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Algeria Torn

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1 The Missing

The Palais Bourbon¹ has been a crowded place over the past three days, but one party was missing: Algeria. French deputies, gathered to vote on a policy for Algeria, spent five sessions failing to reach a decision on three agenda items. Meanwhile, the government initially displayed a fierce determination not to settle anything before the Assembly voted. Then, no less firmly, it insisted on a vote of confidence for its lack of a policy from deputies who had to look up the meaning of the words they were using in a dictionary. Clearly, France continues to get nowhere. In the meantime, however, Algeria is dying.

It would be nice if it were not necessary to attack the people who are struggling mightily with our institutions, as Gilliat struggled with the octopus.² But this is no time for indulgence. For Algeria, bloodshed is the order of the day. The Assembly's three votes will add to the death toll. While the deputies waste their time in useless talk, people are

dying alone, their throats slit and their screams unheard. The deputies consult their dictionaries while Algerians take up arms.

Who has given a thought to the ordeal of reservists called to battle, to the solitude of the French in Algeria, or to the anguish of the Arab people? Algeria is not France. It is not even Algeria. It is a neglected, faraway land populated by incomprehensible natives, cumbersome soldiers, and exotic Frenchmen, all bathed in a mist of blood. The fact that it is missing from the discussion distresses those who remember the place and were sorry to see it abandoned; others want to talk about it, but only if it says nothing in its own behalf.

Were recent lessons learned therefore of no avail? Solutions that might have been considered before August 20 are now out of the question. The elections that were once necessary and possible are now unimaginable without a cease-fire. The gulf between the two populations has widened. Extremists outdo one another in destruction. The worst can be avoided only if the government immediately adopts a firm, clear policy. But no! The opposition attacks the government and in the same breath congratulates the official who carries out the government's orders. Thus impotent moderation continues to serve the extremes, and our history is still an insane dialogue between paralytics and epileptics.

One chance remains, however. The contending forces could meet for a frank final discussion. This is the only possible way to overcome some of the barriers that separate the French of Algeria from both the Arabs and the people of metropolitan France. And if the dictionary and the legislative agenda prevent our politicians from agreeing to such a meeting, let us at least pave the way as far as we possibly can. I would like to do my part in the coming days, despite the difficulty right now of working out a position that is fair to everyone. In the end, though, what does it matter if we cannot find the words, or stumble over them, if those words can, however briefly, bring exiled Algeria back among us, with all its wounds, so that we can at least agree on an agenda of which we need not be ashamed?

1. Where the French National Assembly meets.—Trans.
2. In Victor Hugo's novel *The Toilers of the Sea*.—Trans.

2 The Roundtable

Political problems cannot be resolved with psychology. Without psychology, however, problems will certainly become more complicated. In Algeria, bloodshed has driven people apart. Let us not make things worse through stupidity and blindness. Not all the French in Algeria are bloodthirsty brutes, and not all Arabs are fanatical mass killers. Metropolitan France is not populated solely by passive officials and generals nostalgic for battle. Similarly, Algeria is not France, though many people, superb in their ignorance, continue to insist that it is. Yet it is home to more than a million French men and women, as is all too often forgotten in certain quarters. These simplifications only exacerbate the problem. What is more, one justifies the other, and together their consequences are lethal. Day after day these simplifications prove, in a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*, that in Algeria the French and the Arabs are condemned either to live together or to die together.

Of course, if despair becomes overwhelming, one may choose to die. Yet to dive into the water in order to avoid the rain would be unforgivable, as would dying because one sought to survive. That is why the idea of a roundtable around which would gather representatives of all tendencies, from colonizers to Arab nationalists, still seems valid to me. It is not good for people to live apart, or isolated in factions. It is not good for people to spend too much time nursing their hatred or feelings of humiliation, or even contemplating their dreams. The world today is one in which the enemy is invisible. The fight is abstract, and there is consequently nothing to clarify or alleviate it. To see and hear the other can therefore give meaning to the combat and just possibly make it unnecessary. The roundtable will be a time for accepting responsibility.

This will not happen, however, unless the meeting is fair to all sides and open. It is not in our power to ensure fairness. On principle I would not leave it up to the government to do so. But the fact is that the matter is today in the government's hands, and that makes us anxious. In any case, the roundtable must not be part of some new round of useless bargaining intended to maintain in power men who evidently chose to go into politics in order to avoid making policy.

That leaves the matter of publicity, about which we can do something. I will therefore devote several articles to the simplifications I alluded to above, explaining to each party to the talks the reasoning of its adversaries. Objectivity does not mean neutrality, however. The effort to understand makes sense only if there is a prospect of justifying a decision in the end. I will therefore conclude by taking a stand. And let me say at once that it will be a stand against despair, because in Algeria today, despair means war.

3 A Clear Conscience

The gulf between metropolitan France and the French of Algeria has never been wider. To consider the metropole first, it is as if the long-overdue indictment of France's policy of colonization has been extended to all the French living in Algeria. If you read certain newspapers, you get the impression that Algeria is a land of a million whip-wielding, cigar-chomping colonists driving around in Cadillacs.

This is a dangerous cliché. To heap scorn on a million of our fellow Frenchmen or quietly disdain them, indiscriminately blaming all for the sins of a few, can only hinder rather than encourage the progress that everyone claims to want, because such scorn inevitably affects the attitudes of the French settlers. Indeed, at the moment a majority of them believe that metropolitan France has stabbed them in the back—and I ask my metropolitan readers to measure the gravity of this situation.

In a separate article I will try to show the settlers that their judgment is incorrect. Nevertheless, it exists, and the settlers, united by a bitter sense of abandonment, cling to it except when dreaming of criminal repression or stunning surrender. What we need most in Algeria today, however, is a body of liberal opinion capable of moving quickly toward a solution, before the country is bathed in blood. In any case, this need should force us to make the distinctions essential to a just apportionment of the respective responsibilities of colony and metropole.

Those distinctions are in fact quite easy to make. Eighty percent of the French settlers are not colonists but workers and small businessmen. The standard of living of the workers, though superior to that of the Arabs, is inferior to that of workers in the metropole. Two examples will suffice to make this clear. The minimum wage is set at a level below that found in the poorest parts of France. The father of a family with three children receives not quite 7,200 francs in social benefits, compared with 19,000 in France.

Those are your colonial profiteers.

Yet these same ordinary people are the first victims of the present situation. They are not the ones placing ads in the papers, looking to buy property in Provence or apartments in Paris. They were born in Algeria and will die there, and their one hope is that they will not die in terror or be massacred in the pit of some mine. Must these hardworking Frenchmen, who live in isolated rural towns and villages, be sacrificed to expiate the immense sins of French colonization? Those who think so should first say as much and then, in my view, go offer themselves up as expiatory victims. It is too easy to allow others to be sacrificed, and if the French of Algeria bear their share of responsibility, the French of France must not forget theirs either.

Who in fact has wrecked every reform proposal of the last 30 years, if not a parliament elected by the French? Who closed their ears to the cries of Arab misery? Who remained indifferent to the repression of 1945, if not the vast majority of the French press? And finally, who, if

not France, waited with a revoltingly clear conscience until Algeria was bleeding before taking note of the fact that the country even existed?

If the French of Algeria nursed their prejudices, was it not with the blessing of the metropole? And wouldn't the French standard of living, as inadequate as it was, not have been worse but for the misery of millions of Arabs? All of France batted on the hunger of the Arabs—that is the truth. The only innocents in this affair were the young men who were sent into battle.

The true responsibility for the current disaster rests primarily with a series of French governments, backed by the comfortable indifference of the press and public opinion and supported by the complacency of lawmakers. In any case, they are more guilty than the hundreds of thousands of French workers who scrape by in Algeria on their miserable wages, who responded three times in 30 years to the call to take up arms on behalf of the metropole, and who are rewarded today by the contempt of the very people they helped.

They are more guilty than the Jewish populations that have been caught for years between French anti-Semitism and Arab distrust and who today find themselves forced by French indifference to seek refuge in another country.

Let us admit, therefore, once and for all, that the fault here is collective, but let us not draw from this fact the conclusion that expiation is necessary. Such a conclusion would become repugnant the moment others were called upon to pay the price. In politics, moreover, nothing is ever expiated. Errors can be repaired, and justice can be done. The Arabs are due a major reparation, in my opinion, a stunning reparation. But it must come from France as a whole, not from the blood of French men and women living in Algeria. Say this loud and clear and I know that those settlers will overcome their prejudices and participate in the construction of a new Algeria.

I said that the metropole could help to narrow the gulf between it and Algeria by renouncing demagogic simplifications. But the French of Algeria can help too by restraining their bitterness and overcoming their prejudices.

Mutual recrimination and hateful attacks change nothing of the reality that grips us all. Like it or not, the French of Algeria face a choice. They must choose between the politics of reconquest and the politics of reform. The first option means war and far-reaching repression. For some French settlers, however, the second option would mean surrender. This is not just a simplification; it is an error, and it could become a fatal error.

For a nation like France, the ultimate form of surrender is called injustice. In Algeria, it was a surrender to injustice that preceded the Arab rebellion and that explains why it occurred, though without justifying its excesses.

To favor reform, moreover, is not—as some odiously maintain—to approve of the massacre of civilian populations, which remains a crime. It is rather to seek to prevent the shedding of innocent blood, be it Arab or French. It is of course reprehensible to play down the massacres of French men and women in order to focus attention solely on the excesses of the repression. Yet no one is entitled to condemn the massacres unless he or she unreservedly rejects those excesses. On this point, at least, it seems to me that agreement is essential, precisely because it is so painful.

The crux of the matter, ultimately, is that to reject reform is the real surrender. It is a reflex of fear as much as anger, and a denial of reality. The French in Algeria know better than anyone that the policy of assimilation has failed—first because it was never really tried, and second because the Arab people have retained their own character, which is not identical to ours.

Two peoples, tied to each other by circumstances, may choose to enter into a partnership or to destroy each other. The choice in Algeria is a choice not between surrender and reconquest but between a marriage of convenience and a deadly marriage of two xenophobias.

If French Algeria refuses to recognize the Arab character, it will work against its own interests. To reject reform would be tantamount to rejecting the Arab people, who have their rights, and their more lucid militants, who do not deny that we have ours, in favor of feudal Egypt and Franco's Spain, which have only appetites. That would be the real surrender, and I cannot believe that the French of Algeria, whom I know to be realists, do not recognize the gravity of the stakes.

Instead of relentlessly attacking the failures of the metropole, it would be better to help it work toward a solution that takes Algerian realities into account. Those realities include the misery and deracination of the Arabs on the one hand and the security of the French settlers on the other. If the settlers prefer to wait for a plan concocted by four bored politicians between two campaign tours to become the charter of their misfortune, they can choose moral secession.

But if they wish to preserve the essential, to build an Algerian community in a peaceful and just Algeria, a community that will allow both French settlers and Arabs to embark on the road to a shared future, then they should join us, speak out, and propose ideas with the confidence that comes of true strength. And they should also know—I want to stress this point—that it is not France that holds their destiny in hand but French Algeria that is today deciding not only its own fate but also the fate of France.

5 The Adversary's Reasons

Before coming, if not to the solutions of the Algerian problem, then at least to the method that might make them possible, I must first say a

word to Arab militants. I must ask them, too, not to simplify things and not to make Algeria's future impossible.

I know that, from my side of the divide, those militants are used to hearing more encouraging words. If I were an Algerian fighter and received assurances of unconditional support from the French side, I would of course eagerly welcome that support. But being French by birth and since 1940 by deliberate choice, I will remain French until others are willing to cease being German or Russian. I will therefore speak in accordance with what I am. My only hope is that any Arab militants who read me will at least consider the arguments of a person who for 20 years, and long before their cause was discovered by Paris, defended their right to justice, and did so on Algerian soil, virtually alone.

I urge them first to distinguish carefully between those who support the Algerian cause because they want to see their own country surrender on this as on other fronts and those who demand reparations for the Algerian people because they want France to demonstrate that grandeur is not incompatible with justice. Of the friendship of the former, I will say only that it has already demonstrated its inconstancy. The others, who are and have been more reliable, surely deserve not to have their difficult task rendered impossible by mass bloodshed or blind intransigence.

The massacres of civilians must first be condemned by the Arab movement, just as we French liberals condemn the massacres of the repression. Otherwise, the relative notions of innocence and guilt that guide our action would disappear in the confusion of generalized criminality, which obeys the logic of total war. Since August 20, the only innocents in Algeria are the dead, whatever camp they may come from. Leaving them aside, what remains is two types of guilt, one of which has existed for a very long time, the other of which is of more recent vintage.

To be sure, this is the law of history.

When the oppressed take up arms in the name of justice, they take a step toward injustice. But how far they go in that direction varies, and although the law of history is what it is, there is also a law of the intellect, which dictates that although one must never cease to demand justice for the oppressed, there are limits beyond which one cannot approve of injustice committed in their name. The massacre of civilians, in addition to reviving the forces of oppression, exceeded those limits, and it is urgent that everyone recognize this clearly. On this point, I have a proposal to make concerning the future, and I will do so in a moment.

The question of intransigence remains. The farsighted militants of the North African movement, those who know that the Arab future depends on rapid access to the conditions of modern life for Muslim peoples, at times seem to have been outstripped by another movement, which is blind to the vast material needs of the ever-increasing masses and dreams of a pan-Islamism that is more readily imagined in Cairo than in the face of historical reality.

This dream, which in itself is worthy of respect, has no immediate future, however. It is therefore dangerous. Whatever one thinks of technological civilization, it alone, for all its weaknesses, is capable of bringing a decent life to the underdeveloped countries of the world. Materially speaking, the salvation of the East will come not from the East but from the West, which will then itself draw nourishment from the civilization of the East. Tunisian workers saw this clearly and supported Bourguiba and the UGTT rather than Salah ben Youssef.

The French to whom I referred earlier cannot in any case support the wing of the Arab movement that is extremist in its actions and retrograde in its doctrine. They do not regard Egypt as qualified to speak of freedom and justice or Spain to preach democracy. They are in favor of an Arab identity for Algeria, not an Egyptian identity. And they will not become champions of Nasser and his Stalin tanks or of Franco as a prophet of Islam and the dollar. In short, they cannot become enemies of their own convictions or their own country.

The Arab identity will be recognized by the French identity, but for that to happen it is necessary for France to exist. That is why we who are today demanding that the Arab identity be recognized also continue to defend the true identity of France, that of a people who in their vast majority, and alone among the great nations of the world, have the courage to recognize the reasons of their adversary, which is currently engaged in a struggle to the death with France. This country, which it is repugnant to call racist because of the exploits of a minority, today offers the Arab people their best chance of a future, and it does so in spite of its errors, the price of which has in any case been far too many humiliations.

6 November 1

Algeria's future is not yet totally compromised. As I wrote in a previous article, if each party to the conflict makes an effort to examine the reasons of its adversary, an entente may at last become possible. As a step toward that inevitable agreement, I would like to set forth its conditions and limits. On this anniversary, however, let me first say that there would be no point to making the effort if an intensification of the hatred and killing were to place the desired result beyond the realm of possibility.

If the two Algerian populations were to seek to massacre each other in a paroxysm of xenophobic hatred, nothing anyone could say would be able to bring peace to Algeria, and no reform would be able to resurrect the country from its ruins. Those who call for such massacres, no matter which camp they come from and no matter what argument or folly drives them, are in fact calling for their own destruction. The blind souls who are demanding widespread repression are in fact condemning innocent French people to death. And by the same token, those who courageously avail themselves of microphones far from the scene to call for murder are laying the groundwork for the massacre of Arab populations.

On this point at least, Franco-Arab solidarity is complete, and the time has come to recognize this. This solidarity can lead to either a dreadful fraternity of pointless deaths or an alliance of the living in a common task. But no one, dead or alive, will be able to escape the choice.

It therefore seems to me that no one, French or Arab, can possibly want to embrace the blood-soaked logic of total war. No one on either side should refuse to limit the conflict in ways that will prevent it from degenerating. I therefore propose that both camps commit themselves publicly and simultaneously to a policy of not harming civilian populations, no matter what the circumstances. For the time being, such a commitment would not change the situation. Its purpose would simply be to make the conflict less implacable and to save innocent lives.

What can be done to make this simultaneous declaration a reality? For obvious reasons, it would be desirable if the initiative came from France. The governor general of Algeria or the French government itself could take this step without making any fundamental concessions. But it is also possible that for purely political reasons, both parties might prefer a less politicized intervention. In that case, the initiative might be taken by the religious leaders of the three major denominations in Algeria. They would not need to obtain or negotiate an agreement, which would lie outside their competence, and could simply issue an unambiguous call for a simultaneous declaration on this one specific issue, which would then bind the parties in the future without inciting a pointless quarrel about the past.

It is not enough to say that such a commitment would facilitate the search for a solution. Without it, no solution is possible. There is an important difference between a war of destruction and a simple armed divorce: the former leads to nothing but further destruction, whereas the latter can end in reconciliation.

If there is to be reconciliation, the public commitment for which we are calling is a necessary but not sufficient first step. To reject it out of hand would be tantamount to admitting publicly that one places little value

on one's own people and, furthermore, that the only goal is pointless and unlimited destruction. I do not see how either party to the conflict can refuse to make a pure and simple humanitarian statement that would be clear in its terms and significant in its consequences. Each party can do so, moreover, without giving up any of its legitimate grievances. Yet no one can shirk this obligation without revealing his true designs, which can then be taken into account.

7 A Truce for Civilians

Not a day goes by without terrible news from Algeria arriving by mail, newspaper, and even telephone. Calls for help—nay, cries for help—ring out everywhere. In one morning I received a letter from an Arab schoolteacher whose village witnessed the summary execution of several men by firing squad and a call from a friend on behalf of French workers killed and mutilated at their workplace. And one has to live with this news in a Paris buried under snow and filth, each day more oppressive than the last.

If only the escalation could be stopped. What is the point of each side brandishing its victims against those of the other? All the dead belong to the same tragic family, whose members are now slitting one another's throats in the dead of night, the blind killing the blind without being able to see who they are.

The tragedy has not left everyone in tears, moreover. Some exult about it, albeit from afar. They deliver sermons, but beneath their grave mien the cry is always the same: "Hit harder! See how cruel that fellow is! Gouge his eyes out!" Unfortunately, if there is anyone left in Algeria who has not kept pace with the escalating killing and vengeance, he will soon catch up. Before long, Algeria will be populated exclusively by murderers and victims. Only the dead will be innocent.

There is a priority of violence: I know that. The long years of colonialist violence explain the violence of the rebellion. But that justification is

applicable only to the armed rebellion. How can one condemn the excesses of the repression if one ignores or says nothing about the extremes of the rebellion? And conversely, how can one be outraged by the massacres of French prisoners if one tolerates the execution of Arabs without trial? Each side uses the crimes of the other to justify its own. By this logic, the only possible outcome is interminable destruction.

“Everyone must choose sides,” shout the haters. But I have chosen. I have chosen a Just Algeria, where French and Arabs may associate freely. And I want Arab militants to preserve the justice of their cause by condemning the massacre of civilians, just as I want the French to protect their rights and their future by openly condemning the massacres of the repression.

When it becomes clear that neither side is capable of such an effort, or of the lucidity that would allow them to perceive their common interests, and when it becomes clear that France, caught between its money machine and its propaganda machine, is incapable of developing a policy that is both realistic and generous, then and only then will we give up hope. But these things are not yet clear, and we must fight to the end against the consequences of hatred.

Time is of the essence. Every day that goes by destroys a little more of Algeria and promises years of additional misery for its population. Each death drives the two populations a little farther apart. Tomorrow, they will face each other not across an abyss but over a common grave. Whatever government is chosen a few weeks from now to deal with the Algerian problem, there is a danger that by then there will be no way out of the current impasse.

It is therefore up to the French of Algeria to take the initiative themselves. They are afraid of Paris, I know, and they are not always wrong to be afraid. But what are they doing in the meantime? What are they proposing? If they do nothing, others will do for them, and what grounds would they then have to complain? I am told that some of them, suddenly enlightened, have chosen to support Poujade.¹ I am not yet prepared to believe that they would choose a course

tantamount to suicide. Algeria needs creative thinking, not shopworn slogans. The country is dying, poisoned by hatred and injustice. It can save itself only by overcoming its hatred and with a surfeit of creative energy.

It is therefore necessary to appeal once again to the French of Algeria: “While defending your homes and your families, you must find the additional strength to recognize what is just in the cause of your adversaries and to condemn what is unjust in the repression. Be the first to propose ways of saving Algeria and establishing fair cooperation among the various sons and daughters of the same soil.” And Arab militants must be addressed in similar terms. While fighting for their cause, they must at last disavow the murder of innocents and propose their own plan for the future.

And all must be enjoined to seek a truce. A truce until solutions can be found, a truce in which both sides will refrain from killing civilians. Until the accuser sets an example, all accusations are useless. French friends and Arab friends, I urge you to respond to one of the last appeals for an Algeria that is truly free and peaceful and soon prosperous and inventive. There is no other solution. There is no solution but the one we are proposing. Apart from it, there is only death and destruction. Movements are forming everywhere, I know, and courageous people, both Arab and French, are regrouping. Join them. Aid them with all your might. They are Algeria’s last and only hope.

1. Pierre Poujade (1920–2003), a right-wing populist politician and leader of the Poujadiste movement.—Trans.

8 The Party of Truce

The time is approaching when the Algerian problem will require a solution, yet no solution is in sight. Apparently, nobody has a real plan. People are fighting about the method and the means, while no one pays any attention to the ends.

People tell me that some in the Arab movement are proposing a form of independence that would sooner or later result in the eviction of the French from Algeria. But the French have been in Algeria long enough and in large enough numbers that they, too, constitute a people who cannot tell others what to do but by the same token cannot be made to do anything without their consent.

Meanwhile, fanatics among the colonists break windows to cries of "Repression!" and postpone any possibility of reform until after the victory. In practical terms, this is tantamount, morally speaking, to suppression of the Arab population, whose identity and rights cannot be denied.

These are the doctrines of total war. Neither can be called a constructive solution. A more fruitful proposal, to my mind, is the one approved yesterday by the Socialist Congress, which said that there can be no unilateral negotiation in Algeria. Indeed, the two words are contradictory. To have a negotiation, each party must take the other party's rights into account and concede something for the sake of peace.

Two things make this confrontation difficult. The first is the absence of any Algerian political structure, which colonization prevented, whereas the protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco at least paid lip service to the indigenous state. The second stems from the absence of any clearly defined French position as a result of our political instability. In a clash between passions, no one can define his own position in relation to that of his adversary. Escalation then becomes the only form of expression.

We cannot create a new political structure in Algeria overnight. That is precisely the problem that needs to be resolved. But the French government could clarify its position by recognizing the need to negotiate with duly elected interlocutors and to state clearly what it can and cannot accept.

Today, what the government cannot accept is clear. Succinctly stated, the situation is this: yes to an Arab identity in Algeria, no to an Egyptian identity. With the government tottering, there is no majority in France in favor of the strange coalition that has formed against us, uniting Madrid, Budapest, and Cairo. On this point, the no must be firm. But the stronger that no is, the more steadfast must be the commitment to treat the Arab people justly and to conclude an agreement to which they can freely assent.

This cannot happen unless French opinion in Algeria evolves considerably. The bloody marriage of terrorism and repression is no help in this regard, nor is the escalation of hateful demagoguery in both camps. Those who are still capable of dialogue must come together. The French who believe that a French presence in Algeria can coexist with an Arab presence in a freely chosen regime, who believe that such coexistence will restore justice to all Algerian communities without exception, and who are sure that only such a regime can save the Algerian people from death today and misery tomorrow must at last shoulder their responsibilities and preach peace so that dialogue might once again be possible. Their first duty is to insist with all their strength that a truce be established at once in regard to civilians.

Once such a truce is achieved, the rest might follow. In Algeria it is not only necessary for individuals to come together, it is also possible. A clear and steady path toward justice, a union of differences, and confidence in the possibilities of the future—all of us, French and Arabs alike, should be able to get behind a party based on these principles. The party of truce would then become Algeria itself. What is at stake is life itself.

I experience the current situation as akin to the war in Spain and the defeat of 1940—events that changed the men and women of my generation and forced them to recognize the uselessness of the political nostrums that had previously guided them. If, through some concatenation of misfortunes, the unwitting coalition of two blind enemies were to result in the death, in one way or another, of the Algeria for which we hope, then we would have to take stock of our

impotence and reconsider all our commitments and positions, for the whole meaning of history will have changed for us.

The hope remains, however, that we will be capable of building the kind of future we have in mind. The difficult and exalting task of nurturing that hope lies with the French of Algeria, the French of France, and the Arab people themselves.

9 Call for a Civilian Truce in Algeria

Ladies and gentlemen,¹

Despite the precautions that had to be taken to protect this meeting, and despite the difficulties we face, I come before you tonight not to divide but to unite. That is my most ardent wish. It is not the least of my disappointments, to put it mildly, that the deck seems to be stacked against this wish, and that a man, a writer, who has devoted a part of his life to the service of Algeria, is in danger of being denied the opportunity to speak even before anyone knows what he has to say. But this only confirms the urgency of the effort we must make for peace. This meeting was supposed to demonstrate that there is still a chance for dialogue. It was supposed to prevent the general feeling of discouragement from ending in passive acceptance of the worst.

In using the word “dialogue,” I mean to signal that I did not come here to give a standard lecture. The fact is that, as things now stand, I haven’t the heart for that. But I thought it possible, and even considered it my duty, to come before you to issue a simple appeal to your humanity, which in one respect at least might be able to calm tempers and bring together a majority of Algerians, both French and Arab, without asking them to relinquish any of their convictions. This appeal, which has been sponsored by the committee that organized this meeting, is addressed to both camps and calls on them to accept a truce that would apply exclusively to innocent civilians.

My only purpose today is therefore to argue in favor of this initiative. I will try to be brief.

Let me say first—and I cannot emphasize this enough—that by its very nature this appeal falls outside the realm of politics. If it were otherwise, I would not be qualified to discuss it. I am not a politician. My passions and preferences summon me to places other than this podium. I am here only under the pressure of the situation and the way I sometimes conceive of my profession as a writer. On the substance of the Algerian question, I may have more doubts than certitudes to express, given the pace of events and the growing suspicions on both sides. My only qualification to speak about this issue is that I have experienced Algeria's misfortune as a personal tragedy.

Nor can I rejoice in any death, no matter whose it is. For twenty years I have used the feeble means available to me to help bring harmony between our two peoples. To my preaching in favor of reconciliation, history has responded in cruel fashion: the two peoples I love are today locked in mortal combat. The look of consternation on my face is no doubt a cause for laughter. But I myself am not inclined to laugh. In the face of such failure, my only conceivable concern is to spare my country any unnecessary suffering.

I should add that the people who took the initiative to support this appeal were also not acting on political grounds. Some of them, representing different religious faiths, were responding to a high call and felt a duty to humanity. Others were people whose professions and predilections do not normally involve them in public affairs. Most do work that is useful to the community, work that suffices to fill their lives. They might have remained on the sidelines, like so many others, counting the attacks while occasionally lamenting the losses in the most melancholic tones. But they felt that the work of building, teaching, and creating—generous, life-enhancing work—cannot continue in a land overwhelmed by hatred and drenched in blood.

Their decision to do something—a decision from which numerous consequences and commitments flow—gives them only one right: to demand that others think about what they are proposing.

Finally, I should say that our goal is not to win your political support. If we tried to get to the heart of the issue, we would risk failing to win the agreement we need. We may differ about the necessary solutions and even about the means to achieve them. To rehearse yet again positions that have already been stated and distorted a hundred times would for now merely add to the insults and enmities under which the country has been struggling and suffocating.

But at least one thing unites us all: namely, love of the land we share, and distress. Distress in the face of a future that becomes a little more inaccessible each day, distress at the threat of a rotten war and an economic crisis that is already serious and steadily getting worse, and which threatens to get so bad that recovery will take many years.

It is this distress that we want to address, even, and indeed especially, in the presence of those who have already chosen sides. For even among the most determined of those partisans, those engaged in the heat of the battle, there remain some, I am sure, who are not resigned to murder and hatred and who dream of a happy Algeria.

It is to that unresigned part of each of you, French or Arab, that we appeal tonight. Without dredging up yet again the errors of the past, and anxious only for the future, it is to those who have not resigned themselves to seeing this great country broken in two that we want to say today that it is still possible to come to an agreement on two simple points: first, to come together, and second, to save human lives and thus bring about a climate more favorable to reasonable discussion. The modesty of this goal is deliberate, yet it is important enough, in my opinion, to deserve your broad approval.

What do we want? We want the Arab movement and the French authorities, without entering into contact with each other or making any other commitment, to declare simultaneously that as long as the troubles continue, civilian populations will at all times be respected and protected. Why? The first reason, on which I will not insist, is, as I said earlier, one of simple humanity. However old and deep the roots of the Algerian tragedy are, one fact remains: no cause justifies the deaths of

innocent people. Throughout history, human beings, though incapable of banning war itself, have tried to limit its effects.

As horrible and repugnant as the two world wars were, organizations offering aid and assistance were able to illuminate the darkness with rays of pity that made it impossible to give up hope in mankind altogether. The need for such help seems all the more urgent in what appears in many ways to be a fratricidal struggle, an obscure combat in which lethal force makes no distinction between men and women or soldiers and workers. Even if our initiative were to save only one innocent life, it would still be justified.

But it is also justified on other grounds. Although Algeria's future looks bleak, it is not yet entirely compromised. If everyone, Arab as well as French, were to make an effort to think about his adversary's justifications, then a useful discussion might at least begin. But if each side in Algeria accuses the other of starting the conflict and both go at each other in a kind of xenophobic frenzy, then any chance of agreement will be definitively drowned in blood. For us, the greatest source of distress is the thought that we may be headed toward such horrors. But that cannot and must not happen until those of us, Arab and French, who reject nihilism's folly and destructiveness have issued a final appeal to reason.

In one sense, as reason clearly shows, Franco-Arab solidarity is inevitable, in life as in death, in destruction as in hope. The hideous face of this solidarity can be seen in the infernal dialectic according to which what kills one side also kills the other. Each camp blames the other, justifying its own violence in terms of its adversary's. The endless dispute over who committed the first wrong becomes meaningless. Because two populations so similar and yet so different, and each worthy of respect, have not been able to live together, they are condemned to die together, with rage in their hearts.

There is also a community of hope, however, and it is this that justifies our appeal. This community accepts the fact that certain realities cannot be changed. Sharing this land are a million Frenchmen who have

been settled here for more than a century, millions of Muslims, both Arab and Berber, who have been here for many centuries, and any number of strong and vibrant religious communities. These people must live together where history has placed them, at a crossroads of commerce and civilizations. They can do so if only they are willing to take a few steps toward one another for a free and open debate.

Our differences should then help us rather than drive us apart. In this as in other things, I, for one, believe only in differences, not uniformity, because differences are the roots without which the tree of liberty withers and the sap of creation and civilization dries up. Yet we remain frozen in one another's presence as if stricken with a paralysis from which only sudden spasms of violence can liberate us. This is because the struggle has taken on an implacable character that arouses on both sides irrepressible rage and passions that can be slaked only by escalation.

"No further discussion is possible." This is the attitude that kills any chance of a future and makes life impossible. What follows is blind struggle, in which the French decide to ignore the Arabs, even if they know deep down that the Arab demand for dignity is justified, and the Arabs decide to ignore the French, even though they know deep down that the French of Algeria also have a right to security and dignity on the land we all share. Steeped in bitterness and hatred, each side finds it impossible to listen to the other. Every proposal, no matter what its nature, is greeted with suspicion and immediately twisted into a form that renders it useless.

Little by little we become caught in a web of old and new accusations, acts of vengeance, and endless bitterness, as in an ancient family quarrel in which grievances accumulate generation after generation to the point where not even the most upright and humane judge can sort things out. It becomes difficult to imagine how such an affair can end, and the hope of a Franco-Arab partnership in a peaceful and creative Algeria fades with each passing day.

If we want to keep a little of this hope alive until substantive debate can begin, and if we want to make sure that with an effort of mutual understanding that debate has some hope of altering the status quo, then we must act to change the nature of the struggle itself. For now we are too hamstrung by the scope of the tragedy and the complexity of the passions that have been unleashed to hope for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Any attempt to obtain this would require purely political moves that for the time being might lead to still further division.

We can act, however, on what is odious about the conflict itself. We can propose not to change the present situation but simply to renounce what makes it unforgivable, namely, the slaughter of the innocent. The fact that such a meeting would bring together French and Arabs equally committed to avoiding irreparable damage and irreversible misery would create a real opportunity to intervene in both camps.

If our proposal has a chance of being accepted—and it does—we can not only save precious lives but also restore a climate that could lead to healthy debate not sidetracked by absurd ultimatums. We can lay the groundwork for a more just and nuanced understanding of the Algerian problem. If we can achieve just a small thaw on this one issue, then we can hope that someday it might be possible to chip away at the mass of hatreds and insane demands that currently block all progress. The initiative would then pass to the politicians, each of whom would have the right to defend his position and explain how it differs from the positions of others.

In any case, this is the narrow position on which we can, for starters, hope to come together. For the time being, any broader platform would only offer scope for additional disagreement. We must therefore be patient with ourselves.

As for the proposed action, of the utmost importance despite its limitations, I do not think that any Frenchman or Arab can, after mature reflection, possibly reject it. To understand why, it is enough to imagine what would happen if, despite all the precautions and restrictions with

which we have surrounded this proposal, it were to fail. A definitive divorce would follow, destroying all hope and leading to misfortunes of which we have only the faintest idea at present.

Our Arab friends, who courageously stand with us today in a no-man's-land in which we find ourselves menaced by both sides and who, being torn themselves, already find it so difficult to resist calls for escalation, will be forced to surrender to a fatalism that will snuff out any possibility of dialogue. Directly or indirectly, they will join the struggle, when they might have become artisans of peace. It is therefore in the interest of every Frenchman to help them overcome this fatalism.

By the same token, it is in the direct interest of every Arab moderate to help us overcome another fatalism. Because if this proposal fails and our lack of influence is demonstrated, the French liberals who think that French and Arab can coexist in Algeria, who believe that such coexistence will respect the rights of both groups, and who are certain that there is in any case no other way of saving the people of this country from misery—those French liberals will be silenced for good.

Then, instead of participating in the broader community of which they dream, they will be thrown back on the only existing community that supports them, namely, France. So we too, whether by silence or deliberate choice, will join the struggle. It is this evolution on both sides that we must fear, and that is what makes action so urgent. To explain why, I cannot speak for our Arab friends, but I am a witness to what may happen in France.

Here, I am aware of Arab suspicion of any and all proposals, and by the same token I am aware, as you must be too, that in France similar doubts and suspicions are growing and are in danger of becoming permanent if the French, already surprised by the continuation of the war in the Rif after the return of the sultan and by the revival of guerrilla warfare in Tunisia, are forced by the spread of unrestrained warfare in Algeria to believe that the goal of the struggle is not simply justice for a people but furtherance of the ambitions of foreign powers at France's expense and to its ultimate ruin.

If that were to happen, many in France would reason in the same way as the majority of Arabs if they were to lose all hope and submit to the inevitable. Their argument would be the following: "We are French. There is no reason why considering what is just in the cause of our adversaries should lead us to be unjust toward what deserves to survive and grow in France and its people. No one can expect us to applaud every form of nationalism except our own or to absolve every sin except the sins of France. Having been pushed to the limit, we must choose, and we cannot choose in favor of another country than our own."

If the adversary adopts a similar but opposite argument, our two peoples will separate once and for all, and Algeria will be left a field of ruins for many years to come, even though a little thought today could still turn things around and avoid the worst.

That is the danger we both face, the fatal dilemma we both confront. Either we succeed in joining together to limit the damage and thus encourage a more satisfactory evolution of the situation, or we fail to come together and persuade, and that failure will then color our whole future. That is what justifies our initiative and makes it so urgent. That is why my appeal will be more than insistent.

If I had the power to give voice to the solitude and distress that each of us feels, I would speak to you in that voice. Speaking for myself, I have passionately loved this country, in which I was born and from which I have taken everything that I am, and among my friends who live here I have never distinguished by race. Although I have known and shared the misery that this country has not escaped, Algeria has nevertheless remained for me a land of happiness, energy, and creativity, and I cannot resign myself to seeing it become a land of unhappiness and hatred for years to come.

I know that many people are fascinated by the awfulness of history's great tragedies. Because of this, they remain transfixed, unable to decide what to do, simply waiting. They wait, and then one day the

Gorgon devours them. I want to share with you my conviction that this spell can be broken, that this impotence is an illusion, and that sometimes, a strong heart, intelligence, and courage are enough to overcome fate. All it takes is will: will that is not blind but firm and deliberate.

We resign ourselves to fate too easily. We too readily believe that in the end there is no progress without bloodshed and that the strong advance at the expense of the weak. Such a fate may indeed exist, but men are not required to bow down before it or submit to its laws. Had they always done so, we would still be living in prehistoric times. In any event, men of culture and faith must never desert when historic battles are being waged, nor can they serve the forces of cruelty and inhumanity. Their role is to remain steadfast, to aid their fellow men against the forces of oppression, and to work on behalf of liberty against fatalism.

Only then is true progress possible. Only then can history innovate and create. Otherwise it repeats itself, like a bloody mouth from which an insane babble pours like vomit. We are still at the babbling stage, and yet the century holds the prospect of great things. We are in a knife fight, or something close to it, while the world is advancing at supersonic speed. On the same day that French papers ran the horrible story of our provincial quarrels, they also announced the Euratom treaty. Tomorrow, if only Europe could come to an agreement, a flood of riches would inundate the continent and spill over into Algeria, making our problems obsolete and our hatreds moot.

This is the future, so close and yet so hard to imagine, for which we must organize and strive. What is absurd and distressing about the tragedy we are experiencing is apparent in the fact that to enjoy the new global opportunities, we must band together in small numbers simply to demand that a handful of innocent victims be spared at one isolated place in the world, and nothing more. But since that is our task, obscure and thankless though it may be, we must confront it boldly so that we may one day deserve to live as free men, which is to say, as men who refuse both to engage in terror and to endure it.

1. This is the text of a speech delivered in Algiers on January 22, 1956.

The End