

## Article

# Lalla Fatma N'Soumer (1830–1863): Spirituality, Resistance and Womanly Leadership in Colonial Algeria

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**Abstract:** Lalla Fatma N'Soumer (1830–1863) is one of the major heroines of Algerian resistance to the French colonial enterprise in the region of Kabylia. Her life and personality have been surrounded by myths and mysteries. Although her name is mentioned in colonial chronicles recording the conquest of Algeria, her exact role in leading a movement of local resistance to the French army doesn't seem to be very clear. This paper aims at shedding light on this exceptional Berber woman through the analysis of French colonial sources describing these military campaigns—despite their obvious bias—and later secondary sources. This paper focuses on the spiritual dimension which has been somehow overlooked in the existing literature. It precisely describes her family background whereby her ancestry goes back to a *marabout* lineage affiliated with the Raḥmāniyya sufi order. It argues that her level of education in spiritual and religious matters was probably higher than what had been so far assumed. This article discusses how this spiritual aspect helps explain the tremendous popularity she enjoyed among her people in Kabylia, where she has been considered almost a saint.

**Keywords:** Algeria; Kabylia; Berbers; French colonialism; resistance; feminine leadership; Raḥmāniyya order; sufism; *marabouts*

## 1. Introduction

Lalla Fatma N'Soumer is one of the major figures of Algerian resistance to French colonial expansion to the region of Kabylia, about whom little has been written in English. Although highly celebrated in Algeria, this fascinating woman remains understudied by academics. The scarce information on her life and her push for independence that was recorded by French colonial writers provided the primary sources for our research. But these sources fail to do justice to the spiritual nature of the authority that this extraordinary woman had on her people, because of the biased viewpoints they defend.

The purpose of our study is to examine the life, the personality and the actions of this heroic figure, with a focus on the spiritual dimension that has been so far somehow understated. The article describes her family background and clarifies some of the confusions conveyed by existing studies. It also argues that she probably received a higher level of education than what previous works suggest. The main argument of this article reveals that her intellectual and spiritual gifts granted her a saintly reputation, which was at the heart of her leadership in the region. This saintly aura was acknowledged on occasion in the primary sources. However, it has been completely overshadowed by numerous other qualifications which colonialist writers used to describe her.

Before going further, we would like to start by explaining the name by which this heroine became famous. The term '*Lalla*' (sometimes spelled '*Lella*' or shortened into '*Lla*') is a word used in North-African countries to show respect to a lady. It may be used colloquially to address any woman,

but when attached to the first name of a person, it denotes a special status. Fatma is the way the Arabic name of Fâtima (whose most famous bearer is the Prophet's daughter) is generally pronounced in the vernacular languages of North Africa, and it is the way in which the French transcribed it. However, later studies dealing with this Berber woman known for her resistance to colonialism highlighted her Berberity by proposing a new spelling: Fathma or Fadhma, in order to remain closer to the Kabyle pronunciation. Concerning the word 'Soumer' which is introduced by the letter 'N', it refers to the name of the village where Lalla Fatma gained her notoriety. It is transliterated in some French sources as *Soumer*, *Soumeur*, *Soummeur*, or even *Içommer*. The *N* that precedes the name of this village is the preposition showing the provenance in Kabyle: it can be translated as 'of' in English. Thus, we could translate the name of our heroine as 'Lady Fatma of Soumer'. Some sources would call her "Lalla Fatma-bent Ech-Cheikh" (Lady Fatma daughter of the Shaykh).

The life and personality of Lalla Fatma have been surrounded by layers of myths and mysteries. Most of what we know about her is based on French colonial chronicles, despite the obvious bias with which these primary sources present the facts. On the Algerian side, it is regrettable that no written records going back to that period reflect the autochthone point of view with exactitude. In fact, with the prevailing culture being then largely based on orality, the absence of Kabyle or Algerian historical records about that period opens the door to vagueness and imprecision. Even when the starting points of colonial sources and local legends about Lalla Fatma are diametrically opposed, they come into consensus when describing her brave leadership of a resistant movement in Kabylia, thus, facing one of the hardest military campaigns led by the French in the region.

This paper endeavors to draw a portrait of this Berber Muslim woman who managed to strike the imagination of her contemporaries and their posterity. It also attempts to understand the basis on which her leadership was established, as well as the reasons her singularity was accepted in a culture where the feminine and the masculine hold traditionally very different roles which adhere to rigidly-codified social rules. This study suggests that the spiritual and saintly aura surrounding Lalla Fatma played the greatest role in winning her the legitimacy she needed to exercise her authority as one of the most prominent heads of the Kabyle insurrection against the French invaders in the 1850s.

As a matter of fact, sources attest that Lalla Fatma's ancestry goes back to a *marabout* family affiliated to the Rahmâniyya sufi order, and that her father and brother acted as religious and spiritual guides in their local *zâwiya*-s. Her own religiosity and piety was widely acknowledged among her people, who used to report thaumaturgical deeds attributed to her. This article discusses how this spiritual aspect helps explain the tremendous popularity she enjoyed among her people in Kabylia, where she was almost considered as a saintly figure. The existing literature on Lalla Fatma tends to overlook this spiritual dimension that we find at the core of the leadership she exercised.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Materials used in this research can be classified, according to their chronology, into three types. The first type of materials is the primary sources by direct witnesses. The second type includes the earliest secondary sources which go back to the colonial period, and are close in time with the events and protagonists described. The third type concerns secondary material assembled much later.

Historical sources and secondary literature can also be classified into two broad categories according to the position defended by authors, i.e., mainly pro-colonialist or pro-autochtones. It is worth noting that most of the earliest sources, being extracted from colonialist authors, are flawed with their strong advocacy for the 'civilizing mission' of the French in Algeria, racial opinions about Arabs, Turks and Kabyles, misconceptions about Islam and the sociology of Kabyles, etc. On the Algerian and Kabyle sides, unfortunately, no written sources dating back to that period give the autochthones' point of view. As a matter of fact, exaggerations and imprecisions prevail in the oral accounts that still circulate in the region. Even the written records—by colonial writers—of Kabyle songs and poems evoking our heroine, such as in Hanoteau [1] (pp. 126–146), seem to have been chosen carefully so as not to carry anything more than the sorrow that followed the defeat. Nothing has survived from songs or poems which would have celebrated Lalla Fatma in her glorious period.

A major primary source concerning Lalla Fatma is Carrey [2], which is a first-hand detailed testimony by a writer who accompanied the French expedition led by Marshal Jacques-Louis Randon in Kabylia in 1857, at the end of which Lalla Fatma was captured, and the last free bastions of the region submitted to the French rule. His account is full of interesting and precise details; other direct testimonies by French protagonists include Randon [3] (vol. 1, pp. 185–218; pp. 280–364), by the Marshal and Governor General of Algeria himself. Although Randon speaks very little of our heroine *per se* (see Appendix A which contains the longest quotation about her), his book gives the big picture about the campaign and the military strategy behind its different steps, in addition to the difficulties the French encountered in Kabylia. Oddly enough, secondary literature on our heroine does not make any direct reference to Randon's *Mémoires*. Bertherand's testimonies [4] (p. 287) & [5] (pp. 124–125) are descriptions made by a French military doctor who took part in the expeditions, and Hun [6], which is the testimony of a French judge present in Kabylia during the events. Aucapitaine [7] (pp. 156–159), another military officer, also claimed to have seen Lalla Fatma.

Our method consists of analyzing primary sources with the aim of extracting facts from the biased explanatory framework in which they were presented. In this regard, we try to trace back these facts to the cultural and spiritual background to which they belong and in which they fit better. We also take into consideration the oral local traditions reported in such works as Feredj [8], which is a serious historical study, and Oussedik [9], which is obviously very romanced. This article highlights the spiritual aspect that the French colonialist chronicles failed to grasp while dealing with such an extraordinary leadership as that of Lalla Fatma. It reframes some of the phenomena observed by them into the landscape of important Islamic notions such as sainthood, or rather, *wilâya/walâya* and *karâmât* (prodigies), knowing that this religious and spiritual dimension has been somehow overlooked in the existing literature.

Extensive works undertaken during the colonial period have addressed the religious and spiritual landscape of Algeria at that time, such as Rinn [10], Coppolani & Depont [11], Bel [12], Neveu [13], and Brosselard [14]. Later historians paid particular attention to the Rahmâniyya sufi order, to which Lalla Fatma and her family belonged, such as Sahli's [15,16] and Clancy-Smith's [17,18] works. Concerning pre-colonial Kabylia and its social and political structures, we should mention Roberts's [19] impressive work which is full of insightful remarks about the local context in the region before the arrival of the French. It is also the only available source in English that we know of which has dealt with Lalla Fatma in more than a line (pp. 137, 236, 286).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Family Background

Lalla Fatma is generally considered to have been born around the year 1830—coinciding with the fall of Algiers at the hands of the French—into a family of religious notables (known as *marabouts*) in the village of Ourdja. Her family descends from a local saint: Sidi Ahmed Ou Mezian. According to Al-Warhilânî [20] (p. 16) as cited by Feredj [8], this ancestor was alive around the year 1740, and he was a renowned scholar who authored “many books about religion” but who also had “an unequalled command of a variety of linguistic disciplines” related to Arabic. Lacoste-Dujardin [21] (p. 107) adds that until today, the saint's lineage has given Kabylia and Algeria great religious and political leaders, amongst whom the poet Si Mohand U-Lhosine and one of the leaders of the liberation war of 1954: Hocine Aït Ahmed, who also was the founder of the first Algerian opposition party.

Lalla Fatma's father was leading the *zâwiya* founded by his saintly grandfather, Sidi Ahmed, in Ourdja. He was affiliated with the Rahmâniyya sufi order. It is worth mentioning that the founder of this *tarîqa*, Muhammad b. 'Abderrahmân (cc. 1715–1798) was himself a native of Kabylia who studied in al-Azhar (Egypt) before coming back to his home country and delivering his spiritual teachings. He was probably a contemporary of Sidi Ahmed Ou Mezian, and it is plausible that interesting scholarly exchanges took place between the two. Fatma's father was likely doubly nurtured by the spiritual knowledge he traditionally inherited from his family, in addition to what the surrounding Rahmâniyya *tarîqa* had brought to him. But what was the name of this father? Feredj [8] calls him

Tayeb, while Oussedik [9] names him Mohamed. We will see when mentioning Fatma's brothers the probable cause of the confusion in Feredj [8] between her eldest brother Tayeb and her father. Hanoteau [1] (p. 127) adds that the family of Lalla Fatma belonged to the tribe of Illilten.

With regards to Lalla Fatma's mother, little is known with certitude. Nevertheless, Oussedik [9] (p. 7) mentions that her name was Terkia n'ath Ykhoulaf, and suggests that the man to whom our heroine would be briefly married later, Yahia n'ath Ykhoulaf (also spelled Yahia Bû Ikhluûf), was a cousin on her mother's side (pp. 10–11). The latter belonged to the tribe of Itsouragh, according to Hanoteau [1] (p. 127). This is more likely true than what the poet Mufdî Zakarîa [22] (p. 55), author of the Algerian national anthem, indicates when naming Lalla Fatma's mother Lalla Khadidja, who has given her name to the tallest peak in the Djurjura mountains. As a matter of fact, the said Lalla Khadidja is another important female spiritual figure whose life in Kabylia preceded Lalla Fatma's by a couple of decades. She was the widow of Moroccan *shaykh* Mohammad Ben Aïssa who had been appointed by the founder of the Rahmâniyya *tarîqa* as his successor. At the early stages of this sufi order, a leadership crisis threatened to divide its followers, but Lalla Khadidja's wisdom saved the situation, as explained by Salhi [15] (p. 14). The writer of the notes to Zakarîa's poem [22] (probably former Algerian minister of religious affairs, Mouloud Kacem Naït Belkacem, himself of Kabyle origin) considers wrongly that Lalla Fatma is Mohammad Ben Aïssa's daughter, which is obviously a mistake.

For some reason, Lalla Fatma moved to the village of Soumer with her brothers. While Feredj [8] supposes that this had happened after her father's death, Oussedik [9] (p. 7) gives a different version: it is likely that the father had ordered one of his sons, Tahar, to move to Soumer to run the local *zâwiya* there. The existence of such a *zâwiya* in Soumer is attested by Carette [23] (vol. II, p. 310), which mentions the presence of "five marabouts" running the *zâwiya* of «Içommer», talking surely about Lalla Fatma and her brothers. But before attempting to explain what the meaning of marabout in Kabyle society is, we will try to figure out who those "five marabouts" were.

A curious fact about Fatma's siblings is the divergence between authors in giving their exact number and their names. While it is sure that she had at least four brothers, Oussedik [9] mentions that she also had two sisters: Yamina and Tassaâdit. Whereas Feredj [8] enumerates four brothers: Ahmed, Tahar, Cherif, and al-Hadi; Oussedik [9] counts five: Mohand-Tayeb, L'Hadi, Tahar, Ahmed and Cherif. Interestingly enough, in such a patriarchal society as that of mid-nineteenth century Kabylia, the only name that seems to be retained without hesitation by History is Fatma's, and not those of her male relatives.

A possible explanation for this confusion may be the fact that Tayeb (or Mohand-Tayeb) seemed to have stayed in Ourdja, the village where Lalla Fatma's father had performed his duties as a *shaykh*, seconding him, and probably succeeding him after his death, while Tahar seemed to have been sent earlier by the father to Soumer. As mentioned above, it is probable that Feredj [8] heard testimonies in Ourdja about the *shaykh* of the *zâwiya* named Tayeb, and concluded hastily that he was Fatma's father, whereas it seems that Tayeb was her eldest brother. It seems also that colonial primary accounts sometimes mixed up between Tahar, who led the *zâwiya* of Soumer, and Tayeb.

Before concluding this section, we need to explain what a *marabout* is. This word is the way the French transcribed the Arabic term of *murâbit*, deriving from the notion of *ribât*, itself derived from the root *r-b-t* ر ب ط, carrying a sense of bonding or tying. A *ribât* was a kind of military and educative institution where a group of people used to dedicate their lives to the study of religion, while they agreed to be mobilized at any moment to participate in *jihâd* campaigns. The name of *Murâbitûn*, (the plural form of *murâbit*) was taken by the famous Almoravid dynasty. This dynasty was founded by Yusuf b. Tashfin and ruled the Maghreb in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Later, the notion of *murâbit*, or what the Kabyles call in their language *Amrabet* or *Amrachedh* (pl. *Imrabten* or *Imrabdhen*), was attached to a group of families considered—more or less—of nobler ascendance than commoners, and who were usually in charge of transmitting religious knowledge, in addition to playing an important role in social and political mediations within the Berber tribes. Roberts [19] (pp. 158–163 & pp. 228–229) brilliantly analyses the rise of these religious lineages in the Kabyle landscape and the various missions and roles *Imrabdhen* played in the pre-colonial context. Thus, belonging to a *marabout* family in Kabylia was synonymous with being treated with deep

respect. It is therefore clear that Lalla Fatma's prestigious ancestry played a significant role in legitimizing her leadership in the eyes of her fellow countrymen, who attached great importance on such considerations, as noted by Lacoste-Dujardin [21] (p. 107).

### 3.2. Education and Youth

It is very difficult to assess the level of education of a historical personality who left no written trace of her own, and about whom real facts are easily lost in the torrent of glorifying legends on the one hand, and of political considerations on the other hand.

Nonetheless, it appears that we can come close to broadly evaluating the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in which she was brought up, by giving sense to some elements that went somehow unnoticed in the existing literature so far.

One remark by Feredj [8] (p. 133), quoting Robin [24] (p. 357), notes that after the French succeeded in defeating Lalla Fatma and her brothers' resistance movement, they seized in/from the *zawiya* of Soumer "160 books of high value in Arabic" which belonged to her brother Tahar. The latter kept asking the colonial administration to restitute them with other belongings that had been confiscated, as stated by Feredj [8] (p. 139). Yet, Feredj still expresses his doubts about Tahar's level of education, concluding that he might have been a learned man, as he might have just inherited those books from his illustrious grand-father Sidi Ahmed Ou Mezian.

Another point of view is presented by Oussedik [9] (p. 14), who claims that as soon as Tahar knew the Qur'ân by heart, he was appointed *shaykh* in the *zâwiya* of Soumer by his father. There, he started to learn other sciences, including astrology, and he soon became famous in the whole region for the "amulets" and "talisman" that he used to deliver to the population in order to protect and heal them from "evil eye" and other occult dangers, in addition to his ability to predict events. Hanoteau [1] (p. 127) describes Tahar as being "a marabout who was already famous in the country for being an inspired man predicting the future", while Randon [3] (see Appendix A) also insists that Tahar "was thought of as being an inspired man".

Thus, while Feredj [8] tends clearly to underestimate Tahar's degree of learnedness, Oussedik [9] probably embellished some fancy details about it, or at least expressed what the popular culture retained about him. As a matter of fact, talking about "predicting the future" and giving "oracles", as is mentioned in many colonial sources talking about Lalla Fatma and her brother, denotes a superficial and superstitious interpretation of the spiritual and religious functions exercised by Tahar, and later by his sister as well.

Confusing spiritual insights with fortune telling is a common attitude found in primary colonial sources which tried to explain the influence exercised by Fatma and her brother by a higher level of cunning, taking advantage of people's credulity. Randon [3] (see Appendix A) and Hanoteau [1] (p. 127) (whose words are strangely very close in a way that suggests an influence of the latter on the former) mention that Fatma started to have "visions and dreams", in Hanoteau's terms, or "visions and hallucinations" in Randon's, and to "communicate with the most renowned saints", in a way that made her deliver "oracles" and predict the future.

What these sources didn't take into account is the explanation of such phenomena within the framework of the Islamic notion of sainthood or *wilâya/walâya* and the subsequent notion of *karâmât* (prodigies) of which saintly people are endowed. As a matter of fact, one has to remember that the Rahmâniyya order, as Salhi [14] (p. 32) puts it: "would appear more like a teaching *tarîqa* than a mystical congregation. It was inarguably the inclination towards the transmission and reproduction of the sacred scriptural knowledge that forged the personality of the Rahmâniya".

While knowing that the "sacred scriptural knowledge" in Islam forbids such practices as astrology and fortune telling, it is highly questionable that Lalla Fatma and her brother indulged in such activities. On the other hand, within the realm of Islamic spirituality, supernatural phenomena are acknowledged as being special gifts, or *karâmât*, that God may grant to some of His creatures, as will be later discussed in Section 3.4.

As far as education is concerned, it wouldn't be wrong to assume that, being the descending heir of a respected scholar and saint, as well as the local representative (*moqaddam*) of a sufi *tarîqa* that



places much emphasis on religious scriptural knowledge, as explained by Salhi, Tahar was probably a learned man with sufficient intellectual and spiritual credentials to make him able to deliver simple religious teachings to Kabyle laymen. And contrary to Feredj's [8] conclusion, his insistence on obtaining his confiscated books would tend to prove that he was really attached to acquiring knowledge and couldn't easily cope with being cut from such precious tools.

Assessing Tahar's level of instruction can help us shed some light on Lalla Fatma's own education. Oussedik [9] (pp. 9–10) says that she had learnt, at the age of five or six, many verses of the Qur'ân, even though such knowledge was exclusively reserved for boys. She is said to have retained several *sûra-s* simply by overhearing the boys reciting them. This information sounds highly plausible, as we know of many women of older generations in Algeria, from Berber as well as Arabic speaking regions, who had never been to school, but who managed to retain by heart some *sûra-s* and verses of the Qur'ân only by listening to men or boys reciting them in their vicinity. How much of the Qur'ân did Lalla Fatma know by heart? It is impossible to answer this question, but it suffices to state that the more she learnt by heart, the more exceptional she would appear to her fellow countrymen.

More interestingly, Al-Bouabdelli [25] (p. 308) affirms that Lalla Fatma was one of *shaykh* Mahdî Saklâwî's disciples, without giving any references or further details about this precious piece of information. Saklâwî was an eminent scholar, whose biography can be found in al-Kacimi al-Hasani [26] (p. 396). He had left Algeria after the defeat of the Emir 'Abd-el-Qâdir in 1847—whom he had supported—and headed to Damascus.

A religious scholar himself, Al-Bouabdelli [25] seems to have had a wide knowledge of the different ties and activities of members of the Rahmâniyya *tarîqa*: as a matter of fact, Salhi [15] (p. 79) refers to him as the editor of a text by a later *shaykh* of the Rahmâniyya, *shaykh* Mohammed Ameziane El-Haddad (the spiritual leader of the insurrection of 1871). His affirmation of such a link between Lalla Fatma and *shaykh* Saklâwî must contain some truth.

Saklâwî (1786–1862) was the highest spiritual authority in Kabylia before he left for Syria. As the head of the Rahmâniyya order, to which Lalla Fatma and her family were affiliated, he had surely paid, within the exercise of his religious leadership, several visits to the *zâwiya* of Soumer. Being the sister of the *zâwiya's shaykh*, Lalla Fatma might have, once again, learnt a lot from Saklâwî, just by eavesdropping, as she might have had a direct contact with him, benefiting from especially benevolent treatment from her brother, who might have allowed her to exchange openly with the great *shaykh*.

These remarks lead us to suggest that her spiritual education was probably more elaborate than what the existing literature tends to assume. In addition, we should also note that in Islam, and especially in its spiritual sciences, as Prophet Mohammad himself was illiterate, not knowing how to read and write is not necessarily synonymous with ignorance. Such great sufi masters as 'Alî al-Khawwâs (d.939/1532) or 'Abd al-'Azîz al-Dabbâgh (d.1131/1718) were renowned for their deep spiritual knowledge which they didn't acquire by reading books or learning from scholars, but are supposed to have received it directly from a divine source (*'ilm ladunî*).

Therefore, although we cannot assert that Lalla Fatma knew how to read and write, elements from local stories transmitted from generation to generation tend to attest that she had some mastery of the Quran (some would claim she knew it all by heart) and was gifted with a rare eloquence that made her impress her interlocutors with the wisdom of her speech, in such a way that she became the favorite religious reference for the people of her region, as her reputation soon outshone those of her brothers'.

### 3.3. Personality Traits through Her Failed Marriage

Aside from her degree of learnedness, another aspect of her life has raised a large amount of conjecture: her turbulent approach to marriage. Without citing his sources, Oussedik [9] (pp. 8–11) states that during her parents' life, she turned down a great number of aspirants, and that then, when the pressure to marry was getting stronger, she started to simulate hysterical crises to discourage potential suitors. Her attitude angered her family who decided to punish her by forcing her into

seclusion. Seeing her health declining, her parents felt sorry for her and set her free again. Later on, probably after her father's death, her elder brother, Tayeb, agreed to marry her to her cousin, Yahia n'Ath Ikhoulaf, without waiting for her approval. As soon as she arrived at her in-law's, Lalla Fatma showed her rebellion against this non-consensual marriage in every possible way: breaking anything she could lay her hands on, screaming, and mutilating herself. After a month of her defiant presence there, not letting her husband approach her in any way, her family sent her younger brother, Cherif, to bring her back home. However, the unwanted husband, humiliated by her stubborn refusal, decided to get his revenge through not divorcing her, which made it impossible for her to re-marry.

A shorter account of the story of this unhappy marriage is found in Feredj [8] (p. 133), relying on a document dating from 1845 attesting of her marriage to Yahia Bû Ikhlûf, from the village of Aasker. He adds that Lalla Fatma returned to the house of her brother Tahar (the *zâwiya* of Soumer actually) shortly afterwards. He states rumors that she continued to receive marriage proposals, mentioning especially Sherif Bû Baghla (see Section 3.5. above), but her husband never accepted divorce, despite the huge amounts of money different aspirants proposed to pay him. He concludes that Yahia's refusal to divorce shows that he still loved her and didn't lose hope of gaining her back some day. We are more inclined to think that, as Oussedik [9] puts it, it was a sign of revenge more than of love, but, in a certain way, his attitude was a favor to Lalla Fatma, who didn't seem interested in re-marrying anyway, preferring probably to dedicate her life to spirituality. As noted by Benbrahim [27], this rebellious attitude gave rise to an expression in Kabyle: "*Lalla n'Ourdja*" [the lady of Ourdja] to qualify any young woman stubbornly refusing to get married.

Whatever the reasons which led Lalla Fatma to adopt such unexpected behavior (i.e., resisting the family and social pressure to become a wife, and preferring a life of singlehood), this episode prefigures the vigorous temperament which distinguished her. In fact, she displayed through this recalcitrant attitude a singular mental force, as she clearly and firmly swam against the current. This psychological disposition would play a great role in forging her leadership. By standing strongly against a marriage she didn't agree to, she was stating that she had her say on the matter, in a society where women rarely had a choice, in such circumstances, to express anything but shy consent or a resentful resignation.

Furthermore, she managed to emancipate herself from her brothers' authority and edify the whole society to respect her for what she was, and what she was determined to remain. Her virginity and her lack of interest in starting a family, when added to her reputed piety and her prestigious religious lineage, protected her from being stigmatized for her choice. On the contrary, she seemed to have gained a greater esteem among the population as a woman who dedicated herself to God's service and was not interested in earthly pleasures, even if celibacy is not greatly encouraged in Islam.

Fatma was barely fifteen when she was married. Still, at this very young age, her determination and obstinacy were firm enough to make her stand in front of her family and the whole society. From this trait, we can easily imagine what fervor and tenacity she would later deploy when guiding her people in their resistance against the French army.

### 3.4. A Sainly Aura

This paper is the first study that postulates clearly that at the core of Lalla Fatma's leadership was the aura of sainthood with which she was most probably perceived by her contemporary countrymen, based on direct and indirect evidence collected from historical sources.

In order to describe this extraordinary woman and the ascendancy she had over her people, colonial sources, especially Carrey [2] and Aucapitaine [7], employed such words as "*prophetess*", "*priestess*", "*foreteller*", or even, more oddly "*druidess*" and "*Berber Weleda*".

It is needless to point out how inappropriate these words are in a Muslim context. The particular incongruity of a term like "*druidess*" (the feminine form of the French word "*druid*" i.e., a priest in the Old Gaulois religion) betrays the authors' incapacity to understand the environment they encountered in Algeria, outside a simplistic reading of history, whereby the French used to compare themselves to the Romans who conquered Africa centuries before, bringing "civilization" to its people. Actually, by comparing the Berbers to their own ancestors before the Roman conquest (i.e.,

the Gaulois), French authors were showing indirectly their sympathy to the resisting Kabyles, whom they did their best to differentiate from the Arabs, who were more directly associated with Islam. This colonial vision also makes it easier to understand the numerous remarks that pervade such sources about a supposedly weaker degree of religiosity among the Kabyles, or what later historians have named, the “Kabyle myth”; and it didn’t matter if, within the same sources, these authors contradicted themselves when they later spoke of the influence of some religious leaders in enrolling Kabyles under their leadership in resistance movements. Roberts [19] (pp. 143–146 and 228–229) masterfully analyzes this Kabyle myth and its origins.

What these primary sources failed to convey is that the local population of Soumer and its surrounding villages, if not the whole region of Kabylia, recognized in Lalla Fatma traits that pertain to sainthood, or *walâya*. This affirmation does not deny that these sources have also occasionally used the word “saint” to refer to her, a term that we consider the most accurate qualification that may apply to Lalla Fatma. However this word, “saint”, that colonialist authors used sometimes to describe Lalla Fatma, was overshadowed by a number of other terms that made it lose its real and first sense within the Muslim context.

While the common translation of the Arabic word “*waliy*” is generally “saint”, the original Arabic term expresses a relation of particular protection and support rather than the notion of holiness or sanctity embedded in the word “saint”. Hence the expression “*waliy Allâh*” would be more faithfully rendered as “God’s protégé” or even “God’s friend”. Without going into further details on this notion, to which an impressive number of studies have been dedicated in Muslim spiritual literature as well as in Western academy, we can assume that the population of Kabylia was attached to Fatma because they probably saw her as one of God’s *protégés*.

If they initially held her in high esteem because of her prestigious ancestry, they certainly had perceived later, in her life and personality, signs of a singular proximity to God; she is said to have learnt the Quran (partially or totally) without being taught; as a follower of a sufi *tariqa*, she probably spent most of her time pronouncing *awrâd* and *adkâr* (litanies), in addition to performing daily prayers; she renounced a marital life, preferring to dedicate herself to God’s service; she was apparently well-grounded in matters of religion and spirituality, thanks not only to her male relatives, but also to her probable exposure to Saklâwî’s teachings; she joined her brother’s *zâwiya*, where she proffered her spiritual advice and guidance to whomsoever asked her for it; she reportedly fed the poor, healed the ill, and relieved the anguish of her visitors. It is therefore clear that she seemed to have gained the reputation of a wise and benevolent person whose opinion was highly sought after by men and women alike.

As her reputation of being a saintly woman started to spread, Lalla Fatma became the object of visits of people coming from different parts of Kabylia who wanted to consult her on various subjects, and ask her to pray for them. Thus, one of the Kabyle songs recorded by Hanoteau [1] (p. 126) speaks of her in these terms: “*Lady Fatma to whom we pay visits; she who holds bracelets and pearls*”. Actually, “paying a visit” here is used in its religious sense, as a commoner would do to seek the *Baraka* of a pious person, dead or alive. Additional evidence of the saintly aura that envelops our heroine, at least in her people’s eyes, is the fact that even after her defeat and her forced exile out of Kabylia, in Beni-Sliman’s *zâwiya* near Tablat (in today’s Wilaya of Medea), she continued to receive endless queues of visitors, some of whom came from Kabylia, and others from nearby Arab villages.

Furthermore, colonialist authors reported Lalla Fatma’s supposed ability to predict the future, relying on dreams and “*contacts with the most renowned saints*”, while underlining the population’s naivety in believing in such superpowers. Being unfamiliar with the Muslim interpretation of supernatural phenomena within the category named *karâmât* (prodigies)—of which truthful dream visions (*ru’yâ sâdiqa*) and glimpses at the world of the Unseen (*kashf*) are parts—they couldn’t understand the exceptional deference shown to Lalla Fatma on this religious and spiritual basis.

It is worth mentioning, for instance, that in the scriptural sources of sunni Islam, that Kabyles followed almost exclusively before the arrival of the French, the Qur’ân and the Sunna place particular importance upon visionary dreams. The *sura* of Yusuf (number 12) and many hadiths attest



to the role of dreams in giving insights about the future. Among the hadiths, let us cite the one reported by Abû Hurayra in Sahîh al-Bukhârî:

- The prophet said: “*Nothing is left from prophethood except glad tidings*”.
- They [i.e., the companions] said: “*and what are glad tidings?*”
- He said: “*the good dream.*”

Another hadith, reported by Abû Sa’îd al-Khudrî in Sahîh al-Bukhârî and by Abû Hurayra in Sahîh Muslim, mentions that the prophet had said: “*the good dream represents one part of forty-six parts of Prophethood*”. And to understand the relationship between piety and dreams, the version of this hadith in Sahîh Muslim adds: “*and the most truthful of you in their speech are those who see the truest visions (i.e., dreams)*”.

Colonial sources didn’t endeavor to analyze the notoriety of Si Tahar and his sister Lalla Fatma in the light of the Muslim theological notion of sainthood, or rather *wilâya/walâya*, and its corollary notion of prodigies, *karâmât*. They didn’t try to discover the link between the sacred texts—taught and transmitted in *zâwiyas*—and their oversimplification in the beliefs held by the majority of Kabyle’s laymen. These colonial chronicles seemed to have relied heavily, if not solely, on the way their indigenous informers—probably lacking a proper instruction in matters of theology and religion—reported on the miraculous superpowers attributed to Lalla Fatma and her brother.

However, even Feredj [8] (p. 134 n. 8) feels somehow puzzled about reports on Lalla Fatma’s ability to predict the future, attributing such an expression, that is repeated over and over in the primary sources, to exaggerations and distortions of words of advice and wisdom that she might have given. What we think is that Lalla Fatma was gifted with a rare perspicacity and a highly intuitive intelligence that made her arrive very quickly at correct conclusions when talking to her interlocutors in a way that stoked their imaginations. She was most probably a very pious and truthful lady, devoting her time to prayers and good deeds, and she consequently used to have what the Islamic scholarly tradition calls “truthful visions”, i.e., premonitory dreams. These dreams enabled her to be ahead of her people concerning the events that the region underwent. She is purportedly said to have also predicted the final victory of the French, as Carrey [2] (p. 232) observed.

### 3.5. Resistance to the French

Concerning the political engagement of Lalla Fatma’s family, as Randon [3] puts it (see Appendix A), they joined the resistance movement in 1847, during Bugeaud’s first expedition to Kabylia. As mentioned earlier, we know for a fact that Saklâwî, the highest spiritual guide of the Rahmaniyya, had supported the Emir ‘Abd-El-Qâdir’s efforts to resist the French and to build an independent Algerian State. We can infer from this position the existence of a nascent nationalist conscience within Kabylia, thanks to which the resisting militants would have been aware of the big picture of what was at stake, and would not have been fighting only for their local regional independence. But such an argument needs further scrutiny which clearly goes beyond the scope of the present article.

Nevertheless, it appears from different sources that Lalla Fatma and her family were wholeheartedly against the French invasion, and even when the Emir ‘Abd-El-Qâdir’s enterprise to thwart the French expansion stopped unsuccessfully in 1847, the wind of resistance didn’t cease to blow in Kabylia. We learn from Bourjade [28] (p. 16, n. 3) that the village of Soumer was burnt by Colonel Canrobert in 1849, while Robin [29] (p. 18) mentions that the Beni-Mellikeuch, a neighboring Kabyle tribe, considered that they managed to force this colonel to step back in July 1849. These two indications show that the village of Soumer and its vicinity were constant sites of unrest.

In the same year, Robin [29] (p. 16) notes that our lady met one of the young leaders who continued the struggle for independence, *sharîf* Moulay Brahim. Feredj [8] (p. 134) mentions that she also received Si Mohammad el-Hachemi, another figure of resistance who had previously fought under the authority of Bû Ma’za. Hachemi consulted her, with other Kabyle leaders, with the prospect of launching a new campaign, but he died shortly after this encounter.

She also met *sharîf* Bû Baghla, who had been leading a movement of resistance in Kabylia since 1850, and with whom she seemed to have fought at least one common battle in 1854, according to Perret [30] (vol. II, p. 132) and Robin [29] (p. 288).

Concerning Bû Baghla, as mentioned in Section 3.3, rumors circulated about his willingness to marry her, while Lalla Fatma couldn't contract a new marriage since her husband didn't consent to divorcing her, as in Feredj [8] (p. 133). Not surprisingly, TV and cinema fictions on Lalla Fatma's life (Janadi [31] and Hadjadj [32]) focused on this alleged impossible love story.

The most disrespectful account is what Aucasitain [7] (p. 159) had alleged as an actual cohabitation between the two. However, the strong aversion towards Bû Baghla that this author displays openly makes his testimony, which is based only on hearsay, more than untrustworthy. It is highly doubtful that if such a thing ever happened, Lalla Fatma would have kept the same huge respect she enjoyed from her people. Indeed, such behavior is not only strictly forbidden in Islam, but also severely condemned by the Kabyle's particular set of rules, known as *qânûns*, as Roberts [19] (p. 215) explains, about the 'right to flight' that Kabyle custom gave to an unhappily married woman. This right granted that the unhappy woman could leave her husband but only to return to live at her parents' home, which seemed to be the case of Lalla Fatma. Without being properly divorced, she couldn't contract a new marriage, let alone cohabit without any official contract.

More soberly, Perret [30] (vol. II, p. 132), talking about the encounter between these two figures, points to "a mutual esteem" between them, and reports some words of encouragement that Lalla Fatma would have addressed to Bû Baghla during a battle they fought together in 1854, telling him, in a very colorful style, after he was shot and injured: "*Sharîf, your beard will never turn into hay*"; knowing that the beard was a symbol of bravery, her message meant: you are really a valiant man.

Nevertheless, if she really spoke these words, it would tend to prove that Lalla Fatma spoke some Arabic (at least in its colloquial form "*dârija*") in addition to her native Kabyle language, since Bû Baghla was not a Kabyle and didn't know this language, according to Robin [29] (p. 35). This would corroborate our previous remarks about her degree of instruction.

As for the different battles which took place in Kabylia during the numerous French expeditions in the 1850s and ended in 1857 with the surrender of the whole region, historical sources are abundant in endless military details which we will mention here on a minimal basis, for two reasons. Firstly, because these military details are largely duplicated and are available in the primary as well as the secondary sources, and would make our study unnecessarily long; and secondly, because these details give only the victors' point of view; they certainly ignore a large number of other elements that would have rendered the account of what had really taken place less partial.

Therefore, the first military event that we judge as important is the attested role played by Lalla Fatma and her brother Tahar in enrolling voluntary fighters in a special group of warriors called *Imseblen* in the summer of 1854, when the Governor General of Algeria, Marshal Randon launched a campaign in Kabylia, mobilizing, according to Robin, around 12,000 men, among whom were several highly qualified generals. Robin [33] authored a book on this special troop called *Imseblen*, made up of young people who decided, on a voluntary basis, to join this particular group who obeyed specific rules. The author doesn't hide his admiration for the rigorous organization of *Imseblen* (pl. of *amsebbel*, a word derived from the Quranic expression "*fî sabîl Allâh*" i.e., "in God's path") and the heroism they displayed. He [33] (pp. 8–9) explains that Tahar was in charge of enrolling these fighters, whereas Lalla Fatma "*knew how to exalt the Kabyles' religious bigotry and patriotism and to make them determined to lead a desperate resistance*".

Whereas Randon [3] (p. 214) gives his version about this campaign, describing it as a victory that brought him Emperor Napoleon's praise, Robin [33] (p. 11) doesn't hesitate to call this expedition "*a relative failure*", and reveals that Randon was forced to admit that he was not able to meet the objectives he set for himself of defeating Kabylia with such a small number of soldiers.

It was only three years later that Randon, returning to Kabylia at the head of an army of 35,000 men, managed to reach his long-sought objective of establishing his power firmly on the whole territory of today's Algeria, of which Kabylia was the last recalcitrant region. It was during this expedition that Lalla Fatma was finally captured by the French on 11 July 1857.

The strategy used by the French army under Randon's commandment during this second campaign benefited from the lessons learnt in the previous campaign. The French now had a better knowledge of the geography of Kabylia, they were more accustomed to the defensive methods used by the Kabyles, and most importantly, each time they defeated a tribe, the latter and all the other tribes which were its allies within the same *saff* were obliged to surrender (for a better understanding of the structure of the *saff* system at the level of tribes, see Roberts [19] (pp. 123–137)). This meant that the defeated *saff* of tribes would not only cease any fighting against the French, but were obliged to turn their weapons against those groups of tribes who still remained independent. Under such conditions, the last tribes to resist found themselves not only surrounded by French troops, but by fellow Kabyle fighters as well.

These were the circumstances in which the *saff* (group of tribes) under which Lalla Fatma and her brothers were operating, i.e., the Itsouragh, the Illilten, the Illoulou-Malou and the Aït-Ziki found themselves to be the last bastions of resistance in the heart of Djurjura mountains, when all the other *saffs* were successively submitting to the French after fierce battles, forced as they were to surrender because of the imbalance between the means deployed by the two parties.

In such a desperate situation, there was still something to be tried in order to save the women of these tribes, at the head of whom was Lalla Fatma herself. The independence fighters took the women, children, and all precious objects they possessed to a place named Takhlidjt n'Aït Atsou (named by Carrey [2] "Taklah"). This small village was hidden at the bottom of the ravine of Tirouda, in a way that made it invisible from the top of the mountain for strangers who didn't know of its existence.

In the meantime, Lalla Fatma's brother, Tahar (or Tayeb according to Carrey [2]) contacted the French general Yusuf, pleading for the surrender of his village in exchange for not touching his family's belongings. The French accepted the proposal. In fact, Fatma's brother was trying to take general Yusuf to the village of Soumer after it had been emptied of its women and its most important possessions, leading him through pathways that left the village of Takhlidjt out of sight. But an incident happened around Takhlidjt that alerted the French soldiers' attention to its existence. Some women were late in joining the others, and some Kabyle soldiers of those who joined the French troops saw them and followed them. When they arrived at the village, there was an exchange of fire that brought the rest of the troops to the place. After a hard fight, the French finally got possession of Takhlidjt and took all the people present, amongst whom Lalla Fatma was the most illustrious, prisoners.

It is on this occasion, the day of her capture, that Carrey [2] (pp. 246–247) wrote the most detailed description of what Lalla Fatma looked like, showing how elegant, distinguished and dignified she was compared to the other ladies, but mocking somehow the exaggerated deference her people showed her. He also reported (p. 242) the following dialogue between Marshal Randon and Lalla Fatma, specifying that the exchange happened thanks to an interpreter. Randon had asked why her men shot the French troops, breaking the convention (i.e., the surrender) made by her brother. She answered: *"God wanted it. It is neither your fault, nor mine. Your soldiers went out of their ranks to penetrate my village. Mine defended themselves. I'm now your captive. I have no reproach to you. You shouldn't make any reproach to me. It was written this way!"*

Lalla Fatma, like other leaders of the Kabyle resistance, was forced into exile. Bertherand [5] (p. 124) reports that her first choice of destination was Tunis, but doubts whether she actually went there before coming back to Algeria. Nevertheless, the rest of the sources, including Marshal Randon's [3] memoirs, state that she was sent the next day to the *zâwiya* of Beni-Sliman, near Tablat, in today's Wilaya of Medea, where she spent the last years of her short existence.

Feredj [8] (p. 139) mentions that her brother, Tahar, died after 4 years of captivity in 1861, while Lalla Fatma's health started to decline quickly, to the extent that she was soon struck with paralysis. She didn't survive very long after her brother's death; she passed away in 1863, at the age of 33.

#### 4. Discussion

We have mentioned in our findings what we consider as the most important elements concerning our heroine. So far, we aren't aware of any study in English exclusively dealing with Lalla Fatma; the existing literature is mainly in French, Berber and Arabic. This historical and mythical feminine figure of Algerian resistance has been dealt with mostly in a handful of academic articles or book chapters—but no single monograph has yet been dedicated to her, although we think there is still a lot to be said about her.

Although a conference was held in 2009 at the University of Medea (Algeria) under the promising title of: “Lalla Fatma N'Soumer between resistance and Sufism”, the published acts of the conference [34] gave only some general information about Sufism, the Rahmaniyya, and other sufi orders in Algeria, as well as dealing with military aspects of this resistance movement. Furthermore, the articles were not exclusively dedicated to a thorough examination of Lalla Fatma's case, as they included other movements in other regions of Algeria, and no major new findings were proposed.

In the present study, we have deliberately chosen not to delve into the military details pertaining to the French expeditions in Kabylia to which Lalla Fatma and her people resisted courageously; rather, we have opted to shed light on the spiritual aspect that we judged to be somewhat underestimated in the previous works.

As an example of what we considered a kind of indifference towards some key spiritual elements in our story, let us point out that Feredj [8] who consulted Carette [23] to affirm that the “*five marabouts*” mentioned in this survey about the population of Soumer, were Lalla Fatma and her four brothers, didn't judge it relevant to mention that Carette specified that they were running a *zâwiya* there, i.e., they were there to provide religious and spiritual teachings for the villagers.

Another instance is when Feredj [8] quickly dismisses al-Bouabdelli's [25] assertion that Lalla Fatma had been Mahdî Saklâwî's disciple on the ground that Lalla Fatma was too young to attend Saklâwî's courses, considering that she was only 16 or 17 when this *shaykh* was forced to exile from Kabylia to Syria. This objection doesn't take into consideration that Fatma had by that time already been married and separated from her husband, which meant that, by that period's standards, she was already considered an adult. But most importantly, this objection doesn't take into account that Fatma was probably not a regular disciple attending the courses of the *shaykh* in a formal way. We tend to think that she had been treated exceptionally as the sister of Si Tahar, the head of the *zâwiya* of Soumer.

Despite these remarks about Feredj's [8] article, we still consider it one of the best essays to have rendered justice to this heroine, examining historical sources while reporting also the local verbal traditions that circulate about her and help us to understand how deep an impact she had left almost a century after she passed away. Oussedik's [9] book is also very helpful in completing the missing details based on these oral accounts. However, it is unfortunately not well-documented enough; the author never cites any clear source, and falls easily into lyrical and exaggerated formulas. He writes more in a romance-like style than an academic tone. We didn't dismiss the whole work, but preferred to use it very carefully, with the reservations expressed above.

Lacoste-Dujardin [21] and Desjeux's [35] chapters also constitute good and well-balanced syntheses of previous works. Desjeux [35] relies on earlier French sources and on Feredj's article. But concerning the names of Lalla Fatma's brothers, Desjeux [35] (p. 161, n. 11) suggests that Feredj might have ignored the existence of the eldest brother, Tayeb, whom Perret [30] (p.132) describes as trying at one moment to negotiate a capitulation to the French because Feredj would have felt embarrassed to address this unpatriotic episode. Desjeux is quite wrong in this assumption. Actually, although another colonial source like Robin [33] (p. 8) seems to hesitate between the names of Tayeb and Tahar, Randon [3] (see Appendix below) and Hanoteau [1] (p. 127) clearly call Lalla Fatma's brother in Soumeur Tahar. Desjeux is mistaken about the alleged embarrassment of Feredj concerning the capitulation proposed by Lalla Fatma's brother. Indeed, Feredj [8] (p. 138, n. 17) addressed this issue clearly; nonetheless, he still attributed this behavior to Tahar and not Tayeb.

Benbrahim's [27] short synthesis, which includes in the appendixes passages from Kabyle poems evoking the trauma of Lalla Fatma's capture, as well as from other colonial sources, is useful in

stressing out the importance of this figure in the Kabyle context and the indelible impression she left in the region. However, the date of death the article mentions (d. 1861) seems incorrect. We differ also from Benbrahim's reading of Hun's [6] testimony. As a matter of fact, the latter being a civilian who had visibly good relations with Kabyle friends, and who was paying a visit to some of them while this campaign took place, described in the quoted passage the confrontation between the French army and the Kabyle peasants in a very satirical tone, not to mock Lalla Fatma per se, but more to mock Marshal Randon and his disproportionate use of force.

Ali-Benali's [36] article raises an important question about the mythical Lalla Fatma who had been disputed between many representations. It is true that our study didn't address this question of representations, but it is clear that the historical Fatma hides behind the mythical traits of a legend. People's perceptions about her would make them endeavor to use her as a symbol for causes dear to them. Thus, she became one of the icons of different political and cultural movements in Algeria: the feminist movement, the Berberist cause, the nationalist discourse, etc. Once again, we feel that these representations somehow overshadow the deeply spiritual nature that was at the heart of the great influence that Lalla Fatma really played.

A subsidiary question related to that of representation may also be raised about the visual images that are widely circulating today as being an illustration of what Lalla Fatma looked like. Contrary to what the historical sources assert concerning her physical appearance, where direct witnesses spoke about her being overweight, the pictures that are today supposed to represent her show a slender lady. This is also true for the actresses who have been chosen to play her in audio-visual fictions. This is certainly due to the evolution of positive and negative connotations associated with being overweight, but may find its origin in one of the first illustrations of our heroine, the painting of Felix Philipoteaux (1866), which issued from his imagination.

As outstanding as Lalla Fatma's destiny was in more than an aspect, we need to recall that she was not a complete exception in the history of Maghreb. She had at least one illustrious predecessor, in another legendary figure: Al-Kahina (died c. 703), who opposed a brave and intelligent resistance to the Arabs who brought Islam to the region in the end of the seventh century. Lalla Fatma may also have a successor, though only at the level of spiritual leadership, in Lalla Zaynab al-Kacimi al-Hasani, daughter of the *shaykh* of the *zâwiya* of Al-Hamel (near today's Bousaada), who directed this *Rahmâniyya zâwiya* after her father's death (1897–1904), to whom Clancy-Smith [18] dedicated a full chapter. On the other hand, it is also important to mention the figure of Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc), to whom French writers sometimes compared Lalla Fatma, and with whom great similarities do indeed exist.

Concerning Sufi studies, few have dealt with women in North Africa. Rausch [37] synthesizes the existing research, but without any reference to Lalla Fatma. Besides, it is worth mentioning that the *Rahmâniyya* order has already attracted the attention of researchers, and the role of this *tarîqa* in leading a resistance movement has already been treated by Clancy-Smith [18], but her work concerned other regions, and other leaders. However, our study hints also at the question of feminine leadership within this particular *tarîqa*. Actually, as mentioned earlier, in Kabylia, we can cite at least two great figures affiliated with this sufi order: Lalla Khadidja and Lalla Fatma, and in the South, the aforementioned Lalla Zaynab completes the list. These three women, in different ways, forced the admiration and respect of their fellow-members of the same *tarîqa* in a way that makes it legitimate to wonder whether the teachings delivered by this order were generally more favorably-disposed towards women.

## 5. Conclusions

Our study tried to draw a portrait of a Berber Muslim feminine heroine who didn't receive as much academic interest as she might have deserved, even if conducting research about her involved the risk of missing some pieces of the puzzle.

This paper has focused on what we deemed essential in understanding how Lalla Fatma managed to rise into the position of a political, if not military, leader in the brave and desperate

struggle for independence that the Kabyles had undertaken in the 1850s, making her region the last one to fall under French rule in Algeria.

Contrary to the existing scholarship on Lalla Fatma, we argued that she might have enjoyed a solid theological and spiritual instruction, benefiting from her special position as the daughter and sister of renowned *zâviya* shaykhs. We also claimed that the spiritual dimension, stressed by her belonging to a family of religious scholars, her affiliation to the Rahmaniyya sufi order (which gives much importance to scriptural knowledge), in addition to her personal choice to turn away from a marital life and to dedicate herself instead to a life of prayers and good deeds, played the greatest role in establishing her reputation as a saintly women.

On this basis, we claimed that once her people trusted her wisdom and her judgment, it was only natural for them to follow her instructions in facing the hardships they would go through in their confrontation with a much stronger and better trained foreign army. So much so, especially that Lalla Fatma seemed also to have had spiritual insights about forthcoming events that made her aware, before everybody else, of the dangers surrounding the region.

We think that our findings about the life of Lalla Fatma intersect with many fields of study: (1) North African studies, especially those dealing with the history of French colonialism and subsequent resistance movements, and those which deal with Berber studies; (2) Women or gender studies in Islam; and (3) spirituality and Sufi studies pertaining to sainthood.

Although her example is of an extraordinary nature, this study on Lalla Fatma N'Soumer comes to fill a gap in the study of Muslim Berber women. Indeed, studies on Muslim feminine scholars and leaders, to date, don't have many examples from the Maghreb, especially when it comes to Berber women. Despite the lack of direct evidence on her level of instruction, we think that Lalla Fatma deserves a place of her own, as a lady who exerted a huge influence on the history of the region.

Our research tried to clarify what we think may be the secret behind the successful authority Lalla Fatma had over her people. It was also an attempt to sketch her personality traits and family background more precisely than the available primary and secondary sources have done so far. In doing so, we are aware that many questions have only been quickly raised in this article without being fully tackled, but we are hopeful that time will give us the chance to re-examine some of the issues that we couldn't extensively deal with here.

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## Appendix A

Lalla Fatma était issue d'une famille de marabouts qui comptait parmi ses ancêtres un saint, Si-Ahmed Gou Mezian, dont les restes reposent sous une goubba située sur le versant occidental de la montagne d'Ourdja. Jusqu'à l'arrivée des Français, cette famille resta étrangères aux querelles des soffs, mais à partir de l'expédition du maréchal Bugeaud dans l'Oued Sahel, en 1847, elle changea de rôle et se rangea dans le parti de la résistance. Lalla Fatma, dont le père était le chef de la mamera de Sidi Ahmed Gou Mezian, avait été mariée très-jeune à Si Yahia Embou Ikoulaf, marabout du village d'Asker. Elle resta peu de temps avec son mari et se retira, à seize ou dix-huit ans, chez un de ses frères, Si Tahar, qui passait pour inspiré. Elle marcha sur ses traces et bientôt, elle aussi, eut des songes, des hallucinations: elle passa pour être en rapport avec les saints les plus en renom et rendit des oracles. Sa réputation se répandit promptement et, au début de cette campagne, Lalla Fatma mit au service de la cause nationale toute son influence; elle prêcha résolument la guerre sainte contre les Français. Prise le 11 juillet, elle arriva dans la nuit au camp de Tamesguida avec un assez grand nombre de serviteurs des deux sexes. Le lendemain, le maréchal la fit partir pour les Beni-Sliman, en la confiant aux soins de Si Tahar ben Mahieddin, dont la zaouïa lui fut assignée pour résidence.

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