



## Nations in arms? The military and popular mobilisation in revolutionary Algeria and Libya

Jakob Kraiss

**To cite this article:** Jakob Kraiss (2025) Nations in arms? The military and popular mobilisation in revolutionary Algeria and Libya, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 30:4, 741-765, DOI: [10.1080/13629387.2025.2469057](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2469057)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2469057>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 21 Feb 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 885



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



OPEN ACCESS



# Nations in arms? The military and popular mobilisation in revolutionary Algeria and Libya

Jakob Kraiss

Department of Cultural Studies, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Neubiberg, Germany

## ABSTRACT

In both Algeria under Houari Boumédiène (1965–1978) and Libya under Mu‘ammar al-Qadhafi (1969–2011) the idea of a nation in arms played a crucial role in the ‘revolutionary’ mobilisation of the population. Not just were the regimes based on military coups and led by army officers, but they put forward the ideal of a popular army in which potentially every citizen should be a soldier. In both cases, this included even women to varying degrees. However, while the Algerian state and regime had emerged directly from an actual war of independence with large popular participation, anti-imperialist mobilisation in Libya had to create a narrative linking anti-colonial resistance in the 1920s to the Qadhafi regime. Besides that, the Libyan regime always tried to achieve a higher level of popular mobilisation, while weakening the army as an institution, whereas the Algerian state became ever more controlled by a rather exclusivist officer corps. The article examines ideas around the nation in arms in both countries specifically with regard to questions of historical legitimacy, future mobilisation, and gender issues. It also points to more recent developments and contends that popular military mobilisation has ultimately proven destabilising to the regimes that promoted it.

**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 21 July 2023; Accepted 13 February 2025

**KEYWORDS** Military coup; revolution; anti-imperialism; gender; Houari Boumédiène; Mu‘ammar al-Qadhafi

## Introduction: revolutionary officers

On 19 June, 1965 military units were deploying in downtown Algiers – not an uncommon thing to see, at the time, as Gillo Pontecorvo’s movie *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri*) was being shot with considerable expenditure in the Algerian capital. This time the tanks were not meant for a movie set, though: Colonel Houari Boumédiène overthrew President Ahmed Ben Bella

**CONTACT** Jakob Kraiss  [jakob.kraiss@unibw.de](mailto:jakob.kraiss@unibw.de)  Department of Cultural Studies, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Werner-Heisenberg-Weg 39, 85579 Neubiberg, Germany

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

in a very real military coup and put himself at the head of a Revolutionary Council that was to rule the country for more than a decade. Boumédiène himself would remain head of state up to his death in 1978 (Arezki 2022, 168–172; Francos and Sérénì 1976, 161–179; McDougall 2017, 250–253; Stora 2004, 140–141).

Four years later, on 1 September, 1969 Tripoli witnessed a similar spectacle: a group of army officers around Captain Mu'ammad al-Qadhdhafi used the trip of ailing King Idris al-Sanusi to Turkey to seize power and declare Libya a republic. Qadhdhafi, who had promoted himself to the rank of colonel with his first official act, also chaired a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) for the next 10 years and continued to rule Libya as Leader of the Revolution until his overthrow in 2011 (Del Boca 2010, 19–37; Pargeter 2012, 48–60; St John 2017, 133–139).

Academic interest in the role of the military in the Arab world has grown again since the uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and their aftermath, when the position and reaction of army leaders often determined the course of political events (e.g. Frisch 2013; Grewal 2023; Springborg 2014). But longer-term comparative approaches have also been put forward, which have dealt with the political and economic influence of officers in the region, as well as with more narrow questions like military organisation and effectiveness (e.g. Droz-Vincent 2020; Gaub 2017; Pollack 2019; Sayigh et al. 2011; also Cook 2007). The present article adopts the perspective of cultural history to shed new light on the emergence of military regimes in Algeria and Libya and also touches upon the legacies that played a role in recent upheavals.

Boumédiène's and Qadhdhafi's coups d'état were, to some extent, inspired by Colonel Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, the president of Egypt since 1954, and his ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism.<sup>1</sup> They were also part of a longer series of military takeovers throughout the Arab world, which marked the period from World War II through the 1960s. During this time, which was also a highpoint of the Cold War, regime changes in the region often brought with them a new orientation in foreign policy and, accordingly, new options to gather international support. In fact, most coups that occurred toppled pro-Western governments and then sought alliances with socialist states. Apart from that, military takeovers in Arab countries took place, in many cases, relatively shortly after the attainment of independence and their leaders liked to present them in terms of anticolonial liberation and postcolonial state-building ('Abd al-Rida 2016, 282–286). In a region that had been dominated, for a long time, by colonialism and traditionalist monarchies the army was often the only sector that opened up possibilities for a certain social mobility. It is therefore no coincidence that the officers who ousted kings or presidents would style themselves as revolutionaries (Alexander 2013; Gaub 2017, 96–99; Droz-Vincent 2020, 26–61). In fact, during this

time, the 'terms "military coup" and "revolution" had become almost synonymous' (Be'eri 1982, 69).

Consequently, both the Algerian and the Libyan leader insisted they had not brought about a mere military coup for the interests of an officer corps, but rather a true revolution for the people. Qadhdhafi declared about his circle:

The movement of the Free Unionist Officers continued to work to make a true revolution happen in this country, not to conduct a military coup, [...] it was the idea of the September Revolution to realise political freedom, economic freedom and social freedom and to bring true independence to this country. (Qadhdhafi 1985, 24)

While the Libyan Free Officers had indeed replaced a monarchy with a republic, the Algerian case was more complicated, as there the term 'revolution' was already in use for the independence war and the ousted leader had already stood at the helm of a socialist People's Republic. Therefore, shortly after taking power, Boumédiène defined his actions as a 'revolutionary readjustment, after the deviation that had appeared in the course of Revolution, the Revolution of the popular masses' (Boumédiène 1979, 33).<sup>2</sup>

The two colonels from Algeria and Libya styled themselves as true representatives of the people, whose 'anxious call' and 'dearest wish' they had answered (Boumédiène 1970, 7). As they were not actually taken to power by rising revolutionary masses, but rather by a relatively small group of professional soldiers, the self-proclaimed socialist regimes of both Boumédiène and Qadhdhafi tried to mobilise the common people, which they perceived as their natural constituency. As military men they, maybe not surprisingly, drew on the idea of the nation in arms to achieve a kind of disciplined mobilisation (for an overview see Stora (2004, 143–149); Kikhia (1997, 38–60)).

This article will shed light on three aspects of the concept of the nation in arms and the popular army in revolutionary Algeria and Libya during the 1960s and 70s, in particular: the historical derivation from the experience of anti-colonial resistance, the notion of the military as a motor for the creation of a new society and the impact of women in the armed forces on gender relations.

## History: building anti-colonial legitimacy

The Algerian and Libyan regimes after 1965 and 1969, respectively, tried to root themselves firmly in the history of anti-colonial resistance. In fact, Boumédiène as well as Qadhdhafi aspired to regional leadership in Africa and the Arab world and possibly even to a global role as supporters of anti-imperialist movements throughout the Third World (see Byrne (2016) for Algeria and Ronen (2008) for Libya). Even after they had become settled and

institutionalised regimes, the Algerian and Libyan governments did not discard their self-understanding as revolutionary movements based on an active military and always inclined to help anti-imperialist insurrections.<sup>3</sup> On the first anniversary of his coup, Boumédiène affirmed that Algeria would continue to support revolutionary liberation movements, because otherwise it would 'betray its mission and its history' (Boumédiène 1979, 323). The best-known example for such a movement might be Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) in its fight against apartheid, which, for decades, was among the main beneficiaries of Algerian and Libyan aid (Youcef 2014). When Mandela visited Tripoli as South African president in 1997, Qadhdhafi could pride himself on how many African leaders he had supported, while they had still been guerrilla fighters:

Mandela is a highly regarded global statesman, who is received everywhere with respect. Robert Mugabe [then president of Zimbabwe] is one of Africa's leaders. Sam Nujoma [president of Namibia] is one of Africa's leaders [...]. Zenawi is head of the Ethiopian government, he who would be called a terrorist. Afewerki who was called a terrorist is president of the Republic of Eritrea. Museveni [president of Uganda] who was called a terrorist, Kabila [president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo] and their leadership were here in the tent and received the support of Libya. (quoted from Barnawi 2004, 173)

Complementary to this activist foreign policy was the keeping up of anti-colonial legitimacy inside the country, which rested on the ideology of citizen-soldiers to continue the struggle against imperialism and defend the revolution. In this context, Luis Martinez (2010, 68) has even described Libya as an 'open-air barrack'. Both North African states have devoted considerable attention to the historiography and public remembrance of the anti-colonial movement and allocated extensive funds especially to ancient combatants (*mujāhidūn*) or the families of so-called martyrs (*shuhadā'*) of the independence struggle (Faath and Mattes 1988; Kraiss 2016; Stora 2002; Weulersse 2005/06). Nevertheless, there exist important differences between Algeria and Libya, originating in their very different trajectories from colonial rule to independence.

In Algeria the war of independence had been over for merely three years at the time of the coup in June 1965 (on the independence war see, e.g. Stora (2004, 29–119); McDougall (2017, 195–233)). Colonel Boumédiène had been a commander in the National Liberation Army (*Armée de Libération Nationale*, ALN) during the war, and the entire Algerian leadership had been active, in one way or another, in the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, FLN). However, as Florence Gaub (2017, 172) reminds us, 'while it is true that the Algerian military is the descendant of the armed wing of the independence movement [...], it is indeed the descendant of only a part of the ALN'. In fact, Colonel Boumédiène and his general staff, which emerged victorious from the power struggles directly following independence (at first, in an alliance with Ben Bella), represented the so-called

border army (*armée des frontières*) that had stood by on Moroccan and Tunisian territory, whereas the interior army (*armée de l'intérieur*) had been engaged in guerrilla operations within Algeria (Arezki 2022, 115–148; McDougall 2017, 238–246; Stora 2004, 124–129). As head of the border army Boumédiène himself was stationed in the Moroccan town of Oujda, for most of the war, and not involved in much actual fighting (the standard reference on Boumédiène's life is Francos and Sérénì (1976); for a brief overview see Bozzo (2013)). The Algerians had indeed fought for independence by way of arms and inflicted substantial losses on the French, even though a number of historians contend that the war was actually not won on the battlefield – where the ALN, in fact, suffered heavy losses and was not able to secure control over larger portions of the territory – but rather through diplomatic efforts and international public opinion (Byrne 2014; Connelly 2001).

And yet, the experience of armed struggle between 1954 and 1962 was shared by a majority of the Algerian population, both in the countryside and in the cities. Even if only a minority of up to 300,000 persons enlisted directly in the Liberation Army, many others supported the independence movement in different ways and the war touched the lives of the entire population (Arezki 2022, 95–114). Among the ALN officers some had previously served in the French army, for example Khaled Nezzar, who would later rise to prominence as one of the leaders of the 1992 coup that prevented a probable Islamist election victory and ousted President Chadli Bendjedid, another former ALN officer (Nezzar 1999, 26–41).<sup>4</sup> Boumédiène's predecessor Ben Bella, too, had undergone French military training and even fought in World War II (Ben Bella 1985, 36), whereas Boumédiène himself entered the ALN in 1955, his only experience being that of a nationalist militant, and made it to the rank of colonel in just two years (Francos and Sérénì 1976, 53–62).<sup>5</sup>

Potentially, then, everyone could become a fighter, and many young activists without military experience did join the ranks of the ALN over the course of the conflict. From this developed the national founding myth that there had been only 'one hero, the people' (*un seul héros, le peuple*) in the resistance – a myth that supported the idea of the citizen-soldier (Stora 2004, 172).<sup>6</sup> The ALN was renamed National People's Army (*Armée Nationale Populaire*, ANP) at independence (Arezki 2022, 176–222). What this meant, Boumédiène explained shortly after his coup, when he addressed the graduates of the ANP's military academy at Chercell: 'Our army has arisen from the people. It is made up by *fellahs* [peasants] and workers [...]. Be devoted to the principles of the Revolution, be strong, as you always were from 1954 to 1962, in the service of the people and only of the people' (Boumédiène 1970, 29).

The basis for the mass engagement during the war of independence can be found in the last two decades of French rule in Algeria, when youth activism was on the rise among the indigenous Muslim population. Young men

and women, especially from urban middle-class backgrounds, volunteered for political parties or social associations of various tendencies from Islamic reformist to communist. The Algerian scout movement, founded in the 1930s, played a particular role in shaping new forms of engagement, political consciousness and nationalist persuasions. The independence activist Mohammed Harbi (2001, 45) – who later would become a prominent historian critical towards the Algerian regime – recalled how ‘scouting, through songs, had taught us patriotism’. Another well-known historian and former boy-scout leader, Mahfoud Kaddache (2003, 69), even pointed to the notion, then prevalent according to him, of scouts being ‘the soldiers of the future’.

The FLN built on a number of anti-colonial movements and initiatives, including different political parties, trade unions, student associations, and the private Arabic school system, established by the Islamic reformists from the 1920s. However, it is certainly no coincidence that scouting, which combines aspects of paramilitary training with physical and moral education and generally non-political ideas of solidarity and personal improvement, would serve as a major driving force for the nationalist movement during the late colonial period. The boy-scout movement was originally established by British general Sir Robert Baden-Powell at the beginning of the twentieth century as a remedy to a perceived decadence of society and particularly its young members. Baden-Powell had argued that, at a time when there existed no compulsory military service in Britain, the young generations had become weak and effectively unfit to lead the empire in the future (on the origins and history of scouting, including scout movements in colonial settings, see the contributions in Block and Proctor (2009)). Although representatives of scouting have tended to downplay the military aspects in their movement, it is obvious that the boy scouts would be seen as a potential reserve for a future fight for independence in a colony such as Algeria, where there was effectively no indigenous state structure at all.<sup>7</sup> Many nationalist activists attested to the fact that the scout movement had become a sort of organisational backbone for the clandestine, militant wing of the independence movement at least from the violent clashes of May 1945 onward (e.g. Azzedine 1976, 31; Ben Bella 1985, 48; Kaddache 1991) – a fact French intelligence was well aware of (Gauthé 2003). Although there was certainly a lot of myth-making involved in the Boumédiène-era narrative of a people united with its army, the original popular base as well as the basic anti-colonial legitimacy of the ALN/ANP was undeniable: ‘Of all Arab forces, the Algerian military is the only one which truly emerged from a protracted battle against a colonial power; more so than any other, it can claim therefore the title of midwife of the state’ (Gaub 2017, 172).

Libya, on the other hand, underwent a decolonisation process quite different from Algeria’s independence struggle. The country actually

became independent as a result of great power deliberations and a vote at the United Nations (Rossi 2008; St John 2017, 133–159). The United Kingdom under Idris al-Sanusi, proclaimed in 1951, was more of a compromise solution, or ‘an accidental state’, as Dirk Vandewalle (2012, 43) has termed it. What is more, until the discovery of oil it was also completely dependent on Britain and the United States, which had reserved for themselves the right to several large military bases in the country (Blackwell 2003).

Nevertheless, Qadhdhafi and his fellow putschists placed themselves in a line of historical continuity to the fight against colonial rule in the 1920s. Already in their first proclamation on September 1, 1969 the Free Officers, who toppled King Idris, had addressed the Libyan people as ‘you who joined ‘Umar al-Mukhtar in his holy jihad for the sake of Libya, Arabism and Islam, you who fought in the just struggle with Ahmad al-Sharif’ (‘al-Bayān al-awwal’ 1982). In doing so, they not only alluded to two of the most prominent national heroes from the struggle against Italian colonialism in the country, but also chose to define the people they claimed to represent by its character as ‘a fighting people’ (Hasnawi 1988, 145).

The paradox here is that both ‘Umar al-Mukhtar and Ahmad al-Sharif were leaders of the same Sanusiyya brotherhood the ousted King Idris belonged to (the standard English-language reference to the Sanusiyya is still Evans-Pritchard (1973); see also Triaud (1997) and Shukri (2005)).<sup>8</sup> In other words, Qadhdhafi and his co-conspirators overthrew the rule of the Sanusiyya in the name of anti-imperialism, while, at the same time, emphasising continuity with the resistance against Italian rule upheld by that very same brotherhood (on Sanusi resistance see also Ryan (2018)). Idris al-Sanusi was, thus, regularly portrayed as a traitor, because he had negotiated with the Italians, then left Libya for exile in Cairo and finally returned only with the help of British forces. The figure of ‘Umar al-Mukhtar, on the other hand, became completely dissociated from the Sanusiyya as a popular hero for the nation as a whole (e.g. Hasnawi 1988, 20–22, 199–261; on this narrative see also Dumasy and Di Pasquale 2012; Kraus 2016, 114–125). Hence, the Libyan people in its entirety was presented during the Qadhdhafi era as the main actor of anti-colonial resistance, while the traditional military leaders and political elites were mostly seen as selfish, reluctant to fight and too eager to compromise with the invaders. In a bilingual (Arabic and English) publication on the colonial period a historian close to the regime wrote on the earlier stages of the Italian invasion of Ottoman Libya in 1911:

The Libyan Arabs had to shoulder the responsibility of defending themselves and their country. They refused all attempts to surrender which were being planned by the Turkish government.

The Jihād movement began to move forward, gaining momentum day by day. It became a matter which concerned every citizen. Spontaneity, which created

this movement and impelled the popular masses to organize themselves in camps to oppose the enemy, was the stamp of this movement during its early stages. Everywhere, in each district, organizations and committees were formed to take matters in their hands. Authority in a given district was in the hands of the masses as represented by its leaders. (Hasnawi 1988, 150–151)

Similar to the Algerian doctrine of *Un seul héros, le peuple*, in Libya the idea of 'the people in arms' (*al-sha'b al-musallah*) became the dominant framework for the interpretation of colonial history. The notion of a nation or people in arms is not entirely alien to the context in question: in fact, it was known in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century through the works of Prussian Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz (1925) who served as a military adviser to the government in Istanbul. The Young Turk leader Enver Bey, in particular – one of the most important commanders in the fight against the Italian invasion of Libya after 1911 and subsequently Ottoman minister of war – perceived a popular army based on the *levée en masse* as a central instrument for the strengthening of the state (Maksudyan 2016, 159–160).<sup>9</sup>

Yet, the concept of *al-sha'b al-musallah* was apparently not present in contemporary sources, but rather a label attached to the struggle *ex post* under the Qadhdhafi regime. The Libyan leader first put forward the idea of arming the people in his important Zuwara speech of April 1973. In this speech, which aimed at relaunching revolutionary mobilisation, Qadhdhafi vowed to provide arms to the popular masses, to prevent a possible foreign invasion, but also to eliminate all counterrevolutionaries (Qadhdhafi 1982, 156). Later, a brief paperback volume from the series *Kitāb al-sha'b* (*The People's Book*), published in 1981 and meant for broad distribution within the populace, explained the historic foundations of the concept according to the official ideology. In this text, entitled *al-Sha'b al-musallah: Falsafat wa-taṭbiq fī al-jihād al-libī* (*The People in Arms: Philosophy and Practice in the Libyan Jihad*), the author Riyadh Sayf al-Nasr (1981) refuted the interpretation of the Libyan resistance as primarily driven by religious motives or even 'uncivilized fanaticism' (41) – again downplaying the role of the Islamic Sanusiyya brotherhood. He preferred to highlight the 'national factor' (*al-'āmil al-qawmī*) in the struggle and emphasised the modern and rational strategy and tactics employed by the fighters (75). Finally, he located the Libyan experience 'on the map of the people's struggle' (*'alā kharīṭat niḍāl al-sha'b*) and proclaimed the 'people in arms' effectively as the model for the ongoing global struggle against imperialism and Zionism (105).<sup>10</sup>

Algerian and Libyan notions of a popular army and the citizen-soldier share some similarities, but they also differ on many accounts. In both countries prevailed the idea that the people as a whole had transformed itself into a fighting body to resist the colonial rulers. But in Algeria the fight for independence was a shared experience for large parts of the

population during the 1960s and 70s, and Boumédiène – apart from the question about the extent of his actual involvement – had been one of the war's protagonists. Opposed to that, Qadhdhafi (who received his military training primarily in British academies) was born only in 1942 (among the many biographies of Qadhdhafi the best is probably by Del Boca (2010)), and thus at a time when Italian rule was already falling apart, and like most of his compatriots in the 1970s had no direct experience of the resistance movement led by 'Umar al-Mukhtar. The struggle in Libya had ended already in 1932 and without success, to be sure (for an overview see St John (2017), 56–83). Hence, the filiation of the regime that came to power in 1969 to 'Umar al-Mukhtar was from the beginning much more constructed than in Algeria where the FLN and in particular its armed wing, the ALN, could reasonably claim to have actually won independence.

### Future: the school of the nation

Revolutionary militaries in the 1960s presented themselves – and many outside observers agreed – as forces of modernisation in backward societies (Be'eri 1982, 73–74; Gaub 2013, 221–222). The people's army, in the cases of Algeria and Libya, was seen as a kind of school of the nation.<sup>11</sup> Frantz Fanon, the famous theoretician of the Algerian revolution and third-worldism, in general, wrote in this vein:

The army is not always a school of war; more often, it is a school of civic and political education. The soldier of an adult nation is not a simple mercenary but a citizen who by means of arms defends the nation. [...] We must take advantage of the national military and civil service in order to raise the level of the national consciousness, and to detribalize and unite the nation (Fanon 1991, 201–202).

At the inauguration of the ANP's engineering school, in December 1965, Boumédiène described the social task of the military in the following words: 'The army, then, has to contribute efficiently and in a constructive and positive way to the national campaign of building a new, revolutionary and socialist, society' (Boumédiène 1970, 95).

This constructive role of the army goes, again, back to the independence war when the ALN emerged as the central institution in Algeria. The popular struggle of the independence war was not only supposed to bring about a new nation, but also to revolutionise all existing structures and give birth to a new society, as its leaders stressed repeatedly. Articles in the FLN paper *El Moudjahid* at the time emphasised what ALN cadre schools were able to put together even under the conditions of armed conflict: they not only formed 'future revolutionary cadres' for the time after independence, but also, quite practically, the physicians or technicians for the new nation (El Moudjahid 1959a; 1959b). General Nezzar, too, in his memoir mentioned

the cadre schools, but he also recalled how hard it was for him, the French-trained professional officer, as an instructor to discipline the ALN activists who had no military experience (Nezzar 1999, 41).

In one article from the period of the war, M'hammed Yazid (1960), then minister of information in the Algerian government-in-exile, affirmed that these young 'cadres for tomorrow' who 'will build the future for the Algerian nation' were not only fighting a foreign occupier, but that they were engaged in a revolution, inevitably leading to 'a complete rupture with the backward past'. The theme of the social transformation brought about by the independence war figures prominently in the works of Fanon (1991, 35–94). For him, the violence accumulated over the colonial period had to be discharged in the struggle for national liberation. Thus, the colonised regained their agency and could finally construct a totally new society, born out of the conflict (this is the subject of his famous text 'On Violence'). Fanon (2007, 102–105) also described concretely how traditional family structures would be shaken by the conflict: the son, as an active fighter, could now assume authority over his father, if the latter were reluctant or even collaborating with the colonial system. By the act of fighting colonialism, the fighters became effectively new men, for Fanon, and only the violent struggle was able to establish a new kind of society.

The idea of becoming a new man by joining the struggle is apparent from the change of name many ALN fighters underwent. Boumédiène himself had been born as Mohammed Boukharouba and took the name of the patron marabout of the western Algerian city of Tlemcen (Sīdī Bū Midyān) only in 1955, as he joined the guerrilla force (Francos and Sérénis 1976, 58–59). The well-known ALN commander Rabah Zerari, who then called himself Si Azzedine (1976, 52), explicitly stated in his memoir: 'By going to the *maquis* [i.e. joining the guerrilla], you become a new man'. This also meant that his new family was now the ALN – but only after senior officers had meticulously assessed his character and found him worthy. Another fighter recalled similar tests: 'To become a *maquisard* you had to prove yourself ready to endure numerous sacrifices and to show a lot of conviction. In other words, the *maquis*, you needed to earn it!' (Ighilahriz 2001, 80). Although in principle open to the entire people, then, entrance to the ALN was seen as an initiation into a new kind of community, a national community which prefigured the new social order to achieve in the future.

While in Algeria the military's role as a motor of social transformation was rooted in the war years between 1954 and 1962, in Libya 'the people in arms' became important only during the 1970s. The achievement of full military independence had been a top priority for the Free Officers since their coup. This included the dismantlement of U.S. and British bases as well as the introduction of a conscripted army (Del Boca 2010, 39–41). The concept of the people in arms was first spelled out in Qadhdhafi's Zuwara

speech of 1973. The following year a mandatory short-term military service for students and public functionaries was introduced. In 1978, finally, the General People's Congress passed legislation that established a military training programme for all citizens: beginning at age 15, students had regular courses instructing them in the use of arms, and men of all ages were compelled to participate in military exercises on a regular basis, while women were not obliged but encouraged to do so as well. A People's Militia now stood beside the regular armed forces (Mattes 1985, 532–540).

The concept of the armed people was part of a broader scheme of 'popular' and 'cultural revolution' inaugurated by the Zuwara speech which, finally, led to the unique *jamāhīriyya* system established in Libya in 1977.<sup>12</sup> The idea of a popular army was one dimension of a political and social utopianism the Libyan regime tried to put into practice – at the same time, it was arguably 'a way to turn the collegial military rule of the RCC into a one-man rule behind the veneer of generalized people's power' (Droz-Vincent 2020, 76). The official *jamāhīriyya* encyclopaedia (*al-Mu'jam al-jamāhīrī* 2004, 211–212) asserted under the lemma *al-sha'b al-musallah*:

It is one of the basic pillars of *jamāhīriyya* society, which consists of the fact that power, wealth and arms are in the hands of the people. [...] The 'people in arms' means the complete mobilisation of human potential in society to protect power and wealth from any fascist group inside society as well as from any attack from the outside. [...] It is therefore a basic foundation of the *jamāhīriyya* system: the structure includes people's congresses and people's committees as well as natural socialism and the organisation of the people in arms.

The author of the entry went on to argue that only with such a system freedom and peace could be preserved. The utopian dimension becomes obvious when the text presents the people in arms as a model for the whole world:

If all peoples were armed and all the regular armies designed for offensive purposes had vanished, [armies] which answer to commanders, leaders and presidents, which violate borders, which attack the rights of peoples, if this human goal were accomplished, then global peace between nations would be realised, conflict would end, and the world would live in perfect peace (217).

Being part of the people in arms was also supposed to transform the individual. In a 1975 speech to graduates of a military training programme Qadhdhafi stated: '[...] the military is the producer of men (*al-jundiyya maṣna' al-rijāl*)' (Qadhdhafi 1985b, 42). He went on to stress the responsibility each and everyone acquired by his or her military knowledge for the defence of the nation. In the *jamāhīriyya* system, which left no room for the principle of representation in any domain, it was only consequent that the armed forces, too, should not be separate from the people who were, thus, themselves responsible for their defence. Or, as the encyclopaedia quoted above put it: '[...] there is no representation in death' (*al-Mu'jam al-jamāhīrī* 2004,

212; see also Qadhdhafi 1985b, 38–39). The aspect of educating the people in the sense of the revolution was quite pronounced in a text published by the World Centre for Studies and Research on the Green Book (*al-Markaz al-‘ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar*), the academic institution responsible for spreading the regime ideology under Qadhdhafi. The author, Fu‘ad al-Yusufi (1987, 79–101), argued that military training for every citizen not only reinforced the defensive capacities of the country, but also strengthened the bond between individuals and communities within the nation. The service would instil ‘patriotic fervour’ (*ḥamāsan qawmiyyan*) and, beyond that, by instructing the population ‘in the technical and technological use of advanced weapons’, would even work as a driving force for economic and social progress at large, according to Yusufi.

On the one hand, Libya even under the *jamāhīriyya* remained a military regime with Qadhdhafi and his main allies from among the officer corps, such as Major ‘Abd al-Salam Jallud (prime minister until 1977), Brigadier General Abu Bakr Yunis Jabir (head of the armed forces) or Major Khuwaylidi al-Hamidi (commander of the police), occupying key positions. Originally, the army had been one of the few exceptions from the system of people’s committees managing everything from below, from agricultural and industrial production to universities and the media (the other major exception being the oil sector). On the other hand, Qadhdhafi, ‘on the societal level, mistrusted the armed forces whose role was deliberately made ambiguous’ (Gaub 2013, 226). The institution of the people in arms and the breaking of the ‘monopoly of arms’ (*iḥtikār al-silāḥ* [*al-Mu‘jam al-jamāhīrī* 2004, 212]) were also destined to weaken the military as a factor of influence in politics, especially after two members of the Revolutionary Command Council had tried to stage a coup on their own in 1975 (Gaub 2013, 226–233; Droz-Vincent 2020, 49, 95–100). Qadhdhafi’s Maoist-inspired ideology of constant revolutionary mobilisation against any form of bureaucratic state structure further undermined the traditional security apparatus with the introduction of the Revolutionary Committees and a whole parallel ‘revolutionary’ structure, competing with the institutions of the *jamāhīriyya*, at the end of the 1970s. Interestingly, though, this revolutionary structure was again headed by Qadhdhafi’s officer allies from the then defunct RCC: Jallud, Jabir, Hamidi and Mustafa al-Kharubi (Mattes 1985, 547–548; Kikhia 1997, 86–87; Mattes 1985, 63–68; Vandewalle 2012, 121–125).

In Algeria the development went rather in the opposite direction. Despite the constant insistence on the ANP’s character as ‘an army in the service of the people, an army which preserves the achievements of the people and safeguards the Revolution’ (Boumédiène 1970c, 95), the military after 1965 became the central institution of the state, effectively dominating the government, the legislature and even the National Liberation Front: ‘Contrary to what has often been said, under Houari Boumédiène it was the army/

state that really had a hold on the FLN Party, and not the Party that had a hold on the state' (Stora 2004, 143). Philippe Droz-Vincent (2020, 57) has argued that the ALN thus hindered the emergence of an actual state ideology in Algeria and, hence, had an even stronger political role than its counterpart in Syria – another militarised socialist regime – where officer corps and party remained intertwined. Whereas in Libya the small professional army inherited from the monarchy increased in size and opened its ranks in the framework of the implementation of military training for every citizen, in Algeria the National People's Army, which in 1962 had been characterised by an actual popular base, became more and more detached from the public and independent from other state institutions (Ait Kaki 2004, 430–433; Zeraoui 2012, 136–139; see also Cook 2007, 14–31).<sup>13</sup> Like this, it developed into an elitist officer caste occupying 'a key role of behind-the-scenes manipulator or "supra-constitutional" arbiter/regulator (called "*le pouvoir*," the power in French, by Algerians)' (Droz-Vincent 2020, 82).

### Gender: emancipation through arms

One question arises with regard to an armed force claiming to stand for the entire people: where is the place of women in such a project? The figure of the soldier is often perceived as the very embodiment of masculinity. And the military leaders taking power in the Arab world or the members of revolutionary councils were, in fact, all men. Nonetheless, in the Algerian and Libyan modernisation projects – in which the army occupied the role of a major driving force – women were not absent.

Once again it was the Algerian war of independence that stood at the origin of women's new status in society, as Boumédiène (1979, 190) explained: 'At the same time when she fought the colonial occupier with the weapon in her hand, the Algerian woman rebelled against certain old reactionary traditions. Hence, it was by her own effort and her own merit that she created her place in our society'. The conflict between 1954 and 1962 was also a war for the Algerian women, with both sides, the nationalists of the FLN as well as the French colonial administration, in fact claiming they were fighting for female emancipation (Lazreg 1994, 118–141; MacMaster 2009; Seferdjeli 2004). Information Minister Yazid in his 1960 article, quoted above, stressed that it was both young men and women who were active in the resistance and who were already, at the time, constructing the Algeria of tomorrow. And Fanon (2007, 35–64) in his famous text 'Algeria Unveiled' gave a lively description and interpretation of women's engagement in the liberation struggle and the changes this brought about for social relations (albeit from a very male perspective).

It has been estimated that more than 11,000 women participated actively in the independence movement, about 2,000 of which were fighters in the

rural guerrilla force (*mujāhidāt* (Amrane-Minne 1994, 32; Lazreg 1994, 119)). In their reminiscences female fighters attest to the transformations that affected gender relations during the war. For one, they changed themselves, as Louise Ighilahriz (2001, 72) recounted: 'The war had completely transformed me, I had become insensitive and, to put it this way, forgotten my femininity. To better adapt to my environment, every part of me had become masculine: my dress [...], my behaviour (I had totally adopted the fighting spirit)'. She continued to describe how she would avoid anything that could mark her as the 'weak sex': from marching more slowly than her male comrades to helping the peasant women, with whom the guerrilla fighters were staying, to prepare the food (88–94). By doing so, these women could gain the respect of men and challenge traditional patriarchal authority, as explained by Fanon (2007, 105–116). Both Zohra Drif (2014, 64–66, 195) – herself a well-known female guerrilla fighter – and Si Azzedine (1976, 203–232) recalled how young women they knew succeeded in making themselves independent from their fathers, because they actively joined the struggle and thus surpassed the patriarchs in nationalist commitment.

The question remains, though, how much of this legacy of female fighters endured in Algerian society. After independence there were no female soldiers, let alone officers, in the ANP, and the FLN leadership, too, was composed exclusively of men.<sup>14</sup> One former *mujāhida* described her life after the war in the following terms:

Afterwards, I have not done anything. I married a *mujahid*. At independence, I had a daughter, but I was not very happy with my husband, we divorced. I found myself alone with my daughter, without an apartment, without anything. I worked, but I have not had the time to even think about an engagement [in politics]. (Amrane-Minne 1994, 52)

While the regime, which understood itself as progressive, regularly professed its commitment to the emancipation of women, their actual participation in political and social life remained limited. Under Boumédiène and his policies of socialist developmentalism, focusing on industrialisation, of Arabisation and Islamic identity politics an active support of women's rights, beyond a general 'modernisation', was not on the agenda (Lazreg 1994, 142–165; Vince 2009, 158–168). On International Women's Day 1967 the Algerian head of state explained the place the female part of society was supposed to occupy in his socialist project:

The Algerian woman, who has asserted herself over the course of our people's history, who has effectively contributed to the liberation struggle, today must deploy all her efforts to affirm her presence, by participating in the construction of our country and our society. All doors are open to her, no constraint to her evolution remains. She also has to preserve her dignity and her personality and avoid to fall for the attraction of certain Western traditions or certain new fashions. (Boumédiène 1970d, 450)

Though the subsequent evolution of gender relations as well as feminist struggles in Algeria lie beyond the scope of this article (on this see Lazreg 1994, 195–208; Saï 2012), we can observe a general trend similar to the one highlighted at the end of the last section: while women's equality, based on their participation in the independence war, remained central for regime rhetoric, in fact the military became much more exclusive, and hence again more male, under Boumédiène (on the politics of memory with regard to women in particular see also MacMaster (2009, 369–388); Vince (2013)).

In the neighbouring country the situation was, again, somewhat different. The bilingual history of the colonial period states in a rather general way: 'The Libyan Arab resistance movement was not the prerogative of men. Libyan Arab women too played their part since the early days of the war' (Hasnawi 1988, 164). Still, the subject of female participation in the struggle against Italian rule has not yet been thoroughly researched (see only some brief articles by Duqqali (1990); Najjar (2005/06); Yeaw (2018)). Nonetheless, the emancipation of women was among the Qadhdhafi regime's declared primary objectives (Bertazzi 2008; Graeff-Wassink 1990, 51–70). In fact, the *jamāhīriyya* encyclopaedia stated under the lemma 'the woman' (*al-mar'a*) that men and women have equal rights, including the right to work, to freedom of thought and to education. On the other hand, there was still a 'natural' difference between the sexes, so women would have to be guarded from the negative influences of 'modern materialist culture which tricks them into destroying their femininity and turning into men' (*al-Mu'jam al-jamāhīrī* 2004, 344–346). As in Boumédiène's Women's Day speech, emancipation was understood here not as Westernisation, but in a nationalist way as an 'authentic' evolution, which remains true to Arab and Islamic traditions.

Nevertheless, the Libyan concept of the popular army explicitly included women. It was repeatedly said that defending the nation was the responsibility of every citizen, male and female (*mas'ūliyyat kull muwāṭin wa-muwāṭina* [216]). From the mid-1970s on, women were given the opportunity to participate in regular military training courses, and in 1979 Qadhdhafi inaugurated the first Military Academy for Women in Tripoli (Graeff-Wassink 1990, 73–118). In 1983 the Leader of the Revolution – who in his later years would show himself in public always surrounded by female bodyguards – gave a speech there, in which he pointed to the twofold historic mission the academy's students were accomplishing: in the interior they were in the process of overcoming the opposition of 'backward' elements in society against a public role for women, while, at the same time, becoming a model for other countries in the Arab world and beyond and contributing to the ongoing popular struggle against imperialism. Colonel Qadhdhafi (1985c, 171) summed up the achievements of Libya's women soldiers by

contrasting their position with the one of women in other places, 'a worthless woman, reading worthless writings and the rubbish of reactionary and decadent bourgeois societies, a woman who creates nothing but decadent things and leaves the realisation of freedom aside'. Opposed to that, the Libyan woman was 'important, honoured and free, she has the weapon in her hands and can defend herself, her home, her country, the future and history – this is the free woman'.

As with the notion of the people in arms, in general, here too the idea is that only the means of defending oneself can realise self-determination and freedom – a freedom strictly curtailed by the individual's duties towards society. A female officer in the Libyan air force, interviewed by Maria Graeff-Wassink (1990, 230), seemed to have internalised these ideas when she defined herself as a liberated woman, but went on to say that freedom meant, above all, self-control and that it was, of course, limited by religious and social norms. The most important aspect in the presence of women in the armed forces, for her, was the opening up of new opportunities and the proof that women were able to do everything: '[...] the army is a new professional field for the woman. Hence, it is an honour and a duty, at the same time, and it shows that she can work everywhere'.

In Libya the entry of women into the army was part of Qadhdhafi's emancipation project, 'a gift offered by men, imposed and controlled from above and not the result of a committed struggle by women themselves' (219).<sup>15</sup> In Algeria, on the contrary, women themselves had actively challenged existing gender relations through their participation in the independence war. Here it was the postcolonial regime that effectively blocked the continuation of their efforts to a large extent. In both cases the military served as a motor of social transformations with regard to gender: in Libya as a deliberate choice by the leadership to open the most male-dominated institution for women to induce change in other sectors as well, in Algeria as part of a revolutionary restructuring of society under the conditions of violent conflict.

## **Conclusion: from popular army to civil war**

Both colonels,<sup>16</sup> the Algerian Houari Boumédiène and the Libyan Mu'ammār al-Qadhdhafi, saw themselves as revolutionary officers, well equipped to modernise their countries. Both combined a socialist approach to development from above, financed by the nationalisation of oil companies, with a policy of Arabisation (directed primarily against the Amazigh minorities) and cultural authenticity (McDougall 2017, 260–270; Stora 2004, 166–176; St John 2017, 171–177; Vandewalle 2012, 86–96, 109–130). As career officers, who had built their power on the army, it is not surprising that both perceived the military as the privileged tool in the social transformation

process and posited a strong link between the armed forces and the people as the basis for a new society.

But, as we have seen, there are also important differences between the two models of the citizen-soldier or the popular army. Although not without political implications, in the Algerian case the interpretation of the independence war as a popular struggle could claim a certain self-evidence. In Libya, on the other hand, the regime's historical legitimisation by association with the resistance movement led by 'Umar al-Mukhtar was always more shaky. Another aspect concerns popular mobilisation: the Boumédiène regime tried to curb what was left of the initiative and movements that had sprung up during the fight against colonialism and to channel them into a state-led mass politics. By contrast, Qadhafi and his supporters attempted to instil enthusiasm in a reluctant population in ever new waves of revolutionary mobilisation. This is evident with regard to the emancipation of women and the female presence in the armed forces, which in Algeria reached a peak during the war to decline afterwards, while in Libya it only started in the mid-1970s. Ultimately, though, all efforts at popular mobilisation, at creating enduring support for the regimes and at economic development failed (even though the rentier system, fuelled by oil and gas exports, managed to guarantee basic services and the loyalty of a class of functionaries for several decades).<sup>17</sup>

Apart from training guerrilla fighters for various liberation (or terrorist) movements in Africa and throughout the world, the Algerian and Libyan armies were not engaged in much actual anti-imperialist struggle after independence. Algeria entered its only armed conflict after 1962 with the former Maghrebi 'brother' nation of Morocco: the so-called Sands War of 1963 was followed by another series of hostilities, after Rabat had decided to occupy Western Sahara in 1975 (Stora 2004, 135–136, 155–158). Similarly, the Libyan army fought a brief border war with Egypt – the erstwhile model for Qadhafi's revolution – in 1977, which was resolved by the mediation of Boumédiène (Del Boca 2010, 78–85; Kikhia 1997, 124–128). The 1980s, then, were marked by the very unsuccessful and unpopular Libyan intervention in Chad (Lemarchand 1988; Ronen 2008, 157–180) and the U.S. air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi in retaliation to Qadhafi's alleged support of international terrorism in 1986 (Kikhia 1997, 137–144; Ronen 2008, 9–40).<sup>18</sup>

In general, Arab militaries lost their self-ascribed role as a modernising vanguard in the decades after independence and became, in many cases, part of authoritarian governments' internal security apparatuses and even important economic actors (Cook 2007, 63–92; Droz-Vincent 2020, 107–157; Sayigh et al. 2011).<sup>19</sup> In both countries examined here the army, too, served rather to repress unrest within, especially the mounting Islamist opposition, than to defend the people against imperialist incursions (De Maio 2006; on the beginnings of Islamist opposition see Pargeter (2012, 158–171); McDougall (2017,

284–289)). In Algeria the army leadership played a key role in the selection of presidents after Boumédiène's death in 1978 and again over the course of the 1990s, starting with the coup of 1992. Some observers contended that this process had come to an end with the presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika after 1999 (Ait Kaki 2004, 427–439; Mortimer 2006).<sup>20</sup> However, in response to the *hirāk* protests that led to the resignation of the ailing Bouteflika in 2019, the military once again assumed its role as 'supra-constitutional arbiter/regulator' (Droz-Vincent 2020, 82; on the political situation after 2019 see also Dris-Aït Hamadouche (2021)).

It is interesting, though, how in Algeria as well as in Libya opposition groups have re-appropriated the legacy of the popular struggle against colonialism and turned it against the regimes. In Algeria it was, for one, the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS) that presented itself as the true heir to the independence movement, from the late 1980s onward. The civil war, which began after the army under General Nezzar had invalidated parliamentary elections won by FIS in late 1991, was also a conflict over the question who really represented the people, the ANP or FIS's armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army (*Armée Islamique du Salut*, AIS).<sup>21</sup> But the more recent *hirāk* movement has as well tried to insert itself into a narrative of liberation of which, from this perspective, the ANP – whose political stance has changed '[f]rom revolutionary to conservative' (Gaub 2017, 172) – has claimed an unjustified monopoly (Fabbiano 2019; see also Brand 2014, 202–205). In Libya the popular uprising of 2011 from the very beginning took its symbols from 'Umar al-Mukhtar's resistance movement. The regime's decade-long insistence on arming the people and preparing them for battle finally backfired as militias sprang up everywhere to fight for the removal of Qadhdhafi. Libya's ongoing civil war is certainly not least the result of the Qadhdhafi regime's substitution of stable state structures for a system of competing committees and militias (Willcoxon 2017). In fact, the armed forces as an institution had been all but completely destroyed – as so many other institutions under Qadhdhafi. Accordingly, they were neither a support for the falling regime in 2011 nor have they been able to play a role since then (Droz-Vincent 2020, 198–200, 211–213, 233–235; Gaub 2017, 109–115).<sup>22</sup> The concept of the nation in arms, thus, has proven ultimately destabilising to the regimes that devised it.

## Notes

1. On the narrative of revolution under 'Abd al-Nasir see Brand (2014), 27–68; Abul-Magd (2017), 35–77.
2. All translations from French and Arabic are by the author.
3. However, whereas the Algerian regime never intervened directly in the affairs of other states and often tried to play a diplomatic role, Libya actually deployed

- troops to other countries several times, especially to Chad but also to the Central African Republic and Uganda (Ronen 2008, 145–180).
4. At that time, the Algerian military claimed a role as the arbiter of the political system and thus a duty to intervene in order to avoid an Islamist takeover (Cook 2007, 32–62).
  5. On the recruitment of the ALN see also Arezki (2022), 59–90.
  6. The slogan goes actually back to anonymous graffiti and reflected the Algerian particularity, where no single leader emerged as the undisputed ‘independence hero’ (like Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, for instance). Yet it equally served well to mask the violent conflicts inside the nationalist movement. On the postcolonial politics of memory in Algeria see also Stora (2002); on the Boumédiène period in particular see Brand (2014), 117–152.
  7. This is a difference to protectorates or mandates where the colonial state was superimposed over an indigenous structure (e. g. in Morocco or Tunisia) and where, at times, there existed even indigenous armies (e. g. in Iraq or Egypt).
  8. The Libyan armed forces, too, were originally based on the Sanusiyya brotherhood (Mattes 1985, 523–530).
  9. It is worth mentioning that Enver Bey (later Pasha) is one of the few representatives of the Ottoman state to be spared the negative verdicts by later Libyan authors. Instead, he is seen as an energetic young officer acting in harmony with the people – a role Qadhdhafi also claimed for himself (e.g., Rahuma 1988, 215–221, 339–344).
  10. See also Yusufi (1987, 23–32) and Hasnawi (1982, 69–79).
  11. The army as the ‘school of the nation’ is again a notion from the Prussian military tradition. It is not clear whether this idea was received in Arab countries via the Ottoman Empire (Maksudyan 2016, 141–148, 157–163).
  12. The neologism *jamāhīriyya* (from *al-jamāhīr* = the masses) designated the Libyan political system between 1977 and 2011, which was based on Qadhdhafi’s so-called Third Universal Theory (*al-naẓariyya al-‘ālamīyya al-thālitha*) elaborated in his Green Book (*al-Kitāb al-akhḍar*). It theoretically consisted in a total and direct democracy through which a stateless society administered itself. In practice, Qadhdhafi retained dictatorial powers as Leader of the Revolution (*qā’id al-thawra*), standing outside or above the actual political system (Kikhia 1997, 51–56, 84–106; Mattes 2008; Werfalli 2011, 33–39; Vandewalle 2012, 98–125).
  13. Interestingly, Qadhdhafi had promoted his concept of the people in arms also in a speech before the Algerian National Assembly during his state visit in 1978 (Mattes 1985, 539–540).
  14. Only in the 21st century could the Algerian armed forces again claim a pioneering role for gender equality: in 2009, Fatima-Zohra Ardjoun, then head of a major military hospital, was promoted to the rank of general, apparently as the first woman in an Arab country. Since then, several other women have attained the same rank in the ANP (*Jeune Afrique* 2014).
  15. On the limits of the emancipation of Libyan women see also Langhi (2014).
  16. Like Boumédiène, Qadhdhafi always used the title of colonel – in the 1960s a sort of marker for relatively junior revolutionary officers – although technically he held the rank of general from 1976 on.
  17. The failure of popular mobilisation in Libya is well analysed by Werfalli (2011). For the problems in the implementation of the concept of the people in arms see also Mattes (1985, 540–547).

18. Yusufi (1987, 57–70) even tried to integrate the U.S. attacks into a resistance narrative of the people in arms.
19. Gaub (2017, 78–90), however, points to still relatively high levels of popular esteem for the military in Arab countries (though not in Libya and Algeria).
20. Although technically a captain in the ALN during the war of independence, Bou-teflika, who had risen to prominence as Boumédiène's long-time foreign minister, was considered a civilian in Algeria.
21. Both sides, to be sure, committed atrocities against the civilian population, while claiming to protect the Algerian people (Zeraoui 2012, 139–140; McDougall 2017, 290–317).
22. The influential role of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in Libyan politics after Qadhdhafi, on the one hand, shows the ongoing potential of military legitimacy for political leadership, especially vis-à-vis an Islamist 'threat'. On the other hand, his inability to reign in militias and actually come to power in the whole country attests to the lasting destruction of the armed forces as an autonomous and unified institution.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by Gerda Henkel Foundation.

## References

- "al-Bayān al-awwal li-Majlis qiyādat al-thawra, 19 jumādā al-thānī 1389 h al-fātiḥ min sabtambir 1969m." 1982. In *Min al-jumhūriyya ilā al-jamāhīriyya: Dirāsāt fi thawrat al-fātiḥ min sabtambir fi Libiyā*, edited by Habib Wada'a al-Hasnawi, 151–52. Tripoli: Markaz dirāsāt jihād al-libiyyīn dīdda al-ghazw al-iṭālī.
- al-Mu'jam al-jamāhīrī: Muṣṭalahāt "al-naẓariyya al-'ālamīyya al-thālitha". 2nd ed. Tripoli: al-Markaz al-'ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar, 1425/2004.
- 'Abd al-Rida, As'ad Tarish. 2016. "Zāhirat al-ḥukūmāt al-'askariyya fi al-duwal al-'arabiyya." *Majallat al-'ulūm al-siyāsiyya* 51:273–291.
- Abul-Magd, Zeinab. 2017. *Militarizing the Nation: The Army, Business, and Revolution in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Afriq, Jeune. 2014. "Algérie: l'armée recrute trois nouvelles femmes généraux. Après Fatma-Zohra Ardjoune, l'armée algérienne compte trois nouvelles femmes généraux." July 8.
- Ait Kaki, Maxime. 2004. "Armée, pouvoir et processus de décision en Algérie." *Politique étrangère* 69 (2): 427–439.
- Alexander, Anne. 2013. "'Storming the Ramparts of Tyranny': Egypt and Iraq 1945–63." In *Arms and the People: Popular Movements and the Military from the Paris Commune to the Arab Spring*, edited by Mike Gonzalez, and Houman Barekat, 253–277. London: Pluto.
- Amrane-Minne, Danièle Djamila. 1994. *Des femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie*. Paris: Karthala.

- Arezki, Saphia. 2022. *De l'ALN à l'ANP. La construction de l'armée algérienne*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.
- Azzedine, Commandant Si. 1976. *On nous appelait fellaghas*. Paris: Stock.
- Barnawi, Salim Husayn 'Umar al-. 2004. "al-'Arab wa-l-qaḍāyā al-ifrīqiyya al-mu'āṣira." *Majallat al-buḥūth al-tārikhiyya* 26 (1): 155–214.
- Be'eri, Eliezer. 1982. "The Waning of the Military Coup in Arab Politics." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1): 69–81.
- Ben Bella, Ahmed. 1985. *Ḥadīth ma'rifi shāmil*. Edited by Muhammad Khalifa. Beirut: Dār al-waḥda.
- Bertazzi, Lara. 2008. "La donna nel Libro Verde di Gheddafi." *Africa* 63 (3): 515–530.
- Blackwell, Stephen. 2003. "Saving the King: Anglo-American Strategy and British Counter-subversion Operations in Libya, 1953-59." *Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (1): 1–18.
- Block, Nelson R., and Tammy M. Proctor. 2009. *Scouting Frontiers: Youth and the Scout Movement's First Century*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- Boumediène, Houari. 1970a. "Proclamation du Conseil de la Révolution (19 Juin 1965)." In *Discours du Président Boumediène, 19 Juin 1965 - 19 Juin 1970*. Vol. I, 5-10. Constantine: El-Baath.
- Boumediène, Houari. 1970b. "Aux officiers de l'Académie militaire interarmes de Chercell (10 Juillet 1965)." In *Discours du Président Boumediène, 19 Juin 1965 - 19 Juin 1970*. Vol. I, 28-30. Constantine: El-Baath.
- Boumediène, Houari. 1970c. "L'inauguration de l'École du génie (4 Décembre 1965)." In *Discours du Président Boumediène, 19 Juin 1965 - 19 Juin 1970*. Vol. I, 94-96. Constantine: El-Baath.
- Boumediène, Houari. 1970d. "Journée internationale de la femme (8 Mars 1967)." In *Discours du Président Boumediène, 19 Juin 1965 - 19 Juin 1970*. Vol. I, 445-50. Constantine: El-Baath.
- Boumediène, Houari. 1979. *Citations du Président Boumediène*. Edited by Khalfa Mameri. Algiers: SNED.
- Bozzo, Anna. 2013. "Boumedienne." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_24353](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24353)
- Brand, Laurie. 2014. *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Byrne, Jeffrey James. 2014. "L'action internationale du FLN." In *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale (1830-1962)*, edited by Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, Ouanassa Siari Tengour, and Sylvie Thénault, 651–657. Paris: La Découverte.
- Byrne, Jeffrey James. 2016. *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Connelly, Matthew. 2001. "Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2): 221–245.
- Cook, Steven A. 2007. *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Del Boca, Angelo. 2010. *Gheddafi. Una sfida dal deserto*. Rome: Laterza.
- De Maio, Paola. 2006. "From Soldiers to Policemen: Qadhafi's Army in the New Century." *Journal of Middle Eastern Geopolitics* 2 (3): 17–26.
- Drif, Zohra. 2014. *Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN. Zone Autonome d'Alger*. 2nd ed. Algiers: Chihab.

- Dris-Aït Hamadouche, Louisa. 2021. "Pouvoir-Hirak an 2: les signes de l'impasse?" *L'Année du Maghreb* 26:197–212.
- Droz-Vincent, Philippe. 2020. *Military Politics of the Contemporary Arab World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dumasy, François, and Francesca Di Pasquale. 2012. "Être historien dans la Libye de Kadhafi. Stratégies professionnelles et pratiques mémorielles autour du Libyan Studies Center." *Politique africaine* 125:127–146.
- Duqqali, Muhammad 'Abd al-Nabi. 1990. "Dawr al-mar'a al-'arabiyya al-libiyya fi ḥarb al-taḥrīr al-waṭaniyya ḍidda al-ghazw al-īṭālī." *al-Shahid* 11:341–362.
- El Moudjahid. 1959a. "L'A.L.N. forme ses cadres." January 15.
- El Moudjahid. 1959b. "Une grandiose réalisation de la Révolution algérienne: le corps des transmissions." April 10.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. (1949) 1973. *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, Martin, and John Phillips. 2007. *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Faath, Sigrid, and Hanspeter Mattes. 1988. "Aspekte der Geschichtspolitik und Geschichtsschreibung am Beispiel der Maghrebstaaten Libyen und Algerien." *Wuqūf* 3:21–79.
- Fabbiano, Giulia. 2019. "Le temps long du hirak: le passé et ses présences." *L'Année du Maghreb* 21:117–130.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1959) 2007. *A Dying Colonialism*. Translated by Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1961) 1991. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove.
- Franco, Ania, and Jean-Pierre Séréni. 1976. *Un Algérien nommé Boumediène*. Paris: Stock.
- Frisch, Hillel. 2013. "The Role of Armies in the Arab Uprisings - An Introduction." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36 (2): 177–179.
- Gaub, Florence. 2013. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36 (2): 221–244.
- Gaub, Florence. 2017. *Guardians of the Arab State: When Militaries Intervene in Politics, from Iraq to Mauritania*. London: Hurst.
- Gauthé, Jean-Jacques. 2003. "Les Scouts musulmans algériens vus par les services de renseignement français (1945-1962)." In *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie. La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial 1940-1962*, edited by Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis, and Youssef Fatès, 83–93. Paris: La Découverte.
- Goltz, Colmar Freiherr von der. 1925. *Das Volk in Waffen. Ein Buch über Heerwesen und Kriegführung unserer Zeit*. Berlin: Decker's.
- Graeff-Wassink, Maria. 1990. *La femme en armes: Kadhafi féministe?* Paris: Colin.
- Grewal, Sharan. 2023. *Soldiers of Democracy? Military Legacies and the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harbi, Mohammed. 2001. *Une vie debout. Mémoires politiques*. Vol. I: 1945-1962, Paris: La Découverte.
- Hasnawi, Habib Wada'a al-. 1982. *Min al-jumhūriyya ilā al-jamāhīriyya: Dirāsāt fi thawrat al-fātiḥ min sabbatambir fi Libiyyā*. Tripoli: Markaz dirāsāt jihād al-libiyyīn ḍidda al-ghazw al-īṭālī.
- Hasnawi, Habib Wada'a al-. 1988. *Qiṣṣat jihād al-libiyyīn ḍidda al-isti'mār al-īṭālī 1911-1943/The Story of the Libyans' Jihad (Resistance) against Italian Colonialism 1911-1943*. Tripoli: Markaz dirāsāt jihād al-libiyyīn ḍidda al-ghazw al-īṭālī.

- Ighilahriz, Louise. 2001. *Algérienne*. Paris: Fayard/Calmann-Lévy.
- Kaddache, Mahfoud. 1991. "Historique des Scouts Musulmans Algériens." In *Le groupe Emir Khaled de Belcourt. Un maillon des Scouts Musulmans Algériens 1946-1962*, edited by Ali Aroua, and Mohamed Tayeb Illoul, 71–75. Algiers: Dahlab.
- Kaddache, Mahfoud. 2003. "'Les soldats de l'avenir': Les Scouts musulmans algériens (1930-1962)." In *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie: La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940-1962*, edited by Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis and Youssef Fatès, 68-77. Paris: La Découverte.
- Kikhia, Mansour O. El-. 1997. *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Krais, Jakob. 2016. *Geschichte als Widerstand. Geschichtsschreibung und nation-building in Qaddafis Libyen*. Würzburg: Ergon.
- Langhi, Zahra'. 2014. "Gender and State-Building in Libya: Towards a Politics of Inclusion." *Journal of North African Studies* 19 (2): 200–210.
- Lazreg, Marnia. 1994. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. New York: Routledge.
- Lemarchand, René. 1988. "The Case of Chad." In *The Green and the Black: Qadhafi's Policies in Africa*, edited by René Lemarchand, 106–124. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Macmaster, Neil. 2009. *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the "Emancipation" of Muslim Women, 1954–1962*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Maksudyan, Nazan. 2016. "Agents or Pawns? Nationalism and Ottoman Children during the Great War." *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3 (1): 139–164.
- Martinez, Luis. 2010. *Violence de la rente pétrolière. Algérie - Irak - Libye*. Paris: Presses Sciences Po.
- Mattes, Hanspeter. 1985. "Von der Prätorianergarde König Idris I. zum Konzept des bewaffneten Volkes. Ein Beitrag zur Militärgeschichte Libyens." *Orient* 26 (4): 523–548.
- Mcdougall, James. 2017. *A History of Algeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mortimer, Robert. 2006. "State and Army in Algeria: The 'Bouteflika Effect'." *Journal of North African Studies* 11 (2): 155–171.
- Najjar, Najah 'Abd al-Fattah al-. 2005/06. "al-Mar'a wa-l-muqāwama al-lībiyya ḍidda al-ghazw wa-l-isti'mār al-iṭālī." *al-Shahīd* 26/27: 75-108.
- Nezzar, Khaled. 1999. *Mémoires du Général Khaled Nezzar*. Algiers: Chihab.
- Pargeter, Alison. 2012. *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pollack, Kenneth M. 2019. *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Qadhdhafi, Mu'ammār al-. 1982. "Min khiṭāb qā'id al-thawra al-'aqīd Mu'ammār al-Qadhdhāfi bi-madinat Zuwāra 12 min rabī' al-awwal 1393 h 15 abril 1973." In *Min al-jumhūriyya ilā al-jamāhīriyya: Dirāsāt fī thawrat al-fātiḥ min sabtambir fī Libiyyā*, edited by Habib Wada'a al-Hasnawi, 153-58. Tripoli: Markaz dirāsāt jihād al-lībiyyīn ḍidda al-ghazw al-iṭālī.
- Qadhdhafi, Mu'ammār al-. 1985a. "Fī al-mu'tamar al-sha'bī bi-madinat Ṭarābulus bi-munāsabat raḥīl ākhar fashīstī 'an turāb al-waṭan, 7 sha'bān 1390 h - 7 uktūbar 1970m." In *al-Tha'r*, 19-31. Tripoli: al-Markaz al-'ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar.
- Qadhdhafi, Mu'ammār al-. 1985b. "Fī ḥafl takhrīj al-duf'a al-thālitha min muntasibī al-tadrīb al-'askarī al-'amm, 7 jumādā al-thānī 1395 h - 17 yūniyū 1975m." In *al-Sha'b al-musallah*, 35-44. Tripoli: al-Markaz al-'ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar.

- Qadhdhafi, Mu'ammar al-. 1985c. "Ḥadīth al-qā'id fī al-kulliyya al-'askariyya li-l-banāt, 16 ramadān 1392wr - 26 yūniyū 1983m." In *al-Sha'b al-musallaḥ*, 163-75. Tripoli: al-Markaz al-'ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar.
- Rahuma, Mustafa Hamid. 1988. *al-Muqāwama al-libiyya al-turkiyya ʿidda al-ghazw al-īṭālī: Uktūbar 1911m - Uktūbar 1912m*. Tripoli: Markaz dirāsāt jihād al-libiyyin ʿidda al-ghazw al-īṭālī.
- Ronen, Yehudit. 2008. *Qaddafi's Libya in World Politics*. Boulder, CO: Rienner.
- Rossi, Gianluigi. 2008. "La Libia nel Mediterraneo, 1943-1951: Interessi delle Potenze, indipendenza e questione dell'unità." *Africa* 63 (2): 345-358.
- Ryan, Eileen. 2018. *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saï, Fatima Zohra. 2012. "Quel statut pour les femmes algériennes dans la 'post-colonie'?" In *In Les indépendances au Maghreb*, edited by Amar Mohand-Amer, and Belkacem Benzenine, 141-152. Oran: Centre de recherche en anthropologie sociale et culturelle.
- Sayf al-Nasr, Riyad. 1981. *al-Sha'b al-musallaḥ: Falsafat wa-taṭbiq fī al-jihād al-libī*. Tripoli: al-Munsha'a al-'amma li-l-nashar wa-l-tawzī' wa-l-i'lān.
- Sayigh, Yezid, Philippe Droz-Vincent, Roger Owen, Robert Springborg, Steffen Hertog, and Oren Barak. 2011. "Roundtable: Rethinking the Study of Middle East Militaries." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (3): 391-407.
- Seferdjeli, Ryme. 2004. "French 'Reforms' and Muslim Women's Emancipation during the Algerian War." *Journal of North African Studies* 9 (4): 19-61.
- Shukri, Muhammad Fu'ad. (1948) 2005. *al-Sanūsiyya: Dīn wa-dawla*. Edited by Yusuf al-Mujraisi. Oxford: Centre for Libyan Studies.
- Springborg, Robert. 2014. "Arab Militaries." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch, 142-159. New York: Columbia University Press.
- St John, Ronald Bruce. 2017. *Libya: From Colony to Revolution*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Stora, Benjamin. 2002. "Algérie: Les retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance." *Modern & Contemporary France* 10 (4): 461-473.
- Stora, Benjamin. 2004. *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*. Translated by Marie Jane Todd. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.
- Triaud, Jean-Louis. 1997. "Sanūsiyya." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs. Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_6614](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6614)
- Vandewalle, Dirk. 2012. *A History of Modern Libya*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vince, Natalya. 2009. "Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities: Women Veterans of the 'Battle of Algiers'." *French History and Civilization* 2:153-168.
- Vince, Natalya. 2013. "Saintly Grandmothers: Youth Reception and Reinterpretation of the National Past in Contemporary Algeria." *Journal of North African Studies* 18 (1): 32-52.
- Werfalli, Mabroka al-. 2011. *Political Alienation in Libya: Assessing Citizens' Political Attitude and Behaviour*. Reading: Ithaca.
- Weulersse, Clémence. 2005. "Histoire et révolution en Libye." *L'Année du Maghreb* 249-260.
- Willcoxon, George Frederick. 2017. "Contention, Violence and Stalemate in Post-War Libya." *Mediterranean Politics* 22 (1): 91-114.
- Yazid, M'hammed. 1960. "La jeunesse algérienne dans la révolution." *El Moudjahid*, April 25.

- Yeaw, Katrina. 2018. "Gender, Violence and Resistance under Italian Rule in Cyrenaica, 1923-34." *The Journal of North African Studies* 23 (5): 791–810.
- Youcef, Abdeljalil Larbi. 2014. "The Algerian Army Made Me a Man'." *Transition* 116:67–79.
- Yusufi, Fu'ad al-. 1987. *al-Ṭarīq ilā al-sha'b al-musallaḥ*. Tripoli: al-Markaz al-'ālamī li-dirāsāt wa-abḥāth al-Kitāb al-akhḍar.
- Zeraoui, Zidane. 2012. "Algeria: Revolution, Army and Political Power." *Language and Intercultural Communication* 12 (2): 133–145.