

4^e**CONGRESS**Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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**Panel 36**

**The military in the Middle East and North Africa:
New sources and historiographical perspectives (20th-21st century)**

The historiography of modern armies in the Middle East and North Africa, putting aside the main political and military events, has failed so far to fit in the new military history. Despite a few notable exceptions, these armies are most often depicted as monolithic actors where a group of officers stands out in power struggles. Although the application of the modernization theory to the military has faded, the military history of postcolonial states has yet to consider the findings of recent studies on world wars or Western armies: anthropology of violence, military sociology, politics of remembrance, etc.

A cultural history of these militaries stumbles upon a dual challenge in accessing sources. The first challenge, common to all fieldworks, consists in documenting the "subalterns". As for the second, more specifically, it refers to the difficulty of accessing state archives in these countries, especially those regarding defense and security issues.

This workshop aims to introduce relevant materials for renewing the modern military history of the Middle East and North Africa. It offers, on the one hand, a reflection on neglected sources and their required methods of investigation. On the other, this should be the occasion to rethink and compare the relationship between soldiers and officers, the routine of military institutions or their role in society.

Responsible : Hassine Jonathan (Sorbonne University, CRHXIX/IFPO)

Discutant : Launay Maxime (Sorbonne University, SIRICE)

Program

Arezki Saphia (Aix-Marseille University, IREMAM)

Writing a history of the Algerian army: Sources and methodological issues

The idea of an absence of sources for writing history in Algeria after 1962 seems to be an obstacle to the development of historical works on this period. This is especially true in the case of an institution as central as the army. This problem is undoubtedly common to other countries in the Arab and Muslim worlds. This paper proposes to reconsider this received idea as well as the means to overcome the lack of state archives on this object. If the Algerian institutional archives are indeed not available for the independent period and if access to the archives of the War of Independence (1954-1962) is complicated, historians have at their disposal many materials which make it possible to circumvent these obstacles.

This paper aims to review the various sources available to the historian to write a history of this crucial institution of the Algerian state. More broadly, the aim is to present the numerous alternatives that exist to overcome the lack of institutional archives. First of all, the French archives, which are precious even if they contain many biases that it is necessary to keep in mind and explain, but also the press, written and oral testimonies, iconography or more sources such as tombstones which, in the context of a prosopographic approach, allow us to collect a great deal of data.

Evrard Camille (University Toulouse-Jean-Jaurès, FRAMESPA)

Documenting the Sahara War from the Mauritanian point of view (1975-1978): interview protocols and search for archives

The Sahara war is an example of a conflict whose proximity in time and unresolved political implications greatly increases the difficulty of access to sources. The Mauritanian government waged war in 1975 with poorly trained and poorly equipped armed forces and, after many losses, has seen its president - in office for 18 years - deposed by a group of officers.

The confusing process of Spanish decolonization as well as the brutal territorial claims of the Moroccan Makhzen and the dismay of the young Mauritanian Republic have direct consequences on the way the Mauritanian military, guards, and gendarmes will live their "baptism of fire". Furthermore, the Mauritanian military institution had to face a huge reorganization following the incorporation of tens of thousands of young recruits without experience.

These elements explain, first of all, the tension surrounding the history of the conflict in Mauritania: it takes the shape of a long-lasting opposition between those who claim the illegitimacy of this war on the one hand, and those who defend the memory of the many soldiers who died for their «homeland» on the other. This paper proposes to discuss the making of history of this conflict by analyzing interviews carried out with Mauritanian veterans of the Sahara War, soldiers or guards of subordinate status, and thus enriching the dominant narrative coming from officers' memoirs or journalistic works.

Mahroug Sophia (Sorbonne Université, CRHXIX)

The remembrance of the soldier-martyr in modern Iran and its museums

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the Islamic Republic of Iran praises its soldiers as martyrs (shuhadā) and maintains their remembrance in different public spaces. This culture of war, also known as the "Holy Defense" (Defāgh-e muqaddas) culture, has been particularly reinforced from the election to the presidency of former pāsdār Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005. Several memorial museums and cultural institutions were created since the beginning of the 21st century in Iran. This is mainly the result of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG) involvement in the country's cultural policy, whose emblematic testament is the Holy Defense Museum in Tehran. The soldier in Iran, often reduced to a subordinate role due to his young age and his low social and economic status, is raised nowadays to the rank of the martyr in Iran by the exhibition. Museology is therefore used here to analyze how far the soldier-martyr's figure contributes to the making of a new Iranian national memory with two founding moments: the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The support of IRCG and foundations (bonyādān) inculcates a real duty of remembrance of these fallen soldiers in the new generations, who have known neither the Revolution nor the front.

Waline Manon (University de Rouen, GRHis)r

The Treatment of Dead Bodies in the French Army During the Algerian War. Silence and Patchiness in Late-Modern Historical Sources.

Between 1954 and 1962, nearly 25,000 French soldiers died during the Algerian War of Independence. Their bodies were for the most part returned to their families while the war was still raging, whether they lived in metropolitan France or in Algeria. The period between the moment of their death and that of their body's restitution could last up to several months, during which the corpses were tended to, moved from a place to another, put in a coffin and stored to be preserved. Documenting the way French soldiers' bodies were treated during this war means tracing back the different individuals involved in this process as well as their gestures and practices. However, military and administrative sources remain largely quiet about this issue, and the bodies of the dead are most often invisible to the historian's eyes. It is, therefore, necessary to imagine other sources that would allow us to get a better insight into the actors and their practices. In this respect, written and oral testimonies seem to be relevant sources. But collecting them proves challenging, and too often, individuals remain quiet on matters of death and dead bodies. This presentation aims to explore the diversity of sources that can be used to write this

story, discuss their advantages and their limits, and understand their gaps. Beyond the unspeakably of death, these silences lead us to question the relationship of the individuals involved in this war to their dead comrades, and the issue of memory and erasure of soldier's dead bodies, while physical violence, torture and mutilations constitute a crucial element of the Algerian war and its memory.