

Nicole Guiraud

Algeria 1962: Diary of the Apocalypse

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Preface

History repeats itself

It was in 1962 that Nicole wrote her journal. It would only take a few changes, if we fast-forwarded the clock four decades and stopped the hand... let's say, on 2005, between 2 April and 19 June, the first and last entries in Nicole's notes, then changed the names of roads and people, and Nicole's journal could be that of a young Algerian girl today, recounting the horrors of the civil war during the 1990s that the Algerians now only refer to as the black decade.

These two periods of 1962 and 2005 were the cruellest in the country's tormented history.

Forty-three years apart, the two teenagers would have known the same terrifying daily reality – bombings, machinegun fire on civilians — a thousand times over they would have heard the same rending screams, the same cries, the maddening howl of sirens, the same speeches infinitely repeated, they would have suffered the same irreparable wounds.

Nicole described these terrible daily events, “with simple words and phrases marked with innocence,” as Gérard Lehmann says later in the epilogue, and the young Algerian girl would have undoubtedly recounted her life between 2 April and 19 June 2005 in the same way.

Fifteen years old, children of the same country, the same town, maybe the same street, nourished by the same air, they are inevitably twin sisters in some way – what one feels, the other feels, and they would speak of it with similar words. The forty years that separate them matters little, twins they were, twins they are and will remain.

This resemblance between the two wars calls out and carries within it a message that must be deciphered.

Of course, it's the same country. As geography leaves its mark on history, Algeria has provided its actors of both yesterday and today a unique setting: restless scrubland perfect for ambush and narrow winding cities well suited to fighting in the streets, have both contributed to unrelenting guerrilla warfare. But what's more, the actors are identical, or in any case they behave in the same way, using the same techniques, saying the same words. The difference

between the GIA's¹ methods in the 1990's and those of the FLN² of yesteryear can only be found with a magnifying glass. The GIA, whose main concern was to do its utmost to terrorise the population and the contingent soldiers, struggled to distinguish itself; everything that they found in the handbook for perfect terrorists and the shop of horrors, the FLN had invented, abundantly used, and had found a way to make stylishly acceptable in the dirty war against the Islamists. Similarly, both the French and Algerian armies resorted to the same methods: widespread arrests, internment camps, torture, summary executions of prisoners, raids, surveillance and abductions. Not to mention the nasty tricks pulled by the French Secret Services. *La Bleuite*³, created by Captain Léger, had been tried out by both armies in every imaginable way. If we were to look into it, we would surely have to discuss war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On a political level, this is nothing new. People don't matter, and they won't matter anytime soon. They are variables in the government's geostrategic equation. The Pieds-Noirs (French citizens from Algeria) were thoroughly betrayed and abandoned, and still today their memory is trodden on, their history spat upon, and their graves erased. This, too, is a genocide, if we consider it. We might ask, "What became of these people, and the Harkis⁴?" They were our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, we have the right to know. They are transformed from despised victims into champions of victimisation when it suits so that they can serve as the flipside to the victimisation that certain emigrants and French citizens born in the Maghreb have

¹ *Armed Islamic Group of Algeria* (GIA from French *Groupe islamique armé*): a military organisation whose goal was to fight the FLN and overthrow the Algerian government and to replace it with an Islamic State.

² The *National Liberation Front* (FLN from French *Front de libération nationale*), is an Algerian independence nationalist movement founded in 1954 by the most extreme nationalist divisions. Since 1 November 1954, the FLN and its military branch, the ALN (*The National Liberation Army* from *Armée de Libération Nationale*) committed numerous attacks on civilians of all ethnicities.

³ Infiltration operation staged by the French secret service against the FLN and ALN (see note 2) during the Algerian War, starting in 1957. It consisted of drawing up lists of supposed collaborators with the French Army and sending these lists to the enemy with the aim of provoking internal purges.

⁴ A Muslim auxiliary force fighting during the Algerian War within the ranks of the French Army, often in the role of special forces known as the "harkas". In Algeria, "Harki" has become a synonym for a traitor or collaborator. On 14 April 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy officially recognised the responsibility of the French government for abandoning the Harkis after the end of the Algerian War that ended in a genocidal massacre (with at least 80,000 casualties) despite guarantees given by the FLN in the Evian Agreement of 19 March 1962.

made their stock in trade. Repentance... victimisation... a friendship treaty... blah, blah, blah. Victims yes, victimisation no. The Algerians, too, were thoroughly betrayed and abandoned. In the past they were left to the most radical fringes of the FLN and the MNA⁵, and today they are abandoned to the Islamists, illegal migration and poverty. They dreamed of independence and greater freedom, not a life-long enlistment.

And so we managed to divide the inhabitants of this country: the pure French, Arabs, Muslims, the Pieds-Noirs.

This is all quite sad; living the same terrible history twice is hard.

We must do it all again: rewrite history “with simple words and phrases marked with innocence”, and tell it to everyone over and over, tirelessly, without letting ourselves be intimidated. Over time, a drop of water can penetrate the thickest of armour.

Boualem Sansal

Boumerdès (formerly Rocher Noir)

1 December 2012

⁵ “National Algerian Movement” from the French *Mouvement National Algérien* (MNA). The MNA was a Nationalist political-military organisation founded by Messalj Hadj. The FLN and the MNA started a fratricidal war in Algeria (the Massacre of Melouza at the Mechta-Kasbah in May 1957) and particularly in mainland France.

“Slit their throats and they will leave!”

On 1 November 1954 the War of Independence began – like the insurrection of May 1945 in Constantine – started by the most radical factions of the Algerian nationalist movement. Guy Sitbon, a journalist for the weekly news magazine *Marianne*, hit the nail on the head when he argued that “the Algerian War was not inevitable”, and that the catastrophe began the moment “some hot-heads from the APP (Algerian People’s Party⁶) led a military coup against the leadership of the Algerian nationalist movement, and on 1 November, with the proclamation of the FLN constitution, dismissed the historic leaders and military elite”. He continued, “Without the 1st of November, the complexity of the problem perhaps would have required several more years of political combat accompanied by small outbursts of violence under the leadership of students and ulemas, not the uneducated. After 1 November there was nowhere else to turn. The FLN, were, and still are, for ‘total violence’, the abolition of politics and the submission of the best Algerians to armed ignorance”⁷.

Indeed, in order to supersede the moderate nationalist opposition and force the Muslim population to join the armed insurrection, the FLN resorted to unprecedented terror. Any means were used to remove the French Algerians. Violence, terror, massacre, carnage, assassination, murder, slaughter, mutilation, torture (and yes, the FLN used torture systematically!) – any means was justified as necessary to remove the “wicked colonisers” and “liberate” the “oppressed colony”. The most primitive and murderous instincts were unleashed to fight a battle portrayed as some kind of “purification”. The first targets were not military, but civilian, as attested to by the almost symbolic victims of the attacks on 1 November 1954. Jean-Paul Sartre argued that all French Algerians deserved to die. Exterminating them would almost be a civic and humanitarian duty: “To shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, removing the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time: what remains is a dead man and a free man”⁸. Yes, one must tell it like it is: in worshipping holy violence, the left-wing intellectuals in Sartre’s circle of influence supported not only genocide but also ethnic cleansing as summed up by the famous slogan “Slit their throats and they will leave”.

⁶ From the French *Parti du peuple algérien* (PPA).

¹¹ Guy Sitbon, *The War in Algeria was not Inevitable*, in Jean-Pierre Lledo, *Algeria, Untold Histories... The Shocking Film Banned in Algeria. Scenario - Reactions – Polemics*, ed. Atlantis 2011, p.136.

Wolf Albes

Prologue

1962 - 2012: Time passed and the memory of the distant years of my childhood in Algeria faded... Yet radiant images of this sun-soaked land remain stubbornly rooted in my memory, along with the terrible ones of the war and terrorism that darkened this period.

In 1961 and particularly 1962, the descent into hell had begun. French Algeria was dying in the torment of an endless civil war; it was in the throes of a long and painful death.

From 19 March 1962, the date of signing of the Évian Accords, the violence increased to the point of claiming more civilian victims than throughout the entire war.

In 1962, being the child that I was, barely a teenager, I could neither participate in the fighting nor truly understand the stakes. I could only endure and suffer, but also observe and record this unprecedented surge of violence which descended upon the city of Algiers, upon all of Algeria.

My father, although he didn't belong to the OAS⁹, supported French Algeria like almost all European Algerians during this period. Wounded alongside me in the Milk Bar attack on 30 September 1956, he founded the AVICCEAL¹⁰ from his hospital bed in December along with the families of other bombing victims. He did this to represent the civilian victims of terrorism to a government unprepared for subversive warfare. Victims who, at the time, were considered nothing more than "injured workers", even five-year-old children who, as a result, had no rights and received no compensation. A friend to Auguste Arnould¹¹ and Bachaga Boualem¹², my father was a patriot and a staunch humanist. Rejecting

⁹ *Organisation Armée Secrète*. Established on 11 February 1961 in Madrid by people who opposed General de Gaulle's Algerian policy. It was the armed resistance of French Algerian militants, both civilian and military. The OAS, which committed attacks in Algeria and in mainland France, was dissolved before Algerian independence, after existing for 14 months. Its members were incarcerated and some were executed in 1962.

¹⁰ *Association nationale des victimes civiles corporelles des événements d'Algérie*. National association of civilian victims injured during the Algerian War. Until the very end, the conflict was not known as a *guerre* (war), but as *événements* (incidents).

¹¹ President of *comité d'entente et d'action des Anciens Combattants d'Algérie*, the Algerian war veterans' association, until 1962. He and others like my primary school teacher Maurice Mouchan helped establish the AVICCEAL.

¹²

violence, having suffered it himself, he had chosen to dedicate his energy to protecting civilian victims of terrorism of all ethnicities and faiths. His essentially social and humanitarian involvement in the AVICCEAL permitted these wounded civilians to be officially recognised as war victims and to be incorporated, once and for all, into the National Office of Veterans.

During mass raids carried out by the police in Algiers in the last weeks before independence, my father was arrested on the night of 10 May 1962 by the *garde mobile*. The pretext for his arrest was his involvement with the *exécutif provisoire*¹³ in Rocher Noir on behalf of the civilian victims of the Rue d'Isly massacre: he encouraged families to demand an inquiry into the circumstances of this tragedy, as well as to file a complaint against an unknown at the court of Algiers. The FLN had already condemned him to death and was searching for him, since he was in possession of a list of victims of terrorism and knew too much about their abuses of power. However, it was in fact the French police (Mission C)¹⁴ who arrested and imprisoned him at the police academy of Hussein Dey before deporting him from Algeria.

Since the majority of the AVICCEAL's archives disappeared in the confusion of the last days of French Algeria, I only have a few surviving documents. Maybe a historian will find them one day, in some ministerial filing cabinet or other, in France... or in Algeria.

I was trapped by the war, confined for several weeks in an apartment behind closed shutters which somehow protected us from the fury of the fighting whose din was the only discernible sound, amplified in the amphitheatre of the city – muffled booms of explosions, bazookas firing, the wailing and cracking of machineguns, the incessant hum from the surveillance helicopters circling above us – in a never-ending wait for news from a missing father and an ever imminent departure for mainland France, as a 15-year-old girl I had no other choice but to record day after day the relentless advance of chaos and the breakdown of

founder of the FAF (*Front de l'Algérie française* or the French Algerian Front) and always supported the AVICCEAL.

¹³ A provisional organisation charged with managing public affairs in Algeria during the transitional period between the ceasefire following the signing of the Évian Accords on 19 May 1962, and the proclamation of the Republic of Algeria, on 25 September 1962. The interim executive was appointed by decree on 6 April 1962.

¹⁴ Police from mainland France, specialised in the anti-OAS struggle and sent to Algeria from 1961. Placed at the disposition of the Gaullist secret police by the judicial police director, Michel Hacq, they worked after the Évian Accords (19 March 1962) in close collaboration with the FLN terrorists, among them Si Azzedine, and distinguished themselves by their swift

our everyday lives; through survival instinct, against fear, through the need to leave a trace in this universe of death and destruction.

I still possess the key to our modest apartment in Algiers that my tearful mother had given me on the day of our final departure, 19 June 1962. Even if I will never use it again, I like that it's there in my drawer.

* * *

My journal from 1962 is the account of this apocalypse, the chronicle of French Algeria's last days and the final testimony before the exodus from a now vanished world, engulfed in the haze of history, the stubborn traces of a memory we vainly believed that we could "genocide".

Many years later, finding this little notebook I had forgotten existed at the bottom of a drawer, I was plunged back into what remains a very painful memory of the nightmarish times that constituted the last moments of "our Algeria".

From that moment, the details of events urgently scribbled down day after day flooded back into my memory. Details resurfaced of forgotten facts or things I'd overheard long ago. Images came back and fell into place without me having to seek them out. The sounds, colours, emotions, atmosphere – everything came flooding like a spring that is suddenly released, letting gush forth a stream that had for too long been contained.

Then I had nothing more to do than to add some "embellishments" to the notes hastily jotted down in this journal.

Nicole Guiraud

Frankfurt 2012

Diary

Algeria, April – July 1962

Chronicles of the last days

1

2 April 1962

We still go to Rocher Noir¹⁵ on the weekends, but only on Sundays, and for how much longer? Parents are on edge. The grown-ups talk to each other about the attacks happening all around and the Europeans being kidnapped. The mail doesn't come anymore. Some of the schools stayed closed after the Easter Holidays, some shops too. People are foaming at the mouth; they're angry, they say that nothing is working out as planned, that in Paris they've decided otherwise, that we've been cheated. They're disappointed and worried, they're saying "what will become of us?" Agreements have been signed in Évian,¹⁶ mainland France wants to separate from Algeria.

3 April 1962

We hear the planes and helicopters that circle endlessly over the city. They buzz and make a real racket. Neighbours burn a pile of garbage on the corner of the street in Laperlier, our neighbourhood. There were rats.

Last week, I was in the city with Dad and Mum when a car full of young Arabs sped past Bresson Square and sprayed the crowd with a burst of machinegun fire. A few were wounded. We barely had enough time to get down on the ground.

¹⁵ Hamlet and beach in the Algiers region located on the Petite Kabylie coast 60 kms from Algiers. In the surrounding hills, secure offices were constructed in 1961 for the GPRA (Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic), which housed the French Provisional Executive in 1962.

¹⁶ Spa town located on the French shore of Lake Geneva where, on the 18th of March 1962, the famous Évian Accords were signed between the French government and representatives

5 April 1962

Today, Thursday afternoon, I went to town with Mum and Michelle¹⁷. We left a bouquet of flowers in front of the Grande Poste¹⁸. There were a lot of people there. At the top of the stairs, pointing to the empty sleeve that hung down over my skirt, Mum cried, “Look, look what they did to my daughter!”

People were crying all around us. I was ashamed, but Mum cracked, she says that a lot of people died on this spot. People are going mad.

8 April 1962

We aren't going to Rocher Noir this Sunday. Dad hung a massive French flag along our balcony. I'm sad, I'm bored. I miss the beach. I don't see my friends any more.

10 April 1962

Explosions in town, very close to our house. The neighbours say they're either at the Palais d'Été¹⁹ or the School of Fine Arts²⁰.

14 April 1962

Impossible to go out this weekend, no beach trip to Rocher Noir! There are lots of attacks.

17 April 1962

We're seeing more and more defensive barriers and roadblocks everywhere. Half-tracks and military trucks patrol the streets, even in our neighbourhood. Helicopters hover over the town. Neighbourhoods are closed off, there are searches and raids.

¹⁷ Nicole Guiraud's sister.

¹⁸ A Neo-Moorish style building built in 1910 on the site of the Glières Plateau in the centre of Algiers close to the harbour, and housing a General Post Office that is “the most beautiful in France”. The place was the scene of the shooting on Rue d'Isly on 26 March 1962 (see the chapter “Algiers, 26 March 1962: the Rue d'Isly Massacre”).

¹⁹ The “Summer Palace”, constructed in a Moorish style, was the ancient and sumptuous palace of the Deys of Algiers, situated on the heights of Algiers (superior Mustapha), and it is surrounded by vast and beautiful gardens. It was the place of residence for all the governors of French Algiers and was also home to governmental delegates up until 1962.

19 April 1962

This morning on the way to Thursday's class²¹ at the School of Fine Arts, I was stopped by a military patrol at the bottom of the staircase that leads down from Laperlier towards Boulevard du Télemly, next to the Aérohabitat²². Identity checks and searches. The whole neighbourhood is sealed off, there are armoured cars and roadblocks everywhere. The soldiers are searching for members of the OAS. They let me go, but there's hardly anyone at the School of Fine Arts.

21 April 1962

No Rocher Noir this weekend. There have been attacks in the city, the *gardes mobiles*²³ are everywhere. Mum closes the shutters, we can't even go out onto the balcony anymore.

26 April 1962

I'm not going to art class at the School of Fine Arts this Thursday either. Yesterday, an architecture student was killed and the school has been closed since. Some high schools are closed, too, some schools are on strike. There are raids.

27 April 1962

At the Fromentin high school²⁴, some girls have already left for mainland France. Others are on strike or live in locked down neighbourhoods. Some teachers are missing, we don't have class. I go into town with Mado. On Rue Michelet, there are bodies on the footpath, it's horrible. We step over them to avoid the pools of blood. Someone has thrown a blanket or a newspaper over their faces. Mado says you mustn't look at their eyes. We do the same thing as everyone else, we look away. But we're still scared and we hurry to get home. On the way back, on the stairs leading up to Télemly Boulevard, I find myself face to face with a group of

²¹ Free courses at the Algerian School of Fine Arts were given on Thursday mornings (Thursdays being the school day off) for students wishing to learn visual arts. Students enrolled from ages 12-13.

²² A large, modern 22-story building, in the style of architect Le Corbusier, constructed in 1953-1954 on the Boulevard du Télemly in Algeria.

²³ *Gardes mobiles*: units of the *gendarmerie mobile*, subdivision of the gendarmerie, tasked with maintaining civic order.

²⁴ Formerly a Neo-Moorish style grand hotel *Splendid*, built in 1912. The building was turned into a girl's high school (boarders and day students). Situated in the heights of Algiers, in

men who were coming out of a building, machineguns in hand. They're really on edge and say to me "Go away little girl, this has nothing to do with you..." I run almost all the way to the Aérohabitat's lift where Mum has her hairdressing salon in the shopping centre.

2

1 May 1962

This weekend, Dad took us to the seaside. The road leading there is fairly safe, it's under army surveillance, but Dad still keeps his pistol in the glove box. We've been at Rocher Noir since Saturday. Mum stayed in Algiers, she wants to tidy up the house. We're having lots of fun. I finally get to see my friends again at the beach – Marc, Jean-Mich, Linda, Meriem and some others. We joke around with the soldiers from the military camp at the village entrance, and with the people staying in the little Mar y Sol hotel, overlooking the sea, above the village. But lots of them aren't here anymore, they've already gone back to mainland France. Pierre G. came this afternoon. So, so much fun! It's a change from the ambiance in the city, from the chaos, the raids, the explosions. We don't see the Sarradets²⁵ at the beach anymore, their cabin is closed up. Dad goes fishing in his kayak as usual. After the beach, Marc has a "bash", a party, on his cabin's veranda. He brought his Teppaz turntable and his collection of 45's. He has all of Elvis Presley's records. We dance, we have a whale of a time. His mother makes us biscuits, she calls us "the Ye-Ye²⁶ generation". Jean-Mich has fallen in love with Micheline, a girl from France who came here last summer on holidays. They have become *novio* and *novia*²⁷, they're engaged. Michelle is going out with a cadet, from the cabin opposite ours. As for me, I have been going out with Lucien since last summer, a blond with blue eyes, he's almost 18. And in the evening, we all go together to watch the sunset on the rocks, and we try to spot the green ray²⁸ on the horizon.

²⁵ Neighbours at Rocher Noir, having built the first cabin on the beach. Their son Jean, head of the Commando Z of the Algiers OAS, came from time to time to take refuge there. All three died after the exodus to France, asphyxiated by carbon dioxide from the heating in a little house in central France. Accident for some, suicide for others...

²⁶ Style of pop music originating in France, Italy and Spain the early 1960s, sounding similar to the English "rock 'n' roll" music of the same era. The name comes from the English "yeah yeah", and the music often featured young female singers.

²⁷ *novio/a*: fiancé/e (Spanish). The everyday language of the French of Algeria was sprinkled with terms of diverse Mediterranean origins. Also in Algiers, Spanish words were common due to the presence of many descendants of Spanish immigrants in the working-class areas.

2 May 1962

Back to school... What rotten luck! During three out of the four hours of class, we had exams: geography and writing. Caron, the teacher, is not here; her neighbourhood is closed off. The older girls in their final year tell us that there have been explosions in town, with many dead and wounded. Neighbourhoods have been sealed off.

3 May 1962

There are no more classes at the School of Fine Arts, including today, Thursday. School is closed. It's a shame. I was really enjoying the drawing classes that Mum had signed me up for last year. I laze around. But how I miss the happy times! The neighbours tell us that Europeans have been taken away.

4 May 1962

Mr. Mascaro, the local butcher has been arrested, along with two other neighbours. Dad says they were sold out, as part of some intelligence operation. The neighbourhood is sealed off; there are police raids of houses, roundups. People just disappear – we don't see them again. Others are prisoners in camps.

5 May 1962

A lockdown in the Laperlier neighbourhood. Police raids at home as well. The *gardes mobiles* were at our house from midday till four in the afternoon, searching everywhere. I wasn't there, I was still at school for my Saturday classes. Michelle argued with them. They threatened to take her in. Certainly won't be going to Rocher Noir!

6 May 1962

Well, here we are, at Rocher Noir this morning; Hervé and Nicole D. are here too. In the afternoon, Marc and Marcelle take us for a drive with their two friends from Aumale, (Roger and another). We return with them to Algiers, stopping at a roadside café to eat some kebabs. It was fun.

disappears under the horizon in the form of a vivid light - a symbol of purity and hope.

7 May 1962

Today, on the trolleybus after school, some Arabs harass me and stop me from getting off at Laperlier. They block the door, laugh and say awful things in Arabic. The bus is crowded, but no one says a word, people are scared. I have to ride the bus until El Biar, where I finally get off and walk all the way back home. I was really scared but I didn't say anything to my parents.

8 May 1962

I get to school at 9 o'clock in the morning. I go down to Golfe²⁹ with Gi. We see an attack: two Arabs, vegetable merchants, were shot dead. I saw everything. Two boys on scooters fired at them with a machinegun before disappearing. The old Arab fell to his knees, as if in prayer, and then collapsed, face down in a pool of blood. It is shocking and horrifying. But it has no effect on us. We are too indifferent to it, we see it every day. We arrive late to class, the teacher wants to punish us, but Gi explains to him that we witnessed an attack.

9 May 1962

Last exams today. Phew, AMEN!

Some girls are missing, having already left for mainland France. The new teacher from France is a communist. She doesn't like us and we give her a hard time back. She's a real cow. In class, she storms towards me, yelling at me to put my two arms on the table. Since I don't respond, Gi ends up telling her: "Miss, she only has one arm." The teacher goes pale and leaves me alone. Shops and schools in the city are all closing, one after the other. There are lynchings, some Europeans are abducted. The police patrol the Arab neighbourhoods, very anxious. There are roundups among the Europeans, too. It's chaos.

10 May 1962

No water today. Lucienne came to the house in the afternoon. Her family is going to leave for metropolitan France. She says the neighbour's sons were arrested and are in the Beni-Messous camp³⁰. The abductions of Europeans continue, we don't know what happens to them. No more School of Fine Arts either. It's closed.

²⁹ Residential suburb of north-eastern Algiers, located on the heights of Algeria, close to Hydra.

³⁰ A French military camp in Algiers which served as an intermittent camp for National

11 May 1962

Dad is arrested at a quarter to five this morning by the *gardes mobiles*, dressed in black, wearing helmets and boots, their machineguns pointed at us. They take our neighbour Mr. Belgodère, too. We're very scared.

The neighbours say that according to their information Dad is surely at the Hussein Dey Police Academy, and without doubt he'll be put on a plane for France: deported from Algeria and not detained?

We know nothing – we don't know where he'll end up. People are talking about torture and Mum is worried sick.

12 May 1962

Now there is more talk than ever of leaving for the mainland. We are starting to go over everything in the house. Everything is gloomy since Dad's been gone.

13 May 1962

I think this is the saddest Sunday of my life. Mum has calmed down a little, but we are feeling so miserable. The phone rings all day. We finally have some news: Dad and 50 other "leaders of organisations" were to be transported to Paris (held in custody at Villacoublay) in a Nord Atlas³¹, which had an "accident" mid-flight and was forced to land at Istres.

14 May 1962

Today is Monday: new day, same story. I wait and I'm bored. All the high schools are closed now, since Friday night: that was the last day, and I wasn't in class because of Dad. We won't be taking our final exams. The neighbours tell us that in an apartment in town two babies were found with their throats slit by the FLN, and that dozens of Europeans have been abducted. We hear gunfire, *stroungas*³² exploding, and helicopters over the town. Curfew is set at 6pm.

15 May 1962

People telephone or come to the house to see us. Mum is completely devastated, but has courageously gone back to work. She must be dreaming – there are no clients at her hairdressing salon. Everyone is sad. All across Algeria, people are packing up their bags and leaving this place that has become a hell. It's very hot and sunny but we don't go out, it's too dangerous in town. There are bombings and Europeans are being kidnapped. Lucienne and Renée spend their afternoons at our place.

16 May 1962

Still the same. We are a little less disheartened, especially us girls. Mum tells us Dad is well, we've had some news, he was able to write to us using the CFA³³. The weather is sunny and very hot. But I don't go out anymore, apart from doing some shopping at Madame Pérez's, our local grocer. She's going to stay. She's old and doesn't know anyone in France.

17 May 1962

No more School of Fine Arts. I miss it...we still hear gunfire and explosions in town. Many people have been killed, on all sides.

18 May 1962

I miss the beach, the sea, my friends. It's summer now but we live in the house, with the blinds closed in fear of stray bullets. I don't see the sun anymore.

I keep helping Mum sort out our things. We hear gunfire not far from our neighbourhood.

19 May 1962

We hear explosions, shell attacks and gunfire, it's all very close. Helicopters circle over the city. It's most likely a clash between the OAS and the *gendarme mobile*. People in our neighbourhood tell us about the kidnappings of Europeans. At night, plastic explosives go off in our neighbourhood.

20 May 1962

³³ Compagnie des Chemins de Fer Algériens: the North African branch of the French train service, SNCF).

Once again, I think this is one of the saddest Sundays of my life. No Rocher-Noir of course. The weather has turned ugly. We're bored... Morale is low.

21 May 1962

No more school. The schools are closed. Everybody is leaving for the mainland. Lucienne and Renée spend almost every afternoon at our place. They, too, are stuck inside waiting for a place on an airplane or boat to France. We're bored. We listen to yé-yé records, we dance together, we try on clothes, try out new hairstyles, paint our nails, and put makeup on our eyes. We talk about movie stars and especially boys. Where are they? What are they doing?

22 May 1962

I hear our neighbours tell mum horrible stories about attacks, abductions and terribly mutilated bodies that have been found in mass graves... In town, we constantly hear bazookas and machinegun fire, as well as *stroungas* exploding. People panic and leave en masse. This evening, I'm having trouble falling asleep. People are giving *concerts de casseroles*³⁴ from their balconies.

24 May 1962

People disappear and the neighbours say that new mass graves have been discovered close to Algiers.

Shops are closing, people are leaving. Mum has no more customers.

25 May 1962

This afternoon, a stray bullet came through the louvered shutters in my parents' bedroom, and ended up in their wardrobe. It made a huge hole in the wall. Fortunately, nobody was in there!

Our neighbours tell us that the Maison Blanche³⁵ airport is closed because there are too many people leaving.

³⁴ Banging on their pots in concert in demonstration.

28 May 1962

We don't go out, we stay shut away in the house waiting for free seats on a boat or plane, but everything is taken. We're getting bored. Outside, people continue to kill each other with machineguns, bazookas or *stroungas*. We don't have any more news from Dad. According to the CFA, he was on the FLN list³⁶.

29 May 1962

More kidnappings of Europeans, mass graves discovered close to Algiers, it's horrible.

People are panicked. All around schools and shops are burning, and so is the rubbish.

31 May 1962

Renée comes to the house in the afternoon. Lucienne left for France. Fires and gunfights in town.

3

1 June 1962

Tonight, after curfew, a *strounga* exploded at the Mozabite grocer, belonging to our *moutchou*³⁷. He has his shop in a garage in our building. The windows shattered, the noise was unbelievable. I panic, I begin to scream and try to hide under the bed. I think I'm going crazy too.

3 June 1962

Our neighbourhood is emptying out. The building is emptying, too, our neighbours are leaving.

³⁶ After 19 March 1962, the FLN created blacklists of citizens considered as suspects and generally sentenced to death: members of the OAS (Organisation of the Secret Army), Muslim Francophiles, and simply pro-French-Algeria citizens. These lists were made available to the police and the Mission C (Gaullists special service), who were responsible for stopping and imprisoning these suspects.

³⁷ Popular nickname given to the Mozabite shopkeepers who come from the Ghardaïa

We don't know what to do anymore.

Still no news from Dad. We're tired.

5 June 1962

The neighbourhood continues to empty. Everyone is leaving or has already left. There were horrific attacks by the FLN. We stay in the house and we wait. I'm bored. On the corner of the street, the piles of rubbish are getting bigger and bigger and we see rats.

6 June 1962

We don't go out anymore. I'm bored, I'm sad and tired. I dream of Rocher Noir, the marvellous beach from my childhood where I would meet up with my friends. We used to party at Marc's place, dancing to rock and mambo, before going to the rocks at sunset to watch the "green ray" on the ocean. That all seems so far away now!

7 June 1962

The rubbish on street corners is no longer collected, some of it is burning. It stinks!

Mum is looking for free seats for Michelle and me on a boat or plane, but the lines are too long.

9 June 1962

This afternoon in my street, I ran into two neighbourhood girls. One of them, called MK, is French-Arab and she lives in a house behind the Aérohabitat. The other girl is from mainland France, she is blonde and she has just arrived in Algiers. Her father is an architect, he works for "The Cooperation in Independent Algeria". The girls are very happy, they laugh a lot. The blond girl often goes to parties, she says that she is having a lot of fun here. Her father is very liberal and pro-FLN. We go along the Laperlier track to visit an abandoned villa which is very beautiful but run down. It looks over the whole bay. The girl is going to live there temporarily with her father... I feel a little sad. Schools are still being burnt down. More and more people are leaving: it's awful. The soldiers are leaving too from all over the

10 June 1962

One more Sunday at home. I'm bored to death. I hear gunfire nearby, is it at the Aérohabitat? Schools are burning. The rubbish is everywhere now, no one picks it up anymore. Nothing functions, offices and businesses have all closed one after the other. Mum wants us to leave for France as soon as possible.

11 June 1962

We hear explosions in town and at the port, helicopters circle. We still don't know if we're leaving or if we're staying. It's difficult to find free seats, Mum tries to get two spots for my sister and me. We're very tired. There is rubbish everywhere, it hasn't been collected for weeks.

12 June 1962

Explosions and fires in town. They're saying that the ATO³⁸ killed some Europeans in the port district. And that oil wells are burning in the Sahara. We can't go out anymore, not even on the balcony because of stray bullets. I'm bored, I'm sad. I dream of Rocher Noir, of the great beach of fine sand, of the lentisk covered dunes where I used to play as a child with the black beetles and crickets, and the frogs from the small wadi that hurtled down the hill towards the sea. I think of our underwater fishing trips with friends. We used to bring back urchins, octopuses, scorpion fish and even grouper fish. For a moment, I feel like I'm being rocked by the waves, nestled in the cradle of the enormous inner tube which kept us afloat. And again I see the famous "green ray" at sunset, on the rocks, just on the horizon...

14 June 1962

On the street leading to Madame Pérez's grocery store, I was attacked by a little Arab girl from our neighbourhood. Her family lives next to the Mascaros. They're all in the FLN. Just as we pass each other she comes towards me with hatred in her eyes, she makes a slicing movement on her left arm and hurls at me: "We did that to you". She makes the same movement across her neck saying: "If you stay, we'll do that". It was quick but I got the

³⁸ *Auxilliaires Temporels Occasionnels* or Local Forces. Military auxiliaries formed in 15 days. Created after the Evian Accords to replace the French police leaving Algeria before

message. Back at home Mum asks me what's wrong, I tell her. She replies: "Come on, let's pack our bags".

15 June 1962

The shops are closing and many are looted. Mum is worrying about finding seats. All of our neighbours are leaving or are going to leave. Now, I want to leave too.

17 June 1962

Sunday at home. Still no news from Dad. I'm sad, tired, I'm suffocating. It's already been five weeks of living stuck inside, waiting... I dream of Les Vergers of my childhood³⁹, of Rocher Noir and that peaceful time which seems so far away. I can still see the dance hall on the beach where I learnt to dance the Tango and the Pasodoble with Sauveur, the owner's son. I remember the Mar y Sol hotel on the bluff by the sea where we went to eat kemia⁴⁰ from time to time and the little village of white cabins clinging to the rocks. I recall the beautiful summer nights when I would look for glow-worms in the bushes. In silence, profound peace, I stretch out on the sand and look up at the heavens, watching for shooting stars – they are the souls of the dead passing by... I see the Milky Way; I can make out Ursa Major and the Big and Little Dippers, like Dad had shown me when I was little. I listen to the music of the stars; I fly towards a dark velvet sky shimmering with diamonds, eternity close by. I finally fall asleep.

18 June 1962

We prepare to leave. Tonight's the night, Mum tells us. Someone will come to pick us up. Mum has to stay, to look after her shop.

19 June 1962

And voila, the big farewell, the early morning of 19 June 1962. Gisèle and Jean G. picked us up at 4am, and we will take off from Maison Blanche airport at 6am. On the Route Moutonnière, which goes to the airport, I see the shells of abandoned cars, others are still burning. There is rubbish everywhere. Lots of people at Maison Blanche, sleeping on the ground or their suitcases. My sister and I board a packed plane alone. Everything happens

³⁹ See the chapter "Les Vergers, My Childhood Paradise".

⁴⁰

very quickly.... people are crying around us.

FAREWELL ALGIERS, Farewell beautiful ALGERIA!!

Forever, I'm sure! I believe that this time, that's it.... it's actually finished.

It's getting light. Through the window, I see the coast of Africa, receding. I don't see France yet. I'm flying.... above the blue of the Mediterranean.

I've only just turned 16.

Annex

1 July 1962 (in France)

ALGERIA IS NO LONGER FRENCH... INDEPENDENCE...! That's it, it's done, everything is finished.

We're lucky to be in France! The poor people over there...! And Dad, back in Algiers to pack up, is right in the middle of everything!!

The indifference of the patos⁴¹ is sickening. I want to VOMIT, to VOMIT!

Algiers, 26 March 1962: the Rue d'Isly Massacre

After the signing of the Évian Accords, a unilateral ceasefire came into effect on 19 March 1962. On Friday, 23 March 1962, shots were exchanged between the OAS and the Army in the *Bab El Oued* district. This was the first clash between French Algerians and the French Army. Immediately, the whole city was put on lockdown and the army proceeded to close off this working class area. 8000 phone lines were cut, almost 70,000 people were isolated from the rest of the city and the world. Deprived of water, supplies and medical treatment, they were subject to police raids, intimidation, insults, humiliation and aggressive interrogation in the presence of frightened children and elderly. 7200 apartments were turned upside down by police searches.

On Monday, 26 March at around 2.30pm, after going on strike in the afternoon, the population of Algiers descended upon the Plateau des Glières in the city centre. This was where people planned to form a peaceful gathering of all citizens: women, children and the elderly included. Unarmed, behind French flags, singing the *Marseillaise*, the procession slowly made its way towards *Bab el Oued*, in the west of Algiers, to protest against the blockade of the area and to bring supplies and offer support to its inhabitants.

An initial cordon of European and Muslim soldiers formed barricades at the entrance to the Rue d'Isly awaiting the demonstrators. One officer asked that the crowd go no further, saying "we have orders to shoot". A section of Muslim light infantry⁴² had taken position further up the Rue d'Isly and in the streets around the Grande Poste. The crowd was allowed to pass through the first barricade. The procession was also allowed to pass through the second barricade, which then closed behind it. The crowd was trapped, but continued its march. At the third barricade, the Algerian light infantry, nervous and dangerously on edge, turned their weapons on the demonstrators. According to certain witnesses, one of them said in Arabic "shoot at the Christians!" while their commanding officer responded, "Whatever you do, don't shoot!"

At 2.50pm, heavy gunfire broke out without warning. The soldiers fired point-blank into the crowd with their automatic weapons and machineguns. For twelve long minutes, bursts of fire came one after the other, spraying the unarmed crowd, who were flooding back

towards the entry of the Rue d'Isly. Some were mown down by the gunfire, shot in the back, while the wounded lying on the ground were coldly finished off; among them was a woman with her baby in her arms as well as several elderly people.

The soldiers had received the order (from higher up) to open fire on the crowd. Among them were not only Muslim infantry but also members of the *gardes mobiles* and the French riot control forces of the CRS (Compagnies Républicaines Sécurité), positioned behind their armoured vehicles in different locations throughout the city centre.

The French government accused a unit of the OAS of having attacked the police and army, but this accusation could never be substantiated⁴³. On the contrary, the shooting seems to have been premeditated (simultaneous shots fired from various points around the district). Ambulances and rescue workers alike were targeted and journalists were set upon, their cameras destroyed. A rotation of twenty military trucks was organized to quickly evacuate the dead and wounded. Military helicopters surveyed the scene. Morgue transportation and burials were hastily undertaken, some that very night. Families didn't know where to find their loved ones. All this demonstrates a will to destroy all evidence and any trace of the incident. The investigation into these events, which left 67 dead (80 including those who died from their injuries) and close to 200 injured, was abandoned in 1967. The case was officially "closed".

Every day the people of Algiers gathered to pay their respects at the scene of the tragedy, leaving wreaths and bouquets of flowers.

The *Livre Blanc, le 26 mars 1962*, published by *Esprit Nouveau*, was immediately banned but has been republished several times⁴⁴.

⁴³ "One day, in Paris, during a dinner hosted by the *Cercle Algérieniste*, I made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Duchêne. Later he told me who he was: the lieutenant in charge of the infantry who had opened fire. He told us the story (without mentioning shots of provocation!) and burst into tears. He confessed to me that he had changed his name after 26 March, as he could no longer bear to live with himself. His name had previously been Ouchène Daoud. He was quite young at the time of the massacre and it was he who appeared on the front of the issue of *Paris Match* that covered the events. He has since passed away"

Les Vergers, My Childhood Paradise

In the space of one century, by their own hard work, the colonists turned an infernal swamp into a radiant paradise. Only love could have dared take on such a challenge... Forty years on is a fitting point, it seems, to recognise that these wretched colonists cherished this land more than us, its children...

Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*

These words by Boualem Sansal perfectly allude to Les Vergers, also charmingly called “the gardens of the sea”, as in the Balearic Islands. The Mahonnais people, originating from Minorca, arrived in Algeria around 1830-35 with French soldiers and in turn became French, applied their thousand-year-old know-how to these uncultivated and insalubrious regions of the *Mitidja* and the hills of the Sahel, including the techniques of deforestation and irrigation practised in the Mediterranean since the Greco-Roman Antiquity era (and even before!). It was they who founded the Fort-de-l’Eau, Rouiba, Reghaïa, l’Alma, Le Corso, etc... all these (back then) charming villages that we passed through to go to Rocher Noir, on the Kabyle coast.

Among the other pioneers of this region were the descendants of 73 German families (Rhine, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg), 500 people in total who, on leaving for America in 1832, were diverted from Le Havre towards Algeria. They formed one of the first colonies of emigrants from Northern Europe and, settling into the Sahel of Algiers, contributed to the development of Kouba-Les Vergers.

Les Vergers in the Sahel, at the eastern gate of Algiers, was in some way included in the first remediation plans for the Mitidja Plain. My childhood countryside was dotted with ‘koubbas’ (white mausoleums dedicated to Muslim saints, the ‘marabouts’), little Kabylean farms, or the farms of the descendants of the immigrants from the Balearic Islands (the Juans, the Pons, etc.). Donkeys and mules turned the ancient water wheels; everyone lived in harmony. It was a biblical landscape, the Galilee of young Jesus. That was Algeria before... I am glad that I knew it, and that I can attest to its existence. It is no exaggeration to say that this place was paradise on earth. Indeed, paintings of the Sahel hills from that period clearly show this to be true. But these orchards existed on a small scale – modest properties of small farmers. They had nothing in common with the enormous agricultural industrial enterprises in southern Spain today and even less with the vast estates of some of the feudal lords (the so-

Looking at what has now become of that paradise of my childhood makes me want to cry. Les Vergers no longer exists. Our house has been demolished. It became Kouba, a suburb of Greater Algiers. The leafy hills have disappeared, now covered in gigantic groups of social housing complexes that shelter many families, the majority of them Islamist, including Birmandreis and Birkhadem. The old monastery on the wooded hill where I used to go to catechism has become a hospital. The founders of Les Vergers' old Christian cemetery, situated in what remains of the pine forest of the old monastery, was desecrated and then demolished... On the other hand, mosques, which are more or less Salafist, have sprouted up like mushrooms. I no longer go on Google Earth to survey this disaster, it hurts too much. This is also part of the "genocided memory".

Epilogue

The Green Ray

Simple words and phrases marked with innocence recount in a few pages what were the last days of French Algeria in the eyes of a young Algerian girl, more than fifty years ago. Behind the words as they're read, the echo of a voice resonates in me: calm, diligent, sometimes trembling, dreamy or hesitant. The voice of her film, *La Valise à la mer*⁴⁵. I accompany Nicole through the streets and squares of Algiers, along the beach. There I meet her family and friends.

A sharp and contrasting surrealism emerges from this succession of war scenes, of fury and noise, blockades, raids, roundups, investigations, kidnappings, lynchings, and gunfights. From memories of high school with its ritualistic writing exercises, from the evocation of romantic feelings and parties, or happy times spent on the beach at Rocher Noir, waiting to catch a glimpse of the green ray on the horizon; nothing seems more profoundly or more hauntingly real. The neighbourhoods are emptying. People live behind closed doors. A simple note: "there are lots of attacks", sometimes underscored with a touch of blood: "On Rue Michelet, there are bodies on the footpath, it's horrible. We step over them to avoid the pools of blood". This is the stuff of Greek tragedy: the terror and compassion set against the staggering joy of the sea and sun, of family and friends so dear to Albert Camus: *Betwixt and Between*.

Still, just under the surface of Nicole Guiraud's story lies personal tragedy: the little girl sacrificed by the Milk Bar bombing, her sleeve dangling. And then, at the crack of dawn, the *gardes mobiles* arrive, in boots and helmets, black uniforms, machineguns pointed at the family. Nicole's father arrested, imprisoned, deported. His crime: being devoted to the defence of civilian victims of terrorism (of which he and his daughter were victims) and having founded an organisation for this purpose.

The bouquet of flowers placed on 5 April in front of the Grande Poste by Nicole and her mother takes us back to the Rue d'Isly massacre on 26 March 1962. The government at the time did everything in its power to conceal the truth of this state-sanctioned crime, seizing

and destroying all copies of *Le Livre blanc* which revealed all the details⁴⁶.

Imperceptibly but irrevocably, for such is the scope of the lines written by a fifteen-year-old girl living a confined existence in a family besieged by war, we move from memory to history and from personal tragedy to collective tragedy. This was not only a tragedy for French Algerians, but also for hundreds of thousands of their Muslim countrymen who believed in an Algeria that was both French and fraternal. They paid the price in exile and in blood. And still beyond that: the despair of the Algerian people who wanted us and who we want as brothers.

Nicole Guiraud's diary expresses in words what she has developed over her lifetime in her artistic practice, in drawings, lines, shapes and colours. The meaning behind her message includes and goes beyond our tragedy and invites us to realise that moral obligation transcends history's cruelties and the selfishness of politics, whether in Armenia, Algeria or any land fallen victim to misdirected destiny, its misfortunes and denials.

We recognise in Nicole Guiraud the demand for truth and justice and her refusal - in her liberty, her dignity, her integrity as a human being - to be a victim twice over: the first time in the mutilation of her body and spirit, the second in the denial of her suffering and her existence.

According to a Celtic legend, the green ray gives to those whose eyes are struck by it the power to read feelings and hearts with clarity. We should stay attentively watching along the horizon, far from us and within us, for the green ray of this absurd dream of simple humanity in Nicole Guiraud's diary.

Gérard Lehmann

⁴⁶ *Livre interdit – Livre blanc. Alger, le 26 Mars 1962.* “Forbidden book – white paper.