# Parallel ambiguities: the prisoners during the Algerian War of independence

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In March 1958, General Salan, head of the French army in Algeria, issued a directive stating that combatants "taken while armed" were to be transferred to specific camps. These camps were called military camps of internment (*camps militaires d'internés*, or CMI) and Salan explicitly warned his readers: military camps were not camps for military inmates – what *camps d'internés militaires* would have been. He thus insisted that "military" was characteristic of the *camps*, not of the people detained there. Such a distinction was especially unusual as the other type of camps – from which this new type was supposed to differ – were also military camps, as they were part of the repressive system taken in charge by the army. Why was Salan being so cautious? What was he afraid of? And why, ultimately, was he promoting a new type of camp in March 1958, three and a half years into the war?

These questions regarding the CMI and Salan lay at the heart of many of the French ambiguities in Algeria from November 1954 onwards. They have to do with the status of the war, which is related to the broader political issue at stake in the war: whether to maintain or end French domination in Algeria. This political aspect had wide consequences on the type of war and, particularly, on the civilian/military distinction. In the field, repression by French forces did not distinguish between civilians and soldiers[1]. A total war was waged with the aim of Algeria remaining French. The laws of war were outside the scope. Given the nature of the war and especially the objectives pursued, the period saw a systematic blurring of categories. However, this refusal to acknowledge the laws of war led the French to numerous legal and administrative contortions. In this context, the POW issue is particularly relevant to the civilianization of war, as it reveals that none of the keywords of the question had a clear-cut definition at that time: not "war" or "prisoners", not "civilian" or "military".

Specific to colonial insurgency and even more to war of liberation, is the fact that what was at stake was the division between two nations: the birth, or at least the emergence, of one nation from and against the other. The basic division is indeed between these two entities. Yet, for at least half of the conflict, the French refused to make a distinction between the military and the civilian. Their operations were only referred to as "maintenance of order operations" or "pacification". The Algerian

[1] Contrary to police operations that occurred in France as well as in Algeria, the military operations only took place in Algeria. Some of them were also carried out at the border of Tunisia and Morocco… sometimes even on these newly independent countries' proper territories. As far as the military/civilian divide is concerned, these operations had an important impact on the situation. This divide could also have been addressed from the metropole's perspective where the police operations targeted civilians and where camps were set up. None of these aspects will be part of this chapter but they had to be mentioned in order no to forget the broader picture, that implied the multiple ways the French authorities did not respect the military/civilian divide. My chapter will be focusing on this divide on the Algerian territory only.

people was targeted as such either by repressive measures or by protective measures aiming at improving their well being… and cutting them off from the FLN's influence[2]. Their Algerian counterparts, on the contrary, argued that the "rebellion" on a French territory was a war of liberation and that the guerrilla fighters of the ALN (National Liberation Army) were tantamount to real soldiers. Insisting on the distinction between civilians and military was part of the fight for recognition that the ALN was a real army and the FLN representing the Algerian people. But a "war of liberation" meant also that there was no distinction between the army and the people. As the propaganda stated it: the army was the people... giving grounds for undifferentiated repression. As for the targets of their violence, the Algerian nationalists made no differentiation either between civilian and military targets. The civilianization of warfare was a collateral consequence of such a political view.

As complicated and entangled as it was, the issue of the distinction stayed meaningful from the perspective of the French-FLN relationship. Talking of a state of war and, consequently, of combatants and POWs, was not solely connected to an interpretation of present events such as rebellion, revolt, terrorist attacks or war of liberation and revolution. It had to do with the way of imagining the future. How one wanted to mould the future and weigh on the course of events was present in the words one used to talk about oneself and one's opponents, to talk about war and prisoners. Therefore, the national principle had to prevail.

This chapter will address the almost eight-year war of independence (1954-1962) from both viewpoints on this issue: the Algerian nationalists' and the French authorities'. Both sides had their ambiguities. Were they parallel, as my title suggests? They at least mirrored one another, as the issue of releases revealed.

Both sides acknowledged a rapid shift towards total war within the first 18 months of the conflict (from November 1954 to Spring 1956). At first, the French preferred to think that they were facing a fairly limited military enemy whose agency was confined to one or two areas of the Algerian territory. Troops were sent to re-establish order there and "state of emergency" was declared locally. Borne out of the internal division of the oldest Algerian nationalist party, the FLN demonstrated its capacity to mobilise people at the end of August 1955: 71 French civilians were killed in a single day along with more than 20 Algerians and 20 military. This massacre had a great impact on French public opinion and precipitated an extension of the state of emergency to the entire Algerian territory, along with more considerable recourse to conscripts. The massacre was followed by reprisals without restraint. Thousands of Algerian civilians were killed. Totalization was there as well: not only because the war overflew the first limited areas but because civilians were massively and indiscriminately killed (provided that they were natives or Europeans – depending on each side's perspective)[3].

[2] On the measures toward Algerian women, as part of the war, see Macmaster 2012.
[3] See Claire Mauss-Copeaux 2011. Her estimate is of 7,500 civilian victims.

Totalization had another meaning for the FLN: it meant to achieve the unification of discordant Algerian voices urging France to reform colonial Algeria. Members of the "Ulama", the communist party or any other nationalist had to join the FLN if they wished to take part in the struggle against France. No alternative was allowed: the FLN had to be considered to be the sole voice of the people. This totalization was almost achieved, at least within Algeria, by spring 1956. The FLN had then to win the support of the vast majority of the Algerian people. The civilianization and totalisation were at work here, too: by narrowing down the Algerian population's choices to two alternatives, either supporting the FLN or joining the French. Being neutral became increasingly difficult as the influence of the FLN expanded.

In March 1956, the French government was granted special powers by the National Assembly to end the war in Algeria and restore peace: reforms and modernisation, on the one hand, and a strengthening of the repression (notably by sending *all* conscripts to Algeria), on the other. Indeed, it had quickly become obvious to the French authorities in Algeria that the Algerian civilians did not know who they could rely on. Were the French strong enough to protect them from the FLN's pressure? Were they trustworthy when they spoke of improving the wellbeing of Algerians, after more than a century of feeble commitment to these matters? But the Algerian people had to know more about the FLN to make a choice. Who were these poorly-armed men that claimed that independence had to be taken by force? Did they have any chances of winning? The balance of evidence was obviously in favour of the French, who had been there for more than four generations and had crushed all previous revolts. Why suddenly turn and support the FLN and its call to arms and rebellion?

Inhabitants of Algeria were waiting for signs, weighing attitudes, considering pledges and commitments. This was true for everyone: be it in the countryside or in the cities, be it for the natives (whom I refer to here as "Algerians") or for the French people of European descent[4]. Both sides were aware of this state of mind: they had to convince. War had to be waged within the population. "Hearts and minds" were at stake since the future of Algeria was the real challenge. The issue of prisoners was a direct consequence of the situation; their fate followed the war's progression.

From the French perspective, POW was not a relevant notion at any point during the war. No *jus in bello* applied to what was never officially considered a war. Yet the ICRC was authorised to visit some French camps and prisons in Algeria and it did so under the Third Geneva Convention but the French did not want such authorisation to be considered a recognition of the state of war[5]. The French took prisoners but they were not named POWs.

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[4] Jews had been included in the European population since the 1870 Crémieux Decree, which made them collectively French citizens – contrary to their Muslims neighbours, who were only considered to be French subjects. Even after WW2, when "French Muslims" were granted full citizenship in Algeria, they still had limited voting rights, since two electoral colleges were created with an equal number of deputies for a very unequal number of voters.

[5] On the ICRC during the Algerian war, see Branche 1999, 2001, 2014 and Klose 2009, 2011.

Who were these prisoners? Most of them had not been taken while armed following a successful military operation. The vast majority – probably hundred of thousands - were unarmed and civilians. Indeed, an individual need not have committed any action against the French military or French interests to be arrested and taken prisoner. One just needed to be considered "suspicious" or a "suspect". This blurred notion had to do with the colonial situation in times of crisis. Fear was part of colonial life. If not always perceived as a threat, the native population was to be considered from a certain distance. Even when people were living close to one another, even when they were working together, they did not form more intimate relationships. Intergroup marriages, in particular, were entirely unthinkable in Algeria. The communities with a common fate were obvious to everyone, and one had to stay with one's own group: Algerian or French. While comradeship and trust did exist, in a time of crisis, the colonial barrier between "us" and "them" became apparent again. It did before, notably at the end of WW2. On 8 May 1945, Algerian nationalists demonstrated in the streets of some cities in eastern Algeria, calling for independence. The settlers' community was deeply distressed. Mass murder was committed over the course of several weeks until the government intervened[6]. The fear had led to massacres, followed by no trial… except for some nationalists. Fear, on the one hand, and a burning sense of injustice, on the other, were the basic elements that fuelled the attitudes of many during the war that broke out nine years later.

Fear of the natives led to the notion of "suspect". The police or the military could arrest anyone considered suspicious[7]. Even after a military operation, if no military personnel were to be found, the French arrested civilians. They were said to be suspected of having informed and/or aided the guerrillas. Many examples would illustrate this situation, which also had to do with the frustration of the French military confronted with the evanescence of the National Liberation Army (ALN). Any successful ambush, in particular, would lead to a French attempt to follow their enemy. They rarely caught guerrillas, but the civilians they met would be questioned, tortured, sometimes taken prisoner, and sometimes even killed.

No differences would be made between a civilian and a supposed guerrilla fighter. Both could be killed. Both could be submitted to torture, directly on the battlefield when captured (to find out about hide-outs, shelters or weapons) or, later, in a camp. The military primarily used torture to garner information about their enemy even if many knew how torture could make a human being confess to anything in order to make the pain stop.

> "He is still 'in shock' because of his misfortune [i.e. his arrest], noted, for instance, an officer in charge of gathering intelligence. He is mistrustful. He is terribly afraid and does not know what awaits him or what the future holds. [...] For him (as probably for any other rebel), any prisoner is condemned to die more or less rapidly. [He] is prepared to say anything, even things he does

[6] See Peyroulou 2009, Thomas 2011.
[7] On a wider approach to colonial arbitrariness, see Thénault 2011.

not know, striving to answer not with the exact truth, but with what he believes will show his benevolent feelings for us"[8].

Yet many officers following orders or doing what they imagined would be useful to win the war (to gain information or terrorise people) did indeed use torture. As one of them later admitted provocatively: "Intelligence was extracted at any price. Suspects were tortured as well as guilty people, and then eliminated if necessary"[9]. Summary executions were not out of the ordinary. Anybody considered suspicious could also be killed, provided that the suspect's intention was to escape or so they said[10]… Summary executions were part of the basic violence displayed in Algeria. The French used many euphemisms to describe this, but the most common was "wood chore" (*corvée de bois*). The corpses were sometimes displayed in order to terrorise the population and show the death of local members of the FLN or ALN. Signs would sometimes be placed alongside a body to explicitly denounce the FLN and praise the (local) French victory. In other cases, corpses were buried: even today, their relatives do not know where. This uncertainty about the fate of people arrested by the French army contributed to the great fear Algerians had of being taken prisoner.

Indeed, most prisoners were not brought to trial. They were mere suspects and such suspicion was enough for the military to decide that they should not be released. The others were generally sentenced to jail and imprisoned in France or Algeria. During the war, about 1,500 people were sentenced to death[11]: 198 were actually guillotined. Suspects were held in camps called "*centres de tri et de transit*" (selection and transit centres, or CTTs). Such camps had cells for "special" prisoners, and they all had a room for torture[12]. Born out of wartime necessity, the CTTs were difficult for civilian authorities to monitor. The latter attempted to impose some rules on the military, in particular the need for prisoners to be released after one month – a duration rapidly extended to three months and commonly exceeded. Theoretically, after the screening in the CTT, a prisoner had three options: a trial, release, or more frequently, a transfer.

In this last case, people were sent to another type of camps: the internment camps, euphemistically called "dwelling centres" (*centres d'hébergement*). They were placed under house arrest… but in camps, for the duration of the war. At its peak, this system of repression used twelve camps. The biggest held more than 2,000 inmates. Life in the internment camps was far better than in the CTTs. These camps

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[8] Intelligence Brief [Bulletin de Renseignements], Operational Area of Tlemcen, commented on by the head of the local Intelligence Team, 25 January 1957, 1H 1652/2* (Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes). « [Il] est encore "choqué" par sa mésaventure [son arrestation]. Il n'est pas en confiance. Il a affreusement peur et ne sait ce que l'on attend de lui ni ce que lui réserve l'avenir. [...] Pour lui (comme sans doute pour tout autre rebelle) tout prisonnier est un condamné à mort en puissance dans un délai plus ou moins rapide. [Il] est prêt à tout dire, même ce qu'il ignore, s'efforçant de répondre non l'exacte vérité, mais ce qu'il croit servir à montrer ses bons sentiments à notre égard ».

[9] Argoud, 1974, p.142.

[10] On the July 1955 directive recommending killing anyone trying to escape, see Branche 2001.

[11] The exact figure is 1,415 from 1 January 1955 to 15 September 1961, in Algeria alone. The war ended seven months later. See Thénault 2001.

[12] On the use of torture by the French Army, see Branche 2001, 2007.

were monitored by civilians authorities and inspected on a regular – albeit not frequent – basis. Tens of thousands of people had been interned in such camps. As the demographic pressure increased dramatically (11,000 internees by April 1959), the French military experimented with what they called "psychological action" on the internees in order to be able to release people who could be considered "re-educated". By and large, this experiment was a failure[13].

The blurred notion of suspect and the fact that anybody could be arrested were also useful for committed FLN/ALN members. When arrested, they would give a false name and let the French discover – or not – who they really were. Using noms de guerre, sometimes changing from one to another, Algerian nationalists were not particularly easy to identify. Some went unnoticed by the guards and would be released after a few months in a CTT[14].

Apart from these two main camps for "suspects", where no distinction was made between civilians and others, special camps for "rebels captured while armed" were created in March 1958 (CMIs). After being arrested, screened and interrogated in a CTT, these prisoners had to be held in camps designed for them. They were submitted to "psychological action" and re-education, and could always be subject to torture. Yet their fate was apparently better than that of prisoners in other camps. General Salan's aim was to inform the guerrilla fighters that they would be well treated when arrested. At first, Salan acknowledged that they "should be given treatment as close as possible to that granted to POWs in the civilised countries committed in the matter"[15]. Yet in his memo creating the CMIs, he made it very clear that "they should not be considered POWs. The Geneva Conventions are not relevant to them"[16]. Nonetheless, the creation of the CMIs in itself showed the need to distinguish, and perhaps ultimately to recognise, that the French soldiers were fighting combatants. Later in 1958, the new Premier, Charles de Gaulle, proposed very explicitly a "*paix des braves*", i.e. the peace of the brave.

By doing so, Charles de Gaulle and Raoul Salan had but one goal: to win the war. Identifying military adversaries was part of their strategy aiming at separating the civilians from the military. The other part was to "separate the fish from the water". To recognise the "fish" (i.e. the guerrillas) as different and praise them for surrendering with dignity came with a wider plan targeting the civilians in Algeria. Dating back to 1955, but at that time in very limited areas, the military relocated all civilians suspected of supporting the guerrillas or living in areas where the military wished to have free rein. These people had to leave their homes – which were to be either destroyed or disassembled and reassembled – and live in new settlements called "concentration camps" (*camps de regroupement*). By 1959, these camps had gathered one million people. By 1960, the figure reached two million, about a quarter

[13] See Thénault 2011.
[14] The use of a nom de guerre had another consequence whenever a detainee died: his or her family was less able to identify him/her and claim his/her remains.
[15] General Salan, head of the Army in Algeria, 24 November 1957, 1H 3799/2 (SHD).
[16] Sixth Bureau, Military Staff, Memo on CMI, 19 March 1958, 1H 1100/1 (SHD).

of the native population[17]. Combined with very powerful military operations on a weakened ALN lacking arms, ammunitions and medics, these huge population movements had a great impact on the ALN. In many areas in Algeria, by the end of 1960, the guerrilla fighters were no longer a danger. Separated from their logistics support abroad and from the civilians who aided them, they had been largely destroyed. Yet this strategy was not enough.

Suspects were still suspects. And CTTs (or even more clandestine centres) continued until the end of the war to screen, torture and sometimes re-educate people arrested. Indeed, the real enemy was not military but political. While the guerrilla fighters had to be nationalists and were therefore automatically members of the FLN, all FLN members were not military. The French knew this full well. Nevertheless, by this blurred notion of suspect, they were not mixing the military and the civilians, but mixing committed militants with more neutral people. It was ultimately the French methods – combined with the FLN's propaganda – that contributed to turn many of these "suspects" into convinced FLN partisans.

The situation on the nationalist side was very different in scope and intention. The war was asymmetric on the issue of prisoners as well. The guerrilla fighters took very few prisoners compared to the French army, and they did not try to glean information from them or to re-educate them. Yet, similar to the French side, they used some of them for propaganda purposes.

Differences were not made between civilians and military personnel as the main division that the FLN aimed to create (by asserting it) was a national one: there were French and Algerians in Algeria[18]. Algerians had to rule the country. Therefore, the odds were heavily against Algerians taken prisoner by the FLN while fighting within the French ranks. A very early instruction dated June or July 1955 recommended that French prisoners be "kept locked up" whereas the fate of "Muslim prisoners" was left up to their guards: "you will judge their worth"[19].

When taken prisoner, an Algerian faced two situations: either he would be killed immediately after capture, or would have to join the ALN – provided that he was deemed to be loyal and useful to the cause. Whereas Algerians who volunteered to serve in the French army had a lower probability of surviving, Algerians drafted into the French army were granted a possibility to join the maquis. This was the basic distinction. In some cases, Algerian conscripts even aided the ALN by opening the gates of the post they were supposed to be guarding, killing their former French comrades and taking some of them prisoner.

When taken prisoner, French people faced different situations, depending on where and when they had been captured. Basically, after March 1956 and before the construction of electric fences along the eastern and western borders of Algeria, prisoners were driven safely to the newly-independent states of Tunisia or Morocco.

[17] On these camps, see Cornaton 1998 and Sacriste 2014.
[18] On the prisoners of the FLN, see Branche 2014.
[19] FLN instructions, estimated June or July 1955, translated into French by the SLNA, 93/4191* (ANOM). Les prisonniers français doivent être « tenus enfermés » ; pour les prisonniers musulmans, « vous jugerez leur valeur ».

In August 1956, the Soummam Congress – founding moment of the FLN - made it very clear that prisoners had to be taken. In total, there would be around 430 military personnel (except the Legionnaires) and 500 French civilians taken prisoner. Disarmed soldiers had to be captured alive and not killed. The FLN even stated that they had to be granted respect. Yet the reality of the war was not so clear-cut.

When arrested in eastern, western or southern Algeria, prisoners were transferred to a safer place outside Algeria. The trip was not without danger and some of them died while being transferred. For prisoners in central Algeria, such travel was quite impossible. They had to stay in Algeria. Therefore, they shared the life of their guards. The guerrillas had them walk with them, tied with a rope or a chain but sometimes not even bound. They had to hide in front of the French army and under French fire. They shared the scarce food and very hard living conditions of the guerrillas. When injured, they were not necessarily killed: they would even be nursed and taken care of, as much as possible. Indeed, the FLN/ALN had hidden infirmaries and hospitals to treat wounded or exhausted combatants. Some prisoners were also hidden in these locations. Some were also guarded in caves and had to wait, with a very small amount of food, and the stress of humidity, cold, darkness and fear, for a better future.

At some point, in 1958, the ALN managed to set up something approaching a camp for a dozen prisoners in Wilaya 3 (Kabylia). The camp was made of improvised materials such as branches and canvas. It was composed of three booths only: one for the prisoners, one for their guards and another for the kitchen. The dense forest cover formed protection from French aircraft. Prisoners were watched carefully; their wrists were chained all the time, even during their chores. These wood or water chores were hard work and most of the guards took advantage of the situation to bludgeon the prisoners, sometimes driving them insane[20].

A close-up of this small group of prisoners reveals some interesting features. All the prisoners were French. Ten of them had been taken prisoner thanks to the treason of Zernouh, an Algerian NCO[21], on 4 February 1958. They had rapidly been separated from the Algerians with whom they had been captured: except for Zernouh, two were conscripts and two were professional soldiers. Did they join the ALN? Were they killed? Nobody knows, but the French military never found their bodies. As for the French, the two NCOs were professional soldiers, while the soldiers were conscripts. Their lieutenant was also a conscript. In July, he was separated from his men and told to bid them farewell. The French gendarmerie found his body with three bullets in the face on a roadway, with a letter pinned to his chest stating that he had been condemned to death and executed as "the law of retaliation" was due after the death of an ALN officer, Salhi Hocine, at the hands of the French[22]. Contrary to their officer, the three professional soldiers apparently did

[20] Robert Bonnet, oral and written testimonies, 2010.
[21] Mohamed Zernouh had been a French soldier since 1946. He was born in 1925 and was married. He fought in Indochina and was praised for his bravery by one of his former French comrades.
[22] Gendarmerie report, 11 July, 1958, 1H1510* (SHD).

not face any particularly harsh treatment from their guards. All died, but so did four conscripts, from malnutrition, ill-treatment, injuries, malaria, gangrene, dysentery and exhaustion.

By November 1958, the group of prisoners and their guards could not stay in the camp. They had to move from one place to another to evade the French army. Although having prisoners to deal with obviously impeded the ALN's freedom of movement, the ALN continued to take prisoners. The first group, now reduced to four men, was joined by others: civilians and military personnel taken prisoner from November to March. All men. The only woman, kidnapped with her husband and his employees (two French and two Algerians) on the road, on 8 November 1958, was separated from the rest of the group after a few days and brought to houses where Algerian women took care of her. She had to face the life of Algerian peasants under French military pressure, had injuries and was treated. At the end of December, Colonel Amirouche, head of the wilaya, gave her a safe conduct: she was brought to a monastery kept by white priests and set free[23].

Amongst the men, no difference was made depending on their status. There were aged 19 to 62. Nine of them were military personnel, but no officers. One was a legionnaire: he died in terrible pain due to gangrene, but there is no evidence that he was left to die intentionally. The prisoners all had to face dreadful conditions of survival due to the French military operations. The survivors still remember one night as "hell": four of their comrades died during it (one drowned and the others succumbed to exhaustion after several days of scarce food); two died from injuries suffered during this terrible night. The reasons why the guerrillas, under French fire, persisted in keeping more than fifteen people with them instead of killing them need to be explored.

At that time, Colonel Amirouche was certainly the only officer of the ALN to hold so many prisoners. It was part of his reputation as a great leader. And though he earned a reputation for cruelty, he decided to keep prisoners alive. Indeed, the main reason for keeping them alive certainly had more to do with internal matters than relations with the French. By keeping them alive, Amirouche applied the regulations of his hierarchy. Derived from the Soummam Congress resolutions, rules were issued in every wilaya to incite the combatants to take prisoners. They were forbidden to kill unarmed soldiers and had to take care of them. The goal was one of propaganda: they could be killed later in order to manifest the FLN's justice or be freed to demonstrate its mercy. In any case, they were bargaining chips. No precision existed regarding the civilians. Amiruche captured several of them and treated them equally. So did other ALN leaders in Algeria : they were captured because they were French. The distinction between military and civilian came later, when liberation or propaganda regarding the laws of war were concerned. On the ground, on the micro-level, any French man was good to have as prisoner. His capture was a message addressed to all the civilians, French and Algerian, that the FLN/ALN had the

[23] Rouby 2002.

intention to expel the French from Algeria. On the contrary, when prisoners proved to be foreigners, Swiss or Italian for instance, their capture was considered an error and the FLN/ALN acted to release them safely as quick as possible.

The issue of prisoner releases was very different when it comes to French prisoners in the hands of the FLN or Algerian prisoners taken by the French. Both sides gradually chose to publicise them and use them as propaganda material.

Although French civilians and military personnel were taken prisoner from the beginning of the war, the Algerian nationalists were quite slow in adopting an official position on the issue. A very significant step was made with the creation of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), in September 1958. From that date on, the Algerian nationalists behaved as much as possible as a State. The president of the GPRA proclaimed that it would apply the "humanitarian dispositions of the Geneva Conventions"[24]. In October 1958, the GPRA issued a decree stating that all prisoners, except criminals, were to be granted amnesty. By mid-October, four French military personnel taken prisoner near the Tunisian border in January 1958 were freed in Tunis.

The gesture was particularly symbolic as the execution of French prisoners from the same regiment made public in May 1958 fuelled a revolt in Algiers led by the military. Together with civilians, they formed a "*comité de salut public*" and urged people all across French Algeria to rise up. This revolt eventually led to Charles de Gaulle being called back to power and, ultimately, to the collapse of the French Fourth Republic. With the freeing of the prisoners, the GPRA acknowledged this political change on its own terms. It was a few days later that de Gaulle offered a "*paix des braves*" to the guerrillas: France was in the process of distinguishing between different categories of adversaries.

From the Algerian nationalist perspective, also at stake was the GPRA's capacity to impose its will on the guerrillas. Following the declaration of amnesty, several releases occurred: 51 people were freed within a year or so. Apart from releases in Tunisia or Morocco, prisoners were also freed in Algeria. Such acts made it very clear that the ALN felt strong enough to secure a zone to keep its prisoners safe and strong enough to set them free and face the probability that they would be giving information to the French authorities about the ALN. Many of these releases were enacted under the command of Colonel Amirouche. The first occurred on 1 November, to celebrate the anniversary of the struggle for liberation. Amirouche set free civilians only, six of them[25]. He explicitly expressed his intent of not freeing military personnel, putting the blame on de Gaulle, who supposedly refused to allow the ICRC into Algeria[26]. Yet six months later, his successor set all the military prisoners free in Kabylia. The huge repression faced by the ALN on the ground and the death of Amirouche himself certainly had a great influence on the decision to free them.

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[24] Declaration of Ferhat Abbas, 26 September 1958, quoted in 210008003 (ICRC, Geneva).
[25] Let's not forget that, a week later, other civilians were taken prisoner in the same wilaya.
[26] 1H1508* (SHD)

The progression of the war in Algeria made it very difficult for the guerrillas to survive as of spring 1959. The two fences built along the borders of the territory stifled the "interior", depriving it of regular contacts with Morocco and Tunisia. Some prisoners were taken nevertheless and transferred to these countries, but at a high cost of human life. The GPRA still needed them in order to perform its role as a defender of the Geneva Conventions. Indeed, in June 1960, the GPRA officially presented its wish to be a party to the Geneva Conventions[27]. At that time, de Gaulle had failed to negotiate a separate peace with some officers of what the FLN called the "Interior", i.e. the Algerian territory (and not officers abroad). He had to accept the prospect of negotiations with the GPRA. The step made further by the GPRA in acknowledging the rights of prisoners (Geneva Conventions) was part of this wider diplomatic game.

For de Gaulle as well, the issue of prisoners was part of France's policy in Algeria. As early as summer 1958, he granted amnesty to hundred of prisoners. But he still had to face the French military's hostile attitudes towards these releases: anticipating them, some officers would choose not to take prisoners and de Gaulle knew this state of mind. Yet prisoner releases were sometimes publicised. Taken to extremes, so-called re-educated prisoners would be released and then join the French forces. The impact of such public relations operations is still to be assessed, depending on the public (the Algerian people, the French military, the French population in Algeria or in Metropolitan France, the wider international audience). In any case, such amnesties were granted for "PAM" ("pris les armes à la main", or taken while armed) as well as "suspects" under house arrest. No obvious difference can be noticed in that regard.

At the end of the war, the cease-fire agreement laid the groundwork for parallel processes for prisoner releases. Article 11 of the Evian Accords stated that "all prisoners taken while in combat and detained by each side at the time of the cease-fire shall be freed; they shall be released to designated authorities no more than 20 days after the cease-fire"[28]. Yet the issue was not over. France acknowledged around 3,700 "prisoners taken while in combat", but the GPRA refused to make any figure public – certainly because of its effective inability to do so. France demanded that the GPRA free its prisoners when France freed its. The bargain was a failure. After a short while, France promised that it would set free half of its prisoners if the GPRA were to make any gesture. By the end of April 1962, three French military personnel were set free in Tunis: 1,865 Algerian prisoners were released immediately. In May, four other French military personnel were freed in Morocco.

At that time, kidnapping had become a plague in Algeria. These kidnappings were perpetrated by "Marsiens", or "March soldiers", i.e. those that joined the Algerian army in March, when the cease-fire was signed, and targeted mostly French

[27] Ferhat Abbas made the request in April. Libya presented it to the ICRC on 13 June 1960 (1H1755/1, SHD).

[28] « Tous les prisonniers faits au combat, détenus par chacune des parties au moment de l'entrée en vigueur du cessez-le-feu, seront libérés ; ils seront remis dans les 20 jours à dater du cessez-le-feu aux Autorités désignées à cet effet ».

civilians. Their justification would stress the violence of the French radical organisation (OAS) whose bombs and assassinations targeted Algerian civilians as well as French military personnel. Their motivation could be less political and have to do with envy, revenge and impunity. Although the exact figure still needs to be set, the dissymmetry between civilians and military personnel was obvious during this period. For a few months, French civilians paid a very high toll. If ever taken prisoner, they were almost never freed. From that time on, their names could be added to the long list of civilians taken prisoner before "disappearing" during the war, however most of whom were Algerians.

In the over seven years of war between Algerian nationalists and French forces, the issue was a political one. The military dimension, more than ever before, was just one element in a conflict that took place in several venues. For the FLN and later the GPRA, the crucial point was to impose an independent Algerian nation, while France denied the very existence of such a nation. For the French, it was crucial to maintain the numerous divisions and distinctions within the group of "French Muslims". This trend was also reflected on the battlefield, when "combatants" were separated from "terrorists" on the one hand, and civilians on the other, thanks to the CMIs (camps for military internees) and, more broadly, screening and transit camps. This aim was aided by the massive recruitment of Algerians as auxiliaries in the French army.

Conversely, the FLN worked to promote a unanimous vision of Algerians united behind its efforts and under its flag. The national principle took precedence with regard to French people: blind attacks killed victims indiscriminately, just as civilians and military personnel, when taken prisoner, were basically treated in the same way. This dimension backed the assertion of the principle of the Algerian nation, reflecting the view of a people's war, be it by armed or unarmed individuals.

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