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VOICES OF THE VOICELESS

Edited by M. Farouk, T.S. Senhadji and M. Ait-Larbi

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1. Introduction

In this small collection of testimonies, we give space and voice to a few massacre survivors, relatives of victims and after-the-event witnesses, all of whom give a first-person account of their experience.

Most of the testimonies presented here are hitherto unpublished and originate from the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme. We have, however, reproduced some testimonies which were published in the Catholic paper *La Croix*, and the left-of-centre papers *Libération* and *The Guardian*, *Tribune de Genève* and *Nisf Adounia*.

These testimonies are, of course, not meant to be representative of *all* the massacres. They cannot even be expected to convey the reality of even one massacre, let alone the hundreds of such events in the last few years.

These testimonies were selected on the grounds that: i) they passed stringent tests of authenticity, and ii) they depart from the official versions of events that swamped the national and international media at the time. Testimonies of the kind presented here are still scarce because terror silences the victims, the survivors and the witnesses. 'In no other zone of conflict have I seen people so afraid to speak their mind to a foreigner' wrote Llyod in his reportage about one of the massacres in Algiers.^A The massacres occur in a context where arbitrary detention, harassment, torture and 'disappearing people' remind Algerians, directly and indirectly, of their mandate to keep silent and forget the past. It is therefore only fair to provide space and social validation to the versions of events that have been suppressed from public space and contained to private memories. Official accounts can easily be found in papers such as *El Watan* or *Liberté* or in the news bulletins of the major news agencies such as *Agence France Presse* or *Associated Press*. Whether these testimonies represent an 'unburial and unearthing of the truth that translates into an invasion of the space occupied by official history'^B is left to the reader's judgement and to that of the inquiry commission that will no doubt, one day, shed light on these most painful moments in Algeria's recent history.

Section 2 presents the testimonies about the Raïs massacre while section 3 includes those related to the Bentalha massacre. In the last section, 4, the testimonies relate to several other massacres of differing scales.

^A A. Llyod, 'Zeroual's Zombies Cast Vote', *The Times*, 24 October 1997.

^B N. S. Sternbach, 'Women's Testimonial Discourse', in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 18, No 3, 1991, pp. 91-102.

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2. Raïs Massacre

This massacre took place on 29 August 1997. Raïs lies in the borough of Larbaa, in the district of Blida. The official death toll was 98 dead and 120 injured.^C Residents' figures reported by *The Irish Times* and *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace* range from 200 to 300 dead.^D CNN reported a death toll of 400 from hospital sources.^E

Whole families were decimated and a large number of girls and women were abducted. We have chosen to provide some insight into the victimisation dependence of the massacres on age, gender, and kinship as well as on property victimisation. On the basis of documents made available to us by the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), we have sought to reconstruct kinship trees that integrate data about age and gender in diagrams presented in section 2.1.

In section 2.2 we present the transcription of an interview of Mrs Bachiri. Two of her brothers and their families died in the Raïs massacre. This unpublished interview was conducted by the LADDH. Section 2.3 reports a testimony of a survivor, Messoud. It was recorded by journalist Amine Kadi and published in the Catholic paper *La Croix*. In section 2.4 a woman survivor gives her testimony to the Association for the Defence of the Victims of the Massacres in Algeria (DVMA).

2.1. Kinship, Age, Gender, and Property Victimisation Sample

The victims of the massacres share various common attributes other than the individual experience of harm. We propose to highlight here the age, gender, kinship and property attributes of a sample of victims, four families: Rahab in section 2.1.1, Djaknoun in section 2.1.2, Belkacem in section 2.1.3, and Ferrah in section 2.1.4.

The source of the data used here is the LADDH. For each family we present a copy of the criminological report of the Gendarmerie Nationale in Arabic and our translation of this document to English. On the basis of this report and other data provided to us by the LADDH, we reconstruct and present the kinship structures of the victimised families in diagrammatic form for all the families, except the Ferrahs. In the latter case the available data does not allow a reliable reconstruction of the tree; so we presented it in tabular form instead. The trees clearly demonstrate that there is an intent to victimise families as such. The diagrams contain information about the age and gender of the victims, unambiguously showing that females and children

^C 'Algérie: nuit d'horreur à Raïs', *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 31 August 1997.

^D '300 Algerians dead in worst slaughter in civil war', *The Irish Times*, 30 August 1997; *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 31 August 1997.

^E 'Islamic terrorists slaughter Algerian villagers', *CNN*, 29 August 1997.

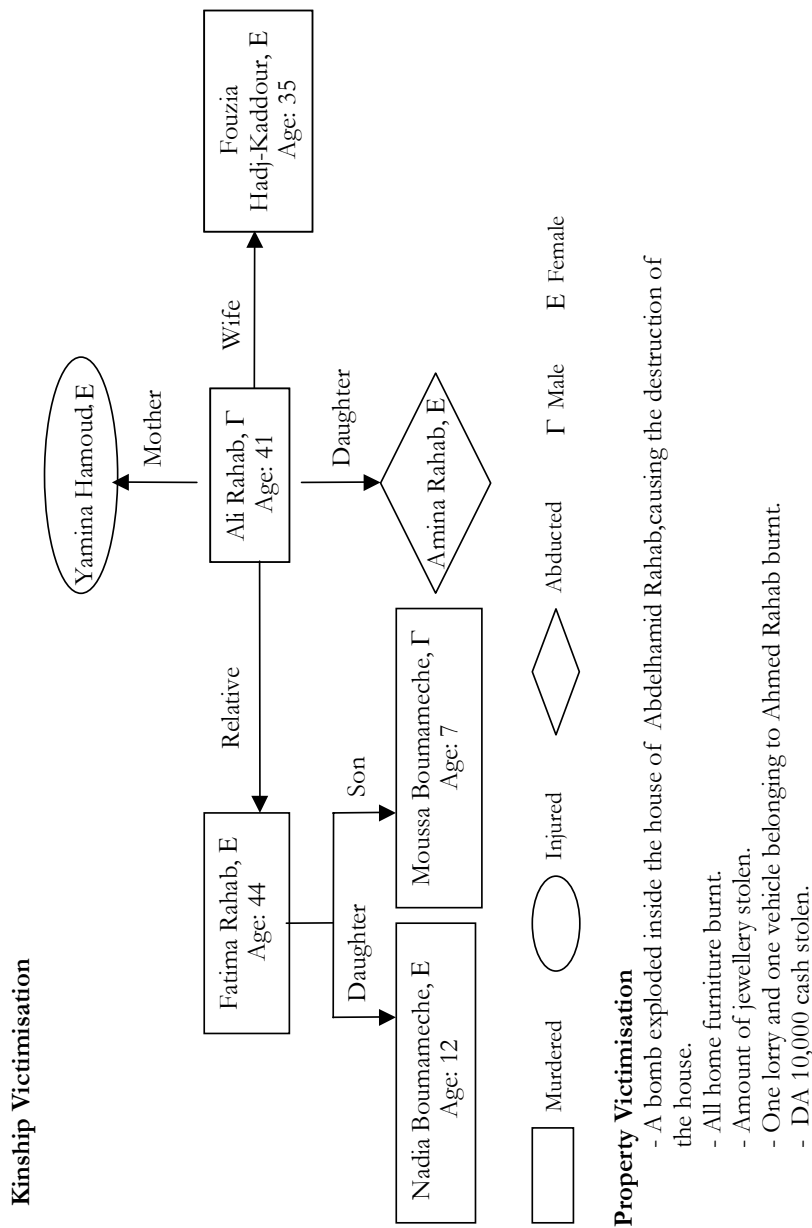
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account for a large component of the gender and age victimisations, respectively.

The diagrams distinguish between the murdered, injured and abducted. Most of the abductees are girls and women. For each family details of property victimisation are also provided.

2.1.1. Rabab Family



Source: Gendarmerie Nationale of Sidi-Moussa, Blida Report No 1414, 22 September 1997. File Ref. 879/97. Drafted and signed by Sergeant-Chief Ahmed Taïrouni.

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Translation of the Gendarmerie Nationale Report

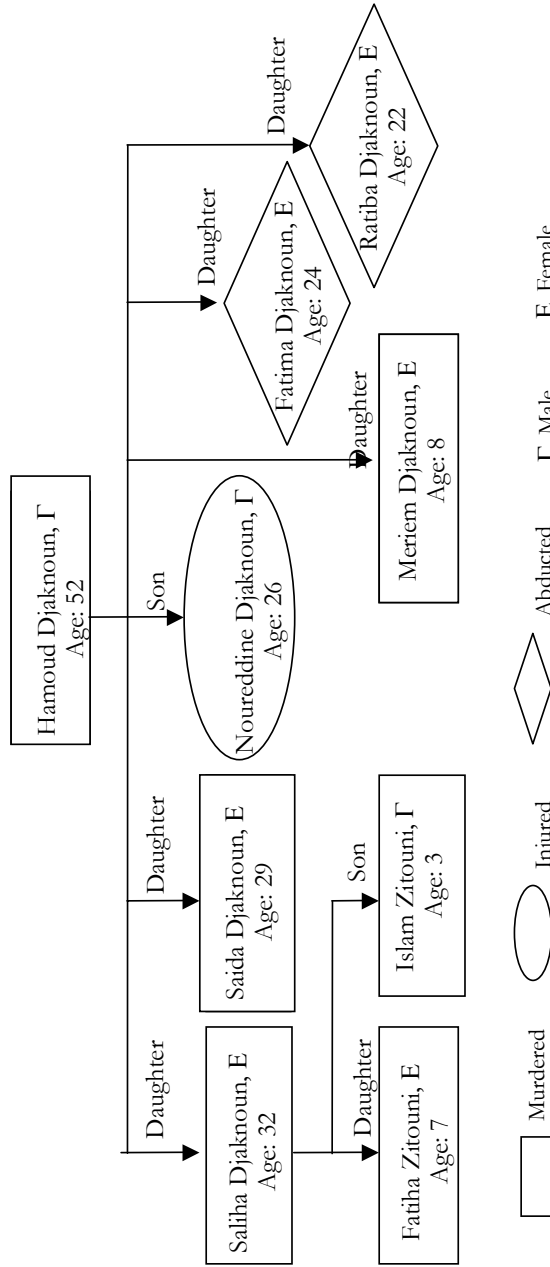
Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria	
National Defence Ministry	Gendarmerie command
The first regional command Gendarmerie of Blida Gendarmerie squad of Algiers Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi Moussa	
Sidi Moussa, 22.09.1997	
Ref. Number: 97/879/	
Certified report	
I, the undersigned, Tadjrouni Ahmed, officer of the Criminal Investigation Department and commander of the Gendarmerie platoon of the district of Sidi-Moussa, testify that	
Name and Surname	Ali Rahab
Date and Place of Birth	11.10.1956 in Sidi-Moussa (Blida)
Son of	Moussa
And	Yamina Hamouda
Nationality	Algerian
Address	District of Rais, Sidi-Moussa, Algiers
Object of report No.	1414
	date: 28.08.1997
of the Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi-Moussa (Algiers), a copy of which was sent to the prosecutor to the court of Larbaa	
Cause (circumstances of the incident): the above-mentioned was murdered on 28.08.1997 in his house, his wife (called Fouzia Hadj-Kaddour born on 20.07.1962) was also murdered. Their daughter called Amina Rahab was abducted and her whereabouts are unknown. A lady called Fatima Rahab, born on 12.03.1953 was also murdered. Her son Moussa Boumameche, born on 02.04.1990 in Hussein Dey, and her daughter Nadia Boumameche, born on 04.06.1985 in Hussein Dey, were also both murdered. Yamina Hamoud, the mother of the first victim, was seriously injured and was taken immediately to the Hospital.	
Property damage: all the home furniture belonging to Ali Rahab was burnt; a bomb exploded inside the house of Abdelhamid Rahab causing the destruction of the house, one lorry (type G5) and one vehicle (type Renault 6) belonging to Ahmed Rahab were also burnt; and a sum of 10,000 Algerian Dinars was stolen.	
Copies to:	
Prosecutor to the court of Larbaa	
The victim and other entitled parties	
Archives	
Platoon commander's signature Gendarmerie Nationale Official stamp	

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2.1.2. Djaknoun Family

Kinship Victimisation



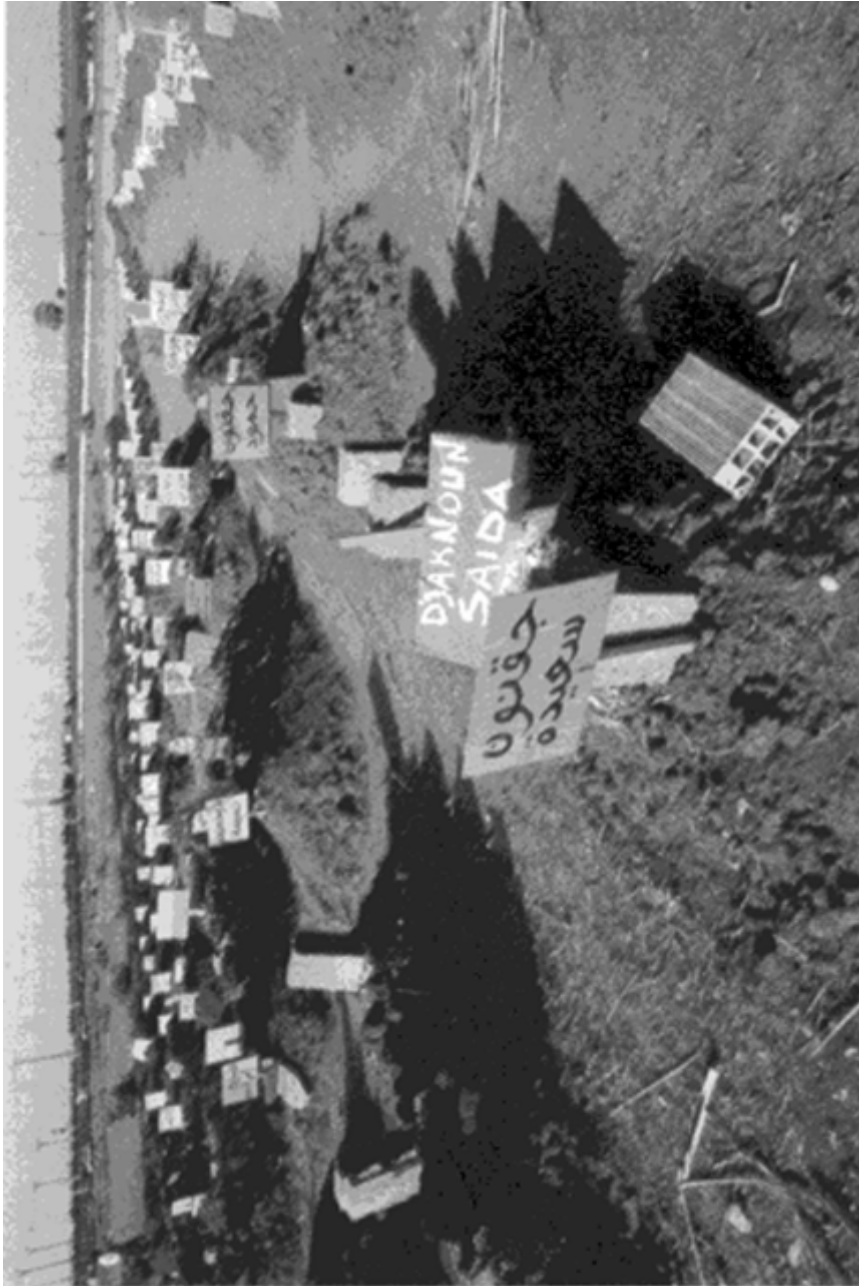
Property Victimisation

- The house burnt.
- All home furniture burnt.
- DA 500,000 cash stolen.
- Amount of jewellery stolen.
- One vehicle burnt. Identity documents burnt.

Source: Nationale Gendarmerie of Sidi-Moussa, *Blida Report No 1414, 24 September 1997. File Ref. 846/97. Drafted and signed by Sergeant-Chief Ahmed Tadjrouni.*

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September 1997 : Rais cemetery in the aftermath of the massacre. The graves of the Djaknoun family are in the central row. Hamoud's grave appears behind that of his daughter Saïda.

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الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية

قيادة الدرك الوطني وزارة الدفاع الوطني


القيادة الجمهورية الأولى
للدرك الوطني بالولاية
مجموعة الدرك الوطني بالجزائر
كتيبة الدرك الوطني براقسي
فرقة الدرك الوطني بسيدي موسى

سيدي موسى يوم 24.08.1997م
رقم 97 / 846

بطاقة إثباتي معاينة

أنا الممضي اسفله الرقيب الأول محمد موسى احمد فاود فرقة الدرك الوطني
بمدينة بجاية .
شهاد بان:
الإسم واللقب : محمد موسى احمد فاود
تاريخ ومكان الإزدياد : 1945.03.28 م بئر بسيرة ولاية الجزيرة
إسكن (ة) : موسى . و ابن (ة) : محمد بن فاطمة
الجنسية : جزائري
عنوان السكن : الرايس سي موسى بوسيدي الجزائر بجاية
موسم محضر رقم : (1997.08.28) تاريخ : 28.08.97 رقم
لقيادة الدرك الوطني بسيدي موسى (الجزائر) . والشروع الي السيد/ وكيل الجمهورية لدى محكمة الأركان
السبب (ظروف الحادثة) : الجمعي بالاعتداء من طرف ضحية اعتداء اجرامي من طرف جماعة ارهابية
مدينة بجاية من طرف قضي الرايس يوم 1997.08.28 اذ تم اغتياله رفقة ابنائه (مصلحة معجدة وبريم) واخطف
كل من اناطية ورتيبة) والعتيل اخطافه (التروى اسلام والفرق فتحية) وجرح (جندون نور الدين) وجرح لعتيل العت
من ارضه بتركة كل الافاك ومبلغا الي حوالي (500000) وسلب عدة مجوزات كالتبعية وخرق التسيار قنن ووسر
زرقان (التسجيل (170.08) 6244) من ارضه بتركة كل الافاك لاربية لخاصة لعتيل العت
السبب الارهاب
- وكيل الجمهورية لدى محكمة الأركان
- النيابة أو ذوي الحقوق
- الوثائق
عن رئيس
و
ل

قائد الفرقة



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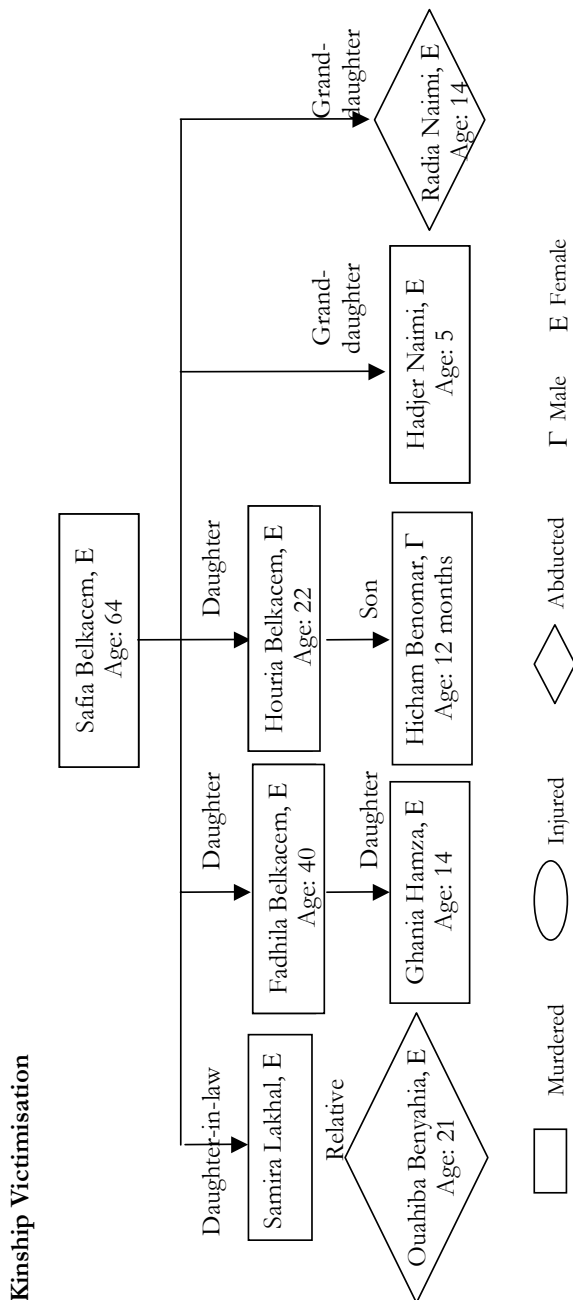
Translation of the Gendarmerie Nationale Report

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria	
National Defence Ministry	Gendarmerie command
The first regional command Gendarmerie of Blida Gendarmerie squad of Algiers Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi Moussa	
Sidi Moussa, 24.09.1997 Ref. Number: 97/846/	
Certified report	
I, the undersigned, Tadjrouni Ahmed, officer of the Criminal Investigation Department and commander of the Gendarmerie platoon of the district of Sidi-Moussa, testify that	
Name and Surname	Hamoud Djaknoun
Date and Place of Birth	28.03.1945 in Bouguara (Blida)
Son of	Moussa
And	Fatima Djaknoun
Nationality	Algerian
Address	District of Rais, Sidi-Moussa, Algiers
Object of report No.	1414
	date: 28.08.1997
of the Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi-Moussa (Algiers), a copy of which was sent to the prosecutor to the court of Larbaa.	
Cause (circumstances of the incident): the above-named is a victim of a criminal attack carried out by armed terrorist groups in the district of Rais on 28.08.1997 in which he died along with his daughters Saliha, Saïda and Meriem. Two grandchildren Islam Zitouni and Fatiha Zitouni were also killed. The two daughters Fatima and Ratiba were abducted. His son Nouredine Djaknoun was injured.	
Property damage: the whole house and its furniture were burnt; a sum of 500,000 Algerian Dinars and jewelry were stolen; a vehicle (type Renault 4) belonging to Hamoud Djaknoun was burnt; and identity documents were also burnt.	
Copies to:	
Prosecutor to the court of Larbaa	
The victim and other entitled parties	
Archives	
Platoon commander's signature Gendarmerie Nationale Official stamp	

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2.1.3. Belkacem Family



Property Victimisation

- The whole house burnt.
- One vehicle burnt.
- Identity documents burnt.

Source: *Nationale Gendarmerie of Sidi-Moussa, Blida Report No 1414, 8 October 1997. File Ref. 949/97. Drafted and signed by Sergeant-Chief Ahmed Tadjrouni.*

الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية

وزارة الدفاع الوطني

قيادة الدرك الوطني

القيادة العامة للجمهورية الأولى
الدرك الوطني بالقيادة
مجموعة الدرك الوطني بالجزائر
قيادة الدرك الوطني بسراقبي
فرقة الدرك الوطني بسيني موسى

سني موسى يوم 10.08.1997
 رقم 97 / 949

بطاقة إثبات و معاينة

ان الممضي اسفله **تجوي احمد دايط الشرطة القضائية و لاند الفرقة الاقليمية**
لدرك الوطني بسيني موسى (الجزائر).

نشهد بان :

الاسم أو القاب : **بالتاسم ميساوش**

تاريخ و مكان الميلاد : **09.03.1939 مطرلاط** ولاية : **المدية**

الجنس () : **مؤنث** و ابن (ة) : **سارسان لاطية**

الخدمة : **جيزا اقليمية**

عنوان السكن : **سني التراب بسيني موسى الجزائر**

موضوع محضر رقم : **1414** صادر بتاريخ : **23.08.1997**


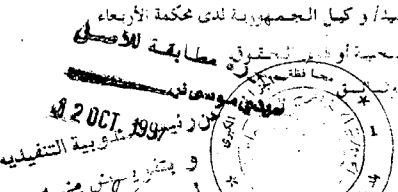
الفرقة الدرك الوطني بسيني موسى (الجزائر) ، و المرسل الى السيد / وكيل الجمهورية لدى محكمة الأربعاء
 لتدبير (شروط الحادثة) : **التمضي بالامر بحجة اعداد اجرامي من طرف الجيطات الارهابية**
المتوجهة لحي التراب يوم 23.08.1997 وقد وُجِدَ زوجة المعني بالتسم مفية وابنته فديلة
زويت حمزة حمدان وابنتهما حمزة فديلة بالتسم حموية زوجة دين عمر وابنتها همام ولكل سعيرة زوجة
بالتسم احمد والتمضي مساجرة حمزة حسين وهم اختطاف التمضي راضيا بين يحي وحمية ابنة عمر وهم حرق
الخبز و التمايلة و تدمية الخبز في اليوم 25.08.1997 وقد ابرجت اذانية

المرسل اليه :

- السيد / وكيل الجمهورية لدى محكمة الأربعاء
 - المحكمة أو وكيل المحققي مطابقة الاصل
 - السيد بسيني موسى

سني موسى يوم 20 OCT. 1997
 و بتاريخ سني موسى

قائد الفرقة

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Massacres and Victims

Translation of the Gendarmerie Nationale Report

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria	
National Defence Ministry	Gendarmerie command
The first regional command Gendarmerie of Blida Gendarmerie squad of Algiers Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi Moussa	
Sidi Moussa, 08.10.1997 Ref. Number: 97/949/	
Certified report	
I, the undersigned, Tadjrouni Ahmed, officer of the Criminal Investigation Department and commander of the Gendarmerie platoon of the district of Sidi-Moussa, testify that	
Name and Surname	Belkacem Ayache
Date and Place of Birth	born in 1939 in Tablat (Médéa)
Son of	Boudjemaa
And	Fatima Taryane
Nationality	Algerian
Address	District of Rais, Sidi-Moussa, Algiers
Object of report No.	1414
	date: 28.08.1997
of the Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi-Moussa (Algiers), a copy of which was sent to the prosecutor to the court of Larbaa.	
Cause (circumstances of the incident): the concerned is a victim of a criminal attack carried out by armed terrorist groups in the district of Rais on 28.08.1997 in which the following persons died: his wife Safia Belkacem, his daughter Fadhila Belkacem (spouse of Hamdane Hamza) and her daughter Ghania Hamza, his daughter Houria Belkacem (Mrs Benomar) and her son Hicham Benomar, also Samira Lakhal (spouse of Ahmed Belkacem) and Hadjer Naimi who is Hocine Naimi's daughter.	
The following persons were abducted: Radia Naimi and Ouahiba Benyahia (Omar's daughter).	
Property damage: the whole house, one vehicle and identity documents were burnt.	
Copies to:	
Prosecutor to the court of Larbaa	
The victim and other entitled parties	
Archives	
Platoon commander's signature Gendarmerie Nationale Official stamp	

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2.1.4. Ferrah Family

	Male	Female	Total
Murdered	Allal Ferrah, 42 Abdelhak Ferrah Lakhdar Ferrah Sohaib Ferrah Kamel Benamane, 40 Mohamed Lamine Kerouma Mohamed Seghir Ayoun	Chaima Ferrah Meriem Ferrah Baya Benamane Djamila Berrouane Mimouna Sari Fatima Ben Thalidjane Fatima Dehiles	
			14
Injured	Brahim Ferrah Sid-Ali Ferrah Boualem Ferrah Abdelhamid Mekourma Younes Sari	Farida Omeir Leila Akani Rabea Ferrah Ghania Ferrah Dalila Ferrah Chahira Benamane	
			11
Abducted		Farida Ferrah Hayat Bennamane Fatima Dhiyat	
			3
Total	12	16	28

Property Victimization

- 2 million Algerian Dinars cash stolen.
- 1.2 million Algerian Dinars worth of jewelry stolen.
- The first floor of the house was burnt.
- All the home furniture was burnt
- Three vehicles and one lorry belonging to the victims or their relatives were burnt.

Source:

*Report of the Gendarmerie Nationale No 1414**Drafted and signed by Sergeant –Chief Ahmed Tadjrouni, dated on 22.09.1997**File Ref. No: 881/97*

Translation of Gendarmerie Nationale Report

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria

National Defence Ministry

Gendarmerie command

The first regional command
 Gendarmerie of Blida
 Gendarmerie squad of Algiers
 Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi Moussa

Sidi Moussa, 22.09.1997
 Ref. Number: 97/881/

Certified report

I, the undersigned, Tadjrouni Ahmed, officer of the Criminal Investigation Department and commander of the Gendarmerie platoon of the district of Sidi-Moussa, testify that

Name and Surname	Allal Ferrah
Date and Place of Birth	01.01.1955 in Sidi-Moussa (Algiers)
Son of	Boualem
And	Baya Benamane
Nationality	Algerian
Address	District of Rais, Sidi-Moussa, Algiers

Object of report No. 1414 date: 28.08.1997
 of the Gendarmerie platoon of Sidi-Moussa (Algiers), a copy of which was sent to the prosecutor to the court of Larbaa.

Cause (circumstances of the incident): the victim was killed during the Rais massacre at Sidi-Moussa with all his family members, namely: Abdelhak Ferrah, Lakhdar, Chaima, Sohaib, Meriem, Baya Benamane, Djamilia Berrouane, Kamel Benamane, Mimouna Sari, Mohamed Lamine Kerrouma, Mohamed Seghir Ayoun, Fatima Ben Thalidjane, Fatima Ben Dehiles. The following persons were injured: Brahim Ferrah, Sid-Ali, Farida Omeir, Boualem Ferrah, Leila Akani, Rabea Ferrah, Ghania Ferrah, Abdelhamid Mekourma, Dalila Ferrah, Chahira Benamane, and Younes Sari. The armed terrorist groups abducted also three women, namely: Fatima Dhiyat, Hayat Benamane and Farida Ferrah.

Property damage: a sum of 2 million Algerian Dinars was stolen; 1.2 million Algerian Dinars' worth of jewellery stolen; the first floor of the house was burnt; all the home furniture was burnt; identity documents, three vehicles (type R9, Peugeot and Lada) and one lorry (type Toyota) belonging to the victims or their relatives were also burnt.

Copies to:
 Prosecutor to the court of Larbaa
 The victim and other entitled parties
 Archives

Platoon commander's signature
 Gendarmerie Nationale
 Official stamp

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2.2. Mrs Bachiri

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

The following testimonies are a direct translation of interviews with the relatives of the victims. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. In the first one, Mrs Bachiri relates the story of her two brothers, and their families, who were killed during the Rais massacre. During the interview, another lady whose name was not introduced interrupts Mrs Bachiri. We refer to this lady here as Lady X. Lady X seems a very articulate witness who, in the course of her account, expressed her grief in a poem. Unfortunately the poem could not be translated into English. She also talks eloquently about the hogra: the cruel oppression of the weak. She draws parallels between what she witnessed during the war of liberation against France and what she is experiencing today in the era of independence.

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

A: What can I tell you? During the Rais massacre, sixteen of my brothers, my *milk brothers*^F, were killed. One of them is 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 Guennouche Amara. The other brother, the younger one, is sixty years old. He is 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 is twenty-eight years old, the other is 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

^F Mrs Bachiri means that they are her brothers in the sense that what she has in common with them is being breast-fed by the same woman.

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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 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

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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:

Shall I tell you, my dear son, who can perpetrate such atrocities? It's the *barkis*. The *barkis* are the ones who kill without mercy. We saw them during the war against France. The French did a lot of damage, but the dirty war did not start really until *barkis* were recruited. And it is these *barkis* who are today doing this to us. It's a kind of revenge. They still bear grudge against the Algerian people who fought for independence. This independence brought more pain than gain. What we are witnessing during the independence era is much more painful than what we endured during the period of colonialism.

Who on earth can benefit from slaughtering babies?

Who on earth can benefit from disembowelling pregnant women then fry the foetuses in frying pans?

[Then Lady X recited a folk tale poem on oppression and corruption and the outcome for the righteous.]

Q: Why is she here? What's her story? [Referring to Lady X]

A: (Mrs Bachiri): Well, this woman [Lady X] has been a victim during the war against France and is being victimised today too. She has been beaten up, her skull is bruised all over. Her children were taken away and...

Lady X interrupts again:

What is really hurting me and causing me a lot of grief is the *hogra*. The *hogra* by the state who took away my son. They took him away from me. I would not have minded had he been arrested for an offence or a crime of some sort. And even if , and I say if, he had done something wrong, they should have brought him to justice. Failing that, they should have brought him and killed him in front of me. I would have then cried and asked Allah for patience in such adversity. The other alternative would have been to put him in jail... Unfortunately, they chose the worst, they took him away and did not leave any trace of his whereabouts. I don't know whether he is alive or dead. He is the son of a martyr. His father has sacrificed his own life [in the war of liberation] so that his son could live in independence. Why did they take him away and leave me, an old lady of 63 years, like a mad cow? When I manage to behave like a sane human being in the evening I wake up in the morning like a mad cow, and when I manage to behave like a sane woman in the morning I end up like a mad cow in the afternoon. And all

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this is due to the anxiety caused by thinking about the *hogra*, which took my son away from me. They took him away stark naked and bare-footed. Can you see what I mean? What has really and utterly devastated me is the *hogra*. They illegally contrived to sell his car and now want to take over my house. How can you remain sane? Is this the country or the independence for which we lost one and a half million martyrs? What we now see is that the state is against us.

They are taking our children away. They take them from their beds. Is this the rule of law? And then they show their faces on TV, with no shame. When I see them on TV, I spit on them, excuse the word. Including President Zeroual, when I see him I feel like killing him, because that person is not a president. He is not a president who can build the country and help the weak. Those who were in a position to build this country have gone.

Well, tell me why did these people vanish? Please explain to me why did these people disappear? Fourteen-year-olds, fifteen-year-olds... they simply chose Islam. That's why they were made to disappear.

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.

2.3. I was at Raïs during the massacre

Source: Amine Kadi, *La Croix*, 26 September 1997.

Messoud weeps for his brother, his sister-in-law and his niece – all massacred at the same time as at least 300 other people in the Mitidja village of Raïs, on the night of 28-29 August. His testimony is the first to be published in France.

In this house of the village of Raïs, the Chief Fire Officer of the Civilian Protection [the fire brigade] suddenly turned back: 'It is better that you stay where you are.' Messoud wanted to go in. Close to the entrance, he had already stepped over the corpses of two women wearing party dresses. Judging by the position of the detached heads, he could guess the depth of the cut which severed them from their bodies. 'You cannot go further, it's impossible,' the Chief Fire Officer insisted, holding his helmet in his hand. Messoud felt sick: at the bottom of the stairs, he saw a crushed head. He looked for the bodies of Meriem, his sister-in-law, of 8-year-old Samir, his youngest

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nephew, and of his 10 year-old niece Amina. They were dead. Nawal, the oldest of his brother's children who would soon be 12, was the only survivor: she threw herself from the first floor of the house where a wedding ceremony was taking place. She was badly injured. Nobody knows whether she wanted to kill herself or whether she attempted to flee. She lay in a pool of blood. The killers paid no attention to her. The brain swelling caused by her fall receded gradually, but doctors could not make any pronouncement on the after-effects of her head injury.

Standing near a window of the Zemirli Hospital of El-Harrach, where he comes to see her every day, Messoud is crying, for the first time. 'Soon, I should tell her that everybody is dead.' He is her only family now.

He thought he was secure at Rais. Last spring, Messoud fled with his family from their house at Piemont, on the outskirts of Larbaa, 20 minutes away from Algiers. The 'blokes' of the AIS, the armed branch of the Islamic Salvation Front, came to tell 'their' families 'not to stay any longer,' because 'the butchers were about to come'. 'So,' Messoud recalls, 'we came to Rais.'

Since he had lost his job, he had been working on and off. On the evening of the massacre he could have been away. His wife and his two children were enjoying the last days of the school holiday in the countryside around Setif. But he had stayed with his brother Mohammed. 'Shortly after 10 p.m., the screams of women rose from the house nearest to us. We rushed to the window. Too late. In the small street, five or six people, three of them carrying 'Klasb' sub-machine guns,^G were pushing in front of them a group of youngsters.' Those who 'usually would play cards under the lampposts of the main road'. Some managed to run away when the killing started. 24-year old Farid, who also, came to the Zmirli Hospital to see his injured father, said that a Mazda van had stopped near the youngsters. From under the van's canvas cover some ten men came out. Most of them wore baggy trousers and tunics; some wore military fatigue trousers. Those who did not have Kalashnikovs were armed with axes and knives. 'They wanted to take us inside the district at once. They swore now and then.' Before rushing into a courtyard, Farid saw another van arriving. 'No one could say exactly how many "they" were. May be fifty.'

In a quarter of an hour 'they' had shut in, amidst screams and gunshots, nearly 200 residents in four or five houses which they guarded. About sixty people were herded together in the house of the wedding party alone. '[Standing by our house window,] Mohammed, may God bless his soul, prayed loudly for his wife and his children who were at the wedding party,' Messoud recalled. Mohammed rushed down the stairs. He wanted to reach the Benshenit's house where the women and children stayed back for the

^G Abbreviation used by the Algerians to mean the Kalashnikov sub-machine guns.

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henna ceremony.^H ‘We could not help crying and hoping that “they” had not reached it.’

However, when Mohammed and Messoud reached their house garage, two men stood in their way. One was armed. ‘Mohammed managed to seize his weapon but could not use it. As for me, I fought lying on the floor with the other man for two or three minutes. A shot was fired very close to me. Then I did not hear Mohammed any longer. I had lost my strength, but I managed after all to go up the stairs again.’

Once he reached the rooftop of the house, Messoud closed the iron door and blocked it with pieces of furniture and old trunks. Eventually, no one went up there. From there, Messoud – alone and ‘half insane’, as he said – followed for one and a half hours, ‘through the sound and the smell, the tornado of death.’ ‘Shortly afterwards, I understood that Mohammed had seriously injured his attacker. ‘They’, therefore, went at his body fiercely and unrelentingly.’ Two hours later, Messoud was crying over his brother’s disfigured body, when some survivors told him to run to the Benshenit’s. ‘They were all dead.’

Since then, some survivors have explained that four sinister-looking individuals had invited themselves, towards 9 p.m., to the men’s table in the small rear courtyard [of the wedding house]. ‘Did you leave us something?’, they asked the bridegroom’s father. ‘They’ started eating. When the Mazda vans were said to be at the entrance of Rais, these men left the rear courtyard and went inside the house where they stripped the women off their jewels before knocking them flat. From then on, horror filled Rais.

2.4. A woman who survived the Rais massacre

Source: Association for the Defence of the Victims of the Massacres in Algeria, Copenhagen

This testimony was obtained by telephone by the Association pour la Défense des Victimes des Massacres en Algérie, on 10 October 1997. BBC-Box 253 Vesterbrogade 208, 1800 Frederiksberg C. Kopenhagen, Denmark.

‘My name is C. [...] and I am a native of Rais. 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.

^H On the occasion of celebrations, including wedding ceremonies, women draw patterns on their hands and feet with brown henna.

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Two days before the massacre I told my husband that I wanted to visit my parents, brothers and sisters in Rais. I took with me my daughter M. Neither I, nor my parents, nor anyone thought that one day Rais 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 and the firemen, and not a single one of the attackers – they were about a hundred – has yet been caught’.

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3. Bentalha Massacre

The massacre of Bentalha occurred on 23 September 1997. Bentalha is in the Borough of El Harrach which is part of the district of Algiers. According to official figures, the death toll was 85 dead and 67 wounded.¹ Other sources estimated the casualties at 200 dead while residents of Bentalha were reported to have counted 300 dead.²

We present three sets of testimonies. The first set includes unpublished testimonies gathered by the LADDH and the ADMAC. The second is a collection of witness reports by foreign journalists. The third document is a transcription of TV documentary that was shown on a Swiss television and was scheduled to be broadcast on the French TV5 Channel but this never occurred. The documentary contains footage and witness statements that contradict the official version of events. We reproduced a selection of statements that we thought was most important.

3.1. El Kechbour family

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

We report on Mohamed El Kechbour (the father) and then give voice to his wife, his eleven-year old son and his fifteen-year old daughter. They speak at turn about the massacre they survived.

A. Mohamed El Kechbour

He was a lorry driver in a private company. He would never rest from working to save money and build his house at Bentalha.

One day in February 1996, the patriots militias came to see him and ordered him to follow them. When they reached the orange grove, they ordered him to lift a pickaxe and start digging. When he asked 'What can I dig? And why?', they told him 'Your grave! Terrorist!'

He started digging but after discussions between them, they decided to take him to the gendarmerie station where he spent 17 days without food. He was then taken before El-Harrach Court. He preferred to confirm his earlier statement of support for terrorism extorted under duress in order to

¹ 'Up to 200 butchered in latest terrorist attack.', *The Irish Times*, 24 September 1997.

² 'Bentalha, la douleur', *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 24 September 1997; *The Irish Times*, 24 September 1997.

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go to jail instead of saying the truth and going back to face his torturers or those who had intended to bury him alive.

He spent several months in jail before he was able to recover from his torture ordeal. He came within a hair's breadth of death and fear was stalking him all the time. He dared not say anything and preferred to keep quiet.

In jail, he was with Mr Ghazal, another lorry driver arrested by the gendarmerie on the same day as him. When the massacre of Bentalha took place on 23 September, they both learned that their respective houses were burnt, that the daughter of El Kechbour and his wife were injured and that the wife of Ghazal, Ayad Zohra, and his children Lakhdar (15 years), Yacine (14 years), Mohamed (10 years) and Rabia (8 years) had been murdered. The house of Ghazal was partly burnt and then occupied by the military.

B. Mrs El Kechbour (*mother*)

One week prior to the event of Monday 23 September 1997, we heard rumours that Bentalha was going to be attacked by a terrorist group. Indeed on that day at 10.30 p.m., I heard a loud bang far away from us. It sounded like an explosion or something falling down at about two kilometres away from our place (near the area called Gaid Belgacem). The neighbours rushed out to find out what had just happened. I, too, hurried to my balcony like the rest of the neighbours.

Fifteen minutes later, that is at 10.45 p.m., we heard another bang which turned out to be a bomb explosion. This time it was nearer. After that, I was very scared and very worried. Shortly afterwards, I heard footsteps in the sand-covered street. I looked through my window and saw four men. I could see clearly because of the many spotlights on the rooftops. The four people appeared to be between 17 and 21 years old. They wore ordinary civilian clothes, were clean-shaven and carried guns. One of them had a shotgun; a second one had a similar weapon, but its barrels were sawn off, it is known as the *mabshoosha*. The third man carried a gun of a well-known make with its bayonet at the ready. As for the fourth man, his weapon was not visible. They all walked stealthily along the wall opposite our house. I went to wake up my brother-in-law who was sleeping in his room. My husband had been in the El Harrach jail since 4 January 1997. Earlier, he had been tortured severely at the gendarmerie barracks. He was accused of assisting and accommodating a group of terrorists.

My brother-in-law rushed out to the balcony along with his wife to see what was happening outside. They saw many other men, some of whom wore afghan clothing with paratrooper trousers underneath. Others sported beards, had long hair and wore turbans. Some inhabitants raised the alarm sirens. One member of the armed group swore and blasphemed. Then he

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said: 'Get out and ululate for your bloody country's flag,' while firing at the flags. These flags had been brought here by the army about one or two months earlier. They had been hung up in Hay Djilali, our quarter at Bentalha, and also in Hay El Bordomain nearby. I do not know whether these flags were also hung up in other areas.

The first four men got scared and ran back after the alarm sirens had gone off. But suddenly, a long-haired, bearded man, tall and with a strong build, obstructed their way, kicked them and said: 'I ordered you to blow up the place. Why didn't you?' So they returned. Given this situation, we woke up the children and fled through the back of our house. Jumping from the balcony to the street, we landed on a heap of sand which was being used to complete the building of our house. As a result of the fall, my six-year old son Imran dislocated his shoulder, while I injured my leg after tripping over a wire. As for my seven-year old daughter Sarah, she broke her left arm when I threw her from the balcony. My little daughter Halima, three-year old, was so scared when I attempted to throw her down that she told me: 'Mummy, I will die if you throw me down, please leave me here.' So I tied her to a bed sheet, then I lowered her down to her 14-year old sister Zineb who caught her.

I fled with my children, my sister-in-law and her children towards the opposite orange tree orchard. We stayed inside a reed-covered deep hole until 7 a.m. Later on, I learnt that my son Athmane, his uncle and his cousin also hid under the trees in that orchard. While we were in hiding, we heard people crying loudly for help. Also, we heard a lady nearby invoking God's help: 'Oh Lord, save me.' 'Call your Lord for help!', one of the killers (the terrorists) replied to her, adding: 'Go to your Lord!', before shooting her dead. We learnt afterwards that she was our neighbour Akila. Explosions and intensive gunfire could also be heard. When we looked up towards the houses, we saw flames rising in their midst.

When we returned to our house at 7 a.m., we found that the top floor had been burnt and the door blown off by a bomb explosion. In the street, we found the corpses of men, women and children lying about. We walked until we met one of the inhabitants who drove us to a school where many families which had escaped the massacre regrouped. At 8 a.m. approximately the injured and the dead were taken to the front of the school where ambulances picked them up. At that point in time, I wanted to go back to inspect my house but the soldiers prevented me from doing so, claiming that the place might be mined. They did not take part in helping the injured; instead they confined themselves to preventing anybody from returning to their homes.

My father and my mother, who lived several kilometres away in the district of Baraki, arrived at that moment and we all walked back to their place.

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At night my daughter Sarah became feverish. It was then that I noticed that her left arm was broken. In the morning, I took her to the hospital where she received treatment.

Algiers 22 February 1999.

C. Athmane El Kechbour (son)

Question (LADDH): *What's your name?*

Answer: Athmane.

Q: *And your surname?*

A: El Kechbour. El Kechbour Athmane

Q: *How old are you Athmane?*

A: Eleven.

Q: *Do you go to school?*

A: Yes.

Q: *What year?*

A: Year six.

Q: *Where do you live?*

A: in Baraki.

Q: *Where in Baraki?*

A: in Bentalha.

Q: *Are you living in Bentalha now?*

A: No.

Q: *Why not?*

A: Our house was burnt down.

Q: *Who burnt it?*

A: The terrorists.

Q: *Tell me how it all happened.*

A: My mother was sitting...

Q: *When did this happen?*

A: In 1997.

Q: *What month?*

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A: Heh?

Q: *What month?*

A: October.

Q: *Ok, tell me what happened.*

A: My mother was sitting... then she saw young children about my age holding firearms... they were followed by older men holding heavy arms...

Q: *What time of the day was this?*

A: It was about eleven at night.

Q: *Go on Athmane.*

A: Then my mum woke us up and we were getting ready to run away through the fields. Before we left the house, we woke my uncle up. He opened the door and saw many armed people outside. We ran through the fields. I climbed up a tree and stayed there until the morning. When I came down in the morning I saw my uncle and went with him.

Q: *Did you see anything when you were up in the tree?*

A: I heard people screaming and shouting. I also saw a helicopter that was dropping the terrorists. The terrorists were using a long rope to come down from the helicopter.

Q: *Were you afraid?*

A: Yes. I was trembling.

Q: *Were they close to where you were?*

A: Some of them passed underneath the tree.

Q: *What did they look like?*

A: I did not see them. I could only hear them talking.

Q: *What were they saying?*

A: One of them said to his friend: 'Abdelkader, tomorrow we'll come back to Bentalha'.

Q: *When you came down the tree, did you go to meet your mum and family?*

A: After the sun had risen, I went with my uncle in his car. Later we went home.

Q: *Did you then meet up with your mother, brothers and sisters?*

A: Yes I found them all live.

Q: *Where did they go during the night?*

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Massacres and Victims

A: They spent the night hiding in the bushes.

Q: *Were they injured or anything?*

A: No. Only my little sister broke her arm as she jumped from the balcony.

D. Zineb El Kechbour (daughter)

Question (LADDH): *Zineb, how old are you?*

Answer: Fifteen.

Q: *Were you at Bentalba when the massacre took place?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Tell us what happened.*

A: I was asleep. My mum came and woke us up. My mum then woke up my uncle who, in turn, started waking up his children. We ran towards the balcony. We hesitated to jump... then my uncle said: 'either you jump or I will leave you behind.' He then jumped followed by his son then my brother. Then my uncle's wife helped her children to jump before jumping herself. My mother and I were helping my brothers and sisters. We were the last to jump. I was scared to jump and clinched to the balcony. My mother had to push me down before she jumped. Then we ran through the fields until we got to a ditch. We stayed there. We could hear the sound of bombs, firearms and people screaming. We, the children, fell asleep in the ditch. Every time we woke up we asked whether they had left or not. Early in the morning we came out of our hiding. We found bodies of our neighbours lying on the ground. We walked a bit further and we could see the *patriots* and the locals taking wounded people away. They took us to a local school. Whilst we were there, an officer from the fire brigade came and said that we should not be staying in the school. They took us to a local Turkish bath. At about seven, we came out of the bath and waited outside hoping that one of our relatives would come and take us. Her brother picked up my uncle's wife. A little later, my uncle (mum's brother) came and we left with him. My mum stayed with my uncle whereas we were taken to our grandma's house. This is the whole story.

Q: *What did you see?*

A: I have seen people injured and lots of bodies. There were soldiers, *patriots* and many people. It was real chaos. Some were screaming with pain 'oh mum', others 'oh dad'. Every one was screaming in their own way.

Many thanks Zineb. Thank you for your testimony.

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3.2. Frarma Family

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

Saïd Frarma was a young man, a father and a dynamic and successful shopkeeper. He was born in El-Harrach and came from a large family. After his marriage, he bought some land in the village of Bentalha to build a house.

After the events of 1992, he was arrested a first time on 20 November 1994 by members of the special branch of Bourouba for not informing against 'terrorists' and was kept in custody for more than seven months. The persons held at the same time as him were taken to court a few days after their arrest, after they have signed statements.

Saïd, who had never hidden his sympathy for the Islamic political trend, denied the charges he was accused of and refused to sign a statement. He was tortured on several occasions but resisted his torturers and told them: 'I will never sign a statement containing false charges.'

He did not know that time was on the side of his torturers and not working to his advantage. Several months passed. Tired, having lost weight and disheartened, and loosing the millions of centimes demanded by his abductors from his family for his maintenance, he came to the conclusion that it was better to sign a statement than languish uselessly in the basement of a police station, maybe for several more months, or even more, as was the case for other detainees. On 13 March he accepted to sign a statement.

In front of the judge, he asked to be confronted with the persons cited in the statement. He was tried on 16 may 1995 and was acquitted after seven months of excessive custody and remand.

He had scarcely resumed his professional activity when he was arrested a second time for the same charges. He was arrested the first time on 10 November 1995. The report containing the charges against him and those of other detainees was sent to El-Harrach court. Because his statement was not signed, he had been declared on the run while he was in fact being kept in the police station. The first report was sent to a criminal court, following which he was arrested for being on the run. Once again, he was tried and acquitted.

He resumed a second time his professional activity but this time death would not miss him. He was murdered with his five children: the twins Hadjer and Younes (5 years), Ishaq (7 years), Souma (3 years), Roumaïssa (12 months) and his wife Khadoudja. His house was burnt and destroyed.

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3.3. Djorlaf Family

Source: Algerian Ligue for the Defence of Human Rights

We give voice to Djorlaf Mohamed who survived the Bentalba massacre. Mohamed was born on 1 January 1977 in Baraki, Algiers. In the aftermath of the massacre he was admitted to Mustapha Bacha Hospital with multiple contusions of the cervical rachis and thorax caused by a fall and injuries with a sharp object. Mohamed lost his father, Allal, and three brothers in the massacre: Samir, born on 11 September 1978, Mouloud, born on 6 December 1984, and Youcef, born on 6 April 1991. His mother, born Hadji Fatima, was at the Zmirli hospital at the time this testimony was recorded. Her left arm was fractured by a bullet, her right arm still contained a bullet that had not been removed at the time, and her right hand was fractured.

Testimony of Djorlaf Mohamed

Around 10 p.m., the family was still awake. Suddenly there was an explosion. Everybody was petrified to go out and check what was going on outside. We saw nothing. Soon afterwards, there were screams, shooting and sirens. The attackers smashed the door with a grenade and then climbed up the stairs.

I jumped from the third floor and hid behind an iron curtain in the garden. I remained there until 4 30 a.m. A stake which was behind the curtain pierced my stomach. I was so frightened that I had to stifle my pain.

During the attack by the criminals, I heard the noise of a helicopter above our street.

When I was hiding I saw a person jumping from a floor. Unfortunately, he was discovered by two attackers. One of them said to the other: 'target the heart with the knife to make sure that he will die.'

At that moment, I fainted. I woke up to find myself in the hospital.

My mother told me later that Youcef was thrown from the third floor. Mouloud was slaughtered and died in the hospital, Samir was slaughtered and had his face mutilated and Allal was slaughtered and his body was riddled with bullets.

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3.4. This is where they shot my wife

Source: David Hirst, *The Guardian*, 20 October 1997

The first British reporter to travel to Bentlha, the site of the worst massacre of the Algerian civil war, bears the horrific and moving accounts of some of the survivors.

Ahmed called his house a 'villa', it has a banana grove in its garden and jasmine drapes its containing walls. The town lies a mere eight miles from the centre of Algiers. It is just off the principal road heading south. There is a barracks less than a mile away, and several checkpoints to get to it.

Ahmed is frank in his spontaneous grief. As he tells it, the terrorists knew that they would be unimpeded in their grisly handiwork. They went about it in leisurely fashion. They came at about 11pm; they did not leave until shortly before dawn – six hours later. According to Ahmed, the army sent tanks to the edge of the town while a helicopter circled overhead. No one else contests the essence of his version but some, more circumspect, found justifications for the army's non-intervention.

The massacre was confined to the Gelali quarter, composed of a few rows of 'villas' and unpaved streets on the outer edge of the rapidly growing township. It gives directly on to the flat, fertile Mitidja Plain. It was from that direction that the assailants came – anything between 50 to 100 of them, according to Ahmed.

Some of his neighbours took refuge in his house. That is why 24 people died on the first floor, and 17, along with his wife, son and daughter, on the second. About 120 more managed to escape to the roof. There he had been planing some fresh construction; so there was a pile of bricks to hand. 'We hurled them down at them, as they came up the stairs, then slammed the door,' he said.

Ahmed said that it was from the roof that he saw the tanks. And he insisted they were tanks, not just armoured cars. In fact the traces of tank tracks are still clearly visible – they end just 200 yards from his house. It was from the roof that he also saw the helicopter.

It is not just the army and the gendarmerie that Ahmed cursed, but his neighbours too. A few had arms – members of the self-defence units, the so called 'patriots' who have long been active in the countryside, but who are now also appearing on the edge of the capital.

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One of them, Ammar, defended himself against Ahmed's charges. 'We could do nothing,' he said. 'The GIA had mined all the roads and taken positions on rooftops. They fired on anyone who moved in the streets below.'

Surely, with tanks, the army could have done some thing? 'If it had fired on the terrorists it would have killed all of us too,' said a colleague of Ammar.

But the unanswered question is how the terrorists could have entered so well protected a town in the first place and then, even more astonishingly, escape across the open plain with the same apparent ease with which they had come.

3.5. Massacre, Pain and Doubt

Source: Francis David, *La Tribune de Genève*, 24 September 1997

An armed group last night attacked a locality in the neighbourhood of Algiers and killed at least 200 civilians, according to survivors' testimonies. The Algerian authorities acknowledged the death of only 85 people. Here is our reporter's account.

Baraki, the scene of the latest collective massacre, is cut off from the outside world. All the roads leading to it are guarded by roadblocks set up by the gendarmerie [country police] who turn back everybody. The only vehicles to go in are police cars, those of the 'Civilian Protection' (the fire brigade) and ambulances, which go in and out ceaselessly with their sirens wailing. Even the residents of the area are not allowed in: with their vehicles lined up in a never-ending queue on the hard shoulder of the motorway, they wait in the stifling heat for the gendarmes' goodwill to allow them to go back home.

Silent Crowd

The Salim Zmirli Hospital is the one nearest to the area. Admittedly, Baraki has a health centre and a general clinic, but they have neither a morgue large enough to hold a hundred corpses, nor the facilities to take adequate care of the countless injured. Systematically forbidden to enter the areas of crime, the journalists based in Algiers have soon had the idea of falling back on hospitals. Once again, this reflex was rewarding. The Zmirli Hospital was invaded by a dense but silent crowd. Vehicles were parked in disorder on the roadside. Soldiers and members of the task force of the Interior Ministry, with their dark blue uniforms, took up position, arms at the ready, at the entrance of the hospital. Consultations were suspended, and so were the visits. The hospital was entirely taken over by the army. Worried relatives, who had

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been unable to go to the scene of the tragedy because they had not been allowed to, came to the hospital.

Requisitioned

'We have been told that there is a list of the victims posted at the hospital entrance, but there is nothing and there is nobody to inform us,' protested in a low voice a mother whose son had spent the night at a friend's house in Bentelha. Groups of three to five people, undoubtedly members of the same families, talked in hardly audible voices, as if they were afraid of being overheard. A young soldier stopped a van full of bottled mineral water. He took out two crates without consulting the driver. 'They are requisitioned,' he said before distributing them to people around him.

Unearthly Scream

Suddenly, there was some sort of a stir in the crowd. People turned to a man who had just got out of a car: He was about 50 years old, brown, small, hard-looking. His clothes were spattered with dry blood on the forearms, chest and knees. He was one of the survivors. A young man, undoubtedly a policeman, held him by the arm. A woman in *hijab* [the Islamic dress], who seemed to know him, rushed on towards him: 'Azeddine, hey, Azeddine?' she gasped with difficulty. 'May God bless his soul,' he answered, holding back a sob. The unfortunate woman remained dumb for a moment, then she made a shrieking scream, an unearthly one, filled with an indescribable pain. Other women and men, touched to their hearts' core started weeping. The policemen panicked. Undoubtedly fearing that things might get out of hand, their chief ordered everyone to be moved back from the hospital entrance to the other side of the road. The crowd obeyed.

Once again, unarmed civilians have been savagely massacred. And once again the countless questions raised by these countless butcheries will remain unanswered. Who? Why? What is the purpose of this? If, for the authorities, things are clear, in that the responsibility of these horrible bloodbaths is put on Islamic terrorism, on the contrary, for the Algerians, there is a big question mark. Because they cannot understand, they refrain from passing a judgement. 'The situation is so complex,' confessed a journalist of the local press who came to this hospital to get some news in vain, 'that all hypotheses are plausible. There is such a large quantity of arms in circulation, so much hatred between the two protagonists and so much misfortunes that anything has now become possible. Only one thing is certain on both sides: the contempt for human life.

The doubts of the Algerian public opinion are fed by the Algerian government's persistent refusal to accept the sending [to Algeria] of an international commission of inquiry to shed light on these massacres. When one

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has nothing with which to reproach oneself, then one has nothing to fear from the truth. There is another reason for such doubts: although these massacres have been going on for years, not a single culprit has ever been arrested and tried in public.

No Corpses

[Algerian] radio broadcast without comment the security services' statement on the massacre. On the news bulletin of 1 p.m., the Algerian television showed pictures of the area in mourning, but not of the victims' bodies as it did for the massacre at Rais. With these pictures came a clarification by the Ministry of Communication, which denied 'categorically' the 'erroneous' number of victims put forward by 'some foreign press organs'.

3.6. Bentalha, the story of a ten-hour massacre

Source: Florence Aubenas, *Libération*, 23 October 1997

A local resident tells the story of the carnage of 22 September 1997, which took less than a mile from the armoured vehicles of the army.

One day, the inhabitants knew that something was going to happen. The signs were trivial: lorries laden with men crossing the streets at high speed, and strange noises during the night. The signs increased over a few days. But they knew, everybody knew. It was said: 'It is going to boil over.' 'At Bentalha, a suburb of Algiers, the atmosphere became tense during one week around mid-September,' explained this resident whom, for convenience, we call Yahia. Since the massacre, in which 400 people died out of a population of two or three thousand, 'I am neither into politics nor into religion. What I am going to tell you I would not have believed it before it happened.'

In camera

'It boiled over' on 22 September, between 6 and 7 p.m. 'I personally saw around fifty people surging, but others stated that the number was around a hundred. They started by blowing up a few doors at random, and then sat down at the tables. They asked to be served food and after enjoying themselves, they said: "Today is your feast." Then they massacred everybody. Using gas cylinders from the kitchens, they would explode door after door, killing each family, one after the other.' Yahia spoke without any apparent emotion. And then, suddenly, he stopped, finding himself lost in the middle of a sentence. 'What did I say? Where have I got to?' His eyes filled with tears.

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‘Around 9 p.m., the women started to scream: “The army is here, we are saved.” On the main road, the only one which leads to Bentalha, soldiers stood by several small armoured vehicles. We saw them from our homes. They were one kilometre away, no more. But after a while, the soldiers put out the lights. Policemen and municipal guards from Baraki, the neighbouring commune, came to help but the army stopped them. The soldiers argued that no one had permission to intervene because their captain was not there and he alone could give orders.’

At Bentalha, in camera, [there was] fear among the residents who were barricaded inside their homes. Hardly anyone had weapons. Some residents did ask for arms from the nearby barracks, following several big massacres in the ‘green belt’ of Algiers, the string of towns around the capital which voted massively for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) during the 1991 elections. ‘One officer gave them three rifles and five bullets. He said that he could not do more. At the ministry they were told: “When you were feeding the terrorists and sheltering them, you did not come. Now, you must manage your own affairs”,’ Said Yahia. ‘On that evening we did not even contemplate fleeing. To go where? Some people just regrouped in the same house. Everyone waited, hoping that the killers would not arrive at their place.’

Balaclavas

From the roof of his house Yahia saw one assailant panic when he noticed the soldiers. He was the only one in this state, all the others were calm.

The leader said to the young man: ‘Do your work calmly, take your time, the soldiers will not intervene.’

What shocked Yahia was the meticulous organisation of the armed men. ‘They were strapping fellows who were dressed in their everyday clothes. Only some of them had black balaclavas, others were disguised as Afghans, with beards and long hair. Everyone got on with his job: one group was on the watch, another smashed down the doors and the third carried out the massacre. They killed methodically, hacking off one leg, one arm and the head. They were rubbing their hands while doing this. At times, it seemed like a spectacle. In one house, we found one woman on her knees huddled against her two children. All three were headless.’ Yahia stopped. He explained that the killers also said ‘things to people’, ‘but this I cannot repeat.’ We insisted. Yahia, who could speak about death without flinching got in a muddle and lowered his eyes. Then he came out with: ‘These were obscenities which we cannot say in front of women.’

Around 4 a.m., the killers started to withdraw. The families in the neighbourhood who had been alerted by the noise rushed unarmed across the

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fields to see if they could help their relatives. 'There are still courageous people,' said Yahia. 'One hour before, the armed men left shouting: "Good bye Bentalha, welcome to Baraki [the neighbouring town]". Only then did the soldiers come in.'

Among the bodies were two belonging to the killers. 'One was dressed in Afghan [clothes], with syringes in his belt. Their accomplices cut off their heads and took them away so as to hide their identity.'

New killers

In six years of conflict, the district of Bentalha was unfortunately used to violence. 'But until around 1996, it was something else,' continued the refugee. With a hint of a smile, as a joke, he even seemed to regret the earlier massacres in comparison with these of today. 'At the beginning, many young men took to the mountains but they did not hide the fact. At night, they often came back to eat their mothers' food. We knew things and we kept quiet. Every death was targeted: a policeman, a journalist... Sometimes one whole family would perish, old partisans who had changed side. Now the early recruits are dead. The new killers are different.'

Yahia said that today, in the district where he and his children grew up, he did not understand anything. Who were the killers on the night of 22 September? Yahia answered: 'We are lost, we are lost, we are lost.' At Bentalha cemetery, one man stayed rolled in a ball like a foetus on the tomb of his relatives for eight days.

3.7. A woman who survived the Bentalha massacre

Source: Association for the Defence of the victims of the Massacres in Algeria Copenhagen

This testimony was gathered by phone by the Association pour la Défense des Victimes des Massacres en Algérie, on 10 October 1997. BBC-Box 253 Vesterbrogade 208, 1800 Frederiksberg C. Copenhagen, Denmark.

'My name is F. [...] I am in a hospital in a foreign country. The day of the massacre was a day unlike any other day. On that day the military moved in a strange way. Even the military roadblocks disappeared. Some people in our village thought something was about to happen but no one thought of a massacre.

As the night was falling some people who were scared wanted to leave the village but they found the military surrounding the village. They prevented them from leaving the and told them: 'Go back home. We are here to

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protect you'. But at about 10 p.m. the attackers assaulted the village. They were in a large number and they were heavily armed: kalashnikovs, grenades, axes, iron bars, picks, knives.

Panic overtook people who become terrorised with the sound of the hail of bullets, explosions and the screams of children, women and men. People from the surrounding villages said they heard the noises.

I was with my children and my husband when our house was invaded by the killers. There were six or eight of them. Some of them were hooded but the others were not.

The blows were raining down from everywhere. No one was spared, even the children were massacred. It was like a nightmare but the blows were real. All my family died. After we had been beaten with axes and iron bars one of them gave one of the hooded killers the order to cut our throats. He was told to take his time. But as God wished that I remain a witness for history I was the last to be slaughtered. The cut-throat was shaking and in an abnormal state. Although he did run the knife over my throat I could still feel I was alive.

His chief asked him whether he finished his job and he replied: '*naam badarat*'.^K The chief then asked the other attackers whether they took everything from the house. Some replied 'yes' and some others said '*naam badarat*'. No one realised that I was still alive in a pool of blood.

When I regained consciousness I was in Zemirli hospital, in El Har-rach [...] I was interrogated by the police but I was afraid to tell them the truth because it was the army who attacked us. I am still in hospital and I am still in a state of shock.

^K Hadarat is the arabic word used in the Algerian army to designate one's superior officer.

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3.8. Autopsie d'un massacre

Source : Un documentaire de 45 minutes proposé par Jean-Baptiste Rivoire et Jean-Paul Billault (CAPA), présenté lors du programme *Temps Présent* sur la Télévision Suisse Romande, le 8 avril 1999.

00' 00"

Première scène : Dans le cimetière de Sidi-Rezine (Bentalha), 48 heures après le massacre, les familles enterrent leurs morts.

29 août 1997
Massacre de Raïs
Bilan officiel 98 morts

00' 45"

Par téléphone : Un survivant du massacre de Raïs ; Septembre 1997.

Ils prenaient tout leur temps, il y en a même un qui disait à l'autre : 'vas-y, prends tout ton temps, personne ne viendra nous interrompre...'

6 septembre 1997
Massacre de Beni-Messous
Bilan officiel 49 morts.

01' 02"

Mohamed Yousfi, journaliste algérien :

Les victimes ont dit que l'armée n'était pas venue, malgré leurs appels téléphoniques à l'armée. Certains s'étaient même déplacés jusqu'à la caserne, mais les militaires ne sont pas intervenus...

22 septembre 1997
Massacre de Bentalha
Bilan officiel 85 morts

Réaction de la population le lendemain :

Incompréhensible, vous y comprenez quelque chose, vous ? C'était juste à côté de la caserne...

01' 33"

Femme 1 :

Amenez-nous Zeroual! Pour être élu, il avait promis que la paix reviendrait dans le pays ! Que Zeroual vienne ici ! Qu'il vienne nous voir à Baraki, ici on meurt comme des mouches !

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01' 43"

Homme 1 :

C'est qui ces terroristes, l'Etat ou les islamistes ? C'est qui ces terroristes, tu peux me le dire toi ?

Titre : Bentalha, Autopsie d'un Massacre

02' 04"

Paris, Février 1999.

Je m'appelle Youssef Nesrullah. Je suis algérien. Je suis né à Marseille mais je suis retourné avec toute ma famille en Algérie en 1966. J'habitais à Bentalha, j'ai commencé à construire à partir de 1988. J'avais une petite entreprise de bâtiment, de travaux publics. Enfin, je travaillais avec les écoles, les casernes, ...

02' 35"

Bentalha, Octobre 1997. [Youssef Nesrullah regarde des images de Bentalha.]

Là, c'est Bentalha. Voilà, c'est Bentalha. C'est Bentalha. Là, c'est l'entrée de Bentalha.

Là, on entre le lotissement du Hay Djilali. Tiens, c'est ma maison. Reviens un peu en arrière. Regardez : les terroristes étaient assis ici. Voilà, ici et ils ont égorgé pas mal de gens ici, là juste sous la dalle. Ils ont égorgé au moins une cinquantaine de personnes, les gens qui fuyaient ils les amenaient ici et les égorgeaient. Et moi, j'étais juste en face.

Depuis plus d'un an, Youssef Nesrullah vit hanté par le souvenir de cette nuit où il a vu la moitié de son village se faire assassiner. Militant démocrate en Algérie, il est maintenant réfugié en France avec sa famille, et il a accepté de nous raconter son histoire, l'histoire du massacre de Bentalha.

Photo Satellite 1

Situé dans une banlieue défavorisée d'Alger, Bentalha avait profité des élections législatives de 1991 pour lancer un véritable défi au régime. A l'époque le candidat du FIS, le Front islamique du Salut, recueille dans le secteur plus de 68% des voix. Pour Nessrullah, c'est le choc !

Youssef Nesrullah :

En 1991, quand je me suis aperçu que les partis islamiques prenaient de l'ampleur, tout le monde les soutenaient, j'étais horrifié, j'avais peur.

04' 09"

Alger, 1989. Manifestation islamiste.

Youssef Nesrullah :

Moi, j'avais voté pour le parti d'opposition, pour le FFS [Front des Forces Socialistes], mais généralement les gens avaient voté FIS. C'est vrai les gens avaient voté FIS parce qu'ils ont cru à certain moyen de retrouver justice, ils voulaient punir un parti qui a mené le pays à la ruine. Ils ont plus voté contre le FLN que voté FIS.

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Le 11 janvier 1992, l'armée algérienne refuse la sanction des urnes. C'est le coup d'Etat à Alger ; l'ambiance tourne à l'émeute contre le régime.

Nesrullah Youssef :

J'avais la rage car toute la population frappait du pilon: à Alger, à la Casbah, à Baraki, tout le monde à 23 h frappait du pilon, une façon de se révolter contre la décision des militaires d'avoir interrompu le processus électoral.

Dès 1992, quand l'Europe a aidé les militaires, ils ont repris confiance, ils ont du budget pour acheter du matériel et pour mater la population. Ils ont mis tout le monde dans un même sac.

05' 25"

Bentalha, photo archives.

Du moment que tout le monde a voté FIS, ceux qui habitaient Baraki, il n'y avait pas un seul propre parmi eux. C'étaient tous des salauds, des fanatiques, alors que c'était une population mélangée que ça soit à Baraki, Hydra, Alger ou Bentalha. Certains étaient pour le FIS, certains non.

Tout le monde n'était pas pour le FIS, mais les militaires quadrillent quand même le secteur. Témoignage d'un habitant de Bentalha recueilli en 1997 par Channel Four.

Pour eux on était tous des terroristes. On place beaucoup de barrages, chaque fois on lève les mains sur la tête, on nous fouille. Par exemple, au barrage de Bentalha ou Hussein Dey ils frappent des gens. Un officier dans ce barrage a fait sortir de sa poche une liste de noms des gens recherchés. Puis il a dit : 'Si je trouve un nom correspondant à ceux que j'ai dans la liste, je l'exécuterai sur place.'

A cette époque le régime annonce officiellement son intention d'éradiquer l'opposition islamiste, c'est-à-dire de la faire disparaître. A Bentalha, beaucoup de jeunes prennent les armes contre l'Etat et, au début, la population les soutient. Témoignage d'une habitante.

Au début, toute l'Algérie les a soutenus, quand on a vu leurs actes, leur horreurs on a fait marche arrière. Au premier vote, les islamistes ont remporté la mise, mais on leur a supprimé l'élection. Alors ils ont commencé à s'en prendre aux gens de l'armée, du gouvernement.

A votre avis est-ce qu'il y a eu vraiment un changement après dans le comportement des islamistes ?

Maintenant, on comprend plus très bien. Avant, c'était le FIS qui tuait, maintenant on nous parle du GIA.

GIA: groupes islamiques armés. Une organisation apparue en 1994 et rapidement soupçonnée d'être infiltrée par les services secrets algériens.

Ancien diplomate algérien en Lybie, Mohamed-Larbi Zitout connaît parfaitement le fonctionnement de l'armée algérienne. Dissident, réfugié à Londres, il prépare une thèse de doctorat sur l'histoire des GIA.

07' 49"

Mohamed-Larbi Zitout, Ex-No 2 de l'Ambassade d'Algérie en Lybie :

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A partir de 1995, ce ne sont plus simplement des groupes infiltrés, mais des groupes complètement retournés. C'est-à-dire on est devenu devant un phénomène de contre-guerilla, de contre-révolution. Le GIA devient un autre bras armé, théoriquement islamiste, mais en pratique il fait le travail et atteint les objectifs de la sécurité militaire, c'est-à-dire du régime algérien.

Dans le secteur de Bentalha en tout cas, certains groupes terroristes semblent effectivement tolérés par les autorités.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Les terroristes se baladaient librement à Bentalha sans être inquiétés. C'est vrai qu'il y avait de temps en temps des ratissages, mais c'était bidon. Parce que les terroristes savaient justement la veille qu'un ratissage aurait lieu le lendemain.

08' 34"

'Ratissage' : Opération militaire. Un mois après le massacre, une journaliste d'une radio britannique recueille à Bentalha un témoignage qui confirme que l'armée tolérait certains groupes terroristes du secteur.

09' 02"

Femme 2, sous-titrage, BBC Radio, Octobre 1997 :

Ils vivaient parmi nous, personne ne peut vous dire le contraire. Dès la tombée de la nuit, l'armée partait et eux ils arrivaient avec leurs tenues afghanes et ils se baladaient dans le village. Mais l'armée ne leur a rien fait. Nous, tout ce qu'on pouvait faire, c'était de prévenir l'armée, mais elle ne faisait rien. Ils venaient se promener dans les rues mais l'armée n'a rien fait.

L'armée algérienne aurait-elle pu empêcher ces groupes terroristes de sillonner Bentalha ? Dans le secteur en tout cas, les casernes étaient nombreuses. Entrepreneur dans le bâtiment, Nessrullah s'y rendait souvent pour y effectuer des chantiers, il les connaissait toutes. Description :

Nesrullah Youssef :

Il y avait la plus importante, celle de Baraki. Avec les événements, il y avait plein de militaires, des vrais militaires étaient là pour combattre les terroristes. Et des relais; il y avait celle de l'ENEMA juste ici, avant le Haouch Boukadoum, une autre à l'entrée de Bentalha et une autre à Kaid Gacem. Il y avait aussi la Garde communale. C'est des gens armés, avec des tenues de combat bleues, un peu comme des ninjas.

Photo Satellite 2 : Les Casernes

De cette région stratégique d'Algérie, aucune carte récente n'est disponible en Europe. Une seule solution pour visualiser les lieux est une photo satellite.

10' 30"

CENES 1997, distribution spot image.

De Bentalha, la caserne de Baraki se trouve à 3,5 km. Le poste militaire de l'ENEMA, à 1,5 km, comme l'hospice de Kaïd Gacem, où étaient également stationnés des militaires. A l'intérieur même de Bentalha, le poste militaire avancé et le relais de la Garde communale, ici à droite de

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l'image, se trouvent à moins d'un kilomètre de Hay Djilali, le quartier le plus touché par le massacre. C'est donc dans ce secteur [Baraki, septembre 1996] quadrillé par les forces de sécurité, que de mystérieux groupes armés officiellement islamistes ont longtemps terrorisé la population. Les a-t-on laissé agir ?

En tout cas, de 1994 à 1996 leur violence a directement servi les intérêts du régime, en incitant les habitants à se retourner contre les islamistes.

Nesrullah Youssef :

A partir de 1996, c'est vrai, ils ne pouvaient plus pénétrer à Hay Djilali.

Pourquoi ?

Parce que les gens en avaient marre, ils ne voulaient plus entendre parler de tueries, de massacres. C'était injuste, il y avait trop d'injustices, on ne comprenait pas pourquoi on tuait les gens, pourquoi on enlevait les femmes. D'autant plus que quand on retrouvait des morts, c'était de la charcuterie. On trouvait des femmes sans tête, des hommes sans tête, c'était des malades, quoi ?

Écœurés par cette violence, Nesrullah et quelques voisins vont tenter de s'enrôler dans les rangs des patriotes, ces civils armés par le pouvoir, pour organiser la défense des villages.

11' 55"

Bentalha, Archives.

Dans le secteur, beaucoup de patriotes sont d'anciens islamistes reconvertis en miliciens du régime. Nesrullah, lui, veut simplement défendre son quartier et sa famille. Il va avoir du mal à obtenir des armes des autorités.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Avant le massacre de Raïs, on avait demandé des armes aux militaires. Au début, ils nous avaient dit qu'on pourrait les avoir rapidement. Mais de jour en jour, avec la pression, on savait pertinemment qu'ils se foutaient de notre gueule. Cela a duré des jours, des semaines, des mois.

Des mois d'attente et d'angoisse, pendant lesquels les massacres se multiplient...

Le 29 août 1997, à seulement 6 km de Bentalha, le village de Raïs subit pendant toute une nuit l'assaut d'un mystérieux groupe armé qui s'enfuit tranquillement au petit matin après avoir égorgé 400 civils. Le lendemain, à la télévision, le Premier ministre promet que, désormais, la sécurité des citoyens sera assurée.

Homme 3 :

M. Ouyahia dira que des décisions ont été prises pour renforcer la sécurité, notamment dans des localités isolées.

Malgré ces promesses du Premier ministre, à Bentalha, Nesrullah et ses voisins attendent toujours que les autorités leur donnent des armes.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Ça a duré des journées entières. On attendait à l'intérieur de la caserne des fois des journées entières. Rien que le jour du massacre, officieusement, on

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nous avait dit qu'on allait recevoir les armes le mercredi d'après, c'est-à-dire le mercredi 25. Le jour même du massacre.

Mohamed-Larbi Zitout, ancien diplomate algérien :

Quand on entend votre témoin parler qui dit qu'ils ont demandé des armes à maintes reprises et qu'on leur refusait les armes et qu'ils ne les ont eu que deux ou trois jours après le massacre, cela veut dire qu'on ne donne pas des armes à n'importe qui, à des gens qui pourraient se tourner contre l'Etat. On donne des armes à des gens après avoir massacré une partie de leurs proches, après avoir massacré une partie de leur village ou de leur famille, pour qu'ils soient sincèrement convaincus de la lutte antiterroriste.

Photo Satellite 3 : Les casernes

Quelques jours après ce massacre de Raïs, d'importants renforts militaires se déploient dans les casernes de Baraki et de Kaïd Gacem. Bizarrement, les militaires demandent aux habitants de ne plus monter la garde la nuit sur leur terrasse.

Le soir du 22 septembre, à cause de l'insécurité, la femme et les enfants de Nesrullah sont réfugiés à Baraki. Lui s'apprête à passer la nuit à Bentalba dans sa maison. Nous sommes à moins de deux heures du massacre, une étrange patrouille pénètre dans le village.

Nesrullah Youssef :

J'ai vu un groupe d'au moins une quarantaine de militaires. C'était bizarre car c'était la première fois qu'on voyait ces militaires là. Moi, j'ai cru que c'était les militaires de Kaïd Gacem. C'était la même tenue de combat, avec des casques, bien habillés, des tenues neuves, des gilets pare-balles...

On les a vus. Ils avaient emprunté le chemin allant vers les orangeraiies, en direction de Kaïd Gacem. Ils ont pris ce boulevard, ils sont passés devant ma maison, ils nous ont bien regardés... Ce qui est bizarre, c'est que mes amis, Abdelkader, ils sont venus me dire que 'les militaires quand ils nous ont bien regardés, ils ont dit : "ils sont en train de jouer aux dominos, les salauds..." Je me demande encore pourquoi ils ont dit cela? Et ils sont repartis par là, par là où sont arrivés les assaillants.

Il était quelle heure ?

Il était entre 21h et 21h 30...

Les militaires repartent donc vers les orangeraiies, un terrain agricole situé au sud Bentalba et qui permet de se rendre à pied à la caserne de Kaïd Gacem.

Photo Satellite 4

Mais Nesrullah n'est pas au bout de ses surprises : une demi-heure après les militaires, c'est au tour des gardes communaux de quitter leur relais du boulevard de Bentalba pour venir inspecter son quartier. Ce soir là, ils restent exceptionnellement groupés, comme s'ils avaient peur.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Ce jour là, ils étaient pressés, ils sont passés comme cela... Je trouvais cela bizarre, d'abord les militaires, ensuite les gardes communaux... même mes voisins, on a commencé à se moquer d'eux: les peureux, ... on ne savait pas ce qui allait arriver...

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Massacres and Victims

Il est maintenant 23 heures, des hommes en armes sortent des orangeries.

Plan suivant

Cet habitant les aperçoit...

17' 04"

Homme 3 :

Vous voyez les abricotiers? Ils sont venus par là. Au début, on croyait que c'étaient des militaires. Lorsqu'ils se sont rapprochés, on a compris que c'étaient des assaillants...

Très vite, les assaillants investissent les premières maisons du village.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Je me prépare à manger, je descends chez moi, c'était vers 23h ou 23h15, j'entends les premières bombes... déchirer la nuit, c'étaient des cris horribles... J'ai appelé Fouad...

Photo Satellite 5

Nesrullah appelle donc son voisin Fouad, dont la maison est cernée par une cinquantaine de tueurs.

Témoignage de Fouad, recueilli par Channel Four...

18' 06"

Fouad (Interview de Channel Four, Octobre 1997) :

Ils étaient habillés avec des cachabias, vous connaissez ? Des jeans et des baskets blanches, des chèches noirs et des barbes. Des fusils de chasse à deux canons et des Klashs... On a passé la murette, quand on a vu les... comment dire ? Les militaires... en train de venir...

Channel Four :

Les militaires ?

Fouad :

Oui, ils sont venus pour nous aider mais ils ont stoppé. Ils ne sont pas venus... ils ont cessé d'avancer. Et les terros, ils ont encerclé tout notre quartier. Ils ont commencé à encercler notre quartier à minuit, ils ont égorgé les garçons, les femmes, les vieux. Et nous, c'était chacun pour soi, on a tenté de fuir...

19' 20"

Homme 4, Habitant de Bentalha, Channel Four , Octobre 1997 :

Il y a des gens qui ont échappé à la boucherie et qui sont allés voir les militaires. On entendait les coups de feu. On entendait les balles, et tout. Quelqu'un leur a dit clairement : 'venez nous défendre...'

Le soldat lui a répondu : 'je n'ai pas l'ordre de tirer, alors j'attends l'ordre...'
Le mec leur a dit: 'donnez-moi au moins une kalachnikov, je vais aller moi-

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Voices of the Voiceless

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même défendre ma famille...’ Le soldat lui a répondu: ‘tu vas pas m'apprendre mon boulot.’

Channel Four :

Pendant tout ce temps, où étaient les militaires ?

Fouad :

Ils ne sont pas intervenus.

Channel Four :

Pourquoi les militaires ne sont pas intervenus ?

Fouad :

Je ne sais pas...

Channel Four :

Mails ils voyaient ?

Fouad :

Ils étaient à 300 mètres. A 300 mètres de nous !

Photo Satellite 6

300 mètres, c'est la distance qui sépare la maison de Fouad du boulevard de Bentalba. Un boulevard où beaucoup d'habitants ont vu des blindés prendre position dès le début du massacre. Cet homme nous avait déjà parlé des barrages militaires.

Quelques heures après le massacre, il recueillait les confidences de ses parents, témoins directs du drame.

Eux aussi ont vu des BTR, des blindés prendre position sur le boulevard de Bentalba dès le début du massacre, des blindés et même des ambulances...

Témoign anonyme, sous-titré :

D'après un parent, il m'a dit qu'à minuit, les BTR étaient déjà placés là. C'étaient l'armée, ils sont venus de Baraki, d'Hussein-Dey, des ambulances...

D'après ce témoignage, des ambulances auraient donc pris position devant l'école de Bentalba au début du massacre. Comme si les autorités savaient qu'elles auraient des victimes à évacuer.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Les gens de Bentalha avaient vu les ambulances devant l'école avant le massacre. Il était 23h, les ambulances étaient déjà prêtes et elles étaient nombreuses.

Moi, je ne voulais pas y croire, alors je me suis souvenu que juste au moment où la première bombe a éclaté vers 23h, j'ai vu un voisin qui a pris la fuite, en marche arrière à l'aide de son véhicule.

Au niveau de l'école, au niveau de l'entrée de Bentalha, il y avait trois barrages, au niveau de l'ENEMA, ils n'ont pas voulu le laisser sortir, on se demande pourquoi. Et il a réussi quand même à leur échapper, à fausser la compagnie au premier barrage, au deuxième barrage.

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Massacres and Victims

Et là je vais plus loin lui demander: 'est-ce vrai que les ambulances, quand tu étais parti, étaient déjà prêtes?' Il l'a confirmé. Cela m'a vraiment choqué...

Photo Satellite 7

De sa terrasse, Nesrullah pouvait voir une partie du boulevard. Lui aussi a vu des blindés.

De ma dalle, j'ai vu deux BTR.

22' 26"

'BTR' Blindés de l'armée

Après, j'ai vu qu'il y en avait six.

Nesrullah Youssef :

On croyait réellement que les militaires étaient venus pour nous secourir. On criait 'les militaires arrivent!', mais les assaillants s'en foutaient pas mal. Ils étaient préparés à ce que les militaires n'interviennent pas.

C'est là qu'Abdelkader a pris la parole et leur a dit: 'allez vers les militaires, nous on vous a rien fait'.

Et là, c'est comme s'il avait pressé sur un bouton, c'était un flux d'insultes, de blasphèmes. Et je n'en croyais pas à mes oreilles.

Il nous ont dit: 'On va vous renvoyer chez votre Dieu'. Ça, c'est grave, C'est grave parce que tous les musulmans savent qu'il n'y a qu'un seul Dieu. Un seul Dieu est le leur. Généralement, ceux qui blasphèment comme cela, ceux qui ne croient pas vraiment en Dieu, c'est uniquement les militaires.

Pas une minute j'ai cru que les extrémistes...

23' 38"

Homme 5, Ahmed Aitar :

Il fallait voir cela, ils découpait des enfants en morceaux et ils les jetaient du deuxième étage !

23' 45"

Gilles Jacquier, France 3

A Bentalba, beaucoup de rescapés partagent les doutes de Nesrullah.

Après, Aitar fait partie de ceux qui veulent se poser des questions devant les caméras des télévisions étrangères.

Ahmed Aitar :

Je suis resté trois heures à me défendre avec des briques, c'est tout ce que j'avais.

Quelques semaines après le drame, Ahmed ne comprend toujours pas comment des tueurs islamistes auraient pu massacrer tout son quartier pendant cinq heures et pourtant au vu et su des militaires.

Ahmed Aitar:

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On m'a tué ma femme et mes trois enfants. Il y a 33 personnes qui sont mortes dans ma maison.

Un journaliste de France 3 qui a réalisé ce reportage.

Cette nuit là, Nesrullah était aussi sur la terrasse, il a également entendu un hélicoptère.

Le jour du massacre justement, l'hélicoptère est arrivé 5 ou 10 minutes avant la première bombe, et il est reparti vers 4h du matin...

Moi, je me pose des questions à quoi il sert, sinon à prévenir les militaires qu'il y a un massacre à tel endroit, les prévenir pour intervenir...

Le témoignage d'Ahmed est accablant pour les autorités. Le gendarme et les patriotes s'inquiètent, ils vont présenter à l'équipe de France 3 un autre témoin.

26' 33"

Philippe Peaster, France 3 :

Voilà le type, un patriote, qui nous explique qu'il était impossible d'intervenir contre les tueurs. Quant à l'armée, elle ne serait pas intervenue car le village avait été miné par les assaillants, c'est l'explication officielle.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Vous prenez tous les plans, vous verrez qu'il y a de nombreux accès, sans parler des militaires qui ont patrouillé, des gardes communaux qui sont venus. De mon voisin qui s'est échappé en voiture, rien n'a pété. Pourquoi ont-ils voulu faire croire que le terrain était miné ?

27' 20"

Campagne de recrutement de l'armée algérienne, ENTV, Septembre 1996

Nesrullah Youssef :

Moi, je sais de quoi est capable l'armée algérienne. On a voulu faire croire que ce n'était pas une armée de métier. On a voulu faire croire que c'était une armée mal entraînée. Moi, j'ai fait mon service, je sais de quoi est capable l'armée.

En 1994, il y a eu un ratissage et les paras sont descendus avec leurs hélicoptères sur les maisons de Bentalha. Boufarik, leur base, est à 10 minutes. Pourquoi les paras ne sont-ils pas venus nous secourir ?

Photo Satellite 8

A l'époque des massacres, Nesrullah n'est pas le seul à se poser cette question. Sur la base militaire de Boufarik, qui se trouve effectivement à moins de 20 km de Bentalha, des pilotes d'hélicoptères se demandent eux aussi pourquoi ils n'ont pas reçu l'ordre d'aller secourir les victimes des massacres.

Au printemps 1998, écœuré par la situation, l'un d'eux s'enfuit en Espagne avec son appareil. De là, il accorde une interview à l'agence CAPA.

28' 35"

Interview: Pierre Hurel
Canal Plus: Le vrai journal

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Massacres and Victims

28' 40"

Alili Messouad, pilote militaire algérien :

Là où il y avait les massacres, c'est à 10 minutes de ma base. S'ils nous avaient appelé, en 10 minutes nous serions là. Pour moi c'est une complicité.

Pourquoi ne vous ont-ils pas appelés ?

C'est à eux de répondre, pas moi.

A Bentalha, il est deux heures du matin, les militaires n'ont toujours pas bougé.

29' 16"

Femme 2, foulard blanc :

Ils égorgaient les enfants et ils les jetaient là, où vous voyez les déchets. On entendait nos enfants hurler.

29' 30"

Homme 6, un vieux borgne :

Ils s'acharnaient, on entendait, on entendait juste le bruit de la hache sur la dalle et quand ils sont repartis, ils ont mis le feu.

29' 39"

Femme 3, une vieille :

Ils lançaient des grenades, des bombes et, ceux qu'ils n'égorgeaient pas, ils les capturaient : ils ont emmené une quarantaine de femmes avec eux.

*Les assaillants prennent donc le temps d'emmener des femmes, et même de piller des maisons.**Ils sont d'autant plus tranquilles que ce soir là, la plupart des patriotes de Bentalha ont été invités à dîner par un militaire du secteur.**Sur cette terrasse, les voisins de Nesrullah sont fauchés les uns après les autres à la kalashnikov. Pour échapper à la mort, lui se jette du 2ème étage et se casse la jambe.*

Nesrullah Youssef :

J'avais du sang plein les mains, j'en ai encore des cicatrices...

Malgré la douleur, il parvient tant bien que mal devant la maison d'Ahmed Aitar, son voisin qui parlera à France 3.

Nesrullah Youssef:

Au début, ils m'ont pris pour un terroriste, ils me jetaient des briques. Puis, j'ai dit mon nom et ils ont ouvert, ils m'ont aidé à monter sur la terrasse.

Photo Satellite 9

De cette terrasse, Nesrullah est soudain ébloui par des projecteurs qui s'allument dans la zone où sont stationnés les blindés de l'armée...

Tout le monde a crié: 'les miliaires arrivent'. Pendant cinq minutes, les terroristes ne voulaient plus attaquer. Les émirs leur ont dit: 'continuez, l'armée ne viendra pas...'

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Pire, ils ont empêché les patriotes d'intervenir, ils ont frappés les patriotes,...

31' 59"

Mohamed-Larbi Zitout, ancien diplomate algérien:

Ce ne sont que les forces spéciales qui peuvent traiter de cette façon les autres forces de sécurité algériennes...

Pourquoi ne sont-elles pas intervenus ?

Car leur rôle est de protéger les massacreurs qu'ils soient leurs collègues ou des GIA manipulés...

Si vous regardez les zones de massacres, ce sont souvent des bastions de l'islamisme. Dans ces bastions islamistes, on veut terrifier, terroriser les populations pour les forcer à abandonner leurs convictions...

Le massacre s'est-il donc déroulé sous protection militaire ? C'est ce que laissent également penser certains témoignages de survivants...

33' 10"

Homme 7 :

J'en ai même entendu un qui a dit: 'Talha, continues d'égorger, travaille tranquillement, l'armée nous couvre, on a réglé cela...'

Le 23 septembre vers 5 heures du matin, les assaillants quittent tranquillement Bentalba par le sud sans être inquiétés.

Pourtant, presque au même moment, d'importantes forces de sécurité se déploient dans le secteur pour en interdire l'accès à la presse.

Une course contre la montre s'engage pour enterrer le plus vite possible et loin des objectifs les cadavres des victimes.

Photo Satellite 10

Ce matin deux journalistes travaillant pour l'Agence France Presse tentent quand même de faire leur travail. L'un d'eux est photographe. Il s'appelle Hocine. Parvenu devant l'école du village, il est bloqué par les forces de sécurité.

33' 55"

Hocine, photographe AFP, Paris, 1998 :

Il y avait cet interdit de travailler, et puis il n'y avait pas grand chose à faire, les corps étaient déjà partis. Lorsqu'on arrivait, il n'y avait que de l'émotion.

Il fallait se diriger carrément vers l'hôpital. L'accès à l'hôpital, il était interdit et même devant l'hôpital c'était interdit. Moi, quand j'ai vu cette femme de loin s'écrouler contre le mur, je ne pouvais pas résister, ne pas faire la photo...

34' 28"

Photo AFP, Hocine :

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Massacres and Victims

La police a essayé de nous enlever les films. Et après avoir discuté, négocié, la seule condition, on nous a laissé les films mais il fallait quitter les lieux...

Quant à l'autre journaliste de l'AFP, il est bloqué dès l'entrée de Baraki. A pieds, avec les familles des victimes qui courent derrière les ambulances, il se rend au cimetière de Sidi Rezine, où sept pelleteuses s'activent déjà pour enterrer à la va-vite des centaines de cadavres.

Sur place, il compte 147 tombes mais officiellement il n'y a que 85 morts.

Ce jour là, les seuls journalistes autorisés à parler du massacre sont ceux de la télévision officielle. Voici leur version.

Femme 4, journal télévisé, ENTV :

Une fois de plus, un crime sauvage vient d'être commis à la faveur de la nuit contre des familles et des enfants. le terrorisme barbare s'est attaqué à eux à coups d'égorgements et de bombes, selon le rapport des services de sécurité, 85 personnes ont été assassinés et 67 blessés, dont 31 dans un état grave.

Cet homme, à gauche de l'image, est Yabia Guidoum, le ministre de la Santé. Ce jour-là, il va quasiment justifier le massacre, en accusant les habitants de Bentalba d'avoir soutenu les terroristes. L'incident n'est pas relaté par la télévision officielle mais il a bien eu lieu. Témoignage d'un couple d'habitants choqués par les propos du ministre.

Homme 8, BBC Radio, Octobre 1997 :

Le lendemain de la boucherie, notre ministre de la Santé Guidoum vient. Quelqu'un dont toute la famille a été tuée lui dit que les services de sécurité n'étaient même pas intervenus. Il lui a répondu: 'Mais c'est vous qui donniez à boire et à manger aux terroristes'.

Femme 2, sous-titrage:

Il nous a dit : 'Vous êtes les racines du terrorisme, vous le nourrissez, alors il faut assumer'.

Nesrullah Youssef:

Guidoum, il a failli être lynché. Dire que c'était de notre faute, c'est hallucinant, pour un ministre. Ils ont tous le même discours, sincèrement je me pose des questions...

Mais les habitants de Bentalba ne sont pas au bout de leur surprise. Après le reportage, retour au plateau et attaque en règle contre les journalistes, notamment ceux de l'AFP, qui ont osé dire que le massacre de Bentalba avait fait plus de 85 morts.

Dans le même temps, le porte-parole du gouvernement apporte un démenti formel aux chiffres fantaisistes avancés par certaines agences d'information et chaînes étrangères. Ces agences d'information qui se nourrissent du sang des Algériens dans la course au scoop.

Cette version officielle qui minimise le bilan du massacre va déclencher la colère des rescapés.

37' 00"

Cimetière de Sidi Rezine, 24 septembre 1997

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Le lendemain du drame, un cameraman algérien travaillant pour France 2 est pris à partie par les familles des victimes qui le prennent pour un journaliste de la télévision algérienne...

Femme 5:

[A] l'étranger, sur les chaînes étrangères, on a bien vu, et ici, non, vous avez menti!... Partez !

Homme 9:

Vous racontez n'importe quoi, regardez la réalité en face, elle est là la réalité....

Homme 2:

Tu me passes à la télévision, hein c'est qui, les terroristes ? Nous, on a que des centras, des fusils a deux coups. Le gouvernement ne nous a donné que des fusils à deux coups. Eux, ils ont des klashinkovs, des bombes.

C'est qui, le terrorisme ? C'est l'Etat, ou les terroristes ? Dis-moi, toi, c'est qui ces terroristes ?

Quelques semaines après le massacre, la presse internationale est invitée à Alger pour couvrir les élections municipales d'octobre 1997.

Au programme, reportages sous escorte et hébergement obligatoire à l'hôtel Aurassi. Tous les matins, les autorités proposent aux journalistes la liste des reportages possibles.

Une journaliste d'une chaîne italienne:

On avait des listes chaque matin des places où on pouvait aller, alors évidemment Bentalha ça passait très bien à l'image. Il y avait toujours une grande liste sur Bentalha et donc les Algériens organisaient des cars 2, 3 ou 4 cars; plus de journalistes et photographes sur Bentalha. Il y avait toujours des journalistes Algériens avec nous pour parler aux gens, pour expliquer tout ça. Là, c'est le village, c'est le cimetière et les guides aident à trouver la maison et les témoignages et tous cela. On essayait de parler aux gens mais à chaque fois qu'on s'approchait des gens on rencontrait d'autres personnes qui se faisaient passer comme intermédiaires surtout lorsque les gens ne parlent pas français.

Homme 9 :

C'était une vengeance.

Vous voyez ce type, il est là, voilà.

C'est une vengeance, pourquoi ?

Homme 9 :

Parce qu'ils veulent assassiner tous les Algériens.

Il prend la parole aux autres, qui, après, ne vont jamais parler.

C'est toujours des gens du GLA dans le village de Bentalha ?

Homme 9:

Il y a des groupes.

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Massacres and Victims

Puis il s'en va, il parle avec le gendarme, on ne sait pas s'il est un patriote ou autre. Il s'enfuit, on ne le retrouve plus.

Derrière les témoins officiels, les vrais victimes de Bentalba voudraient bien s'exprimer, mais avec la présence des escortes, pas facile de parler librement à la presse étrangère.

Nesrullah Youssef:

Je connais un type, Messaoud, qui a perdu huit gosses et sa femme. Il était malade, son gamin se faisait égorger. Il disait : 'Ça c'est mon fils, ils étaient en train d'égorger mon fils.' Il était impuissant et ne pouvait rien faire. Le lendemain avec toute cette rage, il voulait discuter, parler avec les gens de MBC. Il était interviewé par MBC et il a dit: 'Voilà, les militaires ne sont pas intervenus, ils étaient là et il n'y avait pas de bombes, il n'y avait pas de mines.' Et un policier est venu vers lui. Il l'écoutait puis il lui a dit : 'si tu ajoutes un mot je te liquiderai devant tout le monde.' C'est ce qu'il lui a dit : 'Je te tues ici devant tout le monde'.

Les journalistes n'ont pas le droit non plus de parler aux militaires présents lors du massacre. A défaut Saira Shab, la reporter de Channel Four, essaie de comprendre si Mr Les Droits de l'Homme du régime algérien a pu lui interroger les militaires.

41' 03"

Homme 8, Rezzag Bara, Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme :

Excusez-moi, je vous répondrais dans mon rapport 1997.

41' 05"

Femme 5, Saira :

Bon, mais alors sans parler de votre rapport 1997, est-ce qu'au moins, vous avez pu parler aux militaires des casernes implantées près de Bentalha ?

Bara :

Je vous ai déjà répondu.

Saira :

Donc vous leur avez parlé ?

Bara :

Je vous ai déjà ...

Saira :

Je suis désolée, je n'ai pas compris votre réponse ?

Bara :

Je vous ai dit qu'on ne faisait pas une enquête, mais une investigation.

Saira :

Donc, vous ne leur avez pas parlé ?

Bara :

Je vous ai déjà répondu! Ce n'est pas possible!

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Voices of the Voiceless

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Saira:

Je suis vraiment désolée, excusez-moi...

Bara:

Je suis très déçu par votre attitude...

Février 1998, une délégation de parlementaires européens débarque à Alger. A leur tête, André Soulier, un vieil ami du FLN.

Pour Alger, qui craint l'arrivée d'une enquête internationale, pas question de parler des massacres. André Soulier fait comme si tout allait bien.

André Soulier :

Nous pouvons dire que nous n'avons dans nos discussions et dans notre volonté de nous informer aucune entrave et nous pouvons le dire vis-à-vis d'Alger et de nos collègues parlementaires.

Alger est contente, la question des massacres n'a même pas été abordée publiquement...

42' 22"

Manifestation du FFS, Alger, Février 1998

Dans les rues, en revanche, beaucoup se sentent lâchés par la communauté internationale. Ils sont en colère.

Commission d'enquête ! commission d'enquête !

A bas la dictature !

La paix !

Aujourd'hui, l'une des parlementaires européennes qui s'est rendue à Alger révèle qu'avant le départ, une partie de la délégation avait voulu se rendre à Bentalba. La réponse d'Alger fut sans appel.

42' 51"

Anne-Andrée Léonard, membre de la délégation européenne d'Alger :

Alger dit : non. C'est clair et net. Pas question qu'on mette notre nez dans les affaires algériennes. C'est ça l'enjeu, c'était : 'si vous voulez insister sur les massacres, vous n'entrez pas en Algérie.'

Oui, il faut reconnaître qu'on n'a pas voulu prendre ce risque là.

En un an d'enquêtes et malgré plusieurs demandes de visa, Alger ne nous a accordé aucune autorisation pour nous rendre en Algérie. Malgré la gravité des faits rapportés par les survivants, aucun officiel n'a souhaité s'exprimer sur le massacre de Bentalba.

Un an et demi après les faits, aucune enquête indépendante n'a été menée en Algérie sur ce qui restera l'un des plus graves crimes commis dans le pays depuis 1992.

Nesrullah, lui, vit toujours à Paris, en attendant que la lumière soit faite officiellement sur les massacres de 1997. Il milite avec sa sœur en faveur des 3500 personnes portées disparues en Algérie après avoir été arrêtées par les forces de sécurité...

Aujourd'hui, chaque disparu a droit à un ballon symbolique dans le ciel de Paris...

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Massacres and Victims

44' 05"

Paris, Décembre 1998.

50^{ème} anniversaire de la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme

Zeroual, vous n'avez pas le droit de terroriser le peuple.

Arrêtons les massacres en Algérie.

Nesrullah Youssef :

Tu te rends compte, chacun de ces ballons représente un disparu.

Générique

Je voudrais insister sur le fait que Jean-Baptiste de Rivoire a essayé à de nombreuses reprises d'obtenir une réaction des autorités algériennes aux graves soupçons qui pèsent sur elles, ses fax et téléphones sont restés sans réponse jusqu'aujourd'hui.

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4. Other Massacres

We present two sets of testimonies. The first set involves unpublished testimonial accounts gathered by the LADDH while the second is a collection of witness reports of, and interviews by, foreign journalists.

They cover massacres involving a large death toll, such as the mass killings of Sahnien (113 dead^L) Beni-Messous (87 dead^M) and Bougara (93 dead^N), as well as mass victimisation events with a smaller casualty figure.

4.1. Aissa survived the butchery of Beni-Messous

Source: Amine Kadi, *La Croix*, 25 September 1997

Aissa could not forget that terrible night of 5 September. He could not help recalling himself stretched out in the darkness with his face against the ground. At his side, in the same posture, were some thirty members of his clan who, like him, lived in the district of Sidi Youcef, below Beni-Messous which is high above Algiers. Here, in the aftermath of independence, several dozen families belonging to the clan of Benmaatoub had settled. They were originally sheep farmers in the region of M'Sila, east of Algiers.

Aissa could still hear the sniggering of the man with the *klash*,^O who surprised him holding a knife in his hand while trying to defend his family. 'You want to fight me with this! Go and join your friends.' Aissa, who had just reached 29, thought that death was near. In such circumstances, he said, one saw one's life as a flashback. However, Aissa could neither see his childhood as a shepherd on the high plateaux of M'Sila to the east nor his years as a bricklayer in Algiers. He could only hear his neighbours whispering the *shahada*, the profession of faith that proclaims the unity of Allah and the prophethood of Mohammed, which Muslim recites at the time of death.

Aissa thought then about 'doing something', about helping his uncles and cousins to get up. However, a blow on his back left him flat on the ground. His ribs were cracked. Three minutes later, events took over: Aissa heard a rattle but no cries. A head rolled next to him. 'I will never know whether it belonged to an adult or to a child', he murmured. Without moving, Aissa shouted at his own relatives: 'You should not die in the shame of God. You should fight back.' He leapt to his feet. He head-butted the 'man' who had

^L *Associated Press*, 30 December 1997.

^M 'Attackers massacre 87', *The Irish Times*, 8 September 1997.

^N 'Il y avait du sang partout', *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 25 April 1997.

^O Klash: abbreviation for the kalashnikov (AK 47) sub-machine-gun in Algeria.

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earlier knocked him down. The latter dropped his *Klash* and fell down. But no one else stood up. So, Aissa fled. 'Later I asked my rare surviving uncles and cousins why they did not budge. Among them were Mabrouk, Ali, Abbes. All of them were tough persons, but fear had paralysed them.'

As Aissa ran past the front of the house of his uncle Ali, a 'man' fired twice. Aissa, who was hurt in his shoulder and back, rushed down towards the watercourse. He hid behind a heap of dead wood and covered himself with grass. His back was bleeding heavily; he tore up his shirt and dressed his wounds with it. Aissa kept on pressing on his shoulder wound with his hand.

Two 'men' came near him. One of them said: 'I can assure you that I got him. He went away to die.' The other replied: 'Unlikely. If you got hit him, he would have fallen on the spot.' Aissa was lucky. The killers went back up to the houses of concrete blocks and corrugated iron sheets 300 metres higher up, where the massacre was taking place. Maybe they did not have enough ammunition? Old Khiar, who fought against two of his assailants, knew something. 'They' could have fired. But 'they' did not. Only those who were watching over the forty or so villagers who had to die could fire at will. Old Khiar had begged them to finish off everybody with a burst of sub-machine-gun fire. The answer was scathing: 'Do you know the cost of a bullet?'

One hour after his flight into the darkness, Aissa saw the revolving light and heard conversations by walkie-talkie. He stayed hidden: whom to trust? Only at 8 a.m. did he come out of his hiding place, with his hands up. Maybe 'they' were still here. The gendarmes took a while to calm him down. 'What a joy – and tears – when I was reunited with my wife and children! They hid themselves all night like me!'

Ever since, Aissa keeps wondering. 'We were warned, we had installed a couple of floodlights and kept watch the previous two nights,' he remembered. That evening, however, 'they' came around 9 p.m. 'We were having dinner.' Nobody really knew how. 'They' probably came up from the watercourse of Beni-Messous which borders Bainam Forest. 'They' first came across a dozen of people sitting outside their houses. 'They' introduced themselves as security forces. 'They' had dark clothes like those of the police.

Aissa said: 'While fighting against one of them, I felt that his clothes were not made of the linen for uniforms. Some had fine short beards, only one of them had a beard reaching his chest and the others were clean-shaven. I saw ten people, although 'they' were probably double that number: the others were posted at the entrance of Sidi Youcef.'

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On their arrival, one of the young men called Mahdi, shouted: 'They are terrorists', and got up and run away. A little away he stumbled across two men who were trying to force a family out of their home. 'They' shot him before they finished him off with a knife. It was that detonation which had alerted Aissa in his home. He knocked down a partition wall at the back of his house and sent his wife and children to the forest under the protection of Samir, his brother-in-law.

It was Djamel who dragged the two children into the forest and then managed to alert the gendarmerie. The latter saw the wounds, the blood and the torn clothes. They immediately understood. 'It is true, said Aissa, they knew us. They used to bring sheep to us for the Eid (the great Muslim festival).'

4.2. The village of Bougara

Source: Amal Sourour and Aiman Braiz, *Nisf Ad-dounia* (Egypt), 7 September 1997.

I had the impression at the beginning that I was going to visit the homes of victims of terrorism so that I could see with my own eyes what was happening. I was surprised to be told that I had to see the governor of the *Wilaya*^P and the *Wilaya* press officer. I had to acquiesce since eventually I should see what I had come for. The governor gave us a warm welcome. The *Wilaya* press officer whose full name I cannot remember except the Belkadi part, attended the meeting. When the governor asked me about my programme in Bougara, I replied that I was interested in the victims of terrorism at Bougara. The governor then pressed a button and two women aged about 28 entered. The Press officer told me: 'These are the victims of terrorism!' At this point a heated dialogue sparked off, which I shall endeavour to recall in detail.

I said: 'I do not want to see the victims of terrorism in offices; I prefer to see them in their homes.' He said: 'Why? All the victims of massacres have fled their homes for the safety of the capital.' I said: 'No doubt, but there are still neighbours or some survivors of the massacres who are still staying in their small homes.'

He said – and I quote literally: 'Do you want us to orchestrate a massacre so that you can watch, or what do you want?'

I said: 'Doing what! You are supposed to be a journalist and the profession of a journalist is to observe things in their original setting so that he can

^P *Wilaya* means district. Algeria is divided into 48 districts.

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describe what he sees. As for bringing two women into the office and telling me that these were victims of terrorism, this is a comedy. This means that you are hiding something from me. By the way, I am ready to leave Blida straight away, but I cannot keep quiet...'

He lowered his voice and then disappeared for a few minutes. He later came back to accompany me to the scene of the massacre in the vehicles of the gendarmerie. I saw everything in its reality: small poor houses built from sun-dried bricks that the Egyptian peasants use for building their homes. Elderly men were sitting on the roadsides with signs of poverty, pain and misery on their faces, naked children everywhere. We were met by shouts of 'Long live Algeria!'

They slaughtered my father and my mother in front of me

The first home we visited gave us a warm welcome, typical of the Algerian people. We met an elderly woman and her two young granddaughters: Radia, a 12-year-old girl and her sister whose name I could not remember on account of the horror I had heard. The *Wilaya* press officer introduced the family to me and then I started a dialogue with them:

'Mother, has any one of your relatives been killed here in this place?'

'My daughter was killed not here but in her home. She was killed along with her husband, her mother-in-law, her eldest daughter and her son. If you want to know exactly what happened then Radia my daughter and the other girl will tell you everything, because they witnessed the massacres with their very eyes.'

The question came out with difficulty and I was almost tongue-tied, especially as I saw the girls' fill with fear and sorrow. 'Radia, will you tell me what happened?'

She said, while trying to suppress the tears in her eyes and pressing on her sister's hand: 'We were sitting down in the evening after we had had dinner and were laughing a bit. Before bedtime, the terrorists arrived. They broke into the house and tied my mother. They then slaughtered my father in front of her and in front of us. Then others came in and cut the throats of my brother and my sister. At the same time my mother was undressed and two terrorists indecently assaulted her. When they finished with her, they killed her, cut her body open with knives and then severed her head from her body. I still remember her head covered with her beautiful hair under my feet but I could not give her a last hug...'

Radia broke down, and so did all of us. Despite her tears, however, she continued talking: 'They wanted to kill me and asked my age but I gave them the wrong age because I heard the big man telling them to kill all except children under the age of 10. I said to them that I was an eight-years old. I

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remember also the man who looked like a monster. When he seized me to ask me about my age there was a horrible smell coming from his mouth. I think it was alcohol because I know very well the odour of alcohol...'

I did not know what to do except to hide my tears from the girl, and hold on to the hand of the little girl, who will no doubt continue to suffer from psychological traumas as a result of what she witnessed.

They slaughtered my family...I wish they had slaughtered me too!

When I emerged from Radia's home, I was grasped by a woman in her forties. Without uttering a single word, she took me to her home which adjoined that of Radia, and in a fit of crazy hysteria she said: 'They came in ... from this door. There were six of them. They slaughtered my younger brother and my father, and then kidnapped my younger sister. Till now, I do not know whether she is alive or dead. Why did they leave me? They should have slaughtered me too. One of the killers tied me up, drew the knife around my throat and then left me. They were masked so that I could not see their faces. They spoke with the Algiers accent and in some French which I could understand. On the spot where you are standing there was my father's head; and here was another head. The slaughter did not take long. Then they left me. Since then, I have lived alone in a state of distress. I am waiting for them to slaughter me too.'

'Did your family have enemies? Why did they slaughter them?'

'My family was very peaceable. However, my father rented arable land which he should have returned to the landlord. But he was determined to keep it at any price because it was the land that he farmed and the source of his livelihood.'

'Did the state give you weapons?'

'I have never heard about this. However, I do know that some landlords and business people did possess arms which were given to them by the state. For our part we were not given even a knife to defend ourselves with. The police protect only themselves as if they fear the terrorists.'

The strange thing is that the gendarmerie station of Blida and Bougara was in the middle of the village. So, where were the security and gendarmerie forces which are equipped with armoured vehicles, when the crimes of slaughter, killing and kidnappings took place? Where they having sweet dreams, or did they know but pretended not to hear?

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4.3. Mrs Moutadjer of Lakhdaria

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights.

This is a testimony of Mrs Moutadjer R'biha, born Fellab R'biha, who lost her husband, Mr Moutadjer Ahmed, and two sons, Hocine and Rachid. Her account of her family's ordeal, mentions, in an incidental way, a massacre of 72 people.

Moutadjer Ahmed was born on 17 October 1935 in El Kadiria. He was the son of Slimane ben Said and Achouri Laldja. He was arrested on 31 May 1994 at 0:55 a.m. His body was found on 7 June 1994 thrown in a rubbish dump. At the time more than seventy bodies were thrown on the roadway. These persons were presented as victims of terrorism. They were in fact the results of massacres perpetrated by the military in the same village.

His son Moutadjer Rachid, born on 16 June 1972 in Lakhdaria, was a bachelor. He was murdered in the street on 6 March 1994 by the security forces. Moutadjer Hocine was murdered in the Serkadji prison massacre on 21 February 1995.

Testimony of Mrs Moutadjer of Lakhdaria

I am the wife of Moutadjer. I was talking to a neighbour when this militiaman came towards us. He was a so-called ex-islamist. He had been in the *maquis* for one month before he turned himself in to the gendarmerie. One month after his 'turning', the gendarmes gave him a gun. The brother of this militiaman was in the army. One day when he came back on leave, his father started saying to his neighbours: 'If the terrorists were to touch my enlisted son, I would kill them all.' This went around and reached the ears of the Islamic fighters. One evening, they came down to his place and surrounded his house. The father was killed with a shot of *mahboucha*. The death of this citizen pushed his children to enlist in the militia, on the side of their 'turned' brother.

To return to this militiaman, he thus came to threaten me with his gun while I was talking to my neighbour, a woman, outside my house. He started to insult me treating my family of terrorist, alluding to my son who had taken to the *maquis*. He told me that it is people like my son who killed his father. He vowed to destroy our house with a bomb. I told him that it is contemptible for him to threaten an old lady without protection and that if he wanted to avenge his father, he only had to go to the *maquis* and use his gun to confront those who had killed his father. On equal grounds. As for me, old as I am, I have nothing to do with all of this.

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I decided to go to the police and make a complaint. The police officer asked me to sign a complaint form that will be forwarded to the court. Daunted by the prospect of finding myself in the middle of a courtroom where I had never set foot, I did not dare do that. May God preserve me from it. I then said to the police officer on my way out: 'I prefer to entrust the matter to the Divine Justice.' I then made my way back home praying and beseeching God. On the way, I met the militiaman and his henchmen showing off his gun in the middle of the road. I then raised the flap of my veil and sent a large spittle on his face in front of everyone. I had nothing to lose. Ridiculed in front of his henchmen and other witnesses, he started to shout: 'bunch of terrorists, bunch of criminals!' The children who had gathered around us started to boo him. He did not know what to do. He was humiliated by everyone. Since that day, he left us alone.

Then one day, some hooded soldiers arrived. My husband, who is 60 years old, was sleeping. They invaded his room and started to shoot above his head and between his legs. They found one million centimes which they pocketed. They struck my daughter with the butt of their guns. They took along with them my 17-year-old son, Antar, while hitting him hard. On his release, he came back home as a wreck. He had his legs emaciated. He told us that he had undergone several sessions of electric torture. Noticing that his money had vanished, my husband decided, despite our opposition, to complain and press charges against these soldiers. He went to the gendarmerie squad. The gendarme he spoke to promised to recover his money for him.

A week later, other soldiers surrounded and then invaded our home. They started insulting my husband telling him: 'You have accused us of stealing and you made an official complaint against us.'

'Yes', replied my husband, 'it is those hooded soldiers who stole the meagre fruit of my labour.'

A sergeant-major then said to my husband: 'Forgive him this slip. Perhaps this soldier was in need.'

'I can't forgive those who come into my home to steal from me', answered my husband.

'Well then, you will pay for this dearly', the sergeant-major retorted to him.

A week later, on 2 June 1994, the soldiers came back. My son was sleeping on the upper floor. My husband was on the ground floor, lying down. They knocked violently on the door. My husband, dressed in his gandoura, got up and opened the door. They took my husband and threw him in an armoured vehicle stationed in front of the gate. I watched them start off and stop at the local police station, a few hundred meters away from our resi-

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dence. The following day, I went to the police station with my son. The police officers told us that they had nothing to do with this matter and that my husband was not detained in their premises.

A week later, some insane rumours, that got confirmed afterwards, began to circulate around in town. Mutilated corpses of citizens taken away by the soldiers were found each morning on the motorway. All the families who had a relative taken away by the soldiers rushed to the motorway every morning in search of their relatives. Then one day, a group of men and women who were our friends and neighbours came crying and informed us that the corpse of my husband, horribly mutilated, had been found on the motorway. It was horrific. A 60-year old man, innocent, taken away and killed by soldiers. During this week, 72 corpses were found on the motorway.

Thereafter, my son went to the gendarmerie to recover his father's corpse. They refused. But they granted him an authorisation to go to see the corpse at the mortuary of the hospital in Bouira. My son went to the mortuary. A dreadful spectacle awaited him. The body of his father was unrecognisable. He managed to identify him only thanks to a scar on the neck from a surgical operation. His *gandoura* was completely torn, in wrecks.

He was inflated like a balloon. Maggots were devouring his right foot. His arm was completely burnt as if it had been scorched with a blowtorch. He had marks on the neck and his tongue was hanging out. The doctor who was accompanying me, with tears in his eyes, said to my son that, in all likelihood, his father had been strangled after torture. The nails were pulled out. My son went back to the gendarmerie squad in Lakhdaria to try and get permission to recover the corpse of his father. The brigadier initially consented saying to him: 'I give it to you provided that you sign an affidavit-statement declaring that your father is a terrorist.' Without hesitation, my son consented to this blackmail, wanting to recover the body of his father at all costs. A while later, the brigadier retracted his offer under the order of the captain who was present and who explained to his subordinate the reasons of the refusal: 'this person is completely mutilated and the people know that he was arrested by the military. The people will spread a propaganda against the army.'

A few days later, the gendarmes summoned my son to pressure him to sign a statement declaring that his father was killed by the 'terrorists'. My son refused. The gendarme threatened him saying: 'You will sign with or without your holy God!' Facing a violent threat and in spite of himself, my son resigned himself to sign. What else could he do against such a blatant injustice? Yesterday they wanted him to sign a document to the effect that his father was a 'terrorist' and today, just like that, that he had been killed by the 'ter-

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rorists?' The workers in the mortuary of the hospital of Bouira told me that my husband was buried by the gendarmerie only eighteen days later.

Other citizens were victims of this army-led terrorism. I could tell you of the case of the citizen and neighbour, Guelati, a guy who has nothing to do with either the FIS or with politics. He was also killed after being taken away by the military men. I could tell you of the case of another citizen, an invalid who was riding a bike on the street while drunk. Inattentive because of his state of intoxication, he had not heard the horns of an army truck. He was arrested. His mutilated corpse was also found on the motorway. In all, 72 citizens were found.

As for my son Antar, he was arrested on six occasions. Each time he was horribly tortured and returned home like a wreck. The sixth and last instance, he remained confined to bed for fifteen days. He developed a raging fever and could not stand upright because of the sequels of torture. Thereafter, he said to me: 'Mother, as soon as I can walk, I will leave town, you will not hear of me again'. Indeed, as soon as he became better, he left home one evening without saying where he was going. Some time later, we learned that he had joined his brother in the *maquis*. It was during the time when his father was still alive. He could not accept this injustice and the ordeals of torture. It is these inhuman acts by the soldiers that pushed him to join the *maquis*. God is my witness. Prior to this, he hardly knew anything about politics. He used to spend more time in front of the parabolic receiver than at work. He was constantly in conflict with his brother Rachid may God bless him about this parabolic television.

4.4. Mrs Tayeb of Koléa

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

It all started in 1995 in our village. A climate of injustice and of *hogra* gripped the area. Gendarmes came regularly to taunt and attack us. They insulted us and shouted obscenities at us. Nowadays, those who have a gun have the right of life and death on human beings.

A neighbour, a militiaman named Mohamedi Mohamed often taunted us. He used to stop my young brothers, take them along to the gendarmerie and blackmail them saying: 'I would not release you unless your sister Yamina comes to take you'. The truth of the story is that this militiaman, empowered with his gun which he showed off everywhere, wanted to marry me within the framework of *zaouadj el moutâa* (the marriage of pleasure), an aberration. He once came to our house with his rifle and threatened to kill us all and said: 'You do not have any rights in this country because you are terrorists.' He did the same another day at the gendarmerie and in front of the gen-

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darmes. This militiaman, previously unemployed, was involved in shoddy business. He registered himself with the RND political party at its inception. The gendarmes were on his side. They told him to press charges against me at the prosecutor's office so as to put me in prison. They said to him: 'We know everybody at the court, Abdelatif, Belkacem, we know them, there will be no problem to lock her up.'

Belazza Khadidja is my mother. She was arrested on 11 November 1995. The gendarmes set up an incredible trap for her. She had received a summons from the town hall to come and withdraw her voting card. With the letter and the family record book in hand, my mother went to the town hall. The gendarmes of the locality of Chaïba waited there for her. They arrested her and we have not had any news of her since. One month after her disappearance, I was summoned by the gendarmes of Chaïba who gave me the family record book which my mother had when she was taken away. To my question of knowing what became of my mother, they replied that they were not aware of where she was. And since then, we do not know what has become of our poor mother. Is she alive or has she been killed?

Tayeb Abderrahmane is my brother. He was taken away on 23 February 1994. It was the day when the gendarmes invaded our house and killed, under our eyes, my 62 years old father, Tayeb Ahmed and my brother Ali. The corpses were carried away by the gendarmes and were buried secretly in Koléa. They prevented us from attending their burial. Tayeb Mohamed is my other brother. He was abducted in June 1995 by the military in Oran where he worked. He has not been seen since then. There are only three of us left in the house: 11-years-old Mahdjoub, 16 years old Hamza and myself. Our family has been dislocated. My father and my brother were summarily executed under our eyes. My mother and my two other brothers were abducted and have disappeared.

In spite of all this injustice, the gendarmes have not stopped badgering me and my two remaining young brothers. They often come to terrorise us by day and night. They shouted obscenities at me and made filthy advances. Who does one complain to of this injustice? All was in their hands. All the doors were closed.

Our village at Barbessa in Koléa lived a period of injustice which we had never known. Many innocent people were executed for no reason. Families were massacred. I can tell you of the example of my 41 years old maternal uncle, a handicapped person, father of 8 children. He worked and had some money. The militiamen wanted to bring him under their racket. He refused to go along. He was taken away in 1995. He has disappeared to this date. Other examples exist. I could tell you of the disappearance of citizens who were victims of the racketeers like my uncle. They were taken away from their place of work or even in the street. Most of them were found killed by

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bullets or had their throats cut near the well of Ain Messaoud or in Haouch Riacha of the wadi of Doumia. These were the places of predilection where the militiamen threw their victims. These militia imposed terror in our village. They settled scores with those whom they had family or other problems with. They reigned as masters of the earth. Mahmoudi Abdelhafid is a 53 year old citizen who worked in an agricultural field. He was terrorised by the militiamen. They kidnapped his son who has since disappeared. One year later, it was his turn; they kidnapped him. It is the militiaman Amar El Guebli who did it. There are many families who are in the same situation as ours. Saad Messaoud has been a soldier for seven years. He was kidnapped in 1996 after his two children had been killed. His two dwellings were confiscated.

4.5. Mr Ounoughi of Jijel

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

This is a testimony of Mrs Ounoughi who lost two of her sons. Her account of her ordeal mentions in an incidental way a massacre of 45 people.

My son Ounoughi Sadji was born on 22 February 1958. He was a nurse at the hospital of El-Harrach. He had rheumatism. He asked for an unpaid leave of absence from the personnel office to go for a thermal bath treatment in Hammam Salihine of Fedj M'zala in the district of Djidjel. He went with some of his friends. They were arrested by the gendarmes at a crossroad at the entrance to Fedj M'zala on 9 August 1993. The following day, he was transferred, together with his companions, to Sétif. They were locked up for 45 days in a cellar. They were then taken to court. Every one of them was sentenced. Since then, the companions of my son lost all trace of him. I have been to all the courts in Sétif, Djidjel, Constantine, Mila. No trace of my son.

In Fedj M'zala, I was told that he had just been transferred to Mila. In Mila, I was told that he was sent back to Ferdj M'zala. I was sent back and forth, like a ball. In Ferdj M'zala, I was told that he had been transferred to Constantine. In this latter city, I went to the courts, the prisons, the police stations and the gendarmerie squads. Nothing! I was then told that my son had been sent to the special Court in Constantine. When I got there, I was not given any information. A few months later, I was summoned by the gendarmerie. They asked me as to the whereabouts of my son. I answered them that he had been arrested by the gendarmes of Fedj Mzala and that according to the latest news he would be in the special Court of Constantine. But nothing is certain.

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My other son Ounoughi Hakim was arrested on 28 February 1996 at his residence at 3 o'clock in the morning by gendarmes of the Eucalyptus area whom I knew and who wore paratrooper attires. Two of them were hooded. He was 29 years old. He worked in a private industrial company. I went the following day to the gendarmerie squad of Eucalyptus. They denied that they had arrested him whereas I did recognise them. Then I presented myself at the military barracks of Eucalyptus. After three days of search, we came to hear that three corpses had been dumped on the motorway of Dar El Beïda. These news reached us very late at night during curfew time. When we got there, some witnesses told us that the corpses had been transported after one day by the fire brigade to the mortuary of Bologhine.

We went to this mortuary. We begged the employees to show us the corpses. We found the corpses of Hammadi Rachid and Tikniouine Moussa who had been arrested the same day as my son by the gendarmes of Eucalyptus accompanied by soldiers. On that day, five people had been arrested: Ounoughi Hakim (my son), Salhi Riad, Maameri Rachid, Tikniouine Moussa and Hammadi Rachid. Hammadi Rachid had seven bullets in the skull. Tikniouine's body was peppered with bullets. The father of Tikniouine Moussa went to the gendarmerie of Dar El Beïda to obtain the authorisation to recover the remains of his son. He came face to face with one of the gendarmes who had come to arrest his son. He told him: 'It was you who came the other evening to our house to arrest Moussa.' The gendarme rushed onto him to strike him while saying to him: 'You are accusing me of serious things.'

To date, I do not have any news of my children. I have been to all the mortuaries starting with Bologhine and finishing with Boufarik including Thénia. I saw dreadful things. I saw mutilated corpses, some without foot and some without arm, people burnt and others beheaded. I have never seen such acts even in nightmares. These summary executions became run-of-the-mill within the region of Eucalyptus-Chérarba where we lived during the 1994 - 1995 years. Every morning, one would find four to five dumped bodies. One day, the soldiers and the gendarmes killed 45 people all at once. I myself counted them. Things that we have not seen even during the liberation war. They have neither faith nor do they follow any law. Never seen before.

I can not begin to understand what this government is doing to our children. Those who took away our children have been confronted by witnesses and they dare deny it without fearing any retributions. Who is governing this country and who is allowing such acts to be perpetrated in the name of the State? They have come up with 'terrorism' as a pretext and, in total impunity, they take away our children whom they mutilate, kill, and dump on the motorways.

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4.6. Six persons burnt and thrown in a forest

Source: Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

Case of Omari Slimane

Omari Slimane: born on 12 December 1963 at Kadiria in the district of Bouira. He was married and had children: Nacera 12 years, Hocine 7 years, Meriem 5 years. He was employed at the SNIC state company, and lived in Tala Oughenime (Kadiria).

On 24 June 1994, soldiers stormed the house of Omari Slimane and took him away. 15 days later, his body was found in the forest with five other burnt bodies. The family of the victim informed the army which sent soldiers to take the partly charred bodies to the hospital of Lakhdaria.

Testimony of his wife Kobaa Yasmine:

On 24 June 1994 at 4 a.m., the door of the house was smashed. The house was surrounded. Soldiers climbed onto the roof and smashed the roof tiles. Three or four of them wore ski masks.

They took away my husband, Omari Slimane, age 32, who worked at the SNIC.

We went afterwards to see the military and the gendarmerie but without success. Fifteen days later, shepherds discovered the burnt bodies. The authorities refused to go to the site before the arrival of soldiers from Bordj Menaiel. I found my husband with five other burnt bodies. Two other bodies were half burnt. One of the last two was thrown on the ground and the other was hanging. The body of my husband was hanging from an oak tree with his hands tied behind his back. He was strangled by a wire. The impact of bullets were also visible on his body despite severe burning. I am the mother of three children: Hocine (7 years), Nacera (12 years) and Meriem (5 years).

Case of Heraoui Ali

Heraoui Ali born on 8 November 1970 at Kadiria. He was the son of Mohamed and Kaibi Fatima, bachelor, and unemployed. He lived at Tala Oughenime, Kadiria.

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He was arrested at home on 24 June 1994 at 4 a.m. at Tala Oughenime by the army. After 15 days, his body was found burnt in the forest, with other bodies. The body was identified by his family.

Testimony of his mother Kaibi Fatima

The soldiers smashed the door of our house on 24 June 1994 towards 4 a.m. They took my son to Tizi Ghenif. After 15 days, his burnt body was found in the forest with five other bodies. Once informed, the army took the bodies to Lakhdaria hospital before handing them over to the families for burial.

4.7. Mr Al Shabi of Relizane

Source: ArabicNews^Q, January 14, 1998

ArabicNews sent a reporter to Algeria, who visited a village in Relizane in the aftermath of a massacre.

There was nothing in the village of Sahnien west of Algeria except for starving chickens and donkeys and mass tombs dug in a small cemetery.

Thirteen days after the massacre, utter silence is still enshrouding the village and the few huts strewn across the village. It was difficult to stand upright in one of those huts, which are made from tree branches.

The dried pools of blood and the pungent smell dominate the village, which made us move quickly. While we were moving, we found the clothes of the slain people and the ropes with which they were reportedly tied.

After our tour of the village we met one of the survivors, Hamed Al Shabi. Al Shabi told us his story and said that he was living in his hut with his family but, late one night, the criminals came and asked them to open the door. They did not wait for it to open, but broke it and entered.

He heard them asking his wife about where she kept her gold. She told them there was neither gold nor money. Later his wife became silent and the children screamed, he said.

Al Shabi escaped through the darkness of the night and returned in the morning to find 120 of the inhabitants of the village dead. He only found the chicken and his donkey near his hut as the terrorists had slain everything, even the dogs.

^Q Web site : www.ArabicNews.com

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4.8 Fear in the Casbah

Source: Zaki Chihab, *Ida-at asbarq* (Radio Orient in Paris), 23 September 1997, 12:00 p.m. news bulletin

Radio Orient:

Zaki Chihab interviews by telephone an Algerian woman who says she is afraid for her children, in particular for her daughters. Slaughter and abduction have become distinctive features of massacres by groups of armed assailants.

Woman [on the phone]:

The terror in which we live pains us day and night. We experience it day and night. I have daughters who are on the verge of going insane. I am about to take one of them to hospital. She has had a nervous breakdown. All of us, women and men, all Algerian society, are threatened. In particular, those of us who live in populous neighbourhoods are in a terrible situation. Do you understand me? All these neighbourhoods are in danger. They are threatened with deaths and killings.

Zaki Chihab [on the phone]: *How many Children do you have?*

Woman: I have five children

Zaki Chihab: *In which neighbourhood do you live?*

Woman: I live in the Casbah. All the populous neighbourhoods are threatened with death: Casbah, Salembier, El Harrach, Bourrouba, La Glacière, El Khemis, Baraki, Les Eucalyptus.

Zaki Chihab: *What is it that your children are afraid about from what goes on at night?*

Woman: You see, the killers came to slaughter at night but as the residents did not let them get into here [the Casbah] they came back the next day, and another time in the evening. What did they tell us? They told us 'it is you who used to shelter them [the Islamist insurgents] and sympathise with them. Now we are going to settle your hash.' They mean death. But they could not because our neighbourhood is large.

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