

*Algeria*  
*1830–2000*

A Short History

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# 1

## *The "Phony War"*

*(November 1954–July 1955)*

### **October, Eve of a War**

In October 1954, France was living at the slow pace of the Fourth Republic, which had borrowed a great deal from the Third. Politics always took place in sealed offices; elected officials in the provinces rushed from banquets to inaugurations and from hollow speeches to obscure disputes. René Coty was in the Elysée Palace, and Pierre Mendès-France was premier in the Hôtel Matignon. For nine years, Charles de Gaulle, having withdrawn from public affairs, had been biding his time in Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises. Guy Mollet, his spectacles at the tip of his nose, watched the omnipotent SFIO, one of the ancestors of the present-day Parti Socialiste, from the corner of his eye. The Communists were still shaken up over the death of Stalin, which had occurred twenty months earlier. Nasser was the strongman in Cairo, and his revolution of Arab nationalism was continuing.

Eisenhower was in the White House. He had just named a black man to be general of the U.S. Army's Air Force. He was the first. In London, Admiral Mountbatten was named First Sea Lord. In Stockholm, the Nobel Prize committee gave its award to a war writer, Ernest Hemingway. The decision was poorly received. Italian troops had just reentered Trieste, which the Yugoslavs had returned to them. Scenes of jubilation. In Paris, the Franco-German accords on the Saar were signed. People everywhere wanted to settle the accounts of World War II.

But how many dark spots were on the planet! In the USSR, the gulag did not die with Stalin; in Africa, decolonization was yet to come; whole stretches of Asia wallowed in poverty and underdevelopment. In China,

the Communists had taken power five years earlier. The term “Third World” appeared and circulated to designate these impoverished zones. Franco still held Spain under his sway. And, in the United States, McCarthyism was raging. Batista was elected in Cuba; he would very quickly become a fierce dictator.

Officially, France was at peace. On the other side of the Mediterranean, in Carthage in July 1954, Pierre Mendès-France had promised an evolution toward autonomy for Tunisia and Morocco, which had been on the brink of a general rebellion for three years. The true war, the war in Indochina, was over. Bigeard and many emaciated, defeated paratrooper officers left the Viet Minh prison camps. They were reflecting on the causes of the military defeat of Dien Bien Phu on May 7, 1954, a terrible lesson they were not ready to forget.

The weekend of late October 1954 was deadly: thirty-four perished. The highways were beginning to kill in great numbers. France was confronting the problems of a nation at peace that was beginning to grow richer. Its victims, and its defeats, were now in sports stadiums. In the Parc des Princes, Puig Aubert had just led the XIII of France [a soccer team] to a victory over New Zealand. The stabilization of prices, achieved under the premiership of Antoine Pinay in 1952, was a major event. The old specter of price inflation that had so profoundly marked the postwar period was vanishing. This fact reduced “the diplomatic and colonial catastrophes to the rank of political mishaps, and thus comforted the French, who intended to take advantage of the fruits of the expansion once they had got on their feet by consolidating their purchasing power” (Rioux 1990).

Cultural news remained plentiful in 1954, however. People were reading the latest Prix Goncourt, *Les Mandarins* by Simone de Beauvoir, which was a fresco of a social milieu she knew by heart. That year, Françoise Sagan, a young new writer from a good family, published her first novel, whose title was borrowed from Paul Eluard: *Bonjour tristesse*. Jean Giono, who published *Voyage en Italie*, was received into the Académie Goncourt. Nor was Albert Camus absent from that landscape. A collection of his texts contributed to the debate of ideas of the moment (*Actuelles II*), and a long prose text, haunted by flashes of insight and by worry, also appeared (*L'Été*). In October 1954, in darkened theaters film lovers could see *Touchez pas au grisbi*, by the great Jacques Becker, who was in a certain sense the heir to Jean Renoir; *Tant qu'il y aura des hommes*, by Fred Zinnemann; *Roman Holiday*, by William Wyler, with Audrey Hepburn; *On the Waterfront*, by Elia Kazan; and *Dial M for Murder*, by Alfred Hitchcock.

On October 31 the deputies packed their bags, preparing to return to Paris, where the parliamentary session was set to reopen in two days. Pierre

Mendès-France, the man who had made peace in Indochina, was preparing to leave for the United States. He was dreaming of reshuffling his cabinet. The previous week he had offered five Socialists a place in his government. The French stock market immediately dropped, then rose again, reassured. Edgar Faure would remain at Finances until the budget vote.

All Saint's Day 1954 began with a symbol. Very far away, in Pondicherry, the sun rose on a new flag. It was green, orange, and white. At sunset on the previous day, the French flag, still waving on the largest of the four trading posts, had been removed. The empire of French India no longer existed. Everything had gone well in Pondicherry.

### The Outburst

Between midnight and two o'clock a.m. on November 1, 1954, Algeria was awakened by explosions. From Constantinois to Oranie, fires and commando attacks revealed the existence of a concerted, coordinated movement. In Algiers, Boufarik, Bouïra, Batna, Khenchela, and on and on, thirty almost simultaneous attacks on military or police targets were perpetrated.

Very quickly, François Mitterrand, minister of the interior, placed three companies of state security police (CRS), that is, six hundred men, at the disposal of the Algerian general government; they flew from Paris in the early afternoon. A first battalion of paratroopers moved in under the command of Colonel Ducourneau. Three others followed the next day. In fact, the war secretary was already in place in Algiers for a different reason: he was also a deputy and mayor of the city. This was Jacques Chevallier. The SFIO daily, *Le Populaire*, was upset: “The attacks came precisely at a time when France has a government whose comprehensive policy in North Africa is likely to bring calm everywhere there has been tension.” The fact is, on that day, it was a hard fall for Paris. Hadn't François Mitterrand come back from his trip to Algeria some weeks earlier with the feeling that things were going better there?

The insurrection caused the death of seven people. The murder of the teacher Guy Monnerot in the Aurès and of the pro-French kaid from M'Chounèche, Hadj Sadok, elicited strong emotion. But the attacks against the police stations, barracks, and industrial plants did not have the scope that the initiators of the November 1 attacks had hoped. In Algiers the network set in place was broken up by the police in less than two weeks. Only the Aurès in Constantinois posed a real military problem: there, the “rebels” secured the cooperation of “bandits of honor” (in particular, the famous Grine Belkacem), who had been in the underground for years. There was

also Great Kabylia, where several hundred men, trained in clandestine operations under the leadership of Amar Ouamrane and Krim Belkacem, were ready for prolonged action.

On November 1 no one seriously thought that France had just entered a new war. The “events” made two columns in *Le Monde*. A single column in *L'Express*, dated November 6, violently denounced the “subversive schemes” of the Arab League and the old leader of the radical pro-independence current, Messali Hadj. Yet he was not the one behind the November 1 outburst; rather, it was other young leaders, in revolt against the French colonial presence and the conservatism of their own party, which was torn apart by internal struggles.

### The Men of November

On November 1, 1954, an organization, heretofore unknown, claimed responsibility for all the military operations: the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). That “rebellion” was conducted internally by six men: Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Didouche Mourad, Rabah Bitat, Krim Belkacem, Mohamed Boudiaf, and Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. The acts outside Algeria, in Cairo, were spearheaded by Hocine Aït Ahmed, Ahmed Ben Bella, and Mohammed Khider. All were from a single organization, the Parti du Peuple Algérien/Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (PPA-MTLD), which had nearly twenty thousand militants in its ranks. For several years, all had been involved in the political struggle championed by the party.

It was on the basis of a claim for the autonomy of a “culture, heir to a long and glorious past,” and for an entitlement transmitted by history, that this movement worked to legitimate the demand for independence. In that sense, Arab Islamism appeared as a return to the source of ancestral ethics. A centralizing movement, it tended to struggle against particularism, especially linguistic particularism. This was clear in 1949 when the advocates of Berber culture, denounced as “Berber materialists,” were discharged from their leadership posts. The PPA-MTLD championed a strategy of scission with the French presence. Its young activists, advocates of armed struggle, laid the foundations for the FLN, and clashed violently with the old head of the PPA-MTLD, Messali Hadj, who founded the Mouvement National Algérien, or MNA (National Algerian Movement) in December 1954.

Within the leadership of this “activist” current, the youngest person (Omar Belouizdad) was twenty-six in 1954, the oldest (Mostefa Ben Boulaïd) was thirty-seven. Only one of these leaders, Mohammed Khider

(age forty-two in 1954), who joined the group on the eve of November 1, was familiar with Etoile Nord-Africaine, the first pro-independence organization in 1936; he had been involved in the political holdup of the Oran post office, organized in 1949 by the OS (the branch of the PPA-MTLD charged with paving the way for a military insurrection, which was broken up by the French police in 1950–1951). This fact is not without importance. What united these men was that all of them, without exception and whatever their age, had been part of the OS, and had had to flee and hide to avoid repression. The orientation they gave to transmitting the legacy bequeathed by the pioneers of nationalism can be summed up in their recourse to *direct action*. Many activist cadres in the PPA who were called upon to play a “historic” role in the subsequent conduct of the Algerian revolution came from important families, themselves affected by the general downward mobility at work in Algerian society.

Hocine Aït Ahmed, born on August 20, 1926, in Aïn-el-Hammam (formerly Michelet) came from a very important line of Marabouts from Kabylia. Larbi Ben M'Hidi, born in 1923, in the douar of El Kouahi in Constantinois, near Aïn M'Lila, came from a family of Marabout notables from the high plains of Constantinois. Mohamed Boudiaf, born on June 23, 1919, in M'Sila in Hodna, was from a well-off family that had lost its status as a result of decolonization. Krim Belkacem, born on December 14, 1922, in the douar of Aït Yahia near Dra-El-Mizan in Kabylia, was the son of a village policeman, Hocine Krim, who was eventually named a minor kaid. Extremely well known, these four leaders joined the PPA during World War II and rapidly obtained significant responsibilities. They had all gone to school: Aït Ahmed passed the first part of the *baccalauréat* (high school degree); Boudiaf went to the secondary school of Bou Saada; Larbi Ben M'Hidi studied the dramatic arts; and Krim Belkacem earned his *certificat d'études* (primary school diploma). These studies ended when the men entered politics and went underground.

Although the sons of important rural families were affected by pro-independence propaganda, there were also nationalists who belonged to the category of notables, beginning with the interwar period. These are particularly unusual examples, but they deserve to be pointed out as well, since they indicate the shift in the rural areas from a situation of resistance to foreigners to modern national feeling. A very well-known leader, Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, is a telling example of the presence of that social category within the leadership of the pro-independence current. Born in 1917, he was the son of small landowners. He succeeded his father and became a miller by profession. Mobilized in 1939, he fought in the French army, was discharged after being wounded in 1942, then remobilized in 1943–1944 in

Khenchela. As a chief warrant officer returned to civilian life, he became president of the guild of fabric merchants in the Aurès, and established a small flour mill in Lambessa. At that time, he obtained a license to operate a line of buses between Arris and Batna. The results of his life journey are well known: a member of the central committee of the MTLD and founding member, in April 1954, of the CRUA (Comité Révolutionnaire pour l'Unité et l'Action), which would give rise to the FLN, he died in combat in 1956.

The new political activists, living in the midst of varied activities, suspecting they might be able to escape their social conditions through the studies they had undertaken or the positions they occupied, discovered different ways of life, different possibilities for political action. They were more "critical," more "rational" than the veterans of the 1930s nationalist struggle; the search for a political shortcut predominated in their analyses. Slow, patient collective work seemed outdated to them. For them, the turning point of 1945, marked by the Sétif massacre, served more as an accelerator than as a revelation, and precipitated the eclipse of the group built up around Messali Hadj in the interwar period. Hadj, who had been the impetus behind the first pro-independence organizations, was still the true charismatic leader of the national Algerian movement (Stora 1986). He was blind to the emergence of people no longer believing in classic political action (strikes, petitions, demonstrations). The "activists" in his party recommended recourse to armed struggle to escape the colonial impasse.

### Reforms and Repression

"Algeria has been French for a long time. Therefore, secession is inconceivable." So asserted Premier Pierre Mendès-France on November 13 before the National Assembly. Minister of the Interior François Mitterrand added: "My policy will be defined by these three words: will, steadfastness, presence." As for the political bureau of the PCF, it declared on November 9 "that it could not approve of the recourse to individual acts likely to play into the hands of the colonialists, if, in fact, they were not fomented by them." Nevertheless, Communist militants, particularly in the Aurès, joined the underground forces of November. Trotskyists and anarchist militants, very much in the minority, were the only ones in France to pronounce themselves resolutely in favor of Algerian independence.

How was it possible to believe, in that autumn of 1954, that this was a mere flare-up of violent crime, of isolated individual acts? The governor of Algeria, Roger Léonard in Algiers, and Jean Vaujour, the director of Sûreté (the criminal investigation bureau), had warned the government of the im-

minence of an insurrection. On November 20, 1954, Tunisia had its right to internal autonomy recognized. Contacts had already been made to return the sultan of Morocco to his throne. The Arab world was under the influence of the Nasserian revolution. The decisiveness of the official declarations concealed only poorly the tremors that were shaking the colonial empire. *But, as far as Algeria was concerned, no one as yet in the French political class imagined any possibility of independence.* The French government proved to be very steadfast in its repressive will. On November 5, 1954, the main pro-independence organization, the MTLD, was dissolved, its leaders arrested, and hundreds of militants forced to go underground. Most went on to swell the ranks of the first guerrilla groups. Military reinforcements were sent to Algeria. On February 2, 1955, in the Chamber, François Mitterrand declared:

Before the government was formed, that is, before mid-June 1954, there were 49,000 men in Algeria, including three companies of state security police (CRS). Before November 1, that is, in the first phase when, under the premier's authority, I was responsible for the Algerian affair, 75,000 men were sent as reinforcements. After November 1, 26,000 were sent to Algeria, not including the goums trained on site. The figure today is 83,400 men. It is therefore 60 percent higher than what the government found in Algeria when it came to power.

On January 15, 1955, the main leader of the FLN in Constantinois, Didouche Mourad, was killed during a skirmish with the French army. A month later, on February 11, the FLN leader in the Aurès, Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, was arrested. But the sending of reinforcements and the military operations were accompanied by deep reforms. In January 1955, the government elaborated a program for Algeria:

—the creation in Algiers of a school of administration to give Muslim Algerians access to posts of responsibility in the public sector: of two thousand employees in the general government of Algeria, eight were Muslims; only 15 percent of Muslim children attended school; there was one European student for every 227 European residents of Algeria and one Muslim student for every 15,342 Muslim residents;

—a reduction of the gap between Algerian and European salaries: the gross income of the European in Algeria was twenty-eight times that of the Muslim;

—the initiation of major public works projects: entire zones had no roads, city hall offices, or post offices;

—the recognition of the state of economic poverty of many regions of Algeria and the difficulties caused by very strong demographic pressure: there were 850,000 under- or unemployed for an active population of 2,300,000 potential wage earners.

This program was little discussed, and for good reason. On February 5, 1955, the government of Pierre Mendès-France was overthrown. At five o'clock in the morning, at the end of a debate on North Africa, the result of the vote came in. By a margin of 319 to 273, the deputies delivered a no-confidence vote to the government. The right, the centrists, and the Communists applauded. The Catholics in the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, or MRP (Popular Republican Movement, a centrist party) participated in that downfall, an attitude that the weekly *Témoignage Chrétien* did not understand, judging that "we have concluded seven months marked by unquestionable innovation" (February 4, 1955).

Jacques Soustelle went to Algiers the day after the fall of the Mendès cabinet, which was replaced by that of Edgar Faure on February 11. The new governor of Algeria, an ethnologist and a Gaullist, had a justified reputation as an open, liberal man. He had the courage to include in his cabinet Major Vincent Monteil, a great Arabist, and the ethnologist Germaine Tillion, a specialist on the Aurès. Jacques Soustelle was poorly received by those in charge in Algiers. This Cévennes native of Protestant origin was baptized "Ben Soussan" [the implication was that he was Jewish—trans.] Was everything still possible in Algeria, even though the FLN had officially been recognized at the Bandung Conference of nonaligned nations in April? Jacques Soustelle met with the leaders of the ulama (religious reformists) and with Ferhat Abbas, who had his movement (founded in 1946), the Union Démocratique du Manifeste Algérien or UDMA (Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto), participate in the district elections of April 1955.

Until mid-1955, Soustelle labored to understand the discontent of the Muslim population. His trips to the Aurès and Kabylia revealed to him the under-administration of the regions agitated by Algerian nationalism, especially the Aurès, and the futility of the military deployments, which encircled nothing more than a vacuum. In March 1955, he asked the government for the right to adapt legislation to the conditions of that war, which still did not dare speak its name. On March 31, 1955, the National Assembly voted in a state of emergency that strengthened the powers of the army in the limited zone of the Aurès, and authorized the displacement of "contaminated" populations to "settlement camps." A first camp opened in Khenchela, where one hundred and sixty people were confined. On May 19, the government recalled several annual contingents of soldiers. The army

launched major sweeping operations in the second half of 1955. But these measures did not weaken the "rebellion." The authority of the FLN was demonstrated by the district elections in April: the abstention order it issued was followed by 60 percent of the voting population in Constantinois.

Jacques Soustelle promised "integration" and reforms. It was too late: everything fell apart on August 20, 1955, the anniversary of the deposing of the sultan of Morocco. The "phony war" ended, and the Algerian War began in earnest.

## 2

### *The Open War*

*(August 1955–December 1956)*

#### **The Uprising of August 20, 1955**

On August 20, 1955, thousands of Algerian peasants revolted and rushed to attack cities in North Constantinois within the quadrilateral formed by Collo, Philippeville, Constantine, and Guelma. The initiative behind that large-scale action fell to Zighoud Youcef, Didouche Mourad's successor at the head of the FLN's North Constantinois zone, and on his assistant, Lakhdar Ben Tobbal. On that day, the FLN leaders intended to mark the second anniversary of the deposing of Sidi Mohammed Ben Youcef, sultan of Morocco, by the French. The war assumed its true face in Constantinois, where the coexistence of communities had always been tenuous than in the rest of Algeria. Ten years after the "events" of Sétif and Guelma in May 1945, an identical outburst of violence recurred, followed by an excessive and indiscriminate repression. At about noon several thousand *fellabs* (peasants, agricultural workers) moved into about thirty cities and villages. They were weakly organized by a few uniformed soldiers of the Armée de Libération Nationale, or ALN (National Liberation Army, the armed branch of the FLN), and they attacked police stations, the gendarmerie, and various public buildings. These peasants were agitated: a rumor of an Egyptian landing in Collo circulated. Many French people, but also Muslims, were murdered with axes, billhooks, picks, or knives. Political figures were attacked, including Saïd Chérif, UDMA delegate to the Algerian assembly, and Abbas Alaoua, Ferhat Abbas's nephew, who was murdered in his pharmacy in Constantine. The death toll of the riots came to 123, including 71 in the European population.

The repression was terrible. The army set to work and, as in May 1945, private militias were formed. The official death toll was fixed at 1,273. After an investigation, the FLN put forward the figure of 12,000 victims, which has never been disproved. On August 20, 1955, the myth of “peacekeeping operations” in Algeria came to an end. France was going to war, and it recalled sixty thousand reservists. Jacques Soustelle, governor-general of Algeria, overwhelmed by the spectacle of mutilated European cadavers in Philippeville, now gave the army *carte blanche*. The time for reforms was past. On September 30, 1955, the “Algerian question” was on the UN’s agenda. The pro-independence Algerians, via the August 20 uprising, succeeded in attracting worldwide attention to Algeria. The conflict entered its phase of internationalization.

In face of the developing nationalist insurrection in Algeria, the French government hastened to settle matters for the two French protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco. It negotiated with the nationalist leaders Habib Bourguiba and Mohamed V, whom its predecessors had exiled and imprisoned; it granted internal sovereignty to Tunisia (independence would become effective in March 1956) and outright independence to Morocco in November 1955.

### **The Soldiers’ Movement**

After August 20, 1955, the repression in Algeria openly took on the look and dimensions of a true war. The battalions of security police, gendarmes, legionnaires, and paratroopers who were already in Algeria were supplemented by more conscripts. On August 24, 1955, 60,000 young soldiers who had recently been liberated were “recalled” to service, and on August 30 the government decreed that 180,000 “dischargeable” soldiers would remain in the military.

Very quickly, those who were called back tried to oppose these measures, sometimes with the support of their families and the general population. On September 1, at the Gare de l’Est in Paris, two thousand young people refused to board the trains, shouting “Civilian life!” “No war in Algeria!” and “Morocco for the Moroccans!” On September 2, six hundred of the “recalled” in the air force demonstrated at the Gare de Lyons. Similar events were repeated in Brives, Perpignan, and Bordeaux. The contingent demonstrated to shouts of “The civilians are on our side!” But, in fact, that soldiers’ movement, which did not find support among the masses of “civilians,” quickly ran out of steam because of individual lassitude and also a lack of political prospects. The organizations and major parties proved to be more

preoccupied with the tumult of political life within France. On November 29, by a margin of 318 to 218, the Assembly passed a vote of no-confidence directed at Edgar Faure’s government, thus setting in motion its dissolution. Legislative elections were set for January 2, 1956.

### **The Election and “The Day of Tomatoes”**

Despite the dissolution of the Chamber, Jacques Soustelle continued the state of emergency. The government decided to postpone the elections in Algeria. The elected officials in Ferhat Abbas’s Union Démocratique du Manifeste Algérien decided to resign from the Algerian assembly,<sup>1</sup> in the footsteps of the sixty-one Muslim elected officials who, on September 26, 1955, had opposed the integration policy championed by Soustelle. On December 20, 1955, *L’Express* reproduced photographs taken in August depicting the execution of an Algerian “rebel” by an auxiliary gendarme. The electoral campaign proceeded against the background of the Algerian tragedy, and the left called for “peace in Algeria.” The Socialists and Radicals formed a Front Républicain, which won the election on January 2, 1956. The major event of these legislative elections was the making of inroads by Pierre Poujade’s movement, which won 52 of the 623 seats, including one for Jean-Marie Le Pen. Pierre Poujade’s movement, the Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans, or UDCA (Defense Union of Tradespeople and Artisans), campaigned against the “crooks” in the government and against the tax system. The Communists won 50 seats.

On February 1, the National Assembly invested the new government. Guy Mollet became premier, and General Georges Catroux, minister resident in Algeria. Jacques Soustelle, who had received such a poor welcome upon his arrival in Algiers, left a city in frenzy on February 2, 1956. More than 100,000 people, most of them Europeans, noisily demonstrated their affection, and stood in the path of the armored car that was trying to make its way to the port: “Don’t go! Mendès in the Aurès! Catroux in the sea!” Old general Catroux, a liberal, would never reach the Summer Palace in Algiers. On February 6, a demonstration of “ultras,” proponents of French Algeria, shouted down the government’s policy; various projectiles hit Guy Mollet. This event would become known to

1. The statute on Algeria, passed by the National Assembly on September 20, 1947, created an Algerian assembly of 120 members (60 in each electoral college, one for Europeans, one for Muslim Algerians). That assembly passed the budget of Algeria, and could also modify metropolitan legislation, subject to the ratification of the government. Municipal and general councilors in the second (Muslim) college had the right to only two-fifths of the seats (Ageron 1979).

posterity under the name of “the day of tomatoes.” The premier, still neutral, abandoned his policy, seeking peace in Algeria: the Republic had capitulated in the face of a few projectiles thrown onto this Glières plateau of Algiers, which had become the cauldron of Algerian rage. Pierre Mendès-France resigned his post as state minister. The Socialist government was about to plunge into war.

### The “Special Powers”

The extremist *pieds noirs* and the army demanded an increase in the number of soldiers, already 190,000 strong in February 1956, and the addition of helicopters to support the partitioning of the “bled.” Robert Lacoste, former Resistance fighter and member of the SFIO, named minister resident in Algeria by Guy Mollet on February 9, 1956, introduced a legislative bill in the National Assembly, “authorizing the government to set in place a program of economic expansion, social progress, and administrative reform in Algeria, and enabling it to take all exceptional measures in view of reestablishing order, protecting persons and property, and safeguarding the territory.”

Via the decrees of March and April 1956, which would allow increased military action and the recall of reservists, Algeria was divided into three zones (a zone of operation, a pacification zone, and a forbidden zone), in which three specific army corps would move. In the zone of operation, the objective would be to “crush the rebels.” In the pacification zones, the “protection” of European and Muslim populations was foreseen, with the army struggling against the deficiencies of the administration. The forbidden zones were to be evacuated, and the population assembled in “settlement camps” and placed under the control of the army.

On March 12, the Parliament (by a margin of 455 to 76) overwhelmingly passed that law on special powers which, among other things, suspended most of the guarantees of individual liberties in Algeria. The PCF voted for the law. The “special powers” constituted the real turning point in a war that France had decided to wage totally.

On April 11, the recall of the reservists was decreed. Tens of thousands of soldiers crossed the Mediterranean. Prior to that application of the law, the directors of the journal *Les Temps Modernes* realized where it would lead and said so. “The left, for once unanimous, has voted for ‘special powers,’ powers perfectly useless for negotiation but indispensable for the continuation and escalation of the war. This vote is scandalous and runs the risk of being irreparable.” It would in fact be so.

### 1956, Total War

On March 16, 1956, four days after the vote on special powers, the first FLN attacks struck Algiers. Robert Lacoste imposed a curfew on the city, continuously crisscrossed by his patrols. In France, a few final spontaneous demonstrations took shape around train stations and barracks, against “the departure of the recalled reservists.” Public opinion balked at the extension of military service to twenty-eight months. In Algeria, “the bled” continued to “rot,” and terrorism took root nearly everywhere. Oran was hit by FLN strikes in February, Algiers by similar strikes in May. The dissemination of the French troops and their mediocre training made them vulnerable to ambushes: in Palestro, on May 19, twenty young recalled reservists from Paris fell during an attack by members of the “Ali Khodja” ALN commando, assisted by the general population. Five days later the sole survivor was rescued by paratroopers.

In July and September of 1956, discreet negotiations opened between the delegates of the FLN (M’Hamed Yazid and Abderrahmane Kiouane) and of the SFIO (Pierre Commun) in Belgrade and Rome. The SFIO urged Guy Mollet to obtain a pause in the fighting through the intervention of the sultan of Morocco and of Habib Bourguiba, president of Tunisia, which had won its independence on March 20, 1956. Hocine Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Boudiaf, Ahmed Ben Bella, and Mohammed Khider discussed these prospects in Rabat on October 21, and flew off to Tunis the next day. But the Moroccan DC-3 carrying them was intercepted by the French air force and forced to land in Algiers. Robert Lacoste and the military, who did not miss that opportunity to “root out the rebellion,” made it impossible for Guy Mollet to pursue the beginnings of a negotiation. The European population of Algiers, which had endured the nightmare of explosions in bars frequented by its young people, noisily demonstrated its confidence in Robert Lacoste, who was congratulated for his energy. But, in Algeria and the metropolis, attention was soon diverted from the fate of Ben Bella and his companions (they would remain incarcerated until the end of the war) by the Suez expedition on November 5 and 6, 1956.

Guy Mollet, haunted by the memory of the capitulation of Munich in 1938, and comparing Nasser to a “new Hitler,” launched the foolhardy military expedition of Port Said. The Franco-British operation aimed to wrest the Suez Canal from the control of Egypt, which had nationalized the company in July. In the minds of the French general staff, the operation would serve to take down Nasser, who was considered the most active supporter of the Algerian insurrection. But the tactical success, acquired with the cooperation of the Israelis, who had attacked to the east, was transformed

into a political rout: the Americans and the Russians made the troops depart again on November 15, and the UN put the Algerian question on its agenda.

The FLN took advantage of these events to make its presence known in the countryside and in the cities. In the late part of 1956, the Algerian War took a nasty turn. The army had increased in size from 54,000 to 350,000 men within two years. Several classes had to be recalled, and the length of military service was extended to nearly thirty months. The repression pushed thousands of young Algerians toward the guerrilla forces (students in particular, who organized a strike in March 1956). The French sector forces combed the territory with little zeal. The paratroopers and the Legion, constantly on call, suffered heavy losses. In late 1956, the ALN had tens of thousands of *djounouds* (warriors) in its ranks. Things were deteriorating everywhere. Certain regions represented real sanctuaries for the FLN. Most of the Muslim elected officials, including Ferhat Abbas, joined the camp of Algerian nationalism.

Since autumn, Robert Lacoste had been calling for a new commander in chief. On November 15, 1956, Guy Mollet installed General Raoul Salan in place of General Henri Lorillot, who had been unable to respond to the guerrilla war, despite the reinforcements landing each month in Algeria. The arrival of Raoul Salan, a veteran of Indochina and a “strategist” of subversive war, opened a new chapter in the Algerian War, especially since the FLN had decided to change its field of operation: in January 1957, it took the war to the heart of Algiers, making repeated attacks and issuing the order for a general strike.

## 3

### *The Cruel War (1957)*

#### **The “Battle of Algiers”**

On December 27, 1956, Amédée Froger, president of the federation of mayors of Algeria and a virulent spokesman for the minor colons, was murdered in Algiers. The next day his funeral occasioned truly brutal *ratonnades* (Arab-bashings), which caused several Muslim casualties. Tension was extreme between the Europeans and the Muslim Algerians. Robert Lacoste’s general government decided to react. On the basis of the “special powers” passed in March 1956, he entrusted the “pacification” of Algiers to General Jacques Massu, commander of the Tenth Paratroopers’ Division.

On January 7, 1957, eight thousand paratroopers moved into the city, charged with a policing mission. The “battle of Algiers” had begun. On January 9 and 10, two explosions caused panic in two stadiums in Algiers. But the horror reached its peak on January 26. Within a few minutes of each other, two charges exploded, the first in the bar L’Otomatic, the second in the café Le Coq Hardi, in the very center of Algiers. Two Muslim Algerians were lynched by an agitated European mob. On January 28, to coincide with the United Nations debates, the FLN launched an order for an eight-day general strike. The army broke the strike. At every moment and at every location, helicopters landed on the terraces of the Casbah. The city was divided into sectors, and the Muslim neighborhoods were isolated behind barbed wire, under searchlights. General Massu, endowed with policing powers over the city, had the responsibility of restoring order, and broke apart the FLN’s “autonomous zone of Algiers” (ZAA) which was located primarily in the Casbah and headed by Yacef Saadi. The FLN set up a true

organization estimated at five thousand militants. Terrorism served to justify recourse to every means possible. Massu's men made massive arrests, systematically took down names, and, in the "transit and sorting centers" located on the periphery of the city, practiced torture. The leader of the FLN, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, was arrested on February 17, and subsequently was said to have "committed suicide." The "very exhaustive" interrogations produced results.

It was truly "blood and shit," as Colonel Marcel Bigeard said, a horrendous battle, during which bombs blew dozens of European victims to pieces, while paratroopers dismantled the networks by uncovering their hierarchy, discovered caches, and flushed out the FLN leaders installed in the city. Their means? Electrodes (known as *gégène*, a slang term for generator), dunkings in bathtubs, beatings. Some of the torturers were sadists, to be sure. But many officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers would live with that nightmare for the rest of their lives. The number of attacks perpetrated fell from 112 in January to 39 in February, then to 29 in March. The FLN's command center, run by Abbane Ramdane, was forced to leave the capital. Massu had a first victory.

On March 28, 1957, General Paris de Bollardière asked to be relieved of his duties. He could not allow the use of torture, which he had experienced and fought against during the German Occupation. The chaplain of the Tenth Paratroopers' Division responded by declaring: "One cannot fight against revolutionary war except with methods of clandestine action." General Paris de Bollardière was sentenced to sixty days in prison on April 15, 1957.

In early June the attacks resumed. On June 3, a bomb went off near a bus stop; on June 9, the dance hall of a casino was targeted, causing 8 deaths and 92 injuries. The repression began again, aided this time by a network of "reformed" militants (called the "overalls"), who, under the leadership of Captain Léger, infiltrated the FLN and brought down many leaders. Yacéf Saadi was arrested on September 24, 1957. His assistant, Ali La Pointe, finding himself surrounded, committed suicide in a cache to avoid arrest. The "battle of Algiers" was over. The European population rediscovered the pleasures of the beach and the restaurants, and worshiped its paratroopers. That idyll would continue on May 13, 1958.

The FLN networks had been destroyed, thousands of Algerians had been arrested or "disappeared." But that military victory was accompanied by a grave moral crisis. On September 12, 1957, Paul Teitgen, secretary general of the Algiers police, resigned in protest against the practices of General Massu and the paratroopers. He put forward the figure of 3,024 disappeared. The "question" of torture was about to divide France.

### The Question of Torture

Torture, employed as an ordinary procedure of "pacification" during the "battle of Algiers," was certainly the great scandal of these Algerian years (Vidal-Naquet 1975).

As early as January 15, 1955, the writer François Mauriac had published an article in *L'Express* entitled "The Question." At the same time, the journalist Claude Bourdet also denounced what he called "Your Algerian Gestapo" in *France-Observateur*. On March 2, 1955, Roger Willaume, an inspector general in the administration, remitted a report to Jacques Soustelle, governor-general of Algeria, which made it very clear that torture was commonly practiced on "suspects." On December 13, 1955, Premier Edgar Faure received a report prepared by Jean Mairey, director of Sûreté Nationale, that reached the same conclusion. Torture was being used by the *détachement opérationnel de protection*, or DOP (protective operation detail), special units of the army charged with "exhaustive" interrogations.

Beginning in mid-February 1957, the weekly *Témoignage Chrétien* published the "Jean Müller dossier," by a recalled reservist in Algeria: "We are far removed from the pacification for which we were supposedly called; we are desperate to see how low human nature can stoop, and to see the French use procedures stemming from Nazi barbarism." In March 1957, a few recalled reservists put out a brochure, *Des rappelés témoignent* (Recalled reservists bear witness) under the aegis of the Comité de Résistance Spirituelle (Committee of Spiritual Resistance). In it, there are accounts such as this: "I was thinking of the kid, who I imagined terrorized at the bottom of the jeep trailer, where he had been shut up at night. Yet it was the kid they were torturing." In April, the journal *Esprit* published the wrenching account by Robert Bonnaud, "The Peace of the Nementchas": "If France's honor can go along with these acts of torture, then France is a country without honor."

In September 1957, Paul Teitgen resigned his post as secretary general of the police in Algiers. He wrote: "In visiting the settlement centers, I recognized on certain detainees the deep marks of abuse or torture that I personally endured fourteen years ago in the basement of the Gestapo in Nancy." In November 1957, at the initiative of the mathematician Laurent Schwartz and the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, the Comité Maurice-Audin was formed, named after a young mathematician who disappeared after being abducted by paratroopers and tortured. In January 1958, Henri Alleg's *La question* appeared, which troubled consciences and publicly revealed the torture. So began the "affair" that deeply divided public opinion, the Church,

families, and the parties: Why did the French army practice large-scale torture? Many thought that torture could become an institution, first of the police, and then of the military.

The publication in newspapers and journals (*L'Humanité*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit*, *Vérité Pour*) of works such as the Catholic writer Pierre-Henri Simon's *Contre la torture* (Against torture) got intellectuals involved; they soon formed into networks that fought against disinformation and human rights violations. Communist militants, writers, the Catholic intellectuals François Mauriac, André Mandouze, Pierre-Henri Simon, and André Frossard, and priests proved particularly active in the circulation of the war "secrets." Some belonged to the Mission de France, set up in Pontigny, Yonne, in August 1954, under the supervision of Cardinal Liénart.

Despite the censorship and the shroud of secrecy covering Algeria, the French public gradually discovered the true nature of a conflict that, to be sure, no longer had anything to do with a mere "peacekeeping mission."

### **Censorship, Prisons, Camps**

The Algerian war brought about major restrictions on the freedom of the press, of publication, and of visual images. Censorship was set in place on a large scale. The law of April 3, 1955, declaring "the state of emergency," allowed administrative authorities, the minister of the interior, the general government, and the prefects to "take all measures to ensure control of the press and of publications of all kinds, as well as radio transmissions, showings of films, and theatrical performances" (article 11 of the law of April 3, 1955, declared applicable by that law). The decree of March 17, 1956, within the framework of the "special powers," repeated a similar formula, extended to "every means of expression." Printed texts could be seized by the administration and the courts, or subject to police measures or additional penalties, as an attack on state security.

The many newspapers and books seized by the prefects came about by virtue of article 10 of the criminal investigation code, which became article 30 of the penal procedures code. That article allowed the prefect to temporarily seize books or periodicals that contained a press violation, as stipulated by the law of July 29, 1881, if it also constituted "an attack on state security." In its section on crimes and misdemeanors committed via the press, the law of July 28, 1881, restricted freedom of opinion by repressing incitement to crimes and misdemeanors against the body politic. Article 25 of that law, used many times during the Algerian War, "represses the

incitement of military personnel to disobedience, even when it remains without effect." A decision of April 27, 1961, defined the grounds that could justify a ban: support of an act of subversion directed against the authorities or laws of the Republic, or the dissemination of secret information, military or administrative.

Under the Fourth Republic, certain newspapers, such as *L'Express*, *France-Observateur*, *L'Humanité*, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, *La Vérité des Travailleurs*, and *Le Libertaire* were particularly targeted. Nearly thirty works from the publishers Jérôme Lindon and François Maspero would be seized under the Fifth Republic, between 1958 and 1962.

As of 1955, the police and the army championed house arrest for Algerian nationalist militants. Detention camps were established in Algeria by virtue of the law of March 16, 1956. Tens of thousands of Algerians were put into camps without due process, in Bossuet, Saint-Leu, and Lambessa.

The law of July 26, 1957, extended to France the provisions set out in the so-called special powers law. It stipulated the possibility of restricting to a detention center, in places located within the metropolis, any person convicted in application of the "laws on battle squads or private militias." Only one mode of application was envisioned for the detention thus set in place: internment in a guarded residence center. Between 1956 and 1959, then, four detention centers under guard were gradually established: Mourmelon-Vadenay (Marne), Saint-Maurice-l'Ardoise (Gard), Thol (Ain), and Larzac (Aveyron). The militants brought to these centers, after their sentences had been served, were those considered by the police to be "most active in the rebellion, whose return to freedom, that is, to separatist plots, poses a serious danger." The optimal use of these legislative provisions made it possible to obtain, within two years, the signing of 6,707 detention orders, of which 1,860 were executed.

The Fourth Republic was also a time of massive trials and death sentences. Ahmed Zabana, judged by the armed forces tribunal in Algiers, was the first to be sentenced to death; he was executed in the Barberousse Prison on June 19, 1956.

### **The Battles of the French Army**

The bazooka attack committed on January 16, 1957, against Salan's office seems to have been separate from the "battle of Algiers": supposedly, the goal of the plot was to eliminate a general who was suspected of liberalism. In fact, Salan managed to straighten out the military situation. As it hap-

pened, in the *bled*, the combat methods of Colonel Jeanpierre's legionnaires, Bigeard's paratroopers, and others, paid off. The "rebels" bringing armaments from Tunisia and Morocco were intercepted and pursued into the interior of the sectors patrolled by conventional regiments. Helicopters and intelligence became the instruments of the troops, who were freed from policing Algiers in early summer 1957.

Despite a noticeable increase in its losses, the ALN was strengthened, thanks to the weapons and reinforcements that, in spite of everything, it received from Morocco and especially Tunisia, where it sent its recruits to be trained and armed. To isolate Algeria from these countries, Minister of Defense André Morice (a member of the Bourguès-Maunoury government from June to September 1957) decided to build, behind the border lines, networks of electrified and mined barbed wire (called the *barrages* or the "Morice Line"). In the desert zones, these were supplemented by batteries of cannons that would fire automatically when set off by radar. These obstacles could be breached, but as soon as they were, the break in the electrical current would send a signal to the military forces that someone had gone through.

In late May 1957, a very bitter skirmish occurred in *wilaya* IV between Bigeard's paratroopers and five hundred "fellaghas" (the name given the peasant insurrection movement in Tunisia) led by Azzedine, who escaped; ninety-six "rebels" were killed. At the same time, Salan undertook "social" pacification and dispatched SAS (special administrative section) officers to the *bled*: these men were paid to promote literacy and provide medical assistance, which also served as counterpropaganda and intelligence. In the rural areas, the relocation of the evacuated populations from the "forbidden zones" and the SAS actions had a negative effect on the FLN-ALN's recruitment, supply operations, and intercommunications. The recruitment of *barkis* and other auxiliaries from the peasantry resistant to the authority of the insurgent leaders, and from former "rebels," facilitated the actions of the military forces (in 1962, a report sent to the UN estimated the number of Muslims who fought in the auxiliary units or in self-defense groups at 263,000).

In early 1958, the French command judged that the war was virtually won. Minister Resident Robert Lacoste kept repeating victory would come to the one who held out for "the last quarter hour." That entailed "forgetting" the profound political and moral crisis permeating the Fourth Republic in 1957. In addition, the FLN leadership, installed outside the country, still hoped to win by combining an offensive of its troops from Tunisia and Morocco with diplomatic pressure on the UN, as a way to internationalize the conflict with an Algerian "Dien Bien Phu."

### Crises in the Republic

In 1957, the conflict intensified throughout Algeria, outside the large cities. Soldiers of the contingent were now engaged in war, while in the metropolis more and more people were speaking out against torture. The UN demanded that France apply a "peaceful, democratic, and fair" solution to the Algerian problem. The American senator John F. Kennedy publicly declared himself in favor of this approach on July 2, 1957. In Paris, the Guy Mollet government, whose budget was reeling under the weight of heavy expenses incurred by the "peacekeeping operation" in Algeria, was overthrown on May 28, 1957. The cabinet of Maurice Bourguès-Maunoury succeeded it. It decided to focus on the Sahara, where oil had been discovered, and asked Robert Lacoste, who was kept in his post, to prepare an outline law that would bring a "new Algeria" into being. The international repercussions of the Algerian affair were obsessing the parties in the Front Républicain and, by September 1957, the gap had widened between the politicians and the military, between the metropolis and the *pièds noirs*, and within the left itself. A large proportion of "democrats" and "leftists" in the Fédération de l'Éducation Nationale, or FEN (National Education Federation), the Force Ouvrière, or FO (Workers' Power), and the Ligue des Droits des Hommes (Human Rights League), spoke of "the indigenous populations" and of "the territories," not of peoples and nations. Individual oppression was recognized, not national oppression. The republican left (which had come into existence during the Dreyfus affair) with its passion for universalism and the principles of 1789, opposed nationalism (French or Algerian) and religious circles. Logically, it rejected the proclamations of the Algerian nationalists, which were "marked by Islamic religiosity." At the same time, it could not understand why the republican principle of equality had never really been applied to Algeria and the colonies.

The Algerian affair, in fact, legitimated a republican reading of the FLN as a "symbol of justice"; but a different reading saw the organization as the conveyor of an "archaic nationalism to be transcended." The PCF also proved incapable of deciding between these two readings. That failure led to the involvement of a significant faction of young people in a radical Third World movement against "National Molletism" and the PCF, considered obstinately faithful to Moscow. The largest aid network to the FLN was run by Francis Jeanson, a philosopher and managing editor of the journal *Les Temps Modernes*, who, with his wife, Colette, had published *L'Algérie hors-la-loi* (Outlaw Algeria) in 1955. Jeanson had long hoped for a burst of energy on the part of the French left, which the "people" had brought to power in 1956 under the Front Républicain label; he was weary of meetings, placards,

and the pious motions of a left that “continued to put the brakes to a movement that it prided itself on promoting.” Observing that “none of the people who spoke of putting an end to the war, which they themselves declared absurd, conceded that one might help French young people refuse to become mired in it,” and that “they were denouncing colonialism, but considered criminal any sort of practical solidarity with the colonized,” he came to the logical conclusion: provide direct aid to the FLN.<sup>1</sup>

During this time, the Socialist Robert Lacoste was attempting to escape the political impasse. He prepared an outline law that included a “single college,” which would get rid of the voting inequality in the two colleges (one European vote was worth seven Algerian votes, according to the statute drafted in 1947). On September 13, this proposal for an outline law was adopted in the Council of Ministers. But it was in turn shouted down by the majority of Europeans. It did not even manage to convince the National Assembly: on September 30, 1957, Bourguès-Maunoury was overthrown. It was not until the following November 6 that the assembly awarded its confidence to the new government of the Radical Félix Gaillard. The outline law on Algeria, greatly watered down to reduce the influence of Muslim elected officials, was finally passed on November 29, and its application postponed until the end of the war. Funds were allocated to build the electrified barriers on the borders of Morocco and Tunisia, the “Morice Line” (named after the short-lived minister of defense). Robert Lacoste remained resident minister in Algeria, but his authority was gone. General Salan now exercised vast prerogatives, and intended to win the war with his spirited colonels.

1. F. Jeanson, interview for the televised series *Les années algériennes*.

## 4

*The War of the Algerians*  
(1954–1958)

**N**ovember 1, 1954, the official date of the outbreak of the Algerian War, did not coincide with the imposition of a single leadership (the emergent FLN, for example) or with the collapse of all earlier political currents. As it turned out, the FLN was to structure and consolidate itself over two years, culminating in the Soummam Congress on August 20, 1956. In these two years, cadres were recruited and selected, the population trained, the idea of independence developed, channels established, and guerrilla warfare reinvented. But, above all, it took two long years to have the envied title of “authorized representative” recognized through the integration of all other currents into the FLN, with the exception of the proponents of the old nationalist leader Messali Hadj, who in December 1954 founded the Mouvement National Algérien (Stora 1985).

#### Differences among Nationalists

The dissolution of the MTLD by the Council of Ministers on November 4, 1954, led to the arrest of several hundred Algerian nationalist leaders and militants. Those who were not arrested had no choice: they had to go underground or join the guerrilla forces. The FLN took full advantage of the dissolution of the MTLD. It set structures in place to intercept the majority of disoriented Messalists and welcome them into the underground forces; they took possession of the stocks of weapons inherited from the

OS, the paramilitary organization of the MTLD; and they initiated contact with the Tunisians and the Moroccans. A large number of immigrants joining the guerrilla forces were taken in hand by the FLN. But, in the first phase of the insurrection, it also suffered very cruel blows. On January 15, 1955, Didouche Mourad, leader of Constantinois, died in battle; on February 11, Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, leader of the Aurès, was arrested; on March 16, Rabah Bitat, who had organized the urban guerrilla war in Algiers, was also arrested.

Under these conditions of very active repression (between November 1954 and April 1955), efforts at reconciliation took place between “activists” (the members of the MTLD who had perpetrated the events of November 1, 1954), “centralists” (the majority of the former members of the central committee of the MTLD), and “Messalists” (the followers of Messali Hadj). During this period, the FLN was still seeking its identity, assessing its strength. In Algiers, in Cairo, and among the guerrilla forces, contacts and efforts at reconciliation took place between “Messalists” and “Frontists” (supporters of the FLN). That did not fail to promote confusion within the immigrant community in France, and in Algeria. To be sure, the grass-roots nationalist militants had to expend a great deal of effort disentangling the maze of triangular relationships among all the parties involved (Messalists, CRUA, centralists) and understanding the disputes, which were Byzantine in their view, in the period preceding and immediately following the insurrection of November 1, 1954.

Confusion was also at its height among the guerrilla forces. All currents, though not acting in concert, accepted the designation “ALN” as the sole military structure. A large portion of Messalist militants decided on their own to resort to weapons as soon as the November 1 operations became known. In certain regions of Algeria, particularly the Aurès and Kabylia, armed groups formed independent of the existing leadership. They were “taken in hand” after the fact. Animated simply by patriotic desire, some were familiar with the FLN, while others embraced Messali. On November 1, 1954, the pamphlets clearly distinguished between the FLN, the movement’s political organization, and the ALN, a military organization. But in the Aurès, for example, the entire political side answered to the authority of Chihani Bachir, Ben Boulaïd’s second in command. The Aurès zone leaders did not see the usefulness of the distinction. They believed it was enough to proclaim open revolution and to train militants. In Kabylia, and especially in the Bouira region, the militants fought under the name “Armée de Libération Nationale,” which tended to create ambiguity regarding the designation “ALN,” shared by the FLN and the MNA. Things came to a head politically in 1955.

### The FLN-MNA War

In early 1955, the “activists” of the former MTLD, who had founded the FLN, managed to pull the members of the “centralist” current along with them. Conversely, the Messalists, heirs to a long political tradition, and who did not believe exclusively in military action to achieve independence, rejected the activist aims, which they judged simplistic. For Messali Hadj, formed within the French left, the activists were the victims of an “infantile disease.” The two organizations, the FLN and the MNA, were about to engage in violent confrontations.

On June 1, 1955, the murder of Saïfi, an old PPA militant, whose hotel and restaurant on rue Aumaire, in the third arrondissement of Paris, harbored illegal aliens, precipitated the confrontation. In a pamphlet issued in late November 1955, Abbane Ramdane, assistant to Krim Belkacem and leader of the FLN in Algiers, called Messali Hadj “a shame-faced old man who holds the Angoulême front, at the head of an army of police officers, which assures his protection against the anger of the people.” After various insults and accusations exchanged via pamphlets, weapons took the place of words. On December 10, 1955, in Algiers, Salah Bouchafa and Mustapha Fettaï, FLN militants, executed Sadek Rihani, the leader of the MNA in Algiers. The test of strength had begun. For both organizations, the nature of the future independent Algerian society was not at issue. The violent rivalry took place at a different level: who ought to be, who could be, the exclusive representative of the Algerian people?

From 1955 to 1962, the “shock commandos” of the FLN and the MNA waged a long, cruel battle using every means possible: traps, betrayal, infiltration, and executions to serve as an example, all of them sowing fear. In Algeria, this internecine struggle was exemplified, in May 1957, by the FLN’s bloody massacre of 374 villagers in Melouza, who were suspected of Messalist sympathies. The massacre spurred the MNA fighters, especially those of Mohammed Bellounis, to immediately join the French army.<sup>1</sup> On March 20, 1962, the newspaper *Le Monde* published statistics on the scope of the confrontation between nationalists in France (the FLN versus the MNA): more than twelve thousand assaults, four thousand deaths, and more than nine thousand injuries. In Algeria itself, the toll of that civil war was very heavy: six thousand dead and fourteen thousand wounded. In total, in France and in Algeria, the number of victims rose to nearly ten thousand dead and twenty-five thousand wounded in the two camps.

1. Nevertheless, Mohammed Bellounis was murdered, along with his followers, by the men of the third Régiment Parachutiste d’Infanterie de Marine, or RPIMA (Paratrooper Regiment of the Marine Light Infantry) on July 14, 1958.

The FLN would emerge victorious in this war within a war. But thousands of militants who had been trained for modern political life in the immigration movement in France, in particular, were killed in the process, and would be cruelly absent from the leadership of an Algeria at war, and then of an independent Algeria.

### Converts to the FLN, the Soummam Congress

In 1955 and 1956, the FLN increased contacts and discussions with the other Algerian components. All the same, aware of the “bankruptcy” of the earlier parties, it expected them simply to dissolve and their members to join the FLN in a purely individual capacity. Following in the footsteps of the “centralists” (Ben Youssef Ben Khedda, Saad Dhalab, M’Hamed Yazid, and Hocine Lahouel), Ferhat Abbas’s UDMA rallied behind the FLN in late 1955.

The FLN was to obtain this massive conversion of the “old elites,” so avidly desired, from another organization, the ulama (a religious reformist movement that championed the rebirth of Islamic identity in Algeria). That religious organization, worried about its lack of control over the events, went over to the FLN camp during its conference on January 7, 1956, and glorified the “resistance to colonialism.” Then there was the case of the Parti Communiste Algérien, or PCA (Algerian Communist Party). In May and June 1956, Ben Khedda and Abbane Ramdane, representing the FLN, and Bachir Hadj Ali and Sadek Hadjeres, representing the PCA, began protracted discussions. On July 1, 1956, the Algerian Communists were integrated into the ALN.

The Soummam Congress, which was held on August 20, 1956, made official “the bankruptcy of the former political organizations of the old parties,” and noted that the “grass-roots militants” had rallied behind the FLN, and that the UDMA and the ulama had been dissolved. With this congress, held in the Soummam Valley in Kabylia, the “Algerian revolution” changed its aspect. The long (twenty-day) debates culminated in a well-defined program, the structuring of the FLN-ALN, and the affirmation of the primacy of political over military action and of the domestic scene over the exterior (Teguia 1984).

Initially planned for July 31 in the region of the Bibane, the congress did not open until August 20 in a forester’s cottage close to the village of Igbal, on the western slope of the Soummam. Sixteen delegates participated; they very unevenly represented the different regions of Algeria. In addition to the absence of the external delegation, there was no representative of the Au-

rès—their leader, Mohammed Ben Boulaïd, had been killed, and his brother Omar could not come, given the constant movements of the French army. Oranais was represented only by Larbi Ben M’Hidi. Six delegates came from Zone II (North Constantinois): Youcef Zighoud, Lakhdar Ben Tobbal, Mostefa Benaouda, Brahim Mezhoudi, Ali Kafi, and Rouibah. Four came from Zone III (Kabylia): Belkacem Krim, Mohammedi Saïd, Amirouche, and Kaci. Three came from Zone IV (Algérois): Amar Ouamrane, Slimane Dehilès, Ahmed Bouguerra. And one came from Zone VI (the south): Ali Mellah. These fifteen men were representatives of the combatants. The sixteenth, the only political secretary, was Abbane Ramdane.

From the deliberations of this congress, three major concerns emerged:

- an assessment of the material forces of the revolution, judged by the delegates to be moderately satisfactory. There was criticism of the weakness of weapons supply operations, and imbalances in the introduction of political structures were pointed out (good for Kabylia, despite the existence of a few Messalist strongholds, and for Constantinois; acceptable for Algérois; clearly lagging behind for Oranais);
- the drafting of a political platform—partly put together by Amar Ouzegane, but profoundly bearing Abbane’s mark—which was articulated around the principles of a collegial structure of the leadership, the primacy of the political over the military, and the domestic over the external;
- a reorganization of the structure of the ALN, now modeled on a regular army. Algerian territory was carved up into six new *wilayas*, themselves subdivided into *mintaka* (zones), *nabia* (regions), and *kasma* (sectors); Algiers was set up as an autonomous zone. A strict hierarchy of battle units and ranks was instituted, which would give birth to the army, a true linchpin of the future Algerian state.

This “counterstate” in gestation was justified by the suffocating power of the colonial state. According to that argument, the pursuit of the pluralist traditions of Algerian nationalism prior to 1954 appeared too feeble a means for breaking free of the ponderous weight of French tutelage (Slimane Chikh 1981).

Although the Soummam Congress, the only one in the FLN’s history, was historic in the “legislative” work it accomplished, it also inaugurated the struggle for control in the highest echelons of the nationalist organization. On September 23, 1956, Abbane Ramdane (a native of Kabylia) sent a letter to Mohammed Khider, informing him of the congress’s decisions. When Ben Bella learned of the letter and received the minutes of the congress, he decided to compose a three-point response. He insisted on the “nonrepresentative” character of the congress. “The Aurès, the external

delegation, Oranie, and the eastern zones did not attend, nor did the Fédération de France.” He attacked “the questioning, once again, of the Islamic character of our future political institutions” and thereby demonstrated his rejection of the secularism of the state, and his refusal to make a place for the European minority. Finally, he denounced the presence of former leaders of parties within the leading organizations. This reply repeated word for word the themes of the leadership of the PPA-MTLD against “the Berberists” of 1949 (Stora 1991a: 111). But did not Abbane also accuse Ben Bella “of distrusting them because they were Kabyles”? Part of the reason for the dispute over legitimacy can be found in a “regionalist” explanation.

### The Battle of the Guerrilla Forces

The principal unit of the ALN was the *katiba*—the equivalent of a light company—which might reach the size of one hundred men, or the platoon, about thirty men. These men eked out an existence in the territory constituting their field of operation, which they knew intimately for having traversed it in every direction.

Their solidarity was that of combatants waging war for the duration of the conflict, without any thought of return, constantly facing the same dangers and the same privations, whatever their rank or duties: the officer was no less Spartan than the *djoundi* (soldier); the secretary, the medic, the radio operator if there was one, all engaged in combat. It was not military ritual that made for cohesion. The link that united the *mujahideen* (fighters) was the blood spilled, the cause served, the danger marking their existence. It was also the acquisition of a discipline that, if breached, might entail a punishment of death—for example, for indecent behavior or a weapon in poor condition. It was also the shared background of these men, almost all of whom were coarse, rural folk, trained for a hard life since birth. Each man carried his ration of semolina or couscous; as often as possible, oil, chickpeas, and onions were part of the daily menu, as were sugar and coffee. Mutton and fresh fruit appeared only rarely. The medic did not always have the medications needed for the ill and wounded. Whereas battle was an ordeal, marching was hardly so for a mountain dweller or a peasant. Once he had become a soldier, he was equipped by the ALN with lightweight laced boots, called “Pataugas,” made of coarse canvas with rubber soles. His equipment was limited to the minimum. He had no change of clothes. Except for a few food rations and possibly a blanket, nothing counted more than his weapon and ammunition. The unit was moving more or less con-

stantly. In the first place, it had to be present everywhere, at intervals close enough to keep the population aware of its strength.

Truly offensive action always required that the *katiba* (or platoon) move secretly and quickly from one point to another that was as far away as possible, since in guerrilla warfare nothing works like surprise. That meant that marches, except those in the forest, were usually done at night along ridges, in wadi beds, or at best over goat trails. The soldiers slept out in the open. Without warning, an SAS post would be assaulted with mortar; a rural bus would be attacked and burned; or an ambush, carefully set up at a bend in the trail, would patiently wait for the military convoy that informers in the neighborhood had said was likely to pass. A hand-made mine, camouflaged in the dust, would blow up a vehicle, block the convoy line, and set off machine gun fire; then came the assault. At every moment, the FLN leader’s concern was to avoid the surprise of an unexpected encounter with the adversary in full strength, or the chance of having his unit spotted out in the open. In that respect, the ALN’s conditions of existence varied markedly depending on the period and region considered. In some rocky, wild, or wooded massif, or one still barely penetrated by the French army, an ALN unit would have its cantonments, usually several of them, sometimes in shelters dug in the ground, sometimes in a relatively depopulated hamlet: between two changes of location or two interventions, it could rest there more or less at ease.

In that underground war, the ordinary world was closed off for the fighter, who had no means of escape except death or definitive peace. It was in the years 1956 and 1957 that the ALN (with about sixty thousand men) had its greatest successes against French army troops, thanks primarily to the weapon supplies from Morocco and Tunisia. Things would be different after the construction of the barriers at the Tunisian and Moroccan borders.

### Immigration, the Second Front

The 1954 census listed 211,000 Algerians in France; the 1962 census listed 350,000. During the same period, the Ministry of the Interior put out the figure of 436,000. Apart from considerations regarding the delicate problem of nationality and citizenship (who, in effect, was Algerian in 1962, the year of the census in France and of Algerian independence?), one fact became clear: Algerian immigration to France had doubled between 1954 and 1962, the very years of the war.

Most of the immigrants were men age twenty to forty. Of all the upheavals that rural Algerian society had experienced between 1955 and 1962,

those that had been caused by the relocation of the population were the most profound and the most consequential. In 1960, half the rural population, that is, a quarter of the total population, was brutally displaced.

In addition to the “displacements,” let us mention that one million “men of working age” were unemployed in Algeria. One wage earner out of two worked fewer than one hundred days per year. In total, from 1954 to 1960 only 45,000 new industrial jobs were created, of which 25,000 were in construction and public works. Demographic pressure worsened the process leading to unemployment. The population of Muslim Algerians went from 4,890,000 in 1921 to 8,800,000 in 1954. The active male population increased by 385,000, which means that beginning in 1955 it would have been necessary to create 70,000 new jobs annually for the young men of working age. Since that was far from the case, immigration became the last hope.

The need to replace men of the French contingent sent to fight in Algeria and the renovation of the internal French social structure are the two essential elements allowing us to understand the paradox of the large number of Algerians who emigrated to a country that was at war with them.

In examining the geographical distribution of Algerians in the metropolis, we find that five departments continued to serve as centers of attraction: the Seine; the Nord, with the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing agglomeration, which had coal mining and heavy industry; the Moselle, which was experiencing an industrial boom; the Rhône, with Lyons; and the Bouches-du-Rhône, with Marseilles. There were few Algerians engaged in agriculture; most were located in the industrialized regions. Their concentration in the industrial zones only became more pronounced in the years 1948–1955.

The FLN federation in the metropolis retained roughly the same structure as the MTLD, to which a large number of its members belonged. The FLN divided the country into five regions: the Paris region and the west (Paris); the northern and eastern region (Longwy); the central region (Lyons); the southeastern region (Marseilles); and the southwestern region, still unorganized in 1956. The organization had approximately eight thousand members in June 1956, but thanks to an improvement in recruitment the number of militants registered approached fifteen thousand in 1957 (Stora 1992).

The Algerian nationalist movements, applying the principle that the success of an enterprise is a function of the financial means its organizers possess, devoted their efforts to developing and increasing their sources of revenue. The high cost of weapons for the guerrilla forces, the requirements of diplomatic action, and the support of families of militants who had been detained or killed pushed expenses ever higher. The development of the clandestine organization also required installing new cadres paid by the parties.

To take the year 1961 as an example, given the number of paying members in the FLN (150,000) and the MNA (10,000), and the increase in membership fees to 30 francs per person, we obtain the figure of 58 million new francs total (about 400 million 1993 francs) for the single year 1961. Nearly 6 billion centimes raised for the single year 1961! In the seven years of war, approximately 400 million new francs (slightly more than 3 billion 1993 francs) were collected from the Algerian immigrants in France. An altogether substantial contribution, made by the “second front” of Algerian nationalism, a contribution obtained sometimes voluntarily and sometimes by force.

### **The FLN's Doctrine**

The radical pro-independence movement drew its strength from the fact that it was located at the intersection of two major projects: that of the Socialist movement and that of the Islamic tradition.

Of the first aspect, that of the French influence, let us say first of all that the birthplace of the pro-independence movement (Paris in 1926) influenced its subsequent ideological development. The French experience taught the first radical Algerian militants the models of organization and the rudiments of socialist ideology by which they would analyze the situation of their nation and seek to understand the mechanisms and values of an alien world; in the end, that experience put them in contact with industrial and urban models of life. But once they had returned to Algeria, they could not realize their aspirations in the leftist unions or parties, which were dominated by the Europeans.

Regarding that “French influence,” let us also note that most of the nationalist cadres in the FLN were rootless, cut off from their social origins and integrated in a way that often led them to become “professional revolutionaries.” The movement had few peasant leaders or intellectuals. For the most part, however, these leaders were better educated and better informed than the majority of the Algerian people. Many had gone to French schools, and had completed elementary school. It is an irony of history that the French school system, which saw itself as assimilationist, in fact appears to have opened paths of criticism and liberation.

On the benches of French schools in the Third Republic, the republican credo and the episodes in the “Great Revolution” of 1789 left a lasting impression on the minds of the Muslim Algerians who become nationalists. Their curiosity about France's history was sustained by a hope; they took an interest in it because they felt at a loss about their own freedom. An abstract

France with universal principles was contrasted to the temporal France. That conception continued to be asserted during the time of the Algerian War, as this letter from prison attests, written by Mohammed Larbi Madi, an FLN leader: "I confess to you that I am less and less able to separate the real France from the statutory France. I am seeking the France I learned of in school, and I find it only in a few French people, who, in fact, are embarrassed to be French where the Algerian War is concerned" (Pervillé 1984).

Regarding the second principal factor, that of Islam, we must first of all explain that almost all Algerians in the first half of the twentieth century remained faithful to the religious customs of their ancestors. That fidelity was composed of social relics and habits, an attachment to practices where conformity played as great a role as personal conviction. Pro-independence politics reactivated the religious factor. Islam was both a combat ideology and a social project. The reacquisition of the terms and rights fixed by time, the increasingly lost "paradise" of origins, became more and more vital through religion. The promised pro-independence revolution still had certain characteristics of revolts based on millenarian hopes, or of riots for subsistence. This type of nationalist ideology produced a *refusal to compromise* with the existing world. A central event, independence, was the long-awaited and un hoped-for moment, the sense of a future and especially of a pure present. The Algerian militants experienced the colonial institutions in which they were destined to live not as founded in reason but as perfectly arbitrary.

The historical merit of the leaders who set off the insurrection in November 1954 was that, through weapons, they unjammed the colonial status quo. They allowed the idea of independence to take on substance for millions of Algerians. But, as the Algerian sociologist Abdelkader Djeghloul (1990) notes, "the war set in motion a process of destruction of the capital of democratic experience and modern politics, which the different political organizations had begun to accumulate before 1954."

The FLN, aware of the contradictions that permeated it, constantly bowed to the tactical emergency: draining off convictions, mobilizing the available energy in the cause of independence, while putting off until later any examination of the particulars. That conception of an undifferentiated society "guided" by a single party implied a particular vision of the nation. After independence, an undecomposable bloc, the nation, was perceived as a unified and unanimous—indissociable—figure.

The theme of the "people united" reduced the threat of external aggression (Gallicization, assimilation) and internal disintegration (regionalism, linguistic particularism). The latter had to do primarily with the "Berber question," which was disregarded in the establishment of national institutions in the postwar period. The recourse to populism increased the rift be-

tween the real society, which was socially and culturally diverse, and the one-party political system, forged primarily during the second part of the war, between 1958 and 1962. In December 1957, the murder of Abbane Ramdane (the organizer of the Soummam Congress who had advocated the supremacy of "politicos" over the "military"), ordered by other FLN leaders, opened the way for the "border army's" political domination of Algerian nationalism. After the construction of the barriers along the Tunisian and Moroccan borders, the army was camped outside Algerian territory. Led by Houari Boumédiène, its importance and its role increased as of 1958.

### **The International Action of the FLN**

The Algerian nationalists realized the risk of finding themselves face to face with the formidable French war machine. Very quickly, they became aware of the need to broaden their audience to the international level. The armed struggle was thus combined with political and diplomatic action. The objective was to heighten public awareness throughout the world of the cause of Algerian independence, to interest foreign governments, and to mobilize such international authorities as the UN and the Red Cross. That internationalization of the conflict, desired by the FLN, would allow it to find material support (deliveries of weapons, especially from Eastern countries), and moral support (pressure on France regarding its Algerian policy).

From the beginning of the conflict in January 1955, the members of the Arab League, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, directed the attention of the UN's Security Council to the gravity of the situation in Algeria. The Bandung Conference of nonaligned nations in April 1955 heard the communications of the Algerian leaders. In September of the same year, the UN placed the problem of the "events of Algeria" on its agenda for the first time. In July 1956, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens, or UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers), a union organization linked to the FLN, was recognized by the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) over its competitor, the Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs Algériens, or USTA (Algerian Workers' Federation of Unions), run by MNA militants. At the same time, the Union Générale des Etudiants Musulmans Algériens, or UGEMA (General Union of Muslim Algerian Students), actively participated in different worldwide cultural groups and developed an intense propaganda campaign (Pervillé 1984).

In that way, the Soummam Congress in August 1956 established the FLN's international actions: "Externally, seek out the maximum material,

moral, and psychological support. Among the governments of the Bandung Congress, incite the intervention of the UN as well as diplomatic pressure ... on France.” In 1956, when the UN once more put the Algerian question on the agenda (Gadant 1988), FLN delegations set off on a mission: to Eastern Europe (East Berlin, Prague), Western Europe (Bonn, Rome, London), the United States (New York), China, India, and Latin America.

The two events that accelerated and broadened the internationalization of the Algerian conflict were the hijacking of the plane of FLN leaders on October 22, 1956, and the French bombing of the Tunisian village of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef on February 8, 1958, which had a particularly strong emotional effect on world opinion. On the eve of the Fourth Republic’s fall, France found itself brought up on charges by the UN. Atlantic and European solidarity was very uncertain on the question of North Africa.

In waging war against France, the Algerian nationalists set in place “a diplomacy of guerrillas.” Very early on, they constructed a diplomatic apparatus, an external presentation that would continue to function effectively after independence in 1962.

# 5

## *De Gaulle and the War (1958–1959)*

### **Toward the Fall of the Fourth Republic**

On January 11, 1958, a platoon of draftees was ambushed near the Tunisian border. Four soldiers of the contingent were taken across and held captive. Salan appealed for the right to pursue, and the government consented. For its part, the navy seized a Yugoslav freighter, *The Slovenija*, off Oran on January 18. It was transporting 148 metric tons of weapons from Czechoslovakia to the ALN training camps in Morocco.

In fact, a number of countries were now aiding the FLN, including the United Kingdom and the United States, which delivered weapons to Tunisia. On February 8, Salan authorized bombers to pursue an ALN column into Tunisian territory. The village of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef was targeted. Sixty-nine civilians were killed, one hundred thirty wounded. After that scandal, a true disaster for France’s international image, the French government found itself obliged to accept an Anglo-American “goodwill” mission. That mission would study the problem of the French presence in Tunisia, and especially the Bizerte base, which Bourguiba was demanding be evacuated.

During these three months, the ALN pursued its efforts against the Morice Line: the electrified barrier demonstrated its utility and allowed the government to consider shortening the length of military service (to twenty-four months instead of twenty-six in 1957), and to cut back on the army’s expenses. That was enough to aggravate the *pieds noirs* and the army, who were united against the parties supporting the government. The *Courrier de la Colère*, run by Michel Debré, who was close to General de Gaulle,