

The Massacres in Algeria, 1992-2004

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Introduction

It is not easy to deal with the subject of the massacres committed in Algeria. Everything is done to mask their full extent, to camouflage the exact circumstances in which they were committed, to cloud information relating to the identity of the attackers and their backers, in short, to avoid too much interest. However, cornered by the national and international public opinion in search of the truth, the ruling powers and their media connections disseminated a version which puts the blame for the massacres exclusively on Islamist “terrorism” – a term which often gets close to meaning Islamic – and which forbids any other interpretation, even considering those who ask questions and demand independent investigations as “terrorism’s henchmen”.

The number of deaths has to this day always been the object of controversy. President Bouteflika, shortly after his coming to power in April 1999¹, put forward the figure of 100,000 victims of the Algerian tragedy since 1992. This was the first time an Algerian politician provided such a number. Until then, the death threshold remained officially under 26,000. In the beginning of 2004, General Rachid Laâli, head of the DDSE (Directorate for Documentation and External Security) for his part estimated that 48,000 people had been killed, among them 24,000 civilians, 9,500 soldiers and 15,300 ‘terrorists’², whereas the MAOL (Algerian Movement of Free Officers) indicated already in May 1999 the figure of 173,000 killed. As for the national human rights organisations such as the LADDH, they estimate the number of victims to be over 200,000.

Since the coup of January 1992, massacres have been perpetrated in Algeria. These killings assume different forms according to the goals pursued by the people behind them, who can also have diverse identities. Whereas in the first three years following the putsch of 11 January 1992 mostly ‘homicides’ were committed (meaning either extrajudicial executions by security forces or assassinations by Islamist armed groups), from around 1995 the term ‘massacre’ has been increasingly used by the Algerian media to characterise the killings. Although international public opinion was aware that the fight against terrorism carried out by the ruling powers was resulting in thousands of summary executions, the gradual semantic change towards the notion of massacre allowed responsibility to be imputed solely to armed groups.

In fact, the term ‘massacres’, not linked to any precise legal concept, is used to strike minds with the brutality of the acts thus described, while at the same time covering them up : the crime is not qualified, the persons or groups involved therefore remain anonymous. The culprits are in turn confined in an opacity only intensified by the term ‘terrorist’. A triple denial follows: of the victims’ suffering, of the search for the truth in these crimes and of justice.

Only when the horror of the massacres committed from the end of 1996 assumed an indescribable scope, questions relating to those responsible and their sponsors emerged in a pressing manner and the first elements of an answer appeared. But very quickly the Algerian regime succeeded in closing down the scope of the media scope by imposing Islamist terrorism as the only valid explanation, with the support of some Western media reluctant to investigate a complex situation and easily satisfied by a theory reinforcing their prejudices – a ‘theory’ horribly indifferent, as we shall see, to the real origin of a savagery based on an absolute contempt for human life. This theory has become all the more prevailing after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States as the threat of international Islamist terrorism strengthens the Algerian position.

In the aftermath of the coup of 11 January 1992, a fierce repression has been enforced on the winner of the legislative elections, the FIS (the Islamic Salvation Front) leading to the ousting of its leaders, the dismantling of its structures and the criminalisation of its members and sympathizers. A whole range of special laws restricting liberty and measures to control information gradually allowed the putsch’s generals to lead a secret war: a war that went well beyond the goal of

¹ On 26 Juin 1999 at the Crans Montana economic summit.

² Thomas SCHMID, “Duell in Algier”, *Die Zeit*, 29 January 2004.

eliminating a political party to become a means of national and international conflict management and above all of perpetuating their presence at the helm of the country. A logic of war came into place in January 1992³ which constantly used the 'terrorist threat' to justify the worst of crimes.

The time had not yet come for appeasement and the words used by the head of counterespionage and number two of the Intelligence and Security Department (Département de renseignement et de sécurité, DRS, former Military Security) Colonel Smain Lamari (aka 'Smain') in front of his officers, as reported by former Colonel Mohammed Samraoui, a close collaborator who deserted the army in 1996, are revealing: "I am ready and determined to eliminate three million Algerians if necessary to maintain the order threatened by the Islamists⁴". This bloody programme will be carried out using the most sophisticated methods including the different psychological and counter-insurrection warfare techniques.

The sophistication of this strategy explains the difficulty met by the victims and the observers to assess its scope in an exact manner. Later, different actors, witnesses and victims will thus give descriptions and explanations of a precise crime, without however being able to explain how it fitted into an overall logic. Conversely, numerous observers and analysts understood the global strategy of a group of generals aiming at retaining power through terror, without however understanding their intentions in such or such particular crime. The great victory of the generals behind the coup and their civilian connections was to operate a successful cover-up, which means that until today neither those responsible for the most serious crimes nor the motives behind the choice of the victims are known by public opinion. This strategy of confusion, deliberately created and nurtured, gave the generals not only a great scope for action but also led to the involvement of a great number of actors in the violence, contributing to ensure impunity for those really responsible.

Throughout the months of 1992, different armed groups opposing the military regime formed. They quickly took on police officers, but it took more than a year for this very diverse armed opposition to start structuring resistance against governmental forces. The underground groups fought the security forces and those they considered to be 'the State's henchmen' (including ordinary civil servants). Thanks to the support they gathered among (or imposed on) a population hostile to the powers that be, they enforced their rule in some regions, through violence if deemed necessary.

The turnaround took place in 1995, when the army and the DRS progressively regained control of the situation on the ground. Curiously, the more scattered and weakened the armed groups, the stronger and more complex the violence became.

The attacks and the massacres have not ceased to this day, even if they are only the subject of tiny paragraphs in Western newspapers. This 'trivialization of crime' shows, since early 2000, the image of a pacified, controlled and secure Algeria. The number of killings has indeed decreased since the election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as President of the Republic in April 1999. However, the confusion and opacity surrounding them has intensified and renders them even less decipherable

³ The government in Algeria did everything to start a confrontation with the whole Islamist movement, not only its armed component, which took close to a year to happen. Let us recall that the FIS sympathizers did not immediately react to the cancellation of the elections, or to the mass arrests of FIS officials. Only when the power in place promulgated on 20 January 1992 a law prohibiting gatherings around mosques did confrontation unleashed between protesters and security forces. The much frequented mosques were encircled and the worshippers violently repressed. These 'black Fridays' caused the death of dozens, wounded hundreds and thousands were arrested and sent to detention camps in the South of the country without ever being brought to justice. In order to escape repression, some militants fled Algeria and others joined the underground movement that was being constituted.

⁴ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang. Algérie: comment les services secrets ont manipulé les groupes islamistes*, Denoël, Paris, 2003, p. 162. This former lieutenant-colonel, in charge of the 'Research and Analysis Service' (SRA) of the DRS until 1992 was then the right-hand man of the counterespionage chief Smain Lamari and was as such informed about part of his manipulations.

than in the period before his first mandate. It is important to note that all the structures (military, judiciary and police) which allowed, on the one hand, these crimes to be committed and, on the other hand, to institute impunity are still in place, so much so that the machine could race out of control again at any time. This, incidentally, happened several times, in particular during the riots in Kabylie which started in April 2001 (the security forces killed more than 120 people and used torture in a large scale).

The demand for an independent and impartial commission of investigation, whether national or international, remains as meaningful today, as long as the mechanisms which can lead to such crimes have not been exposed and those responsible brought before the courts.

I. The massacres in time

1992-1993: Targeted violence

From 3 to 7 February 1992, in reaction to a demonstration following the arrest of an imam in Batna, the security forces and the army intervened and charged the protesters. Dozens were killed (officially fourteen) including some of the following: Derghal Yamina, 60 years, Khellaf Abdennabi, 27 years, Merzekane Lakhdar, 18 years, Louchene Abdelmadjid, 18 years, Chekabi Fawzi, 24 years, Abdelmadjid Mohamed, 30 years, Ibrahim Lotfi, 60 years, Aouam Mahmoudi, 22 years, Meddour Ammar, 22 years, Yakhlaf Ibrahim, 18 years, Achach Said, 15 years, Deram Salim, 17 years, Hamlaoui Lazhar, 11 years, Benzeroual Samir, 20 years, Benkezza Tarek, 14 years, Bourenane Salim, 22 years; and twelve other unidentified persons aged 13 to 45, including 7 children⁵.

From 1992, thousands of FIS sympathizers or so presumed were arrested, detained and deported to internment camps in the South of the country, and dozens were killed in confrontations around mosques at weekly worships on Fridays or in combed searches by the security forces and, increasingly, by the special police forces commonly dubbed 'Ninjas'. The arrests campaigns were facilitated by the state of emergency imposed on 9 February 1992, the decree on counterterrorism promulgated on 30 September and the establishment of a curfew commencing 5 December of that same year. These provisions allowed the security forces to act under cover of law, whilst illegal practices were established as norms. Massacres were committed by State agents under this partly codified impunity.

Many Islamist opponents for their part chose to take up arms. They attacked security forces, preferably ordinary policemen, to collect the weapons they lacked. A multitude of small groups, often composed of former Afghanistan combatants, operated without any common programme or strategy. The year 1992 was marked by dozens of killings of members of the security forces, the majority of which were policemen. In addition to these operations, attacks against banks and police stations or gendarme brigades, as well as against civilian public employees, were carried out.

Amnesty International reported in its March 1993 evaluation of the year ended:

Since the introduction of the state of emergency more than 270 members of the security forces and up to 20 civilians have been killed by armed underground opposition groups, operating in towns and in remote rural areas of Algeria. During the same period up to 300 government opponents and others were killed by members of the security forces. Many of these deaths appear to have occurred in the context of armed clashes. [...]

In addition to those killed in armed clashes, unarmed civilians not involved in violent activities and innocent bystanders have also been killed by members of the security forces in the context of demonstrations against the Algerian Government, and in the course of raids to arrest suspected government opponents in hiding. An unknown number of civilians have also been killed while failing to stop at police road blocks and for breaking curfews imposed during the state of emergency⁶.

Although both sides engaged in a propaganda and military struggle, the parties were not ready to confront each other and acted through civilians. In reality, the FIS had not prepared itself for guerrilla conflict. However, groups which were active on the periphery of the party took some measures as soon as 1991, but were not able to rally the masses in their enterprise. The State, for its

⁵ COMITE ALGERIEN DES MILITANTS LIBRES DE LA DIGNITE HUMAINE ET DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, *Livre blanc sur la répression en Algérie (1991-1994)*, volume 1, Hoggar publishers, Geneva, 1995, p. 89-90.

⁶ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Deteriorating human rights under the state of emergency*, March 1993.

part, although the military had taken the reins and headed all armed units, did not hold complete control of the fight against a nascent rebellion.

1992 was therefore for both sides a year of 'preparation'. The security forces did not control the areas with an Islamist majority, in which groups formed to control social and economic life and external relations. Bringing those areas to heel was made possible by the passive resistance of a significant part of the population against the State and its sympathy for the insurgents, which were often its children. But it was also accomplished through restrictive measures, laws and prohibitions enacted by the same groups, which did not hesitate to kill in order to impose their conception of social cohesion. This process took some time, and only around mid-1993 did Islamists' 'controlled zones' appear, around Algiers and in the cities of Blida and Larbaa, Meftah etc.

Threats and attacks against civilians, especially those seen as hostile to the Islamists, increased in scale from 1993. They took a heavy toll on media professionals, with almost a hundred killed in the years between 1993 and 1996, but all socio-professional groups incurred losses: teachers, musicians, trade unionists, shepherds, members of different political parties, Muslim and Christian religious leaders etc. Hundreds of people died, but many of those responsible for their assassination remained unknown. For instance, the murder of the renowned journalist and writer Tahar Djaout on 26 May 1993 was attributed to no less than five armed groups, and the truth was never determined.

On the State's side, the structure that was to manage the 'fight against terrorism' for years, the Centre for the Conduct and Coordination of Anti-subversive Action (Centre de conduite et de coordination des actions de lutte anti-subversive, CCC/ALAS, abbreviated CLAS), only became truly operational in September 1992.

This structure was composed of 'special forces' units of the ANP and elements of the DRS. At the beginning, the CLAS gathered three paratrooper regiments (4th and 8th RAP, 12th RPC), a military police battalion (90th BPM) and a reconnaissance regiment (25th RR). Elements of the Gendarmerie Rapid Intervention Group (GIR) and of the DSCA were also mobilised to supervise combing operations carried out by these men acting in obscurity⁷.

However, already at that time subversive measures were being employed by the State's services. In 1992, two events took place which had a tremendous impact on the public opinion. The first one was the terrorist attack against seven policemen in the Bouzrina street of the Casbah on 9 February 1992, the day of the promulgation of the state of emergency, which, according to convergent sources⁸, seems to have been a massacre committed (or sponsored) by some elements of the DRS with a view to bring the police to heel. The latter had not incurred the same conditioning as the military, often hostile to the Islamists, due to their closeness with the population. However, the aim was also to emphasise the offensive force of the 'terrorists' in order to justify the measures implemented by the State. The second attack made an even stronger impression on the public, being a bomb which hit Algiers' airport indiscriminately on 26 August 1992. Nine persons were killed and over one hundred injured. This attack was attributed to the FIS (which vigorously denied it) and used to justify the decree on the fight against terrorism promulgated on 30 September 1992. Many grey areas continue to loom over this crime which remains unresolved, but for which many men were sentenced to death and executed.

⁷ ALGERIA-WATCH and Salah-Eddine SIDHOUM, *Algérie: La machine de mort*, October 2003, <http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/mrv/mrvtort/machine_mort/machine_mort.htm>.

⁸ On this case, see the summary of available information compiled by Lounis AGGOUN and Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d'États*, La Découverte, Paris 2004, p. 276 sq.

1994-1995: Terror and horror settle in

From the spring of 1994 on, dozens would be killed on a daily basis. The whole machinery of the security forces was mobilised in the 'fight against terrorism'. And the new credit obtained by the State, thanks, amongst others, to the support of France (which was at the time facilitating the rescheduling of Algeria's public debt at the Paris Club) allowed the military to intensify its search and arrest operations. These killed dozens of civilians every day. Several actors appeared however from this date on: the regular forces (special army forces, police, gendarmes), different paramilitary groups linked to the DRS parading as anti-Islamists or, on the contrary, pretending to be Islamists (death squads), genuinely autonomous Islamist armed groups and others manipulated or controlled by the DRS, and lastly the militias which began to form in March 1994.

In the areas where the population was sympathetic to the Islamic cause, it became increasingly difficult to understand what was occurring and to choose a course of conduct which would guarantee survival. In some families, one son would join the underground opposition while another was sent in the police; some would never see their policeman of son or husband for fear of reprisals; some families hid the fact that their child was engaged in armed struggle.

We will attempt to distinguish below between the different bodies involved in these massacres while keeping in mind that these formations often operated jointly (for example the regular forces with the death squads) and that it was very often impossible to differentiate armed groups from each other.

The regular forces

As was described by some witnesses of this period, the 'death cortege' – in the words Nesroulah Youss⁹ used in his testimony - started in 1994. From then on and for several years, mainly in the region around Algiers, an extraordinary number of corpses was discovered on the side of the roads, in rubbish dumps, streets and city districts. These were the result of extrajudicial executions of persons arrested in their homes and simply eliminated, or of suspects tortured and assassinated. Dozens of men were pulled out of their homes at night in the shadow of the curfew to be killed in the streets.

The chronology (non-exhaustive) of the massacres drawn up by Salah Eddine Sidhoum starting in 1994 lists, for the first part of 1994, the following massacres:

15 January: Combing in Larbaâ (Blida). 11 citizens were arrested. Their bodies riddled with bullets were found the next day near their homes.

From 18 to 22 March: 25 bodies of citizens arrested during combing operations were found in Médéa and Berrouaghia and 19 others in Cherarba and les Eucalyptus.

19 March: The bodies of 20 citizens were found in the streets of Ouled and El Fodda. According to their families' testimony to international human rights organisations they had been arrested during army raids.

20 March: 14 bodies were found in the streets of Blida. They had been arrested the day before by paratroopers, according their families' testimony, as a reprisal for the death of 6 policemen.

29 April: 65 worshippers were abducted from the Mosque of Taoughrit (Ténès) by men in military clothes and driving in military vehicles, according to their family's testimony. They were found dead on the periphery of the village.

4 May: 173 bodies were found in the El Marsa forest, in the region of Ténès (Chlef). According to their families' testimony, they were part of a group of over 200 citizens arrested by the military on 25 April 1994 in the villages of Taoughrit, Ouled Boudoua, Sidi Moussa and Tala Aïssa, as a reprisal for the death of about fifteen soldiers in an ambush in the region of Ténès.

⁹ Nesroulah YOUS (with the collaboration of Salima MELLAH), *Qui a tué à Bentalha? Chronique d'un massacre annoncé*, La Découverte, Paris, 2000.

22 May: 43 mutilated and burnt bodies were found scattered in the oued and near the railway tracks of the city of Lakhdaria (Bouira). According to their families' testimonies, they had been arrested a few days earlier during a military combing.

2 to 10 June: 72 mutilated bodies of residents of Lakhdaria were found scattered on the motorway¹⁰.

Moreover, the above-mentioned massacres were either unreported by the indoctrinated media, or attributed to Islamists. Thanks to the human rights defenders who were able to collect statements from the families and neighbours who witnessed the crimes, a number of them could be solved.

Those testimonies showed that combing and elimination campaigns were carried out by the security, gendarmerie, police and military forces, sometimes 'combined', very often in collaboration with the DRS. This is the reason why the victims' families and neighbours were able sometimes not only to identify the corps involved but also the identity of their members. But other actors came into play, which were not as identifiable.

Death squads

The first death squads appeared at the end of 1993, killing targeted individuals (including Cheikh Bouslimani, president of the charity Al irchad wal-islam, responsibility for the assassination of whom was first claimed by the OJAL and then by the GIA). We know of the OJAL (Organisation of free young Algerians) and the OSRA (Organisation for the safeguard of the Algerian Republic), which were active in different regions and massacred suspects. Many other paramilitary groups were created in secrecy. These first formations publicly proclaimed their opposition to the extremists.

The OJAL was most active in March and April 1994, but it claimed responsibility for dozens of killings, leaving a bloody and lasting trail in the Algérois, in Blida, Médéa, Chlef, Boufarik... Here is an example, amongst many others, of its violent acts: on 11 April 1994, the bodies of five assassinated youths were found in Aïn-Naâdja with this message signed by the OJAL: 'this is the fate of those who help terrorists'¹¹.

The previously mentioned massacre of 173 persons (committed in May 1994 following an ambush organised by the rebellion in the region of Ténès, which resulted in the death of sixteen soldiers) was reported in a compilation of victims' testimonies. Retaliation was extremely violent, as men kidnapped without being found guilty were atrociously tortured before being burnt and thrown out of helicopters. This was not an exceptional fact, but rather a common practice of which no one would speak. The collaboration between the regular forces and the death squads should be highlighted in this example. We outline in an annex to this document three examples of this form of massacre committed in 1994¹².

Former president Zeroual himself acknowledged the existence of death squads. In 2001, the press reported what he allegedly told a key politician:

Death squads have existed. They killed. They still enjoy impunity. The confession is hard. Very hard. It comes from the former president Liamine Zeroual. According to Louisa Hanoun, the former Head of State acknowledged in the course of an official meeting the existence of death squads active in Algeria in the 1990s. Zeroual declared that those groups were not 'institutional', were not under the authority of official structures but were linked to 'interest groups' more difficult to identify¹³.

¹⁰ Salah-Eddine SIDHOUM, *Chronologie des massacres en Algérie (1994-2002)*, Algeria-Watch, http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/2002/bilan_massacres.htm.

¹¹ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

¹² See annex 1. These three examples are summaries of testimonies collected by the Algerian Committee of Free Human Dignity and Human Rights Activists, published in *Livre blanc de la répression (1991-1994)*, volume 1, *op. cit.*, p. 77-84.

¹³ *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, 6 December 2001.

The former lieutenant-colonel Mohammed Samraoui confirms however that some of these formations were directly linked to the structures of the DRS. He reported a discussion he had with the head of the Main Military Investigation Centre (CPMI), under the responsibility of the Central Army Security Directorate (Direction centrale de la sécurité de l'armée, DCSA, one of the main branches of the DRS). The centre is located in Ben-Aknoun in the suburbs of Algiers (directed from 1990 to 2001 by Colonel Athmane Tartag, aka 'Bachir', who was promoted to a general in 2003).

In the course of my conversation with Lieutenant-Colonel Tartag, I have learned that since the beginning of 1992 he constituted, on the order of colonel Kamel Abderrahmane [then head of the DCS, Ed.], a 'commando' unit called 'action unit' which would not only be charged of executing the suspects but also of terrorising Islamists' families in areas considered as their fiefdom. In his words, 'he destroyed the support to fundamentalists who ought not to find refuge with their parents anymore'.

This unit was composed of several groups of six to ten elements wearing 'Afghan' clothes and sporting ten day-long beards. In the middle of the night they would drive in unmarked civilian cars to 'Islamist' districts such as Cheraba, Les Eucalyptus, Sidi-Moussa, Meftah etc. targeting the precise families of the wanted Islamists. They knocked on the door shouting "open up, we are *mujaheddin*". As soon as the door opened, all the occupants would be slaughtered. The day after, the national daily newspapers would attribute those crimes to the Islamists or to the fratricidal war splitting their group. In 1993 and 1994, ten to forty victims would be killed daily by those acts¹⁴.

As Samraoui very well describes it, these shadowy groups no longer claimed responsibility for their massacres and hundreds of victims were killed by their guns or knives, as they told survivors they were Islamists. They appeared wearing 'Mujaheddin' clothes and head bands with the colours of Islam and introduced themselves as 'brothers'. In fact, this fictitious change of identity allowed them to liquidate the suspects while at the same time breaking the martyr-villagers solidarity with the rebellion through terror. Most importantly, these massacres attributed to the Islamists struck the imagination of the West, ready to believe the official Algerian version spread by the civilian supporters of the ruling junta which bombarded the public opinion of the countries they visited.

The Islamist armed groups

An armed rebellion became organised from 1993 in several mountainous regions very difficult to access by regular troops: in Mount Chréa, in the region of Algiers, in the Western Ouarsenis Mountains and in those of the Eastern Aurès. Some groups also became active in cities, with a preference for working-class areas including in Algiers where they benefited from strong support. In the Northern region, different groups delivered strong blows against the army, State properties and civil servants. The media never reported them to avoid undermining the troops' morale, and for this reason the confrontations and losses on either side went unknown. It seemed that the years 1993-1994 were the hardest for the army, but it regained ground from 1995. This was acknowledged by a general in an anonymous interview in 1998:

The worst period was the spring of 1994, when the GIA and to a lesser extent the AIS took the initiative in several zones by attacking economic and military targets. They would loot everything, arson factories and warehouses, sabotage roads, railway tracks and electric networks. They also managed to divert planes and trains, to rob banks and even to temporarily seize control of some villages. At some point in time, parts of the national territory had become no-go zones for most citizens. At the time the terrorists benefited from a tremendous recruitment capacity. Around 500 young men – and some young women – would be enrolled every week. But starting 1995 the wind of

¹⁴ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang*, op. cit. p. 199-200.

change definitely started to blow. We totally cleared the zones surrounding sensitive targets, as a result armed groups became incapable of attacking any important economic or military installation¹⁵.

For the armed groups claiming to have their roots in Islam, violence was unleashed from 1994-1995. The deaths had so far been the result of strict political and religious conditioning following the *Chari'a* promulgated by local chiefs without deep religious knowledge. Alternatively, murders were the consequence of sanctions on those who did not respect 'norms' and taboos. However, from the end of 1994, killings started to move into a logic of terror which was becoming less and less 'understandable'. The population of pro-Islamist areas supporting armed opponent materially became victims of massacres claimed by the GIA (Armed Islamic group). They were not State agents, soldiers or militiamen anymore, but civilians whose 'mistake' had been to read a newspaper, not to take down their satellite dish or not to wear the *hijab*. The reason was often unknown. These massacres stood out by their cruelty: throat slitting, mutilations, dismemberment etc.

Nesroulah Yous clearly remembers the transition from an atmosphere which could be qualified as resistance against the state power to one where terror gradually set in, forcing many to flee to supposedly safer locations and leaving those who did not have this chance or who did not want to abandon their houses in even greater isolation. At the same time, the army started abandoning the areas, leaving the villagers at the mercy of armed groups increasingly composed of strangers.

We understood less and less what was going on. From mid-1994 armed groups ruled without respect for any law. The GIA attacked families, young people and imposed taboos leading to aberrant behaviours. [...] Every other day we discovered bodies, including of young girls. They were sometimes hung to a post or tied up with metal wires, sliced to pieces or beheaded. There seemed to be no limit to horror and this explosion of barbaric acts was totally incomprehensible to us¹⁶.

Another witness living in another suburb of Algiers, Saoula, had exactly the same experience, as if the scheme took place in several locations, at least in the first military region (the region of Algiers):

The political landscape completely changed in the years 1994-1995. Men who took up arms were less and less familiar to us. We did not know what had become of the FIS members from our region who were acting clandestinely. Some went underground, others were declared killed, arrested or missing. More and more people died for reasons unknown to us. Killings were becoming of an increasingly arbitrary character¹⁷.

From this moment, everyday life became a great achievement. While women hid inside their homes, only leaving them when they worked, men and children prayed to come back alive after each movement. The roads in those suburbs were controlled by the armed groups. The rare buses transporting passengers were often stopped for hours, while those armed men carried out their controls. The 'suspects' – a suspect being for instance a person having done military service – were liquidated. The journey was good when there was no killing.

In the autumn of 1994, Amnesty International released an alarming report on the horror Algerians faced daily:

Thousands of lives have been lost already, and the killings continue. In many cases it is impossible to know with certainty who carried out the killings and why. The bodies of the victims have often been burned or mutilated, sometimes in front of their families. Victims, including children, have had their throats slit, and their heads severed from their bodies; other have been

¹⁵ Interview with General X, "Algérie: les grands cimenterres sous la lune", *Politique Internationale*, spring 1998.

¹⁶ Nesroulah YOUS, *Qui a tué à Bentelha?*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁷ MILOUD, "Un quartier sombre dans la terreur", testimony collected by Algeria-Watch in 1997, <http://www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/aw/awtermiloud.htm>.

viciously maimed by having their genitals and limbs severed. Both armed groups and members of the security forces are believed to be responsible for such brutalities.¹⁸

Ever since the first killings, the difficulty lay in the impossibility of clearly attributing responsibility. Armed group claiming allegiance to Islam uttered general threats against their 'enemies' – with more and more socio-professional groups belonging to this category– but they rarely claimed responsibility for the killings committed.

Violence gradually increased: next to targeted killings, the horror of bombing started in 1995 and reached its peak in 1996. Hundreds of people were victims of bomb attacks on buses, markets and trains. For months on end, children were not sent to school either because their parents did not know how to bring them there or because they were afraid a terrorist attack would take place on the way or that the school would be destroyed by a bomb. During this period, which ran from 1994 to 1996, hundreds of school buildings, factories, shops, administrative buildings etc. were destroyed by armed groups.

What was considered extremely puzzling was the fact that massacres did not stop when the army took over control of the security situation. On the contrary, they increased in number and power.

The anti-Islamist militias¹⁹

As early as 1993, some voices within and around the ruling powers began to demand that civilian populations be armed against Islamist armed groups. After some reluctance, those who advocated the engagement of the civilian population in the conflict imposed their ideas and militias were slowly constituted from March 1994, under the command of the gendarmerie and with the active involvement of former *mujahedin* (veterans from the liberation war). The function of these militias was to protect villages and their populations from the incursions of armed groups (defensive character) and to accompany the army in its combing operations through field reconnaissance. Rather quickly, however, these new formations went beyond these notions to become a back-up to the army; many persons enrolled full-time on high salaries (clearly above the minimum wage) or other benefits. But the recruitment of these militias was carefully selective: the ruling power had to ascertain these armed men's loyalty, which very often they first had to pay for with their blood. From 1996, the army put increased pressure on civilian populations to enrol in militias, forcing them to take positions in the conflict which opposed the State and the insurgents.

The historian Benjamin Stora noted that:

From 1996, the nature of the violence changed. This change was directly linked to the mass gathering of farmer militias in a self-defence system against the Islamist underground movement. Privatisation of the war took place. From then on, the conflict turned into a terrifying barbarian rounding of villagers, be they militias or pro-Islamists. It is striking to note the number of assailants who were often over 100 for a single village. Entire families were exterminated in a terrifying vendetta²⁰.

In order to arm the civilian populations, the military did not hesitate to resort to methods typically linked to wars of subversion such as those described to a journalist by an army defector:

My uncle was living in the region of Jijel, a region of woodlands which had already protected terrorists in the past. The army, under the command of general Boughaba, came to his village and summoned them to take up arms to defend themselves against terrorists. The problem was that by

¹⁸ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, Algeria, Repression and violence must end, 25 October 1994.

¹⁹ See the report by ALGERIA-WATCH and Salah-Eddine SIDHOUM, *Les milices dans la nouvelle guerre d'Algérie*, December 2003 < http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/mrv/mrvmili/aw_ses_milices_1.htm.

²⁰ *L'Express*, 22 August 1997.

accepting they would take the regime's side, which they did not want, and would become a target of the terrorists.

My uncle said he would think about it, but eventually he refused this proposal. The army isolated the village for two weeks. No supplies and no vehicle were authorised to enter and the villagers' identity documents were seized. Pressure went up a level. The army demanded that people take a decision. My uncle and others tried to resist this pressure.

And one night, 14 persons were slaughtered. The next morning, each one made up their mind. Some took up arms, other fled for the city. "Who, then, killed these 14 people?" The army did. They did it to terrorise people and pull them to their side. General Boughaba has now been transferred to Algiers to do the same job²¹.

Officially – as we can now see clearly – it was the 'terrorists' who attacked the village. The number of massacres committed in the villages which refused to form militias is important. However, this kind of reprisals did not only aim at forcibly rallying the population and isolating the rebellion, but also to spare the army a 'dirty job' which was from then on accomplished by residents of dissident villages or areas themselves. These militias increasingly targeted the families of those who went underground to terrorise them, take revenge or force members of the resistance to surrender.

In some places these groups developed into genuine small private armies, ruling over entire regions, terrorising the population and enthusiastically resorting to massacres themselves to establish their power or claim the region's resources. For instance, several cases of 'warlords' have been presented by human rights defenders or their victims. In the region of Rélizane, two DEC (Local Executive Directors, mayors designated by the ruling power) Hadj fergane and Mohamed Abed laid down the law for several years. The Algerian League for Human Rights wrote in 1992 on this subject:

In March 1994, Hadj Fergane organised a clandestine paramilitary group dubbed G.A.T. (Anti-terrorist Armed Group). This death commando was placed under direct control of DRS officials at Rélizane's wilaya. G.A.T. sent hundreds of threatening letters to citizens, followed by indiscriminate attacks against suspected FIS sympathizers. From July 1994 abductions followed by disappearances began as well as large scale killings. [...]

The 1995 attack against Abed Mohammed's son, the DEC of the town of Djédioua, led to a collective massacre. Twelve persons were killed at night at their doorsteps by militiamen directed by Hadj Fergane. DEC of the town of Rélizane, identified by the families of the victims who lodged complaints with the Interior ministry, and by General Bekkouche, commander of the second military region.²²

Due to the severity of the acts committed by the militias against families of Islamist members of the resistance, organised attacks against those close to the militiamen were perpetrated in retaliation. For example, on 15 July 2002 the killing by an armed group of "seven persons including a militiaman's family (Bendouia Larbi) composed of 5 persons (father, mother and three children) took place in Ouled Allel, near Boukadir (Chlef)"²³.

1995-1996: The army gains the upper hand with the help from the GIA, and the massacres intensify

As already noted, Islamists who had taken root in the populations of the Mitidja Plains were being decimated from 1994 and particularly in 1995, and gave way to groups hardly identified

²¹ John SWEENEY, "We know how to deal with the bully of Baghdad (just follow Clinton). It's Algeria that will really test Cook's ethical policy", *The Observer*, 18 janvier 1998.

²² Statement from LADDH of 6 January 2002.

²³ Salah-Eddine SIDHOUM, ALGERIA-WATCH, *Chronologie des massacres (1994-2002)*, < http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/2002/bilan_massacres.htm >.

which spread fear and death using the name of Islam. One group stood out among the other: the GIA (Armed Islamic Group). Widely infiltrated by DRS agents, it attacked populations suspected of supporting a rebellion of autonomous local groups²⁴. Parallel to the redeployment of the military, which regained ground from 1994 thanks to military funding and finally gained total control of the plains and cities from 1996, the GIA (or GIAs) targeted villagers armed groups which it placed under its thumb.

People started talking about the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) and Hijra wa takfir (Exile and Redemption). Most of them were not originally from our region, but some who we knew as criminals who never had any interest in religious issues, pretended to lead a struggle in the name of religion. The population distanced itself from those persons. However, armed men dominated the region by organising road blocks, letting some go through, requesting the payment of a fine from others and executing the most unlucky of them. They had with them lists of names among which those of young men who had just completed their military service or who were about to do it. They would take them from their homes and liquidate them. The members of these armed groups were able to move around freely despite the proximity of the gendarmerie and military quarters²⁵.

This latter point was highlighted by many observers: some kind of burden-sharing was carried out for a period of time in those areas over which the army had regained control. The army would control these regions during the day, while armed groups seemed to enjoy total freedom at night. Besides, witnesses reported facts that clearly showed that the two supposedly opposed parties really fitted into the same strategy. Miloud reported his experience in a remote suburb of Algiers:

When GIA members were controlling our district, the security forces had miraculously disappeared. But at certain times of the day, one could notice the presence of gendarmes and soldiers. The head of the gendarmerie for example would move freely in the streets and did not appear to be threatened by insecurity. However, combing operations often took place. They were not directed against GIA members but rather against us, the young people of the district. Two of my friends were arrested by gendarmes. Fearing that they would come for me, I often changed place of residence.

The GIA members showed me and my friends a list of eleven names of persons who they ordered to join the underground resistance. Mine was written down. This happened at the end of 1994. We were often wondering whether the gendarmerie and GIA were collaborating: One group would terrorise us in order to force us to join the resistance, while the other tracked us down to lock us up in torture centres. We understood less and less what was unravelling in front of our eyes, but we all had the unpleasant premonition that there was a link between all this.

Nesroulah Yous confirmed this very impression in the district of Haï el-Djilali in Bentalha:

From the beginning of 1996, the military carried out rounds in our areas in trucks or Land Rovers, at different times but always during the day. They were carrying out combing operations in Haï el-Djilali, during which they would pull young people out of their houses and gather them in the stadium the entire day, before picking a few to take with them. Most of them disappeared. This kind of roundup took place three times in 1996 in Bentalha, and most of the victims were young people from the '200 housing' district. At the beginning of 1997, soldiers even dared to come out of their barracks on foot to carry out those controls. They were generally between twenty and thirty trying to get close to the population which was tired of the armed groups' incursions. They would then advise civilians to get armed.

We always had the feeling that what mattered for the army was not to track down the armed groups, but to identify and dismantle support networks. They were some low scale skirmishes with the groups but nothing very serious²⁶. [...]

Parallel to this military deployment, we had the feeling that a radical change was happening with the armed groups. The 'terros' we knew were eliminated by the army or during internal conflicts and the new recruits, unknown to the population, seemed to benefit from the army's leniency. From the

²⁴ Salima MELLAH, *Algerian Islamist Movement between Autonomy and Manipulation*
http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_en/islamist_movement.pdf

²⁵ Testimony of MILOUD, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Nesroulah YOUS, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?*, *op. cit.*, p. 108-109.

autumn of 1996 the GIA would *de facto* not venture into Bentalha anymore: there were no roadblocks and gunmen would not come to get supplies there anymore. Of course, they still carried out attacks and led incursions into our areas, but the situation had changed considerably. The atmosphere started to become less tensed with the end of the daily presence of those groups. Strangely however, in the greater Algiers and in its centre, we were more and more affected by bombs or armed attacks²⁷.

The massacres committed by the GIA affected different sections of the population and all but spared those sympathetic to the armed resistance and the combatants' families in particular. For instance, on 31 January 1997 in Ktiten, in the region of Médéa, 31 relatives of Ali Benhadjar, chief of a local group which had broken links with the GIA, the Islamic league for Daawa and Djihad (LIDD). It should be note that the population of this region had for a long time refused to form militias.

From 1996, the regions with the strongest rebel presence became the target of attacks by unidentified armed groups presented in the Algerian media and their French and Western relays as Islamists, generally from the GIA. Fighting between armed factions thought to have been at the source of civilians massacres also took place. Population displacement on a truly considerable scale followed (comparable to a large extent to the forced displacement imposed by the French army in the war of independence). Hundreds of thousands of civilians from affected regions ran away from the 'throat cutters' and fled towards the city in 1996 and 1997. They crammed up in slums in appalling conditions²⁸.

The army regained total control of the greater Algiers region, the Mitidja Plain and as far as the mountains south of Médéa in the course of 1996. However, 1997 was to be the bloodiest year: from the beginning of the year there was not one day without a massacre being perpetrated. The most affected *wilayat* were first Algiers (the South-West) then the neighbouring ones (Blida, Boumerdès, Bouira, Tipaza) and those of Médéa, Aïn-Defla, Djelfa and Biskra. A great number of these massacres thus happened in the first military region which had the highest concentration of soldiers and military structures.

In the first part of the year, these massacres killed almost invariably between 10 and 40 victims, as shown by the frightful '(non exhaustive) list of massacres for the year 1997' drawn up by Dr. Salah-Eddine Sidhoum, reproduced in **annex 2**. It is *positively imperative* to read this rigorously drawn-up 'list' to attempt to get a close sense of the absolute horror of these repeated massacres, hitting indiscriminately the elderly, women, men and children: inhumanity unleashed beyond all apparent comprehension but responding, as we shall see, to the perverse rationality of a handful of military 'decision makers'.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113-114.

²⁸ These movements went virtually unreported in the press, so much so that several observers considered this 'discretion' as being precisely one of the objectives of the military power. By entrusting the 'Islamist groups' they controlled with the task of forcing tens of thousands of families to flee from their home regions through massacres and terror, the decision makers allegedly implemented one of the classic measures of a 'subversive war' without attracting such criticism as the French army for its 'grouping camps' during the war of independence, as sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad recalled: "Of all the upheavals experienced by the rural society between 1955 and 1962, those determined by population grouping were undoubtedly the deepest and those with the most consequences in the long run" (Pierre BOURDIEU and Abdelmalek SAYAD, *Le Déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie*, Minuit, Paris, 1964).

The total number of persons displaced by the war which started in 1992 is estimated, depending on the source, to be between 1 and 1.5 million. For an overview of available sources, see: NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL/GLOBAL IDP PROJECT, *Algérie, Plus d'un million de déplacés internes sont ignorés par la communauté internationale*, www.idpproject.org, 5 mars 2004.

The 'great massacres' of the summer of 1997

Hundreds of families left their mountains from the end of 1996 to find refuge with relatives in the plains or around towns in makeshift camps. In areas like Bentalha or Rais, which were to experience the most horrible massacres of the war a few months later, many refugees from the Medea region (Tablat, Beni Slimane...) settled in empty houses abandoned by their occupants who had also fled the insecurity which had prevailed in the past years. This temporary settlement was authorised by the army which registered the names of the newcomers. Moreover, the houses occupied by the fleeing families were marked with a cross (a means for the military, through the threat of destruction of inhabited buildings, to force the owners to come back or procure tenants)²⁹.

Throughout the months of 1997, the almost daily massacres came closer to the capital, accelerating the waves of exodus towards the city. The massacres reached Algiers' suburbs in the summer. Schools, public squares and administrations were besieged by thousands of people who did not know where to go anymore. Some of them were fleeing for the second or third time. Those who stayed in their areas collected everything they could use to prevent massacres and defend themselves: lamps and sirens were installed, roofs were loaded with projectiles including Molotov cocktails. Meanwhile men continuously asked the army to provide them with some weapons to retaliate in case of an attack, although unsuccessfully.

Armed groups seemed to come from nowhere and return to nowhere, committing massacres in total impunity in the meantime. Arresting the assailants, increasingly presented by rumours as invincible monsters, was never considered. Panicked and traumatised residents could no longer live anything like a normal life: children were not going to school, families gathered at relative's places, changed homes everyday and wondered what the army was doing, as the latter still stationed 100,000 soldiers in the region, by far the most populated of the country and smaller than a French department.

Then, on 28 August 1997 in the area of **Ar-Raïs**, in the town of Sidi-Moussa (around 25 km from Algiers) horror took place: dozens of assailants arrived in trucks, killed close to 300 people and injured over 200 in a five-hour-long carnage (while the official death toll stood at 38!). The soldiers alerted and posted less than five minutes away from the village did not intervene and went so far as to prevent the survivors from fleeing. It was an immense shock, not only in the area and its surroundings. Question poured in from everywhere: How could a massacre of such scale occur on the gates of Algiers? Where did the assailants go? What did the military do? Why those massacres?

Unfortunately, this was not the only massacre which killed so many victims. A few days later, in the night from 5 to 6 September, in the working-class area of **Sidi-Youcef** in Béni-Messous (Algiers) between 70 and 150 citizen (depending on the sources) were killed by gunmen who came in trucks, some of them wearing military attire. It is of note that the massacre took place a few hundred meters away from the presidential guard's headquarters and a few minutes away from the DRS barracks, in the heart of the most militarised zone in the country with no less than fifteen barracks located in a few square kilometres.

In the night from 22 to 23 September the area of **Bentalha** (commune of Baraki) in Algiers' eastern suburbs was the victim of an attack by several dozens assailants. The residents had prepared for weeks and were organising guard duties and begged the army to provide them with weapons and set up an army station in the centre of the area, all to no avail. Officially, 85 citizens were killed, while survivors and hospital sources spoke of about 400 killed and 120 wounded. There too, trucks were used to transport the armed men who proceeded in a very systematic way searching for precise individuals. As the map published in the testimony of Nesroulah Yous proves, the military, the commune's security guards and the gendarmes' stations were very near, in places where they could not have failed to hear and see that an attack was taking place a few hundred meters away. Besides,

²⁹ Nesroulah YOUS, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?*, op. cit., p. 119-120.

soldiers first moved close to the area with six armoured vehicles, but did not enter it and even prevented people fleeing and rescuers coming in. Moreover, a helicopter flew over the site in circles all night and security forces even installed spotlights illuminating the crime scene! The day after, the dead were buried hastily, some graves containing several bodies, which made the identification of the victims very difficult.

The national and international press was alarmed and came to the site of the massacres. It was very difficult for journalists, surrounded by security forces, to collect survivors' testimonies. Nevertheless we have at our disposal the very detailed testimony of Nesroulah Yous, which not only describes in an extremely detailed fashion the massacre itself, but also the period preceding it, and which can only lead to the conclusion that this attack had been 'announced' and that the army which was omnipresent in the region did absolutely nothing to protect the residents. We will come back at a later stage to this massacre, as to which a number of comments can be made supported by the testimonies of other massacres survivors.

A fact scandalous in itself and which reveals the absurdity of the official version, is that the exact number of those massacres' victims was never known. The authorities tended to minimise the result of the massacres, while at the beginning of September 1997 "in private, a high ranking Algerian military official estimated the death toll of the recent massacres to be of around 5,000³⁰". One has to say that many of the "killings were not made public. Like the one in Tixerane, 30 km away from Algiers. About fifty victims, according to the doctors".

The nightmare however was not ending. The residents of Algiers' suburbs, close or distant, justifiably panicked as endless rumours of attacks spread around the areas, which were sometimes unfortunately followed by assaults by unidentified men carrying manual weapons and firearms who killed, looted and abducted women. Indeed, in each massacre women were kidnapped and later found dead after having been raped.

And then sorrow struck a distant region: on 30 December 1997, the first day of Ramadan, three villages, Kherarba, Ouled-Sahnine and Ouled-Tayeb in the region of **Relizane**, were the target of bloodthirsty hordes which killed 386 citizens, including women and children (some sources giving higher figures). These groups struck again a few days later on 4 January 1998 and killed over 300 people in three other villages of the region, Meknassa, Souk El-Had and Had-Chekala. The region was in turmoil, with hundreds of families leaving their isolated homes to escape the killers, abandoning their belongings, land and houses to take refuge in towns, the luckiest with relatives and the others in makeshift camps.

But peace had not returned to the region of Algiers since on 11 January death smote the village of **Sidi-Hammed**, located between Bougara et Meftah, at the gates of Algiers. AFP reported 120 killed, the official toll was of 103. Here too, various military structures were located close to the area.

Throughout 1998, the massacres continued. The number killed was not several hundreds anymore as it was in the second half of 1997 and at the beginning of 1998 and they affected villages more distant from Algiers (Médéa, Aïn-Defla, Chlef) or in the west (Tlemcen, Tiaret...), But 15 to 50 people were still killed each time.

Only in 1999 did the number of massacres and victims decrease, although it did not stop. Up to this point (spring 2004), massacres continue to be perpetrated (see annex 6) but unlike in the years 1994-1998, they are only the subject of very short articles in national newspapers and appear only very rarely in the international press. This is why the request for an independent international commission of enquiry, which was expressed very strongly from 1997, remains wholly relevant today as a means to throw light on both past massacres and on those, since 1999, which mark the period described as 'civil concord' during which the return to security was officially declared.

³⁰ *Le Canard enchaîné*, 10 September 1997.

The reasons behind these killings had already been difficult to grasp in the past years (the most likely explanations are detailed below), but for the crimes committed from 2000 to 2004, explanations are even less easy to find. This also goes for the identity of the attackers who made no credible claims and who were invariably described in the Algerian press in the absence of verifiable sources as 'Islamist terrorists'. The authorities have not carried out any serious investigation into their identity and in practice those crimes continued to be committed in a guilty indifference of Algerian government as much as of the international community.

For all that, it would be completely wrong to admit that in the proven absence of investigations meeting the standards of international law, getting closer to the truth as to the authors of the past and present massacres would be impossible. By analyzing in a rigorous manner and without complacency the testimonies available (below, part II) and by placing those massacres in the political context of the period (part III) one can, as when gathering the pieces of a (not wholly) incomplete puzzle eliminate some hypotheses without leaving room for dispute (which obviously belong to pure disinformation) and confirm others accompanied by a very high probability rate (which only truly independent judicial investigations can fully confirm, especially regarding those directly and indirectly responsible for those crimes).

II. Survivors' testimonies

While many testimonies on enforced disappearances or torture are available to human rights organisations, those are clearly rarer when it comes to massacres. It is indeed extremely difficult and dangerous to investigate on the ground. The residents of martyr areas are still doubly traumatised years later. The violence incurred and the loss of loved ones is already very difficult to overcome, and not being able to freely talk about it increases their feelings of powerlessness and injustice. Survivors of massacres were conditioned by an omnipresent propaganda and indoctrinated by DRS agents who imposed on them one version of the facts (using force and shady deals when necessary). How can one not be tempted to accept the designated culprits to try to understand the unimaginable and the incomprehensible?

Those who in the wake of the massacres tried to gather survivors testimonies were repressed. For instance, the author of an article published in the Algerian daily *El Watan* was interrogated at length by the police: he had denounced the security forces' passivity even as they had been alerted by the local residents during the massacre of Béni-Messous³¹. The surviving witnesses for their part were put under tremendous pressure: they were threatened while at the same time being offered material benefits. After the publication in France of the testimony of Nesroulah Yous on the Bentalha massacre in October 2000, the DRS launched a campaign, mainly using its supporters in the 'independent' press, to discredit him, notably through other survivors.

The ruling powers as well as a great part of the private press attributed responsibility for the massacres exclusively to 'Islamist terrorists'. However all the elements which a number of human rights defenders were able to gather clearly shows that this is far from being obvious. At the end of 1997, Amnesty International noted in its report written at the very time the massacres were taking place:

The massacres fall within a pattern whereby large groups of men have been able to come from their supposed hiding places in the mountains and forests into the villages, which often entails crossing main roads, carry out killings lasting several hours, and leave to return - undisturbed - to their hiding places. The sound of gunfire and bomb explosions, the screams of the victims, and the flames and smoke of the houses on fire are audible and visible from a distance.

The lack of response by security services to calls by residents alerting them to night-time attacks taking place is not new. Over the past three years scores of individuals have reported to Amnesty International that the security forces had either not responded or refused to intervene when they had called at night, either by telephone or in person, to report attacks on their homes, killings of their relatives, attacks on neighbours, or shootouts. Daytime roadblocks, checkpoints and patrols are withdrawn at night, when the population is most vulnerable to attacks and when massacres are committed. The army and security forces usually do not come to the site until several hours after the massacres, and often not until the following morning. The reason most frequently cited in the past for their lack of response is the security forces' fear of being trapped by a false alert and ambushed. Understandably it may often not be possible for them to intervene in time to stop individual attacks, which tend to happen very quickly, or to arrest the attackers, who may easily hide and escape. However, the situation of massacres is fundamentally different in so far as the massacres often last for several hours, during which nearby security forces should have ample time to intervene to stop the massacres and to apprehend the attackers, who up to now have always been able to leave undisturbed.³²

³¹ *Le Figaro*, 9 September 1997.

³² Amnesty International, Civilian population caught in a spiral of violence. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGMDE280231997>

The massacre of Ar-Raïs, 28 August 1997

Testimony or Mrs. Bachiri, survivor.

Mrs. Bachiri³³ lost sixteen family members. She testified before members of the Algerian League for the Defence or Human Rights (LADDH) :

Q: Mrs Bachiri, what can you tell us about the Raïs massacre?

A: What can I tell you ? During the Raïs massacre, sixteen of my brothers, my milk brothers, were killed. One of them was seventy-five year old. He participated in the war of liberation. Seven of his children were [killed along] with him. His daughter came to visit them on that day. They were having a party, a marriage ceremony, one of the girls in the family was getting married. I was there, I was present... not when the massacre took place, no... the massacre occurred after I had left. So his guests [i.e. daughter, her husband and children] were staying overnight with him...

Q: What is his name? I mean your brother's name?

A: The eldest is Guennouche Amara. The other brother, the younger one, was sixty years old. He was blind. He was born blind.

Q: Was he killed too?

A: Yes, they slaughtered him along with his seven children. They slit their throats. He is blind the poor guy... a blind man... what could he have done to deserve this? He is married to a lady who is not totally fit mentally. She gave him two sons and two daughters. The sons were dragged outside with their father and had their throats slit, whereas the daughters were taken away. One was twenty-eight years old, the other was twenty-four.

As for Amara, they first called him out, he said: 'why would they want to kill me? What did I do? They should go and sort out the patriots.' He acts both as an imam and caretaker for the local mosque. They told him: 'come out, we want a word with you'. When he came out they were there... with military uniforms and toting their guns. There were a few women with them. The women were wearing the hijab over a military uniform.

One of the soldiers cut the finger of one of Amara's daughters and said to his colleague: 'take the gold, take the gold'. Amara's 2-year-old granddaughter was found burnt in the oven. His old daughter [the guest], was slaughtered too... she was lying on the ground... they put one of her sons on her right arm, another son on the left arm and they shouted 'Allah Akfar'... We say: Allah Akbar [Allah is the Greatest] but they were saying 'Allah Akfar' [Allah is the worst of the unbelievers]. They came in cars, in Landrovers... People who stayed at home were slaughtered, and those who went out were shot dead.

My sister lives nearby. Her young son saw exactly what happened. He hid under a metallic sheet and saw what happened.

Q: How old is he?

A: He is about nine years old. He said they wore military uniforms. Their heads were covered with turbans, similar to those worn by the Touaregs. Their faces were covered. The soldiers were on standby nearby. In fact, the army unit was stationed near the mosque. So were did these killers come from? How could they go through the military unit near the mosque?

Q: So did they kill both of your brothers and their families?

A: Yes, they slaughtered both my brothers and their children. My brothers had seven each. A total of sixteen...

Q: What about the house?

A: They burnt it...

We are puzzled... Why would anyone want to kill this family? They are not involved in anything. Their son in law, who was there on a visit, escaped miraculously. His wife helped him to get to the loft so that he could see what was happening. By the time he made it to the loft they [the killers] were

³³ "Voices of the voiceless", in Youcef BEDJAOUI, Abbas ARROUA, Meziane AIT-LARBI, *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, op. cit., p. 212 sq.

already inside the house. He could see everything, including the killing of his wife and children, but could not utter a word. What can he say? What can he say now If he says anything the soldiers will take him away and get rid of him...

Other people who saw what happened cannot talk either. They fear the army's reprisal. They say that if they mention anything the soldiers will come back and take them away and they will disappear.

The government says that my brothers (and their families) are victims of terrorism. What terrorists are they talking about? They say it is the Islamists... Are they Muslims those who kill other fellow Muslims? And how come my brothers were slaughtered, the victims of terrorism [we are told], and my children were put in jail and they disappeared!?

Who is doing this? The cows, sheep were killed. Even a donkey was not spared.

[...]

Lady X interrupts again:

I was at a function once and a policewoman was whispering to her friend sitting beside her. She was talking about one of the massacres that took place in the region of Zeralda (in the District of Tipaza). She told her that after the killers had slit the throats of their victims, they started bashing the houses with their heavy lorries. Her friend asked: 'How can the terrorists acquire such huge lorries?' The policewoman signalled her to keep quiet. I was going to speak then I thought I'd better not.

Testimony of another witness³⁴

Another woman who survived the same killings testified before an association based in Denmark:

My name is C. [...] and I am a native of Raïs. I am married to M. and I live in the heights of Algiers. It is a very dangerous area where some massacres did take place. The press never reported them.

Two days before the massacre I told my husband that I wanted to visit my parents, brothers and sisters in Raïs. I took with me my daughter M. Neither I, nor my parents, nor anyone thought that one day Raïs would be attacked and that its inhabitants would be massacred, especially since it is surrounded by the military and barracks.

On the night of the massacre all seemed quiet. Suddenly we heard shouts and screams, and then the hail of bullets. My father and my brother opened the door to find out what was happening in the village There was panic. There were many armed people running in all directions. It was dark. The village was being attacked from all sides. My father closed the door. It was panic at home. The others were thinking of running away but I was thinking about my daughter.

People were shouting from everywhere so that the military close to the village might hear. Unfortunately, although the sound of the hail of bullets and the explosions of bombs could be heard 5 kilometres away, no one came to help us.

In the midst of the screams, they smashed the door down and broke the windows. There was quite a number of them. My brother and father tried to defend us but they were beaten to death by axes. My daughter tried to run away but she was caught and slaughtered by two attackers. As for me, I tried to hang on to life but I was beaten with an axe and an iron bar and knocked over. I was hit in the face and was bleeding everywhere, but when I was about to fall down I clung to the beard of my killer. Although he had a long beard and Afghan clothes he was no Muslim for he was cursing God. The other attackers were also insulting God. As I told you, I clung to his beard and it came off. He had a false beard.

I lost consciousness from the beating by my killer. When I woke up, I was in a hospital, surrounded by doctors and nurses. I stayed over a month in the hospital. I am still in a state of shock and traumatised.

That is all I can say because I am still in Algeria and I am afraid for my husband and his family. No one can ensure our safety. The security forces and the military arrived after the ambulance men

³⁴ Source: Association for the Defence of the Victims of the Massacres in Algeria, Copenhagen, in "Voices of the voiceless", *ibid.*, p. 217 sq.

and the firemen, and not a single one of the attackers — they were about a hundred — has yet been caught’.

Bentalha, 22 September 1997

Bentalha, the tale of ten hours of killings³⁵

Contrary to sites of other massacre, many journalists were able to go to Bentalha. But it was impossible for them to move around freely and to collect testimonies without the presence of members of the security forces. In spite of those very strict controls, some survivors dared to give testimonies.

One day, they knew that something was going to happen. Because of very small signs, vans packed with men speeding through the area, strange noises at night. These signs could multiply over a few days. But they knew, everybody knew. People say *“it is going to hit”*. In Bentalha, in the suburbs of Algiers, the atmosphere grew heavy for one week in the middle of September, a resident explained. We will call him Yahia, he took refuge in Brussels since the massacre in which 400 residents out of 2 or 3,000 perished. *“I am not doing politics nor religion. What I am going to tell you, I would not have believed it myself before it happened”*

Behind closed doors *“It hit”* on 22 September between 6 and 7 o’clock PM. *“I saw about fifty men emerge, but others said they were a hundred. They started to break some houses doors all around and sat down at the tables. They got some food served to them and after they had enjoyed it they said: “today is your day”. Then, they massacred everybody. They collected gas bottles in the kitchen to break the next doors, killing each family one after the other”*. Yahia speaks without showing emotion. All of a sudden he stopped, lost in the middle of a sentence. *“What did I just say? Where am I at?”* his eyes are full of tears.

“At around nine o’clock in the evening, women started to shout: “Here comes the army. We are saved”. On the main road, the only one leading to Bentalha, soldiers posted themselves with several small armoured vehicles. They turned on spotlights. We could see them from our houses. They were one kilometre away, not more. But after a while, the military turned their lights off. Policemen and municipal guards from Baraki, the area next to ours, came to offer some help. The army blocked them. The soldiers said that nobody had the right to intervene because the captain was not there and only he could give the order. Ambulances were parked a bit further, also waiting”.

Behind closed doors in Bentalha, fear was at its peak among the residents locked up in their homes. Almost no one had weapons. Some people did request some at the barracks after several massive massacres took place in Algiers’ “green belt”, the string of cities around the capital where a majority of residents had voted for the Salvation Islamic Front (FIS) in the 1991 elections. *“An officer gave them three rifles with five bullets. They got this reply at the Ministry: “When you were feeding terrorists, when you were hosting them you did not come. Now, deal with this”* Yahia added. *That night, we did not even think about fleeing. To go where? Some just gathered in the same house. Everybody was waiting, hoping that the killers would not come as far as their place”*

Hoods. From his terrace, Yahia saw a young attacker panic at the sight of soldiers. *“He was the only one. The others were very calm. The chief told the young man: “Do your job calmly, take your time. They will not intervene”*. What struck Yahia was the extreme organisation of these armed men *“They were robust fellows, dressed in normal clothes. Only some of them were wearing black hoods, others were dressed up as Afghans, with a beard and long hair. Each one was doing his job: one group was in charge of the watch, another one smashed the doors opened, a third one massacred. They killed bit by bit, a leg, an arm, the head. They were rubbing their hands doing this. At times it was like a show. We found in a house a woman kneeling down clutching her two children against her. Neither of the three had their head anymore”* Yahia stopped. He added that the killers also said *“things to people”*: *“but that I cannot repeat”* We had to insist. Yahia, who can talk about death without flinching, became muddled and lowered his eyes. Then he said: *“These are swear words you do not say in front of women”*.

³⁵ Collected by Florence AUBENAS, *Libération*, 23 October 1997.

At around 4 in the morning, the killers started to withdraw. Alerted by the racket, neighbouring families came running through the fields empty-handed to see if they could help their folks. *“There still were some courageous ones”* Yahia said. *One hour later, the armed men left and shouted: “farewell Bentalha, welcome to Baraki (Ed: the neighbouring town). Only then did the army enter”*.

Among the bodies were those of two killers. *“One was dressed like an Afghan, with syringes in his belt. Their accomplices cut both of their heads off and took them away so that they could not be identified”*.

New killers. Six years into the conflict, the area of Bentalha was, sadly, accustomed to violence. *“But until around 1996, it was different”,* the refugee carried on. With the ghost of a smile, he laughed at the fact that he seemed to regret the past massacres compared with the present ones. *“At the beginning, many young people joined the resistance, but they did not hide it. They would sometimes come back at night to eat at their mothers’ place. We knew about things without saying them. Each killing was targeted: policeman, journalist... Sometimes, a whole family was killed, former partisans for example, who had switched side. Now the first waves of recruits are dead. The new killers are different”*.

Yahia said that today, in this area where he and his children grew up, he did not understand anything anymore. Who killed on 22 September? Yahia answered *“We are done for, we are done for, we are done for”* At Bentalha’s cemetery, a man stayed eight days curled up in a ball on the grave of his whole family.

Chronicle of an announced massacre

The most comprehensive testimony on the Bentalha massacre was given to us by Nesroulah Yous, who in his book provides a detailed account, too long to be presented here. It is nevertheless possible to highlight the following points:

- The new soldiers [Ed: stationed for two weeks on the region] banned residents from organising watch rounds.
- A helicopter regularly flew over the area in the nights before the massacre.
- Graves had been dug at the Sidi-Rezine cemetery a few weeks before the massacre.
- In the course of the evening before the massacre, the new soldiers passed by and one of them said: *“They do not know what awaits them”*. The patriots were absent: they had been invited by a captain to Bordj el-Kiffan, an entertainment centre. The communal guards shortened their watch round that night.
- Some residents saw men arrive at dusk and take cover by the orchards. The soldiers who had just finished their round passed by this exact location. Neither side attacks the other.
- The military had just left when the first bombs blew up. Ambulances came and waited along the great boulevard, less than 100 meters away. Soon afterwards came army armoured vehicles which also waited without intervening.
- The attackers arrived in trucks on the path that had been cleared, carrying handmade bombs weighing 30kg designed to break through houses. How could these trucks have later disappeared in such a militarised zone? The local road at this level was almost their station point...
- A helicopter circled over the area where the massacre took place all night.
- The police was also present. A total of three road blocks prevented the neighbours from intervening. Some people who were fleeing had to turn around and throw themselves into the lion’s jaws.
- Four points were attacked that night. The massacre occurred in Haï el-Djilali, in a perimeter containing around one hundred houses.
- The attackers took all their time, had prepared a detailed plan and operated in a systematic way with the help of a list. They only targeted precise houses (those where refugees and people from Tablat and Jijel, famous stronghold of armed opposition, lived) and those where many families took refuge during the same night. They proceeded with three groups, each with its own function – one of being the slaughterers’ group.
- They had all kind of possible uniforms, one even had a long sword, some were wearing fake beards and some had a strong eastern accent (many officers are native from the east). Many were

well trained. They were using extremely blasphemous language, which struck those who heard them. They kept on saying that they have “all the time” and that nobody would intervene.

- About ten attackers were killed during the night, but their associates took away the heads of two of them. The residents never knew who were the men killed. One attacker was even found alive the next day in a confused state. The population never found out what became of him either.
- All of a sudden in the night huge spotlights were switched on for a few minutes and quickly switched off again. This was the only incident which disconcerted the attackers. The day after revealed that the police had installed those lights; but the military who was present outside the area ordered to turn them off.
- Around 200 attackers left the way they came, i.e. through Caïd Gacem, partly in trucks, taking around thirty women with them less than one kilometre away from the place where hundreds of soldiers were stationed.
- In order to justify the army’s inaction during the massacre, officials later mentioned the presence of mines and ‘traps’ (this was argued amongst others by general Khaled Nezzar in his *Mémoires*³⁶, to which we will come back) barring access to the rescuers: this was purely made up; the civilians who forced through the blocks at dawn to help the victims did not find any mine.
- The survivors found syringes and white powder in the streets the next day.
- The military entered the area well after the civilians did. The bodies were taken away quickly; coffins were already at the school and they were buried in different cemeteries in the morning, sometimes several people in the same grave and without means of identification. This is how the number of victims was falsified³⁷.

Parts of these observations can be matched up with those of other massacre survivors. Thus, it is striking that in Bentalha as well as in Raïs, one of the attackers’ targets was the families who had fled from other regions some months before. Messaoud, who survived the Raïs killings, told a journalist that he had left “his house in the Piémont, outside Larbaâ, twenty minutes away from Algiers: the ‘guys’ from the Islamic Salvation Army, AIS, the armed hand of the Islamic Salvation Front, came to tell ‘their’ families “not to stay” because “slaughterers were coming”. So we went to Raïs, Messaoud recalled³⁸”.

The special groups, death squads and other paramilitary entities as well as militias carried out secret operations to eliminate those thought to be in the armed opposition as well as their families and close contacts, according to the principle of “taking the water away from the fish”. From the end of 1996 and especially from 1997, the massacres took another dimension and it is necessary, in order to grasp their character and meaning, to establish a link between these crimes and the political events that shook the country during that period. In fact, it would be necessary to carry out this exercise for the whole period, including the one which since 1999 marks the presidency of Bouteflika, which is presented as the victory over ‘terrorism’ while in reality hundreds, not to say thousands, of people are still massacred every year. In the year 2000, the year of the ‘Civil Concord’, a confidential army report counted 9,000 dead, three quarters of whom were civilians, the residents of remote villages. “Only the particularly shocking massacre in the month of Ramadan of 22 high school students in a boarding school near Médea was acknowledged by the authorities. This was one of the 71 collective killings listed in this report³⁹”.

³⁶ Khaled NEZZAR, *Mémoires du général*, Chihab, Algiers, 1999, p. 82.

³⁷ Extract from the council of Habib Souaïdia’s response to the “Memorandum to the public prosecutor at the Paris Tribunal” July 2002, p.86-87.

³⁸ *La Croix*, 26 September 1997.

³⁹ *Libération*, 5 January 2001.

III. The massacres in the light of political events

We will highlight here some of the major events of the years 1994 to 1998, a period in which massacres started to increase in number to reach a peak in 1997-1998 before decreasing considerably, without however ending altogether. This period corresponds to the presidency of Liamine Zeroual, a retired General, Minister of Defence, who was appointed head of state by the military command on 31 January 1994. He was elected to the post by the presidential elections on 16 November 1995, and resigned in 1998. His successor, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, elected on 15 April 1999, was also placed in this position by the generals, the holders of real power⁴⁰.

1994: Zeroual, a ‘bound’ president

From 1992, two opposing tendencies existed within the political and military junta (even if it should be highlighted that they shared solidarity on one essential point, the preservation of their power). On the one hand, those who organised and hailed the January 1992 putsch and advocated in favour of a ‘total war’ against any real opposition (not limited to Islamist or armed groups) were commonly described as ‘Eradicators’, while the ‘Reconciliators’⁴¹ comprised those who advocated a more political approach while pursuing the same goal of maintaining power.

The tendency labelled ‘reconciliatory’ was that of President Liamine Zeroual, supported by his friend and adviser General Mohammed Betchine and a number of military officials who occupied important posts (military regions commanders, police chief...). This faction by no means considered recognising the FIS but rather advocated in favour of managing the Islamist movement in order to attract, buy and finally marginalize party officials while fighting those reluctant by force. The pro-putsch ‘eradicators’ (often called ‘Janviéristes’ (*note. those of ‘January’*)) were made up of the DRS chiefs – Generals Mohamed Médiène (Head of the DRS), Smaïn Lamari (Head of the DCE, Direction du contre-espionnage, Directorate for Counter-espionage) and Kamel Abderrahmane (Head of the Central Army Security Directorate, Direction centrale de la sécurité de l’Armée, DCSA), the army’s chief of staff since 1993 General Mohamed Lamari, and several men behind the scene: Generals Larbi Belkheir (former Interior Minister and adviser to President Bouteflika since 1999, Belkheir is undoubtedly the government’s mastermind), Mohamed Toutai and Khaled Nezzar (former Defense Minister). From 1990, these men progressively appointed some of their most faithful supporters to all key posts of the army, as well as trusted followers to influential judicial, customs and diplomatic posts.

As we have seen, repression intensified from the spring-summer of 1994 (in particular because of the external support the regime enjoyed and to the allocation of funds to strengthen the human and armed resources of the security forces). The number of disappearances and extrajudicial executions started to spiral upwards. At the same time, individual killings of journalists, trade unionists, politicians, religious leaders and above all of members of the security forces increased. As to the massacres, the public opinion was starting to become concerned about them, even if – as we already noted – they had been being committed since 1992.

⁴⁰ We will use as main sources in order to recreate the events the postscript to the above mentioned testimony book by Nesroulah Yous written by François Gèze and Salima Mellah; and a study published in the above mentioned book *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, entitled “An anatomy of the massacres”, *op. cit.*, p.13-195. We will also use as a basis the chronology of events published in the journal *Maghreb-Machrek* as well as that published by Salah-Eddine Sidhoum, <http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/2002/chrono/chrono_1992.htm>.

⁴¹ Not to be mistaken with the “Dialogists” from the truly democratic opposition (the “Reformists” FLN, LADDH, etc.) who always advocated for dialogue with the FIS’ Islamist opposition, as long as it was ready to accept the democratic rules of conduct and renounce all violence, whatever its source.

The authors of the study “An anatomy of the massacres”⁴² observed three peaks in the number of massacres during 1994. The first one occurred in February, after the nomination of General Liamine Zeroual as President and the announcement of his intention to re-launch a dialogue with the political parties including the FIS (officially dissolved in March 1992). Several republican personalities linked to the army command and to newspapers were quick to respond, launching a campaign in March opposing a dialogue with the FIS members. In parallel, on 21 March, the army’s Chief of Staff Mohamed Lamari received an authority from the Head of State, who was also Defence Minister, to sign “all instruments and decisions, including decrees” within this mandate, while Interior Minister Salim Sadi announced that mandatory enrolment of reservists was made possible to back up the regular forces. It should be recalled that on 10 March around 1,000 detainees escaped from the prison in Tazoult with the help of accomplices within the army, which supposedly led to DRS agents infiltrating the underground resistance. This date is important as it marked the beginning of a change in the composition of the armed groups, which progressively came under the control of the DRS and modified their methods of action, as mentioned above.

The second peak in massacres took place in September 1994 and coincided with the imposition of house arrest on two FIS leaders who had been sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and detained since the end of June 1991. The negotiations initiated between them and the presidency were strongly disputed by the ‘Eradicator’ parties, while three officials from the illegal party were released. On 29 October, Liamine Zeroual declared that the dialogue with FIS had failed and announced shortly afterwards that new presidential elections were to be held before the end of 1995. Meanwhile, the GIA reiterated its motto “Neither reconciliation, nor truce, nor dialogue” when its leader Chérif Gousmi was killed on 26 October.

The third and very pronounced peak occurred in November, and coincided with the opposition parties’ meeting in Rome under the auspices of the Sant’Egidio movement. Officials from parties represented at the December 1991 legislative elections (FLN, FFS, and FIS together with other small parties) met to discuss a way out of the crisis. This initiative was discreetly supported by some governments (including the US’) which urged the Algerian Government to start a dialogue with the whole opposition, including the Islamists. In Algeria, protests by those opposed to dialogue intensified.

1995 opened with two incidents of carnage: a car-bomb exploded on 30 January in one of Algiers’ main avenues, opposite the central police station, and officially killed 42 (in reality the toll was almost 300, according to several witnesses). On 22 February, a massacre was perpetrated inside the prison of Serkadji, killing around 100 detainees⁴³. This took place shortly after the opposition who met in Rome had made public a “Platform on a way out of the crisis” addressed to all parties in the conflict. The international community generally approved this initiative (the Americans as much as the Europeans, including France which was seen to that point as supporting the Algerian generals’ radical position), while the army command and the Eradicators violently rejected it. All events to promote this alternative were repressed and participants were called ‘traitors’. The GIA totally rejected the initiative and threatened to attack France, which it actually did from July 1995.

The nomination of General Liamine Zeroual as President was confirmed by the (notoriously flawed) November 1995 elections. With the help of his adviser General Mohamed Betchine, he

⁴² M. AIT-LARBI, M.S. AÏT-BELKACEM, M.A. NAÏT-REDJAM, Y. SOLTANI, “An anatomy of the massacres”, in Youcef BEDJAOUÏ, Abbas ARROUA, Meziane AIT-LARBI, *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, *op. cit.*, p. 13-195.

⁴³ We cannot expose here the details of this atrocity perpetrated by the military and which killed over 100 persons. We refer the reader to the report written in 1995 by several Algerian organizations: <http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/mrvrap/serkadji.htm>. We would also recall that this was not the only operation carried out to liquidate political prisoners, since another massacre took place in November 1994 at the Berrouaghia prison which killed at least 59. http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/mrv/observatoire/berrouaghia_0.htm >

subsequently tried to expand his power, which disturbed the generals who had plotted the 1992 coup as they had seen Zeroual as a loyal servant who they could use to defend their interests⁴⁴.

1996: “Eradicators” versus ‘Reconciliators’

The subsequent peaks in the number of massacres occurred from the summer of 1996 and steadily increased until the beginning of 1998. A doubling or even quadrupling of the number of massacres was witnessed during this period as compared with 1994, as they coincided with the great massacres in Algier’s suburbs and in the West of the country in the autumn of 1997 and at the beginning of 1998. One characteristic of the massacres committed during this period was the high number of victims of each.

Different key events took place in the wake of the increase in civilian massacres: the abduction in March 1996 of seven French Trappist monks in the monastery of Tibhirine and their murder two months later, as well as the murder of the bishop of Oran, His Lordship Pierre Claverie, on 1 August, the day of the visit of the French Foreign Minister with whom he had met, did not make Zeroual’s task easier. Moreover, the President lost a precious ally in June 1996 when General Saïdi Fodhil, commander of the 4th military region, was killed in a highly suspicious ‘traffic accident’⁴⁵. The massacres intensified in August 1996 as Zeroual initiated negotiations with opposition parties with the view to prepare a ‘national agreement conference’. The FIS was excluded, and the AIS announced it was resuming armed struggle although still being ready to negotiate. However, Zeroual intended to gain ground over his enemies in the military command through the adoption by referendum on 28 November 1996 of a new constitution endowing him with large general prerogatives. He then intended to form a political party in order to be prepared for the communal and legislative elections scheduled in 1997. The relations with France at that time were tense, while those with the US were positive.

At the same time, the government was planning a last-ditch dialogue with the opposition, without however including the FIS; the FIS’ leaders offered to act to end the bloodshed. In the course of November 1996 the massacres reached a record high, which could be linked to the holding of the referendum on the Constitution. The killings took place in areas within the 1st military region, in Médéa, Aïn-Defla, Blida, close to Algiers and supposed to have long been pacified. They led to the exodus of many families who sought refuge in Algiers’ suburbs. Nesroulah Yous witnessed the number of refugees moving in his area. Here is his testimony:

Since the beginning of April in the region of Médéa, famous fiefdom of the AIS, massacres took frightful proportions. Entire families were fleeing, and as we had many neighbours coming from Tablat, we tried to host a few of them. What the refugees told us is unimaginable and terrifying. They did not flee to escape the AIS, on the contrary: it advised them to leave because the ‘slaughterers’ were coming, hordes of shady groups with unidentified commanders. Witnesses said they saw these ‘terrorists’ arrive in helicopters before they did their dirty job. Soldiers pretending to be Islamists were terrorising the population. In Béni-Slimane, fake terrorists forced worshippers out of mosques by groups of five before slaughtering them outside. Such terrifying testimonies did not only come from this region. Throughout the summer, the number of dead and the places affected streamed like a funereal litany; we often met survivors from Thalit, El-Omaria (in the region of Médéa), Aïn-Defla and, closer to home, from Bougara, Baba Ali, Souhane and Béni-Ali where dozens of victims perished under the bullets and the blades of bloody assailants⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ For further details on this period of tensions within the state, see Lounis AGGOUN and Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d’États*, op. cit., especially chapter 24, ‘Zeroual, président élu’, p. 460 sq.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

⁴⁶ Nesroulah YOUS, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?*, op. cit., p.140.

The massacres which occurred in the second part of 1996 should be seen in the context of the negotiations initiated by the AIS with the State around May 1996 through the commander of the 5th military region, General Rabah Boughaba, one of Zeroual's men⁴⁷. It is clearly possible that the DRS felt upset about these dealings with the presidency which could have given an extra hand to the game of the Zeroual/Betchine clan had they been successful. This could explain why massacres began to affect populations closer to the AIS. It should be highlighted that the following negotiations were held with General Smaïn Lamari, who imposed the terms of the agreement with the AIS in October 1997, which were subsequently politically confirmed by Boutéflika in 1999 with the law on the 'civil concord'.

1997: Preparations for the end of Zeroual

It is necessary to recall the fact that the situation of armed groups on the ground evolved considerably between 1994 and the beginning of 1996: the 'historic' GIA had ceased to exist, many factions had left the movement because of its methods, which were rather similar to those of counter-insurrection groups (massacres of Islamist combatants and their families, internal seizure of power in violation of the rules, directives ordering the elimination of whole segments of the populations, etc.) and it had since become mostly controlled by the DRS⁴⁸. Moreover, the army gained control over all of the armed groups' fiefdoms, while the AIS, strongly fought by the GIA, initiated negotiations with the State which would lead to a unilateral cease-fire on 1 October 1997 and to the surrender of arms in 1999.

Thus, in March 1997, Zeroual had formed a political party, the RND (National Democratic Rally) which in 1997 following the legislative elections (marred as usual by massive fraud)⁴⁹ became the main party in Parliament; the Senate also came under Zeroual's control in December of that same year.

In order to sum up the period marked by fierce clan struggle which led to the forced resignation of Zeroual and his clan, we refer to the summary put forward by François Gèze and Salima in the post face of the book *Qui a tué à Bentelha?*:

As the summer of 1997 was approaching the tensions between the two camps got sharper. In the spring already, the DRS' number 2 General Smaïn Lamari discreetly contacted Madani Mazrga, the 'national emir' of the AIS, with a view to by-pass the negotiations initiated between the Presidency of the Republic and the FIS officials. In June the presidential party won the elections as planned and dismissed straight afterwards in July the commander of the gendarmerie Abbas Ghezaiel (an 'Eradicator') to replace him by one of his allies, Tayeb Derraji. But most importantly, the President released two historic leaders of the FIS, Abdelkader Hachani (in June) and Abbassi Madani (in July), which could only annoy the 'Janviéristes'. [...]

The sequence of events reinforces in any case the hypothesis that [the Mitidja massacres] had been planned in advance:

- In the beginning of the summer, some 4,000 members of the Special Forces were deployed in the region, under direct supervision of General Mohamed Lamari;
- In August, the latter instructed all military units not to leave their stationed area under any circumstances in the absence of an express order;

⁴⁷ ICG writes that discussions between the head of the AIS Madani Mezrag and the army had allegedly started in May 1996 and that Smaïn Lamari took control of the process as soon as the first contact was established (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *La Concorde civile : une initiative de paix manquée*, Brussels, 9 July 2001, p.4).

⁴⁸ Salima MELLAH, *Algerian Islamist Movement between Autonomy and Manipulation*
http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_en/islamist_movement.pdf

⁴⁹ The person who was to become its Secretary-General, trade unionist Abdelhak Benhamouda, was assassinated in February 1997. It is public knowledge (in the absence of a credible investigation) that this assassination was committed upon order of the DRS in order to hinder the formation of this party, and which granted president Liamine Zeroual and his clan a little more power.

- 28 August and 7 September: massacres of Raïs and Sidi-Youcef;
- 1 September: Abbassi Madani was placed under house arrest on the ground that he had supposedly welcomed the call for dialogue launched by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan;
- Mid-September: soldiers from the Special Forces started to patrol in Bentalha and demanded the end of watches by residents; by army request graves were dug in the Sidi R'zine cemetery. They were subsequently used to bury parts of the victims of the Bentalha massacre;
- 21 September: the 'truce' which came into effect on 1 October was signed between Madani Mezrag (AIS) and Smain Lamari (DRS);
- 22 September: Bentalha massacre;
- 5 October: the army summoned the press to observe a spectacular military offensive against the village of Ouled-Allal, described as the den of the GIA who was allegedly perpetrating the massacres. [...]

The whole operation could have allowed the planners of the crimes to send several 'messages': to president Zeroual that it was not up to him to reorganise the political forces by negotiating in his own interest with the leaders of the FIS, and to the latter and the AIS that they had no other choice than to accept a truce under their conditions in order to end the terror on others or on their followers; to the Algerian people that it had no other option, in this spiralling of bloody madness, but to continue to submit to the rule of the 'decision makers', and finally to the international community that it had to understand once and for all that 'Islamist barbarism' was capable of such horror, and that it was in its interest to support the only people able to act as a rampart against them, even be they corrupted and not commendable (this was the meaning behind the authorisation – under strict control- of the exceptional media coverage of the massacres by the foreign press). Beyond these 'strategic' objectives, one should not exclude that the choice of the martyr areas was also made to solve other 'problems' such as the necessary elimination of inconvenient witnesses and the liquidation of supporters of the armed opposition.

The three months that followed witnessed endless skirmishes. The massacres, although less dramatic, continued in high numbers until relative calm returned after the great massacres in the region of Rélizane, in the West of the country, in which close to 1,000 were killed between the end of December 1997 and the first days of 1998. A lull ensued from February 1998 which coincided with the extraordinary international public relations operation organised by the Algerian 'decision-makers' [...]⁵⁰.

The 'clan war' continued but in a less bloody way during the first part of 1998; it peaked in the summer with a violent campaign by a section of the 'independent press' against Mohamed Betchine. It ended with the resignation of President Liamine Zeroual on 15 September and his 'special adviser's two months later. The 'Janviéristes' had won, and they organised in February 1999 the election – rigged as the previous ones- of their new civilian screen Abdelaziz Bouteflika (who quickly sought, like its predecessors, to emancipate himself from his mentors...)⁵¹.

⁵⁰ This conclusion meets that reached by the authors of *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres* (*op. cit.*, p. 24-43) who attempted to reconstruct the change in the number and scale of the massacres from the end of 1996 until the end of 1998: they noted that each one, which brought hope of an improvement in the political situation, was systematically followed by an increase in violence attributed to the Islamists. A continuously upward trend started in April 1997 when the Zeroual-Béchine clan seemed to consolidate its power; it noticeably decreased only after the visit of several foreign delegations starting in the spring of 1998 and reached a relatively low level at the time Zeroual announced his resignation in September 1998.

⁵¹ François GEZE and Salima MELLAH, post face of *Qui a tué à Bentalha*, *op. cit.*, p. 271 sq.

IV. Who is responsible for the massacres of 1997-1998?

Explanations from the various actors and observers

We will not attempt here to provide definite answers in the issue of the responsibility for the massacres committed in Algiers since 1992, as they could only stem from more a comprehensive investigation, and one that is independent from political power, military institutions and all actors in the violence. The first part of this essay showed that there were multiple authors for many of the crimes committed since 1992. All army formations, official (security forces and militias) as well as non-official (armed groups claiming Islamic base, DRS death squads) were involved in those crimes.

International opinion was alerted from 1996, and mostly in 1997 and 1998, as the massacres reach an unprecedented scale and were committed on an almost daily basis. It did not understand who was committing these monstrous crimes and why. For years, the Algerian government and its media supporters imposed their view that the crimes were committed by the Islamists only. However, except for the GIA, all Islamist parties and groups denounced these crimes. This is indeed not sufficient to clear them *a priori* from responsibility, and neither can the rejection of those crimes by military leaders exonerate them. These crimes still essentially affected officials from the Islamist movement and their own followers who became the main victims: we cannot see the logic by which they could have been the authors. Furthermore, it turned out that many of the phalanxes who had joined the GIA in 1994 dissociated themselves from it in 1995 and especially in the beginning of 1996 due to the GIA's criminal practices and serious charges of collusion between the GIA and the DRS.

Even more surprising was the fact that the worst massacres occurred after the Algerian authorities had defeated 'terrorism' – besides, as we have seen, on the ground, the populations in the areas who had formerly been ruled by armed groups said they passed under military control from the beginning of 1996. We will limit ourselves here to asking questions and exposing some of the answers suggested concerning the massacres committed at the gates of Algiers between 1997 and 1998, as it is the issue for which the highest number of documents and concurring testimonies are available.

How could large groups of assailants manage to penetrate the areas surrounding Algiers, which were located in the most militarised zone in the country with the highest alert level following the massacres committed in the region? Why did the security forces, which had been alerted, not intervene to protect the population in danger? Who were the victims of the massacres, the choice of which was less arbitrary than it seemed at first glance? Who were the attackers who massacred those very people meant to provide them with means of subsistence?

The GIA claims responsibility

As we have seen questions were most pressing during the great massacres of the summer of 1997. The GIA consequently published, on 26 September 1997, a statement in its newspaper *Al-Ansar*⁵² acknowledging that it was the author of the massacres. For the first time in this statement, the GIA called the Algerian people 'ungodly', which justified the collective killings. This discourse in many respects no longer coincided with any political reality and clearly showed that it could only stem from parties which tried to use it as a scarecrow to justify the unjustifiable. Moreover, NGOs were not taken in for – as we will later see - they joined forces to denounce those army officials strongly suspected of involvement in these crimes.

⁵² 'GIA' statement number 51, 26 September 1997.

It was always difficult to believe that the GIA would massacre its possible human, logistical and material support base. But the official version endlessly repeated that the populations who had massively voted for the FIS were guilty of supporting terrorism, a charge that General Khaled Nezzar explicitly expressed. As we shall observe, he maintained that terrorist groups were immersed in this accomplice population, which justified the non-intervention of the army. ‘Terrorism’ – at the time when it was qualified as ‘residual’ by the authorities in 1996 – could hardly have done without ‘support’ from the population if in reality it did not at all depend on it.

What is strange to say the least is that no authority – whether Algerian, the media recipients of the GIA statement (in the first place the London-based Arab language daily *Al-Hayat* which published the word of the GIA for years without verification) or Western intelligence services – did not see it necessary to verify the authenticity of the statements even if many were taken aback by them and they led to numerous GIA splinter groups take their distances.

Abou Hamza, a radical Imam then preaching at the Finsbury Park Mosque in London, was also in charge of the publication of *Al-Ansar*. When he supported the statement justifying the massacres in the Mitidja, many Algerian worshippers expressed their disagreement, denounced the army as responsible for those crimes and discredited him, accusing him of being in the pay of the DRS. Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, who witnessed this, reported:

Destabilised by this internal contestation, the *Al-Ansar* manager, although a most radical Islamist, questioned for the first time the exact identity of the mysterious correspondents who were sending him from Algiers the statements of the ‘GIA’ claiming responsibility for the massacres: “In mid-September 1997, Hamza requested clarifications from his counterparts, the *Al-Hayat* journalist in charge of the subject Kamil Tawil revealed today. He told them it was urgent as people had demonstrated and criticised him saying he was supporting the ‘GIA’ although it killed women and children...He then received a statement justifying the massacres. He published it but dissociated himself from it saying that he would no longer support the GIA⁵³”. According to *Paris-Match* journalist Patrick Forestier, Abou Hamza was manipulated without his knowledge by the military Security: “When the British secret services tapped his mobile phone, they were surprised: the calls from the GIA in Algeria were made from a military barracks⁵⁴!” On 1 October 1997 in London, Mustapha Karmel, Director of *Al-Ansar* “withdrew his support to the GIA” by declaring that its latest statement “contained parts which were not in conformity with the *Sharia*⁵⁵”.

These great massacres almost marked the end of the GIA. The army simulated a large offensive at the end of September in Oued-Allal, a town close to where the massacres took place and where the killers allegedly hid, but many observers confirmed that this had been staged on purpose to respond to accusations of passivity by the army in front of the atrocities committed⁵⁶. The national Emir Antar Zouabri was only officially killed on February 2002, but the GIA gave him much less publicity during the years which preceded his death.

When intellectuals embrace the claims of generals

André Glucksmann, a French philosopher attracting much media attention, went to Algeria at the time that the massacre in Sidi-Hammed, which killed almost 120, was committed on 11 January 1998. Upon his return, he published articles and took part in a TV documentary (broadcast in March

⁵³ Interview of Kamil Tawil by one of the authors for the documentary of Jean-Baptiste Rivoire and Romain Icard, *Attentats de Paris: On pouvait les empêcher*, Canal +, 4 November 2002.

⁵⁴ Patrick FORESTIER, “Derrière les tueries, de sordides intérêts immobiliers et fonciers”, *Paris-Match*, 9 October 1997.

⁵⁵ Lounis AGGOUN and Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d’États*, op. cit., p. 521.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 527 sq.

1998 on France 3⁵⁷), in which he claimed to be a spokesperson for ‘the Algerians’ living outside Algeria. By explaining ‘what I saw in Algeria’ he pursued no other aim than to confirm the idea that the authors and circumstances of the massacres were well known, and thus to exonerate the army of the charges against it. While most observers agreed to denounce the armed forces’ idleness, some intellectuals explained it saying it was due to a ‘messaging up’, and therefore justified it:

The primary question Algerians have been asking for six months is not: who kills? They now find this one obscene. “*There is none more blind than the one who does not want to see*”. The phrase goes around the Kabyle Mountains and the streets of the capital. Islamist groups publicise their feats of arms and blame each other. Algerians are asking in the first place how it can be possible for such massacres to be repeated. The competence and even the determination of the armed forces and the government are widely disputed. [...]

In short, no confrontation occurred during the carnage or when the slaughterers withdrew: the battle of Sidi-Hamed did not take place. However, officials themselves confessed that there were troops on the ground in close proximity. [...]

The government forces, although benefiting from the number of troops, did not manage to attack, capture or pursue the killers. It was a triumphant mess-up, lack of preparedness and of coordination. It is indeed not possible to shoot randomly when slaughterers and victims are mingled in the dark. But the concrete obstacles were multiplied by the bureaucratic heaviness of a Soviet-style apparatus, which inherited from the lack of initiative and operational paralysis the Red Army has often showed in the past ten years⁵⁸.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, an essayist as equally media-savvy as André Glucksmann, had himself travelled to Algeria at the end of December 1997 and returned with the same conclusions. He also knew who had killed. He found, like his colleague and almost using the same words, the questions raised to be ‘obscene’. He excuplated the armed forces by criticising their heaviness, decrepit material, etc. These ‘things seen in Algeria’, published in the form of a report in *Le Monde* newspaper on 9 January 1998, hinder all attempts to go beyond a dichotomist analysis of ‘Evil’ committing the massacres and ‘Good’ resisting it.

He travelled to Algeria escorted and guided by the security forces, visited some massacre sites, met with people he did not choose himself, often needing to have their words translated but reported them without an inch of self-critique. He got his interlocutors saying:

“Who kills who? I know that some ask this question. But we know well who kills. We did see the killers. They were children of the neighbourhood. They were there among us that night...” yes, the question “who kills who” is obscene – as if doubt and confusion needed to be added to horror ... [...]

He concluded:

I asked all the same question about the army’s passive role. They all gave me the same type of answer, attributing it either to the ALN’s ‘culture’, or to the ‘elusive’ mobility of the terrorist groups, or else to the difficulty for any army in a similar situation to adapt its ‘tools’ to the constraints of a guerrilla war which constantly changes form and field (urban terrorism, attacks on suburbs then villages, isolated doyers)⁵⁹.

Let us recall that at the time of the daily massacres in the autumn of 1997, although the residents of Algiers’s suburbs were constantly urging the militaries stationed nearby to protect them, they did not intervene and did not even close off the region although it was under their control.

⁵⁷ *Ce que j’ai vu en Algérie. Carnets de route d’André Glucksmann*, documentary directed by Malik AÏT-AOUDIA, France 3, 6 March 1998.

⁵⁸ André GLUCKSMANN, “Ce que j’ai vu en Algérie”, *El Watan*, 30 and 31 January 1998.

⁵⁹ Bernard-Henri LEVY, “Choses vues en Algérie”, *Le Monde*, 9 January 1998.

General Khaled Nazzar perfectly summed up the array of explanations put forward by different state-supporting observers. He went as far as to suggest blaming the victims for the responsibility of the massacres, in his *Memoirs* published in 1999:

It is true that the quick succession of killings which occurred in Bentalha, Raïs, Béni-Messous and in the region of Rélizane in the West of the country seriously damaged, in the public opinion, the credibility of the security forces in their mission to protect the population. The prolonged duration of the acts, the presence of the security forces patrolling in the same areas and the disappearance of the terrorists once their deeds committed contributed to fuel doubt as to the capacity of the security forces to appropriately fulfil their mission.

The reasons explaining what seems to be inexplicable at first sight lie in the following factors;

1) The presence among the targeted population of active accomplices under the total influence of terrorists;

2) The presence of terrorist groups established in the urban fabric within arranged structures facilitating their acts and their subsequent flight, always benefiting from a screen of complicity;

3) The very dense and uncontrolled urbanisation, making rescue operations even slower and more difficult;

4) The *fatwa* which not only made the killing of civilians licit but also legitimised the spoils of war (*el ghanima*) and gave a religious blessing to these crimes;

5) The sites, at the times of the massacres, which were purposely darkened, causing the victims and executioners to be indistinguishable.

In these circumstances, even when a unit is posted close by, intervention is very difficult due to the darkness, the traps that are previously scattered over all possible avenues of access and above all the fray causing total confusion.

In such case, the role of the Chief of Order can be to show army presence and illuminate the area so as to limit losses without creating risks for the civilians and to neutralise terrorists by cutting their flight routes.

In any case one has to admit that no army in the world is able to guarantee security in each hamlet, community, town and sensitive spots of any sort at the same time, even more so when unidentified danger originates from these towns, hamlets or communities themselves.

In such situation, the immediate answer is to set up an armed self-defence system in order to, at the minimum, keep the attackers at bay and at best to defeat them⁶⁰.

However, it took some time for these explanations to be accepted and the skills of the DRS' psychology department, supported by a number of Western media, to impose them⁶¹. An unprecedented offensive was started in France by the DRS to prevent, manipulate or destroy dozen of committees who had formed in the wake of the 1997 massacres demanding truth through an international commission of enquiry. The whole campaign which was orchestrated from the beginning of 1998 was unable to satisfy the legitimate questions of thousands of people who wanted to know the truth. It nevertheless managed to a great extent to quell the first demand which had stemmed from the movement of protest and indignation, namely that an international commission of enquiry be sent.

NGOs raise doubts as to the official version

In its report written 'in the heat of the moment' at the time of the great massacres in the autumn of 1997, Amnesty International summarised the different versions put forward by the power holders and their supporters:

⁶⁰ Khaled NEZZAR, *Mémoire du général, op.cit.*, p.81-82.

⁶¹ The French-German TV channel Arte particularly distinguished itself in this disinformation campaign through the broadcasting of a thematic programme in January 1998 which left no room for discordant voices in the documentaries presented or the debates.

According to the authorities and security services all the massacres have been committed by the GIA and other such groups with the aim of terrorizing and punishing the population hostile to them, or who formerly supported them but who had recently withdrawn their support, or relatives and current supporters of rival armed groups.

Many massacres have taken place in areas where a large percentage of the population had voted for the FIS in the 1990 municipal elections and in the 1991 legislative elections. Amnesty International has received reports that many of the victims of recent massacres were relatives of members and supporters of armed opposition groups, people who had in the past been detained on charges of "terrorist activities" and their relatives, and people who had in the past refused to take up arms and set up militia groups. Members of the security forces and militias are reported to have said to local inhabitants and journalists that the victims of some of the massacres had met the fate they deserved because they had supported the "terrorists", and thus deserved no protection.

Many massacres are believed to have been carried out by armed groups with the aim of eliminating supporters of rival groups, or supporters of the FIS, which has increasingly often condemned killings of civilians and other abuses by these groups. [...]

The victims of the massacres seem to have been mostly ordinary people, often poor and living in makeshift homes, including people who had settled in the area in recent years after having fled their homes elsewhere because of the conflict.⁶²

On the subject of the non-intervention of the security forces, the international organisation wrote:

The question which remains unanswered is why there was no intervention? The Algerian authorities have not commented officially on any specific incidents, but newspapers close to the authorities have often reported that the security forces could not intervene because the terrain around the villages where the massacres were committed had been mined by those who committed the massacres to prevent the security forces' intervention. However, this seems to be unlikely given that during the massacres villagers managed to flee from the villages and after the massacres survivors, ambulances, helpers, and security services have gone in and out of the villages without stepping on any mines. If such movements have been possible both during and after the massacres, it should also have been possible for security forces to go into the villages to stop the massacres.⁶³

The military's responsibility

Numerous observers, survivors and former soldiers, confirmed the hypothesis of army involvement in the massacres. It is however vital to establish the form of this participation in the crimes. As we have seen, there is no doubt that at the very times the massacres took place, the military did not intervene to protect the population under attack, although troops were stationed in the vicinity of the towns and were observing the carnage. "Many journalists⁶⁴ indeed reported the existence of a cable which had been addressed in August [1997] to all the units in the country by the army's Chief of Staff General Mohamed Lamari, urging them imperatively not to leave their bases without an express order⁶⁵."

Abdelkader Tigha, an N.C.O. posted at Blida's CTRI (Territorial Research and Investigation Centres) at the time of the massacres, explained that the reason the military did not intervene, although it was 'always nearby the GIA's targeted sites', was because the chiefs' order had been not to intervene. He explained:

⁶² AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, Civilian population caught in a spiral of violence. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGMDE280231997>.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See in particular Patrick FORESTIER, "Derrière les nouveaux massacres, y aurait-il le clan des militaires éradicateurs?", *Paris-Match*, 25 September 1997.

⁶⁵ François GEZE and Salima MELLAH, Postface to Nesroulah Yous, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?*, *op.cit.*, p.241. The authors quote from the magazine *Courier international*, 2-8 October 1997: "The existence of a directive signed by the chief of staff prohibiting movement outside the barracks at night in the absence of a written order was even mentioned in Algiers".

The CTRI in Blida did give instructions to the different operational sectors in the region (Bouinem, Baraki, Bougara, Sidi-Moussa) not to intervene in case of an attack on these places by the GIA⁶⁶.

But beyond the army's responsibility for failing to intervene and assist the population at risk, was it involved in those crimes? Certainly, this question can only be dealt with in a satisfying manner by an independent commission of enquiry and impartial justice. It is however possible to present the testimonies of former military personnel who were part of the military apparatus at the time of the events and who exposed very disturbing facts.

Some witnesses, but mostly people opposed to the idea of an international commission of enquiry, often reported that the massacres survivors recognised the attackers as they were 'children of the neighbourhood'. However, other witnesses talked about unknown men who spoke with an accent from another region, big, strong, well-trained, etc. This apparent contradiction was not a real one, as former Colonel Mohammed Samraoui explained:

In order to demonstrate that the massacres of civilians were indeed committed by the Islamists, the DRS elaborated an almost infallible technique, which was to include real Islamists in the combined forces in charge of these 'operations' (those were individuals who had been arrested and 'turned around' through torture or 'bound' by promises of clemency for the crimes committed in the past). During the massacres, the residents of the first houses in the target town were voluntarily spared, so as to allow the survivors to testify that they recognised some Islamists. It goes without saying that these 'alibi' Islamists acted openly while the militaries were using hoods⁶⁷.

As to the identity of the authors of those crimes, the former member of the secret service is positive:

What is in any case certain is that one cannot attribute them to autonomous Islamist groups for a simple reason: as I have explained, all these groups had been eliminated since mid-1996, either by the special forces or mostly by the GIA under the control of the DRS. From this date, the only armed groups still acting 'in the name of Islam' were controlled by the services – directly or through 'DRS emirs' like Djamel Zitouni and later Antar Zouabri. Only the blind and the regime followers could consider the terrorist forces as acting under the traditional model of guerrilla war, as they had no unified command and did not even think necessary to give verifiable or indeed any claims to back their actions.

These were the groups which committed the massacres, mostly based in the region of Algiers, in a space just about as large as half a French department but with an absolutely impressive concentration of security forces. These never intervene because they had received orders to do so at the highest level: to all those who know the Algerian army from the inside, there is no other possible explanation⁶⁸.

These accusations were shared by other army members. Omar, an Algerian deserter, accused the military of committing a massacre:

"We were transported in a plane and then in trucks, at around two or three in the morning we were near a doyar, about 120, 130 men. The 86 recruits, all in my class, were told to stay on the hill above the doyar and not to move, except if we saw a flare launched from the village. The 'contractors' [ed. the volunteers] – they were about 25 – went to the doyar. We did not see anything, so we did not move. At around 5 or 5 thirty in the morning they came back. They were wearing make up and fake beards and smelled of musk like the Islamists. They had kept their cargo pants but wore civilian T-shirts; they really looked like typical Islamists. Some of them had blood on their trousers and their commando knives were also bloody. They took their beards off. We did not ask anything, you don't ask anything in the army and I did not ask myself any question". The unit came back to the barracks in the morning. "I learnt then that a massacre had taken place in the doyar where we had been. We

⁶⁶ Abdelkader Tigha, notes from 8 February 2003.

⁶⁷ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang, op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283-284.

learnt it through gendarmes who were close-by, around thirty people were believed to have been killed, we made the connection, we understood, but we did not talk about it, we were scared.” Two days later, Omar was on duty to clean the room of his chief warrant officer. “We searched his pockets, to look for cigarettes or money, we were thieves like Zeroual, Omar said, laughing. In one of his pockets we found a fake beard⁶⁹.”

Questioned by the journalist Jean-Baptiste Rivoire about the behaviour of those in the CTRI in Blida (the main DRS antenna in the first military region) commanded by Colonel M’henna Djebbar at the time of the great massacres of 1997, the former warrant officer Abdelkader Tigha explained:

Bentalha was the [GIA’s] “death phalanx” of Berrafta Aïssa, our contact in the CTRI. In Raïs there were several groups, including Aïssa’s. He was a famous and influential terrorist. If he took ten groups from each zone, they would follow him. We knew in advance. In Raïs for instance, we knew that the population would be ‘paying up’ that night. Colonel Djebbar M’henna had told us. He said “They are going to pay tonight”. And they paid. What’s worse: we prepared the weapons before the massacre. Djebbar had said that over six hours before the massacre⁷⁰.

Massacres as a tool of counter-insurrection?

Let us recall that during the years 1997 and 1998, different hypotheses to explain the motives behind these crimes were more widely discussed than today, particularly in Western written media, but the Algerian regime and its backers in Algeria and in Western countries managed to suppress those questions. The issue remains however unsolved, and disclosures by several Algerian army deserters and Islamist armed groups dissidents,⁷¹ as well as the works of some journalists and academics, have made it possible to develop, in the light of experiences made in other countries, hypotheses which inscribe the massacres in a logic of power-struggle or counter-insurrection.

However, counter-guerrilla war often implies the formation of groups assimilated to the resistance. As explained by the authors of the study “What is the GIA”⁷² :

A counter-guerrilla organisation is an irregular force, disguised and posing as a guerrilla force, whose function is to combat the real guerrilla force. The rationale behind the use of false guerrillas to combat genuine guerrillas is the principle that the latter should be fought with their own methods, ‘carrying the revolutionary war into the enemy camp’⁷³.

A counter-guerrilla organisation as mirror image of the genuine guerrilla may comprise, amongst others, members of various ‘security’ forces, surrendered or captured guerrillas ‘turned’ by the former, in addition to members or groups that are dissident from, or in conflict with, the main guerrilla organisation. (...) Also, although a counter-guerrilla force is controlled ultimately by the intelligence body to which the security agents within it are attached, it needs to and does retain some degree of independence in order to be operationally effective.

This pseudo-insurgent force, operating covertly among the guerrillas’ personnel and within guerrilla-controlled territory, is used to perform a wide variety of intelligence, subversive, offensive tasks and ‘special operations’ with the aim of discrediting, isolating, fragmenting and ultimately destroying the genuine guerrillas.

In the light of the experience of anti-guerrilla forces during the national liberation struggle in Algeria (1954-1962) and the Rhodesian war (1972-1979), the authors of the study on the GIA

⁶⁹ *Libération*, 23 October 1997.

⁷⁰ Interview of Abdelkader Tigha for the documentary by Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE *Services secrets: révélations sur un “vrai-faux” enlèvement*, “90 minutes”, Canal Plus, 1 December 2003.

⁷¹ The issue of the authors of the massacres goes back to the nature of the GIA, as they were blamed as responsible for the massacres and at times so claimed it. This subject is further developed in Salima MELLAH, *Algerian Islamist Movement between Autonomy and Manipulation*.

⁷² B. IZEL, J.S. WAFA, W. ISAAC, “What is the GIA”, in *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, *op. cit.*, p. 383-384.

⁷³ See: Roger TRINQUIER, *Guerre, Subversion, Révolution*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1968.

concluded that this movement fulfilled the necessary conditions to be compared to previous movements. A number of features and actions are typical of these counter-insurrection groups:

The composition of the GIA: It was made up of at the same time genuine Islamist combatants surrounded by infiltrated intelligence agents and former Islamists who had been ‘turned’.

The missions:

- Collection of intelligence among the population on the real armed opposition movement,
- Subversive operations within the movement itself with a view to generate suspicion and impose liquidation campaigns,
- Offensives against the insurgents and other movement through so-called ‘fratricidal’ operations, in this particular case against the AIS, the armed wing of the FIS.

The objectives: to marginalise the movement, to keep combatants at a distance or liquidate them, to discredit the armed movement amongst the population, and to terrorise the latter which results in joining the side of the security forces.

The ensuing effect is inter alia to spread confusion at the national and international level and to legitimize repression by the State facing armed opposition violence.

The conclusions of the authors of the study confirm the opinion of the political expert F. Aït-Mehdi:

All those who knew the history of Algeria well had good reasons to believe that the GIA was an updated version of the K Force (Boukabous) or of the National Algerian People’s Army of ‘General Bellounis’, which France had used as a tool in its counter-insurrection scheme. The K Force for instance was conspicuously directed by Belhadj Djillali Abdelkader, nicknamed Boukabous (a former Messalist), although it was really controlled by Captain Conille, in charge of Lamartine’s SAS, and Captain Hentic, in charge of the harka of Béni Boudouane.

Force K’s subversive arsenal to isolate the population from the FLN was made up of extreme nationalistic discourse, rape, torture, slaughter of Algerian men and women, very heavy taxes, in short aimed at breeding an atmosphere of terror and confusion among the population through its actions. [...]

Journalists and experts who made the effort of collecting the statements from the groups which massively left the GIA from November 1995, following the assassination of Mohamed Saïd, can prove the wealth of information they have on intelligence work, offensive and subversive operations and the GIA special operations they uncovered. They fit perfectly within the counter-guerrilla strategy and tactics and coincide with what is known about the content of the anti-guerrilla programme taught by French and South African counter-insurrection experts at the Chercell military academy.⁷⁴

Testimonies from various sources confirmed the foregoing points. Whether they emanated from GIA dissidents, AIS officials, army deserters, massacres survivors, or journalists in the know, many reports confirmed the existence of DRS-controlled armed groups claiming an Islamic philosophy. This control could take different forms: the groups could be constituted by a majority of agents (and could have been created by the DRS) or act in a more or less independent fashion while being manipulated directly (by former combatants switching sides or infiltrated persons) or indirectly (from the outside by other groups, the spread of a rumour, etc.)

In the case of the groups which committed the great massacres in 1997-1998, considering the planning, the substantial logistics mobilised in a region totally controlled by the army, the perfectly organised characters of the operations carried out and the withdrawal from the scene once finished, one must conclude that the killers were experienced, trained, acting in a concerted manner,

⁷⁴ Interview of F. Aït-Mehdi, Paris, 29 September 1997, published in the bulletin *Algerian Forum*, 7 October 1997 (mentioned in a press review published at the time of the great massacres in 1997: Anonymous, “Halte aux massacres en Algérie”, October 1997, <http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/mrvmass/halte.htm>).

methodically and carefully. At this time there no longer existed any autonomous Islamic armed group likely to carry out this type of operations: this simple and logical observation allows us to conclude that these massacres could only have been perpetrated at the instigation of the security forces which held total control over the region. This in no way contradicts the fact that some neighbours who had joined the underground resistance were recognised amongst the authors of the massacres. They may have switched sides or may have been prisoners forced to accompany the killers.

It must be recalled that in some places, the massacres preceded the armament of a population considered as hostile and supporting the GIA. Abdelkader Tigha, then posted at Blida's CTRI, wholly confirmed this strategy of 'turning' entire populations:

The aim of the CTRI and even more of the DRS' services was indeed to facilitate the GIA incursions in these places and to allow the population to be massacred in order to create a revolt, officially against the GIA and the whole armed opposition. [...] Once the population was massacred, my service acted quickly to provide weapons of war and start recruiting among the population which had become very easy to manipulate. [...] Eventually, the targeted place fell into the hands of the service and was called 'a liberated zone'⁷⁵.

This mode of operation was described in this exact way by Nesroulah Yous, survivor of the Bentalha massacre.

Hypotheses for the massacres

We have seen in previous chapters the evolution of the situation in the neighbourhoods surrounding Algiers, known for their support to the Islamist movement, which had been demonstrated in the local elections in June 1990 and the first round of the legislative elections in December 1991. The Islamist opposition in power had originated there and had a strong impact on the population upon which it was dependent. Although it imposed 'its' law through violence, it represented the resistance against the army which arrested people in brutal search and seizure operations, tortured them, and disappeared or executed them.

Such repression made many young men join the underground resistance and clandestine urban groups. Some of these groups became gradually controlled by the DRS and imposed a different 'law' in the villages, while the army recovered control of those zones and neighbourhoods from 1995 onwards. The massacres multiplied (mainly in the region of Algiers) once the genuinely autonomous armed groups were eliminated (or used), from the first half of 1996 through to the great massacres of 1997-1998. The powers that be and their civilian supporters declared that it was the 'last convulsive movement' of a 'residual' terrorism which was to be all the bloodier since it was taking revenge on populations which betrayed it. But all the evidence available leaves no room for a different hypothesis than that these massacres were perpetrated by armed groups controlled and/or manipulated by the army's secret services, or by some in those services.

In this framework, a reason for the massacres could be the intention of the military power to terrorise a population (and liquidate parts of it) which was not yet pacified and tamed (this was the reason why in Bentalha the army did not give weapons to those requesting them, although they had been promised), even more so because entire families (combatants' relatives) sought refuge in their areas. Once they joined the regime's side, at the cost of a massacre, the population itself was enrolled in the 'fight against terrorism'.

Another reason would fit in the framework of the 'counter-insurrection' strategy put in place by Algerian generals based on the model theorised and used by the French army during the Algerian war of liberation: as well as death squads, torture, extrajudicial killings and fake underground movements, this strategy granted much importance to population groupings outside of their usual homes, in order to better control it and to take away any support from the real

⁷⁵ Abdelkader Tigha, notes of 8 February 2003.

combatants in the opposition. In the framework of Algeria today, *mutatis mutandis*, the blind massacres led in any case, as we have seen, to the exodus of hundreds of thousands of people to the capital.

Another hypothesis, which is not in contradiction with the previous ones, could be found in the mode of conflict management conducted at the highest level of the State. We have seen that the great massacres were perpetrated at the height of the crisis between two competing groups in power. Only when President Zeroual resigned did the number of massacres start to decline.

It is in any case certain that there is no unique cause to explain the mass massacres, which were the result of a horrendous spiral undisputedly fuelled by the core group of 'Janviériste' Generals. All the more so that they managed to procure multiple authors: besides the armed groups of Islamist pretence or the paramilitaries were found death squads, special troops, regular units, militias and communal guards (not to forget the emergence of bandits using the same methods). This multitude of actors with often diverging interests largely contributed over six years of war to generalise, within Algerian society, the use of violence, often armed, to manage internal conflicts.

V. National and international reactions

Common indignation and calls for action

We can only provide an outline of the major trends in national and international positions at the height of the massacres and show in which manner the ‘spontaneous’ reactions of indignation and calls to action were quickly suppressed and subjected to the ‘reason of State’⁷⁶.

International human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or FIDH, which denounced crimes and violations committed from 1992 (AI and HRW) and 1995 (FIDH), became permanent targets of the ‘Eradicator’ press, as well as Algerian government officials at the United Nations and the National Human Rights Observatory (a body set up in 1992 by Algerian authorities with the main task of minimising human rights violations by state agents while act as a privileged counterpart for western governments as well as families of victims in Algeria)

Some pressure was exerted on the Algerian government from 1996 onwards. International NGO reports and criticism expressed in the privacy of chanceries⁷⁷, but also public stakeouts started to make Algerian officials nervous. As a matter of fact, a whole part of the Algerian secret services had been for years busy drafting fake reports to international institutions⁷⁸, and above all disseminating disinformation through Algerian and Western media. At the height of the massacres, the DRS deployed its best skills to dampen calls for investigation in the crimes. Already in August 1997 United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan implicitly called for dialogue between the Algerian government and the Islamist opposition:

We are facing a situation which has long been considered an internal issue. It is extremely difficult for all of us to pretend that nothing is going on, as if we did not know and had to abandon the Algerian population to its own fate⁷⁹.

Four days later, he called for an ‘urgent solution’ to end the violence. The reaction of Liamine Zeroual, with whom he met, was as short as dry: “No interference in Algeria’s affairs”. Strangely, following the Bentalha massacres three weeks later, Kofi Annan simply condemned this “brutal terrorist act”⁸⁰ through the voice of his spokesperson. There was no longer any question of concrete action.

Indignation and consternation in the face of the horror experienced by the population that summer was however shared by many politicians, intellectuals and journalists who noted in the first place that the Algerian government and its army failed in their responsibility to protect civilian population:

The recent carnages committed in Raïs, Béni-Messous and Bentalha were all executed in zones with strong military and gendarme presences. In Béni-Messous, near the capital, killers were able to act for four hours without being disturbed, a few hundred meters away from a special services

⁷⁶ For reference on this subject, we recommend the book that has been mentioned several times in this essay, *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, in which the reactions of the different actors and observers are stated in great details.

⁷⁷ See also the report of the Rand Corporation, a US *think tank*, composed upon the request of the Pentagon in 1996, which supported power being held by the FIS and raised criticisms of the Algerian regime (mentioned in G. E. FULLER, *ALGÉRIE : L’INTÉGRISME AU POUVOIR*, Editions Patrick Banon, Paris, 1997).

⁷⁸ Abdelkader Tigha for instance reported that in the end of 1996 he was ordered by his superiors to draft a fake report to the UN Human Rights Commission regarding two missing university professors who had been tortured by the judicial police and executed (see NORD-SUD EXPORT, “Les révélations d’un déserteur de la SM”, 21 September).

⁷⁹ AFP and Reuters, 30 August 1997.

⁸⁰ *Le Figaro*, 25 September 1997.

barracks where General Smaïn Lamari's elite troops were stationed. In Bentalha, a few hours before the drama, civilians had informed the army about the presence of a group of suspicious individuals camping at the fringe of the small village. In short, it is now an open secret that the army knew but chose to remain passive. The existence of a directive signed by the chief of staff prohibiting movements outside barracks at night without an express order was mentioned in Algiers⁸¹.

These criticisms of the Algerian army increased and were mirrored by major NGOs in their reports. Amnesty International thus stressed the fact that no assistance was given to the victims although a number of massacres took place near military barracks and points:

Most of these killings were committed close to the capital, in the regions of Algiers, Blida and Médéa, the most militarised ones in the country. In many cases the massacres, which sometimes went on for several hours, were perpetrated a few kilometres or even a few hundred meters away from barracks or advanced posts of the army or of the security forces. However, in spite of the victims' screams and call for help, the security forces did not intervene to rescue the people being massacred or to arrest the authors of the killings who managed to escape each time.

Survivors and neighbours declared that they had called the security posts or hurried there and that the members of the security forces had refused to intervene, stating that they had not been given a mandate to do so. In at least two cases, survivors told how people trying to flee from the villages where massacres were being committed were forced back by a security cordon, which did not intervene when the killings were taking place and only entered the village after the attackers had gone.

It is undeniable that army barracks and security forces advanced posts were located nearby the site of several massacres. Besides, Algerian authorities do not deny the fact that security forces did not intervene during the massacres. The question why did they act this way remains unanswered⁸².

But the reasoning goes further and implicitly questions whether the massacres could not be benefiting the interests of the power holders. The Secretary-General of Amnesty International posed the following questions, long before the great massacres of 1997:

It is difficult for us to provide an explanation for these massacres. However, one can wonder why they are still going on, as they are mainly committed in the Mitidja plains, very near Algiers and even nearer to Blida, a garrison town, headquarters of the country's first military region. Why is a State which showed so much confidence in its security strategy unable to protect its population twenty minutes away from the capital? It is also of note that nobody is able to visit the sites and interview the survivors. The only reading which can be done is through the official lens or the Algerian press which is barred from investigating security matters. Also of note is the fact that nobody has so far been brought to justice for these killings⁸³.

The declared positions of Western politicians were much less clear. Although Lionel Jospin declared on 27 January 1997 in the French daily newspaper *Liberation*: "France must break the silence. [...] The government and politicians of France must say that there is no future for a policy solely repressive⁸⁴", he came back on his statement in September 1997, once he had become Prime Minister, content with only deploring the massacres: "At the official level, the French government faces constraints in its expression. If it ever took initiatives they would not be welcome, we know this⁸⁵"; thus, it was better not to take any at all! The role of the French government was also summarized in *The Economist's* assessment:

⁸¹ *Courrier International*, 2-8 October 1997.

⁸² AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *in Algérie, le livre noir, op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁸³ Pierre SANE, Algérie: "qui profite de cette situation?", *Libération*, 7 Mai 1997.

⁸⁴ *Le Canard enchaîné*, 10 September 1997.

⁸⁵ *Le Monde*, 16 September 1997.

France has done more than anybody else to protect Algeria from international criticism and help it to obtain loans with the IMF. It is leading European policy – or rather non-policy- towards Algeria⁸⁶.

On 15 October, four international NGOs called for the holding of a special session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the setting up of an international commission of inquiry⁸⁷:

In order to find a solution to this tragic situation, an investigation must be carried out to shed light on the events. To this aim, we call for the opening of an international fact-finding investigation to assess the alleged responsibilities and draft recommendations regarding the massacres and other abuses committed by all parties to the conflict. This inquiry should have significant authority and adequate human and material resources. It should be entrusted, amongst other things, to collect evidence and testimonies, including from victims, witnesses and officials, in order to uncover the truth⁸⁸.

Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who declared herself extremely concerned at the situation in Algeria, reacted to the refusal of the Algerian government to allow a UN inquiry on the ground:

I do not accept that under the pretence of not violating the Algerian sovereignty, we cannot say anything while people are being massacred. I have disagreed on this issue in a meeting last week with the Algerian Foreign Minister⁸⁹.

Even the spokesperson for the US Department of State called, at the beginning of January 1998, for the opening of an international commission of inquiry and the adoption of measures of protection for the civilian population. He also requested a visit by a UN Special Rapporteur. The Algerian government reacted strongly and summoned the US ambassador on this particular point. The French government was much more cautious as it only denounced the terrorist crimes and recalled that the population must be protected. Nevertheless, it called for international pressure on Algeria. Here too, Algerian reactions were violent: an internationalization of the Algerian conflict had to be prevented in any case. By means of counter-attack, it demanded that an end be put to GIA networks in Europe, as they were seen as supporting terrorism in Algeria.

The Algerian authorities launch an offensive

The pressure exerted by non-governmental organisations, some UN officials but also the public opinion mobilized outside and inside Algeria which expressed incomprehension in the face of the daily acts of horror in Algeria, forced the Algerian government to act. It did so at several levels. With the help of some Algerian newspapers and intellectuals, it launched a large-scale media campaign in Europe to impose the official version as to those responsible for the massacres and the lack of army intervention. On 13 November 1997, Liamine Zeroul issued a directive to this aim:

There is a need to correct Algeria's image abroad, an image which is often wrong because it has been manipulated according to the interests of internal and external political cliques. Because the promotion of a healthy image of Algeria suffers from a lack of strategy [...], additional support and a strong framework, the creation of an external communication agency with the function to produce

⁸⁶ *The Economist*, 11 October 1997 (mentioned in Abbas Aroua, "L'UE et les massacres", in *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres, op. cit.*, p. 773).

⁸⁷ Some Algerian intellectuals for their part launched at the same time an appeal in favour of an international commission of inquiry into the situation in Algeria (see annex 7).

⁸⁸ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, FIDH, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, REPORTERS SANS FRONTIÈRES, "Alerte Algérie", 15 October 1997.

⁸⁹ Interview with Mary Robinson in *Nouveau Quotidien*, Lausanne, 17 October 1997.

and project Algeria's real image in the political, economic, commercial, cultural and tourism field is necessary⁹⁰.

Former Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Samraoui, previously a right-hand man of the head of counter-espionage Smaïn Lamari, explained that calls in favour of a commission of enquiry were perceived as a threat in Algiers:

In the face of this threat, the propaganda section of the DRS⁹¹ created a dangerously efficient strategy: through its supporters in the Algerian and foreign media (especially in France where there were many), they spread the word that NGOs and the personalities backing them dared, stupidly, to ask the question 'who kills who' – yet this sentence was never used by human right defenders. This question was systematically qualified as 'obscene' (including by French philosophers André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy), since 'responsibility for all these crimes had been claimed by the GIA' — but of course the existence of these claims, and when they existed their authenticity, were never verified. In the following years and until today, all those who question the role of the security forces in the unexplained attacks, killings and massacres are accused of being 'supporters of the 'who killed who' theory'.

It is important to know that the DRS propaganda section and a certain kind of press were entrusted with pursuing any attempt to challenge the official discourse. The slightest doubt, the smallest questions were condemned as 'attempts to absolve the Islamists of their crimes', with the aim of reinforcing the dominant interpretation of the conflict: the just struggle of the secular and republican military against the 'God-crazy' terrorists. This simplification justified all crimes, sending some of the authors of the crimes back to back into a mystifying Manichaeism and omitting to mention other major actors, starting with the Algerian people itself⁹².

The result was conclusive, in large part due to the support of French intellectuals and politicians. Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann, as we have seen, were indisputably among those who conferred support on the military regime at this sensitive time. Moreover, General Khaled Nezzar paid tribute to them: "They have spread the truth through their courage", he wrote at the beginning of February 1998 in *El Watan*, before assuring "those men of courage and conviction" of "his greatest respect" and his "highest consideration"⁹³.

The media campaign launched in France and in Algeria – see previous chapter – was doubled by a lobby on UN institutions. At the 52nd session of the UN General Assembly on 24 September 1997, voices were raised to alert participants about the situation in Algeria. The German Foreign Minister expressed his indignation and urged the international community to act. Pierre Sané, Secretary-General of Amnesty International,

presented the list of human rights abuses and violations [...] [and] regretted that the international community did not agree upon any action. [...] The European Union passively hid behind a wall of ignorance it itself created, declaring that it did not have comprehensive information on human rights violations in Algeria, while not taking any action to initiate or support investigations⁹⁴.

This attitude by the European Union did not subsequently change, as we shall see later.

⁹⁰ Quoted by Jean-Pierre TUQUOI, "Les succès de communication du pouvoir algérien », *Le Monde*, 20 February 1998.

⁹¹ During the whole 'second Algerian war' and until today, this section has played a major role in disinformation. Formerly called 'press and documentation section' it became, in January 1993, the 'psychological action section', directed by Colonel Djillali Meraou, aka 'Salah', and then by the grim Colonel Tahri Zoubir, aka Hadj (who was replaced by Colonel Faouzi at the end of 2001).

⁹² Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang, op. cit.*, p. 21-22.

⁹³ Quoted by Jean-Pierre TUQUOI, "Les succès de communication du pouvoir algérien", *loc.cit.*

⁹⁴ Abbas AROUA, "L'ONU et les massacres en Algérie", in *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres, op. cit.*, p. 870.

Algerian reactions consisted of, on the one hand, claiming non interference in Algeria's internal affairs, denouncing those who demanded explanations and blaming them of "legitimising in some way terrorism" and of weakening Algeria. On the other hand, the Algerian authorities maintained that there was no doubt as to the identity of those responsible for the massacres and that allowing an international investigation would amount to an acknowledgement of doubt⁹⁵. The Algerian Foreign Ministry called for cooperation in the fight against terrorism at the Commission on Human Rights in March 1998.

The diplomatic parade

It is true that between the low-key attitude of Algerian officials in the autumn of 1997 and the confidence they showed in 1998, Algerian diplomacy had designed a clever offensive: it accepted the principle of foreign delegations visits, which it would control and direct, while focusing on the fight against terrorism in Europe and suppressing the idea of an inquiry in Algeria. The first visit by European officials was carried out in January 1998 by three secretaries of state who did not spend more than 24 hours in Algiers and met mostly Algerian civil servants and people opposed to the idea of a fact-finding mission on the massacres and other abuses. The report of this 'troika' was in line with these consultations: it recommended further transparency and political dialogue and the visit of a UN official. Although any comment relating to the massacre and the role of the Algerian authorities was avoided, the latter reacted strongly, according to the motto 'attack is the best defence'.

The next visit was carried out from 8 to 12 February 1998 by a delegation of European MPs led by the French European MP André Soulier, an 'old friend of Algeria'. Once again they met a great number of civil servants, members of parliament, officials of political parties and, once again, discussions mostly revolved around the assistance to be provided to the Algerian government in the fight against terrorism. The head of the delegation turned into such an effective advocate that Algerian humour said of him: "André Soulier (*Tr. Shoe, in French*) is wearing a military boot the size of Generals"⁹⁶." He explained his opposition to the idea of an international investigation and certified that the military "is not involved in the massacres", but that the army "is poorly trained and equipped to fight mutating forms of terrorism"⁹⁷". It was later learned that the Algerian authorities had imposed conditions on the European MPs' visit:

We wanted to go to Bentalha, Anne-André Léonard, member of the delegation, recalled. But Algiers said no, it was quite clear. Putting our nose into Algerian affairs was out of the question. The stakes were: "If you insist on the massacres, you will not enter Algeria". It must be recognized that we did not want to take that risk⁹⁸.

This visit nonetheless showed contradictions within the delegation itself. Two reports were eventually written, one by the head of the delegation, André Soulier, which replicated exactly the Algerian government's official position, the other by Daniel Cohn-Bendit. The official report clearly opposed an international commission of inquiry, identified the GIA as the exclusive authors of the massacres, noted the danger of distributing weapons to the civilian populations and most importantly supported the idea of an investigation on "possible terrorism support bases in Europe". In spite of the 'Cohn-Bendit incident', the European delegation's visit was a great success for the Algerian regime. It is necessary to note that the Europeans, through their conciliatory attitude, provided a blank check to the Algerian regime: On 31 March, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg said that the European Union had 'changed its vision' of Algeria.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 879.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Abbas AROUA, "L'UE et les massacres", *loc.cit.*, p. 788.

⁹⁷ *Le Monde*, 19 February 1998.

⁹⁸ Interview with Anne-André Léonard for the documentary by Jean-Baptiste Rivoire and Jean-Paul Billault, *Bentalha, autopsie d'un massacre*, Envoyé Spécial, France 2, 23 September 1999.

Information mission by a UN delegation

They were not the only ones to clear the Algerian generals and their political supporters. The insistence of public opinion and international NGOs on the idea of having an international mission of inquiry led the Algerian government to negotiate a compromise with the UN of benefit to both parties: it was decided to send a 'panel of eminent personalities' on a fact-finding mission to Algeria without an investigative mandate or any follow-up mechanism, according to the principles imposed by Algeria and accepted by the UN and the panel members. The official Algerian news agency APS wrote that the panel visit:

Will aim at putting an end to the human rights debate and blackmail, and Algeria, which will no longer have to exhaust itself in clarification and awareness campaigns, will be able to consolidate with a serene mind its natural place on the international scene⁹⁹.

The mission of information appointed by the UN Secretary-General acted as a substitute for a commission of enquiry (and this is what Algerian officials later claimed: each time they received a request for an international inquiry, they replied that the UN had sent a delegation). The choice of the panel members was already made with the consent of the Algerian authorities: Mario Soares, former socialist President of Portugal was the head of the delegation; Simone Veil, former minister, represented France; Donald McHenry the United-States; the Kenyan Amos Wacko represented Africa, the Jordanian Abdel Karim Kabariti, the Arab countries and Kumar Gujral, Asia.

They went to Algeria from 22 July until 4 August 1998, visited different regions of the country, and met with different stakeholders - "Algerian Government leaders, representatives of political parties, including some of the opposition, civil society, human rights and women's organizations, the media, religious institutions, the families of victims of terrorism and of disappeared persons, and from Algerian citizens"¹⁰⁰. The report was made public on 10 September and caused an outcry of criticism from numerous human rights organisations and personalities, which denounced the overly conciliatory attitude of the delegation towards the Algerian authorities. However, the Algerian Foreign Minister summed up in a short sentence the complete satisfaction created by this mission: "The report is in conformity with what was agreed between ourselves and the UN".

Which were the panel's conclusions? It seemed that diverging assessments and the need to find a compromise within the group delayed the publication of the report. "In fact, there were two trends within the panel. The first one unconditionally adhered to the claims of the Algerian regime and was led by the Veil-Kabariti tandem¹⁰¹." The second trend, represented by Soares and McHenry, was less unconditional.

One can say that the delegation on the whole accommodated the 'red lines' imposed by the Algerian regime: the 45-page report did not expand far beyond the general context. Regarding what concerns us in our research on the massacres, delegation members insisted that despite "mistakes made in the fight against terrorism" the violence by security forces and by terrorist should not be "put on the same level". They reproduced the official Algerian rhetoric suggesting that the authors of the crimes are identified:

Over the past two years, the civilian population has been targeted by terrorists in an unprecedented manner, with the emergence of a pattern of mass killings in rural areas [...] Many of the persons with whom we met said that the security situation had improved since 1994, and that most of the terrorism was now behind them, though terrorists continued to strike mainly in remote areas and in isolated hamlets. Government representatives told us that there were about 3,600

⁹⁹ *Libération*, 23 July 1998 (quoted by Abbas AROUA, "L'ONU et les massacres en Algérie", *op.cit.*, p. 910-911).

¹⁰⁰ *Algeria: Report of Eminent Panel*, July-August 1998, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information with the code DPI/2007, September 1998.

¹⁰¹ Abbas AROUA, "L'ONU et les massacres en Algérie", *op.cit.*

terrorists, mainly identified with banditry, remaining in the country. Independent citizens with whom we spoke accepted that the responsibility for the violence being committed lay with the radical extremists¹⁰².

Patrick Baudouin, president of the FIDH, voiced his criticism in an Algerian daily newspaper:

The mission said that there is, on the one hand, terrorism and, on the other hand, abuses committed by the Algerian authorities, but immediately adds that it refuses to put them on the same level. This is where the discourse is ambiguous, because it contributes to the idea that in order to achieve a certain aim, i.e. the eradication of terrorism, some sympathy can be allowed, and even if the means of repression of terrorism can be condemned, and whatever their seriousness, they are not of the same nature than terrorist acts. This is pernicious¹⁰³.

The international human rights organisations Amnesty International and the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, rejected the report, considering that “from a human rights perspective the UN mission’s visit was a whitewash and does not replace an independent investigation”.

Leaving no room for questions as to the identity of the ‘terrorists’ and their supporters, the conclusions of the panel indeed fitted with the arguments of the Algerian authorities, which were strongly attacked by the report of the UN Human Rights Committee published in August 1998. It mentioned “persistent allegations of collusion of members of the security forces in terrorist attacks”, “the lack of timely or preventive measures of protection to the victims from police or military officials“, «the meagre information regarding the organization of "legitimate defence groups", and expresses concerns at allegations of systematic use of torture, the ‘disappearances’ phenomenon, secret places of detention, extrajudicial killings, etc.

A few weeks after the publication of this report, President Liamine Zeroual announced his intention to resign. The massacres then slowly decreased in intensity without however stopping altogether. But the reactions of the Algerian authorities and the pro-eradication press did not change during those years. When the testimony of Nesroulah Yous was published in October 2000, a campaign of disparagement was launched in the Algerian press against him and his publisher, presenting the survivor of the Bentalha massacre like a ‘terrorist’ who showed killers their targets.

¹⁰² *Algeria: Report of Eminent Panel, op. cit.*

¹⁰³ *El Watan*, 27 September 1998.

Conclusion

The Algerian state did everything to monopolise the discourse on the massacres (and human rights violations in general) committed in Algeria and to prevent any investigation. Any expression contradicting the official version of events was stifled and repressed. A majority in the Algerian society was convinced that the Islamic Armed Groups (GIA), alleged authors of the massacres in the years 1996-1998, had been manipulated, but the Algerian strategists admirably managed to impose a dogma: Islamist terrorist covered the country with blood for over ten years.

We are witnessing a lie taking root which holds the future of a whole country hostage. Based on a triple denial of truth, justice and the victims' suffering, it distorts the experience of millions of people and forges history. The State is the main actor responsible – without however putting aside the responsibility of others in the violence – in so far as it makes use of every means to cover-up the truth. However, the trauma within the Algerian society caused by the violence suffered is aggravated by the prohibition on the identification of the culprits, *be they militaries or Islamists*. The farcical trials of alleged authors of killings or massacres poorly concealed the will to censor and forge: How many times were innocents condemned for acts they did not commit and how many times were those really responsible not troubled? The population in martyr areas see their rights being denied on a daily basis. Now institutional violence is added to what they suffered, by the 'slaughterers' not only being allowed to run free but also being cleared.

Does this mean that the Islamists who opted for armed struggle in 1992 have no responsibility in the massacres? Guilty of violence and crimes during the first years of the war, some definitely were, and those responsible for those crimes have never been judged in a serious manner. Moreover, everything indicates, as we have seen, that the 'massacres strategy' which prevailed from 1996 to 1998 was fundamentally the work of the army chiefs and the secret services. This, however, does not exonerate the Islamists from all responsibility.

On the one hand, many of them, originally activists, accepted (sometimes under duress) from 1995-1996 putting themselves under the leadership of bloodthirsty chiefs and carrying out at their instigation horrible crimes and massacres: even assuming that the leaders were DRS agents and that they had been unwillingly manipulated, they are no less guilty of these crimes (and it is not acceptable, from the viewpoint of international law and simply out of respect for the victims that the so-called 'civil concord' law granted them *de facto* amnesty).

And, on the other hand, many political leaders from the FIS Islamist scene, clandestinely in Algeria or in exile, had a more than ambiguous attitude towards crimes allegedly committed 'in the name of Islam'. Until mid-1995, probably hoping they could still rally the GIA troops, they often remained silent about the crimes, or even implicitly approved of them. From 1996, although most of those leaders systematically denounced the GIA's barbaric acts, because they understood that they had become the exclusive tool of the DRS, they never gave themselves the means to be heard by the international community (for example by giving timely information to international human rights NGOs which they could use to go further in their investigations). Whether it was for many the price to pay for their explicit or hidden support to the regime, or for others for their concern to preserve some kind of legitimacy for the armed struggle against the regime, this 'half-silence' played a role in the international impunity from which State terrorism and 'Janviériste' Generals benefited.

Of course, one should not underestimate the fact that the political blindness of the surviving former leaders of the FIS can be partly explained by the regime's systematic elimination of those movement officials most likely to look for a political, and not military, solution to the crisis (as clearly shown by the assassination in Algiers by the DRS – obviously disguised as an 'Islamist crime' – on 22 November 1999 of Abdelkader Hachani, which all observers agreed had a political meaning). Since the end of the 1990s, many former FIS leaders still alive were notoriously taken in by the authorities. In this convergence lies one of the reasons for the current difficulty in

establishing the respective responsibilities for the crimes of the ‘dirty war’— and in particular for the massacres – between the Islamists and the real leaders of the Algerian State.

However, this State carries another responsibility: one of failing to assist victims and survivors. The latter were either abandoned in their neighbourhoods, at the mercy of unemployment and marginalisation, or hundreds of thousands of them fled their land and possessions to cram into slums. Families imploded, solidarity networks were repressed and destroyed, and exile further accentuated cultural differences within the same extended family. The material losses which resulted are not quantifiable, and the massive deficits in terms of social stability, education, psychological balance, as well as the impact on women in particular, are not even taken into account. Violence erected as a mode of social management produces violent relations within the society whose members are increasingly fragmented and have no other means of collective expression than riots.

It is urgent today to shed light on what really happened since the putsch of 11 January 1992, for civil peace and stability will only be possible once the victims’ suffering is recognised, those responsible for the crimes named and a process of reconciliation based on truth and justice initiated. In this sense, the call for a truly independent commission of inquiry into the massacres in Algeria remains wholly topical. Under the current circumstances, it is certain that the Algerian authorities will never set up such a commission: this is why it can only be international.

Annexes

Annex 1.- Three testimonies of the 1994 massacres¹⁰⁴

Testimonies from citizens of Ténès (May 1994)

On 4 May 1994, the population of Ténès and the surrounding region (Wilaya of Chlef) discovered the brutality and unimaginable violence of the wild hordes of the sinister General Lamari, which killed 173 unarmed civilians to avenge 16 of their people who had been shot dead in an ambush by the armed resistance ten days earlier.

The armed resistance's feats of arms:

- On Monday 25 April 1994 at 10 o'clock, the armed resistance lures an ANP (National Popular Army) section into a trap, about twenty kilometres East of Ténès on the road to Algiers.

- The ambush led to the death of 16 soldiers, including 1 Captain and 1 Lieutenant, and 20 wounded

- Despite the deployment of helicopters throughout the day, the members of the resistance all came back to their base safe and sound, and with weapons.

Retaliation:

- On Tuesday 26 April, an estimated 3 back-up battalions were hurried to the site under the protection of 5 helicopters.

- Combing operations were carried out in a 30km, or sometimes 50 km, perimeter from the site of the ambush. They consisted of searching the doyards. Let us note that they always carefully avoided thick woodlands.

- During the same day in Ténès-City, a team from the despicable and sinister Military Security (Sécurité militaire, SM) went to the house of the Bouchareb family, whose father and son were wanted. Before shamelessly dynamiting the house, they stole 10,000 DA worth of family savings, jewels, furniture and other valuable objects.

- Following the failure of the combing operations in rural areas, the regime's roughnecks turned to mass arrests. In the night from Thursday 28 April to Friday 29 April starting from 1 o'clock in the morning, they pulled their victims out of their beds.

The abduction method:

Accompanied by the unavoidable 'Bouchkara', the SM teams distinguished themselves by:

- Their disguise: wearing a beard and the Kachabia, a head band with the words "La Ilaha Illa Allah" written on it.

- They knocked on doors saying "open, we are the 'Ikhwa' [brothers]"

¹⁰⁴ Testimonies collected by the Algerian Committee of Free Human Dignity and Human Rights Activists, published in the Livre blanc de la répression (1991-1994), volume 1, op. cit., p. 77-84. These testimonies are extremely important as they are the first ones on the massacres perpetrated in the spring of 1994 by the security forces (or the death squads depending from them) to have been made public in 1995, at a time when these acts were unreported (or attributed to Islamist groups) in the Algerian and international press. These testimonies, collected immediately from civilians after the attacks, some of whom were obviously Islamist supporters, have since been widely corroborated by other sources, often by members of security services who took part in them (such as the former under-lieutenant Habib Souaïdia who described in 2001 in his book La Sale Guerre, op. cit., with much additional details, the Lakhdaria massacre in May 1994, which he witnessed).

- Searches conducted at the victims homes were only limited to finding money, jewels and other valuable objects that were immediately seized.

At the end of the curfew at dawn, it has been reported that all the town's walls were covered by posters signed by "OJAL, Ténès section". These posters were glued preferably in the areas they had been active all night and, visibly, on the walls of the high school and popular housing estate facing the barrack across a street which was very well lit and strongly guarded by three sentinels.

These posters were statements as they already literally announced: "punishment and death to anyone who assisted the terrorist, even only with a drop of water"

In such circumstances, is there a difference left between the OJAL-Ténès Section and the SM's hordes?

The fate of the victims:

In the course of the following days, increasingly frightening information spread through the region reporting mass arrest among populations who had made Islam their only credo in life.

- On Wednesday, 4 May 1994, the residents of El-Marsa, 30 km West of Ténès, noticed at the same time vultures flying in circles in the woods close by, and the ANP hordes, who had been posted nearby, leaving the site.

- This is how the mass graves were discovered, each containing 15 to 20 half-charred bodies tied together with metallic wire. Most of the victims faces had been carefully burnt to be made unrecognizable.

- Witnesses living in the woods reported seeing and hearing the *chouhadas* [martyrs] being burnt. Their awful cries were unbearable even for their torturers who put an end to their agony by shooting them.

- Other victims of torture were discovered perched on tree tops. Others were impaled on some trees which had a spiky top. These *chouhadas* had been thrown from helicopters.

The death toll:

The number of victims unanimously reported by rescuers is 173. The town of Taougrit in the Dahra Mountains was the most severely affected, as 65 worshippers who had been arrested after the Salat El Djoumouâ (Friday prayer) on 29 April were all executed. Other surrounding villages, Ouled Boudoua and Sidi-Moussa, experienced the same genocide.

Chouhadas from Ténès-City:

- Bourahla Mérouane (60 years)
- Déramchi Mustapha (26 years)
- Chaouch Larbi (32 years)
- Benhamama Bouaïssi (42 years)
- Zidane Hadj (40 years)
- Khermechene Hadj (26 years)
- Kallaliz Ahmed (28 years)
- Attatfa Abdelhafidh (22 years)
- Baghdali Abdelhadi (26 years)
- Bouzar M'hamed (40 years)
- Boumeziane Mohammed (27 years)
- Bessaillet Omar (20 years)

The list would have been longer if other well-advised brothers had not fled.

In Tala-Aassa, a small village in the Dahra Mountains, torturers were unable to find the actual target for their assassination but turned instead to his brother and 13 year old son who were found dead in a mass grave. They were the Bensari.

The list is too long to mention all of them, but God does know those He chose for the *Chahada*.

Testimony collected with the population of Ténès.

Testimonies from citizens of Berrouaghia (18 June 1994)

Since the beginning of March, we are witnessing true human butchery at our Wilaya, in total contradiction with the government's political discourse, in particular from General Zeroual and his Prime Minister Sifi. Concurring information coming from all over the country describe the same atrocities than the ones experienced by the citizens of our region.

We want to tell the facts as they occurred in Berrouaghia.

During the month of Ramadan, the military security addressed a letter in the name of the Armed Islamic Movement to the tribunals asking them to cease all judicial activity or face execution.

On the Eve of Eid (13 March 1994), the same Military Security Services, still in the name of the Armed Islamic Movement, released a curfew order to start at 21:00.

Men in civilian clothes started to deploy, under the protection of the military which stayed in the background and circled the zones of operation. Dozens of armed 'civilians' then arrived in unmarked Mazda vehicles and started to search houses under the eyes of the military, breaking windows and doors.

They pulled citizens out of their homes and embarked them in their vehicles, insulting them, punching them and hitting them with the butts of their rifles. Mothers and children watched their relatives being arrested screaming and crying

This was a true collective 'kidnapping' under the amused gaze of the military which made sure that everything went smoothly. In one single evening forty citizens were abducted.

A few days after this collective 'kidnapping', bodies started to appear a few kilometres away from the site. They were murdered! Horror and savagery reached an intolerable level. Not only were these citizens murdered, but their bodies were so awfully mutilated that they were unrecognizable. Fathers were unable to recognise their children, and wives their husbands. Toes had been cut off, stomachs eviscerated, eyes pulled off and noses cut. Some bodies were only a lump of flesh and ground bones. Two bodies had been thrown out of a helicopter.

Forty bodies were found scattered, some decomposing. As soon as these bodies were buried, the 'civilians' came back at night to kidnap a new lot of victims.

The same scenario was repeated in Cherarba, Ténès, Lakhdaria and Aïn-Oussara.

The Oueds, roads, forests and plains of Berrouaghia were strewn with bodies. The hospital was under high surveillance and doctors were not allowed to examine the bodies, usually declared as 'Algerian X' by the security services.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of citizens executed by 'civilians' under the watchful eyes of the military:

- Saad-Saoud Mohamed, 38 years, father of 5 children, teacher, living in Robaoa (Médéa), killed in March 1994.

- Sihaoui Moussa, 48 years, father of 7 children, manual worker, living in Berrouaghia, murdered in April 1994.

- Bouchenafa Ahmed and Bouchenafa Méliani, respectively working at Sonacome and at the Cereals Office, living in Médéa's '800 housing' estate, murdered in April 1994.

- Zoulikha Mohamed, 36 years, father of 4 children, Director of the Chafii school in the Mohamedi suburbs, executed in April 1994.
- Mansour Belkacem, 36 years, father of 4 children, high school teacher, living in Berrouaghia's railway station district, murdered in May 1994.
- Fertas Nadji, father of 7 children, Sonacome employee, living in Berrouaghia's '800 housing' estate, executed in May 1994.
- Maddar Ali, 22 years, nurse, living in the '800 housing' estate, murdered in May 1994.
- Lachmat, 60 years, unemployed and his cousin, 65 years, living in Ouled Dhabet (Berrouaghia), executed in May 1994.
- Ferrah, 22 years, living in the Hantabli suburbs, murdered in May 1994.
- Kheiter Salem, Sonacome employee, the Fattas brothers, one of whom is a nurse, and Hadjri Mohamed, sports teacher, executed in Zoubeiria in May 1994.
- Benyahia Mahieddine, 46 years, father of 7 children, Sonacome employee, living in Berrouaghia's district n. 9, murdered in May 1994.
- Mahmoudi Mohamed, 55 years, shopkeeper, living in the '800 housing' estate (Berrouaghia), murdered in May 1994.
- Omar Saïd, 37 years, father of 3 children, PTT employee, living in the '800 housing' estate, Benamar Abdelkader, father of 8 children, living in the Aïn Amrane area, Benaïssa Aïssa and Bedjaoui, PTT employees, murdered at the beginning of June 1994.

These testimonies were sent on 18 June 1994 by citizens of Berrouaghia to the Algerian Committee of Free Human Dignity and Human Rights Activists.

Testimonies from citizens of Lakhdaria (May 1994)

How do you call a State which flouts human dignity, stifles liberties and savagely represses its people's children?

The atrocities experienced go beyond all understanding. After arbitrary arrests and institutionalised torture we are now witnessing collective summary executions. We are witnessing, since the beginning of March, true collective butchery, of an indescribable savagery with innocent citizens as only victims, who are kidnapped at their homes at night by soldiers and taken away from their relatives for ever.

Our conscience calls on us as citizens of this bleeding country to bring our humble testimony on the atrocities our city Lakhdaria recently experienced in the hands of the army.

What happened?

In mid-May and for a week a large-scale citizens arrest campaign took place, irrespective of their age or social status. What is strange is that most of the citizens arrested were not linked in any way with the Islamic movement.

On Monday 23 May 1994, totally naked bodies were found exposed in the railway station street, one of the city's main streets. We were able to identify them as being Kadi Farid and Azergui Fatah, 24 years old, shopkeeper.

This discovery shook the population of Lakhdaria and the rumour about collective killings of citizens who had been arrested in mid-May spread like wildfire. The families were overwhelmed with angst. Citizens started running around looking for bodies. It was an apocalyptic sight. People were screaming everywhere, Bodies started to appear around the city.

Six (6) bodies were then discovered in a field on the outskirts of the city. Their members were cut and their faces were disfigured. It was a real magma of flesh and blood.

Three decomposing bodies were cast up by the oued in Lakhdaria, collected by civil protection officers and brought to the hospital. These three bodies could not be identified by the families due to the advanced state of decay.

Two additional bodies were found in the city's rubbish dump. Both had their throats slit.

The sight was frightful. Corpses were regularly found on every street corner. No area was spared. It was a truly diabolic plan of the special services. Corpses were scattered in every corner of the city to impose a real atmosphere of terror among the population.

Over 30 bodies were discovered over one morning. The number could be higher as the number of arrests was by far higher. What became of the others? Were they murdered and thrown in the neighbouring villages or are they still alive?

Among the identified bodies were the following persons:

- The Brait brothers who lived in the railway station area.
- Boudjema Abdelwahab, father of 2 children and employee in a company.
- Messaoudi Mohamed, taxi driver and father of 16 children.
- Moutadjer, 75 years, shop-keeper.
- The Bairi brothers from the Hamana district.
- Djamal Mekhazni, student.

And the list is still open...

This is the sad reality experienced by our city of Lakhdaria on the dark day of 23 May 1994. The murderers and vultures responsible for this horrible butchery have neither faith nor conscience. How can one speak about humanitarian values in Algeria today when the military, supposed to guarantee security for citizens and territorial integrity, slaughtered an old man of 75 years whose son was killed by the same soldiers two months before? And what a manner of executing him!

His chest and face were horribly burnt. His old wife was only able to identify him thanks to a mole on the back of his neck. How can these inhuman and beastly behaviour be explained? How will a mother react at the loss of two of her sons, savagely murdered by the military horde? You would not do that to your worst enemy.

Such is the dramatic situation of Lakhdaria and of the whole of Algeria. Terror and savagery are the only means left to the blood thirsty dictatorship to stay in power.

In what universe are we? The citizen no longer knows when he wakes up whether he is alive in a cell or dead in a grave!

This testimony is brought to the knowledge of the public opinion for History, on the crimes committed by the junta which lost everything...everything in its dark existence by trying to preserve power at the cost of thousands of victims.

History will judge tomorrow!

Testimony sent on 27 June 1994 to the Algerian Committee of Free Human Dignity and Human Rights Activists.

Annex 2.- (Non exhaustive) list of the massacres in 1997¹⁰⁵

By Salah-Eddine Sidhoum

4 January: 16 citizens were murdered in the village of Benachour (Blida) by masked men a few hundred meters away from a military camp. It is of note that the citizens of this village had refused to set up armed militias.

5 January: Massacre of 18 citizens in the Oliviers district of Douaouda (Tipaza). Among the victims are 3 children and 6 women. This region had refused to organise armed militias.

6 January: 23 citizens were horribly mutilated and killed in Hadjout (Tipaza) by an armed group.

7 January: Explosion of a bomb in the Didouche Mourad street in Algiers: 20 dead.

11 January: 5 citizens massacred in Ouled Chebel by an armed group.

12 January: 14 citizens were murdered in Tabâinant (Bouinan, Blida) by an armed group. The victims had sons who joined the underground resistance according to testimonies collected.

17 January: 43 citizens were murdered in Sidi-Abdelaziz in the region of Béni Slimane (Médéa) and 6 others in the village of Bouchrahil, in the same region.

19 January: Explosion of a car bomb in the main street of Algiers' working-class district of Belouizdad, one hour after the fast was broken. A true carnage: 54 citizens were killed and 89 others wounded, according to the count from different hospitals in Algiers.

22 January: 14 people were murdered in the village of Benramdane in Saoula (Tipaza). 23 people massacred in El Omaria (Médéa).

23 January: Explosion of a bomb in the middle of a market in the working-class area of Baraki (Algiers): 30 dead. The Sifouane, Benmahdi and Loukal families living in Haouch El Hadj in Baba Ali (close to Algiers) were decimated by an armed group. A total of 15 people including 9 women were murdered.

24 January: 35 citizens living in the Ouled Ali doyar (Berrouaghia) were murdered by an important armed group.

29 January: 8 citizens including one baby were murdered in a farm in Sidi-Kaddour located in Sidi-Moussa (Blida). According to the local population the tenants of this farm were suspected to have helped help armed opposition groups.

31 January: The area of Ktiten located in the city of Médéa was attacked by dozens of armed masked men. 35 people including women and children were murdered and some horribly mutilated. The citizens of this region had refused to set up armed militias.

The citizens of the city of Médéa were terrorized. Committees of citizens organised night watches carrying knives and pickaxes to protect themselves. Others fled the city.

1 February: 7 citizens of a farming estate (Haouch Louz) located in Larbaâ (Blida) were killed by an armed group.

3 February: 9 people of the same family were killed in horrible conditions in Benchicao (Médéa).

4 February: 28 people massacred in Boumedfaa (Ain Defla).

10 February: 25 people massacred in Hammam Melouane (Blida) by an armed group.

¹⁰⁵ Source: http://www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/2002/bilan_massacres.htm.

16 February: massacre of two families from the El Karrech doyar (Blida). The residents of this doyar had refused to set up militias. One of these families was burnt alive in its home after the armed group set fire to it: 33 people perished in this massacre.

22 February: 6 family members living in Tablat (Médéa) were murdered by an armed group.

23 March: 32 people, including 14 women, were savagely mutilated and killed in Ouled Antar (Ksar Boukhari).

24 March: 5 young girls were killed in Berrouaghia by an armed group.

3 April: 13 people were killed by an armed group in the village of Aïn El Hadid (Tiaret). In the village of Thalit (Ksar Boukhari), an armed group massacred more than 50 citizens including women and children.

4 April: In Amroussa (Chebli. Blida), two families composed of 15 members, including seven women and three children, were exterminated by an armed group.

5 April: 12 citizens including 7 women were killed by an armed group in Bouinan (Blida).

6 April: 15 people massacred by an armed group in Aïn Lahdid (Tiaret). 13 people massacred in the Merniche doyar (Tlemcen) by an armed group. 52 people massacred in the village of Thalit (Médéa) by armed men.

11 April: 23 citizens including 12 women and 6 children were savagely massacred in the Mena village (Boufarik). This massacre took place only a few hours after the death of 5 militia men in a bomb explosion in Haouch Gros (Boufarik).

7 people massacred in la Chiffa (Blida) by an armed group.

13 April: 32 citizens were massacred by an armed group in the Chaïb farm in Chebli (Blida).

21 April: An armed group on horses (!) raided a farm (Haouch Boughelaf) located at the entrance of Bougara (Blida) and proceeded to the horrible massacre of 120 people (including dozens of women and children). It is of note that a military camp, the militia base and the gendarmerie brigade were situated a few hundred meters away. The armed group occupied the farm all night long until dawn, and perpetrated the crimes undisturbed.

22 April: 42 people massacred in El Omaria (Médéa).

25 April: Bomb explosion in a train at the level of Baba Ali (Blida): 21 dead.

14 May: 29 people including around ten children and women were killed after having been awfully mutilated in the Faner farm (Chebli. Blida) by an armed group.

26 May: a family of 8 people was assassinated by an armed group in the village of Djebabra (Médéa). Thirteen citizen were assassinated in Douaouda (Tipaza) by an armed group.

29 May: 14 people massacred in Bakoura, near Cherchell, by armed men.

2 June: Explosion of a bomb in the working-class area of the Casbah in Algiers: 10 dead.

11 June: 12 people were killed in Cheraïfia, near Boufarik, by armed individuals.

14 June: 16 citizens massacred in Haouch Sahraoui (Blida) by an armed group.

16 June: 48 citizens killed in the village of Daïat Labguer (M'sila) by an armed group.

24 June: Assassination of 15 citizen in Saïda by an armed group.

27 June: 22 people were killed in the Zmala doyar, Seghouane village (Médéa) by an armed group.

2 July: 4 people of the same family were killed and six girls kidnapped in Larbaâ (Blida) by a group of around 30 armed men.

3 July: 18 citizens were murdered in Ouzra, a village close to Médéa by an armed group.

6 July: 27 people were killed by an armed group in Aïn Boucif (Médéa).

11 July: 14 people were killed in the Balili doyar (Bou Ismaïl-Tipaza) by an armed group.

12 July: 33 citizens were killed by an armed group in the Fetha doyar close to Ksar Boukhari (Médéa).

14 July: An armed group introducing itself as *mujahedeen* entered the village of Tafraout (Ain Boucif, Médéa) to demand some food. After having been well fed and cared for, they turned to the villagers and kill twelve.

18 July: 14 people massacred in Bou Ismail by armed men.

21 July: Massacre of 21 citizens in the M'ghita doyar, in Chréa (Blida) by an armed group.

22 July: 11 people massacred in Benachour (Blida) by an armed group.

24 July: Over 30 citizens of the Sidi-Ghiat and Oued Bouhradoun doyards (Hadjout — Tipaza) Including children and women were murdered by an armed group.

25 July: 13 citizens of the Sidi-Salem doyar near Omaria (Médéa) were savagely assassinated by an armed group.

27 July: 36 citizens were savagely assassinated in the district of Si Zerrouk at the entrance of the city of Larbaâ (Blida), located less than a hundred meters away from military barracks and a gendarmerie brigade. Electricity had been cut in the afternoon, according to survivors' testimonies. The armed group used bombs to blow up the houses

22 citizens were killed in Omaria (Médéa) by an armed group.

29 July: Massacre of 39 citizens, including women and children, in the Matmata doyar (Aïn Defla) by an armed group.

30 July: Massacre of 38 citizens in the village of Sidi-Madani (Blida) by an armed group. Massacre of 22 citizens in Larbaâ (Blida) by an armed group.

31 July: 20 people massacred by an armed group in a doyar located near the roman ruins of Tipaza.

3 August: Massacre of 19 young citizens in Amroussa (Blida) by an armed group. It was discovered that the victims were citizens who had belonged to the FIS.

Over 50 citizens were massacred by a strange armed group in the villages of Mzaourou and Oued El Had (Aïn Defla). Indeed, the elements of this group had shaven hair and eye brows, according to many witnesses who survived the killing. They were wearing bands with the writing "El Ghadiboun aâla Allah" (the angry against God) and were behaving like drug addicts.

5 August: 9 citizens massacred in the Benamor area of Oued Slama (Blida) by armed men.

7 August: 21 people were massacred in the village of Zaboudja (Médéa).

8 August: 11 people massacred in Medghoussa (Tiaret) by an armed group.

12 August: Massacre of 29 citizens in the Hraouat doyar at Ain Defla by an armed group.

13 August: Massacre in the Ouled Djillali douar, near Douéra (Algiers) perpetrated by an armed group against families who had fled the massacres in Jijel and Médéa. Toll: 15 dead including women and children.

19 August: 20 citizens were massacred in Faïd El Batma (Djelfa) by an armed group.

20 August: Over 60 citizens including women and children were massacred in the Souhane doyar near Tablat (Médéa) according to information from survivors who were wounded by bullets and hospitalised in the Zemirli d'El Harrach hospital. Witnesses said that a strange group was lurking about for a month already and visited several doyards in the region of Tablat. They introduced themselves as *mujahedeen* and asked the villagers for money and food. The witnesses are positive: these persons were not from the region and were wearing strange costumes.

23 August: 24 citizens from the town of Béthia (Ain Defla) were massacred by an armed group.

24 August: 29 citizens were massacred in the Omaria doyar (Médéa) by an armed group.

26 August: Massacre of 64 citizens including around 30 women in the Béni Ali doyar near Chréa (Blida) by an armed group.

28 August: Awful massacre in the area of Er-Raïs located near Sidi-Moussa (Algiers). Heavily armed men came in a truck convoy at 11:45 PM a few hundred meters away from a military camp and butchered the population. More than 300 citizens were killed and 200 others wounded. Some of the armed men were wearing masks and others fake beards, according to many concurring survivors' testimonies. They had Kalashnikovs on which electric torches were fixed, 'commando' daggers and axes.

Massacre of over thirty people in the village of Maâlba near Djelfa.

29 August: Bomb explosion in the working-class area of the Casbah in Algiers: 13 killed and over 60 wounded.

31 August: 19 citizens, members of two families, were massacred in Bologhine, in the middle of the capital, by armed men. 32 citizens were massacred in the region of Tissemsilt by an important armed group.

2 September: 22 citizen including 10 children are massacred in the village of Ouled Larbi near Médéa by an armed group.

5 September: Massacre of over 70 citizens in the working-class area of Sidi-Youcef in Béni-Messous (Algiers) by an armed group which came in trucks, with some of its members wearing military outfits. Many children and women were awfully mutilated before being murdered. It is of note that this zone hosts many military barracks, including one of the so-called 'special' forces.

6 September: 11 people were massacred in Saïda.

12 September: 9 people massacred in Larbaâ by an armed group.

15 September: Massacre of 22 citizens in the regions of Béni Slimane (Médéa) and Saïda over the weekend.

20 September: Over 50 citizens were massacred in Béni Slimane, near Tablat (Médéa) by an armed group.

22 September: Awful massacre in Bentalha, in the Eastern suburbs of Algiers: 85 citizens were killed according to the official version and over 400 according to testimonies collected, and 120 wounded. Militia men and policemen who came to rescue the population were allegedly brutally prevented from entering the neighbourhood by the military, according to many testimonies given by the wounded at hospitals. According to some survivors, a helicopter was flying over the scene at the time the butchery took place.

26 September: Over 20 citizens were massacred in the village of Aïn El-Hadj near Djelfa by an armed group.

28 September: The Ferhah family of Tabâinet (Chebli) composed of 47 members, of which 4 sons joined the underground resistance, was massacred by an armed gang. Women, children and old men were eliminated with axes and knives. Five sisters of the resistance members were abducted.

29 September: 10 people massacred in Ouled Mimoun (Tlemcen) by an armed group.

2 October: 14 people were massacred in the village of Kharouba near Oran. 37 people were massacred in the village of Melaha (Blida). 32 citizens were assassinated in the village of Ouled Sidi-Aïssa (Médéa). 13 members of the same family including women and children were massacred in Seghouane (Médéa).

4 October: 22 people were massacred by an armed group in Ouled Bouchraâ (Médéa). Hand-made mortar shells were launched on an area of the city of Blida: around 10 citizens were killed.

5 October: 16 people were massacred in Sekmouna, Zoubiria (Médéa) by armed men. 10 people massacred in Ouled Sidi-Yahia (Aïn-Defla) by an armed group. 17 people including 16 school children on a bus were killed at a road block set by an armed group.

9 October: 9 people were massacred in Souaghi, near Béni Slimane (Médéa) by an armed group.

11 October: 14 people belonging to the Boutazalt and Kerdacha families living in Haouch Souidani Boudjemaâ (Boufarik) were massacred by an armed group.

12 October: 22 people massacred in Béni Slimane (Médéa).

20 October: 11 people belonging to two nomad families, massacred in Bougtob (Saïda) by an armed group.

25 October: 16 members of the same family, including women and children from the village of Bir El Djir (Médéa) were killed by an armed group.

7 November: Over 22 people were massacred in Tajmout (Tlemcen) by armed groups at fake road blocks.

8 November: 26 citizens were massacred in the village of H'Malit in the Chréa Mountains (Blida) by an armed group.

13 November: Massacre of a family of 12 members in the village of Hammama (Miliana) by an armed group.

27 November: 25 people massacred in Souhane, near Tablat by an armed group.

29 November: Nearly 30 citizens including women and children from the village of Hassi Labeled (Saïda) were massacred by an armed group.

18 December: 31 citizens from Larbaâ (Blida), including women and children were massacred and 20 others wounded by an armed group.

20 December: 10 nomads were massacred near Aflou by an armed group.

23 December: Carnage in two villages located between the Wilayas of Tiaret and Tissemsilt (Sidi-Antri et Shari): 80 to 100 citizens including women, children and old people were massacred with hand weapons by armed men.

24 December: Massacre of 26 citizens, including women and children, in the village of Zouabria (Tiaret) by armed men. 11 people including women and children massacred in a slum located in Baïnem's forest.

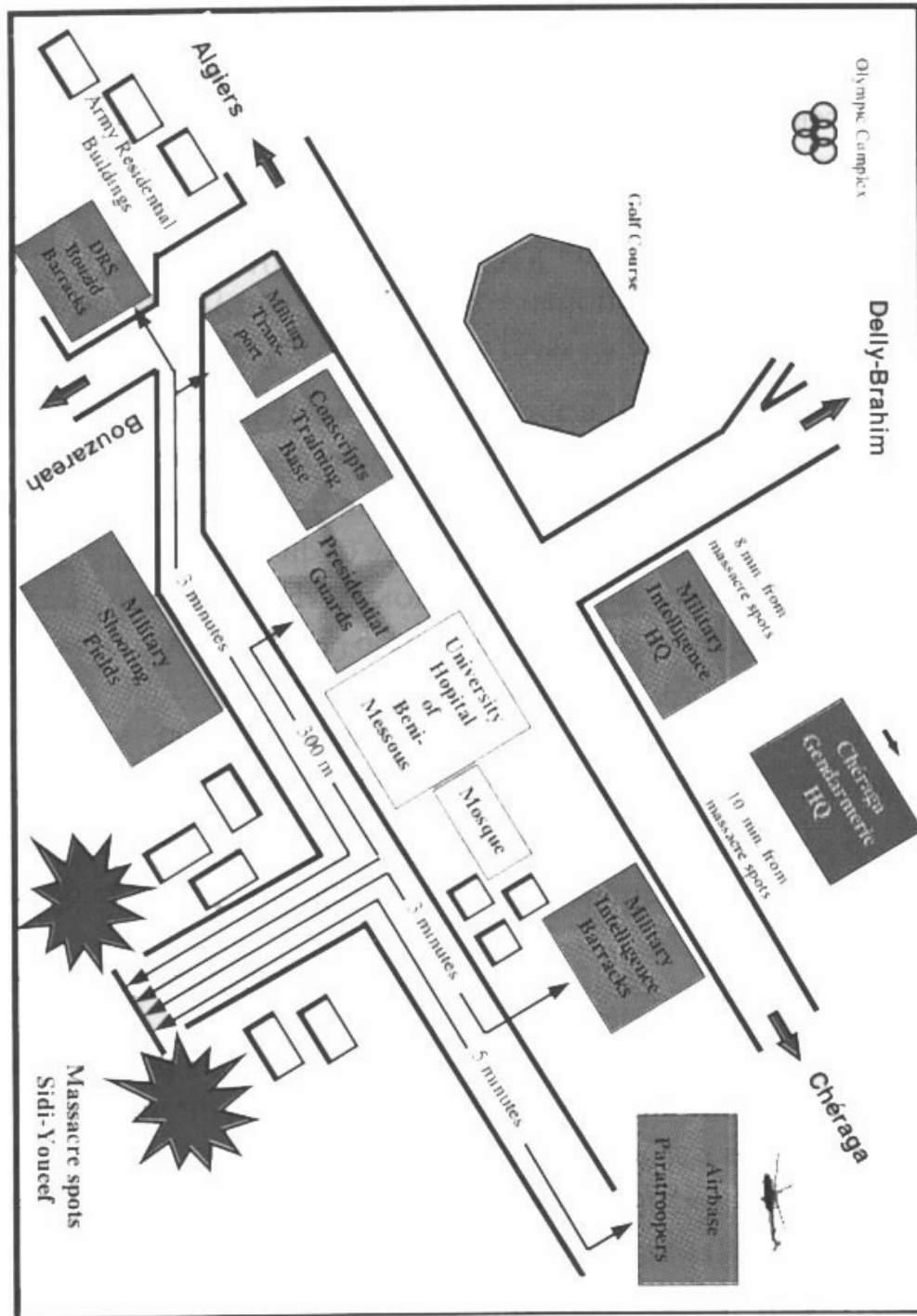
26 December: Massacre of three families in the village of Ouled Moussa (Médéa): 21 dead including three women and seven children.

27 December: 25 citizens, including women and children, were massacred in the Safsaf doyar near Mascara, including 14 inside a mosque, by armed men.

29 December: 34 citizens, including women and children, were massacred in the Faoudj doyar (Médéa) by an armed group. 10 people belonging to 2 families killed by an armed group in Hassi Bahbah (Djelfa).

30 December: Horrible carnage on the first day of Ramadan in three villages located a few kilometres away from Relizane (Kherarba, Ouled Sahnine et Ouled Tayeb): 386 citizens, including women and children were massacred by armed men, according to hospital estimates. The press reported 412 killed. Over 120 others were wounded. An atmosphere of terror prevailed in the region.

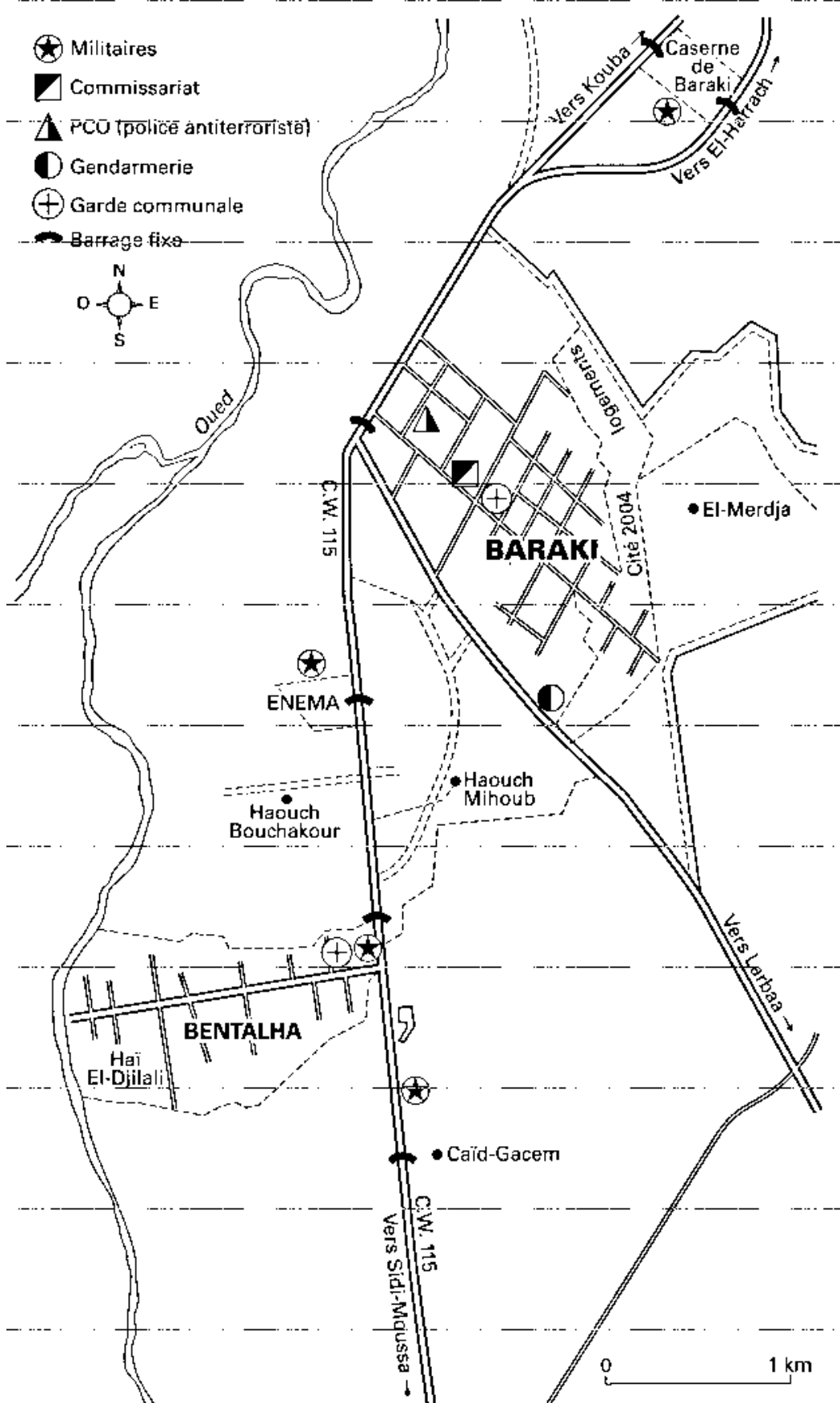
Annex 3.- The scene of the Béni-Messous massacre, 5 September 1997



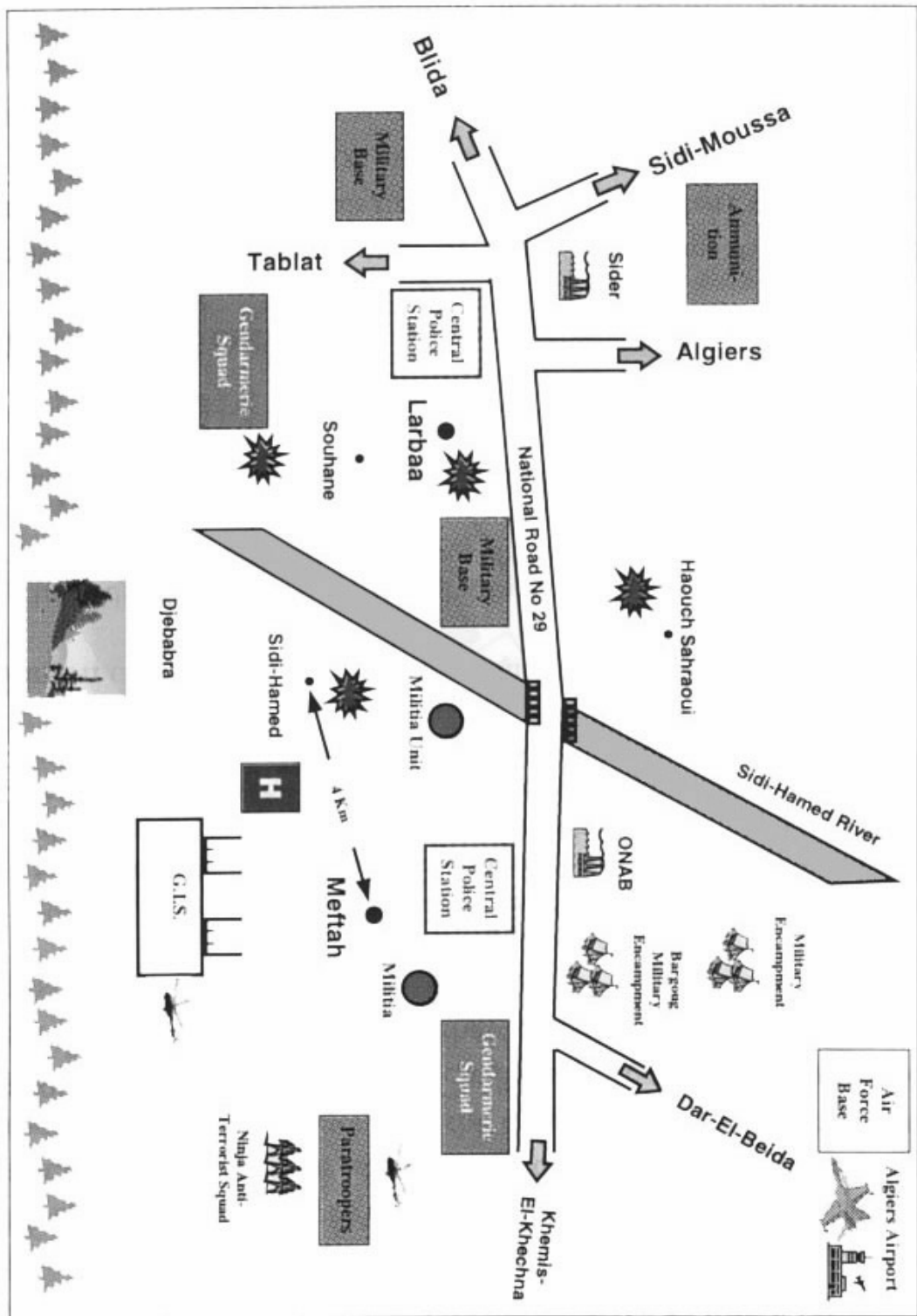
The Scene of the Beni-Messous Massacre.

Annexe 4.- The scene of the Bentalha massacre, 22 September 1997

BARAKI ET BENTALHA



Annexe 5.- The scene of the Sidi-Hamed massacre, 11 January 1998



The Scene of the Sidi-Hamed Massacre.

Annex 6.- (non-exhaustive) list of the massacres in 2002 and 2003.

2002

12 January: a taxi was riddled with bullets at a road block erected by armed men in El Gaâda, near Aflou (Laghouat): 5 dead.

2 February: 12 citizens killed and 9 others wounded at a road block erected by armed men at Rezarza, near Médéa.

4 February: 9 citizens killed and 4 others wounded at a road block set up by armed men in military outfits in Sidi Lakhdar (Aïn Defla). 13 members of a militiaman's family (Serdoun family) massacred by an armed group in Sidi Amar (Aïn Defla).

9 February: 6 citizen killed (including five belonging to the Boulefaât family) and one wounded in the Chaabna doyar, near Bougara (Blida) by an armed group.

9 April: 5 members of the Boukerrouche family, massacred by an armed group at El Hammama, near Miliana (Aïn Defla).

19 April: 7 members of the same family (Chaïbi), including 4 children, massacred by an armed group near Sidi Akacha, near Ténès (Aïn Defla) and 4 others wounded. The father, who belonged to the local militia, escaped death.

24 April: 16 people belonging to two nomadic families (Dekia et Rabhi) massacred by an armed group at Dhaïet Nabla, (Tiaret). Nine children and four women were among the victims.

1 May: 11 people belonging to the Salim and Bekkar families massacred by an armed group in the Benseghir area of Tiaret. Twenty people belonging to the Rakhrakh, Bengasmia and Djaâdi families massacred by an armed group in Ksar Chellala (Tiaret).

2 May: 7 people killed at a road block erected by an armed group on the road to Bou Hanifia (Mascara).

29 May: 23 people belonging to a nomadic family, massacred by an armed group in Sendjas (Chlef).

11 June: 12 people travelling in a bus were massacred at a road block erected by a group of armed men in Médéa. 10 other were wounded.

13 June: 6 citizens belonging to two families (Khaldi et Daoudji) massacred by an armed group in the Khraïcia neighbourhood called Télégraphe, near Douéra (Alger). The site of the massacre was located near a military barrack (Château d'eau), a militia camp and a gendarmerie brigade.

6 young citizens massacred in Boukhris, near Douéra (Algiers) by an armed group which managed to flee.

22 June: 6 young citizens killed by three armed men, shot as they were playing ball games on waste ground near the coach station in Zeralda (Alger).

28 June: 15 citizens killed following the machine-gunning of their bus at a road block erected by armed men in Eucalyptus (El Harrach).

5 July: The explosion of a very powerful bomb caused a massacre at a market in Larbaâ (Blida): 38 dead and over 50 wounded.

7 July: 6 shepherds including four teenagers, slaughtered in Harbil (Médéa) by an armed group.

9 July: 10 people, including five children of the Boualem family, massacred and two others wounded by an armed group in a neighbourhood of Tiaret.

13 July: 6 people, including four children, massacred and two others gun wounded in Aïn El-Kerma, near Miliana (Aïn Defla) by an armed group.

15 July: 7 people, including the family of a militia men (Bendouia Larbi) composed of five people (father, mother and three children), killed by an armed group in Ouled-Allah, near Boukadir (Chlef).

16 July: Armed men shot at a café with machine guns in Médéa's city centre: 6 dead.

18 July: 10 citizens, including a family of 5 people (Medjadji), killed by an armed group in Sobha, near Boukadir (Chlef).

6 August: 5 young citizens killed and a woman seriously wounded by bullets by an armed group in Babar's forest (daïra Ammi Moussa — Relizane).

15 August: 26 citizens belonging to three families (Guenfoud, Rabhi et Brahim), including 16 children, massacred by an armed group in the El Khodr doyar, in the town of Harchoun (Chlef)

Thursday 12 September: Eleven citizens massacred at a road block erected by armed individuals in Bouhdoud, near Sidi Lakhdar (Aïn Defla). Four vehicles set on fire by the attackers.

Saturday 28 September: Seven citizens killed during the night in the area of Redjaem, near Ammi Moussa (Relizane) by armed individuals in military outfits who managed to flee.

Tuesday 1 October: Fifteen people belonging to the Tebrouk family, massacred by an armed group in Oued Chorfa (Aïn-Defla). Nine women and three children are among the victims.

Tuesday 15 October: Thirteen pupils of a Koranic school in the town of El Hadjadj (Chlef) shot dead and one other wounded by an armed group in military outfits.

Thursday 27 October: 21 citizens belonging to the Akil family were massacred and four others wounded by an armed group in the M'Rabte doyar, near Boukadir (Chlef). Eight children and eight women were among the victims.

Tuesday 29 October: Eight people belonging to the Ben Amer family were massacred by an armed group in the Sidi Bouaïssi doyar, near Sidi Okacha (Chlef). Two militia men cousins, women and children were among the victims.

Thursday 21 November: Explosion of a bomb as a taxi-bus was driving past on the road to Ain Rich – M'sila: Six dead and two wounded.

Thursday 12 December: Six members of the Gacem family killed by an armed group who broke into their home in the Thelidja doyar (Djelfa). Three teenagers and two militia men were among the victims.

2003

Saturday 4 January: Fifteen people belonging to two families (Kebaili and Hammadi) massacred, one child seriously injured and two girls abducted in Malamane, in the town of Zabana (Blida) by an armed group. The two girls were found dead a few days later. 5 women and 5 children were among the victims.

Tuesday 7 January: Five people belonging to the Chahraoui family, including one woman and two children, massacred in the Douachiche doyar, near Oued Sly (Chlef). The father was seriously injured.

Tuesday 25 February: An armed group fired at vehicles with machine guns on the road to Hameur El Aïn (Tipaza): 12 dead, including three women and a chief militia man. Two citizens declared missing.

Wednesday 26 March: Nine citizens massacred at a road block erected by armed men on the road to Meftah (Blida) (APS, 27/03/03). Four members of the same family massacred and four others wounded by an armed group in the town of la Chiffa (Blida)

Thursday 27 March: Eight people (Annani and Nouaz families), seven of which belonged to the same family (Annani), massacred by an armed group in a doyar at Merdjjet Sidi Abed, near Oued Rhiou (Relizane). Three children and two women are among the victims.

Wednesday 2 April: Three people from the same family were slaughtered by an armed group in the village of Maâzouz, near Zerdezas (Skikda).

Sunday 25 May: Seven citizens massacred in the village of M'Rane (Chlef) by an armed group. They were four pupils of a Koranic school, a mother and her two children.

Monday 26 May: Fourteen citizens members of the same family (Chérif) massacred by an armed group in the Ain Soltane doyar (Chlef). The father is thought to be a militia member. Six children were among the victims.

Tuesday 3 June: Twelve citizens massacred and two others wounded at a road block erected by individuals in military outfits, at the crossroads in Boumedfaâ (Aïn-Defla). (APS 04/06/03 and *Le Matin*, 05/06/03).

Thursday 12 June: Three citizens, including a woman, killed by an armed group in El Madher (Batna).

Sunday 15 June: Three citizens were killed by an armed group in Guenzet (Sétif).

Wednesday 18 June: Four citizens were killed at a road block erected by armed individuals dressed like communal guards in N'Chima near d'El Ancer (Jijel).

Saturday 21 June: Five members of the same family including three children (Lakréche family), massacred by an armed group in the Errata doyar, near Merdjjet El Abed (Relizane), a few hundred meters away from the militia's headquarters and the gendarmerie brigade. One woman is thought to have been kidnapped by the attackers.

Wednesday 25 June: Eight members of the Bouanika family, including four children, massacred by an armed group in the Beni Belkacem doyar, near Tablat (Médéa). A 24-year old young girl was abducted by the attackers.

Friday 1 August: Three citizens were slaughtered at a road block erected by armed individuals on the road between Dahr Elouz and Ouled Abdelkader (Chef) (*Quotidien d'Oran*, 3/08/03).

Wednesday 29 October: Three citizens were killed at a road block erected by armed men on the road of Hameur El-Aïn/Sidi Rached (Tipaza). They are believed to have been employees at the Cosider company (AFP 29/10/03; *Le Matin*, 31 Oct.- 1 Nov. 2003).

Thursday 6 November: One militia man and his 15-year-old daughter were killed at a road block erected by armed individuals in Oum Toub (Skikda) (*Echourouk El Yaoumi*, 8/11/03).

Thursday 20 November: Three citizens, including a militia man and his brother killed at a road block erected by armed individuals near Hammam Righa (Aïn-Defla). (AFP, 22/11/03).

Sunday 23 November: Three members of the same family (the father and two sons) killed at their homes by an armed group near the village of Oued Sbaâ (Sidi Bel Abbès) (*El Khabar*, 27/11/03). Three members of the same family (father, daughter and uncle) killed by an armed group at Remila, near Chettia (Chlef) as fast was being broken (*El Jarida*, 27/11/03).

Thursday 18 December: Three citizens, including a woman, killed and two others wounded by armed individuals in Laghouat (AP, 20/12/03).