

Zohra Drif, the legendary freedom fighter, was born on a farm in Tiarot. She was a little over 19 when the Algerian Revolution broke out. Two years later, she was studying law at Algiers University when she joined a group of the (FLN) revolutionaries and placed a bomb in the French Milk Bar café. The following year, Mrs Drif was arrested and condemned to 20 years of hard labour for "terrorism". She spent five years in prison before she was finally released upon independence. Here is an extract from her book: For nearly five years, I was the only Arab girl at the French primary school, with long braids and long skirts reaching to my ankles, among the little European girls with their short hair and their little dresses above the knee. The difference between me and these girls even extended to the foods we ate at ten o'clock in the playground: they pulled out a brioche, a croissant, sometimes a chocolate croissant or a baguette with jam. As for me, I had my Algerian treats—maqrouta, m'bardja, msemena or matlou with our family's honey. Completed my primary-school years as an excellent student, finishing tied for first place in my class with my classmate Roselyne Garcia. I considered Roselyne a dear friend until we reached the sixth-grade entrance exam, a major test that marked the passage from childhood to adolescence. We were in school the day the results were announced. I, Zohra Drif, daughter of the Arab qadi, managed to rank among the first students in the region, whereas my best friend Roselyne, the daughter of Tissemsilt's baker and an excellent student, had failed. I was as shocked as the rest of the school at Roselyne's results. When we parted to go home, I told her, still crying, "You know, Roselyne, everybody knows you're an excellent student. It was an accident. Next year, you'll get it." Roselyne replied, "But Zohra, it's not that. You don't understand a thing. How do you explain to my mother that you passed and I didn't? She will never understand that Zohra the Arab succeeded and I failed." I was unsure whether I had misunderstood or understood all too well. Soon my tears dried up. I looked her in the eye and spat back, "Well, you'll just have to explain to your mother that it was the Arabs like Zohra who invented mathematics." In a few short seconds, I lost my best friend and my innocence. I suddenly realised that all my excellent marks, all my efforts to learn French language and culture and all my sincere feelings of friendship for Roselyne would never make me the equal of Roselyne, the European. With one simple sentence, she put me in my place as the "Arab".