

# On the Spaces of Guerre Moderne: The French Army in Northern Algeria (1954–1962)

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## Introduction

On the night of Friday, 13 November 2015, as the Paris attacks were still unfolding, François Hollande, President of the Fifth Republic stood before national television and declared the closing of the country's borders and a nationwide *état d'urgence* (state of emergency). The French media compared these attacks with the calamities of World War II, thus disregarding and undermining the Paris Massacre of 17 October 1961, during *La Guerre d'Algérie* (the Algerian War, 1954–1962), which killed hundreds of peaceful Algerian pro-independence protesters who had gathered in Paris. The Paris police forces were then under the authority of Maurice Papon, a French civil servant who had served twice in Algeria under French colonial rule, and who was convicted of crimes against humanity in 1998 for his participation in the deportation of Jews in Bordeaux to concentration camps during World War II.<sup>1</sup>

The French newspaper *Libération* of Saturday and Sunday, 14–15 November, wrote that the exceptional law of the state of emergency was rooted in the *Evènements d'Algérie* (Algeria's events), as it had been decreed for the first time on 3 April 1955, five months after the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution on 1 November 1954. The expression *Evènements d'Algérie*, as well as *Opérations de maintien de l'ordre* (the enforcement of law and order), were employed by the French authorities during and after the war to designate the Algerian War. It was not until 18 October 1999, under the presidency of Jacques Chirac, that the

French National Assembly formally recognised the term *war* by law and authorised the use of the appellation *La Guerre d'Algérie* in French schools and in official terminology.<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, sixty years after the institution of the state of emergency, the same extraordinary law is enforced, but it took the French president a few hours to call the Paris attacks 'an act of war', and a few days after that to proclaim that 'France is at war'. Hollande and his government, however, had no intention of recalling the peculiar character of warfare that France waged (and is still waging), a war that Colonel Roger Trinquier, a French army officer and theorist who served in Algeria, termed *la guerre moderne* (modern warfare).

The aim of this article is to trace the genealogy of the practices and theories of French modern warfare, its *modus operandi*, and its exportation to other parts of the world. The paper does not pretend to scrutinise the spatial organisation and built forms that resulted from this type of warfare, but rather to uncover the psychology and bureaucracy of militarily designed and controlled spaces.

## Pacification is not peacemaking

On 3 April 1955, the French National Assembly and the Council of the French Republic approved law no. 55–385 on the state of emergency. Although the bill was modelled on the *état de siège* (state of siege) – that is, a state of war – the state of emergency was not legally deemed a state of war in the

eyes of the French authorities, because Algeria was considered a French territory; ironically, a state of war thus would have meant a civil war.<sup>3</sup> The law gave exceptional powers to the then minister of the interior, François Mitterrand; to the French Prefects; and, in Algeria (under French colonial rule), to the then governor general of the French government in Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, a French ethnologist and former intelligence / anti-Vichy propaganda agent.

The exceptional law of the undeclared war empowered the French authorities to confiscate legally owned weapons; control the press and censor publications, radio broadcasts, cinematographic screenings, and theatre performances; close gathering places; pronounce house confinements without judiciary oversight; forbid the circulation of vehicles, people, and gatherings in given areas and times; institute zones of protection or security where the 'sojourning' of people was regulated; and forbid the sojourning of any person who sought to hinder public authorities' actions in any way.<sup>4</sup> Given the (at the time) recent precedents of the Vichy regime and World War II, the law forbade the establishment of camps, stating that 'under no circumstances [... may] the home arrest [...] result in the creation of camps in which the persons referred to in the precedent paragraph would be under detention'.<sup>5</sup>

In the Aurès Mountains, one of the most revolution-affected regions in north-eastern Algeria, the state of emergency was immediately enforced on 6 April 1955. Six days later, the military cabinet of the governor general in Algeria circulated a memo bearing the title *La pacification de l'Aurès* (Aurès Pacification). It claimed that 'the recovery of the situation in the areas where the state of emergency is enforced will be achieved by means of the policy of pacification'.<sup>6</sup> *Pacification* in this sense consisted of systematic practices of profoundly dissimilar, yet interconnected, character that included the organisation of an extensive network of administrators

and military officers; the application of significantly in-depth political and administrative actions; and the destruction, the capture, or the prevention of so-called rebels from threatening law and order. The military directive articulated the peculiar characteristics of *pacification* by means of three operations, which involved:

1. *Action humaine*: human action performed upon civilian populations, by becoming acquainted with them, supervising them, gaining their confidence, and obtaining their profound and unconditional support;
2. *Action constructive*: constructive action that may comprise the construction of new connecting roads and infrastructures, the building of new administrative centres and military posts, and the improvement of living conditions in the Aurès; and
3. *Actions de protection*: action of protection that were meant to create a permanent environment of insecurity for the rebels by (a) intelligence, human contact, and ambushes; (b) the presence and action of military forces, and police controls based on intelligence and political actions; (c) the progressive arming of the population in order to manage its own self-defence; (d) the *éloignement* (distancing) of 'suspects'; and finally (e) conventional armed fighting against the rebels.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the term *rebels* alluded to Algerian revolutionaries, the fighters for the liberation of a colonised population and territory, the word *suspects* entailed (as deliberately defined in the military directive) those 'who provide any personal, volunteer and effective assistances to the rebels'.<sup>8</sup> To this end, if any person – a family member, neighbour, friend, colleague, or anyone else – dared to feed, treat, dress, lodge, hide, or perhaps even speak to a revolutionary, he or she would systematically be considered a potential suspect and would immediately be 'distanced' from the general population.

The same guidelines stated that during the process of the *éloignement* of suspects, 'no collective sanctions of deportation character [will be] accepted. Construction sites [are] to be specified as soon as possible.'<sup>9</sup> Because there were no written instructions that dictated how to distinguish 'suspects' from 'non-suspects,' however, the entire Algerian population thus became potentially suspect: enemies who should be converted into non-suspects, or, if possible, friends.

Despite the use of the epithet *pacification* by the French military and civil authorities in the nineteenth century (in the contexts of the colonial wars and the colonisation of Africa and south-eastern Asia), the policies, processes, methods, and technologies of *pacification* had been considerably upgraded to meet the conditions of the twentieth century: specifically, since the end of World War II and the beginning of the long Cold War. In his 1961 book *La Guerre Moderne*, Roger Trinquier – who had served in World War II, the Indochina War (1946–1954), and the Algerian War – defined modern warfare as 'an interlocking system of actions – political, economic, psychological, military'.<sup>10</sup> Trinquier unreservedly argued that 'the *sine qua non* of victory in *modern warfare* is the unconditional support of a population. According to Mao Tse-tung, it is as essential to the combatant as water to the fish.'<sup>11</sup> To this end, the Algerian War marked a shift from conventional to unconventional warfare; from the clash of two armies in a given battlefield to a much more complex system of operations, in which the target is hardly discernible, and therefore the entire population is at risk.

*Modern warfare* was also frequently referred to as asymmetric, irregular, subversive, psychological, or revolutionary warfare. Its counterpart term, *counter-revolutionary warfare*, was immediately substituted with the term *counterinsurgency operations*, most likely because the term *revolution* entailed a forcible overthrow of an established authority in a country

and its replacement by a different order, whereas insurrection suggested merely a temporary uprising against an authority that will not necessarily result in the conquest of power. While the term *counterinsurgency* thus suggests non-permanent politico-military actions that are designed and executed against the activities of insurgents, this is, as we know, hardly the case.

*Pacification* is not peacemaking. In his *Grammaire Africaine* (African Grammar) in his 1957 book *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes claimed that during the armed conflict in Algeria, the French authorities employed a language whose aim was not to communicate but rather to intimidate. This *écriture cosmétique* (cosmetic writing), as he argued, was ideologically burdened and politically loaded: a mask intended to divert the nature of the war and to cover the real facts with a 'noise' of language. Barthes wrote:

War – the aim is to deny the thing. For there are two ways: either to name it as little as possible (the most common method); or to give it the meanings of its own antonym ([the] more devious method, which is the basis for almost all the mystifications of bourgeois language). *War* is then used in the sense of *peace* and *pacification* in the sense of *war*.<sup>12</sup>

### **The French doctrine of modern warfare**

Among the leading practitioners and theorists of *modern warfare* who gained their practical experience in World War II, Indochina, and then in Algeria (some were also celebrated for the bloody Battle of Algiers) were colonels Marcel Bigeard, David Galula, Charles Lacheroy, and Roger Trinquier; and generals Paul Aussaresses, Jacques Massu, and Raoul Salan, who was then France's most decorated soldier. He also founded (in January 1961) a far-right extremist paramilitary group, the *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS, or Secret Armed Organisation), which violently opposed the independence of Algerians and of Algeria. In 2003,

the year of the invasion of Iraq and the capture of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, by US forces, Marie-Monique Robin, a French journalist, released a film documentary titled *Escadrons de la mort: l'école française* (Death Squads: The French School), in which she told of the export of the French military doctrine imposed by the French army on Algerians (including the systemic use of torture) to North and South America, notably to Argentina, Chile, and the United States.<sup>13</sup> Robin interviewed French officers who were still alive and who were willing to confirm the doctrine they had set up, and their role in disseminating their war strategies and tactics during and after Algeria's independence. To understand the French doctrine of the death squads, it is relevant to analyse some of the discourses and practices that France enforced in Algeria in order to keep Algeria under French colonial rule and to exploit the Algerian Saharan region.

On 2 July 1957, Colonel Lacheroy, then Chief of the Service of Psychological Action and Intelligence at the French Ministry of National Defense, and who later served in the Algerian cities of Constantine and Algiers, delivered a lecture to an audience of two thousand officers at the auditorium of the Sorbonne in Paris entitled *La guerre révolutionnaire et l'arme psychologique* (Revolutionary Warfare and Psychological Weaponry). He drew particular attention to the radically distinct character of this form of warfare, which consisted of *total warfare*. He claimed:

total, because not only [does it mobilise] in this effort all industrial, commercial, [and] agricultural powers of a country, but also it takes and pushes in the effort of war all children, all women, all elderly men, all that thinks, all that lives, all that breathes, with all their forces of love, all their forces of enthusiasm, all their forces of hate, and it throws them into war. This is the new factor. Total war because it takes the souls as well as the bodies and it yields them to the obedience of the effort of war.<sup>14</sup>

In the same line of thought, Colonel Trinquier, who recommended and defended the use of torture, claimed that the population may be forced to support the French anti-independence struggle, highlighting that 'such support may be spontaneous, although that is quite rare and probably a temporary condition. If it doesn't exist, it must be secured by every possible means, the most effective of which is *terrorism*.'<sup>15</sup>

Colonel Galula, meanwhile, noted that 'pacification would be achieved if we could gradually compromise the population in the eyes of the rebels'.<sup>16</sup> Galula is well known to English-speaking military strategists and readers, since he published two manuals in English when he was a research associate at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs between 1962 and 1967: *Pacification in Algeria, 1956–1958* (in 1963) and *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (in 1964).

Colonel Galula's 1964 monograph on the theory and practice of counterrevolutionary warfare influenced the Department of the US Army, even in the writing of its 2006 field manual FM 3–24, entitled *Counterinsurgency*, which was addressed to US soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. As noted in its foreword, the manual was meant to fill a doctrinal gap of twenty years.<sup>17</sup> Colonel Galula's thinking was frequently cited in the manual's second chapter, 'Unity of Effort: Integrating Civilian and Military Activities', notably when he argued that in this type of war, 'the soldier must be then prepared to become [...] a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse, a boy scout. But only for as long as he cannot be replaced, for it is better to entrust civilians' tasks to civilians.'<sup>18</sup> Colonel Galula's claim of the extra-military responsibilities of army officers was informed by the French school of colonial warfare that recognised the so-called social role of army officers. The school was developed by Marshal Thomas Robert Bugeaud in French colonial

Algeria, refined by Marshal Joseph Simon Gallieni in French colonial Indochina, and then disseminated by Marshal Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey in the French Protectorate of Morocco.<sup>19</sup> In his first influential article, *Du rôle social de l'officier dans le service militaire universel* (On the Social Role of the Officer in the Universal Military Service), from 1891, Marshal Lyautey criticised the rigidity and inadequacy of the French military education. He demanded that it provide 'a fruitful conception of the modern role of the officer to become the educator of the entire nation'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he argued that it was necessary to transform the cruel sides of the war into a good opportunity, and thereby to 'display, during the course of the military service, not only the violent and sterile fatigue, but also the broader field of the social action'.<sup>21</sup> Both warfare doctrines employed the term *pacification* in order to imply *war*, both applied the military strategy of winning hearts and minds, and both employed soldiers to serve as 'nation builders as well as warriors':<sup>22</sup> that is, to meet both civil-political and military objectives.

Over the course of the French War in Algeria, such aims coincided with specific territorial and spatial operations. Officers drew new borders, built new infrastructures, forcibly displaced Algerian civilians, and erected new shelters: not to colonise Algeria (because Algeria was already considered a French department), but to oversee and monitor every movement and activity of the colonised populations who were deemed to be potential suspects. Given that 1) the entire population (then about ten million) was affected, that 2) the Algerian territory was enormous (about four times larger than France), and that 3) the rural population was spread over its large countryside, the French authorities forced entire populations to adhere to new maps that dictated a new distribution of the whole rural population and a portion of the urban population. Colonel Galula described the exemplary geographic situations for Algerian liberation fighters, whom he called the 'insurgents', and for the French civil and

military authorities, whom he termed the 'counterinsurgents', as follows:

the ideal situation for the insurgent would be a large landlocked country shaped like a blunt-tipped star, with jungle-covered mountains along the borders and scattered swamps in the plains, in a temperate zone with a large and dispersed rural population and a primitive economy. [Fig. 1] The counterinsurgent would prefer a small island shaped like a pointed star, on which a cluster of evenly spaced towns are separated by desert, in a tropical or arctic climate, with an industrial economy.<sup>23</sup> [Fig. 2]

With the latter figure in mind, the French authorities remodelled the entire Algerian territory, causing a massive forced resettlement of roughly three million people that they named the *regroupement des populations* (regrouping of populations); the subsequent built settlements were termed the *centres de regroupements* (regrouping centres). In reality, however, they looked like camps.

### **Militarily controlled camps**

In an attempt to legitimise the reorganisation of the Algerian territory and the massive resettlement of the Algerian rural populations, the French governors general in Algeria – Soustelle and his successor, the socialist Robert Lacoste – claimed that Algeria was dangerously underadministered, and that its population was too large to maintain the 1848 territorial departmentalisation. According to Lacoste, a new territorial reorganisation ought to face several of the population's most urgent administrative necessities.<sup>24</sup> He drew particular attention to the departments of the Hauts Plateaux (where the Aurès Mountains are located), in which, according to him, minor rural populations occupied overly vast, underdeveloped areas. As a result of a planned enhancement of Algeria, new regions, departments, districts, and municipalities were created between 1955 and 1958, coupled with a strategic choice of new administrative epicentres in order to ensure a

pressing national security regime and to facilitate the regional communication and enforcement of French regulations.<sup>25</sup> At the military level, however, the entire territory was gradually interpenetrated by adjustable infrastructures and hermetic cobwebs of checkpoints, watchtowers, military posts, border fortifications, minefields, and electric fences, all of which enabled continual counterrevolutionary military operations.<sup>26</sup>

The French army progressively allocated particular areas of the Algerian territory to one of the three main military categories: *zones opérationnelles* (zones of operation), *zones de pacification* (pacification zones), and the *zones interdites* (forbidden zones).<sup>27</sup> In the zones of operation, officers were ordered to utilise any means possible to restore security. In the militarily controlled zones of pacification, the army employed the *action psychologique* (psychological action) against civilians, who were forcefully administered, supervised, and indoctrinated, as well as being induced to collaborate with the army.<sup>28</sup> Finally, there were the forbidden zones, which consisted of free-fire zones for both air and ground military forces; these zones needed to be cleared of any living beings, including animals. The prohibited regions were frequently isolated places, and they often comprised vast woodlands and highlands, but they also included inhabited rural areas, from which large masses of civilians were forcefully relocated to ensure safe zones for the French army.

The various territorial categories spawned frequent spatial misunderstandings and border conflicts between the civilian and military authorities. The civilian administrative subdivisions, for their part, consisted of departments, districts, and municipalities, while the systematic military *quadrillage* (gridding) was composed of zones, sectors, subsectors, *quartiers*, and *sub-quartiers*, which were intended to be combined with one of the operational, pacification, or forbidden military zones. The most unmistakable directive, however, was to

evacuate the forbidden zones, thus forcing civilians to leave their homes, villages, and arable lands. This military operation not only damaged countless Algerian villages and uprooted numerous Algerian peasants, but it also engendered the establishment of thousands of *centres de regroupement*.<sup>29</sup>

The French term *centre de regroupement* poses translation problems, because it involves both a displacement and a concentration of civilians – the extrajudicial detention enabled by the state of emergency – into an enclosed and surveyed space; it also entails precisely that which it is not. For obvious reasons, the words *concentration* and *camp* were circumvented in official military parlance, and, consequently, by the majority of the French media. In 1957, Maurice Papon, at the time the Inspector General of Administration in the Extraordinary [civil-military] Mission in Eastern Algeria and Prefect of the Department of Constantine, rigorously requested the immediate suppression of the term *camp* from all road signs and indications in the Algerian Department under his authority, stating: ‘the term camp will have to disappear from the terminology’.<sup>30</sup>

The term *regroupement*, on the other hand, seems to inhabit a purely military sense, in that it coincides with the meaning of *concentration*. According to one French dictionary, *regroupement* is the action of *regrouping*, which means, ‘1. To group, to unite anew (what was dispersed): *To regroup officers of an army*. 2. To group (dispersed elements), together. à to reassemble: *To regroup the populations*’.<sup>31</sup> *Concentration*, meanwhile, is the action of *concentrating*, which means (according to the same dictionary) ‘to gather in a centre. Military: *The concentration of troops in an area of the territory*. à Grouping, roundup, regrouping. Special: *Camps de Concentration*’.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas the state of emergency empowered the Fourth Republic to acquire a lawful form that allowed for regulating the residence and circulation



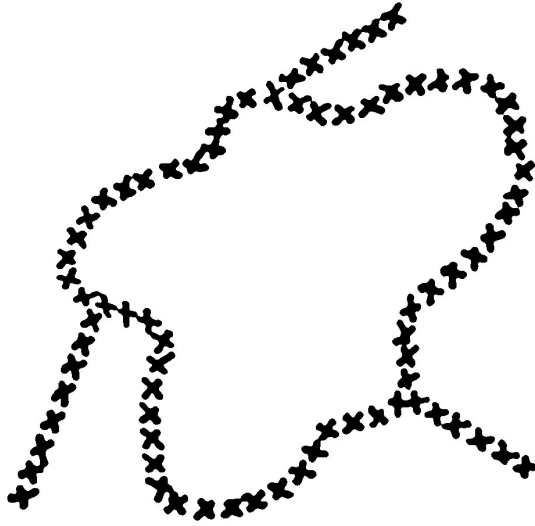


Fig. 1

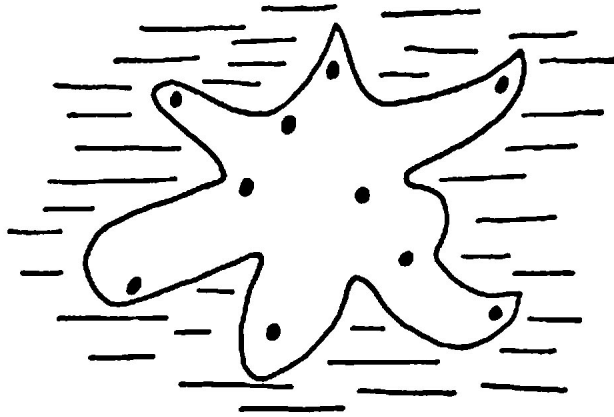


Fig. 2

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Fig. 1: Ideal territory for the insurgent © Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 28.

Fig. 2: Ideal territory for the counterinsurgent © Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 28.

of civilians and controlling their activities, as well as arresting persons at any time and at any place, the creation and construction of camps was unquestionably banned, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, camps were intensively and continuously created. One estimate for 1960 evaluated 2,157,000 forcibly resettled persons; another evaluation (for 1961) considered that at least 2,350,000 persons had been concentrated into camps, and that an additional 1,175,000 persons were compelled to leave their original homes due to constant and violent military operations.<sup>33</sup> That is to say, 3,525,000 persons were compulsorily displaced in Algeria under French colonial rule.<sup>34</sup> Another figure, for 15 February 1962 – just a few weeks before Algeria's independence – reported that 3,740 *camps de regroupement* had been built in French Algeria since the outbreak of the revolution in 1954.<sup>35</sup> Even today, historians – both Algerian and French, civil and military – have yet to agree on the exact numbers of the resettled populations, the devastated villages, and the camps that were built.

Despite the fact that these camps had been created since the outset of the Algerian Revolution, it was not until 1957, under the military command of General Raoul Salan, that official military policies stamped 'secret', 'secret-confidential', or 'top-secret' began to regulate the creation of the forbidden zones, as well as of the forced resettlement of civilians. Notable among these endeavours was the construction and completion of the defensive perimeter called the Morice Line that sealed off Algeria's eastern and western borders with Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco in order to prevent human circulation and material exchanges.<sup>36</sup> The Morice Line provoked a rapid and massive expansion of the camps. Furthermore, the military Challe Plan fortified the Morice Line in 1958 with additional electrified wire, minefields, barriers, and checkpoints. These systematic counterrevolutionary operations intensified the imposed evacuation of civilians from

the forbidden zones, and therefore the number of camps continued to increase throughout the course of the Algerian War of Independence.

The *Inspection Générale des Regroupements de Population* (IGRP, or General Inspection of the Regroupings of the Population), a French military institution that was mandated to inspect the regrouping of the Algerian population that had been accomplished by military officers, argued that 'the creation of the regroupement is the most effective means for subtracting the population from the influence of the rebels'.<sup>37</sup> It went on to claim that 'the policy of the regroupement is one [of] the masterpieces of the manoeuvre of pacification'.<sup>38</sup>

### The architects of the camps

Central to the construction of the *camps de regroupement* were the extraordinary army units called the *Sections Administratives Spécialisées* (SAS, or Specialised Administrative Sections). The SAS were deployed in September 1955 in rural areas in order to assume the powers that were usually offered, as per Decree no. 55-1274, to 'administrators of civil services on the individual decision of the Governor General of Algeria'.<sup>39</sup> The military missions of the SAS officers entailed the gathering of intelligence, the diffusion of propagandistic information, the ensuring of law and order, and the direct control of the civilian population, while their civil functions consisted of providing social, economic, educational, sanitary, and medical facilities, as well as to evacuate the populations and monitor the construction of militarily controlled camps with technical knowledge that was almost nonexistent.

Similar divisions were subsequently implemented in urban areas in order to cope with the alarming numbers of the *bidonvilles* (slums, literally 'can-towns'), in addition to performing most of the aforementioned civil-military responsibilities; these were then named the *Sections Administratives*



*Urbaines* (SAUs, or urban administrative sections). By the end of 1961, twenty SAUs coexisted in urban neighbourhoods inhabited by the Algerian population (including the Casbah of Algiers), and there were more than seven hundred SASs in the vast areas of Algeria's countryside and the immense Sahara.<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to supervise the majority of the population, every SAS extended its various operations over a maximum of ten to fifteen thousand persons, which was thought to correspond to the population of two to three Algerian villages. The chiefs of the SASs were expected to be able to speak the local language of the geographic areas in which they were appointed (either Arabic or one of the Berber languages), or were quickly trained to speak the language if they did not. In most of the SASs, the team members included one to three subofficers, a secretary, an interpreter, a radio operator, often an auxiliary medical officer, and one or two nurses. Each SAS possessed its own security forces, called *Makhzen*, which comprised from thirty to fifty Algerian men who were in one way or another compelled to serve in the French army.<sup>41</sup> In order to gain an intimate knowledge about Algerians, SAS officers received special training in administrative, legislative, geographic, economic, health, agricultural, religious, traditional, historical, gender, and sociological features of the Algerian Arabic and Berber populations.

In October 2005, fifty years after the establishment of the SAS, the military *Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces* (CDEF, or Doctrine Centre for Forces' Employment) under the French Ministry of Defense released a ponderous study called *Les Sections Administratives Spécialisées en Algérie: Un outil pour la stabilisation* (Specialised Administrative Sections in Algeria: An Instrument for Stabilisation). The military survey was based on a number of interviews with former SAS officers and selected

literature on the SAS. It was intended to divulge French experiences in colonial Algeria during the Algerian War, and in particular to provide a guide for the *stabilisation* of local populations who had been claimed and enforced by French troops who were 'in charge of similar assignments in Bosnia, Afghanistan and soon in Kosovo'.<sup>42</sup> As asserted in these military guidelines, the SAS were the direct heirs of the nineteenth-century *Bureaux Arabes* (Arab Bureaus) in colonial Algeria, of the twentieth-century *Affaires Indigènes* (Indigenous Affairs) in Morocco, and of the greatest French colonial military officers, notably Bugeaud and Lyautey. The manual made no mention of the camps, however, nor of the special roles played by SAS officers in the politico-military policy of mass resettlement of the civilian population. Instead, it dedicated less than a page to the *villages de regroupement*, which it said were part of the socio-economic activities of the SAS within the Plan de Constantine launched by General de Gaulle in October 1958.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to this assessment, French military archival documents demonstrate that SAS officers were responsible not only for evacuating existing villages for military reasons, but also for supervising the construction of the camps.

One such piece of evidence may be found in the various factsheets about the *centres de regroupements* that were drafted in August 1958 by the SAS chiefs of the Department of Bône (today Annaba, Algeria) in response to the telegram of the General Commander of the Zone of Eastern Constantine (ZEC) asking for accurate quantitative data about the camps. The majority of these archival records contained the camps' names, dates of creation, and geographic locations; their populations; the conditions of their shelters; their hygienic circumstances; their medical services; their existing schooling facilities; their means of subsistence; their possibilities of employment of the labour force; their clothing and food requirements, such as oil, condensed

milk, sugar, and coffee; and their monthly needs of semolina, wheat, and barley.<sup>44</sup> The figures of the evacuated populations, as well as the effective conditions of the standing shelters varied from camp to camp and from SAS to SAS.

For instance, in the SAS of Bordj-M'raou, which monitored the daily lives of 1,346 people in the camp of Bordj-M'raou, the majority of the huts were made of straw and had only one main opening; only five people (who were considered by the SAS to be 'traders') had been able to build a house of durable materials, with a thatched roof.<sup>45</sup> In the case of another SAS (of Gounod, in the arrondissement of Guelma), the housing and living conditions of the displaced civilian inhabitants of the ongoing *regroupement* were, according to its chief, very precarious. Most of the people were piled 'into the ruins of damaged barracks or housed in tents – some families have been resettled in "improved huts" whose construction was carried on as long as the municipality provided the credits.'<sup>46</sup>

In another larger camp called Herbillon, which held three thousand people, families were distributed in either huts or tents. Fifty families were about to be transferred to one of the fifty newly built dwellings named *cités d'habitat rural* (rural housing settlements), and that an additional  *cité de regroupement* of a hundred metal-framed housing units was initiated so that within the next two months, a hundred families would again be relocated.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to this reality, as specified in the survey about the camps in the municipality of Mondovi, during the previous two years, 'many families [had been] invited to leave their habitual place of residence in the mountain[s;] nothing was planned or officially organised to receive them'.<sup>48</sup> The survey described the disastrous hygienic conditions and the distress of certain families who were constrained to rent the floor of courtyards as living spaces, as in the case of 132 people who were compelled to argue over 120 square metres of space. And to complete this insight

into the vicissitudes of a handful of SASs in just one department, a tiny part of the *regroupement* of Barral presented an exceptional situation: 145 families (out of two thousand people) were lodged in dwellings that were purpose-built by the *Commissariat à la Reconstruction et à l'Habitat Rural* (CRHR, or Rural Housing and Reconstruction Commission), which had been established in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 9 September 1954 in the Algerian town of Orléansville (today Chlef).<sup>49</sup>

A typical plan from 1956 of the *habitat rural* (rural housing) in the camp designed by the CRHR consisted of a one-floor unit composed of two identical spaces; one served for indoors activities and the other (a courtyard) for outdoors pursuits, so essential to the daily lives of Algerian families. The dimensions of the courtyard were six by just less than five metres, resulting in an area of about twenty-nine square metres. The indoor entity was composed of a main room of less than fourteen square metres (4.9 by 2.9 metres); a smaller room, of around seven square metres (3 by 2.3 metres); a tiny kitchen; and a minuscule WC. The kitchen (2 by 1.7 metres) comprised cooking equipment and a small washbasin, whereas the space for sanitation facilities included no sink, but merely a WC that was also to be used as a shower. While the housing unit was juxtaposed with another identical one, the latter was shifted in such a way that the courtyard of the former was always surrounded by three indoor spaces, which was not always taken into consideration; therefore, the privacy of the dislocated families was again further invaded. This overall configuration could result in an infinite row of housing units, and its multiple iterations could compose what the CRHR have called the  *cité d'habitat rural* (rural housing settlements), and some SAS simply as the  *cité rurale* (rural settlement). Despite the considerable differences in climatic and socio-economic conditions, such dwellings, destined for rural displaced populations, were analogously built across the entire territory of Algeria.

### Transforming camps into ‘villages’

In April 1959, a year after the first ‘Generals’ Putsch’ in Algiers, the collapse of the Fourth Republic, and the return of General de Gaulle to power, and a few months after the adoption of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, a media scandal over the existence of the Algerian camps arose in France. The scandal was provoked by two Frenchmen who were allowed to visit the camps: Monsignor Jean Rodhain (1900–1977), Secretary General of the *Secours Catholique* (Caritas France), who had just returned from a visit to colonial Algeria and had launched an emergency appeal for humanitarian aid there; and Michel Rocard (b. 1930), the young Inspector General of Finances, who leaked his report on the *centres de regroupement*, which he submitted in February 1959 to the newly appointed general delegate of the French government in Algeria, Paul Delouvrier (1914–1995).

Newspaper articles reported on the disgraceful conditions of the camps, and deplored the material and psychological situations of the resettled Algerian families, which included a great number of children who suffered from diseases and famine. Their titles speak of the Algerians’ misery: ‘*Dans les camps d’Algérie des milliers d’enfants meurent...*’ (In Algerian Camps, Thousands of Children Die); ‘*Un million d’Algériens “regroupés” par l’armée menacés de famine*’ (One Million Algerians ‘Regrouped’ by the Army Threatened with Famine); ‘*Un million d’Algériens dans les camps: c’est la guerre*’ (One Million Algerians in Camps: This is War); ‘*Un million d’Algériens parkés dans des camps de “regroupement”*’ (One Million Algerians Parked in ‘Regroupment’ Camps); ‘*J’ai visité, près de Blida, les villages de regroupement*’ (I Have Visited, near Blida, the Villages of Regroupment), ‘*Un million d’Algériens derrière les barbelés...*’ (One Million Algerians Behind Barbed Wire); ‘*Algérie: un million de personnes déplacés*’ (Algeria: One Million People Displaced); ‘*Un million d’Algériens de l’Atlas ont été rassemblés dans mille villages*’ (One Million

Algerians from the Atlas Mountains Have Been Gathered in a Thousand Villages).<sup>50</sup> [Figs. 3–5] The unique and apparently preconceived number – one million – announced by the French media was merely indicative. In fact, among the French army, the situation was rather different; as argued by the IGRP, it was clear that by ‘1959 we [had] found ourselves [...] facing a very serious situation: it had become impossible to quantify even approximately the volume of the displaced rural populations since 1954’.<sup>51</sup>

In the wake of the media scandal and criticism, Delouvrier proclaimed that he would personally take care of the *regroupement* of Algerian populations, and subordinate it to his direct control, and he announced a large rural renovation programme that he called the *Mille villages* (One Thousand Villages). The regrouping suddenly became grounded on rural modernisation reforms, and was thereby rapidly attached to General de Gaulle’s strategic politico-economic Plan de Constantine (1959–1963). In his communication to Delouvrier, de Gaulle wrote that ‘the will of the Government is that Algeria, through the ordeals and despite the delays, reveals gradually itself in its deep reality thanks to the action conducted by all France. To this end, you need to pacify and administer, but at the same time, transform.’<sup>52</sup>

Delouvrier ordered an immediate improvement of the subsistence and economic conditions of the camps. He established mobile teams, composed of a military officer and two skilled professionals of rural planning, which he called *Equipes Itinérantes d’Aménagement Rural* (Mobile Teams for Rural Planning).<sup>53</sup> These teams were expected to study (a) the future of the regrouping; (b) the economic viability of the centres; (c) the legal status of occupied lands; (d) the people’s administrative needs for education and health care; (e) the extent of immediate assistance; and (f) the military concerns of security and self-defence.<sup>54</sup>



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 3: Newspaper clipping, *L'humanité*, 17 April 1959. FR SHAT 1 H 2485 © Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.

Fig. 4: Newspaper clipping, *Libération*, 18 April 1959. FR SHAT 1 H 2485 © Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.

Fig. 5: Newspaper clipping, *Témoignage Chrétien*, 7 June 1959. FR SHAT 1 H 2485 © Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.





Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

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Fig. 6: Camp de regroupement in Northern Constantine in 1959. ECPAD D104-127 © Etablissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense.

Fig. 7: Regroupement in Thiers (Kadiria today) in the region of Kabylia in 1959. ECPAD ALG 59 378 R6 © Etablissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense.

Fig. 8: Regroupement of Bazer in the region of Setif in 1958. ECPAD ALG 58-347 R17 © Etablissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense.



Fig. 9: Regroupement in Tizi-Ouzou. FR SHAT 1H 1119/1 © Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.





Fig. 10: Regroupement in Tiaret. FR SHAT 1H 1119/1 © Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.

On 24 April 1959, Delouvrier circulated directive no. 3.444 CC, in which he recalled his guidelines that announced that if the *regroupement* were based on sane economic and property foundations, it might become a *foyer de promotion sociale* (a place of social promotion), but, as he highlighted, 'if the inhabitants would not find, in the dictated places of settlement, opportunities for normal existence, the regroupement is the place of impoverishment and discontent in which the politico-administrative organisation of the adversary would find a fertile ground for agitation'.<sup>55</sup> In order to circumvent rebellion, Delouvrier endeavoured to turn existing camps into *foyers de promotion sociale* by enhancing the living conditions of the forcibly resettled populations and by providing prospects for 'normal existence', to paraphrase Delouvrier, although the circumstances of war were far from being 'normal'.

According to Delouvrier, 'the sought objective is to render economically viable all regroupements, that is, to ensure every regrouped family the possibility to gain its means of subsistence from a productive job, which will mostly be farming'.<sup>56</sup> This aim was to be applied in different cases and was to be achieved depending on the case; he described three plausible circumstances: two opposing situations, and one intermediate situation that he urged was to be considered the priority. The first consisted of *regroupements* that were located in territories without any access to arable land and pastures; he recommended submitting these cases to the general commanders of the zones in question, who would, in accordance with military obligations, displace (again) the populations into more advantageous locations. The second probable situation consisted of the forced regrouped populations who now had access to their original farming land, and had been allowed to maintain their own domains of subsistence; as such, they did not require any urgent mediation. And finally, all those *regroupements* that belonged neither to the first case nor to the second necessitated an immediate intervention.<sup>57</sup>

Delouvrier's appeal for the 'betterment' of the camps was not always upheld thanks to the weighty French bureaucratic machine, the long, drawn-out freeing up of appropriate funds, and the lack of determination of a number of military and SAS officers. In his circular no. 3.852 CC of 5 May 1959, Delouvrier informed civil and military authorities that the general delegation of the government in Algeria had signed an agreement with the French Red Cross, and that three specially equipped lorries were formally authorised to circulate throughout the *regroupements* and to procure food and medical aid. The first Red Cross lorry departed only on 25 June in the Region of Algiers, as announced by Delouvrier in his circular of 1 July 1959, in which he requested his men to engage in total collaboration: 'in these difficult circumstances that we are facing, and given the enormous needs created by the Centres de Regroupement, I believe that we must welcome and facilitate, insofar as possible, the offers of help that we are likely to receive'.<sup>58</sup> To this end – and in addition to this humanitarian assistance that undeniably displayed the inability of the French army to deal with the socio-economic problems that it had generated in the camps – Delouvrier promoted any sort of patronage, sponsorship, and twinning of the camps, including offers by a number of religious organisations.

Whereas the *centres de regroupement* were often surrounded by barbed-wire fences and watch-towers, from whence armed guards were ready to open fire, the *mille villages* were intended to look like planned rural settlements.<sup>59</sup> Their locations were strategically selected, however, and a strict gridiron plan was frequently employed in order to enable military surveillance and to facilitate the enforcement of law and order. The ideal site for a grid plan was undoubtedly the plains, far away from the remote mountainous topography that was typical of the Aurès. A wide linear main street ran through the flat land of a typical settlement to permit immediate access. The central area of

such a place accommodated a large square and military headquarters, and the involuntarily resettled populations were distributed around the main access and military posts. [Figs. 6–10] The small, juxtaposed shelters differed according to the availability of the financial resources that were assigned, the construction materials that were supplied, and the time that the camps had existed. The shelters varied from standardised boxes built of durable materials (in the best of cases) to little more than barracks placed in quadrangular formations, in strict accordance to the grid system.

### Concluding note

The evacuation of civilians from the forbidden zone, the construction of camps, and the conversion of camps to ‘villages’ were all components of the French doctrine of modern warfare in Algeria as a state of emergency. Such planned politico-military objectives led not only to the uprooting of millions of civilians, but also to an irreversible disequilibrium of socio-economic structures that had until that time partially managed to resist colonialism and its expanded exploitation. In 1964, two years after the independence of Algeria from France, Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmaled Sayad avowed: ‘this population displacement is among the most violent [...] that history [has] ever known’.<sup>60</sup> Since that time, involuntary violent displacements have only proliferated.

The case of the French army in Algeria did not serve to reconsider or begin anew the design of camps, but rather to extract an operational theory of the French doctrine of modern warfare – or counterinsurgency operations – directly from military practices in Algeria. The objective of French officers was to refine the bureaucratic aspects of forced displacements and constant control of civilians, and export their skills to other parts of the world.

### Notes

1. Richard Golsan, *The Papon Affair: Memory and Justice on Trial* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 1.
2. Law no. 99–882 of 18 October 1999. *Journal Officiel de la République Française (JORF)* of 22 October 1999. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>.
3. Unlike other French colonies and protectorates, Algeria was deemed a French territory, whose colonisation began in 1830. It was composed of the three northern departments of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine and the southern territories of the Sahara.
4. Law no. 55–385 of 3 April 1955, which instituted the state of emergency and declared its application in French departments in Algeria for a period of six months. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>.
5. Article 6. Law no. 55–385 of 3 April 1955. All translations of French sources by the author, unless otherwise stated.
6. Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre (Historic Service of Land Forces, hereafter ‘SHAT’). SHAT 1H 1119 D1, , *Note Memento A/S de la pacification de l’Aurès [Memo on Pacification in the Aurès]*, Algiers, 12 April 1955.
7. *Ibid.*, 2–3. The arming of certain individuals resulted in the creation of what the French called the *village d’auto-défense* (self-defence village).
8. *Ibid.*, 3.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View on Counterinsurgency*, trans. Daniel Lee (London and Dunmow: Pall Mall Press, 1964 [1961]), 6.
11. *Ibid.*, 8.
12. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), 157.
13. Marie-Monique Robin, *Escadrons de la mort, l’école française* (Ideale Audience, ARTE France, 2003), documentary. A year later she published *Escadrons de la mort, l’école française* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2004).
14. SHAT 1118 D3. Conférence du Colonel Lacheroy, Chef du Service d’Action Psychologique et d’Information du Ministère de la Défense Nationale. *Guerre*

- révolutionnaire et l'arme psychologique. 2 July 1957, 4.
15. Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, 8. (Italics in the original.)
  16. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 92.
  17. Quoted in David H. Petraeus and James F. Amos, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual FM 3–24 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 December 2006).
  18. *Ibid.*, 2–9.
  19. On the development of the colonial school of warfare, see, for example, Douglas Porch, 'Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare', in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 376–407.
  20. Hubert Lyautey, *Le rôle social de l'officier: suivi de textes et de lettres autour de CELe rôle social de l'officier*, ed. Christian de Bartillat (Paris: Albatros, 1984), 37. Lyautey's article was first published in 1891 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, under the title 'Du rôle social de l'officier dans le service militaire universel.'
  21. *Ibid.*, 38.
  22. Petraeus and Amos, *Counterinsurgency*. Foreword.
  23. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 27–28.
  24. Decree no. 56–641 of 28 June 1956.  
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>.
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. See, for example, Jean-Charles Jauffret and Maurice Vaisse, eds., *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie. Actes du colloque de Montpellier des 5 et 6 mai 2000, organisé par le Cente d'étude d'histoire de la Défense et l'UMR no. 5609, Idéologies, Défense, du CNRS* (Brussels: Editions Complexes, 2012); Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La défense en surface (1945–1962), Le contrôle territorial dans la pensée stratégique française d'après-guerre* (Paris: Service Historique de la Défense, 2009); André-Roger Voisin, *Algérie 1956–1962: la guerre des frontières sur les barrages électrifiés* (Charenton: Presses de Valmy, 2002).
  27. In 1959 some *zones interdites* (forbidden zones) became *zones de contrôle militaire renforcé* (zones of reinforced military control). See Patrick Kessel, *Guerre d'Algérie: Ecrits censurés, saisis, refusés 1956–1960–1961* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 234–235.
  28. Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *Guerre et action psychologique en Algérie* (Paris: Service Historique de la Défense, 2007).
  29. Another consequence of the forbidden zones is the internal migration of the Algerian population: those who were able to escape from the atrocities of the war in rural areas and managed to reach urban areas such as Algiers and Oran. As a result, the number of the *bidonvilles* (slums) increased tremendously during the Algerian War.
  30. Cited in Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Une dimension de la guerre d'Algérie: les 'regroupements' de populations,' in Jauffret and Vaisse, eds., *Militaires et guérilla*, 236.
  31. 'Regroupement, Regrouper', *Le Nouveau Petit Robert. Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993), 2143.
  32. 'Concentration,' *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*, 482.
  33. Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964), 13.
  34. Michel Cornaton, *Les camps de regroupement de la Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 122–123.
  35. *Ibid.*, 121.
  36. Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1977), 230.
  37. SHAT 1H 2030 D1, *Les regroupement de population en Algérie* [Regrouping of the Population in Algeria], Algiers, 11 December 1960, 15.
  38. *Ibid.*
  39. Decree no. 55–1274 of 30 September 1955.  
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>.
  40. Jacques Frémeaux, 'Les SAS (sections administratives spécialisées),' *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 4, no. 208 (2002): 56.
  41. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (Overseas National Archives, hereafter 'FR ANOM'), FR ANOM SAS DOC 5. *Les SAS, Sections Administratives Spécialisées, leur politique, leur rôle et leurs méthodes* [Specialised

- Administrative Sections, their Politics, Roles and Methods], 10 March 1958, 8–9.
42. Ministère de la Défense, Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces (CDEF), , *Les Sections Administratives Spécialisées en Algérie: Un outil pour la stabilisation* [Specialised Administrative Sections: an Instrument for Stabilisation], October 2005. <http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr>.
43. *Ibid.*, 51.
44. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Arrondissement de Bône, SAS Sidi Aissa; SAS de Barral; SAS d'Ain-Zana, SAS d'Hammam-Zaid, SAS de Bordj El Hassane.
45. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Arrondissement de Bône, Regroupement de Bordj-M'raou, SAS de Bordj-M'raou, 20 August 1958.
46. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Arrondissement de Guelma, 1 September 1958.
47. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Centre de Regroupement – Herbillon, 22 August 1958.
48. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Comune de Mondovi – Centres de Regroupement, 29 August 1958.
49. FR ANOM 933/154. Département de Bône, Affaires Algériennes, SAS de Barral, 22 August 1958.
50. SHAT 1H 2485 D2. Press cuttings of the *camps de regroupement*, 1959.
51. SHAT 1H 2030. *Les regroupements des populations en Algérie* [Regrouping of Populations in Algeria]. Algiers 11 December 1960, 13.
52. Roselyne Chenu, *Paul Delouvrier ou la passion d'agir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), 284.
53. SHAT 1H 2030 D1. Paul Delouvrier, Directive no. 3.444 CC, *Regroupement de populations* [Regrouping of Populations], Algiers, 24 April 1959.
54. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
55. *Ibid.*, 1.
56. *Ibid.*, 2.
57. *Ibid.*
58. SHAT 1H 2574. Paul Delouvrier, Circular no. 5.766 CC. *Regroupement de populations*. Algiers, 1 July 1959, p. 2.
59. As part the budget of the first phase of the construction of the *centre de regroupement*, both watchtowers and barbed wire are often included. See 1H 4394, ZEA and 27° DIA, Etat-Major, 5° Bureau, *Regroupement de populations*. Tizi Ouzou, 17 June 1959, p. 4. In addition, several published aerial photographs clearly show the watchtowers and barbed wire.
60. Bourdieu and Sayad, *Le déracinement*, 13.

### Biography

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