WANTON AND SENSELESS?

THE LOGIC OF MASSACRES IN ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

I use a rationalist framework to explore an issue typically framed and understood as irrational: large-scale violence against civilians in the context of civil wars. More specifically, I focus on the massacres of civilians in Algeria and seek to uncover the logic that drives such actions. The main thesis is that these massacres are not irrational instances of random violence motivated by extremist Islamist ideology, as they are typically described in the media; they can be understood instead as part of a rational strategy initiated by the Islamist rebels aiming to maximize civilian support under a particular set of constraints. Mass, yet mostly targeted and selective, terror is used to punish and deter defection by civilians in the context of a particular strategic conjuncture characterized by (a) fragmented and unstable rule, (b) mass civilian defections toward the incumbents and (c) escalation of violence. I check this thesis against the available evidence, address puzzles such as the identity of the victims and the behavior of the army, extend it to similar massacres in other countries, draw a number of implications and discuss a research agenda.

KEY WORDS • political violence • civil war • civilian massacres • insurgency • Algeria

The large-scale massacres of civilians which have been taking place in Algeria since at least 1996, have been consistently described by the media and denounced by international authorities and non-governmental organizations alike as 'indiscriminate,' 'beyond comprehension' [Amnesty International (AI) 1997b: 15; 7], 'senseless,' 'wanton' (Ganley 1997) and 'incomprehensible' (Smith 1998: 27) instances of 'random butchery' (*Time*, 6 October 1997) and 'deadly madness' (*L'Humanité*, 15 September 1998). Such descriptions raise a number of puzzles: why would any political organization kill civilians in a wanton way? Why slaughter, decapitate and mutilate hundreds of men, women and children, including babies? Moreover, why would an *insurgent*

organization resort to such actions given that civilian support is a pre-
condition for its very existence? In short, is there any logic behind these
massacres?

It is difficult to see how such apparently indiscriminate terror can
actually help fulfill any goal at all—except its own finality. On the face
of it, these massacres seem both incomprehensible and self-defeating,
hence definitively irrational. As a commentator puts it, 'if there is one
situation that defies rational understanding, this is well that of …
Algeria' (Sibony 1998). Generally, students of peasant rebellions have
often pointed to the irrationality of mass collective violence (Stanley
1996: 3; Starn 1998: 230), a view consistent with what an anthropolo-
gist (Riches 1986: 2) calls 'theories prominent in Anglo-Saxon lay cul-
ture', which 'focus strongly on the irrationality and bestiality of
violence'.

The Algerian case provides an opportunity for exploring the micro-
mechanisms of a phenomenon traditionally considered as archetypically
irrational: large-scale civil war violence. Such violence has always been
seen as a fundamental component of civil war: Thucydides (III:81)
describes the civil war in Corcyra as a situation in which 'there was
death in every shape and form. And, as usually happens in such situ-
ations, people went to every extreme and beyond it'. Despite the cen-
trality of violence in civil war, most studies have focused on
preconditions and outcomes of revolutions and rebellions rather than on
their content: to the extent that violence is present in the analysis, it is
treated as an independent rather than as a dependent variable. Studies of
social movements have tended to avoid political violence altogether.[1] In
fact, the majority of the studies that do focus on violence tend to con-
centrate either on the 'suffering' of victims (e.g. Daniel 1996) or the
memory of past violence. Although the pathbreaking work of Tilly
(1978), has spurred a wave of research on contentious action—including
studies of ethnic riots (Kakar 1996; Tambiah 1996; Bass 1997;
Varshney 1998), little theoretical attention has been paid to mass viol-
ence against civilians in the context of civil wars (Wickham-Crowley
1990). This is surprising in light of the widespread descriptive attention
generated by this issue.

Civil war violence is fundamentally different from contentious poli-
tics. First, there is a difference of degree: data from 87 countries in the
1960s show that the typical country had five times as many man-days of
participation in protest as rebellion, but rebellion was far more deadly
than protest. The total deaths in all reported episodes and campaigns of
protest was approximately 10 000 contrasted with more than 3 million in

all rebellions (Gurr 1986: 52). Second, there is a difference of kind. To begin with, contentious collective action itself should be distinguished between violent and non violent. For instance, Tarrow (1989) argues that violent repertoires of protest cycles follow different dynamics from non-violent ones. As Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 425) point out in a recent review of the literature on ethnic and nationalist violence, 'violence is not just a degree of conflict but a form of conflict, or a form of social and political action in its own right'. Furthermore, civil war violence should be distinguished from violent collective action (such as riots and pogroms) because war structures choices and selects actors in fundamentally different ways than peace—even violent peace. As McCormick and Mitchell (1997: 525) remark, 'those interested in generating useful knowledge on individual crimes, rather than state crimes, do not employ a one-dimensional crime scale that combines nonviolent and violent crimes. They disaggregate shoplifting from rape and seek explanations for these substantively different types of criminal activity'.

In this article, I sketch a theoretical framework for the analysis of violence in civil wars and see how it fares in one particular case: insurgent violence in Algeria. The central thesis is that massacres can be understood as part of a rational strategy aiming to punish and deter civilian defection under specific constraints. Massacres are likely to be committed by insurgents in the context of a particular strategic conjuncture characterized by (a) fragmented and unstable rule over the civilian population, (b) mass civilian defections toward incumbents and (c) escalation of violence. These are all elements encountered in situations of incumbent counter-attacks against insurgent 'liberated' areas; such counter-attacks typically combine purely military strategies with 'pacification' techniques, the most important of which is militia-building.

Caveats

Two caveats are in place. First, I only seek here to check the plausibility of a tentative thesis. My goal is to show how a phenomenon such as large-scale massacres of civilians can be gainfully approached from a rationalist perspective—rather than provide and test a full-fledged theory of civil war violence. Direct evidence (such as testimonies or documents about the strategy of the main political actors) is scarce and unreliable; indirect evidence (mostly in the form of journalistic reports and eyewitness testimonies) is fragmentary and incomplete. Like similar conflicts, the Algerian civil war 'has been shrouded in mystery since

it began in early 1992, a war concealed by layers of darkness' (Peterson 1997b). However, the political importance of civil war violence, its long-term polarizing consequences, its apparent irrationality, and the lack of cogent explanations and of a theoretical framework that can make sense of it, are factors which justify the effort to unravel it, however early and incomplete this might be. In addition, the approach put forth might help shape the agenda of researchers who will be gathering evidence in the field of this and other civil wars.

Second, I focus on the strategies of the political actors rather than on the individual motivations of massacre perpetrators. Given the state of available data, I chose to remain agnostic about these motivations—which can include peer pressure, obedience, hatred, revenge, or simply sadism.[2] The trouble with individual intentions, as Tilly (1975: 512) points out, is that intentions of violent acts are usually hard to discern. Even with full knowledge (which is hardly the case in Algeria), intentions often turn out to be mixed, even contradictory. Fortunately, although limited and fragmentary, the available evidence provides many insights about the strategies of political actors. The international impact of the massacres attracted many journalists to Algeria; although the conditions of their investigation were far from ideal (the war is still going on and the government restricted the journalists' movements in significant ways), they were able to write useful reports. Brought together under the proposed theoretical lens, their insights help make sense of this tragic story as well as the larger phenomenon of civil war violence.

I first sketch a rationalist framework for the analysis of civil war violence and draw some hypotheses from it; I then provide background information on the Algerian case, describe the massacres in Algeria, elaborate on the logic of the argument and the hypotheses, and check their plausibility against the available evidence. Finally, I see how this thesis fares in explaining (a) the puzzling behavior of the army and (b) insurgent massacres in other countries.

1. A rationalist perspective

In this article, I define the term *massacre* narrowly, as large-scale, face-to-face violence against civilians targeted in groups, in the context of a civil war. For the sake of simplicity, violence is restricted to its most basic form: homicide.[3] This definition excludes individualized violence against civilians (where, typically, individuals are targeted in isolation of each other)[4] and mass but indirect or impersonal violence, such as

bombardment or battle-related civilian deaths, etc. This definition is obviously not universal and covers only a limited range of the violence that takes place in civil wars.[5] The focus on this particular category of violence is justified by its character: its sheer brutality and the inclusion of women, elderly people and children, its enigmatic nature, and its apparent irrationality—which, in turn, explain the widespread media attention it has attracted.

The massacres in Algeria included mainly raids against villages and small towns, typically occurring at night; they were carried out by groups of armed men whose principal objective was the systematic killing of civilians.[6] The attackers broke into houses and killed families in their entirety (including babies and the elderly) in a most brutal way, usually hacking them to death or slicing their throats, using knives, machetes and axes. In some cases, corpses were mutilated, houses set on fire, and women abducted to be raped and then killed. In Algeria, they first appeared in 1996, became a recurrent pattern in 1997 and waned in 1998. The number of victims ranged from about 10 to about 400. Most massacres took place in an area of about 150 km², south of the capital, Algiers. This area, dubbed the 'triangle of death,' comprises parts of the Medea and Blida regions, including the Mitidja plain (see Figure 1). The second most affected area is in the west of the country, in the Relizane region. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the massacres up to January 1999.

Assuming that the massacres in Algeria are imputable to the Islamist guerrillas of the GIA (*Groupe islamique armé*)—and as I argue below there are good reasons to think that this is the case for most massacres—the first puzzle is explaining why rebels resort to such massacres. Indeed, indiscriminate large-scale massacres are typically associated with governmental armies rather than insurgent movements (Wickham-Crowley 1990).

Ideology provides the most popular explanation. Massacres, the argument goes, are committed by people who hold an ideology that justifies the extermination of a category of people, defined in racial, ethnic, or religious terms. According to the interpretation of an Algerian psychiatrist (Dr Houria Salhi, quoted in Kaci 1998a): 'It's religious fanaticism, fascism. It's an ideological terrorism. Behind their acts, there is a strategy of destabilization. To terrorize is to mark the imaginary and the symbolism of a people'. A similar argument (Charef 1998: 34) underlines the ideological characteristics of particular guerrilla groups which operate like religious sects. One such group, the *Ghadhiboune aala Allah* ('those who are angry with God') is said to
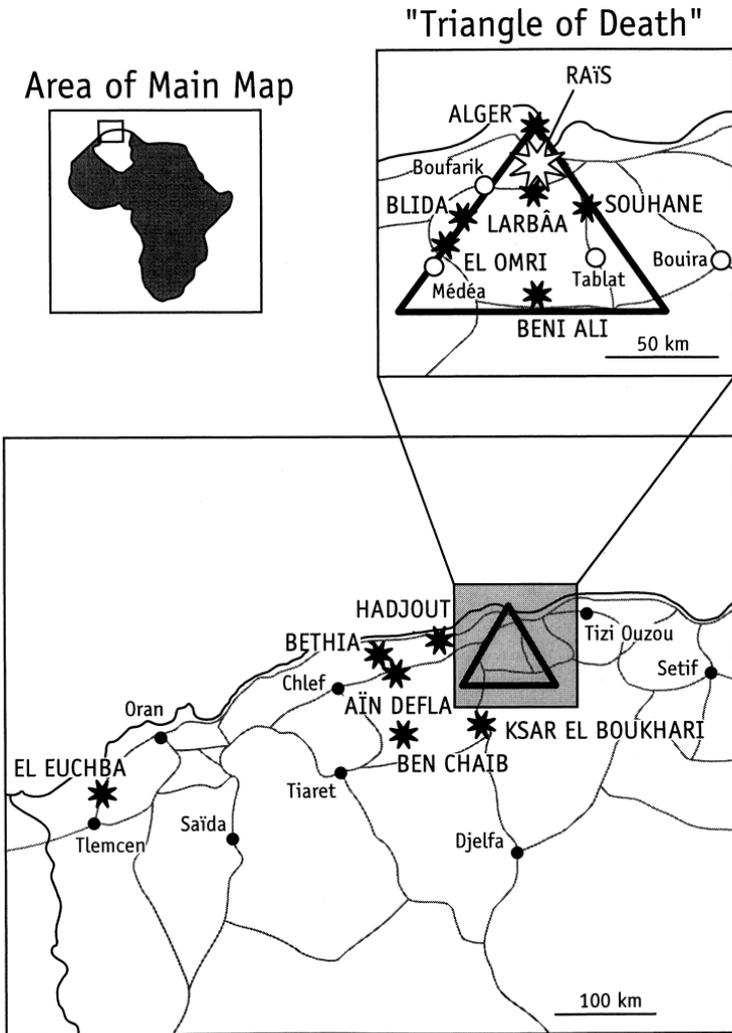
Figure 1. The Geography of massacres in Algeria

have declared itself 'angry with God', since God promised them a quick victory but did not deliver it. As a result, this group feels that it can commit all kinds of atrocities until the law of God is imposed on earth.

The main problem with such arguments, which a historian of the Nazi occupation of Italy (which produced dozens of massacres), dubs

Table 1. Massacres in Algeria (August 1996–January 1999)

Date	Location	No. of victims
17 August 1996	Msila	63
7 October 1996	Laghouat	38
6 November 1996	Sidi El Kebir	32
15 November 1996	Bensalah	12
November 1996	Unspecified	18
6 December 1996	Ben Achour	19
29 December 1996	Ain Defla	28
5 January 1997	Ben Achour	16
6 January 1997	Douaouda	18
13 January 1997	Bouinan	19
13 January 1997	Tabainat	14
18 January 1997	Sidi Abdelaziz	49
22 January 1997	El Omaria	22
22 January 1997	Baraki	22
23 January 1997	Haouch Pino; Haouch Benramdane	22
1 February 1997	Ktiten	31
17 February 1997	Kerrach	33
6 April 1997	Thalit, Medea	52
6 April 1997	Amroussa, Blida	15
11 April 1997	Monaa, Boufarik	22
21–22 April 1997	Boughelef, Blida	109
14 May 1997	Haouch Fanir	34
15–16 June 1997	Dairat Lebguar	50
23 June 1997	Mouzaia	18
12–13 July 1997	Ksar El-Boukhari, Medea	44
22 July 1997	Yemmaa M'ghita, Chrea mountains, Blida	39
25 July 1997	Si Zoubir, Hadjout	24
25 July 1997	Sidi Salem, Medea	13
28 July 1997	Si Zerrouk, Laarba	51
30 July 1997	Ain Defla	41
3 August 1997	Mezaoura and Oued El-Had, Aïn Defla area	76
7–10 August 1997	Zeboudja, Medea	21
7–10 August 1997	Tiaret region	41 in 6 incidents
7–10 August 1997	Djelfa region	50
7–10 August 1997	Blida	46
7–10 August 1997	Medea	30
21 August 1997	Souhane	63
26 August 1997	Beni Ali	64
28–29 August 1997	Rais	98–375
30 August 1997	Bologhine	19
30 August 1997	Miramar	19
5 September 1997	Sidi Youssef, close to Beni Messous	49–200
19 September 1997	Gelb el-Kebir, Medea	53
21 September 1997	Beni Slimane, Medea	N/A
22–23 September 1997	Benthala	85–200
27 September 1997	Aïn Addem, Sidi Bel Abbes	13

Table 1. (Continued)

Date	Location	No. of victims
30 September 1997	Chebil	52
2 October 1997	Mellaha	38
2 October 1997	Unspecified locations in the Medea region	50
4–5 October 1997	Bouangoud, Blida	30
4–5 October 1997	Sekmouna, Medea	16
4–5 October 1997	Mahelma, Bilda	38
4–5 October 1997	Ouled, Benaissa, Blida	37
4–5 October 1997	Kharrouba, Oran	20
9–10 October 1997	Souagui, Medea	9
12–13 October 1997	Sig, Oran	43
8–9 November 1997	Lahmalit, Blida	27
27 November 1997	Sacamaoudi, Larbaa	27
29–30 November 1997	Hassi Labed	29
December 1997	Laarba	31
31 December 1997	Kherarba, Relizane	176
31 December 1997	Ouled Sahnine, Relizane	113
31 December 1997	Ben Taïyeb, Relizane	50
31 December 1997	El Abadel, Relizane	73
3–4 January 1998	Had Checala, Relizane	N/A
3–4 January 1998	Meknasa, Relizane	117
12 January 1998	Sidi Hammed	103–130
7–8 March 1998	Haouch Bouhalouene, Blida	11
7–8 March 1998	Djelfa region	13
26–27 March 1998	Polarrat El-Ahdab	46
26–27 March 1998	Youb, Saida	11
5–6 April 1998	Close to Arzew, Oran	27
27–28 April 1998	Chouardia, Medea	43
11 May 1998	Raïs El Aïn, close to Arzew, Oran	22
27 May 1998	Unspecified village, Blida	11
14 July 1998	Unspecified village, Aïn Defla	4
25 July 1998	Khelil, Tlemcen	12
26 July 1998	Sidi Abdelmoumen, Saïda	8
14 September 1998	Miliana, Aïn Defla	27
6 October 1998	Tizi, Mascara	7
10 November 1998	Moussa Abderahmane, Aïn Defla	18
17 November 1998	Khemis Miliana, Aïn Defla	8
2 December 1998	Sidi Rached	12
5 December 1998	Meras, Tipaza	7
9 December 1998	Tadjena, Dahra mountains	52
10 December 1998	Ahmer El Ain	4
29 December 1998	Beni Amrane	16

Source: news reports. N/A = not available.

'diabolic' (Klinkhammer 1997: 30), is that ideological discourse is a fluid and contested field of meaning, amenable to a multiplicity of interpretations: one can derive multiple courses of action from the same ideological tenet. Moreover, ideology is often used for the *ex-post facto* justification of actions. Finally, ideology tells us very little about the variation of massacres over time and space. The GIA did not alter its ideology between 1994 and 1997, yet it committed massacres in 1997 but not 1994. Even in 1997 massacres display a wide variation. Why did so many massacres take place during the summer of 1997? Why did they take place in some areas but not in neighboring ones? As the Algerian journalist and author Abed Charef (1998: 41) points out, 'The idea that the GIA has no logic and kills simply to kill is insufficient for explaining such actions'.

Civil wars typically take the form of guerrilla warfare. Their key element is civilians: winning is to a large extent contingent on civilian support.[7] Competing political actors (incumbents and insurgents, but particularly the latter) need to attract and maintain civilian support. Although civilians have political preferences, their overarching priority in the context of a deadly war is to remain alive. Practically, this means that political actors will try to commit civilians on their side by providing benefits (such as land distribution) and sanctions (such as attaching a high cost to defection to the opponent) (Taylor 1988). In general, sanctions are cheaper than benefits. Periods of intense military conflict (as opposed to calmer periods) reduce the availability of benefits, turning survival into the key benefit; during such periods, political actors are likely to resort to terror in order to shape civilian behavior and reduce the probability of defection.[8] In other words, they will try to alter the expected (dis)utility of defection (the probability that an individual defection will be sanctioned and the intensity of the sanction). Valuing survival, most civilians will respond by cooperating with the political actor who makes the most credible threats.

To be efficient, terror needs to be selective; indiscriminate terror tends to be counterproductive. In a regime of indiscriminate terror, compliance guarantees no security; in such a situation joining the opponent can actually increase the probability of individual survival (Gross 1979). Disaggregating mass massacres into well-planned, individually targeted, and selective killings might thus be an indicator of a strategy initiated by insurgents to maximize civilian compliance (more precisely: to minimize loss of civilian compliance) by deterring defection; hence, extreme brutality can be instrumental.

A number of empirical implications follow. Massacres will be more

likely in areas and periods of declining rebel control; in areas and periods of 'fragmented' rule (when violence can be exercised by both sides); and in an advanced stage of escalation, when both sides have already used substantial levels of terror (hence the effectiveness of sanctions requires a rise in their intensity). These implications can be checked against the evidence from the Algerian case.

2. Background

On 11 January 1992 the Algerian military ('incumbents')[9] aborted the country's first multiparty parliamentary elections and terminated the country's first democratic experiment which began in 1988. In doing so, they deprived the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front islamique du salut*—FIS) of a sweeping victory, ushering the country on the path of a bloody civil war which is still raging (Kapil 1994; Esposito 1995). In the wake of this intervention thousands of known or suspected FIS supporters were arrested and more than 10 000 were deported to internment camps in the desert. The FIS was officially outlawed in March 1992 and most of its leadership was condemned to steep prison sentences. In the course of that year, armed groups were formed by FIS supporters and began attacking the security forces ('insurgents'). Since 1992 many groups have formed, but the two main organizations are the Islamic Salvation Army (*Armée islamique du salut*—AIS), the armed wing of the FIS, and the GIA, which is suspected of being responsible for most massacres. These movements are decentralized and regionally based, fielding no more than 10 000 fighters (Martinez 1997). The war has cost the lives of an estimated 80 000 people (AI 1997b: 2).

3. The Massacres: Some Facts

3.1 Who Kills?

Speculation that massacres might be committed by incumbents rather than insurgents has been fueled by a number of factors: the Algerian government's obstruction of independent investigation of the massacres; the suspect behavior of the security forces during some of these massacres (the army failed to intervene although massacres have lasted for several hours, were audible and visible from a distance, and took place in close proximity of barracks and outposts in heavily militarized regions of the country); the Islamist political orientation of many of the

victims (many massacres have taken place in areas were the FIS obtained high scores in the 1990 municipal elections and the 1991–1992 parliamentary elections); the immediate killing by the security forces of the alleged Islamist perpetrators of these massacres; the general scarcity of information about the massacres; and a few newspaper interviews of alleged former members of security forces claiming to have taken part in as many as 18 massacres, organized by the military but disguised to look as if they had been committed by Islamists.[10]

Still, there is substantial evidence that many among the deadliest massacres have been perpetrated by Islamist guerrillas. The most important evidence comes from testimonies of survivors who were able to identify local Islamists among the attackers (see below). In fact, survivors who openly accuse the army for its failure to intervene also expressed no doubt about the identity of the killers, pointing to the Islamist guerrillas (e.g. Tuquoi 1997). Moreover, some of the troubling aspects of this story can be explained without reference to an army conspiracy. For example, in civil wars prisoners tend to be killed on the spot rather than taken prisoner (Laqueur 1998).[11] Militiamen, the most likely to capture guerrillas, have openly stated that they took no prisoners (AI 1997b: 17).

Journalists working in the field have found credible testimonies in support of the thesis that most massacres are organized by the rebels (Leclère 1997; Tuquoi 1997 among others). European foreign ministries believe that it is Islamist guerrillas who are responsible for the massacres (*Observer* 9 February 1998). Although, it is impossible to know the full truth at this point (see Charef 1998), the assumption that many massacres were committed by the Islamist guerrillas seems plausible and is widely adopted by area experts (Addi 1998: 44) and other authors (Smith 1998: 27). Likewise, the reluctance of the army to intervene and stop some of these massacres is also beyond doubt.

3.2 Are Killings Random?

Many news reports claim openly or assume implicitly that collective massacres are necessarily random (e.g. *Le Monde* 2 September 1997). One definition even 'builds-in' randomness: according to Carlton (1994: 1), a massacre 'may be defined as the indiscriminate killing of unresisting and defenseless people'. However, contrary to this prevailing view, there is substantial evidence in the form of survivor or eyewitness testimonies, that most massacres in Algeria are not random. They are selective and target particular towns and villages, and within them particular neighborhoods, families and individuals. These testimonies come

mostly, but not only, from the two massacres that have received the most
media attention, those of Raïs (28–29 August 1997) and Benthala
(22–23 September 1997).

   Attackers target specific neighborhoods. The raid against Laarba on
July 18 1997, targeted in fact the neighborhood of Si Zerrouk; likewise,
the massacre of Benthala targeted two neighborhoods, Haï Boudoumi
and Haï Djillali. Within these areas attackers targeted particular families
who they singled out for extermination. In Raïs, a man who survived
the massacre, recognized among the attackers both local guerrilla mem-
bers and local sympathizers who carried lists with names; he could hear
them choose particular houses: 'this is X's house, this is Y's house, this
is Z's place.' He added: 'they did not come like that, randomly, to kill
and slaughter everyone. There was a list of people to be killed, it was
calculated, arranged, they were well informed of what was going on in
the village' (Taveau 1998).[12] According to Leclère (1997) 'the attackers
took particular care to leave alone the families of sympathizers. They
targeted about 60 houses'. There is also some evidence from the guer-
rilla side. Ould Hamrane Zohra, the sister of a local GIA leader, was
captured by the army and presented to the journalists following the
Benthala massacre. Among other things, she said that she participated in
this massacre by indicating to the guerrillas the houses of the families
that should be killed and those of the families that should be protected
(*Reuters* 8 October 1997; *L'Humanité* 9 October 1997). That the mas-
sacres are not random is also suggested by the fact that some of the vic-
tims had previously received death threats from the guerrillas (AI
1997b: 14). Garçon (1997) summarizes the evidence: 'the massacre at
Raïs corroborates two insights from previous massacres. First, the
attackers targeted with precision their victims, looking for specific
houses and families. Second, villagers appear to know who the attackers
were—and they were most probably from the same area'. In short, 'mas-
sacres are not blind. They are planned and target specific families. They
bypass other families' (Leclère 1998).[13]

3.3 Who is Targeted?

The evidence suggests that the victims of Islamist guerrillas belong to
three groups: (a) local opponents, especially members of the security
forces, informers, or those who had been supporting or joining govern-
ment-backed militias; (b) people supporting competing guerrilla organ-
izations; and (c) former sympathizers who either switched sides, refused
to help the rebels, or were about to do so.

The primary target of insurgent movements are people associated with the incumbents: members of the security forces and the state apparatus, informers, or simply men and women who are regarded as supporters of the authorities and refuse to join or support the rebels—and their relatives (AI 1997b: 14). For example, the rebels killed a policeman, his wife, and a neighbor, in February 1995, in front of their children (AI 1997a: 2).

Civilians associated with competing guerrilla movements have also been the targets of attacks in the context of internecine guerrilla wars. The available evidence suggests that the massacres which took place in the winter of 1997 (most of which were concentrated in the western part of the country) targeted precisely these people (Baki and Baila 1998). The massacres in the villages of the Ouarsenis mountains and in the willaya of Tiaret (January 1998), appear to be related to an internecine war between the GIA and the AIS, triggered by the ceasefire that the AIS negotiated with the government on 1 October 1997. A villager described this war to Aubenas (1998): 'the GIA came in from the East at the beginning of 1996. . . . These guys, we did not know them at all. They stayed out of the village and did not recruit from us. They began to fight with the AIS. There were many battles in the mountains. The AIS was weakened, some among its guerrillas even defected and joined the GIA'. Then in the spring of 1997, the battles between the GIA and the AIS grew more intense. In March, a first massacre of 55 civilians took place in about 30 km, the first massacre in the area. Eventually the AIS was eliminated from the area. Its supporters faced a choice between joining the GIA or the governmental side.

The third category of victims, and the one that has attracted most attention, is composed of former FIS sympathizers and cadres (most of whom were GIA supporters as well) particularly from villages and towns in the Mitidja plain, who were suspected of intending to defect to the incumbents—or already having done so. For example, Adir Zeghba, a moderate Islamist living in the Mitidja, refused to help the GIA; as a result, he was targeted in line with a GIA decree that 'those who are not with us are against us'. Nine members of Zeghba's family were killed on 31 August 1997, but Zeghba himself escaped because he was away during the slaughter (Peterson 1997b).

The available evidence suggests that most of the massacres that took place in the summer and early fall of 1997 (mainly in the Mitidja) targeted former guerrilla supporters (see below). As Figure 2 suggests this is also the period with the highest incidence of massacres, the most massive massacres (the massacres at Raïs and Benthala are described as
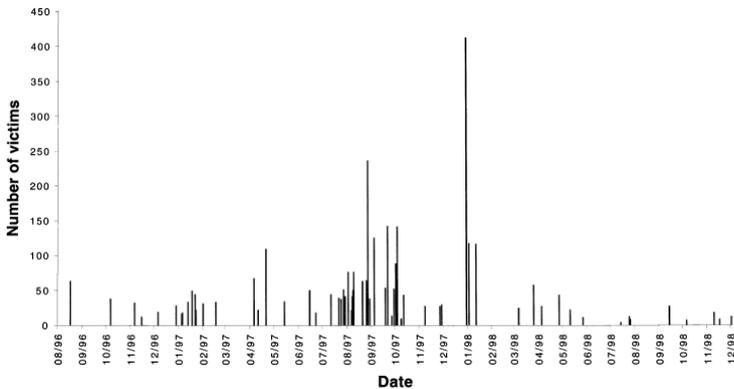
Figure 2. Massacres in Algeria (August 1996–January 1999)

the most deadly single instances of violence since the beginning of the
civil war), and the highest number of victims.

  In just three months, between 12 July and 12 October 1997, 1690
people reportedly lost their lives in these massacres. This amounts to
48% of the total massacre victims (August 1996 to January 1999).
Moreover, these massacres are also the most puzzling ones; they are the
ones on which I focus primarily.

3.4 How Are They Targeted?

Targeted violence requires good information. How do rebels know who
defected or who is about to defect? The answer is that the killers are
often local people—or that local people assist the killers. The available
evidence suggests that the massacres are carried out by teams which
typically include non-local guerrillas, local guerrillas and local inform-
ers.

  In Raïs, two of the leaders of the guerrilla group which attacked the
town, were identified by survivors as being Mehdi Mohammed and
Rabah Bengouria, both former FIS cadres from the town (Zerrouky
1997b). A Raïs resident recognized the movements and voice of one of
his attackers, and named him, a village man (Ganley 1997). A young
man whose family was killed in the massacre said that he saw among the
guerrillas local men from his neighborhood during the attack (Taveau
1998). Another man accused some of his co-villagers: 'they give them
food, money, guidance. They are the eyes of the GIA. Everyone knew

this' (Ganley 1997). As yet another man put it: 'in the village everyone knows the names of the "emirs", the Islamist leaders; they are all kids from Raïs'. A day after the massacre people remarked: 'we knew them all' (Leclère 1997). Likewise, the leaders of the guerrillas who attacked Benthala were recognized by survivors because they were from the village: Rabah Begas and Mohammed Laazrouni, former local FIS cadres (Zerrouky 1997f). In Lahmalit, a villager openly fingered some of his neighbors as having collaborated in the massacre: 'our village is full of support networks for these criminals' (Zerrouky 1997f). In Boughelef, a girl recognized among the attackers her former professor of physics. She said that she had seen him once before, in a roadblock setup by the guerrillas (*L'Humanité* 6 March 1998). In Had Chekala, the massacre that took place on 11 January 1998 was carried out by guerrillas from the village, guided by local informers. As a villager points out: 'they grew up with us. The monsters who slit our throats are our children' (Baki and Baila 1998). This is how two sisters, aged 11 and 13, described the killing of their parents to an Amnesty International interviewer (AI 1997b: 14):

> We woke up at the noise; some armed men were hitting father with a shotgun. Mum ran towards them screaming and the other men grabbed her and hit her. They pushed father into the kitchen and the other two took mum out into the courtyard and tied her hands. They cut her throat. The other men called from inside the house and the one who slaughtered mum shouted: 'Wait, I'm finishing'. Before running away they threatened us and told us not to tell anyone and not to go to school. One of them was from the village; he is called Boudjema.

Leclère (1998) summarizes the available evidence: 'survivors of massacres consistently say that they have identified some of the attackers as being people from the neighborhood, the village, sometimes neighbors'. The presence of ties between killers and victims is important in two respects: first, because it provides additional evidence that massacres are not random and second, because it suggests a local dynamic of escalation that underlies the massacres.

3.5 Why Are They Targeted?

Most victims of the summer 1997 massacres were Islamist sympathizers who had either abandoned the rebels or were getting ready to. The rebels killed them to 'make an example' of them: to signal the cost of defection and thus deter it.

Indeed, some journalists have reported that former rebel sympathizers, who for various reasons had either refused help to the guerrillas or had

joined the incumbents, were targeted by the guerrillas. Hoche and Kahn (1997) argue that the guerrillas' 'goal is to punish and terrorize the civilian populations accused of disloyalty to the holy cause'. Peterson (1997a) reports that villagers are often punished for not supporting the rebels enough. In one confrontation between guerrillas and Mitidja residents, the former shouted: 'why did you now betray us?' (Peterson 1997b). According to Leclère (1998), the victims had 'provided [the rebels] with material and men. . . . The killers now attack those who until yesterday protected and supported them. Why? A hypothesis is that the guerrillas have lost the ability to control these places and want to punish the villagers who are accused of having defected'. Indeed, these raids have been described by them as 'punitive expeditions' (Zerrouky 1997b).[14] An examination of the available evidence lends support to this view.

The wife of a rebel leader in the Haï Bounab hamlet (Mitidja), related to the Algerian journalist Baya Gacemi (1998:171) how her husband, Ahmed, told her that the population 'ceased to support them' in the summer of 1997. He came secretly to the hamlet (which he had ruled for the past two years), in order to investigate the killing of four rebel sympathizers who had been denounced to the security forces by a local defector, noticed that the villagers were now systematically denouncing the local rebels, and decided that a 'big cleansing' was needed. After a few days, the rebels beheaded five local girls (some of whom dated militiamen) and threw their heads on the doorsteps of the houses of people who were suspected of intending to defect. According to this testimony, the same man had participated in the massacre of Benramdane (January 1997), whose victims were men who had applied to join the militia (Gacemi 1998: 175–6; 188; 190). Raïs residents told journalists that they expected a rebel attack: 'we knew that our time would come, especially since the GIA knew they could get nothing from us' (Zerrouky 1997b). The attacking guerrillas were heard to call their victims 'traitors' (Taveau 1998). In Boughelef, survivors of an attack that led to the death of more than 100 people reported that they heard the attackers said that 'the villagers had to pay for their treason, for having ceased to support them' (*L'Humanité* 6 March 1998). Likewise, the raid against the Haï Djillali neighborhood of Benthala is attributed by some local people to the request for weapons that some residents put to the authorities (Tuquoi 1997). Villagers from Had Chekala acknowledged their formerly close relationship with the rebels: 'We are all responsible for this tragedy. We all contributed to it' (Baki and Baila 1998).

That the GIA decided to target defectors is also supported by state-

ments allegedly made by the GIA itself. A GIA communiqué taking responsibility for massacres in Raïs justified the action by pointing out that the GIA 'follows the traces of those apostates in the cities, villages and deserts and then wipes them out and destroys their fields' (Ganley 1997). The GIA bulletin *Al Ansar* has repeatedly emphasized that the GIA 'will attack and kill the partisans of the tyrants in the villages' (*L'Humanité* 27 September 1997). The leader of the GIA in the Mitidja is reported to have announced a strategy along these lines in February 1997: 'a new stage of the struggle against the government has begun with the execution of apostates and their relatives in towns and villages' (Zerrouky 1997a).

In sum, the available evidence strongly suggests that most massacres (a) were committed by the Islamist insurgents and (b) that they were not random and senseless but selective and targeted. The selection of targets, the clustering of massacres in specific areas and times (e.g. the Mitidja in the summer/early fall 1997), their duration (spreading over months), and their distribution across the country all strongly suggest that we are not dealing with random acts of collective revenge by some rogue groups but with carefully planned actions. It is these actions that require explanation.

4. The Dynamics of Civilian Support and Defection: Rule and Regimes of Violence

As Tilly (1975: 512) points out, 'violence is rarely a solo performance; it usually grows out of an interaction of opponents'. Understanding the dynamics of civilian support and defection, which I argue are central in making sense of the massacres, requires a prior analysis of this interaction in the context of civil war. A central feature of civil wars is the breakdown of the state monopoly of violence and its replacement by locally segmented monopolies of violence. An insurgent organization which controls a given area (a 'liberated area') operates as a counter-sovereign authority, a 'counter-state'. It provides protection, administers justice, collects taxes, and applies its social program. It also enjoys a local monopoly of violence which it uses to punish its enemies and sanction uncooperative behavior, such as the refusal to supply food or pay the 'revolutionary tax'.

The Algerian case fits this description (Peterson 1997a; Tuquoi 1997; Martinez 1998). 'Liberated areas' vary in size: they can be very large in the mountains (800 km^2 in the Dhahra mountains) and smaller in the

plains (Charef 1998: 19). 'There were two different worlds, two states' says a Raïs resident; the Islamist guerrillas 'were the real authority here', he adds (quoted in Leclère 1997). They often even lived inside the villages; if not, they would come back in the evening, to eat at home with their family (Aubenas 1997). As Leclère (1997) puts it, 'the guerrillas imposed their law'. The two zones were distinct, though 'in Algeria the frontiers of fear are almost always invisible' (Leclère 1997). This may be true for the outside observer, but not so for the local people who knew exactly where the borders were. These 'invisible borders' could be roads, rivers, or other geographical markers. For example, the river between Sidi Moussa and Ouled Allel was called by the local residents 'the frontier' (Zerrouky 1997e). In a nearby village, between Laarba and Meftah, about 30 km south of Algiers, the border which separated guerrilla from government territory was known by all: it was the national road, outside the village: a mere 10 m separated the official and the guerrilla state. Joining the guerrillas meant taking the central street of the village and continuing straight ahead (Aubenas 1998).

4.1 Sources of 'Support'

Typically, insurgent rule is based on a variable mix of consent and coercion. According to Amnesty International (AI 1997b: 9) 'it is not known to what extent the local population really supported such [guerrilla] groups, and if so to what extent it did so willingly or out of fear'. There is evidence that support was based on both consent and coercion, as is the case in most similar instances. Many local men in guerrilla-controlled areas had joined the armed groups and many others supported them and collaborated with them willingly and openly (Martinez 1995; Aubenas 1997; Leclère 1997; Charef 1998). For example, Raïs is described as a 'breeding ground' for the rebels, a support base for the GIA since 1995 (Ganley 1997). Aubenas (1998) reports the following testimony of a Mitidja villager:

> We had all voted for the FIS. When the party was dissolved we all felt that we had been cheated once more by those who govern. . . . In 1992, 1993, 1994, taking up weapons was a great temptation. Everyone here was certain that the AIS was going to win and take power. There was Afghanistan, Yugoslavia. We had the impression that Islam was victorious everywhere. Our young men from the guerrilla strolled in the village as usual. They were handsome. . . . The military did not dare to pass between the houses. For some months the army held the national road in front of the village up to a small barrack a little further. But the others attacked them every day. The [military] retreated to the other side of the street and did not move. Ten

meters separated the territory of AIS from that of the military. It was, so to speak, official; there were taxes, administration.

Sympathy toward the rebels initially emerged from the support extended to the FIS in the context of the short-lived democratic experiment. Expectations of an Islamist victory (Aubenas 1998), as well as benefits played an important role—insurgents helped the poorer peasants in some villages (Gacemi 1998: 67). Finally, indiscriminate violence against villages under rebel control by the security forces in occasional but deadly raids, reinforced popular support for the insurgents. For instance, a rebel attack against a village police outpost which left all the policemen and 'lots of people' dead was followed by an army raid in which seven people were killed in reprisals, 'people who did not have anything to do with the attack, people who were not even pro-FIS. They took these people to the gendarmerie in [the city] and their bodies were later found in the woods' (Human Rights Watch/Middle East 1997: 18).

Coercion was widely used by the rebels. The selective killing of people associated with the government certainly acted as a deterrent. A resident of Blida points out that between 1992 and 1995, the rebels 'were everywhere, they knew everyone. When someone received a condemnation letter, he knew they would kill him the following day. ... The first to be killed were the policemen of the criminal brigade at Blida. And we must recognize that these killings were facilitated by a certain complicity of the population. The FIS was widely supported at the time. The policemen families did not even dare attend the funeral of their dead' (Kaci 1998b). Also targeted where those who did not cooperate with the guerrillas. These people were singled out for brutal and visible punishment. Martinez (1995: 46) reports a case in which the guerrillas decapitated two young men and placed their heads on a crossroads. In the Dhahra mountains, rebels killed a policeman who had interrogated them, a co-villager who had refused to join, or villagers who had refused to supply them (Charef 1998: 26–7). A Raïs resident describes the period of rebel domination as one in which 'people were afraid to give information to the army, afraid of reprisals' (Ganley 1997). In Sidi Moussa, close to Benthala, the guerrillas are said to have killed about 100 people between 1993 and 1995 (Zerrouky 1997e). In Raïs, the first killings took place in 1994 and the bodies of those killed were exposed in the streets (Leclère 1997). In another Mitidja village, in 1995, the guerrillas killed 21 men who were planning to join the army after being drafted (Aubenas 1998).[15] In November 1998, the security forces discovered in Haouch

Hafiz (20 km southwest of central Algiers), in a farm used by the GIA as its local headquarters from 1993 to 1996, a mass grave containing the remains of about 110 people, believed to be victims of the rebels.

According to a Raïs resident: '80 percent of the villagers were against [the guerrillas], but we had no choice. During the evening, when they came to your place you had to give them money, clothes or lend them your car. . . . We were living a nightmare' (Leclère 1997). The years between 1992 and 1995 are described as 'black years' by another villager (Kaci 1998b). Yet another villager describes an evolving relationship between the rebels and the local population, one which gradually moved from consent to coercion: after the first instance of guerrilla violence, he says, 'our bond with the guerrillas was broken, but they were the masters' (quoted in Aubenas 1998); likewise, an Algerian journalist (quoted in Peterson 1997b) points out: 'At the beginning, people believed these groups were the underground opposition, that they were still the FIS. So it was true the people helped them to build a more fair republic and for justice. But they discovered very soon they were wrong'. One thing is certain: where the guerrillas could claim a monopoly of violence, they obtained the willing or unwilling compliance of the population.

4.2 A Stable Regime of Violence

Most of the Mitidja plain (including some Algiers suburbs, such as Hussein Dey, Mohammadia, Bab el-Oued, and Les Eucalyptus) came under insurgent control in 1992–1993 and remained so for one to three more years depending on the place. After police outposts were attacked by the rebels in 1992–1993, the police evacuated the area. The army was caught unprepared and soon lost control of many areas (Martinez 1995: 58). During this period, communication between guerrilla-controlled areas and the rest of the country was difficult; there was no telephone contact and roads were full of checkpoints. However, there was relative stability in these areas. As Ganley (1997) put it 'within that circumscribed world, each side knew its boundaries, and in Raïs there was peace'. Peace, of course, in the very relative sense that no massacres (as defined in this paper) took place. There was, as I pointed out, substantial violence primarily directed against people connected with the government or suspected informers.[16] Thus, this was a stable regime of violence: in insurgent-controlled areas, the state monopoly of violence was replaced by a rebel monopoly. Boundaries were stable, and violence was regulated, predictable, and relatively invisible to the outside observer.

The rebels targeted individuals rather than entire families. Families are reported to have been targeted only in serious instances of 'treason' (Aubenas 1997). A resident of Benthala compared the type of violence that prevailed under insurgent rule to the massacres: 'there was violence', he said referring to the time when the village was under insurgent control, 'but it was a different thing' (Aubenas 1997). Likewise, governmental violence in areas under government rule followed a similar pattern: targeted individuals were arrested, tortured, and made to 'disappear'. Governmental violence tended to be indiscriminate mostly in insurgent-held areas.

4.3 The Transition to a New Regime of Violence

A regime of violence conducive to massacres is one in which stable boundaries are replaced by unstable ones and local monopolies of violence move from segmented to fragmented. In fact, this is an incomplete transition between two local rulers, whereby incumbents dislodge insurgents but are unable to eliminate them. This transition is indicated by the ability of rebels to still access areas which they lost to the incumbents.

   This transition began in the Mitidja in 1995–1996. After retooling its army for counterinsurgency warfare and securing the oil-producing regions of the south, incumbents began to aggressively reclaim the rebel-held areas. In 1993–1994 the suburbs of Algiers were 'pacified'. In 1994, the army moved in the towns and villages surrounding Algiers, such as Baraki, Chararba and El Harrach, which had become guerrilla strongholds (Martinez 1997: 59). A large number of villages and towns of the Mitidja, such as Raïs and Benthala, changed hands in 1996. A teacher from Raïs pointed out somewhat condescendingly: 'Raïs people are illiterate, they are peasants. They believed in the FIS, and then they followed the terrorists. . . . And then, especially, from April 1996 on, the situation began to change. After the Islamists burnt down the school, the army came back in the village. The state made its presence felt again, after three years of absence!' (Leclère 1997).

4.4 Fragmentation and Incomplete Control

In spite of sustained army operations, the rebels managed to retain their bases in the hills surrounding the Mitidja plain throughout 1997.[17] Unless guerrillas are totally eliminated from a region, their mobility undermines incumbent rule, particularly in areas surrounded by terrain

that is difficult to control, such as hills and mountains. For example, guerrillas launched their attacks against Raïs and Benthala from the nearby village of Ouled Allel, which they allegedly used as a base. Army control in the Mitidja during 1996–1997 varied from very loose to more effective, but it was never total. According to a Mitidja villager: 'in 1996, the army regained control of the road. . . . The soldiers began to come in the village again. They came in jeeps, fired a couple of shots in the air and left as soon as they came. . . . Although they came less often, the guerrillas continued to govern us' (quoted in Aubenas 1998). In other places, like Benthala, the rebels came to the villages and towns by night: 'a dozen of local young men had joined the guerrillas; they came to the town in late afternoons and left before being seen by the patriots [the militiamen]' (Tuquoi 1997). In short, the Mitidja became in 1997 an area where locally segmented monopolies of violence were replaced, after the army gradually moved in, by fragmented rule, where both political actors had the ability to exercise violence within the same space: as a villager put it, there was a 'government by day and an [Islamist] government by night' (Peterson 1997a).

The massacres began after the return of the incumbents. They intensified in 1997 with the launching of vast mopping up operations whose goal was to annihilate the rebels. A correlation can be detected between mopping up operations launched by the army (with the active participation of the local militia) and the massacres committed by the rebels. For instance, in June and July 1997, the army launched an operation in Hatatba, a mountain region covered by forests in the willayas of Blida and Tipasa in the Mitidja (AI 1997b: 10). In September 1997, when the massacre of Benthala took place, the military were in the midst of a large mopping up operation in the area of Benthala and Sidi Messous (*Libération* 1 October 1997). The March 1998 massacres in the west of the country also coincided with mopping up operations (AFP 10 March 1998; 9 April 1998).

Clearly, the incumbents' return in the Mitidja fragmented the existing monopoly of violence in two ways: (a) it dislodged the rebels but failed to eliminate them; (b) it launched a massive program of militia formation which generated mass defections and an escalation of violence. The key factor lies in the outcome of the military operations launched by the incumbents: a quick and sweeping elimination of the insurgents or a complete failure and retreat will not fragment the monopoly of violence and will foreclose insurgent massacres, whereas intermediate outcomes will be conducive to insurgent massacres.[18] Figure 3 maps this dynamic.
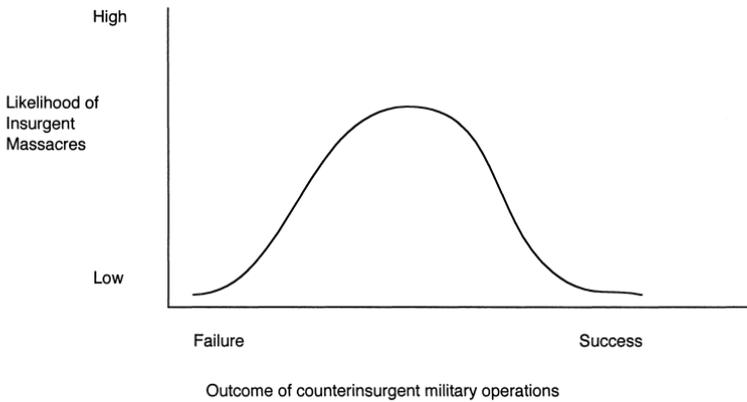
Figure 3. Incumbent operations and insurgent massacres

4.5. The Militias

The local militias in Algeria go back to 1994, but really took off in 1995. Their official name is *Groupes de Légitime Défense* or GLD, but they are generically known as 'patriots'. Their formation was part of a major strategic reorientation of the counterinsurgency war (Garçon 1998). Their strength is estimated to be around 100 000 men. In 1996 they were placed under a common command with the 100 000–men strong rural gendarmerie, the *gardes communales*. They were initially created outside the frame of law and were legalized only in January 1997. In addition to guarding their villages from attacks, they are becoming increasingly involved in full-fledged military operations as auxiliary corps of the army (Oberlé 1998; AI 1997b: 17; Callies de Salies 1997). Their participation in the civil war so far is viewed as a success for the army (Martinez 1996–1997).

Militias (also known as 'paramilitary' groups) are the answer of incumbents to protracted guerrilla warfare. First, they allow incumbents to reduce information costs: local people know who supports and helps the rebels. Second, they also allow incumbents to cut warfare costs. Militias operate as counter-guerrillas: they are irregular forces, composed of local men. Being permanently present in an area (their villages), they fight irregular warfare in terrain they know well, and are motivated by the desire to defend their village and their families. As the Algerian pro-government journalist Salima Tlemcani puts it (quoted in Peterson 1997b): 'people can't eradicate the terrorists without the army, and the army can't exterminate the terrorists without the people'. Hence,

incumbents need militias to suppress insurgencies; but militias almost always cause an escalation of violence. Following each major military operation, the army sets-up local militias in villages previously occupied by the insurgents (Zerrouky 1998a). Militia-building is largely based on defection from the rebels: many (willing or unwilling) militiamen are former (willing or unwilling) rebel supporters (Gacemi 1998). Inducing mass defections requires a mix of benefits and coercion, as well as the manipulation of individual motivations such as perceptions about the outcome of the conflict and the desire for revenge triggered by older or more recent personal animosities, family feuds and local conflicts. As an Algerian puts it (quoted in Abdi 1997): 'In rural areas this has become a tribal war. Some tribes are connected to the state, because someone is civil servant, policeman, or works for the military. The spiral of horror begins when the Islamists kill a member of this tribe. This tribe decides then to take ammunitions from the security services and then organizes a revenge operation against those who have children in the guerrilla' (the term tribe refers here to ties of kinship).[19]

4.6 Defection

In civil wars insurgents and incumbents compete to make individual defection a costly move. For example, in 1944, the German occupation army in Greece (like elsewhere in occupied Europe) 'aimed at convincing the Greeks that they would be punished more severely by the Germans for aiding the guerrillas than they could possibly be hurt by the guerrillas for not aiding them. In this way, the Greeks would learn to fear the Germans more than the guerrillas' (Condit 1961: 264). The advantage in this competition is often held by the organization that actually controls a locality. This organization can make more credible threats: permanent presence allows the effective identification and sanctioning of potential or real defectors. In Greece, for example, the partisans responded to the German terror by launching their own campaign of terror, which was far more effective than the Germans' could be. As a result, most peasants remained attached to the guerrillas—willingly or not.

    When the incumbent army moves back into a village, most people will be forced to abandon the guerrillas and switch their support to the new rulers. Where the guerrillas have been completely chased out of the area, this will be a relatively straightforward process: some rebel sympathizers will be killed, some will flee, and the majority of the population will, willingly or not, adjust to the new rulers. When, however,

control is incomplete and insurgents are still active in the area, civilians will find themselves caught in a crossfire. If they abandon the rebels and stop supplying them with food, shelter, information, etc. (and provide instead information to the army about guerrillas, their caches, their resources, etc.) they will run the risk of being punished by them. These are precisely the localities targeted by rebels. If, on the other hand, civilians remain linked to rebels, they will be punished by the incumbents.

The initial reaction of individuals caught in such situations is to opt for fence-sitting while waiting for uncertainty to decrease. However, they often realize that such a choice is very difficult. Fence-sitting is unacceptable by both insurgents and incumbents who equate it at best with free-riding and at worst defection; they will, therefore, strive to punish it.[20] For example, Zerrouky (1997c) describes the visit of a GIA guerrilla in the village of Sidi Moussa. He called up the villagers and traced three circles on the sand. He then told them: 'the first circle is us; the second is the *taghout*;[21] the third is the people. We will not accept to hear from you: "we are neither for one camp nor for the other". You are either with us or against us'. It is often preferable to support one side than free-ride, since free-riding will attract the simultaneous sanctions of both actors. The most sensible solution in this kind of situation is exit: 'I like it when I stop working but it is impossible to work now'; says a pharmacist (quoted in Martinez 1995: 56); 'one evening three people visited me, they introduced themselves as *mujahidin* [Islamist]. One was wounded and they wanted me to treat him. But if the army saw these people in front of my house, they would have demolished it with explosives, they would have killed me, and they would have thrown my family out in the street, like dogs. I am not part of this war, I am neither with one nor with the other; this why I left. Because this war is not my business'.

However, only wealthier people can abandon everything at once and seek refuge in town; for most people exit is equivalent to absolute destitution. As a result, most civilians will tend to defect to the new rulers and withdraw from the old ones despite high levels of uncertainty. The reason is that incumbent threats will be more credible than insurgents' because the former are now present in the village whereas the latter have fled. Moreover, once a critical number of people in a village defects a coordination dynamic sets in, leading to mass defections. A woman, for instance, recounts the remarkable speed which her covillagers turned GIA supporters and the similar speed with which, three years later, they defected to the incumbents (Gacemi 1998: 109; 185). It is to react against this dynamic that rebels target defectors.

4.7 Escalation

A number of processes converge to turn militia-building into an escalation of violence. First, a common way for enrolling men into militias is to manipulate individual motivations, ranging from openly criminal ones[22] to the individual desire for revenge against the rebels. For example, during the counter-revolution in the Vendée in the late 1790s, the French government proposed to recruit companies of counter-guerrillas composed of men determined 'to take revenge for the killing of their relatives and the violation of their properties' (quoted in Dupuy 1997: 148).[23] Indeed, individuals who have suffered at the hands of the guerrillas are highly likely to join the militia. For example, Rafik, a 38-year-old man from the Mitidja town of Boufarik, joined the militia after his entire family was massacred by the rebels to punish him for refusing to join the guerrillas (Ben 1998). In Raïs, all surviving men of a family which was killed by the guerrillas joined the militia; their house was stung with a banner proclaiming it army territory. One of them told Ganley (1997): 'This is my home. I'll stay here and fight to neutralize these terrorists'. Likewise, Peterson (1997a) describes the motivation of a 13-year-old boy and his two older brothers in the aftermath of the killing by the guerrillas of their parents and two siblings in the village of Haouch Fanir: 'Each day when he comes here, Abdurahim dreams of joining the patriots. But for his two surviving brothers, who are both militiamen, that seed of revenge is already growing—pointing to a cycle of violence that will be difficult to break. "If I kill 1000 terrorists, it won't be enough for my one brother", says a brother named Arabah, cradling a gun and wearing a clear-plastic waist pouch stuffed with colorful shotgun shells. "Do I look for revenge? Of course", he says. "Of course"'. It is important to distinguish here between the targets of violence and its audience. Although the surviving kin of the victims of massacres will be highly likely to join the militias (i.e. defect) in order to exact revenge, insurgents anticipate that the village at large (and the surrounding area in general) will be so thoroughly terrorized by the massacres as to be deterred from defecting.

Revenge motivates local processes of escalation in which 'Security forces killed members of armed groups, their relatives and people known or suspected of supporting such groups; while armed opposition groups targeted relatives of security forces' and militias' members, as well as families and supporters of rival armed groups. In this context, some believe that certain massacres have been committed as a vendetta, in retaliation for previous massacres and killings of relatives or communities by rival forces' (AI 1997b: 9).24 Another mechanism of esca-

lation is related to the process of defection. Because defectors are often mistrusted, getting them to perpetrate visible acts of violence is a way to induce commitment.

Generally, militiamen are more prone to commit atrocities than security forces (Gacemi 1998: 95). Reports from the towns of Relizane and Jdiouia (in western Algeria) which have suffered from Islamist violence point to a rule of terror and a widespread pattern of violence perpetrated by the militias (headed by Relizane's and Jdiouia's mayors, El Haj Fergane, alias the 'sheriff' and El Haj El Abed), including tens of executions (some people were buried alive), kidnappings, 'disappearances', looting, and wholesale destruction of houses (Garçon 1998). According to the Algerian daily *El Watan*, similar violence has been taking place all around the country (*Le Monde* 16 April 1998).[25] As Garçon (1997) puts it, 'one thing is certain: civilians are also the principal victims of the violence exercised by the paramilitary groups'. According to Amnesty International (1997: 3): 'If the existence of these militias has in some areas contributed to providing protection against attacks by armed groups, in other areas it has drawn the civilian populations further into the conflict'.

Second, rebels target primarily defectors. For example, the 10 men killed in Ouled Sidi-Yahia were members of the local militia (*Associated Press* 6 October 1997); the first families to be massacred in Lahmalit (8–9 November 1997) were the families of militiamen (Zerrouky 1997f). Hamlets that field men in the militias are usually the first to be singled-out for attacks (Peterson 1997a).

That iteration and escalation go hand-in-hand is clear in reprisals: one day after the rebels killed a 15-year-old boy in the Mitidja village of Haï Bounab because his uncle was a militiaman in a neighboring village, the militiamen came in, arrested four young men, including the two brothers of the local rebel leader and one 15-year-old boy, took them to the spot where the militiaman's nephew had been killed, and shot them. They then called the villagers and told them: 'you killed one of us and we killed four. If one of us is killed again, the whole hamlet will be shot' (Gacemi 1998: 114). In retaliating against their local enemies, militias behave in a particularly violent way. Members of Algerian militias have told Amnesty International 'of their determination to kill as many "terrorists" as they could find, so as to "clean-up" the areas' (AI 1997b: 17–18). As a militiaman put it: 'if they kill one of my relatives I will kill their entire families; this is the only language that terrorists understand' (AI 1997b: 18). When they cannot capture and kill local rebels, militiamen often kill their families. For instance, prior to the massacre in Benthala, local militiamen attacked the family of a local insurgent leader, bombing their house (Tuquoi 1997).

Whereas in the past it was enough to kill, say, one man in order to signal a threat, it is now necessary to kill an entire family. Amnesty International confirms that the targeting of women by guerrillas has increased since the beginning of the conflict and that the pattern of large-scale massacres has developed against a background of years of escalating violence (AI 1997b: 9; 15). What is more, the formation of militias 'makes the civilian population a target of armed opposition groups, who take revenge against the militias by targeting the local inhabitants' (AI 1997b: 17–18). Overall, the available evidence very strongly suggests that the creation of local militias is intimately associated with the escalation of violence—given the constraint of incomplete control.

4.8 Brutality

The escalation of violence does not only affect the number of victims, but also the way in which they are killed. The expected utility of a sanction is determined by both its likelihood and its intensity. Because their access to army-held villages and towns (and hence their ability to inflict punishment) is declining, insurgents will seek compensation through brutality: they will want to signal that although death at their hands might be less certain than death at the hands of the army, it will definitively be more brutal: more painful (through the use of knifes and axes), more comprehensive (including entire families), transgressive of taboos (mutilation of dead bodies), etc. A woman from the Mitidja Haï Bounab hamlet recounts (Gacemi 1998: 95): for Islamists 'the worst crime is apostasy. It deserves the strongest punishment. Compared to it, the punishment meted to the taghout [tyrant, i.e. opponents] is sweet.' According to Amnesty International, these 'atrocities have created an atmosphere of terror, where people fear not just being killed, but being killed in particularly brutal ways' (AI 1996: 2). The killing of so many children and women (AI 1997a) can be explained by two complementary facts: first, it signals brutality;[26] second, it is a result of demography. Algeria has a very high birthrate: only 30% of the population is over age 30. Hence targeting entire families means killing many children.[27]

5. Accounting for the Incumbents

The biggest puzzle of the Algerian case is the behavior of the military. The non-intervention of the army while massacres have been going on is puzzling because it appears to be self-defeating. The army will gener-

ate defections only if it is willing to guarantee the security of defectors; otherwise potential defectors won't defect, which is precisely the rebels' goal in undertaking the massacres. Yet, not only did the Algerian army fail to protect a number of defectors in the Mitidja but it seems to have done so purposefully. How can such behavior be explained?

Officially, Algerian authorities have argued that security forces have not been unwilling, but rather unable to intervene; they have been prevented by fear of ambush and by the guerrillas' mining of the terrain around the villages. It is true that the military have proved extremely inefficient in the past, unable to control effectively the country's territory, including areas very close to Algiers, which were under the effective control of the guerrillas for about three years.[28] It is also true that the gendarmes and draftees who man the outpost garrisons in the Mitidja were probably as scared about their lives as the local population. However, inefficiency seems to be, overall, an unconvincing explanation for the behavior of the army, as evidenced among others by the fact that many villagers managed to flee during the massacres, while ambulances arrived from outside without stepping on any mines (AI 1997b: 6).

Moreover, the army appears to have refused to arm a substantial amount of former Islamist sympathizers in Mitidja towns, such as Raïs and Benthala, who approached the authorities and asked for weapons to protect themselves from possible guerrilla raids (Tuquoi 1997; Zerrouky 1997b).[29] Aubenas (1998) reports that in one village only one-third of the applicants received weapons. 'When you gave food to the terrorists', they were told 'when you lodged them, you did not come to us. Now find a way out' (Aubenas 1997). It appears that the motivation behind this refusal was the authorities' lack of trust *vis-à-vis* these former guerrilla supporters. Indeed, in some instances weapons intended for militia use found their way to the guerrillas (Tuquoi 1997). In other words, many defectors face a commitment problem. Rejected by both camps and unarmed, they became the easiest prey.[30]

Interestingly, a substantial amount of villagers, both in Raïs and Benthala, opted against demanding weapons from the authorities (Zerrouky 1997d). This was probably seen as a move of appeasement since asking for weapons was akin to provoking the guerrillas into reprisals. In a Mitidja village, a youth told Aubenas (1998) that a guerrilla warned him: 'if you take weapons from the government, the first bullet will be for you'. This is further confirmed by Le Guilledoux (1997) who reports that it 'is enough for the killers to learn that the residents [of a village] ask for weapons to protect themselves, a sign that they trust them no more, for reprisals to happen'. Village informers let

the rebels know about these moves. As a group of young men from Raïs told Taveau in November 1997: 'There was no trust. We knew that some people here worked for them [the rebels]. They were talking to the terrorists, giving them information. We knew that. . . . For example, look. If they learn that this guy is a patriot [a militiaman], the next morning we find him dead' (Taveau 1998).[31] Not asking for weapons, however, is not always a guarantee of appeasement.

If this is the price to pay, why defect in the first place? This is a complex situation where uncertainty is high and information incomplete. There are two possible scenarios: (a) defectors were either uncertain about their ability to obtain protection or certain that they would not be protected by incumbents; in both cases they defected because not doing so was riskier. Defectors were probably right on average: after all, the rebels only attacked a limited number of villages.[32] (b) defectors were tricked into thinking that they would be protected; however, once they defected, they were abandoned. But, why would the army be willing destroy its reputation by cheating? I suggest some possible reasons below. While it is possible to advance a reason for the incumbents' refusal to give weapons to defectors (they did not trust them), it is less easy to explain their failure to intervene in order to protect them during the massacres. A possible explanation for incumbent behavior is that they shifted their time horizon and decided to make long-term choices in the context of which it made sense to be selective about defections: sacrifice some defectors (who were suspect people anyway) in favor of maximizing the commitment of sections of the population that could genuinely be trusted. In other words, the army decided to allow local and individual dynamics to take precedence over its concern about generating any kind of defection. Indeed, it is possible to imagine that local militiamen, many of whom (or their families) had suffered in rebel hands in the past, vetoed the idea of extending protection to the former associates of their victimizers. Statements made after the massacres point to a deep hostility toward defectors because of their past behavior: 'members of the security forces and militias are reported to have said to local inhabitants and journalists that the victims of some of the massacres had met the fate they deserved because they had supported the "terrorists", and thus deserved no protection' (AI 1997b: 8). Likewise, a gendarme explained the security forces' attitude to Tuquoi (1997) by saying about the Benthala victims that 'before they supported the terrorists'.

Maximizing commitment among supporters over generating defections among non-supporters is a sensible option only under the perception that the war is being won. In a different formulation, for the army to afford

to cheat on some defectors and deny them protection, it must believe that this is the conflict's final round.[33] The evolution of the war in 1998 (and so far in 1999) suggests strongly that this is the case.[34] Seen from this perspective, the rebels were fighting a rear-guard war to deter defection at the local level, while the government had already set its sight at the forthcoming postwar period on a state-wide level.[35] This also reflects the gap between the decentralized nature of the Islamist guerrilla movement and the state-wide organization and goals of the army; if true, this would mean that the very strategy that makes possible the short-term survival of rebels in the Mitidja undermines them in the rest of the country (and vice versa). The consolidation of incumbent rule in the Mitidja during 1998, coupled with the end of massacres in the area lends support to this view.

Finally, defectors could be victims of uncertainty and incomplete information.[36] They are locally informed and ignore the overall balance of power and the wider strategic designs into which their villages are embedded; once they realize that they have fallen between the seams they cannot backtrack.[37] They could also be victims of their past choices and their present desperation: realizing that the rebels (whom they had supported in the past) are losing, they rush to switch sides and save themselves, but some get killed while on their way. At this point many will abandon their homes and flee to the cities—whatever the cost (Baki and Baila 1998). The feeling of helplessness generated by this situation is often reflected in the statements of these people to journalists: 'We now know that we are alone in the world' (Aubenas 1998); 'our lives are in the hands of God' (Sibony 1998). Such statements, easily interpreted as generic instances of Middle-Eastern fatalism, may in fact be expressions of the particular situation described above.

Unfortunately, no empirical data about the exact defector motivations and expectations are available. This is true about most civil wars. As Gurr (1988) has pointed out, the 'state of the art' of empirical studies on political violence is characterized by a disturbing lack of good empirically grounded research. These data should be based on careful ethnographic research reconstructing the sequence of events at the micro-level and uncovering the role of perceptions, expectations, and beliefs, mechanisms of trust and norms of reciprocity and individual processes of risk calculation.

6. Comparative Considerations

The extreme brutality of the massacres in Algeria has led to a perception that they somehow are unique to Algeria or specific of Islamic funda-

mentalism. The French press, for example, has described these massacres using terms such as '*barbarie paroxystique*', '*barbarie rarement égalée dans l'Histoire*', '*barbarie aussi exceptionnelle qu'inexplicable*', or '*une horreur sans précédent*'.[38] However, when placed in comparative perspective, these massacres cease to appear exceptional. In fact, they are a staple of most civil wars, practised both by incumbents and insurgents, irrespective of their ideology—even though they do not always receive the media coverage given to the Algerian massacres.[39] The following excerpt, taken from a telegram sent by the British Embassy in Athens to the Foreign Office in London on 14 March 1947 (Public Records Office, file FO 371/67075), describes an attack by the Communist 'Democratic Army' against a village of central Macedonia, on 26 September, 1946—just one among many similar (and unrecorded in historical studies of the Greek civil war) massacres which took place during the six years of the Greek civil war (1943–1949):

> Raids on villages . . . have usually been accompanied by acts of extreme brutality. Houses have been burnt and in some cases villagers have been burnt alive. . . . [In one case] 500 bandits after overcoming the gendarmerie garrison of 64, occupied the village and executed 24 inhabitants of whom four were men, five women and 15 children between three and nine years of age. Executions were carried out with guns; knives and axes. One pregnant woman was disemboweled and afterwards her eight children and their father were killed. 45 houses were set on fire.

A comprehensive analysis of civil war violence should be comparative and include both cases of incumbent and insurgent violence and nonviolence. The main problem such a project will have to address is the lack of reliable and comprehensive data. The dearth of data is even more pronounced with regard to insurgent violence. For example, massacres committed by insurgents (particularly in the context of right/left conflicts) tend to be under-reported both because they are perpetrated in areas which are difficult to access and because data collection is often carried by researchers who sympathize with the rebels and tend to minimize or overlook their violence (Stoll 1993: 18). Moreover, because of the overarching focus on violence, the non-occurrence of violence tends to be both underestimated and non-studied (Fearon and Laitin 1996). A comparative study of the macro-variation of violence, which is obviously beyond the scope of this paper, should include an analysis of macro-factors such as the social and political context of the conflict, the decision-making processes of competing organizations, and the links between regional micro-decisions and wider strategic aims. The argument presented in this paper carries a number of implications for macro-comparative research. For instance, mass insurgent violence will be

more likely in countries and areas with small landed property, where an important available benefit (land to distribute) is absent (in other words, *ceteris paribus*, unequal distribution of land should be associated with lower rates of insurgent violence); conversely, it will be less likely where insurgents are dependent on external aid (hence defection will be less costly).[40] These variables are usually not found in isolation; this is why the study of individual cases requires careful research; still, individual complexities are harder to make sense without a clear understanding of the underlying logic of defection.

Here I only provide evidence from insurgent massacres in three very different civil wars, which appears compatible with my thesis. During the 1980s a guerrilla movement called *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) carried several massacres of villagers in Peru. For example, in 1983, the rebels massacred 80 peasants in the village of Lucanamarca, located in the Ayacucho area, in the Andes; in July 1986 they slit the throats of 18 villagers, including a 4-year-old girl and an 82-year-old woman, in the village of Cochas, while in September 1993 they committed a similar massacre in the village of Matucana Alta. Likewise, it is estimated that Viet Cong terror in a decade and a half of civil war in Vietnam caused close to 50 000 deaths (Wickham-Crowley 1990: 215). Recently the rebels in Sierra Leone launched a terror campaign against several villages. For example, in April 1998, they attacked the village of Kondembaia, gathered the villagers under a large tree and proceeded to kill and mutilate them (Rupert 1988). Contrary to Algeria, no one has questioned the identity of the attackers in these cases.

Recent research on the civil war in Peru, provides clues pointing to a dynamic that parallels Algeria's.[41] In the early 1980s, the Shining Path launched an insurrection which generated considerable support among the impoverished Andean peasants. This support was reinforced by selective killing of (alleged) government informers, as well as the retreat of the army and its reliance on indiscriminate terror: the army offensive of 1983 and 1984 displayed the most brutal side of the military. After several failed attempts, the army began to create a militia. Initially, few weapons were handed out to peasants as the military was distrustful of them; gradually it handed out more: in 1991 it handed out 10 000 shotguns. Eventually over 3500 villages organized local militias, officially known as *Comités de Defensa Civil* but widely called *rondas campesinas*. Selective killing began to predominate over wholesale slaughter, as civilian deaths at the hands of the military declined by more than two-thirds after 1983–1984. By 1993 almost every village in south-central Andes had formed a militia.

Militias were based on a mix of coercion (threats and forced resettlement) and benefits. In addition, many peasants realized that the military was not about to 'collapse before the glorious advances of the people's war', as the insurgents had promised them back in 1982. These militias were criticized by human rights organizations for introducing an escalation in the conflict: in 1990, for instance, militiamen from the village of Comas stoned 13 suspected guerrillas, sliced off their heads, and took them in a blood-soaked burlap sack to army headquarters. Overall, however, the consolidation of military rule and the subsequent realization of the price of opposition to the government, led most peasants to cooperate exclusively with the incumbents; gradually, the rondas took on a self-reinforcing logic. Defections were massive: several current commanders and civil defense committee presidents are former Shining Path collaborators.

As a response to these defections, the insurgents targeted for attacks villages where militias were being formed. The massacre of Lucanamarca was precisely such an instance. It was justified by Shining Path's leader A. Guzmán in the following terms: 'Confronted with the use of armed bands and reactionary military action, we responded decisively with one action: Lucanamarca. Neither they nor we will forget it, of course, because there they saw a response that had not been imagined. There more than 80 were annihilated . . . I reiterate, the principal thing was to make them understand that we were a hard bone to chew, and that we were ready to do anything, anything' (quoted in Degregori 1998: 143). The attack against Cochas took place amid shouts of 'Death to Wretches [collaborators of the rondas]'. How to deal with the militias was reportedly the main issue at the December 1991 Lima meeting of the Shining Path's Central Committee. Eventually, the insurgents lost the war; their ability to operate in the Andean countryside was vastly reduced and they were almost entirely expelled from some areas. Defections to the militias snowballed with startling speed in 1991 and 1992. Although they were still able to mount attacks against militiamen and villages, the rebels were ultimately defeated by the combined action of the army and the militias. By 'defragmenting' the monopoly of violence, the expansion of the militias in 1990 and 1991 led to a 30% decline in recorded casualties and deaths in the departments of Andahulayas, Apurímac, Ayacucho and Junín. The assertion by human rights organizations that 'the patrols have contributed to the escalation of violence' could no longer be sustained (Starn 1998: 245).

In Vietnam, the Viet Cong switched from selective killings of local opponents (such as village officials) to mass violence when the

American intervention in the conflict led to a counter-attack against the mainly insurgent-controlled countryside. First, in the mid-1960s the Viet Cong attacked and overran village outposts housing local militiamen, typically killing them together with their families. As the American-led campaign of inducing defections (based on an escalation of terror coupled with an amnesty program) picked up steam in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Viet Cong attacked entire hamlets and massacred their inhabitants. For example, only in July and August 1968 and only in two regions, the insurgents conducted 45 raids against (forcibly) relocated villagers (Moyar 1997: 261). An American district senior advisor in Phong Dinh province described arriving in a village which had been attacked the night before: 'A hand here, a leg there. Mothers shot up. It was like a massacre. They killed everyone in the hamlet, except the few who escaped. They did it because there was an outpost there' (quoted in Moyar 1997: 307). Finally, in Sierra Leone a prominent rebel commander, Sam Bockarie, told the editor of a local independent newspaper: 'you didn't want us—now you'll have to pay'. The rebels who attacked the village of Kondembaia told the villagers: 'since you want a civilian government, we're going to cut off your hands or kill you' (Rupert 1988). According to a recent report released by the United Nations Human Rights Mission (*The New York Times* 12 February 1999) the rebel terror campaign took place in the context of escalating violence perpetrated by the incumbents and (the mainly Nigerian) peacekeeping forces.

Note that the logic of defection described above applies to both ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts. From the wars of decolonization in Africa to the Kurdish insurgency in eastern Turkey, insurgents have consistently targeted their co-ethnics who collaborate (or are seen as likely to do so) with the enemy, either individually or in the context of militia-building programs.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to shed light on the micro-mechanisms of a particularly perplexing phenomenon: the massacres of civilians committed by the rebels in the Algerian civil war. I argue that instances of extreme violence against civilians in the context of civil wars are not wanton and senseless acts: they have a rational basis. I sketch a theoretical framework, derive some hypotheses, and provide evidence supporting their plausibility. Although the theoretical framework is

preliminary and the evidence fragmentary, the case for studying civil war violence in a way that is theoretically and empirically informed (as opposed to relegating it to the realm of the dark forces of the human psyche) is well supported.

The key to any successful analysis lies in the development of a research program on civil war violence which will combine analytical work on micro-mechanisms (Laitin 1995), fine-grained micro-level data and ethnographic observation, and a comparative approach. This program will generate theoretically informed hypotheses about both the macro- and the micro-levels which will then be tested systematically. The present absence of such research is felt by the most perceptive historians and journalists who often ask questions about empirical variation. For instance, Tuquoi (1997) asks: 'Why attack these small towns, Sidi Moussa, Raïs, Benthala, rather than neighboring villages? And why specific neighborhoods of these small towns?' In his anthropological account of ethnic violence in Cyprus, Loizos (1988: 650) emphasizes: 'We need to understand not only a personal predisposition to violence, but we must ask about time, place and choice of victims'. Likewise, Klinkhammer, a historian of the German occupation of Italy, points out (1997: 29):

> Up to now there is a lack of answers to questions such as: 'Why this place and not another one?'; 'Why this region and not the next one?'; 'Why were the people killed in this particular way?'; 'Why did it happen this particular day?' . . . We must be able to find an answer to this question: why did massacres take place in some cases but not in others even though circumstances were similar? Why such a concentration of massacres in the region of Arrezo but not in the neighboring region of Sienna?

Anthropologists, who are in the best position to study conflicts from a micro-perspective, have generally shunned issues of warfare—civil or otherwise (Otterbein 1994: 163). One reason is that it is extremely difficult to conduct such research even long after a civil war has ended: the depth of the wounds can be an effective deterrent. Still, research is possible, even in time of war, as shown by the work of a few anthropologists, such as Geffray (1990) in Mozambique, Stoll (1993) in Guatemala, Degregori (1998) and Starn (1998) in Peru. Unfortunately, anthropologists tend not to be systematic and comprehensive in their research (they typically study only one village—often the most violent one), and often fail to collect crucial data because they are unaware that such data can be extremely useful in a non-anthropological theoretical context (for example, they fail to provide information on the rate of success of incumbent military operations). Hopefully, by suggesting that an ana-

lytic approach can unravel a series of issues typically barred from the realm of rationality and by suggesting ways in which theory can be fruitfully combined with systematic empirical research, this paper may encourage the kind of empirical research that is necessary in understanding the violence of civil wars.

NOTES

1. In her review of the relevant literature, McClurg Mueller (1992: 18) notes that new approaches to social movements pay little attention to political violence; the relationship among levels of violence and conflict, types of grievances and the key variables of resource mobilization, she claims, remain underdeveloped. Della Porta (1995) is a notable exception.

2. While organizational decisions about massacres are compatible with a variety of individual motivations, individual motivations *alone* are unlikely to result in numerous large-scale massacres over a long period of time [see Tambiah (1996) for a similar point about riots].

3. I do not deal here with other kinds of violence, such as various forms of harassment, arbitrary and secret detention, unfair trial, torture and ill treatment, rape, hostage-taking and death threats.

4. This category includes most cases of state abuse, such as individual arrests, internment and torture and eventually execution.

5. The massacres of civilians in Algeria appear to have cost the lives of no more than 3000 people up to now—although no reliable estimates exist.

6. Some massacres have taken different forms, such as attacks against buses or killings at roadblocks. The army has been accused of massacres of deserters (Martinez 1995: 52). Attacks against villages and small towns have been the predominant type.

7. The term 'winning' is used in a relative sense. The goal of insurgent movements is often to establish control over a certain area in order to force the government into negotiations. Likewise, the term 'support' is equivalent here to 'compliance'.

8. Defection ranges from providing supplies and information to joining and being armed by the opponent.

9. The military form the core of the elite that governs Algeria.

10. See *Libération* 23 October 1997 and *Observer* 9 February 1998.

11. 'Extrajudicial executions have since [1993] become widespread and appear to be often used as an alternative to arresting and prosecuting people known or suspected of being members of, or linked to, armed opposition groups' (AI 1997b: 11).

12. This man showed Taveau his house: all apartments but one had been burned by the bombs. The one apartment which was not burned had been empty. The man argued that this was additional proof that the attackers did not kill at random: they did not want to waste their scarce ammunition on an apartment they knew to be vacant.

13. This evidence is supported in part by the Amnesty International report, which also includes testimonies stating that guerrillas used lists with names (AI 1997b: 7). According to *one* testimony: 'The terrorists had lists of people to kill, but they also killed at random'. This is the only testimony I could locate that refers to random killings as well.

14. A secondary motivation for the attacks (but not the killings) is looting; this is often necessary for the survival for the guerrillas (Leclère 1998).

15. Young men who live in contested areas and are drafted into the army had a choice between two options only: join the army or the guerrillas. Many joined the guerrillas (Labat et al. 1995: 149). Another motivation for joining was the death of a relative at the hands of the army (Martinez 1995: 45).

16. During this period the biggest part of insurgent violence was directed against the cities, both with targeted murders of journalists, intellectuals, etc. and bombings.

17. According to Véronique Taveau who was reporting from the Mitidja in November 1997, military operations were still going on in the area with the army trying to eliminate the guerrillas. At the same time a mopping up operation was going on in the forest of Baïnem located in the hills overlooking Algiers. In spite of its proximity to Algiers, this forest had been a guerrilla haven since 1995 (*L'Humanité* 10 November 1997).

18. Two clarifications: complete failure refers to a quick defeat in which no defections are induced; protracted intermediate situations generate iterations of terror and counterror ultimately leading to full-fledged civilian exit and the creation of depopulated 'dead zones' and 'no man's land'.

19. However, a great number of families are internally divided between supporters of the Islamists and the government (Labat et al. 1995: 149)

20. A different way to be neutral is to simultaneously support both camps. Some families have sent sons in both camps to minimize the likelihood of reprisals (Martinez 1995: 53). Obviously, this is a very risky (and hence not widespread) strategy.

21. The word *taghout* is used by the Islamists to refer to the regime; it is a term that means devil or tyrant.

22. According to a villager, 'some patriots commit massacres and looting. At this moment, in the region it is possible to kill for a cow' (Le Guilledoux 1997).

23. Likewise, during the war of Algerian independence, the French recruited a large number of local auxiliaries, generically known as *Harkis*. Their motivation seems to have often been the desire of revenge against acts committed by the FLN guerrillas (Hamoumou 1993).

24. Often, political actors can control this dynamic with considerable difficulty. For example, the Algerian parliament voted in February 1995 a clemency law (*Qanun al-rahma*) which provided for charges to be dropped or for reduced penalties for people involved in 'terrorist' activities who gave themselves up and repented. The logic behind such a law is to make possible for rebels to desert. However, militiamen trump this law by killing the guerrillas they catch: when asked if they handed over to the security forces people whom they caught, 'militiamen stated that they took no prisoners. If they handed "terrorists" over to the security forces, they said, they might be released under the terms of the clemency law and "terrorists" do not deserve to live' (AI 1997b: 17). Hence the formation of the militias favors escalation even if this is not be part of the incumbents' goals. Generally, both incumbents and insurgents prefer to kill few rather than many people in order to achieve compliance.

25. Fergane was arrested on 11 April 1998 after he ordered the kidnapping of a man associated with the regime. Abed remains at large (*Le Monde* 16 April 1998).

26. It is also easier to kill unprotected families. According to Amnesty International, 'the justification for targeting women, children, and the elderly seems to be that they are easier targets and provide a means of putting pressure on relatives who are members of the security forces' (AI 1997b: 14).

27. Indeed, a closer look at the news reports suggests that families tend to be the primary target of the massacres. In an attack against Laarba (18 July 1997), Samir Moussa, 14 years old, was reported to be the only survivor of the 12-member Moussa family. In the village of Si Zoubir, 24 members of the Zenagui were killed on 25 July 1997. A family of six, was killed in the commune of Medghoussa and a family of nine killed in Benamor, between Laarba and Sidi Moussa in August 1997. The 19 people massacred in Bologhine, in August 1997, included a family of 10; likewise, the 39 people killed in Yemmaa M'ghita included 15 members of the same family. Abdelkader Zeraoula lost 17 members of his family in the massacre of Oued El-Had in August 1997 (Charef 1998). In Raïs, a man named Ali Aliche lost 13 members of his family: his wife, two sons (including a 4-year-old), his father, a brother, a sister, nieces and nephews (Ganley 1997). In Sidi-Youssef (5 September 1997), the Bouzidi family was entirely exterminated and only one person survived from another family. In Chebil the 52 victims of the massacre that took place at the end of September 1997, turn out to all be members of one extended family. This family had left Chebil earlier this year to escape from threats, but had moved back 2 days before the massacre. In Draa T'mar, attackers killed 13 members of the same family, while in Souagui, nine members of the same family were also killed (October 1997). The 11 people killed in Haouch Bouhalouene, on the 7 March 1998, were members of two families, as were the 27 people killed in Arzew (close to Oran) on 6 April 1998, while the 52 people (including 27 children younger than 16) massacred in December 1998 in Tadjena belonged to seven families.

28. The army has been able to establish efficient protection of the oil-production areas in the south of the country; they have managed as well to reduce violence during important events such as the presidential elections of November 1995 and the legislative elections of June 1997. These facts indicate that the Algerian authorities have the means to ensure a higher level of protection for the civilian population throughout the country when it is necessary for them to do so (AI 1997b: 9). However, this kind of high-level security can only be maintained for a limited amount of time; and the oil-producing areas are sparsely populated making effective control by the army easier.

29. There is considerable confusion about how the distribution of weapons to civilians is organized. In some places the authorities refuse to satisfy the demand of civilians. In other places, however, they threaten and force civilians to accept weapons and join the local militias. According to Amnesty International (AI 1997b: 8), 'people who had in the past refused to take up arms and set militia groups' have been targeted for killing by the military and the local militias'. The variation might be related to the location of the rebels: where they are close, I suspect that authorities would not want to risk distributing weapons that might reach them; where they are further away they feel safe enough to pressure people into joining the militias.

30. Weapons are not always a full guarantee of security. In some cases, like in Sidi Hammed (12 January 1998), the locals were armed and put up a resistance but lost to the attackers. However, as a former FIS supporter, who decided to accept a weapon from the authorities in the face of the widespread massacres in the Mitidja, told Aubenas (1998): 'When the gendarme gave me this shotgun, I took it because it offered myself and my wife the only chance to die with dignity'.

31. Following the massacres, some rebel informers left with the guerrillas and some were caught. When possible, rebel relatives fled their village after the massacres (Gacemi 1998: 185). When asked what happened to these informers, villagers replied: 'We caught them all and delivered them to the authorities after the massacre. We knew them. From the very beginning' (Taveau 1988). It is rather unlikely that if caught they were delivered to the authorities. In Benthala there was a report of the lynching of suspected guerrilla informers the day following the massacre (Zerrouky 1997c).

32. It would be necessary to calculate the proportion of defectors who were killed by the rebels across the Mitidja. I believe that this percentage is quite low.

33. Moreover, since information about massacres is kept to a strict minimum across the country (i.e. Algerians living outside the Mitidja only learn about indiscriminate killings by Islamists there), it is possible to discern an additional benefit for the incumbents: the reinforcement of the incentive to join militias outside the Mitidja (or alternatively to exit and leave the area). As general Kamel Abderrahmane declared in the wake of some of the worst massacres: 'People must either arm or take refuge in the towns. The state does not have the means to put a soldier outside every front door' (*Libération* 5 January 1998). A similar concern is echoed in Bonaparte's instructions to General Brune, commander of the French army of the West, who was getting ready to fight against the monarchist guerrillas: 'It is only by making war terrible that the inhabitants themselves will rally against the brigands and will finally feel that their apathy is fatal to them' (quoted in Dupuy 1997:158—brigands was the term used to describe rebels).

34. The rebels were chased from the Mitidja and appear to have suffered numerous defeats; two prominent guerrilla leaders were killed: Mohamed Kebaïli in June 1998 and Athmane Khelifi in July 1998.

35. Given the future cost of violence, it is rational for rebels to perpetrate massacres when they expect that this wave of terror will significantly affect the conflict. This includes both increasing gains and cutting losses; incumbent attacks cause huge losses to the rebel organizational infrastructure.

36. As early in the war as 1994, Martinez (1995: 47) points out, 'the complexity of the strategies of different protagonists confused the local population and increased the feeling of insecurity'.

37. Not all of them. There is always some possibility to 're-defect' back to the Islamists although the cost is high. This might be the case of villagers who guide guerrillas during massacres.

38. Bruno Callies de Salies, *Le Monde Diplomatique* October 1997; Laurent Joffrin, *Libération* 23 January 1998; José Garçon, *Libération* 11 August 1997; Alain Finkielkraut, *Libération* 21 January 1998.

39. An exception is Luis Martinez, an Algerian politics expert, who has been calling for the study of the Algerian civil war in a comparative perspective (1996–7: 40).

40. The Algerian case is compatible with both implications.

41. This account is based on Starn (1998).

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