

## WOMEN IN THE MEN'S HOUSE: THE ROAD TO EQUALITY IN THE ALGERIAN MILITARY

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In developed countries, the recruitment of women into the military has been the subject of intense debate for over thirty years. Supporters assert the equal right of women to serve alongside men in the army, even in combat roles, while opponents fear that the very presence of women in what they see as a male institution undermines its esprit de corps and combat efficacy.<sup>1</sup> Some argue that women cannot bear physical harm, although the integration of women into Western armies in increasing numbers suggests otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

By way of contrast, the recruitment of women into Arab armies, even in noncombat roles, is rare and remains socially and politically contentious. So when the United Arab Emirates announced that one of its pilots who had flown combat missions against the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria in 2014 was a woman, Major Mariam al-Mansouri, this generated considerable media interest. Algerian media paid similar attention in 2009 when Fatima Zohra Ardjoune, director general of the Ain Naâdja military hospital, was promoted to general, the first woman in the Algerian People's National Army (PNA)—and in the Arab world—to reach this rank. Three years later, Fatima Boudouani became the second woman to be promoted to the rank of general in the PNA, and she was followed by three more women in 2015.

The status of women in the military had been made legally equal to that of men in an ordinance on February 28, 2006, and the military's promotions of women from 2009 to 2015

broke an apparent taboo.<sup>3</sup> The army has since put in place a formal policy framework for equal opportunities, and efforts have been made to apply it.

The equal opportunity policy enabled the PNA to portray itself as progressive, equal, and open to all members of the society it is supposed to represent. But this reflects more of a public-relations move than a substantive shift in the PNA's approach. In practice, there is no equality, and the full integration of women remains limited in scope. Women in the Algerian army are portrayed in contradictory ways: they are seen as commendable symbols of gender equality, and yet the manner of their representation reveals them to be sexualized and marginalized. The traditional gender-based division of labor—with female military personnel placed mostly in subordinate or support positions where they remain aides to their male counterparts—is maintained.

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The outcome is the persistence of a protective paternalism that regards women as incapable of adapting to the rigors of military life and the harsh demands of combat. At the same time, women are perceived primarily as mothers and caregivers amid a prevailing atmosphere of benevolent sexism.

The PNA's official monthly magazine, *El Djeich*, along with interviews with retired officers, reveals that the army's policy toward women is neither systematically inclusive nor wholly exclusive. Significant progress has been made in recruiting women, who are now admitted to all branches of the armed forces. However, a gap persists between official pronouncements of equality and the reality. Women continue to serve in the same fields as before—notably, administration, communications, and social services—and mostly in lower-grade positions. They moreover continue to be excluded from combat units. Their integration into the armed forces is incomplete.

Nonetheless, the status of women in the PNA remains largely off the public agenda. The culture of secrecy that surrounds the Algerian army—dubbed *la grande muette* (the great silent one)—means that there is little information about the force, and even less about female personnel in its ranks. However, much may be gleaned from the way women and gender relations are discursively constructed within the military, because discourses (defined in one study as “systems of concepts which give meaning to entities and activities”<sup>4</sup>) and narratives (characterized in another analysis as “both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation”<sup>5</sup>) explain concrete practices and underlie the politics behind the recruitment of women into the PNA.

The PNA's stance on the status and role of women is becoming increasingly untenable but has yet to attract the focused attention and sustained effort of Algeria's military command or ministry of defense.

## WOMEN'S HISTORY WITH THE MILITARY IN ALGERIA

Since Algeria's independence in 1962, women have been seen more as a propaganda and public-relations tool for the PNA

than as active members taking part in decisionmaking and sharing principal duties, especially in combat.

Attitudes toward the involvement of women in the military were first formed in Algeria's 1954–1962 war of independence, during which time women were relegated to support roles and sometimes even excluded from army life. The initial reluctance to include women in active service carried over into the post-independence period, until former Algerian president Houari Boumediene finally allowed women to join the PNA as both commissioned officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as a means of portraying Algeria as a pioneering country in terms of women's rights. But formal policy remained unclear and inconsistent: The recruitment of women was suspended in 1986 and restarted fifteen years later. Even since 2006, when more departments and branches were opened up to female personnel, there has been no diversification of their roles.

### Female Fighters in the National Liberation Army

Despite the participation of women in the struggle for independence from France, Algeria's then nationalist movement and current ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), and its former military branch, the National Liberation Army (NLA), did not consider women full-fledged members either in word or in deed. Gender inequality was the rule in the FLN and NLA, and women were never given a legitimate voice to participate in decisionmaking. Their involvement was encouraged for pragmatic reasons and served the FLN's propaganda.

Yet, since independence, women have been regarded as Algerian role models, recognized by the state as national heroes like their mujahideen brothers. School students learn about *fidaiyet* (women who participated in armed action), *mussabilet* (women who were militants and whose principal task was to host and nurse the mujahideen), and *maquisardes* (women who lived in the maquis with men, their main tasks being to cook for and take care of the male mujahideen).

These figures are particularly visible to the public in annual statements commemorating International Women's Day on

March 8. Along with the army's official magazine, *El Djeich*, these statements highlight the devotion, courage, and selflessness of women during the war.

In a special issue in April 2013, *El Djeich* allocated 40 out of 86 pages to discussing women's participation in the army, from the struggle for independence to modern times. Another fifteen pages were dedicated to interviews with military women, such as General Boudouani.<sup>6</sup> In this special issue, the participation of women in the NLA was taken for granted: "At the beginning of the revolution, women's participation was evident in the military sector as many of them joined the maquis."<sup>7</sup> The Algerian woman was presented in the magazine as a "victorious revolutionary and combatant woman." She was the "brave" and "fearless" one who "wore the military fatigues and held the rifle and the grenade with the same courage and determination as her *mujahid* brother."<sup>8</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, the FLN and NLA publicized heroic images of *poseuses de bombes* (bombers) like Djamila Bouhired, Zohra Drif, and Hassiba Ben Bouali as progressive symbols for Western audiences.<sup>9</sup> Images of female combatants—the exception, not the rule—were used as propaganda; women wearing military uniforms and posing with guns were the face of the FLN and NLA to the outside world.

In reality, things were different. The participation of women in the struggle for independence was not the primary goal of the FLN and NLA. Women were recruited for practical reasons: to optimize rare resources for the struggle after student protests broke out in 1956.<sup>10</sup> The FLN and NLA openly displayed their refusal to recruit women. In 1958, the regional council of *Wilaya* (Zone) 2, wrote a directive to this effect:

We recall once again that it is prohibited to recruit women in the centers, whatever the results and benefits are. We inform you as it is strictly forbidden for all women to join our ranks; if they try to join, they should be turned back to their original destination, even if the enemy had captured them. Those who accompany women should be given capital punishment.<sup>11</sup>

This was also the case in *Wilaya* 5, where the captain of the zone, nicknamed Si Allal, explained:

I remind all units one more time that it is forbidden to recruit privates and nurses in the area without permission. In independent Algeria, the freedom of the Muslim woman will stop at her doorstep. The woman will never be equal to the man.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, female fighters were discriminated against within the FLN and NLA because of their sexual purity and vulnerability. In some regional zones, such as *Wilaya* 3, virginity was a prerequisite for female fighters. It was a test that every female combatant had to go through; as historian Gilbert Meynier wrote, "The NLA replaces the father in the management of the good sex."<sup>13</sup>

No woman ever reached a leadership position in the FLN or NLA during the struggle for independence. Furthermore, in selection procedures in which a man and a woman had equal qualifications, the man was always chosen over the woman, according to studies by researchers including Djamila Amrane.<sup>14</sup> For instance, when Nafisa Hamoud, a female physician in the maquis, requested to manage the health department of *Wilaya* 3, the FLN and NLA declined her request and chose a male colleague, Mustapha Laliem, instead; both held the same qualifications. As many other examples of men being given preference over women confirm, gender inequality was the rule.

In addition, women accounted for only 3 percent of the total strength of the *mujahideen*. Women's participation as combatants in the war of independence was minimal, at 2 percent of all women who took part in the war. The majority of fighters—82 percent—were *mussabilet*, women who, in addition to hosting the *mujahideen*, washed and sewed their clothes.<sup>15</sup> More rarely, the *mussabilet* collected funds, medicines, and weapons, while those who were qualified could be secretaries or nurses.

Nonetheless, the war of independence opened up new horizons for Algerian women, including by questioning gender relations. Algeria had a male-dominated society in which

women were “immured” in a “mythical-patriarchal system,” in the words of anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, and segregation between women and men was strict.<sup>16</sup> The war, despite its ugliness, allowed women to expand their occupational roles outside their households, but the FLN and NLA limited them to undertaking tasks that would not profoundly disturb the social order, then or in the future. As sociologist Joyce Robbins explained, “Cultural militarism and a strong ethos of participation in nations-in-arms do not reduce inequalities—such as those between men and women—but rather disguise them for war purposes.”<sup>17</sup>

After Algeria’s declaration of independence on July 5, 1962, the purely instrumental agenda of the FLN and NLA was clear. The ruling FLN once again adjusted its representations of women to fit the traditional “phallogocentric society,” as Bourdieu put it.<sup>18</sup> Values and women were pushed back into the domestic sphere. Despite the adoption of education reform targeting women, the FLN became more conservative and restrictive of women’s rights: strict marriage and divorce laws were promulgated; and unequal inheritance rights, the banning of birth control, polygamy, harassment, and domestic violence became evident signs of women’s marginalization. As summarized by activist and author Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas, “Socialism, nationalism, and religion became tools for the elaboration of an anti-women state policy.”<sup>19</sup>

### From Segregation to Integration?

After the end of the war of independence, the FLN took the image of *fidaiyet* (women involved in physical combat against colonialism) to symbolize an equality women had already achieved. In reality, however, women were marginalized: set aside in the construction of the new state and kept out of decisionmaking. In the newly independent state, women’s issues were so secondary that few seemed to feel that they required much debate.

A significant example of women’s relegation in postindependence Algeria was their insignificant representation in governing bodies. In the country’s first constituent assembly, formed in 1962, there were only ten women out of 196 members, or 5.1 percent of the total. In the second assembly, created in

1964 and reduced to 138 members, the number of women decreased to two, or 1.4 percent. Women accounted for only 3 percent of the 1977 assembly, 1.4 percent in 1982, and 2.9 percent in 1987. As for the National Council of the Algerian Revolution, which was the body responsible for the management of the FLN, it was formed exclusively by men.

Women in the military were similarly marginalized. Those who participated in the war were treated differently from their male counterparts. For instance, all male fighters, including some who had not taken part in combat, were honored with the title of *ancien mujahid* (veteran).<sup>20</sup> Women, meanwhile, were not even registered to receive benefits such as pensions, priority for employment and training, loans, housing, and land allowances.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, women who participated in the struggle for independence were not assigned military ranks, as shown in the national database of the mujahideen.<sup>22</sup> Ranks are mentioned only for men. No justification was given for this policy of double standards.

Although the NLA was converted into a regular force and renamed the People’s National Army (PNA) in 1962, the army command did not put in place any recruitment policy for women. However, women could work as civilian employees in administrative and secretarial positions.

On January 5, 1978, following a decree promulgated by Boumediene, women were finally allowed to join the PNA as officers and NCOs. Women were excluded from the category of enlisted soldiers—those with ranks such as private or corporal—“by virtue of the specificity of women and their nature, which is not a good fit for this category of work,” to cite *El Djeich*.<sup>23</sup>

There is a clear conservative view that underestimates the capacity of women and their operational effectiveness to perform tasks that come naturally to enlisted men, who go through intensive physical training and whose functions range from launching grenades and firing cannons to driving tanks. This exclusion has less to do with an objective requirement than with a social construction of gender roles and what is viewed as suitable work for women.<sup>24</sup>

The opportunity for women to join the army proved brief, lasting only eight years. In 1986, female recruitment was suspended, to be resumed in 2001. The suspension was justified as a problem of profit. According to those interviewed for this publication, recruiting and training women required an important investment because it involved costs for implementing these policies, building facilities to house women, developing human capital, and covering expenditures associated with the turnover of women and maternity leave. The dramatic growth in the number of women joining the army after 1978 directly affected the management of personnel.

The army command found that most women eventually left the PNA to start a family or to work in the private sector, where they could easily use the skills they had acquired in the military—such as decisionmaking and teamwork—and had opportunities for advancement.

Nonetheless, the doors to the so-called men's house were finally open to women, and the PNA had made noteworthy progress toward recruiting them as military personnel and acknowledging their rights. Since 1978, women in the Algerian army have performed an increasing number—though not a wider range—of roles.

### **On the Way to Equality?**

There has been a significant evolution in the recruitment of women into the PNA, as evidenced by their admission into all branches of the armed forces. But the distance they must still travel before being considered equal to their male counterparts is revealed by the continuing policies of appointing them to subordinate positions and of excluding them from combat units.

In May 2001, the army command decided to resume women's recruitment, with an expansion of the fields that women could join. These included administration, social services, health, finances, research and development, military manufacturing, maintenance, and education. The announcement was accompanied by several references to the importance of meeting the new needs and special requirements of the army.<sup>25</sup> In 2006, the PNA introduced a decisive shift in policy,

proactively seeking and endorsing greater recruitment of women and expanding their role. This was reflected in a discourse about modernity and accompanied by new measures ostensibly intended to facilitate and ensure fuller participation of women.

In the February 2006 ordinance, the status of women was for the first time declared to be equal to that of men. This remarkable move was explained by the PNA as

a response to the demands of military personnel and a way to be in tune with the demands of modernization of our armed forces. . . . The ordinance . . . was enacted and gender equality within the PNA is granted in consideration of the fact that a woman is an active element who brings a full contribution to the process of modernization and development of the PNA.<sup>26</sup>

*El Djeich* presented the ordinance as “a new statute [that] establishes the principle of equality between male and female personnel in their recruitment, training, and promotion as well as in their rights and duties.”<sup>27</sup> According to the magazine, the decree also stressed the importance of women's participation in the army as “being at the heart of national modernity.”<sup>28</sup>

Practical measures were taken to implement the new statute and facilitate women's participation in the army. Aspects specific to women such as maternity leave before and after childbirth and factors regarding women's lengths of service were taken into consideration. In this regard, Article 20 of the decree stipulated that female officers with the rank of lieutenant colonel or higher may benefit, on request, from a three-year reduction of the regular retirement age. Article 98 granted extended leave to military women—officers and NCOs—in the case of an accident or serious illness suffered by a direct family member (spouse, child, or legitimate subject of legal sponsorship, known as *kafala*). Extended leave is also allowed for female personnel who want to follow their spouse for professional reasons, to raise a child under the age of three, or to take care of a disabled family member who requires continuous care. Female personnel can take extended

leave for their studies, for research purposes, or for personal reasons, though only for a nonrenewable term of twelve months. The ordinance exempts female officers from certain obligations such as night duties as well.

Today, women are admitted to Algeria's cadet academy, where they accounted for 18 percent of all recruits in 2013. Women are accepted by the National Gendarmerie Academy, the Special Military Academy, the Academy of Military Administration, the National Academy of Military Health, and the Regional School of Maintenance of Transmission Material. In 2013, the Naval Academy welcomed female officers for the first time. Out of 92 officers, 29 were female, representing 31.5 percent of the total.<sup>29</sup>

The ordinance reflected some degree of progress, but most likely, it was a public-relations effort. Indeed, the decree granted equality to women in terms of recruitment, training, promotion, and rights, however women are excluded from units that perform combat missions such as the artillery, infantry, and armored branches as well as the air force combat units. Also, women do not have to go through the same training as men. According to those interviewed for this publication, including former officials within the PNA, this exclusion is not codified. It is probably done, the interviewees believe, to protect the PNA's image as a progressive employer that is open to both genders and as an institution connected with all segments of society.

## UNFINISHED INTEGRATION

The PNA has put in place a recruitment policy for women as well as a policy of equal opportunities. On the positive side, women are more present in the army than before; there are 30 times more than there were in 1978. On the negative side, women are neither fully included in the military nor completely excluded from it. This ambiguous situation has left the integration of women into the forces unfinished.<sup>30</sup> This is primarily due to the ways in which women are represented in the PNA, a traditional gender-based division of labor, and the prevalence of paternalism and sexism toward women. These three obstacles symbolically reinforce women's status as what

social anthropologist Máximo Badaró calls "liminal individuals," or singular entities who neither have an identity nor a recognized position within the institution.<sup>31</sup>

### The Representation of Women in the Army

Analyzing back issues of *El Djeich* reveals how the Algerian army portrays women and presents gender images. The magazine also shows how the PNA advertises women's participation in its ranks to give credibility to its claim to be a progressive, impartial, and strong platform for women's empowerment and, by extension, for society as a whole.

Although the PNA makes an effort to offer women the same chances as their male counterparts, it reinforces gender inequality by feminizing women, who are continuously represented in noncombat positions and excluded from the field. By eluding any association between women and warfare, the PNA is reinforcing the gender division and strengthening associations between virility, masculinity, and war. The army draws a sharp line between male and female, retaining its character as mainly masculine and martial.

*El Djeich* was launched in 1961 as a French-language newsletter distributed to all units of the NLA. In July 1963, it became a magazine with the same name, issued by the Establishment of Military Publications, and in 1964, the first Arabic-language version was published. *El Djeich* contains reports on the PNA's education centers and training schools, coverage of activities organized by the army, and studies and records dealing with security and defense issues. With a print run of 65,000 copies, the magazine is principally but not exclusively for internal use within the army: a huge proportion of the publication's leadership consists of military personnel.

I analyzed a corpus of 40 issues from 2011 to 2014, with gaps due to missing issues in the Ministry of National Defense's online collection.<sup>32</sup> This is an interpretative textual approach.<sup>33</sup> I examined what was said about women and how it was said. For instance, is gender always mentioned in the text? What kind of language is used to describe women, and is it different from that used to describe men?



I also analyzed photos in the magazine and assessed their gender applications. Photography is a good medium to shape the narrative that the PNA wants to communicate internally and externally. Therefore, I looked at the appearance of individuals (both male and female), their use of makeup and choice of clothes, and the roles they were portraying—combat-oriented, ceremonial, medical, or technical.<sup>34</sup> I also looked at the activities in which the subjects were engaged—whether the women were in active or passive positions, because passivity can be associated with feminizing roles, while physical behavior can be interpreted as more military.<sup>35</sup>

There is a clear quantitative evolution in the representation of women over time. The 2013–2014 issues of the magazine are different from those of 2011 and 2012, in which women were absent. However, depictions of men dominate the magazine despite rhetorical references to women in the text. Indeed, for every 100 pages, there are on average two pictures of women. There is a clear difference between the images of women and men, as those of women tend to be small and do not have the same visual focus as the photos of men. Most of the time, the women appear at the bottom of the page and are often photographed with one or several men, who are leading or instructing the women.

In addition, women frequently appear in passive but technical roles, such as operating a computer or sitting in front of a screen. They are often seen engaged in outdoor leisure activities or in a civilian setting, such as the national day of road safety where they can be seen teaching children traffic laws. Women are often presented in what are considered female positions, such as nursing, that “suit their natural dispositions,” to quote *El Djeich*.<sup>36</sup> In addition, they are continuously feminized to the point that it is quite hard to find a picture of women without makeup on (even though it is not heavy makeup), while men are often portrayed with camouflage or dirt on their clothes and faces.

The role of women within the PNA has increased, and the army’s magazine may serve to develop and expand the definition of femininity and military womanhood.<sup>37</sup> In several issues, women are attributed certain qualities that are traditionally associated with men, such as independence, bravery,

courage, stamina, determination, cold-bloodedness, strength, and the ability to face challenges. For instance, women are given access to the masculine tradition of proving oneself.<sup>38</sup> According to an account of the experience of Lieutenant Colonel Soraya Aissaoui recorded in *El Djeich*,

Women like [Aissaoui] in the PNA need to prove themselves and their capacities. . . . [Women] need to double their efforts to gain the recognition of their peers and access the highest positions.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the story of Captain Leila Hassane in the magazine highlights that the PNA allowed her “to prove herself, show her capacities, and face challenges thanks to her discipline and perseverance.”<sup>40</sup>

In the discursive construction of the PNA, there is a systematic textual reference to women’s femaleness, while there is no reference to gender when it comes to men. In its daily application, this kind of reference tends to reinforce the natural state of the masculine soldier while highlighting the artificiality of the female soldier.<sup>41</sup> This also shows that the institution is still ruled by a masculine mind-set.

The photos of women and references to military women often appear at the end of the magazine, in the sports section. The narrative is that women are physically capable and can be competent fighters. There is an intention to normalize the participation of women. As General Mohamed Koriche stated in *El Djeich*,

Women have exactly the same rights and duties as their male counterparts. . . . They can reach all ranks and be in all positions.<sup>42</sup>

These kinds of images reiterate the progressive posture of the PNA in terms of gender equality. The marginalization is very subtle, but it exists. “The appearance of normalcy encourages complacency; complacency allows gender subordination to continue,” in the words of historian Jean Boulègue.<sup>43</sup>

Women are photographed engaging in specific sports and games such as judo, karate, and chess, but there are few

references to or images of women skydiving, performing a commando walk, riding horses, or shooting a rifle. This shows how within the imagery of the PNA magazine, women's militarization is partial, because they are rarely—in fact, almost never—associated with markers of combat, such as weaponry.

An example of an exception to the stock portrayal of women appeared in a special issue in April 2013 for International Women's Day.<sup>44</sup> In one photograph, a woman in military fatigues and a combat helmet is pictured wielding a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, with her long hair tied back in full view. Two other photographs show women with what seems to be a Vickers-Berthier light machine gun. The main narrative of these three rare pictures is that women are able to fight within the PNA: they can use weapons such as grenade launchers and have special skills like men do.

The representation of women in the PNA's official magazine serves two contradictory purposes: to normalize women's participation in this institution, described by sociologist Orna Sasson-Levy as "hypervirile," and to obliterate it at the same time.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, on the one hand, the army is incorporating a few images of women into its magazine, trying to make it more conceivable for some women, for their parents and communities, and, especially, for male personnel that women have a role to play in the military. On the other hand, the army is keeping women's presence marginal and contradictory, so as not to challenge the image of masculinity within the institution.

### **A Traditional Gender-Based Division of Labor**

High-ranking women within the PNA are not easy to find. Nevertheless, compared with the 18 percent of civilians in the national labor force who are women, the five female generals represent significant firsts that should be acknowledged. Indeed, the PNA took a major step by appointing five women as generals and by putting in place a policy framework for equal opportunities. The army's activities in this regard should be recognized as an example of good practice of recruiting women and acknowledging their rights.

However, women are neither fully incorporated nor rejected. There is a "combination of inclusion and exclusion," to

borrow Robbins's description of the Israeli army.<sup>46</sup> Women suffer from a traditional gender-based division of labor. This division is based on two organizing principles: separation, which assigns different tasks to men and women—the man is in the productive sphere, and woman is in the reproductive sphere; and hierarchy, meaning a man's job is worth more than a woman's.

Interviews with former military personnel reveal that most women are concentrated in what are seen as suitable jobs, such as those in the communications department: some work in telephone units as switchboard operators, others work as mapmakers, and still others are translators or data-entry personnel. The numbers in the PNA magazine confirm this trend: according to *El Djeich*, the army's information and communications department employs 17 percent of the military women and 51 percent of the civilian women assimilated into the military.<sup>47</sup> Women are massively present in the health department, with 17 percent of the total number of military health personnel, including 6 percent who are military. A majority of women occupy educational roles such as instructors, researchers, or scientists.

The pattern of women's participation in the PNA mirrors trends in the gender division of the national labor force, which has a low proportion of female workers. Indeed, out of the 10,788,000 people employed in Algeria in 2014, 1,926,000 were women, which represents only 18 percent.<sup>48</sup> To put that into context, in the same year, women made up 49.7 percent of the country's total population, according to the World Bank. Despite women's access to the workplace—a result of an education level of 92 percent for both boys and girls, and a female youth literacy rate of 80 percent in 2014—women are still overrepresented in less prestigious jobs and concentrated in a few sectors traditionally seen as feminine.<sup>49</sup>

There is a high proportion of women in the health sector: in 2013, more than 50 percent of medical assistant professors were women, as were more than 48 percent of paramedics.<sup>50</sup> Women constitute higher proportions of Algerians employed in the education sector, where in 2011 they accounted for 74.3 percent of those working in pre-primary education, 54.9 percent in primary education, and 39.2 percent in higher education.<sup>51</sup> In 2014, 44 percent of those enrolled in higher



education were women.<sup>52</sup> And in the same year, women accounted for 67.9 percent of the employees of the national radio staff.<sup>53</sup>

Women's access to decisionmaking is inconsequential: they occupy only 11.4 percent of senior positions such as ministers; secretaries general, directors general, and chiefs of ministries; ambassadors; and executives in central government institutions, public bodies, and local authorities. In the judiciary sector, only 24 percent of those working in the Supreme Court are women, and there is only one female general prosecutor, who was appointed in 2014.<sup>54</sup>

According to former military officials interviewed for this publication, the majority of Algerian military women occupy so-called female jobs: they are nurses, doctors, instructors, translators, mapmakers, and so on. Data showing how many women occupy senior ranks are not available, but it is highly revealing that on the day when Fatima Zohra Ardjouné became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of general, 51 men also became generals. Of course, the disparity can be explained by the fact that women were first admitted to the army at a time when men already had access, so women reach the strict time-in-service requirements for promotion later than men do. But if there were more women in senior positions, this would have been publicized, as the PNA would have been likely to advertise these advancements as it did for the female generals.

Another illustration of women's limited integration into the army is the fact that they cannot serve in the infantry, armored, or field-artillery branches slated for direct ground combat. This ban is extended to combat air force units as well. Physiological differences remain the most cited justification for this exclusion.

As women are excluded from combat positions, they cannot command military operations and therefore do not have access to the same ranks as their male counterparts, namely those above the level of commander. Because of that, women are also unable to take part in the decisionmaking process that affects the lives and careers of the other women in the institution.

## Protective Paternalism and Benevolent Sexism

### *Protective Paternalism*

The combat ban for female members of the PNA reflects traditional, paternalistic attitudes toward women, who are excluded from full participation in the military. This paternalism deprives women of the treatment that their male counterparts receive, which undermines women's training and their capacities as female soldiers and excludes them from prestigious military positions for which combat experience is key.

There is a prevalent mentality among male members of the military that women have a "delicate nature," in the words of one retired officer.<sup>55</sup> Another interviewee told me that because of women's "natural disposition to have children," they need to be protected.<sup>56</sup> Women are still seen as mothers and nurturers. This is what psychologists Peter Glick and Susan Fiske call "protective paternalism [that] is the benevolent aspect of paternalistic ideology, which states that because of their greater authority, power, and physical strength, men should serve as protectors and providers for women."<sup>57</sup>

New female recruits in the PNA undergo several months of basic training alongside male trainees and without being commanded by exclusively female instructors. During this training, they study military discipline, military norms, and ethics. The rest of the training is technical, according to the specialty of each individual.

Women also carry out field exercises but can choose whether or not to go through the same exercises as their male counterparts. There are no explicit regulations governing this field-exercise segregation because this would undermine the PNA's claim to be egalitarian. However, according to my interviewees, there are special arrangements for female soldiers. In the words of one former colonel in the PNA,

If a military woman wants to do the same drills as men, she can do so, but only if she wants to . . . but it is useless . . . because she does not need it. It is up to her. It is also up to the instructor's personality—if he considers women equal to men, he will ask her to perform the training exactly like the men . . . but he cannot oblige her. Women have the right to

decline participation in a drill because they are women. A man cannot have any excuse.<sup>58</sup>

This semi-segregation is justified on the grounds of women's nature. Interviewees supported the view that women cannot go through the same training as men because of their physical inadequacies, explaining how dangerous it is for women to shoot with heavy weapons, throw grenades, and perform gymnastic maneuvers such as jumping onto a 6-foot-high (2-meter-high) wall or walking along horizontal beams. One former lieutenant colonel told me,

Let's face it, we are not made the same, it is Mother Nature who decided . . . but this does not mean that there is no equality. There is total equality in the institution, but women have to be protected, so the institution protects them!<sup>59</sup>

As another retired lieutenant colonel explained,

Women don't go into combat. It is well-known but not written down because it is bad publicity. . . . [Women] don't participate in combat missions, it is useless to make them do these exercises that they are never going to execute. Why, then, risk a woman breaking her leg or her arm for an exercise that she is never going to perform on the field? It is a question of being reasonable. It has nothing to do with equality. We are equal in the institution.<sup>60</sup>

Equality for these men lies in the fact that women have been accepted into the institution. Male members of the army interpret equal treatment as the admission of women into what they see as the men's house, but with a recognition of women's limits due to their nature. There is a continual emphasis on women's supposed equality with men. But behind the repeated claim of egalitarianism, there is a modern sexism that is more subtle than the traditional variety because it denies the existence of discrimination against women and rationalizes patriarchy and traditional gender roles.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding the exemption of women (except medical personnel) from night duties, one former commandant explained,

The institution does not allow women on night duties except for the nurses and doctors. It is normal because a woman should be with her family at night . . . she is a woman, a spouse, maybe a mother, and she has family responsibilities . . . so you cannot ask her to abandon her family.<sup>62</sup>

The paradox is that female military personnel are asked and expected to perform to standards as high as those of their male counterparts, but at the same time, women do not go through the same training process as men because of their "delicate nature," as one retired colonel put it.<sup>63</sup> So women are presented as tough and strong but still in need of help from their male colleagues. Women know how to use guns but cannot throw grenades because it is "too dangerous" and "a male's job," according to one interviewee.<sup>64</sup> Military women are robust but maternal. They are soldiers but remain innocent.

#### *Benevolent Sexism*

Another pretext to hinder women's full integration into the military is married life and motherhood. In Algeria, as in many other Arab countries, women are intricately linked to family values and children's care. As one interviewee summarized, "Even in the military, a woman is still a woman . . . and a mother above all."<sup>65</sup> This traditional attitude toward women is an example of benevolent sexism that, according to Glick and Fiske,

relies on kinder and gentler justifications of male dominance and prescribed gender roles; it recognizes men's dependence on women. . . . Benevolent sexism encompasses subjectively positive (for the sexist) attitudes toward women in traditional roles: protective paternalism, idealization of women.<sup>66</sup>

Interviewees supported the view that at a certain moment in their careers, women in the military have to make a choice between family life and the military, despite the flexibility that the relevant legal norms give them. As their family responsibilities increase, women become less represented in the army. Having children and coming back to a career after a few years' absence seems possible, but it is hard to accomplish, especially

in some specialties such as the air force. One retired lieutenant colonel explained,

When [women] are young and single, they think that they can reconcile the two, but once they get married and have children, things change. Imagine a female pilot who has spent nine months out of the cockpit plus a minimum of six months or more on maternity leave, as women have the right to extended leave. . . . That's a year without piloting, and this can be fatal for a career.<sup>67</sup>

Returning to work is also challenging because women are suspected of having “changed” and of “being less able to focus on their professional tasks,” according to one interviewee.<sup>68</sup> As a former lieutenant colonel told me, “It is normal. When a woman gives birth, she changes. She is different. It's like that. It is Mother Nature, and often when [women] have children, even a single child, they are not the same.”<sup>69</sup>

Interviewees backed the assertion that family responsibilities challenge women's motivations. A former commandant stated,

We had with us a woman who was training to become a pilot. She was brilliant. But once she decided to marry and have a child, things changed. She could not fly while pregnant because it was very dangerous. We are speaking here of a fighter, do you understand? So, after pregnancy and maternity leave, she returned. However, after five months, she couldn't fly because she had not flown for too long. She was put in a technical unit, but no more flights for her. She eventually resigned because she was frustrated with the decision to reallocate her.<sup>70</sup>

Data on women's lengths of service in the PNA are not available, but according to the interviews I conducted, women generally tend to leave the army at an earlier age than men do, and they do so for personal and marital reasons. Indeed, women frequently leave the military because their husbands do not accept their work in the men's house. The integration of women into the military remains in many ways threatened by gossip, the jealousy of husbands, and the discontent of some fathers, brothers, or even mothers.

The departure of women from the army for personal reasons seems to be frequent, despite the presence of legal norms such as signed contracts that in theory require them to complete their terms of service. That is because women can end a contract for private reasons, as a retired colonel explained:

The army cannot hold them . . . they are women. If a woman wants to take care of her children and interrupt her career despite her agreement with the institution, she can. Even in the military, a woman is still a woman. We cannot put in jeopardy her marriage or her family because we want to keep her, so we let her go despite the waste of time, energy, and money for her training. A woman is a woman and a mother above all. One has to keep that in mind.<sup>71</sup>

In short, war seems to be as specifically masculine as maternity is feminine.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Algerian women have moved a long way from the periphery to the center of army life,<sup>73</sup> and the efforts that the PNA have made with regard to recruiting them and acknowledging their rights should be recognized. Despite the fact that the figures show a traditional division of labor, women's recruitment into the PNA is still a good step and a positive accomplishment in comparison with the previous situation. However, it seems that the integration of women into the Algerian army is unfinished in three ways.

First, the representation of female soldiers in the official PNA magazine is marginal and contradictory. Above all, the portrayal of women is done in a way that does not threaten the image of the PNA's masculinity. The army should work on the representation of women as soldiers first and foremost, rather than reaffirming their femininity within a gendered military.

Second, the traditional gender-based division of labor is very indicative of the institution as a sanctuary of hypermasculinity—a men's house. This represents a real obstacle to the full integration of women into the PNA. The military should

widen women's roles in the institution and stop appointing them to stereotypical positions. A better integration of women may contribute to the development of a different military culture, as women may be able to help reshape civil-military relationships by reducing the distance between society and the military.

Third, by denying women access to combat missions, the PNA is contradicting its own equality policy, thereby blocking women's ascension to positions of prestige and power. Even though Algeria is not at war, the country is fighting terrorism, especially in the Sahel region, where the situation is being exacerbated by the turmoil in Algeria's neighbors—Tunisia, Libya, and Mali.

Women should have access to combat units in ground and air forces. This should be asserted as a general principle and materialized through adequate and appropriate training for women to ensure that they are effectively prepared for field operations. The full integration of women into combat units could allow them to play significant roles in counterterrorism operations and contribute as fully as their male counterparts to the protection of the country, which is the first mission of the PNA.

Evaluations must be rigorously standardized for women to ensure that they are capable of performing the jobs that are assigned to them. The army command should also consider assessing military equipment and adapting it to women's bodies. In addition, work is needed to address existing mentalities: the army command could organize workshops to discuss women's contributions to combat units. Likewise, research should be developed to provide a better understanding of women's departures from the army and to find ways to foster their loyalty.

Integrating women into the army does not only mean including more female personnel. To quote a United Nations statement on gender mainstreaming, it is more about "making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit

equally and inequality is not perpetuated."<sup>74</sup> In short, to overcome the gap between the discourse of equality and the reality of women in the military, the PNA needs to start regarding women as full-fledged soldiers.

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***This regional insight was prepared as part of the 2014–2015 Renegotiating Civil-Military Relations in Arab States: Political and Economic Governance in Transition Project run by the Carnegie Middle East Center. The project sought to promote research on armed forces in Arab states and on the challenges of democratic transition.***

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***The Carnegie Middle East Center is grateful to International Development Research Center (IDRC) for their support of the Civil-Military Relations in Arab States project. The opinions expressed in this article are the responsibility of the author.***

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