



## Crisis in Algeria, Albert Camus

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## Crisis in Algeria

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### 1 Crisis in Algeria

When one looks at the recent disturbances in North Africa, it is wise to avoid two extremes. One is to describe as tragic a situation that is merely serious. The other is to ignore the grave difficulties with which Algeria is grappling today.

To adopt the first attitude would be to play into the hands of interests out to persuade the government to take repressive measures that would be not only inhumane but also impolitic. To adopt the second would be to continue to widen the gap that for so many years has separated the metropolis from its African territories. In either case, one

would be opting for a shortsighted policy as harmful to French interests as to Arab ones.

The survey that follows is the fruit of a three-week visit to Algeria, and its only ambition is to reduce the incredible ignorance of the metropolis in regard to North African affairs. I tried to be as objective as possible as I traveled more than 1,500 miles along the Algerian coast as well as inland to the limits of the southern territories.

I visited not only cities but also the most remote douars, and I listened to the opinions and firsthand accounts of bureaucrats and native farmers, of colonists and Arab militants. A good policy is first of all a well-informed policy. Of course this survey is just that: a survey. But if the facts I report are not new, they have been checked. I therefore hope that they can be of some use to those charged with coming up with a policy that can save Algeria from spinning out of control.

Before going into detail about the North African crisis, however, it may be useful to dispose of a certain number of prejudices. To begin with, I want to remind people in France of the fact that Algeria exists. By that I mean that it exists independent of France and that its problems have their own peculiar texture and scale. Hence one cannot resolve those problems by following the metropolitan example.

One simple fact will suffice to illustrate what I mean. All French schoolchildren learn that Algeria, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, consists of three départements. Administratively, that is true. In fact, however, those three départements are the size of forty typical French départements and have a population equivalent to twelve. So the metropolitan bureaucracy thinks it has done a great deal when it sends 2,000 tons of

grain to Algeria, but that amounts to exactly one day's consumption of the country's eight million inhabitants. The next day they have to start all over again.

As for the political dimension, I want to point out that the Arab people also exist. By that I mean that they aren't the wretched, faceless mob in which Westerners see nothing worth respecting or defending. On the contrary, they are a people of impressive traditions, whose virtues are eminently clear to anyone willing to approach them without prejudice.

These people are not inferior except in regard to the conditions in which they must live, and we have as much to learn from them as they from us. Too many French people in Algeria and elsewhere imagine the Arabs as a shapeless mass without interests. One more fact will set them straight.

In the most remote douars, 500 miles from the coast, I was surprised to hear the name of M. Wladimir d'Ormesson mentioned. The reason for this was that, a few weeks ago, our colleague published an article on the Algerian question that Muslims deemed to be ill-informed and insulting. I'm not sure that the journalist for the Figaro will be glad to know how quickly he made a reputation for himself in Arab lands, but it does tell us a great deal about the political awakening of the Muslim masses. Finally, if I point out one more fact of which too many French people are ignorant—namely, that hundreds of thousands of Arabs have spent the past two years fighting for the liberation of France—I will have earned the right to move on to other matters.

In any case, all this should teach us not to prejudge anything about Algeria and to refrain from repeating clichés. In a sense, the French have to conquer Algeria a second time. To sum up my impressions from my visit, I should say that this second conquest will not be as easy as

the first. In North Africa as in France, we need to invent new recipes and come up with new ways of doing things if we want the future to make sense to us.

The Algeria of 1945 is enduring the same economic and political crisis it has always endured, though never before to this degree. In this lovely country, now glorious with spring blossoms and sunshine, people suffering from hunger are demanding justice. We cannot remain indifferent to their suffering, because we have experienced it ourselves.

Rather than respond with condemnations, let us try to understand the reasons for their demands and invoke on their behalf the same democratic principles that we claim for ourselves. My goal in the remaining articles of this series is to support this effort simply by supplying objective information.

P.S. This article was complete when an evening paper appeared with an article accusing Ferhat Abbas, president of the “Friends of the Manifesto,” of having personally organized the Algerian disturbances. This article was obviously written in Paris on the basis of fragmentary information. Nevertheless, it is unacceptable to make such a serious accusation on the basis of such flimsy evidence. There is much to be said for and against Ferhat Abbas and his party. We will in fact be discussing him. But French journalists must recognize that a problem this serious cannot be resolved by intemperate appeals for blind repression.

The most obvious crisis afflicting Algeria is an economic one.

Algeria already shows unambiguous signs of this to the attentive visitor. The leading taverns serve drinks in cut-off bottles with the edges filed down. Hotels give you wire coat hangers. Bombed-out stores have fallen beams in their windows rather than glass. In private homes it is not uncommon for the bulb used to light the dining room to be moved to the bedroom after dinner. There is a shortage of manufactured goods, no doubt because Algeria has no industry, but above all there is an import crisis. We will be looking at its effects.

The news that must be shouted from the rooftops is that most Algerians are experiencing a famine. This is the reason for the serious disturbances we have heard about, and this is what needs fixing. The population of Algeria is nine million in round numbers. Of these nine million, eight million are Arabo-Berbers, compared with a million Europeans. Most of the Arab population is scattered throughout the vast countryside in douars, which French colonial administrations have combined into mixed villages. The basic diet of the Arabs consists of grains (wheat or barley), consumed in the form of couscous or flatbread. For want of grain, millions of Arabs are suffering from hunger.

Famine is still a dreadful scourge in Algeria, where harvests are as capricious as the rainfall. In normal times, however, the reserves maintained by the French administration made up the shortfall caused by drought. There are no longer any reserves in Algeria, because they were transferred to the metropolis for the benefit of the Germans. The Algerian people were therefore at the mercy of a bad harvest.

That misfortune has happened. Let me mention just one fact to give you an idea of how bad it was. Throughout the high plateaus of Algeria, there has been no rain since January. These vast fields are covered with wheat no higher than the poppies that stretch off to the horizon. The land, covered with cracks like a lava flow, is so dry that double teams had to be used for the spring planting. The plow tears at the flaky, powdery soil incapable of holding the sown seed. The harvest expected for this season will be worse than the last, which was already disastrous.

I beg the reader's indulgence if I cite some figures. Normally, Algeria requires some 18 million quintals of grain. As a general rule, its production is roughly equal to its consumption: for instance, the 1935–1936 harvest of all grains combined was 17,371,000 quintals. Last season's total was barely 8,715,000 quintals, however, which is just 40 percent of normal needs. This year's forecasts are even more pessimistic, with a maximum expectation of roughly six million quintals.

The drought is not the only reason for this terrifying shortage. The acreage devoted to grain has decreased, because there is less seed and also because fodder is not taxed, so that certain heedless landowners chose to grow it rather than essential grains. Certain temporary technical difficulties also play a part: deteriorating equipment (a plow blade that used to cost 20 francs now goes for 500), fuel rationing, and labor shortages due to the military mobilizations. What is more, demand for grain has increased owing to rationing of other foods. Without help from the outside world, it is clear, therefore, that Algeria cannot feed its population from its own soil.

To witness the consequences of this famine is enough to break your heart. The administration was obliged to reduce the grain allowance to 7.5 kilograms per person per month (farmworkers receive 18 kilograms

from their employers, but they are a minority). That works out to 250 grams per day, which is not much for people whose only staple is grain.

Yet even this famine ration could not be honored in the majority of cases. In Kabylia, in the Ouarsensis, in the South Oranais, and in the Aurès (to take widely separated regions), four to five kilograms per month was the most that could be distributed, which comes to 130 to 150 grams per person per day.

Is it clear what that means? Is it clear that in a country where sky and land are invitations to happiness, this means that millions of people are suffering from hunger? On every road one sees haggard people in rags. Traveling around the country, one sees fields dug up and raked over in bizarre ways, because an entire douar has come to scratch the soil for a bitter but edible root called talrouda, which can be made into a porridge that is at least filling if not nourishing.

The reader may be wondering what can be done. To be sure, the problem is a difficult one. But there is not a minute to waste, and no one's interests can be spared, if we want to save these wretched people and stop hungry masses egged on by criminal madmen from resuming the savage massacre in Sétif. In my next article I will indicate what injustices must be ended and what emergency measures must be taken in the economic sphere.

3 Ships and Justice



What can we do for the millions of Algerians who are suffering from hunger? It doesn't take exceptional political lucidity to observe that only a policy of massive imports can change the situation.

The government has just announced that a million quintals of wheat will be distributed in Algeria. That is good. Bear in mind, however, that this amount is enough to meet the needs of only about a month's consumption. There is no way to avoid sending the same quantity of grain to Algeria next month and the month after that. The import problem has thus not been solved, and it will continue to require the utmost energy.

I am by no means unaware of the difficulty of the undertaking. To restore the situation, feed the Arab population properly, and eliminate the black market, Algeria will need to import 12 million quintals. That amounts to 240 shiploads of 5,000 tons each. Given the state in which the war has left us, everyone understands what that means. But given the urgency of the situation, it must also be recognized that we cannot allow anything to stand in our way and must, if necessary, demand that the world provide the necessary ships. When millions of people are suffering from hunger, it becomes everybody's business.

When we have done this, however, we still will not have done everything we can, because the gravity of the Algerian affair does not stem solely from the fact that the Arabs are hungry. It also stems from the fact that their hunger is unjust. Hence it is not enough to give Algeria the grain it needs; that grain must also be distributed equitably. I would have preferred not to write this, but it is a fact that the distribution is not equitable.

For proof of this assertion, consider first the fact that in this country, where grain is almost as scarce as gold, it can still be found on the black market. In most of the villages I visited, it was possible to buy grain not at the official price of 540 francs per quintal but at an underground price ranging from 7,000 to 16,000 francs per quintal.<sup>1</sup> The black market is supplied with wheat siphoned from official supplies by thoughtless colonists and native overlords.

Furthermore, the grain that is delivered to distribution points is not distributed equally. The caïdship, that most harmful institution, continues to wreak havoc. The caïds, who act in a sense as stewards representing the French administration, have all too often been entrusted with the task of overseeing distributions of grain, and the methods used are often highly idiosyncratic.

The distributions carried out by the French administration itself are inadequate but generally honest. Those carried out by the caïds are generally unfair, governed by self-interest and favoritism.

Finally, to save the most painful point for last, the ration distributed to natives throughout Algeria is inferior to that distributed to Europeans. This is the case officially, since a European is entitled to 300 grams per day, compared with 250 for an Arab. Unofficially, the situation is even worse, since the typical Arab receives only 100 to 150 grams, as I mentioned earlier.

The people of Algeria, animated by a sure and instinctive sense of justice, might perhaps accept the need for such severe rationing in principle. But they do not accept (as they made clear to me) the idea that because it was necessary to limit rations, only Arab rations should have been reduced. People who have not been stingy with their blood

in this war are justified in thinking that others should not be stingy with their bread.

This unequal treatment, together with various other abuses, has created a political malaise, which I will deal with in forthcoming articles. But within the context of the economic problem that concerns me now, it is further poisoning an already grave situation, and it is adding to the suffering of the natives a bitterness that could have been avoided.

To quell the cruelest of hungers and heal inflamed hearts: that is the task we face today. Hundreds of freighters filled with grain and two or three measures of strict equality: this is what millions of people are asking of us, and perhaps this will help to make it clear why we must try to understand them before we judge them.

1. To give an idea of prices, wheat at 10,000 francs per quintal meant that a kilo of bread cost about 120 francs. An Arab worker's weekly salary averaged about 60 francs.

#### 4 The Political Malaise

As grave and urgent as the economic privation from which North Africa is suffering is, it cannot by itself account for the Algerian political crisis. If we discussed the famine first, it was because hunger is the first priority. But when we have done everything that needs to be done to feed the Algerian population, we still will only have scratched the surface. Or, to put it another way, we will still, at long last, need to come up with a policy for North Africa.

Far be it from me to try to formulate a definitive policy for North Africa in the space of two or three articles. This would please no one, and truth would not be served. But our Algerian policy is so distorted by prejudice and ignorance that to offer an objective account based on accurate information is already to render an important service. That is what I propose to do.

I read in a morning newspaper that 80 percent of the Arabs wished to become French citizens. In contrast, I would sum up the current state of Algerian policy by saying that, indeed, Arabs used to want to become citizens but no longer do. When you have hoped for something for a long time and your hopes are dashed, you avert your eyes, and your erstwhile desire disappears. That is what has happened to the indigenous peoples of Algeria, and the primary responsibility for this is ours.

French colonial doctrine in Algeria since the conquest has not been notable for its coherence. I shall spare the reader the history of its fluctuations, from the notion of an Arab kingdom favored by the Second Empire to that of assimilation. In theory, it was the idea of assimilation that triumphed in the end. For the past 50 years or so, France's avowed goal in North Africa was gradually to open the way to French citizenship for all Arabs. Let it be said at once that this idea remained theoretical. In Algeria itself, the policy of assimilation met with unremitting hostility, primarily on the part of the most influential colonizers.

There exists a whole arsenal of arguments—some of them apparently convincing at first sight—which have until now sufficed to keep Algeria immobilized in the political situation we have described.

I won't discuss these arguments. But it is clear that on this issue as on others, someday a choice will have to be made. France had to state clearly whether, on the one hand, it considered Algeria to be a conquered land whose subjects, stripped of all rights and burdened with additional duties, would be forced to live in absolute dependence on us, or, on the other hand, it attributed to its democratic principles a value universal enough to be able to extend them to populations for which it had accepted responsibility.

France, to its credit, chose, and having chosen, it was obliged, if words were to mean anything, to follow the logic of its decision to the end. Special interests opposed this venture and tried to turn back the clock. But time inexorably marches on, and people evolve. No historical situation is ever permanent. If you are unwilling to change quickly enough, you lose control of the situation.

Because French policy in Algeria ignored these elementary truths, it was always 20 years behind the actual situation. An example will help to make this clear.

In 1936, the Blum-Viollette Plan marked a first step toward a policy of assimilation after 17 years of stagnation. It was by no means revolutionary. It would have granted civil rights and voting status to roughly 60,000 Muslims. This relatively modest plan aroused immense hopes among the Arabs. Virtually the entire Arab population, represented by the Algerian Congress, indicated its approval. But leading colonists, banded together in the Financial Delegations and the Association of Mayors of Algeria, mounted a counteroffensive powerful enough to ensure that the plan was never even presented to the chambers.

The dashing of this great hope naturally led to a very radical disaffection. Now the French government is proposing that Algeria accept the ordinance of March 7, 1944, whose electoral provisions more or less emulate those of the Blum-Viollette Plan.

If this ordinance were really enforced, it would give the vote to roughly 80,000 Muslims. It would also eliminate the exceptional legal status of Arabs, a goal for which North African democrats have fought for years. In effect, Arabs were not subject to the same penal code or even the same courts as Frenchmen. Special tribunals, more severe in their punishments and more summary in their procedures, kept Arabs in a permanent state of subjection. The new ordinance has eliminated that abuse, and that is a very good thing.

Arab opinion, much dampened by all that has taken place, remains reserved and wary, however, despite all the good things in the new plan. The problem is quite simply that time marches on. The fall of France was followed by a loss of French prestige. The 1942 landing brought Arabs into contact with other nations and spurred them to make comparisons. Finally, one cannot ignore the fact that the Pan-Arab Federation is a constant temptation for the people of North Africa, whose misery only adds to all their other grievances. As a result of all this, a plan that would have been welcomed enthusiastically in 1936 and would have solved a great many problems is today met only with wariness. Once again we are late.

Peoples generally aspire to political rights only in order to set themselves on the road to social progress. The Arab people wanted the right to vote because they knew that, with it, and through the free exercise of democracy, they could eliminate the injustices that are poisoning the political climate of Algeria today. They knew that they could eliminate inequalities in wages and pensions, as well as more

scandalous inequalities in military allowances and, in a more general sense, everything that helped to perpetuate their inferior status. But the Arabs seem to have lost their faith in democracy, of which they were offered only a caricature. They hope to achieve by other means a goal that has never changed: an improvement in their condition.

That is why, to believe my sample, Arab opinion is in its majority indifferent or hostile to the policy of assimilation. This is most unfortunate. But before deciding what ought to be done to improve the situation, we must have a clear sense of what the political climate in Algeria is today.

Arabs today face any number of possibilities, and since, historically, every aspiration of a people finds political expression, Muslims have lately found themselves drawn to a remarkable figure, Ferhat Abbas, and his “Friends of the Manifesto” party. In my next article, I will discuss this important movement, the most important and novel to have appeared in Algeria since the early days of the conquest.

## 5 The Party of the Manifesto

I said in my last article that a substantial number of North African natives, having given up on the policy of assimilation but not yet won over by pure nationalism, had turned to a new party, the “Friends of the Manifesto.” I therefore think it would be useful to make French people familiar with this party, which, like it or not, has to be reckoned with.

The leader of this movement is Ferhat Abbas, a native of Sétif, a university graduate with a degree in pharmacy, and, before the war, one of the staunchest proponents of the assimilation policy. At that time he edited a newspaper, L'Entente, which defended the Blum-Viollette Plan and called for the establishment in Algeria of a democratic political system in which Arabs would enjoy rights corresponding to their duties.

Today, Abbas, like many of his coreligionists, has turned his back on assimilation. His newspaper, Egalité, whose editor Aziz Kessous is a socialist as well a former proponent of assimilation, is calling for Algeria to be recognized as a nation linked to France by ties of federalism. Ferhat Abbas is fifty years old. He is undeniably a product of French culture. The epigraph of his first book was a quotation from Pascal. This was no accident. He is in fact a man in the Pascalian spirit, combining logic and passion with some considerable success.

The following thought is very much in the French style: "France will be free and strong by dint of our freedoms and our strengths." Ferhat Abbas owes his style to our culture, as he is well aware. Even his humor bears the French stamp, as is evident from the following classified ad, which appeared in upper-case characters in Egalité: "Exchange one hundred feudal lords of all races for 100,000 French teachers and technicians."

This cultivated and independent man has evolved along with his people, and he has set forth their aspirations in a manifesto that was published on February 10, 1943, and accepted by General Catroux as a basis for discussion.



What does the manifesto say? In truth, taken on its own terms, the text limits itself to a detailed critique of French policy in North Africa and to the assertion of a principle. That principle, which takes note of the failure of the assimilation policy, is that there is a need to recognize an Algerian nation linked to France but distinctive in character. According to the manifesto, “it is now clear to everyone that this assimilation policy is an unattainable reality [my italics] and a dangerous instrument designed to serve the interests of the colonization.”

Building on this principle, the manifesto asks that Algeria be given its own constitution in order to ensure that Algerians will enjoy full democratic rights and parliamentary representation. An appendix added to the manifesto on May 26, 1943, and two more recent texts from April and May 1945, further flesh out this position. The amended manifesto calls for recognition, an end to hostilities, and an Algerian state with its own constitution, to be drafted by a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage of all people residing in Algeria.

The general government would then cease to be a bureaucratic agency and become a true government, with top positions equally divided between French and Arab ministers.

As for the assembly, the “Friends of the Manifesto” were aware that any proposal for strictly proportional representation would have met with hostility in France, since with eight Arabs to every Frenchman in the population, the assembly would then become a de facto Arab parliament. As a result, they agreed that their constitution should allow for 50 percent Muslim representatives and 50 percent Europeans. Hoping to spare French sensibilities, they accepted the idea that the powers of the assembly would be limited to administrative, social, financial, and economic matters, leaving all problems of external security, military organization, and diplomacy to the central

government in Paris. Of course, this basic text is accompanied by social demands, all of which are aimed at bringing the fullest possible democracy to Arab politics. I believe, however, that I have accurately summarized the gist of the document and have not distorted the ideas of the Friends of the Manifesto.

In any case, a substantial number of Muslims have rallied around these ideas and the man who represents them. Ferhat Abbas has united a diverse group of individuals and movements, including the Oulémas, a group of Muslim intellectuals who preach a rationalist reform of Islam and who were until recently proponents of assimilation, along with socialist militants. It is also quite clear that elements of the Algerian Popular Party, an Arab nationalist group that was dissolved in 1936 but has illegally continued to propagandize in favor of Algerian separatism, have joined the Friends of the Manifesto, which they may regard as a good platform for further action.

It is possible that it was this latter group that involved the Friends of the Manifesto in the recent disturbances. From a direct source, however, I know that Ferhat Abbas is too keen a political mind to have advised or desired such excesses, which he knew would only reinforce the politics of reaction in Algeria. The man who wrote "Not one African will die for Hitler" has given sufficient guarantees in this regard.

The reader may think that he would be inclined to favor the program I have just laid out. Whatever his opinions, however, he should know that this program exists and that it has profoundly influenced Arab political aspirations.

Although the French government has decided not to follow General Catroux's lead in giving tentative approval to the manifesto, it may have

noticed that the entire political basis of the document rested on the fact that it judged assimilation to be “an unattainable reality.” The government might then have concluded that it would suffice to make that reality attainable in order to undermine the argument of the Friends of the Manifesto. Instead, it preferred to respond with prison sentences and repression—stupidity pure and simple.

## 6 Conclusion

The French, whose confidence was shaken for a time, have since lost interest in Algerian affairs. In the ensuing period of relative calm, articles have been published in various newspapers arguing that the political crisis is not that serious or widespread and is simply the work of a handful of professional agitators. Not that these articles are distinguished by careful documentation or objectivity. One describes the recently arrested president of the “Friends of the Manifesto” as the father of the Algerian Popular Party, which has been led for many years by Messali Hadj, who was also arrested. Another treats the Oulémas as a nationalist political organization when it is in fact a reformist religious group, which actually supported a policy of assimilation until 1938.

No one has anything to gain from these hasty and ill-informed articles, nor from the far-fetched studies that have appeared elsewhere. To be sure, the Algerian massacre would not have occurred had there been no professional agitators. Nevertheless, those agitators would not have had much effect if they had not been able to take advantage of a political crisis from which it would be pointless and dangerous to avert one’s eyes.

This political crisis, which has been going on for many years, did not miraculously disappear overnight. Indeed, it has grown more severe, and all the information coming from Algeria suggests that it has lately been enveloped by a climate of hatred and distrust that nothing can alleviate. The massacres of Guelma and Sétif have provoked deep indignation and revulsion in the French of Algeria. The subsequent repression has sown fear and hostility in the Arab masses. In this climate, the likelihood that a firm but democratic policy can succeed has diminished.

But that is not a reason to despair. The Ministry of National Economy has envisioned resupply measures that, if continued, should be enough to recover from a disastrous economic situation. But the government must maintain and extend the ordinance of March 7, 1944, in order to prove to the Arab masses that no ill feeling will ever interfere with its desire to export to Algeria the democratic regime that the French enjoy at home. But what we need to export is not speeches but actions. If we want to save North Africa, we must show the world our determination to give it the best of our laws and the most just of our leaders. We must demonstrate our resolve and keep to it regardless of the circumstances or attacks in the press. We must convince ourselves that in North Africa as elsewhere, we will preserve nothing that is French unless we preserve justice as well.

As we have seen, words like these will not please everyone. They cannot easily overcome blindness and prejudice. But we continue to believe that this is a reasonable and moderate approach. The world today is dripping with hatred everywhere. Violence, force, massacre, and tumult darken an atmosphere from which we thought the poison had been drained. Whatever we can do in service of the truth—French truth and human truth—we must do to counter this hatred. Whatever it costs, we must bring peace to nations that have too long been torn and tormented by all that they have suffered. Let us at least try not to

add to the bitterness that exists in Algeria. Only the infinite force of justice can help us to reconquer Algeria and its inhabitants.

## 7 Letter to an Algerian Militant<sup>1</sup>

My dear Kessous,

I found your letters upon returning from my vacation, and I am afraid that my approval will arrive very late. Yet I need to let you know how I feel. Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is where I hurt at this moment, as others feel pain in their lungs. And since August 20, I have been on the edge of despair.

Only a person who knows nothing of the human heart can think that the French of Algeria can now forget the massacres in Philippeville. Conversely, only a madman can believe that repression, once unleashed, can induce the Arab masses to trust and respect France. So we now find ourselves pitted against one another, with each side determined to inflict as much pain as possible on the other, inexpiably. This thought is unbearable to me, and it poisons my days.

And yet you and I, who are so alike, who share the same culture and the same hopes, who have been brothers for so long, joined in the love we both feel for our country, know that we are not enemies. We know that we could live happily together on this land, which is our land—because it is ours, and because I can no more imagine it without you and your brothers than you can separate it from me and my kind.

You said it very well, better than I will say it: we are condemned to live together. The French of Algeria—who, I thank you for pointing out, are not all wealthy bloodsuckers—have been in Algeria more than a century and number more than a million. That alone is enough to distinguish the Algerian problem from the problems of Tunisia and Morocco, where the French settlement is relatively small and recent. The “French reality” can never be eliminated from Algeria, and the dream that the French will suddenly disappear is childish. By the same token, there is no reason why nine million Arabs should be forgotten on their own soil.

The dream that the Arabs can be forever negated, silenced, and subjugated is equally insane. The French are attached to Algerian soil by roots too old and deep to think of tearing them up. But this does not give the French the right to cut the roots of Arab life and culture. All my life, I have defended the idea that our country stands in need of far-reaching reform (and as you well know, I paid the price in the form of exile). No one believed me, and people continued to pursue the dream of power, which always believes that it is eternal and always forgets that history does not stop. Today reform is more necessary than ever. Your proposals would constitute an indispensable first step and should be implemented without delay, provided they are not drowned beforehand in either French or Arab blood.

But I know from experience that to say these things today is to venture into a no-man’s-land between hostile armies. It is to preach the folly of war as bullets fly. Bloodshed may sometimes lead to progress, but more often it brings only greater barbarity and misery. He who pours his heart into such a plea can expect only laughter and the din of the battlefield in reply. And yet someone must say these things, and since you propose to try, I cannot let you take such an insane and necessary step without standing with you in fraternal solidarity.

Of course, the crucial thing is to leave room for whatever dialogue may still be possible, no matter how limited.

It is to defuse tensions, no matter how tenuous and fleeting the respite may be. To that end, each of us must preach peace to his own side. The inexcusable massacres of French civilians will lead to other equally stupid attacks on Arabs and Arab property. It is as if madmen inflamed by rage found themselves locked in a forced marriage from which no exit was possible and therefore decided on mutual suicide. Forced to live together but incapable of uniting their lives, they chose joint death as the lesser evil. Because each side's excesses reinforce the reasons—and the excesses—of the other, the deadly storm now lashing our country will only grow until the destruction is general. Constant escalation has caused the blaze to spread, and soon Algeria will be reduced to ruin and littered with corpses. No force or power on earth will be capable of putting the country back together in this century.

The escalation must therefore stop, and it is our duty as Arabs and Frenchmen who refuse to let go of one another's hands to stop it. We Frenchmen must fight to stop collective repression and to ensure that French law remains generous and clear. We must fight to remind our compatriots of their errors and of the obligations of a great nation, which cannot respond to a xenophobic massacre with a similar paroxysm of rage if it wishes to retain its stature in the world.

And we must fight, finally, to hasten the adoption of necessary and crucial reforms, which will once more set the Franco-Arab community of Algeria on the road to the future. Meanwhile, you Arabs must tirelessly explain to your own people that when terrorism kills civilians, it not only raises doubts about the political maturity of people capable of such acts but also reinforces anti-Arab factions, validates their

arguments, and silences French liberals who might be capable of propounding and promoting a compromise solution.

I will be told, as you will be told, that the time for compromise is over and that the goal now must be to wage war and win. But you and I both know that there will be no real winners in this war and that both now and in the future we will always have to live together on the same soil. We know that our destinies are so closely intertwined that any action by one side will bring a riposte by the other, crime leading to crime and insanity responding to madness. If one side abstains, however, the other will wither.

If you Arab democrats fail in your effort to restore peace, then we French liberals will inevitably fail in our own efforts. And if we flag in our duty, your wan words will vanish in the wind and flames of a pitiless war.

That is why I am with you one hundred percent, my dear Kessous. I wish you, I wish us, good luck. I want to believe with all my heart that peace will dawn on our fields, our mountains, and our shores, and that Arabs and Frenchmen, reconciled in liberty and justice, will try hard to forget the bloodshed that divides them today. On that day, we who are together exiles in hatred and despair will together regain our native land.

1. When the rebellion broke out, Mr. Aziz Kessous, an Algeria Socialist and former member of the Party of the Manifesto, had the idea of publishing a newspaper, *Communauté Algérienne*, the aim of which was to transcend the twin fanaticisms that plague Algeria today and thus help to create a truly free community. This letter appeared in the first issue of the paper on October 1, 1955.



The End