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## FRENCH REACTIONS TO THE MASSACRES IN ALGERIA

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*L. Salem-Badis*

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*But some of these intellectuals go very far. They support actively the eradication option of the Algerian authorities whose only logic is: 'kill all of them!' In this outlook, the violations of human rights, however horrible they may be, are but a necessary evil that will cease with the death of the last activist.*

François Gèze, *Revue Esprit*, No. 235, August-September 1997.

*Let us have the frankness to say that if Algeria fell into an Islamist regime, the interests of France would be directly affected.*

Jean-Pierre Chevènement, interior minister, *L'Express*, 22 January 1998.

*In Algeria, we have only two things to export: our oil and our rows. The great French intellectuals have but succeeded in one thing: in reproducing without any distance the same debate that we have been having here for six years. Instead of going beyond, seeing things from high above, they confuse a little more the talking.*

Counter-reactions of Algerian citizens to the reactions of the French philosophers, *Libération*, 24 January 1998.

## 1. Introduction

France exerts a considerable influence on the political events in Algeria as a result of its colonial past. It still sees Algeria and the rest of its old colonies as a private preserve. In Africa, for instance, it has supported military dictators like Jean Bedel Bocassa of Central Africa, Mobutu of Zaire, and armed the Hutu militias which are responsible for the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. The will to maintain a Francophone zone and a French presence in the ex-colonies where there are natural resources and markets for French products has meant a French policy of active support to repressive and corrupt regimes. At a time when the French cultural 'rayonnement' is in decline, owing to the neo-colonialist attitude of France, many former French colonies risk finding themselves in the situation of Rwanda or Algeria. France seems reluctant to accept peaceful transitions towards democratic forms of government over which the Ecole de Guerre-trained military officers have no influence. In the case of Algeria, the situation is further complicated by the historically inimical attitude of France towards Islam.

The political discourse in France is full of references to human rights, liberty, equality, fraternity and humanity. Unfortunately, the Algerians seem to be undeserving of these values. France is one of the few countries in Western Europe which denies free expression to the opponents of the Algerian regime. The political exiles on its soil are harassed and live in fear of the

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dreaded Algerian security services. The killers of Imam Sahraoui, an opponent of the Algerian regime and a founding member of the FIS party, have not been caught to this date. Like Algeria, France has interned Algerians in camps such as Folembay<sup>A</sup>. However, the supporters of the Algerian military regime find encouragement, easy access to the media and are celebrated as ‘democrats’.<sup>B</sup> Algeria is presently the worst country in the world with regard to human rights abuses and stands accused of gross and systematic violations of human rights by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and la Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme. The lives of Algerians are threatened by endless massacres, extra-judicial killings, kidnappings and disappearances. The French government is well placed to know what is happening<sup>C</sup>, yet it continues to support a military junta whose excesses have embarrassed even its allies<sup>D</sup>.

Long before the implication of the Algerian security forces in the atrocities became known, a report<sup>1</sup> compiled by Algerian lawyers and campaigners for human rights in 1995 was banned in France by the interior minister Jean-Louis Debré. By this action, the French government dispelled any ambiguity on its stand regarding the Algerian conflict. Moreover, the activities of the supporters of the military regime have always found encouragement and assistance. Despite bomb attacks in Paris, whose responsibility is widely attrib-

<sup>A</sup> On 9 November 1993, a vast campaign of arrests was organised by Charles Pasqua, the then interior minister. The detainees were members and sympathisers of the Fraternité Algérienne en France (FAF). In total 88 persons were arrested without any valid reason, including the spokesman of the FAF, Moussa Kraouche, and were later placed under house arrest. After nine months of house arrest, 26 persons were assembled in a disused barracks at Folembay, near Soissons, at about 100 km North of Paris. On 31 August 1994, the interior minister decided as a matter of urgency to expel 20 of them to Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina-Faso. The remaining persons stayed under house arrest and under judicial control.

<sup>B</sup> Saïd Saadi, Khalida Messaoudi and Rachid Boudjedra have been ubiquitous in the French media since the military coup of 11 January 1992 against the nascent democracy in Algeria. They lobbied, together with other losers in the ballot box, the military to intervene and take power. Algeria has been plunged since then in a spiral of violence which feeds on grinding innocent lives. The responsibility of the Algerian ‘democrats’ in the tragic events of Algeria cannot be overlooked.

<sup>C</sup> Through its eavesdropping operations, French intelligence is aware of what is exactly going on in Algeria.

<sup>D</sup> The Algerian newspaper *Liberté* is a staunch ally of the military regime’s eradicationist line. It could not however keep silent when it emerged that militiamen belonging to the ruling RND party, the party of President Zeroual, were involved in the massacres of innocent civilians. El-Hadj Fergane, the mayor of Relizane, nicknamed the ‘Sheriff’ and El Hadj El-Abed, mayor of Jdiouia and their relatives were heading death squads which were responsible for the killing of scores of people. *Liberté* mentioned 17 corpses found in a well and 62 others found in blockhouses. Some of the victims were buried alive. Given the level of media censorship and the strict guidance under which the newspapers operate, the revelations could not have been published without the intervention of a powerful clan within the military to check the rise of the rival Zeroual clan. Indeed, the whole episode enlightens us about the rivalry that exists among the various poles of the military structure in Algeria. It supports also the analysis of the army made by Lahouari Addi (cf. *L’Armée Algérienne Confisque le Pouvoir*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, N° 527, February 1998).

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uted to the Algerian secret service<sup>E</sup>, the Algerian ideologues of eradicationism continue to enjoy a status that even French politicians cannot aspire to.

In what follows, the French reactions to the massacres in Algeria are reviewed. The reactions are grouped into three categories: the French state and its representatives, political and cultural personalities, and human rights organisations and the media. Obviously, it would be an enormous task to gather everything that has been said in connection with the massacres in Algeria. No doubt, such an endeavour would be valuable. However, it is estimated that the reactions gathered below are sufficiently representative to give a true indication of the stand of France and its public opinion with respect to the massacres in Algeria. First, the special relationship between the Algerian generals and France is briefly illustrated in the light of recent revelations contained in a book written by two French investigative journalists: Claude Angeli and Stéphanie Mesnier.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Tacit Support for the Algerian Generals

Relations between France and Algeria have always assumed a dual character: public and private, especially since the military coup of 11 January 1992. In public, the French call for democracy and the respect of human rights but in private they have always supported military rulers who serve their interests, regardless of the human rights situation. Claude Angeli and Stéphanie Mesnier wrote in this respect:

During the bomb attacks of the 1995 summer, Chirac confined himself to ordinary and prudent words in restating the position of France. Of the kind: 'France helps the people and not the military who are in power; it does not seek to interfere in this conflict, but encourages the Algerians to find the answers to their own problems.'

Has the GIA been led into action in France by these false neutrality and discreet support to the authorities? A study of the Saint-Simon foundation, published in July, does not rule out this hypothesis: 'The French help constitutes for the Algerian authorities an ever more indispensable support [...]. One has to recall that French targets remain a priority for the terrorists, whether in Algeria or on French soil.'<sup>F</sup>

An official of the secret service has confirmed the statement: 'We are paying for the promises made from 1993 to 1995, and especially by Pasqua. We are paying for the help granted to the Algerian regime in terms of arms and intelligence.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>E</sup> According to information published by the British newspaper, *The Observer* of 9 November 1997: 'The bombs that outraged Paris in 1995 -blamed on Muslim fanatics- were the handwork of the Algerian secret service. They were part of a sophisticated black propaganda 'psy-ops' war aimed at galvanising French public opinion against the Islamists'.

<sup>F</sup> Notes de la Fondation Saint-Simon, *Comprendre l'Algérie*, July 1995. Two high officials, one French and the other Algerian, provide the keys for understanding the Algerian crisis. An editorial in *The Financial Times* published in August 1995 under the title, 'Chirac's Algerian puzzle', mentioned this document and suggested that the export of violence might be a tactic of the military regime aimed at provoking an anti-Islamist reaction in France.

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The Algerian generals have always sought to widen the conflict against their opponents and export it as far as possible to the West. So, any violence committed in the West, whether manipulated or engineered by them, and which can be attributed to the Islamists is grist to their mill. Indeed, the generals have been busy gathering their supporters world-wide for international action against the Islamists. Already, the Arab League and some European countries are fully collaborating with them on security matters. For the Algerian regime, France is a strategic country to which violence must be exported at any cost. France can indeed exert pressure on the European Union to take action against the Islamists. This is why, despite their support for the Algerian military authorities, the French remain wary of the intentions of the latter.

The support to the military is not devoid of suspicion. In the aftermath of the Saint-Michel bomb attack, a collaborator of Alain Juppé did not hide a mistrust shared by the prime minister, Dominique de Villepin and the DGSE still more than the DST: 'it is undoubtedly the work of Islamists. But who is behind them? Maybe a clan of either the Algerian Sécurité Militaire or the authorities which would like to draw us as their allies in the fight against terrorism?'

In order to justify such a mistrust, the same adviser of Juppé states that, according to information possessed by Matignon, it is not certain that many of the assassinations of the French of Algeria can be attributed to the terrorists. And he cites: 'the execution for instance of a nun in the Casbah, or that of the four Pères Blancs (White Friars) in Tizi-Ouzou. Some leaders in the Algerian secret service want perhaps to demonstrate that Juppé's position, which is in favour of a dialogue between the military and the opponents, is bad.'

If the team of Matignon believes, without proof but through intuition, that the Sécurité Militaire is capable of such operations, it is due to an obvious reason: some GIA commandos are infiltrated by its agents.<sup>4</sup>

The belief that the bombs planted in Paris were the work of the Algerian secret service was widespread among French officials.

The doubts were such that high officials within the police, the judiciary and the administration raised, in an opinion column in *Le Monde* under the pseudonym "Cicéron", a disturbing question: 'The financial help of France to Algeria is considerable and it has just gone up. Which side are we taking, without openly saying so, through such a policy? And what if it was this that the dead of Saint-Michel paid for with their lives?'<sup>5</sup>

Suspicious about the Algerian authorities extended up to the interior minister of the time, Jean-Louis Debré, who was, privately, concerned by the activities of the Algerian secret service.

'The Algerian Sécurité Militaire wanted us to be on the wrong track, quite simply so as to eliminate the persons that annoyed them', confided Jean-Louis Debré during a lunch with the regional press, on 15 September. He bit

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his lip later, but a bit late. He denied in vain – many journalists heard it and reported in writing – having said such words.

Thus the Algerian secret service is not only suspected of manipulating some of the bomblayers, but also the Paris authorities. On 14 September, an information note from the DST had once again warned Debré against this little game. ‘The Algerians are pushing us in the direction of the persons that interest them’, stated one member of the counter-espionage. The DGSE voiced the same precautions<sup>6</sup>.

France nurtures great ambitions in North Africa and views the rise of Islamic movements in this region with alarm. A large front comprising France, Tunisia and Egypt, three countries with a history of repression of Islamic ideas, was seen as an effective way of helping the Algerian regime to crush its opponents.

All the assessments transmitted to the Elysée by the secret service incited Chirac to be cautious, but to no avail. The head of the state is within his rights and he decides. During a visit to Tunis on 6 October, after congratulating Ben Ali for his struggle against fundamentalism, Chirac announced that he would meet the Algerian general Zeroual, in the UN headquarters, at New York. Both Ben Ali and the Egyptian President Mubarak satisfactorily applauded.

Everybody understood that Chirac was lending his support to a kind of anti-Islamic front, and backing a policy of repression practised in the Maghreb without concern for human rights and other nonsense. Out goes the official discourse on French ‘neutrality’ while Paris was under a wave of bomb attacks.<sup>7</sup>

President Jacques Chirac decided to meet general Zeroual against the advice of experts on Algerian affairs and the secret service. General Zeroual was chosen as the candidate of the generals in the presidential elections of September 1995. Obviously, a meeting with Chirac would enhance his position as an international statesman. Chirac, however, following advice from his officials, imposed conditions on the meeting such as the absence of photographers. General Zeroual felt humiliated by such restrictions and cancelled the meeting. The whole episode was a publicity boost for Zeroual for it allowed him to claim pride and jealousy for the sovereignty of his country. Beneath this circus, the reality was different. The Algerian regime was now firmly subservient to France and the theatrics were intended only for domestic consumption.

But nothing can shake the head of the state who draws a parallel between fundamentalism and Nazism, before crediting the Algerian generals of an inescapable victory over ‘the common enemy’.

On the same day that the Algerian president snubbed him, Chirac put on a brave face and assured that it was not in his intention to withdraw his support from him. ‘He is the only one capable of helping Algeria to get rid of the army’, he stated with optimism during a lunch offered to French journalists. Then followed a quick outburst on fundamentalism: ‘A great battle to be waged, and we should all stand together’, he declared to his guests and asked them not to quote what he said at the

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table. He then added with assurance: ‘The Algerian authorities are winning militarily on the ground.’<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Reactions of the French State

On 29 August 1997 over 300 people were killed in the Raïs massacre. The French President, Jacques Chirac, reacted to the event by issuing the following communiqué on 30 August 1997:

The President of the Republic has learnt with deep emotion of the tragedies that have affected again the Algerian civilian populations. He expresses his indignation with regard to these acts of barbarism and his sympathy for the Algerian people, friend of the French people.

Within a month, two other massacres were perpetrated: Sidi Youssef on 6 September 1997 and Bentalha on 22 September 1997. Hundreds died in each atrocity. In October 1997, in an answer to a written question by a member of parliament on the attitude of France to the massacres in Algeria, Hubert Védrine, the French foreign affairs minister, replied as follows:

France is distressed by the afflictions that Algeria is going through these days. After the tragic events at Raïs on 29 August, the massacres of Sidi Youssef and Bentalha have, once again, by their atrocity and barbarism, caused revulsion in French society.

The French authorities share the pain of the Algerians and express their complete solidarity. As they have never stopped doing, they denounce the blind violence and terrorism that affect Algeria. The French declarations are, in this respect, without ambiguity. The Algerian population, which wishes to live in peace, has a legitimate right to be protected. It needs security and safety. But the crisis that Algeria is going through is above all of an internal nature. It is up to the Algerians themselves to define together their political future as they wish. The solutions to the Algerian difficulties cannot come from the outside or be imposed by the international community. In the present circumstances, any intervention or premature declaration, on the contrary, risks being counter productive. The Algerians are searching today for solutions. They aspire, more than ever before, to a political and democratic issue to the crisis which is tearing up their country.

The French authorities emphasise, for their part, without interfering in the internal Algerian affairs, the importance of a true political solution elaborated by the Algerians themselves. They wish that dialogue will prevail over the blind violence in order to put an end to the suffering experienced by the Algerian people. The French society, which understands and shares the aspirations of the Algerian population for peace, renews to the latter its support and unreserved solidarity.<sup>9</sup>

Following the large-scale massacres in Relizane and Sidi Hamed in January 1998, to a written question raised by a senator on the subject of an international inquiry, foreign affairs minister Védrine replied:

Naturally, the government shares the deep emotion felt by the French, as by the international community as a whole, against the terrible ordeal inflicted on Algeria by

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the terrorist violence and the collective massacres of civilians. It could not remain insensitive to the legitimate preoccupation of its fellow citizens who wish to demonstrate their solidarity with the Algerian people and seek to understand better what is happening in Algeria. The policy of France is guided above all by the concern to act usefully. The authorities and the great majority of the Algerian political organisations oppose clearly, at this stage, the visit of an international commission of inquiry whose objective they dislike. They wonder also about the means that the commission would have in order to inquire about the acts of the terrorist groups.

In this context, the French government wishes to establish a natural and deep dialogue with the Algerian authorities, on the bilateral level as well as within the framework of the European Union, in order to encourage them to continue with their effort of opening up and transparency. The mission to Algiers of the European Troïka on 19 and 20 January 1998 constitutes an important stage in this dialogue. For the first time, an initiative of the international community has been accepted by the Algerian authorities which did not view it as a will to interference. This visit has allowed the European Union to understand well the situation in Algeria and the political project of the Algerian government. The French government intends, in the future, to lend its support to European initiatives aimed at the strengthening of relations with Algeria. On the other hand, the French government considers that the path of dialogue through the United Nations deserves to be explored. As proposed by the fifteen member states during the council of foreign affairs ministers on the last 26 January, it encourages in this respect the Algerian authorities to allow into their country the special rapporteurs on torture and arbitrary executions. The policy of the French government is part of a long term approach. With the help of its main partners, the French authorities wish to support and encourage, without an interventionist spirit, the search by the Algerians themselves of a political solution to the violence which afflicts the country.<sup>10</sup>

These reactions, at the highest level, couched in diplomatic language do appear balanced. The foreign affairs minister shows consideration for the sensitivity of the Algerian regime. The massacres are attributed to terrorism but the terrorists are not specifically designated. The Algerian regime is advised to cooperate with the United Nations and to allow the UN rapporteurs on torture and extra-judicial executions to carry out inquiries inside the country.

The words are fine but it is the deeds which provide the telltale print of French policy towards the military regime in Algeria. First, France was instrumental in helping Algeria reach an agreement with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) for the restructuring of its crippling debt, thus leaving billions of pounds in the coffers of the military junta to prosecute a costly war against its opponents. The agreement was a boost to the regime at a time when the country was financially on its knees and its survival was in doubt without exceptional assistance<sup>G</sup>. Mr Camdessus, a French citizen and

<sup>G</sup> Algeria resorted twice to the restructuring of its public debt in 1994 and 1995 with the Club of Paris for an amount of 10 billion dollars and to a restructuring of its private debt with the London Club for an amount of 3.2 billion dollars. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a credit for Algeria equivalent to 252 million dollars under the compensatory and contingency financing facility (CCFF). The drawing relates to an excess in the cost of cereal imports during the period July 1995-

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the IMF Director, showed unusual enthusiasm in providing the Algerian generals with a very generous standby loan<sup>H</sup>. Second, France helped to shield the Algerian regime from scrutiny by the UN Human Rights Commission. During its session of March-April 1998, France and Algeria coordinated their efforts to prevent any discussion of the massacres and to oppose the visit of the UN special rapporteurs on summary and extra-judicial as well as arbitrary executions to carry out systematic inquiries. Thirdly, France constrained the reactions of the European Union by preventing the latter from adopting any resolution critical of the Algerian regime and its appalling human rights record.

Roger Cohen wrote in *The New York Times* of 6 December 1996: 'Broadly, according to French officials who insisted on anonymity, the French government backs Zeroual, a retired general, because it believes that a strong state, where democracy is introduced prudently, is now necessary in Algeria to avoid another crisis'.

France has always sought a regime in Algeria with which it can do business. This regime, however, should have a democratic cloak because the era of one-party states ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This regime should also be underpinned by generals sympathetic to French interests. The existence therefore of domesticated political parties, infiltrated associations and a free press owned by the generals themselves cannot threaten the stability of the regime. In this new political configuration, France will safeguard its interests through military generals whose financial interests will be guaranteed to move freely between Algeria and France. This position has been articulated by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the French interior minister, who could not have been clearer when he said on 5 February 1997: 'Let us have the frankness to say that, if Algeria fell into an Islamist regime, the interests of France would be directly affected.'<sup>11</sup> Olivier Roy, a specialist on Algerian affairs, unveiled in the newspaper *Le Monde* the rationale behind French support to the generals in Algeria: 'We support the undemocratic forces because they are secular, hence more susceptible, in our minds, to be democratic one day, even though the question is not there [...] We cannot eradicate in a democratic way.'<sup>12</sup>

The massacres have always served as an important tool in the hands of the eradicationists because they serve to vilify and demonise the opponent. The real position of the French state can be gauged from the reactions of establishment figures such as Claude Cheysson. The Communist French

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June 1996 reflecting the exceptional increases in world grain prices which have been taking place over the previous year.

<sup>H</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a credit for Algeria totalling 1,795 million dollars under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The credit was made available over a three-year period to support the medium-term adjustment and structural reform programme of the government.

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newspaper *L'Humanité* reported a visit paid by Claude Cheysson to Algeria. The former Socialist foreign affairs minister of François Mitterand reported conversations he had with survivors of the fundamentalist violence whose fanaticised authors themselves explain to their victims that they prefer to slaughter rather than to kill by bullets, that, in their suffering, the victims might find purity.<sup>13</sup> As for the massacres, he estimated that 'the armed Islamic groups pursue relentlessly the villages which had voted for the FIS and which are prepared now to set up self-defence militias in response to the excesses of the fundamentalists.'<sup>14</sup> Claude Cheysson brushed aside totally the idea put forward by many according to which the Algerian authorities had a direct responsibility in the massacres, or the attacks that took place. He denounced the idea, which was unacceptable in his opinion, of an international commission of inquiry and said that he 'understands the reaction of Algiers' which had refused what it considered an interference. Mr Cheysson went on to add:

I have tried to understand why the security forces stationed in proximity of the place of massacre did not intervene early. There are comprehensible cases, even if they are not pleasant to relate. There are also purely technical reasons which are difficult to understand for civilians. When a company has as a mission to guard a post, it is not equipped to go on the offensive. There is nothing more dangerous than to reduce the Algerian problem to the fact that there are massacres in certain villages.<sup>15</sup>

Claude Cheysson also criticised severely the image given by French television of the situation in Algeria and the attitude of France, which was one of unprecedented disengagement from Algeria. 'In 170 years there has never been such a total human split between Algerians and French. Apart from oil, it is the break up', he said. He blamed the closing down of consulates and cultural centres, the suspension of Air France links and criticised 'the precipitate withdrawal of a big number of elements of the French presence in Algeria.'<sup>16</sup>

Claude Cheysson insists on the 'sacralisation' and 'cleansing' aspect of the violence. In his description of the slaughter, he borrows heavily from religious semantics. He chooses words that are loaded with sacrificial and ritualistic meanings such as: 'in their suffering, the victims might find purity'. Clearly, the aim is to draw attention to an 'Islamic signature' for these crimes. However, what Claude Cheysson does not mention is that the Algerian regime has 'religious brigades' whose members dress like devout Muslims, grow beards and are frequent visitors of mosques. According to ex-members of the Algerian security forces who defected to seek asylum in Europe, these 'religious brigades' are involved in armed groups which publicly commit atrocities.<sup>17</sup> Claude Cheysson, a Socialist turned supporter of the Algerian junta, prefers to ignore the revelations of the French newspaper *Libération*. The paper carried the testimony of a deserter, named Omar, who described how soldiers committed a massacre in a village by slaughtering

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about thirty villagers. While cleaning his commander's room, 'We rifled his pockets, looking for cigarettes or money. We were robbers just like Zeroual [Algeria's President]', said Omar laughing. 'In one of his pockets we found a false beard.'<sup>18</sup> This is a 'religious' signature that Claude Cheysson prefers to ignore .

Claude Cheysson calls for the outright murder of the opponents of the Algerian regime. He said on 3 January 1998: 'The armed Islamist groups defy our conception of life [...]. Against these, only counter-violence is possible. We will not convince them.'<sup>19</sup>

This is indeed the kind of interference that is sweet to the Algerian junta. However, it makes a mockery of the talk of pride, jealousy for independence and sensitivity to interference of the Algerian regime. The regime welcomes interference when it is in its own interest. Charles Pasqua, another fervent supporter of the military junta, used to comment, when he was interior minister, on every aspect of Algerian political life without ever incurring the slightest displeasure from his putschist friends.

Jack Lang, the President of the foreign affairs commission of the French parliament distinguishes himself by his vocal support for the Algerian regime. The country that tops the world league table of cruelty and human rights abuses, as demonstrated in a study carried out by the British Sunday paper *The Observer*<sup>1</sup>, becomes a model of democracy and freedom for Jack Lang. In an interview with the Algerian paper *Saout el Abrar*, which was reported by a *Reuters* despatch, he said: 'Algeria has reacted as a state enjoying all its capacities and powers to assume its responsibilities.'<sup>20</sup> He went on to state that no one had the right to dictate to it his point of view. He then added that he noticed 'a total control of the security situation by the state and a success of the security policy which has won the people over to the side of the security forces and the army in order to combat terrorism, thus allowing the defeat of the terrorist plan and the elimination of armed groups in several regions.'<sup>21</sup> After a two-day visit in February 1998, he said that he returned to France with

good impressions and a conviction that democracy has succeeded in the institution of a pluralist parliament, a council of the state, in holding local elections, in giving expression and responsibility to the people and freedom of expression to the press

<sup>1</sup> On 28 June 1998, *The Observer* stated: 'Algeria is the "winner" of an alternative world cup -for the worst abuser of human rights. The garland of dishonour emerges from the findings in The Observer's Human Rights Index, launched today to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With the backing of a panel made up of internationally recognised human rights campaigners and Nobel laureates, following extensive research, we have drawn up the first comprehensive league table of countries according to their respect for human right.

The Observer Human Rights Index aims to name and shame the world's worst abusers and maps out the relationship between economic development and oppression.'

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in the context of a real pluralism and a state of Law in the proper sense of the term.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Reactions of Cultural and Public Personalities

French intellectuals have been in the vanguard of the struggle against injustice and oppression since the days of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Emile Zola took on the French establishment at the beginning of the twentieth century and exposed the anti-Semitism at its core in his famous pamphlet "J'accuse" in defence of colonel Dreyfuss, a Jewish officer who was wrongly accused of passing state secrets to the Germans. That tradition of selfless struggle for the dignity of man is still, fortunately, upheld by many French intellectuals who, as we shall show below, are not tempted by the glare of publicity and free trips. With regard to Algeria however, a number of French intellectuals are to be found firmly entrenched with the Algerian eradicationists, fighting a war on their behalf in the media and lobbying the French government for unwavering support to the Algerian junta. They have espoused the struggle of the Algerian eradicationists lock, stock and barrel. Many of their positions are not only incomprehensible within the French tradition of upholding just causes, but are criminal in the sense that they constitute an incitement to murder. For instance, *El-Watan*, an eradicationist Algerian paper, reported the following declaration by Ahmed Djedjai, the general secretary of the FFS party: 'Djedjai has revealed that the philosophers Bernard-Henry Lévy and Herzog had told him that the dead of Bentaha had but what they deserved since they gave their voices to the ex-FIS during the aborted elections. These personalities, added the first secretary, wanted the continuation of the war in Algeria.'<sup>23</sup> The FIS was a legal party before the military coup of 11 January 1992. Is voting for a legal party a crime punishable by the death penalty? Have the French philosophers become apologists for crimes? While this is the case for some of them, many intellectuals have not gone down that infamous road.

We begin first by reviewing the reactions of some intellectuals and public figures who fervently support the eradicationist line of the Algerian regime. For this group, the perpetrators of the massacres are Islamists, the victims are supporters of the ex-FIS party who have stopped supporting the rebel groups, and an international commission of inquiry is not only unnecessary but is an obscenity.

##### 4.1. The Eradicationists

André Glucksmann, a French philosopher and a college lecturer is an ardent supporter of the Algerian junta. He believes firmly that the Armed Islamic groups are the perpetrators of the massacres. In a declaration reported by *The Chicago Tribune*, he said:

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The first thing that outside countries could do to help Algerians would be to call the crime being committed against them a crime against humanity and hold its perpetrators just as criminally responsible as indicted war criminals as in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I think it's absurd to argue that we don't know who is doing the killing. All the independent Algerian journalists say it's the armed Islamic Group. Proclaiming the crime as a crime against humanity would be a large step towards deterring Islamic terrorism, or, for that matter, terrorism perpetrated in the name of any religion.<sup>24</sup>

Glucksmann takes his evidence from 'independent Algerian journalists'. One would like to know who these 'independent journalists' are. Reporters sans Frontières would have been in a position to enlighten Glucksmann had he wished to be informed about the state of the freedom of press in Algeria. The editor and the journalists of *La Nation*<sup>J</sup> could have also provided a first hand account on the 'independence of journalism' in Algeria. Glucksmann dares not mention the names of the 'independent' journalists or newspapers for fear of being ridiculed. Serious researchers always cite their sources, but it seems that the magic that surrounds French philosophers relieves them somehow from the rigours of objectivity by which researchers are bound.

Bernard-Henry Lévy (BHL), a philosopher is also an admirer of the Algerian junta. The Communist paper *L'Humanité* published this reaction of his to the massacres.

The attacks, atrocities perpetrated in Algeria are not the work of a victorious army but the work of groups in flight [...]. Terrorism is not residual but is on the way to being defeated. 'Who kills whom?' is obscene when one remembers all the victims that I saw and met in the field during my stay.<sup>25</sup>

The French satirical paper *Le Canard Enchaîné* reacted to a long article by Bernard-Henry Lévy published in *Le Monde* following a visit paid to Algeria. *Le Canard Enchaîné* wrote:

The generals of Algiers prefer a reportage of BHL to an international enquiry. The Algerian daily papers have acclaimed his performance: four pages in "*Le Monde*". But they did not mention that they were full of errors, approximations and unspoken comment. Bernard-Henry Lévy, who was invited by the Algerian film library, received the best of welcomes from the highest authorities of the state. The latter made it possible for him, as he himself modestly recognised, to go 'into places forbidden to journalists'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>J</sup> The Algerian weekly *La Nation* was seized by the interior ministry on 4 Mars 1996 to prevent it from publishing a special issue on the violations of human rights in Algeria. The ministry accused the paper of seeking to publish 'false and tendentious informations' bordering on an apology for terrorism and criminal violence. Two weeks later (18 mars 1996), the paper was again suspended because of an article on the role of militias and the consequences of their proliferation throughout the country. On December 1996, the paper ceased to appear. The reason given is unpaid debt to the state-owned publishing company. This is how a flagship paper for democracy and human rights was silenced in Algeria.

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Bernard-Henry Lévy can get away with unsubstantiated allegations because the Algerian victims who are either buried under the earth or too scared to talk cannot contradict him. However, he cannot escape the scrutiny of investigative journalists such as those of *Le Canard Enchaîné* or John Sweeny of the British Sunday paper, *The Observer*, who rebutted his allegations. John Sweeny addressed him in an open letter:

Dear Bernard-Henry Lévy,

You must have found the news from Relizane a cruel blow. But evidence is evidence. That the Algerian authorities have arrested their own officials on suspicion of the mass murder of 17 villagers is astonishing news. It is proof that it is not just 'Islamists' fundamentalists who are to blame for the killing in Algeria. The Algerian military junta, which you have supported with such vigour, and its servants, kill too. And the news from Relizane makes celebrity philosophers such as you and your friends on the French left, who have bought the junta's line, appear credulous fools, as naive as your part name-sake, George Bernard Shaw, who went to the Soviet Union and declared: 'I have seen the future and it works'. He saw Stalinism and he was conned.

Your support for the Algerian junta sits at odds with the evidence in the open, with the reports of Amnesty International, with the testimony of the clients of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, with what any Western journalist with half a brain can glean within a minute of looking into the eyes of a ninja on the streets of Algiers. If the junta is a good government fighting Islamic terrorists, why has it refused entry to the United Nation's missions on extra-judicial killing and torture?

On your return from your recent trip to Algeria, you wrote an article which appeared in *The European*. You wrote: 'The question of who is killing whom is itself an obscenity, as if you needed to add doubt and confusion to the horror.' That was sweet music for the junta. It says that the village massacres are the work of crazed Islamists. To cast doubt on their line is 'to add doubt and confusion to the horror...'

After Relizane, you must realise that you have been wrong to solely identify the Islamists as those responsible for the violence. You should apologise now, and remember that the first duty of any public figure, and especially of one who boasts that he is an intellectual, is respect for the evidence. Otherwise, you will be remembered in history as an unwitting apologist for murder.

And a fool.<sup>27</sup>

Yves Bonnet, ex-Director of the DST (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire) declared that he would support a French intervention in Algeria if that proved necessary. He has led delegations to Algeria and continues to lobby on behalf of the military junta, especially in the intelligence circles that he knows very well since his days in the DST. *The Observer*, without naming him, accused him of having received bribes from the Algerian secret service. However, Yves Bonnet recognised himself in the article and threatened to sue the newspaper. Yves Bonnet has but admiration for the two heads of

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state, Mohamed Boudiaf and Liamine Zeroual who, in his view, have rendered a big service to France. He wrote in *Le Monde*:

Bad trial: that especially of two persons, Mohamed Boudiaf and Liamine Zeroual of the institution of the army and the administration who have spared us the quasi-promise of an absolute theocracy within missiles reach of our coasts when we had resigned ourselves to the worst.<sup>28</sup>

Robert Badinter, an ex-minister, has been very vociferous in his support for the Algerian junta. He campaigns hard for the enactment of international legislation to indict the Algerian armed opponents of the military regime. He declared to the Algerian eradicationist paper *Liberté*:

The collective killings, the collective rape, the slaughter of babies, children, old people, bear a name, namely that of crimes which affect the whole of mankind and which concern humanity whatever the place where they are committed.<sup>29</sup>

Robert Badinter is also quoted to have said in *L'Express*: 'In the person of the slain Algerian child, it is the whole community of mankind that is affected.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the world has been silent while crimes against humanity are committed on a massive scale in Algeria. If Robert Badinter had been calling for an independent commission of inquiry to identify the perpetrators, his words would have reflected a genuine concern for the forsaken Algerians, and the massacres would have ceased by now.

Yvette Roudy, a Socialist MP and an ex-minister, paid a visit to Algiers to express her support to the eradicationist camp. Algiers has become indeed, the hub of activism for the fanatics of electoral cleansing and eradicationism. Bernard-Henry Lévy, André Glucksmann, Jack Lang and many others have made this obligatory pilgrimage to Algiers. Yvette Roudy's visit was reported by *El-Watan*. She declared to the paper<sup>31</sup> that she felt persuaded that events had evolved and that there was actually in France 'a sudden awareness that leaves no room for doubt as to those who kill in Algeria.' For her 'it is clear that it is the Islamists, these God's madmen who kill'.

The Algerian street finds the opinions of the eradicationist philosophers partial and not helpful to the resolution of the ongoing conflict. The journalist Florence Aubenas of *Libération* visited Algiers and talked to various persons. The subject of the French philosophers' visits elicited the following response from passers-by:

In Algeria, we have only two things to export: our oil and our rows. The big French intellectuals have but succeeded in one thing: in reproducing without any distance the same debate that we are having here for six years. Instead of going beyond, seeing things from high above, they confuse a little more the talking.<sup>32</sup>

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#### 4.2. The Sceptics

In this category, one finds the doubters of the official versions of events, and those who know sufficiently the nature of the Algerian regime to take what it says at face value. Only an international commission of inquiry can meet their quest for the truth. They have serious questions about the attitude of the Algerian regime in relation to the massacres. The indifference of the army to the cries of help from the victims of massacres raises disturbing doubts in their minds. They wonder if, by tolerating or by being accomplice to the massacres, the regime is seeking to destabilise the Islamists and to win over the support of the population? Successive Algerian regimes have indeed undertaken psychological operations to discredit their political opponents. Are the recent massacres to be inscribed in the logic of an army that seeks, through counter insurgency operations, to break its political opponents? These are the questions to which the sceptics would like to have answers.

Michel Rocard, a former prime minister, declared on 8 January 1998: 'It seems that the army does what it wants and that the government does not have as its first worry the defence of human rights.'<sup>33</sup>

François Léotard, an ex-minister, declared on 7 January 1998: 'No country can presume on its internal sovereignty when it comes to crimes against humanity or war crimes.'<sup>34</sup> This was in response to the refusal of the Algerian authorities to accept an international commission of inquiry.

Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a Socialist politician, declared on 5 January 1998: 'To say that it is the government against the Islamists is certainly a rather simplistic vision of things. It is much more complicated.'<sup>35</sup>

The French prime minister Lionel Jospin had a suspicious attitude towards the Algerian regime before becoming prime minister. In January 1997 he declared: 'France should not keep silent, or give the impression that it supports the regime unconditionally'. However, once he became prime minister, he backtracked on his convictions and turned his back on Algeria. In an interview with *Le Monde*, he said: 'France is not responsible for what ravages Algeria today. At the official level, the French government is constrained in its expression [...]. We must repeat that a democratisation process is indispensable in Algeria.'<sup>36</sup> Realistically, one cannot expect a French prime minister to transgress the prerogatives of the Elysée in the area of foreign affairs which remains the preserve of the President. This reaction may also be seen as a feeling of frustration and powerlessness from a person known to be principled.

#### 4.3. The Fact Finders

While some French philosophers have compromised their integrity by defending the indefensible and allying themselves with the eradicationist cause

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of the Algerian generals, other French intellectuals have remained sceptical of the official versions of the events coming from Algiers. They favour an international commission of inquiry to shed light on the disturbing circumstances that surround the large-scale massacres of villagers in the suburbs of Algiers. These intellectuals do honour a French tradition of impartial inquiry and non-conformist thinking. They know from their research and past experience that the Algerian regime is skilful in the art of disinformation and psychological warfare. They do not take its declarations at face value.

Rony Braumann, member of Médecins sans Frontières and essayist wrote in *Liberation*

We have to be the least harmful possible. The unconditional and unflinching support of the French government to the Algerian military authorities as well as the dichotomy which consists in presenting always, on one side the Islamist killers and, on the other side, politicians carrying solutions, add fuel to the fire. We have to get rid of the eradicators among the Algerian authorities in the same manner that we do not support the nebulous GIA. The dialogue with the FIS has become a fundamental political necessity. 'Interference' is a trap word that I do not allow myself to use. This word is bandied about only when a foreign state does not support the authorities in place. However, when it supports the authorities, no one formulates any accusation.<sup>37</sup>

François Gèze, Director of the publishing house la Découverte wrote in *Liberation*.

The most important thing is first to break the silence: it is essential that the French government take a firm stand against the violations of human rights in Algeria, whether they are the work of the Islamists or the authorities. It is necessary to place the latter before their responsibilities. It is a corrupt mafia regime whose power games instrumentalise the deviations of the hardest Islamists in order to stay in power. The silence of the international community plays into the hands of the authorities as well as the Islamists. Given the extreme sensitivity of the Algerian government to international pressures, I think that such a position -which has nothing to do with "interference"- would be one way of moving things. The French government should also ask the UN Security Council to send an independent commission of inquiry into the massacres, as was done for other countries. In parallel, at the economic level, we should decide to make the financial transactions more transparent between France and Algeria, notably those linked to Algerian imports of consumer goods which give rise to all sorts of occult commissions. It is the sinews of the regime's war. Contrary to what our diplomats think, it is this type of international pressure which can contribute to the opening up of a true dialogue between the regime and its opponents, Islamists or not, for the return of civil peace.<sup>38</sup>

Bruno Etienne, Specialist on Algeria at the Institute of political science, Aix-en-Provence, wrote in the newspaper *L'Hebdo*.

Was not the massacre at Raïs perpetrated a few hundred yards from a military encampment without the army intervening? From this to say that the regime is not a stranger to the continuation of violence that has torn the country for more than five

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years, there is only one step which some do not hesitate to cross. 'The Islamist' can be made responsible for anything. The violence is also the work of clans belonging to the authorities which seek to destroy each other through intermediary groups.<sup>39</sup>

In the newspaper *Le Nouveau Quotidien*, he also declared: 'In this huge black hole that Algeria has become one certainty stands out: the Algerian authorities cannot provide security for their citizens. Unless they do not wish to.'<sup>40</sup> When questioned by the newspaper *Le Figaro*, he estimated that:

Three out of four attacks are promoted by the regime. In fact, a certain level of violence serves the interests of the authorities since it justifies repression and wide-scale military operations. A large number of the massacres of civilians have taken place in the Mitidja, a region where there are many barracks, without the security forces showing up.<sup>41</sup>

François Burgat, researcher at the CNRS, was interviewed by the journal *La Revue Croissance*. In answer to the question 'how do you explain these terrible massacres of villagers which, it seems, have been increasing since the beginning of the year?' he said:

This violence is the product of a confrontation between three actors. First the army which has sought to privatise repression and which has contributed to the process of militias creation. Then, these militias which have been engaged in the physical elimination of villages from which the armed groups are reputed to have originated. Thus, the militias arrive in certain villages and assassinate all the families of the persons belonging to the armed groups. Obviously, the armed groups do the same thing because they are indefinitely capable of coming to the villages that have militias and assassinating not only the militiamen but also their families. There is also another explanation that becomes more and more credible. The army might offer reprisal raids to some of its officers whose families have been the victims of attacks. I refuse therefore to lay equally the blame on the two parties because for me the initiative of the radicalisation of the civil war comes from the regime that has made it its principal political resource.<sup>42</sup>

The eradicationist lobby in France intimidates and bullies any person who has doubts on the perpetrators of the massacres in Algeria and who does not subscribe to the demonisation of Islam. The flames of McCarthyism directed against Islam and its adherents are being fanned. An Orwellian paradigm has been fashioned: 'democrats' good, 'Islamists' bad. Bad and revisionist are also the persons who sail against the new paradigm. The leitmotif of intellectual correctness is 'it is obscene to ask who kills whom'. Those who do not subscribe or conform to the new credo are ostracised. Thus, François Burgat, Rony Braumann of Médecins sans Frontières, Gilbert Granguillaume and Tassadit Yacine<sup>K</sup> feel indignant about the accusation of revisionism levelled against them by the French eradicationists. They wrote in *Libération*:

<sup>K</sup> Gilbert Granguillaume and Tassadit Yacine are readers at the EHESS.

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In the face of the atrocity of violence in Algeria, it no longer suffices to either deplore or become indignant or lay the blame equally on the army and the Islamists back to back. The dead of Relizane, Raïs or Bentalha deserve a political explanation. The latter cannot be reduced to a denunciation of “powerlessness” of an army that is incapable to check ‘head-cutting Islamist hordes’. To affirm that the responsibility of the massacres rests on Islam, as some intellectuals declare loudly and strongly, is to reduce the complexity of the Algerian situation to an appalling Manicheism. We cannot accept to be taxed ipso facto with ‘revisionism’ and with alliance with the throat-cutters because we refuse this outrageously reductionist prism. The dignity, and what is more, the survival of the Algerian people require breaking out from illusions and falsifications.<sup>43</sup>

The writers draw up an indictment of the French media that have presented a one-dimensional view of the Algerian crisis. The coverage of the Algerian crisis is selective and gives undue exposure to personalities who are opposed both politically and militarily to the Islamists.

And that is how the French authorities have ‘naturally’ supported the orientation taken by the Algerian authorities since 1992 even if nuances have appeared going from ‘non-interference’ to a more marked engagement in favour of the ‘total security’ line pursued by Algiers to a prudent wait-and-see policy, but nevertheless benevolent, since the attacks in France in 1995 and 1996. Political prudence is more than required in the face of a situation that is far from opposing on one side a state that is a ‘bulwark of democracy and civil society’, and on the other side “terrorists”. From now on it is time, if not to call into question, at least for a questioning of the unconditional support which has been given until now to the Algerian state.<sup>44</sup>

The authors do not comprehend the atmosphere of intimidation and ostracism towards individuals who dissent from the dogma that is currently fashionable among the French intelligentsia. They are concerned about attacks on the freedom of expression and about censorship.

Worse, we witness henceforth the importation to mainland France of practices that are current in Algeria and that consist in cursing and publicly denouncing all those humanitarian organisations, journalists, researchers and intellectuals whose only fault is that they do not tow the official line and try to do their job through asking questions which surround a more complex reality.<sup>45</sup>

## **5. French Humanitarian Organisations**

Non-governmental organisations are not allowed to operate in Algeria. The victims of repression, the orphaned and the destitute cannot count on the support of humanitarian organisations. The military regime dares not allow them to operate in the country for fear of losing control of the propaganda war. Since humanitarian organisations are known for their unwillingness to compromise their integrity, the only way to deal with them is either to ban them from carrying out their duties within Algeria, or to hinder their activi-

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ties so as to reduce their role to the mere provision of medicines and other goods.

### **5.1. Médecins sans Frontières**

Pierre-Pascal Vandini, programme co-ordinator of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) declared:

Algeria is a country which causes uneasiness among us. For the first time in the history of MSF, we have decided straightaway not to send permanent representatives on the spot within the context of our mission. The risks are too important, both for our collaborators and our partners living there. Of course, we go there regularly. But we keep a low profile. It is very frustrating. On the genocide in Rwanda or the massacre of Srbrnica, in Bosnia, we made inquiries that lasted for months and drew the necessary conclusions. In Algeria, however, a very close country, we have no more than indirect information. The subject causes real uneasiness within MSF. Nevertheless, in our concern for effectiveness, we cannot see any other possible policy.<sup>46</sup>

The MSF organisation tries to help the victims in Algeria as much as it can, given the almost impossible circumstances under which it operates. Even the medicine and the medical equipment it provides are not labelled to avoid the wrath of the military regime.

### **5.2. Médecins du Monde**

In 1997 the humanitarian organisation Médecins du Monde appealed to the UN secretary general to intervene in order to assure the safety of the Algerian people. The president of Médecins du Monde Jacky Mamou said :

Following this initiative, our relations with the Algerian Red Crescent have become tense. Our humanitarian help on the spot, modest of course, has been affected. But I do not have any regret. In the face of such a tragedy, it is essential to recall some principles and to demonstrate one's emotion and solidarity.<sup>47</sup>

### **5.3. French Section of Amnesty International**

The Algerian human rights organisations have not been able to carry out investigations or inquiries because of the climate of intimidation that prevails in the country. However, there are individuals who risk their lives and that of their families by continuing to speak out against the abuses of human rights and to alert international organisations on the plight of urgent cases in which the persons involved would be in mortal danger if the international human rights organisations did not intervene quickly. Amnesty International, despite not being admitted to the country since early 1997, continues to monitor the human rights situation. The director of the French Section of Amnesty International, Michell Frost declared:

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The peculiarity of the Algerian case with respect to other countries where we are not allowed in, is that we ignore to which extent the government is accomplice or responsible for some of the massacres of civilians. Amnesty International has constantly called on the UN Human Rights Commission to take charge of the Algerian case.<sup>48</sup>

#### 5.4. Reporters sans Frontières

The organisation Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) strives to maintain contacts with their Algerian colleagues. The journalists who are still active in Algeria support by and large the military regime. The few publications that refused to tow the line of the authorities have ceased to appear. This is the context in which RSF operates. Djallal Malti of RSF sums up this difficult relationship with the Algerian authorities as follows:

In relation to the regime, we reek of heresy [...]. The Algerian press survives under the pressure of the authorities. It had experienced a golden era at the beginning of the nineties but did not know how to manage its achievements. At present the newspapers depend financially on the state, especially through advertising. In this context, our efforts to protect pluralism and freedom of expression seem to embarrass most of our interlocutors [...]. The differences in interpretations between the remaining newspapers reflect only the internal struggle at the head of the state. For the rest, it is too late.<sup>49</sup>

#### 6. French Media

The French media, in their majority, have always presented the FIS as an extremist and a dangerous party. As far back as June 1991, when the FIS called for a general strike in protest against the introduction of an electoral law that favoured the ruling party, the magazine *L'Express* wrote:

The population which is weary of the uncompromising 'bearded' who know nothing else save issuing interdicts, has started to turn away from them. The momentum plays, henceforth, against them and the coming elections promise to be a setback for them. The leaders, who will reject the results of the ballot box, have understood and are taking the fight to the streets. Their demonstrations no longer attract huge crowds, only the militants. Having become a minority riven by internal power struggle, the Islamic movement is hardening its stance, and showing a face that is more violent by the day to the Algerians. The elections boycott may be the next action of the FIS.<sup>50</sup>

The predictions of *L'Express* turned out to be wrong. The FIS took part in the general elections of 26 December 1991 and secured a resounding victory. It was not the FIS that rejected the outcome of the ballot box. The so-called 'democrats' put pressure on the army to interrupt the democratic process, thus plunging the country into a savage war that is still grinding the lives of Algerians by the thousands.

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As for the perpetrators of the massacres, the magazine lends credence, in a subtle way, to the claim that the massacres are committed by armed Islamic groups. The interviews with specialists on Algerian affairs are usually selective. In an interview with Luis Martinez, a researcher at the CNRS, the following was reported:

These killings are the work of those who had opposed the dealings and then the truce between the Salvation Islamic Army (AIS) and the authorities, that is the GIA. As to the massacres that occurred in the Western part of the country, the researcher states they are perpetrated by the group, *Al Aboual*, which apparently came from the Mitidja, following a split. According to the ex-FIS and its sympathisers, La Sécurité Militaire, is responsible, at least in part, for these killings. A version that is rejected says our correspondent, by the Algerian opinion, and which does not convince foreign observers, either. Thus, for Hubert Védrine, the elements that are in the possession of the Europeans do not “support” the thesis of the implication of the army.<sup>51</sup>

The above example provided by *L'Express* can be multiplied and extended to *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Point*, *L'Humanité*, etc. The French media as a whole have been echoing, without the usual customary precautions, the information disseminated by the *Algérie Presse Service* (APS) and recycling the unverifiable and loaded accounts of the eradicationist newspapers such as *El-Watan*, *Liberté*, *Le Matin* and *l'Authentique*. From the *Agence France Presse* (AFP), the daily and weekly papers to the radio and television, the same overkill dominates. The Islamists stand condemned of all evils, without trial and without giving them the opportunity to express their side of the story. Even the prestigious evening paper *Le Monde* lost its usually balanced reporting. François Burgat, Rony Braumann, Gilbert Granguillaume and Tassadit Yacine have drawn attention to the complicity of the French media in presenting a truncated vision of events that is favourable to the Algerian regime. They published in *Libération* the following scathing attack on them.

If these changes are perceptible in the political space, we are compelled to notice that the French media space, especially the televisual one, remains for its part strongly monolithic. Television functions as a platform for a truncated vision of the Algerian political crisis. This partial treatment of the Algerian affair can be explained by a French blindness towards Algeria but at the same time becomes an additional political resource for the Algerian authorities which have all interest in presenting themselves as the ultimate bulwark against religious fanaticism. Besides the retransmission without precautions of images provided by the official Algerian channels, the French networks have served as a springboard to political personalities with virulent anti-Islamism, using that artificial proximity between some Francophone elites and the French intellectual and decision-making circles.

The only Algerians that are acceptable on our channels are those that are least representative of the Algerian society but who have the advantage of resembling us and who take advantage of this proximity by making us believe that they are democrat, tolerant and respectful of pluralism even though their political practices are

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poles apart from these criteria. Such media orchestrations contribute to reinforcing the existence of a *trompe l'oeil* Algeria which serves today the political interests of the authorities. The support of France is an essential element in the communication strategy of the Algerian authorities to the outside world. With this intention, all the means are used, not only the muzzling of the Algerian press but also the broadcast to the outside world of the successive official versions of the political crisis: first of all a bulwark and protector state of the population against the attacks of the “terrorists”, then since the massacres of the last month, of a powerless state. The objective is indeed quite simple: it is a question of confining the representation of the mode of action of the Islamist camp to the sole blind violence against innocent civilians with lots of epithets and semantic shifts. A vision is then created of a savagery imputable solely to the Islamists who then assume the hard wearing archetype of bestiality and obscurantism to the point where it would never enter the head that intellectuals (researchers, teachers, journalists) might be found in the ranks of these new barbarians or even that Islamists themselves can be the victims of this violence as was the case at Raïs, Bentalha and Relizane. If the testimonies of the different actors attesting to the extent of the manipulation of the violence, the practice of killing by the regime of its own policemen but also of civilian populations, the constitution of criminal gangs financed by the authorities, can find room in the columns of certain French daily papers, indeed in the chambers of foreign parliaments, the televisual barrier of mainland France remains for its part difficult to pass.<sup>52</sup>

Only a minority of media have refused to take part in this witch-hunt and have continued to report the Algerian situation without a-priori bias. This media category which has striven to honour the journalistic tradition of inquiry and factual reporting includes the newspapers *Libération*, *Le Canard Enchaîné* and the television channel *Canal Plus*. As an example of exaggerated bias, the television channel *Arte* broadcast a programme of four hours in which the French eradicationist philosophers vented their uncorroborated accusations against the Islamists. No person with a different opinion was invited and neither were the human rights organisations that have collected massive evidence on the violations of human rights in Algeria. Most of the media, regardless of their niches in the political spectrum, repeat ad nauseam that it is the Armed Islamic groups that kill, oppose an international commission of inquiry and deny the right to ask the pertinent question ‘who kills whom in Algeria’. J. P. Daniel, the director of the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* goes further and does not even attempt to hide his prejudices. In a programme on the television channel *La Cinq* he shouted in the face of his detractors: ‘yes, I write with my prejudice.’<sup>53</sup>

At a time when people, who not long ago seemed to have irreconcilable differences, whether in South Africa or Northern Ireland, are learning to live together with those differences, the Algerian regime is being praised and encouraged in the eradication of its political opponents. The generals have already destroyed a whole generation<sup>L</sup>. It should certainly be the role of a responsible media to inform and promote understanding and reconciliation.

<sup>L</sup> The Algerian street has nicknamed general Mohamed Lamari the Red Sea because he is fond of spilling the blood of Algerians. Lamari is the chief-of-staff of the Algerian army and the co-ordinator

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## 7. Conclusion

A clear picture emerges from an analysis of the French reactions to the massacres: establishment figures and intellectual journalists accuse the Islamists and demonise them. Scholars and researchers accuse the regime of master-minding and manipulating the violence for its own survival. In the press however, the opinions of the scholars weigh less than those of philosophers, politicians or columnists who even feel pride in harbouring personal prejudices<sup>54</sup> when it comes to their support for the Algerian military regime. The writings and declarations of the latter are so in harmony with the thinking of the Algerian junta that they are reproduced in full by the Algerian media. Philosophers such as Bernard-Henry Lévy and André Glucksmann visited Algeria at the invitation of the Algerian authorities and came back enlightened with 'the truth' concerning the massacres. The UN rapporteurs on torture and extra-judicial killings have been waiting for years to be allowed into Algeria to investigate the human rights situation. The Algerian authorities have so far refused them permission. Have the French philosophers of the BHL, André Glucksmann or Jack Lang type more expertise in carrying out investigations on atrocities than the UN rapporteurs? The military junta wants clearly to pre-empt the work of the UN rapporteurs by co-opting its own investigators. The Algerian generals think the magic of French philosophers can ward off the demand of the international community for an independent inquiry into the massacres.

The world owes the dead of Bentalha, Raïs, Beni-Messous, Relizane and other numerable places a duty of conscience and remembrance. The only way to identify their killers is through an independent international commission of inquiry with full investigative powers. Once the killers are identified they should be severely punished by the international community to deter future atrocities. If the Algerian regime has clean hands, it should not fear an international inquiry. As for France, it can help the Algerians by denouncing the human rights violations in Algeria and refraining from echoing the disinformation of the Algerian generals. It can also support the voices of human rights organisation and those of numerous Algerians who call for an international commission of inquiry.

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of the anti-terrorist war. His policy is to kill his opponents and especially not to take prisoners. He is on the record for saying that if the price of crushing the FIS is to kill a third of the Algerians, he would not hesitate one instant to pay it. His policy has already resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Algerians. He is indeed swimming in a sea of blood.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Comité Algérien des Militants Libres pour la Dignité Humaine et les Droits de l'Homme (Algerian Committee of Free Campaigners for Human Dignity and Human Rights), *Livre Blanc sur la Répression en Algérie (1991-1994), Part 1*, Hoggar, Geneva 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Angeli et Stéphanie Mesnier, *Salé Temps pour la République 1995-1997*, Bernard Grasset, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Journal officiel*, 27 October 1997.

<sup>10</sup> *Journal officiel*, 5 March 1998.

<sup>11</sup> *L'Express*, 22 January 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *Le Monde*, 24 April 1997.

<sup>13</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5 January 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Libération*, 23 octobre 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by *The Observer*, 26 October 1997.

<sup>19</sup> *L'Express*, 22 January 1998.

<sup>20</sup> *Reuters despatch*, 4 April 1998

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *El-Watan*, 5 March 1988

<sup>24</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January 1998

<sup>25</sup> *L'Humanité*, 30 December 1997.

<sup>26</sup> *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 14 January 1988.

<sup>27</sup> John Sweeny, *The observer*, 19 April 1998.

<sup>28</sup> *Le Monde*, 1 October 1997.

<sup>29</sup> *Liberté*, 23 January 1998.

<sup>30</sup> *L'Express* of 22 January 1998.

<sup>31</sup> *El-Watan* of 1 March 1998.

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<sup>32</sup> *Libération* of 24 January 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Monde* of 16 September 1997

<sup>37</sup> *Libération* of 24 September 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *L'Hebdo* of 4 August 1997

<sup>40</sup> *Le Nouveau Quotidien* of 1 August 1997

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *La Revue Croissance*, Paris, June 1997

<sup>43</sup> *Libération* of 8 February 1998

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *L'Express* of 20 January 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *L'Express* of 6 June 1991.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Express* of 22 January 1998.

<sup>52</sup> *Libération* of 8 February 1998.

<sup>53</sup> In a programme broadcast on the television channel *La Cinq*, (25 January 1998) J. P. Daniel the Director of the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* admitted to a partial treatment of the Algerian crisis in his writings.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

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