relationships, roles, functions, and the management of its affairs, particularly those related to power. Power within the family takes several forms, including decision-making power, authority over household management and affairs, and economic power, also referred to as expenditure.

In this context, the contemporary family faces new challenges that are entirely different from those of previous decades, as it interacts with rapid social, economic, and cultural changes that reshape its internal structure and mechanisms of operation. Globalization, the development of technology and communication tools, as well as economic and political transformations, have directly affected the nature of family relationships and the distribution of roles and responsibilities within the family.

Moreover, women's strong entry into the labor market, their access to higher education, and their economic independence have brought about a fundamental shift in the balance of power within the family. This has led to a redefinition of the traditional concept of family authority, which was based on absolute male domination. This transformation has not been limited to the economic dimension but has extended to decision-making authority, household management, and even child upbringing and guidance.

Given the changes observed in reality, the family has also been affected by this transformation. Hence, the importance of this study emerges, which can be summarized as follows:

### Importance of the Study:

✓ The necessity of studying changes in family power in light of contemporary social transformations

- ✓ The importance of analyzing changes in power and their impact on the family, its stability, and its functions
- ✓ The importance of studying the nature of power in the modern family and the extent to which it differs from the traditional model
- ✓ The necessity of understanding the implications of this transformation for emerging generations and societal values
- ✓ The need to shed light on new mechanisms of exercising power within the contemporary family
- ✓ The importance of identifying the challenges and difficulties faced by the family under this transformation

This study also gains particular importance in the Algerian context, as society is undergoing profound transformations that affect traditional structures and raise questions about the future of the family and its role in maintaining social cohesion while keeping pace with modern developments.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of this study can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ Analyzing the changes experienced by the Algerian family in terms of power and identifying their various manifestations
- ✓ Clarifying the impact of changes in power on the family as a whole and on its internal and external relationships
- ✓ Attempting to determine the nature of modern power within the contemporary family and the mechanisms of its exercise
- ✓ Attempting to observe internal family relationships in light of changes in power and their effects on roles and functions
- ✓ Tracing the historical trajectory of the development of family power from the patriarchal model to modern models
- ✓ Exploring the factors contributing to the reshaping of power balances within the family
- ✓ Evaluating the positive and negative aspects of this transformation on family stability and its social functions
- ✓ Attempting to anticipate the future and predict potential trends in the development of family power

### **Research Problem and Questions:**

In light of the significant social changes affecting the family in both its external and internal dimensions, the research problem can be summarized in the following main question:

How has family power changed from male domination to female power?

From this central question emerge several subsidiary questions that the study seeks to answer:

- What are the factors and variables that contributed to this transformation in the structure of family power?
- To what extent has women's educational and economic development influenced the redistribution of power within the family?
- How are the manifestations of new female power reflected in various aspects of family life?
- What are men's reactions and adaptation mechanisms to this shift in power balances?
- Can we speak of absolute female power, or are we facing a new model of shared power?
- What are the implications of this transformation for marital relationships and child upbringing?
- How does this change interact with prevailing societal values and traditions?

These questions constitute fundamental axes for understanding the depth of the transformations experienced by the contemporary family and help in drawing a comprehensive picture of the new reality faced by this essential social institution.

### **Methodology Adopted:**

The descriptive method was adopted, as it is the most appropriate method for this type of study in order to analyze the topic and identify its various aspects as a whole.

## **2. Concepts:**

The concepts of this study are summarized as follows: power, domination, male domination, female power.

### **2.1. Concept of Power:**

"Power is a systematic and legitimate force within a given society, linked to the system of social status, and approved by all members of society. The importance of power lies in its ability to direct individuals' behavior in a specific manner to achieve general goals. This is realized through certain mechanisms such as exchange, shared interests, solidarity, and force" (Dahmani, 2005/2006, p. 81).

Thus, power is any force associated with a person's status that enables them to exercise a certain authority over other individuals.

Power is also defined as: "the legitimate influence that grants its holder the authority to issue legal and rational orders in which individual judgments or personal activity intervene. Therefore, obedience and compliance of followers are directed toward rational laws and rules rather than toward the mere exercise of power" (Sharif, 2017, p. 320).

"Power, as a social process, can be viewed as meaning the establishment of rules and their application to society through various means that may include the use of force or the threat of using it. Power also means influencing the behavior of others, directing this behavior, and making the final decision on a given issue" (Khamash, 2005, p. 178).

### **Operational Definition:**

Power is a legitimate force manifested in making and issuing decisions over a group of individuals.

### **2.2. Domination:**

Domination is defined as follows:

In linguistic terms, domination means: “to dominate, control, and monitor; and ‘the Dominant’ is one of the names of God Almighty, meaning the Watcher and Controller over everything” (Alloushen, 2014, p. 07).

### **Operational Definition:**

Domination is the complete control of one person over another.

### **2.3. Male Domination:**

It is a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu, by which he means “the complete domination of men over women, which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, involves elements of complicity and submission on the part of the dominated individual.”

### **2.4. Female Power:**

It refers to women’s domination over men and others, whereby women become the ones who issue all decisions.

## **3. Previous Studies on the Topic:**

There are many studies that have addressed power within the family, including the following:

### **First Study:**

It was entitled “Manifestations of Paternal Authority within the Algerian Family” and is a thesis submitted for the attainment of a Master’s degree in Sociology. The research problem revolved around the following questions:

– Has the change that affected the Algerian family system since independence, resulting from several economic, demographic, and cultural factors, influenced the transformation of the patriarchal mentality and the authority of the father within the traditional family? In other words, does the nature of the new family pattern play a role in the dynamics and development of the manifestations of paternal authority, especially since the authority of the father in the traditional extended family was derived from the kinship unit of the family within shared housing, where this kinship unit often exercised collective authority within the family environment, thus greatly contributing to strengthening the father’s authority over his children and wife? Do the new privileges granted to individuals affect the father’s authority, or are there other hidden social factors that limit the manifestations of his authority within the Algerian family today?

To answer these questions, the study relied on three hypotheses:

- The more reduced the family pattern, the more democratic and thus more tolerant the direction of authority toward children becomes.
- The more advanced the educational level of the child, the more democratic and thus more tolerant the direction of the father’s authority toward the child becomes.
- The more the wife has an independent income, the more understanding the marital relationship becomes, and thus the more tolerant the husband’s authority toward his wife becomes.

The study was conducted during the period from 1998 to 1999 on a sample of families from the city of Ain Benian in the Wilaya of Algiers. The research sample included approximately 150 family units represented by male heads of households. The study relied on the descriptive-analytical method, the questionnaire technique, as well as interviews with some wives and mothers (Belkacem, 2008/2009, p. 68).

“The study reached a number of results, which can be summarized as follows:

- The wife’s employment is not the sole and fundamental determinant of the authority of the husband/father; rather, there are other factors related to mentalities and behaviors.
- The husband continues to assume the economic responsibilities of the family (family budget, etc.) despite women’s participation in work.
- Family decisions are made jointly by both spouses through discussion, understanding, and dialogue rather than through the imposition of opinion.
- Most household chores remain the responsibility of the wife, while the husband’s contribution is limited to assisting with some light and occasional tasks, such as supervising and controlling children.
- The phenomenon of paternal authority within the family continues to take precedence in Algerian society and is often supported by women, who consider the father more capable and more deserving of family responsibility. Women attribute this to customs, traditions, and especially religion, which they regard as one of the fundamental pillars of the family” (Belkacem, 2008/2009, p. 69).

### **The Algerian Family:**

“The most important characteristic of Algerian society throughout its historical stages is the existence of phases that have influenced its social structure, such as the Ottoman period and the colonial period. Algerian society prior to colonization consisted of a group of tribes and clans, each headed by a sheikh who was respected and revered by the rest of the members. The sheikh organized the affairs of the tribe and ensured stability.”

With the advent of colonialism, many changes occurred in society, as colonial rule attempted to erase national identity and dismantle the tribal system in order to weaken kinship ties and destroy the collective spirit. This led to the disappearance of collective ownership and the spread of individual ownership, and Algerian society moved from a tribal system to a family system dominated by the extended family form. After independence, many changes emerged that affected several sectors such as the economic, social, and demographic fields. All of this impacted the structure of the Algerian family, which began to transform from an extended family into a nuclear family. The Algerian family also witnessed a shift from a social model to an individual model based on an industrial economy. Consequently, socialization took on new dimensions within the modern family, as it was no longer limited to family members alone; rather, many institutions began to contribute to the socialization of individuals (Ibrahim, 2013, p. 121).

The characteristics of the traditional Algerian family are represented in the following:

- “The Algerian family is patriarchal, meaning that the father and grandfather are the leaders who organize its affairs. Lineage is traced through males, and affiliation is patrilineal.
- Mustafa Boutfenoucht states in one of his interventions that Algerian society is multiple and complex to the extent that it is difficult to define a single social pattern for it. According to him,

Algeria is still living a transitional period and has not yet reached the stage of modernity. Therefore, he proposed three classificatory levels for Algerian society:

- The traditional conjugal family system.
- The patriarchal family system, where authority is in the hands of the father.
- The paternal family system” (Bekkour, 2009, p. 46).

Accordingly, and based on this study, the Algerian family has almost changed and transitioned gradually through three levels: from the family system associated with traditional marriage, where parents choose a life partner for their son without any objection from him; then to the patriarchal family system, where authority lies with either the father or the grandfather within the extended family; and finally to the paternal family system, in which the father assumes the authority to manage his household and family affairs within the nuclear family.

The Algerian family has changed in the modern era and emerged in a new form, represented as follows:

“It is not possible to understand the Algerian family and its development without addressing the transformations and changes that have occurred and continue to occur in Algerian society itself. Before colonization, society consisted of a group of tribes and clans, each headed by a sheikh who held a special status within the tribe or clan. He was the spiritual leader of the tribe, organizing all material and spiritual matters. He was responsible for distributing roles and functions, protecting and caring for members of the tribe, and resolving disputes that arose within it. Algerian society did not follow the totemic pattern, nor was domestic society built on the nuclear family. Rather, it consisted of social groups based on patrilineal kinship as a natural bond, in addition to the influence of Islam on Algerian society. This religion left strong effects on the traditions of the Algerian family through the behaviors and kinship relations among its members” (Maliki, 2011, pp. 48–49).

Therefore, understanding the contemporary Algerian family and its evolutionary characteristics necessarily requires examining the historical and social context of Algerian society itself, which has undergone radical transformations across successive historical periods. In the pre-colonial era, the Algerian social fabric was based on a well-organized tribal and clan system, where a central figure the sheikh occupied the top of each tribal or clan grouping, holding a sacred and prestigious status within this social organization.

The functions of this sheikh were manifested in his role as a spiritual guide and practical administrator of the group. He was responsible for organizing material and moral life, distributing roles and tasks, ensuring protection and care for all members of the group, and pl

aying a vital role in resolving internal disputes and conflicts that might arise among members of the tribe or clan.

It is worth noting that the Algerian social organization did not rely on a totemic system, as was the case in some other societies, nor was the social structure based on the narrow concept of the nuclear family. Rather, it consisted of broad social groupings grounded in patrilineal kinship ties as a fundamental and natural bond.

In addition, Islam played a pivotal role in shaping Algerian social identity, leaving deep imprints on the system of family values and traditions, and profoundly influencing patterns of behavior and

kinship relations among members of the Algerian family. This contributed to the formation of distinctive cultural and social characteristics whose effects are still evident to this day.

**A table distinguishing between the traditional and the modern Algerian family.**

Traditional Algerian Family	Modern Algerian Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extended and large family.</li> <li>• Regarding social status within the family: the woman is responsible for household affairs, while the man is responsible for financial provision.</li> <li>• Decision-making authority is held by the man.</li> <li>• Parents are the decision-makers in matters concerning children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small, narrow, nuclear family.</li> <li>• Women work and contribute financially to the household.</li> <li>• Shared participation in decision-making; not restricted to one family member.</li> <li>• Decline in parental authority; children make their own life decisions.</li> </ul>

**Family Authority:**

Authority within the family is defined as “the latent ability of one of the partners to influence the behavior of others. Authority is manifested in the ability to make decisions that affect family life (...) Many rules indicate that the father enjoys wide-ranging authority over all members of his family, to the extent that he was allowed to impose the harshest punishments on family members who did not obey his orders. This image prevailed in the past and was confirmed in several societies. In ancient Greek and Roman societies, authority within the family was in the hands of the head of the household, who was considered the successor of the saints. This doctrine did not place women on an equal footing with men and did not consider them mistresses of the house. Greek and Roman laws granted the head of the family three privileges: he was the religious leader for family members, the owner of property, and the primary judge within his family. Ancient Chinese and Japanese societies also displayed a considerable degree of strong paternal control over family members. Traditional Japanese society vested all forms of authority in the father, and after his death, this authority passed to the eldest son. The extent of the father’s power in the Japanese family reached a level expressed by the Japanese Masako, who said: ‘In the pre-war period, we learned from earthquakes, thunder, fire, and the father’” (Abu Zaid, n.d., p. 08). Thus, authority in many societies was in the hands of the man, who represented the head of the family and the direct authority responsible for all family decisions.

“It is not possible for the most important element of regulation, management, and control to be formed by one or two factors alone. Given the sensitivity and importance of this structure within the family, multiple factors contribute to its construction: cultural, social, psychological, economic, and religious. Many thinkers and researchers in the field of family and society have addressed the issue of deconstructing the elements of power formation or the motivation toward forming authority in one pattern rather than another. Among them is Rodman, who, in his theory of resources, identified two factors for the distribution of marital power: the resources available to the spouses and cultural expectations regarding the distribution of marital power. From this division, it becomes evident that Rodman focused on two aspects: the psychological (subjective) and the social. Resources pertain to the spouses themselves, as they are the ones who possess them, whereas cultural expectations surround the spouses through an environment that carries a cultural heritage encompassing customs

and traditions and the perceptions they include regarding marital relations. This environment influences spouses' behavior, as each spouse seeks not to deviate from it" (Aliwat, 2013, p. 02).

"Anthropologists believe that paternal authority represents most aspects of individuals' lives during childhood, and individuals accept it mechanically and without awareness due to their weak and dependent position. The school, as an educational and pedagogical institution, also plays a role by enabling individuals to acquire a distinctive role in their lives, as it is entrusted with meeting basic needs and teaching reading and writing. However, the family remains the preferred context, as it is the primary social environment responsible for socializing individuals and teaching them how to live. This makes it possible to trace its influence on them and to address the issue of the forms of authority it uses to impose its values on its members, given that it provides the individual with a range of nutritional, emotional, social, economic, and recreational needs, in a way that allows it to impose its authority and status upon them. The weaker the fulfillment of one of these needs from outside, the more the role of the family in the individual's life is reinforced" (Hatim, 2012, p. 1074).

In this context, in-depth sociological and anthropological studies conducted by researchers specializing in the study of social and family structures confirm that authority within the traditional family was absolutely concentrated in the person of the man, whether the father or the husband. He monopolized all levers of power and control over various aspects of family life. This concentration of authority was not an arbitrary practice, but rather rested on a complex system of cultural and social justifications rooted in the traditional structure of patriarchal societies.

This male authority manifested itself in multiple and interrelated dimensions, as the man exercised direct and absolute supervision over all processes and activities taking place within the family, from the simplest daily matters to strategic and decisive decisions. He was responsible for organizing the family's economic life, determining priorities, managing financial resources, and controlling patterns of spending and consumption. He also held the exclusive right to decide on investments and projects that the family could undertake or avoid.

The scope of this authority also extended to making vital and important decisions within the family, as the man held the absolute right to determine the fate of family members and define their life trajectories. This included decisions related to marriage and engagement, wedding ceremonies, education and its level and type, work and profession, relocation, travel, and migration, and even determining the nature of social relationships the family could establish with the external environment and various social circles.

At the practical level, this male authority was embodied in a set of tangible practices and behaviors within the family. The man was the official and sole spokesperson for the family in all external dealings, whether with neighbors, government institutions, or commercial and economic actors. He also determined the timing and nature of daily activities for family members, deciding sleeping and waking times, meals, visits, leaving and returning home, and distributing roles and responsibilities to each individual within the family system according to what he deemed appropriate and in the best interest of the family.

On the other hand, the man enjoyed full authority to monitor the behavior of family members, guide and direct them, intervene directly and immediately in their personal affairs when he deemed it necessary, impose punishments or disciplinary measures when his instructions were violated or when established rules were breached, and grant rewards and privileges to those who complied with his directives and met his expectations. This form of supervision and guidance extended to the most



minute details of family members' lives, from dress, food, and drink, to friendships and social relationships, and even modes of expressing opinions and ideas.

The theoretical foundation of this model of paternal authority rested on several interconnected factors. The first was the religious and spiritual factor, as religious teachings emphasized the role of the man as the leader of the family and the one responsible for its care and protection. The cultural and traditional factor also played a role, as inherited social customs and traditions supported and reinforced this model of authority and regarded it as the natural and proper way to organize family life. The economic factor was equally central, as the man was the sole provider and breadwinner for the family, which granted him strong economic influence that naturally translated into clear and effective social authority across all aspects of family life.

Furthermore, the educational and cognitive factor contributed to reinforcing this model, as education and knowledge were, in most cases, reserved for men rather than women. This made men more capable of dealing with complex matters, more experienced in making deliberate and calculated decisions, and more aware of external and societal issues affecting the family. This educational and cognitive advantage justified granting men broad powers in managing family affairs and making decisions.

The overarching patriarchal social structure also played a decisive role in consolidating and entrenching this pattern of authority. Society as a whole, through its institutions, traditions, and norms, expected the man to be the leader and primary authority responsible for his family. Any retreat from this role or relinquishment of these responsibilities was considered a form of weakness or social failure, deserving of blame and criticism from the surrounding social environment. This social pressure pushed men to adhere to their leadership role within the family and to exercise their authority in a clear and influential manner.

Comparative studies in anthropology indicate that this pattern of family organization and paternal authority was not exclusive to Algerian society or Arab and Islamic societies alone. Rather, it was prevalent and widespread in most traditional societies across different continents and civilizations. This suggests that it responded to certain objective necessities and requirements in those historical periods and achieved a degree of balance and stability in managing family life under the conditions and resources available at the time.

Family Power in the Algerian Family:

### **5.1. Power in the Traditional Algerian Family:**

Power in the traditional Algerian family is characterized by the following:

- ☐ The father is the center of power in the traditional Algerian family; he possesses authority and management over everything related to family members.
- ☐ The father's authority is taken for granted in the traditional Algerian family.
- ☐ One of the most prominent features of traditional authority in the Algerian family is limited communication between the father and other family members, with few words issued mainly in the form of orders.
- ☐ Verbal or even physical violence is one aspect of authority in the traditional family; if any family member disobeys the father or grandfather, violence occurs.

□ The role of women within this system of authority is limited to providing assistance only, and they contribute to reinforcing the authority of the father or grandfather through socialization.

## **5.2. Power in the Modern Algerian Family:**

Power in the modern Algerian family has undergone changes compared to the traditional family, summarized as follows:

□ In the traditional Algerian family, the wife had no opinion, whereas in the modern family she has a voice, and her participation in decision-making has emerged.

□ Power relations among family members have changed, leading to shared authority and the emergence of consultation.

□ The emergence of cooperation in the interest of the family and child care.

□ Consultation in managing family affairs.

## **6. Manifestations of Change in Power within the Family:**

These are reflected in the following:

□ The method of making family decisions (decisions related to childbirth and family planning) is determined through consultation between spouses. In the past, the man was the sole decision-maker within the family, deciding on childbirth, the number of children, and all matters related to them. With the rise in women's awareness, education, and participation in the labor market, decisions have become shared, leading to the emergence of a new concept within the family: family partnership instead of male domination.

□ Male authority has shifted from individual and absolute authority to participation and listening to the other party. The man no longer monopolizes family authority as in the old traditional model. With the spread of rights-based and media discourse on gender equality, men have become more participatory with women in family decisions and all aspects of life. This has led to the decline of the authoritarian father image and the emergence of the democratic father image.

□ Family authority that forced women to marry without their consent has faded, while women's freedom to choose their life partner has increased. Education and social and cultural change have contributed to empowering women to defend their right to determine their family destiny.

□ Economic family authority has shifted from being solely in the hands of men to being shared by both men and women due to women's participation in the labor market. Women's total dependence on men for financial support has almost disappeared, replaced by shared responsibility in meeting family needs, and financial decisions are now based on the contributions of both parties.

## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, family authority is no longer as it was in the traditional model an absolute male authority monopolizing decision-making and direction but has gradually transformed into a shared authority exercised jointly by both men and women. Today, women have a prominent role in family decisions, whether educational, economic, or social, reflecting a shift from a rigid patriarchal system to a more democratic family model based on dialogue and mutual respect. This transformation did not occur in isolation from major social changes but is the result of multiple factors, including the rise in women's educational levels, their entry into the labor market, laws promoting gender equality,

and the spread of human rights culture and modern values. However, this transition toward shared authority is not without challenges, most notably the difficulty of balancing women's traditional and new roles, the potential emergence of role conflicts between spouses, and the lack of a clear definition of the concept and boundaries of female power.

### **Study Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are proposed:

- The necessity of conducting studies concerned with family affairs and family authority.
- The necessity of identifying foundations that achieve family stability under female authority.
- The necessity of conducting and developing studies on female authority and male domination.
- The necessity of defining the concept and meaning of female authority.
- The necessity of tracing changes in women's personalities and their impact on family authority.
- The necessity of presenting studies on sensitive topics, particularly those related to women.
- The necessity of launching awareness and educational programs targeting spouses and young people preparing for marriage, to promote a culture of dialogue and partnership within the family instead of imposing unilateral authority by either women or men.

We conclude this article with a fundamental question imposed by the transformations occurring in Algerian society: What is the fate of the Algerian family following the signing and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), whose provisions in many respects conflict with Islamic religious reference and the cultural and social specificities of Algerian society?

This question derives its legitimacy from the fact that the Algerian family is not merely an ordinary social unit, but a value-based and historical institution rooted in Islam and local customs, playing a fundamental role in preserving collective identity and social cohesion. Therefore, any change in the legal framework regulating family relations cannot be understood in isolation from these deep dimensions.

The ratification of such conventions, although ostensibly aimed at promoting women's rights and ensuring equality, raises several issues, most notably:

- Conflict with Islamic law in fundamental matters such as inheritance, guardianship in marriage, and family-related rulings.
- The possibility of social conflict between a generation influenced by global rights discourse and another generation attached to tradition and religion, potentially exacerbating value-based conflict within Algerian society.

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