



Algeria, Albert Camus

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### PREFACE TO ALGERIAN REPORTS

HERE is a group of selected articles and texts concerning Algeria. They are spaced out over a period of twenty years—from 1939, when almost no one in France was interested in that country, until 1958, when everyone talks about it. A volume would not have been enough to contain all the articles. It was necessary to eliminate the repetitions and too general commentaries and preserve the facts, figures, and suggestions that may still be useful.

As they stand, these texts sum up the position of a man who, faced very young with the misery of Algeria, in vain multiplied his warnings and, long aware of his country's responsibilities, cannot approve a policy of preservation or oppression in Algeria. But I have long been alert to Algerian realities and cannot approve, either, a policy of surrender that would abandon the Arab people to an even greater misery, tear the French in Algeria from their century-old roots, and favor, to no one's advantage, the new imperialism now threatening the liberty of France and of the West.

Such a position satisfies no one today, and I know in advance how it will be received by both sides. I sincerely regret it, but I cannot do violence to what I feel and what I believe. Besides, on this subject no one satisfies me either. This is why, finding it impossible to join either extreme camp, faced with the gradual disappearance of that third camp in which it was still possible to keep a cool head, doubting my

certainities and the things I thought I knew, convinced in short that the real cause of our follies is to be found in the habits and functioning of our intellectual and political society, I decided to take no further part in the constant polemics that have had no result other than to harden the uncompromising points of view at loggerheads in Algeria and to split even wider a France already poisoned by hatreds and sects.

There is indeed a spitefulness in the French, and I refuse to add to it. I know only too well what it has cost us and still costs us. For the past twenty years the French have loathed their political opponent to the point of preferring anything to him, even foreign dictatorship. The French apparently never tire of such potentially fatal games. They are indeed the strange people who, according to Custine, would rather depict themselves as ugly than be forgotten.

But if their country disappeared, she would be forgotten, however she had been depicted; and in a subjugated nation we should not even have the liberty of continuing to insult each other. Until such truths are admitted, we must be resigned to giving a purely personal testimony with all necessary precautions. And, personally, I am interested only in the actions that here and now can spare useless bloodshed and in the solutions that guarantee the future of a land whose suffering I share too much to be able to indulge in speechmaking about it.

Still other reasons keep me from playing such public games. To begin with, I lack the assurance that allows one to settle everything. On this point terrorism as it is practiced in Algeria greatly influenced my attitude. When the fate of men and women of one's own blood is bound, directly or indirectly, to the articles one writes in the comfort of the study, one has a right to hesitate and to weigh the pros and cons.

In my case, if I am aware that in criticizing the course of the rebellion I risk justifying the most brazen instigators of the Algerian drama, I never cease fearing that, by pointing out the long series of French mistakes, I may, without running any risk myself, provide an alibi for the insane criminal who may throw his bomb into an innocent crowd that includes my family. I went so far as to admit this fact baldly in a recent

declaration which was commented upon most strangely. But anyone who does not know the situation I am talking about can hardly judge of it. And if anyone, knowing it, still thinks heroically that one's brother must die rather than one's principles, I shall go no farther than to admire him from a distance. I am not of his stamp.

This does not mean that principles have no meaning. An opposition of ideas is possible, even with weapons in hand, and it is only fair to recognize one's opponent's reasons even before defending oneself against him. But on both sides a reign of terror, as long as it lasts, changes the scale of values. When one's own family is in immediate danger of death, one may want to instill in one's family a feeling of greater generosity and fairness, as these articles clearly show; but (let there be no doubt about it!) one still feels a natural solidarity with the family in such mortal danger and hopes that it will survive at least and, by surviving, have a chance to show its fairness. If that is not honor and true justice, then I know nothing that is of any use in this world.

Only from such a position have we the right and the duty to state that military combat and repression have, on our side, taken on aspects that we cannot accept. Reprisals against civilian populations and the use of torture are crimes in which we are all involved. The fact that such things could take place among us is a humiliation we must henceforth face. Meanwhile, we must at least refuse to justify such methods, even on the score of efficacy.

The moment they are justified, even indirectly, there are no more rules or values; all causes are equally good, and war without aims or laws sanctions the triumph of nihilism. Willy-nilly, we go back in that case to the jungle where the sole principle is violence. Even those who are fed up with morality ought to realize that it is better to suffer certain injustices than to commit them even to win wars, and that such deeds do us more harm than a hundred underground forces on the enemy's side. When excuses are made, for instance, for those who do not hesitate to slaughter the innocent in Algeria or, in other places, to torture or to condone torture, are they not also incalculable errors since they may justify the very crimes we want to fight?

And what is that efficacy whereby we manage to justify everything that is most unjustifiable in our adversary? Consequently, the chief argument of those who are trying to make the best of torture must be met head on. Torture has perhaps saved some, at the expense of honor, by uncovering thirty bombs, but at the same time it aroused fifty new terrorists who, operating in some other way and in another place, will cause the death of even more innocent people.

Even when accepted in the interest of realism and efficacy, such a flouting of honor serves no purpose but to degrade our country in her own eyes and abroad. Finally, such fine deeds inevitably lead to the demoralization of France and the loss of Algeria. And censorship, always stupid, whether resulting from shame or cynicism, will not change anything about these truths. The government's duty is not to suppress protests, even interested protests, against the criminal excesses of repression. Its duty is rather to suppress the excesses and to condemn them publicly in order to keep each individual citizen from feeling personally responsible for the actions of a few and hence obliged to denounce or approve them.

But, to be both useful and equitable, we must condemn with equal force and in no uncertain terms the terrorism applied by the F.L.N. to French civilians and indeed, to an even greater degree, to Arab civilians. Such terrorism is a crime that can be neither excused nor allowed to develop. Under the form it has assumed, no revolutionary movement has ever accepted it, and the Russian terrorists of 1905, for instance, would have died (they proved this statement) rather than stoop to it.

It would be impossible to transform an awareness of the injustices imposed on the Arab population into a systematic indulgence toward those who indiscriminately slaughter Arab and French civilians without regard for age or sex. After all, Gandhi proved that it is possible to fight for one's people and win without for a moment losing the world's respect. Whatever the cause being defended, it will always be dishonored by the blind slaughter of an innocent crowd when the killer knows in advance that he will strike down women and children.

I have never failed to state, as can be seen in these reports, that these two condemnations could not be separated if we wanted to be effective. This is why it seemed to me both indecent and harmful to protest against tortures in the company of those who readily accepted Melouza or the mutilation of European children. Just as it seemed to me harmful and indecent to condemn terrorism in the company of those who are not bothered by torture. The truth, alas, is that a part of French opinion vaguely holds that the Arabs have in a way earned the right to slaughter and mutilate while another part is willing to justify in a way all excesses.

To justify himself, each relies on the other's crime. But that is a casuistry of blood, and it strikes me that an intellectual cannot become involved in it, unless he takes up arms himself. When violence answers violence in a growing frenzy that makes the simple language of reason impossible, the role of intellectuals cannot be, as we read every day, to excuse from a distance one of the violences and condemn the other. This has the double result of enraging the violent group that is condemned and encouraging to greater violence the violent group that is exonerated.

If they do not join the combatants themselves, their role (less spectacular, to be sure!) must be merely to strive for pacification so that reason will again have a chance. A perspicacious Right, without giving up any of its convictions, would thus have attempted to persuade its members, both in Algeria and in the government, of the necessity for major reforms and of the discreditable nature of certain forms of behavior. An intelligent Left, without giving up any of its principles, would likewise have attempted to persuade the Arab movement that certain methods were essentially base. But not at all. Most often the Right ratified, in the name of French honor, what was most opposed to that honor.

And most often the Left, in the name of justice, excused what was an insult to any real justice. In this way the Right abandoned the monopoly of the moral reflex to the Left, which yielded to it the monopoly of the

patriotic reflex. The country suffered doubly. We could have used moralists less joyfully resigned to their country's misfortune and patriots less ready to allow torturers to claim that they were acting in the name of France. It seems as if metropolitan France was unable to think of any policies other than those which consisted in saying to the French in Algeria: "Go ahead and die; that's what you deserve" or else "Kill them; that's what they deserve." That makes two different policies and a single abdication, for the question is not how to die separately but rather how to live together.

If I annoy anyone by writing this, I ask him merely to think for a moment about the divergence between the ideological reflexes. Some want their country to identify itself wholly with justice, and they are right. But is it possible to be just and free in a dead or subjugated nation? And does not absolute purity for a nation coincide with historical death? Others want the very body of their country to be defended against the whole universe if need be, and they are not wrong.

But is it possible to survive as a people without doing reasonable justice to other peoples? France is dying through inability to solve this dilemma. The first want the universal to the detriment of the particular. The others want the particular to the detriment of the universal. But the two go together. The way to human society passes through national society. National society can be preserved only by opening it up to a universal perspective. More precisely, if you want France alone to reign in Algeria over eight million mutes, she will die. If you want Algeria to separate from France, both of them will perish in the same way. If, on the other hand, French and Arabs resolve their differences in Algeria, the future will have a meaning for the French, the Arabs, and the whole world.

But to achieve that, we must cease looking upon the mass of Arabs in Algeria as a nation of butchers. The great majority of them, exposed on all sides, feel a suffering that no one expresses for them. Millions of men, crazed with poverty and fear, have dug themselves in, and neither Cairo nor Algiers ever speaks up for them. You will see that I have tried

for a long time to point out something of their misery, and my somber descriptions will probably be held against me.

Yet I wrote complaining of Arab misery when there was still time to do something, at a time when France was strong and when there was silence among those who now find it easier to keep heaping abuse, even abroad, upon their weakened country. If my voice had been more widely heard twenty years ago, there would perhaps be less bloodshed at present. The misfortune (and I feel it to be a misfortune) is that events proved me right. Today the poverty of the Algerian peasants may well increase out of all proportion as a result of a lightning growth in population. In addition, caught between the combatants, they suffer from fear; they too, they above all, need peace! It is of them and of my family that I continue to think as I write the name Algeria and make a plea for reconciliation. They are the ones to whom we must give a voice and a future liberated from fear and hunger.

But to achieve that, we must cease condemning the French in Algeria as a group. One body of opinion in metropolitan France, which insists on hating them, must be called to order. When a French partisan of the F.L.N. dares to write that the French in Algeria have always looked upon France as a prostitute to be exploited, such an irresponsible person must be reminded that he is speaking of men whose grandparents, for instance, decided in favor of France in 1871 and left their Alsatian soil for Algeria, whose fathers died together in the east of France in 1914, and who themselves, twice mobilized in the most recent war, were indefatigable, along with hundreds of thousands of Moslems, in fighting on all fronts for that prostitute.

As a result, they can doubtless be considered naïve, but it is hard to call them pimps. I am summing up here the story of the men of my family, who, being poor and free of hatred, never exploited or oppressed anyone. But three quarters of the French in Algeria resemble them and, if only they are provided reasons rather than insults, will be ready to admit the necessity of a juster and freer order. There have doubtless been exploiters in Algeria, but fewer than in metropolitan France, and the first one to benefit from the colonial system is the entire French



nation. If some Frenchmen consider that, as a result of its colonizing, France (and France alone among so many holy and pure nations) is in a state of sin historically, they don't have to point to the French in Algeria as scapegoats ("Go ahead and die; that's what we deserve!"); they must offer up themselves in expiation.

As far as I am concerned, it seems to me revolting to beat one's mea culpa, as our judge-penitents do, on someone else's breast, useless to condemn several centuries of European expansion, and absurd to include in the same denunciation Christopher Columbus and Lyautey. The period of colonialism is over; we simply have to know this and draw the conclusions. And the West, which within ten years has granted autonomy to a dozen colonies, deserves more respect in this regard and, above all, more patience than Russia, which in the same period of time has colonized or put under a harsh protectorate a dozen countries of great and ancient civilization.

It is good for a nation to be strong enough in tradition and honor to have the courage to point out its own mistakes. But it must not forget whatever reasons it still has for self-esteem. It is dangerous in any case to expect that a nation will confess that it alone is guilty and to condemn it to perpetual penance. I believe in a policy of reparation in Algeria rather than in a policy of expiation. Problems must be seen in relation to the future, without endlessly going back over the errors of the past. And there will be no future that does not do justice at one and the same time to the two communities of Algeria.

Such a spirit of equity, to be sure, seems alien to the reality of our history, in which relationships of force outline another sort of justice; in our international society there is no good ethical system except a nuclear ethics. Then the only guilty one is the vanquished. It is understandable that many intellectuals have consequently come to the conclusion that values and words derive their meaning altogether from force. Hence some people progress without transition from speeches about the principles of honor or fraternity to adoring the fait accompli or the cruelest party.

I continue, however, to believe, with regard to Algeria and to everything else, that such aberrations, both on the Right and on the Left, merely define the nihilism of our epoch. If it is true that in history, at least, values—whether those of the nation or those of humanity—do not survive unless they have been fought for, the fight is not enough to justify them. The fight itself must rather be justified, and elucidated, by those values.

When fighting for your truth, you must take care not to kill it with the very arms you are using to defend it—only under such a double condition do words resume their living meaning. Knowing that, the intellectual has the role of distinguishing in each camp the respective limits of force and justice. That role is to clarify definitions in order to disintoxicate minds and to calm fanaticisms, even when this is against the current tendency.

I have attempted the work of disintoxication as best I could. Let us admit that up to now the results have been nonexistent; these reports are also the record of a failure. But the simplifications of hatred and prejudice, which are constantly rotting and reviving the Algerian conflict, must be noted every day, and one man cannot do so alone. There would have to be a movement, a press, a ceaseless action. For one ought to note likewise, every day, the lies and omissions that obscure the real problem.

Our governments already want to make war without calling it by name, want to have an independent policy and beg money from our allies, and want to invest in Algeria while protecting the standard of living in metropolitan France. They think they can be uncompromising in public and come to terms behind the scenes, covering up the stupidities of their administrators and yet disavowing them in a whisper.

But our parties or sects that criticize the government are no more brilliant. No one says clearly what he wants or, if he does so, draws the conclusions. Those who advocate the military solution must know that it can only mean a reconquest by means of an all-out war which will involve, for example, the reconquest of Tunisia in opposition to the

opinion, and perhaps the armed resistance, of a part of the world. That is a policy, to be sure, but it must be seen and presented as it is.

Those who, in purposely vague terms, advocate negotiation with the F.L.N. cannot fail to be aware, after the precise statements of the F.L.N., that this means the independence of Algeria under the direction of the most relentless military leaders of the insurrection—in other words, the eviction of 1,200,000 Europeans from Algeria and the humiliation of millions of Frenchmen, with all the risks that such a humiliation involves. That is a policy, to be sure, but we must see it for what it is and stop cloaking it in euphemisms.

The constant polemics that would have to be carried on for this purpose would boomerang in a political society where the will to be lucid and intellectual independence are becoming rarer and rarer. All that is left of a hundred articles written on the subject is the adversary's distortion of them. At least a book, if it does not avoid all misunderstandings, makes some of them impossible.<sup>1</sup> A book can be referred to, and it can present a calmer statement of the necessary distinctions. Hence, wanting to satisfy all those who sincerely ask me to state my position once more, I have been able to do so only by summing up in this book twenty years of experience, which may inform unprejudiced minds.

By experience I mean a man's facing up to a situation over a period of years, with all the mistakes, contradictions, and hesitations that such a confrontation implies, of which many an example will be found in the following pages. My opinion, moreover, is that too much is expected of a writer in such matters. Even, and perhaps especially, when his birth and his heart link him to the fate of a land like Algeria, it is useless to think he is blessed with some kind of revelation of the truth; his personal story, if it could be truthfully written, would be but the story of successive lapses, sometimes corrected and committed once again.

I am quite ready to admit my shortcomings on this score and the errors of judgment that can be noted in this volume. But, however much it may pain me to do so, I at least thought it possible to gather together

the documents of this long record and to submit them to the reflection of those whose minds are not yet irrevocably made up. The relaxation of psychological strain that can be felt at present between French and Arabs in Algeria gives rise to the hope that the language of reason may again be heard.

Consequently, there will be found in these records a picture (on the occasion of a very serious crisis in Kabylia) of the economic causes of the Algerian drama, a few references for the specifically political evolution of that drama, comments on the complexity of the present situation, a prediction of the impasse to which the revival of terrorism and repression has led us, and, in conclusion, an outline of the solution that still seems to me possible.

Recognizing the end of colonialism, my solution excludes dreams of reconquest or of maintaining the status quo; really mere reactions of weakness and humiliation, such dreams only prepare for the definitive divorce and the double misfortune of France and Algeria. But my solution also excludes the dream of uprooting the French in Algeria, who, if they haven't the right to oppress anyone, do have the right not to be oppressed and to be their own masters in the land of their birth. There are other ways of re-establishing the necessary justice than substituting one injustice for another.

In this regard I have tried to define my position clearly. An Algeria made up of federated settlements and linked to France seems to me preferable (without any possible comparison on the plane of simple justice) to an Algeria linked to an empire of Islam which would bring the Arab peoples only increased poverty and suffering and which would tear the Algerian-born French from their natural home.

If the Algeria I hope for still has a chance of emerging (and, in my opinion, it has many chances), I want to help it with all my strength. On the other hand, I consider that I must not help even for a second in any way whatever the establishment of the other Algeria. If it came about (and, necessarily, against the interests of France or without consideration for France), through the joint operation of the forces of

surrender and the forces of pure conservation (with the double retreat they involve), this would be a great misfortune for me, and, with millions of other Frenchmen, I should have to suffer the consequences.

That, loyally stated, is what I think. I may be mistaken or unable to judge fairly of a drama that touches me too closely. But if the reasonable hopes we can still nourish today should fade away and we were faced with the serious ensuing events for which—whether they do violence to our country or to humanity as a whole—we shall all be responsible together, each of us must stand up and declare what he has done and what he has said. This is my declaration, to which I shall add nothing.

March–April 1958

1 The entire book entitled *Actuelles III* was devoted to Camus's "Algerian Reports" of the years 1939–58, from among which he selected for this volume the present "Preface" and the three following essays. (Translator's note)

#### LETTER TO AN ALGERIAN MILITANT

(M. Aziz Kessous, an Algerian socialist and former member of the Party of the Manifesto, had planned, after the rebellion broke out, to launch a newspaper, *Algerian Community*, which would rise above the double fanaticism now afflicting Algeria and help establish a really free community. This letter appeared in the newspaper's first issue on the first of October 1955.)

MY DEAR KESSOUS,

I found your letters on returning from a vacation and am afraid that my approval may come very late. Yet I need to give it to you. Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is the cause of my suffering at present as others might say their chest is the cause of their suffering. And since the 20th of August I have been on the verge of despair.

We know nothing of the human heart if we imagine that the Algerian French can now forget the massacres at Philippeville and elsewhere. And it is another form of madness to imagine that repression can make the Arab masses feel confidence and esteem for France. Hence we are pitted against each other, condemned to inflicting the greatest possible pain on each other, inexpiably. The idea is intolerable to me and poisons each of my days.

Nevertheless, you and I, who are so much alike—having the same background, sharing the same hope, having felt like brothers for so long now, united in our love for our country—know that we are not enemies and that we could live happily together on this soil that belongs to us. For it is ours, and I can no more imagine it without you and your brothers than you can probably separate it from me and those who resemble me.

You have said it very well, better than I can say it: we are condemned to live together. The Algerian French—and I thank you for having pointed out that they are not all bloodthirsty rich men—have been in Algeria for more than a century, and there are more than a million of them. This alone is enough to distinguish the Algerian problem from the problems raised in Tunisia and Morocco, where the French settlement is relatively new and weak.

The “French fact” cannot be eliminated in Algeria, and the dream of a sudden disappearance of France is childish. But there is no reason either why nine million Arabs should live on their land like forgotten men; the dream that the Arab masses can be canceled out, silenced and subjugated, is just as mad. The French are attached to the soil of Algeria by roots that are too old and too vigorous for us to think of tearing them up. But this gives the French no right, in my opinion, to destroy the roots of Arab culture and life.

Throughout my life I have fought for sweeping and profound reforms—and you know that I paid for this with exile from my country. But people refused to believe because they cherished the dream of power that is supposedly eternal and forgot that history constantly

progresses; and now those reforms are needed more than ever. Those which you point out represent an initial effort, and an indispensable one, to be made quickly, before its chance of success is drowned in French blood and Arab blood.

But saying this today, as I know by experience, amounts to taking one's stand in the no man's land between two armies and preaching amid the bullets that war is a deception and that bloodshed, if it sometimes makes history progress, makes it progress toward even greater barbarism and misery. If anyone dares to put his whole heart and all his suffering into such a cry, he will hear in reply nothing but laughter and a louder clash of arms. And yet we must cry it aloud, and, since you plan to do so, I cannot let you do such a mad and necessary thing without telling you that I stand beside you like a brother.

Yes, the essential thing is to leave room, however limited it may be, for the exchange of views that is still possible; the essential thing is to bring about an easing of the situation, however slight and temporary it may be. And to achieve that, each of us must preach pacification to his people. The inexcusable massacring of French civilians leads to equally stupid destruction of the Arabs and their possessions.

It is as if two insane people, crazed with wrath, had decided to turn into a fatal embrace the forced marriage from which they cannot free themselves. Forced to live together and incapable of uniting, they decide at least to die together. And because each of them by his excesses strengthens the motives and excesses of the other, the storm of death that has struck our country can only increase to the point of general destruction. In that ceaseless attempt to go one better, the fire is spreading, and tomorrow Algeria will be a land of ruins and dead which no force, no power in the world, will be capable of reviving in this century.

We must put a stop to the attempt at outbidding each other; it is the duty of all of us, Arabs and Frenchmen, who refuse to let go each other's hands. We Frenchmen must struggle to keep repression from becoming general so that French law will continue to have a generous

and obvious meaning in our country; we must struggle to remind our people of their mistakes and of the obligations of a great nation, which cannot, without losing its prestige, answer a racial massacre with a similar outburst.

Finally, we must strive to hasten the necessary and decisive reforms that will once more launch the Franco-Arab community of Algeria on the road toward the future. You Arabs must spare no effort to show your people that, when they kill civilian populations, terrorism not only raises justifiable doubts as to the political maturity of men capable of such acts, but also strengthens the anti-Arab elements, reinforces their arguments, and silences French liberal opinion which might find and put through some solution leading to reconciliation.

I shall be told, as you will be told, that it is too late for reconciliation, that the only thing to do is to wage war and win. But you and I know that this war will not have any real victors and that, once it is over, we shall still have to go on living together forever on the same soil. We know that our destinies are so closely linked that any action on the part of one calls forth a retort from the other, crime engendering crime, madness replying to lunacy, and, finally, that if one stands aloof the other suffers from sterility. If you Arab democrats fail in your work of pacification, the activity of us French liberals will be doomed to failure in advance. And if we falter in our duty, your poor words will be swept away in the wind and flames of a pitiless war.

This is why I am with you in your effort, my dear Kessous. I wish you, I wish us, luck. I want most earnestly to believe that peace will rise over our fields, our mountains, our shores, and that then at last Arabs and French, reconciled in freedom and justice, will make an effort to forget the bloodshed that divides them today. When that happens, we who are both exiled in hatred and despair shall together recover our native land.

APPEAL FOR A CIVILIAN TRUCE IN ALGERIA

(Lecture given in Algiers in February 1956)



LADIES and gentlemen, despite the need to surround this meeting with precautions, despite the difficulties we have encountered, I shall speak this evening not to divide but to unite. That is my most ardent wish. Not the least of my disappointments (and the expression is weak) is to have to admit that everything stands in the way of such a wish. For instance, a man and writer who has devoted a part of his life to serving Algeria is almost deprived of the right to speak, even before anyone knows what he intends to say.

But at the same time this emphasizes the urgency of the effort toward pacification that we must make. Consequently, this meeting had to take place to show at least that an exchange of views is still possible and to keep people from accepting the worst as a result of the general discouragement.

My speaking of “an exchange of views” suggests that I did not come to deliver a formal lecture. To tell the truth, in the present circumstances I should not have the heart to do so. But it seemed to me possible, and I even considered it my duty, to come and echo among you a purely humanitarian appeal that might, at least on one point, silence the fury and unite most Algerians, both French and Arab, without their having to give up any of their convictions. That appeal, endorsed by the committee that organized this meeting, is addressed to both camps in the hope that they will accept a truce insofar as innocent civilians are concerned.

Hence I have only to justify such an enterprise in your eyes. I shall try to do so briefly.

Let me insist at the outset that, owing to the force of circumstances, our appeal has nothing to do with politics. If it were otherwise, I should not be qualified to speak. I am not a political man, and my passions and inclinations do not lead me to public platforms. I step onto the podium only when forced to by the pressure of circumstances and by my conception of my function as a writer. As to the basis of the Algerian

problem, I shall probably have, as events multiply and suspicions increase on both sides, more doubts than certainties to express.

My only qualifications for taking a stand are that I have lived through the Algerian calamity as a personal tragedy and that I am incapable of rejoicing over any death whatever. For twenty years, with paltry means, I have done all I could to contribute to the understanding of our two peoples. To be sure, one can laugh at the expression of the preacher of reconciliation when history answers his preaching by showing him the two peoples he loved embraced in a death grip. He himself, in any case, is not inclined to laugh at it. Faced with such a failure, his only concern must be to spare his country any unnecessary suffering.

I must add that the men who took the initiative of backing this appeal are not acting in any political capacity either. Among them are members of large religious families who were willing, in keeping with their lofty calling, to support a humanitarian duty. Others are men not singled out either by profession or by sensitivity as the kind who get involved in public affairs. For most of them, indeed, their profession or business, which served a purpose in the community, sufficed to fill their lives.

They could have stood on the sidelines, like so many others, keeping score and from time to time sighing with a fine note of melancholy. But they thought that building, teaching, creating were functions of life and of generosity which could not be pursued in the realm of hatred and bloodshed. Such a decision, heavy with consequences and commitments, gives them no special rights except one—the right of asking that their suggestion be seriously considered.

I must say finally that we don't want to get you to agree to anything politically. If we wanted to raise the problem on a political basis, we should run the risk of not getting the agreement we need. We may differ as to the necessary solutions and even as to the means of achieving them. To contrast positions that have been defined over and over and even distorted would, for the moment, merely add to the

weight of insults and hatreds under which our country is stifling and struggling.

But one thing at least unites all of us—and that is our love of our common soil, and our anguish. Anguish as we face a future that closes up a little every day, as we face the threat of a degrading struggle, of an economic disequilibrium that is already serious and is increasing every day, that may reach the point where no effort will be able to revive Algeria for a long time to come.

We want to address ourselves to that anguish, even—I might say, especially—among those who have already taken sides. For even among the most militant, in the thick of the fray, there is an element, I know, that will not indulge in murder and hatred, and that dreams of a happy Algeria.

We are appealing to that element in each of you, French or Arab. We should like to say to those who are unwilling to see this great country break in two and go adrift that, without recalling again the mistakes of the past, anxious solely for the future, it is possible today, on a single definite point, to agree first and then to save human lives. In this way we may prepare a climate more favorable to a discussion that will at last be reasonable. The intentional modesty of this objective, and yet its importance, make it worthy, in my opinion, of your broadest agreement.

What do we want? Simply to get the Arab movement and the French authorities, without having to make contact or to commit themselves to anything else, to declare simultaneously that for the duration of the fighting the civilian population will on every occasion be respected and protected. Why this measure? The first reason, on which I shall not insist much, is, as I said, one of simple humanity.

Whatever the ancient and deep origins of the Algerian tragedy, one fact remains: no cause justifies the death of the innocent. Throughout history, men, unable to suppress war, have made an effort to limit its effects; and, however terrible and repulsive the latest world wars were,

nevertheless organizations of aid and solidarity succeeded in piercing the darkness with the feeble ray of pity that keeps one from despairing utterly of mankind. Such a necessity seems even more urgent in a struggle that in many ways has the appearance of a fratricidal war that makes no distinction between men and women, between soldier and worker. From this point of view, even if our present initiative saved but one innocent life, it would be justified.

But it is also justified for other reasons. However black it may seem, the future of Algeria is not yet altogether sealed. If each individual, Arab or French, made an effort to think over his adversary's motives, at least the basis of a fruitful discussion would be clear.

But if the two Algerian populations, each accusing the other of having begun the quarrel, were to hurl themselves against each other in a sort of xenophobic madness, then any chance for understanding would be drowned in blood. It may be, and this is our greatest source of anguish, that we are heading toward such horrors. But we Arabs and French who reject mad, nihilistic destruction cannot let this happen without launching a final appeal to reason.

Reason clearly shows that on this point, at least, French and Arab solidarity is inevitable, in death as in life, in destruction as in hope. The frightful aspect of that solidarity is apparent in the infernal dialectic that whatever kills one side kills the other too, each blaming the other and justifying his violences by the opponent's violence. The eternal question as to who was first responsible loses all meaning then. And because they could not manage to live together, two populations, similar and different at the same time but equally worthy of respect, are condemned to die together, with rage in their hearts.

But there is also a community of hope that justifies our appeal. That common hope is firmly based on realities over which we have no control. On this soil there are a million Frenchmen who have been here for a century, millions of Moslems, either Arabs or Berbers, who have been here for centuries, and several vigorous religious communities. Those men must live together at the crossroads where history put

them. They can do so if they will take a few steps toward each other in an open confrontation. Then our differences ought to help us instead of dividing us. As for me, here as in every domain, I believe only in differences and not in uniformity.

First of all, because differences are the roots without which the tree of liberty, the sap of creation and of civilization, dries up. Nevertheless, we stand facing each other as if frozen, as if struck with a paralysis that can be cured only by brutal and brief outbursts of violence. This is because the struggle has assumed an irrevocable aspect that rouses on both sides towering indignations and passions aspiring to outdo each other.

“No further discussion is possible”—that is the slogan that sterilizes any future and any possibility of life. After that there is nothing but blind warfare in which the Frenchman makes up his mind to know nothing of the Arab, even though he feels, somewhere within him, that the Arab’s claim to dignity is justified, and the Arab makes up his mind to know nothing of the Frenchman, even though he feels, somewhere within him, that the Algerian French likewise have a right to security and dignity on our common soil.

Locked up in his rancor and hatred, neither one can listen to the other. Any proposal, whichever side it comes from, is received with distrust, distorted at once and made unserviceable. We are gradually getting caught in a tangle of old and new accusations, of fixed vendettas, of relentless rancors alternating with one another. It’s like an old family lawsuit in which grievances and arguments pile up for generations until even the most humane and upright judges can make neither head nor tail of the matter. It is hard to imagine the end of such a situation, and our hope for a Franco-Arabic association, for a peaceful and creative Algeria, becomes dimmer every day.

Consequently, if we want to preserve some of that hope, at least until discussion about the fundamentals gets under way, if we want to help such a discussion get somewhere by making a joint effort toward understanding, we must act upon the very character of the struggle.

We are too much hampered by the scope of the drama and the complexity of the passions it has loosed to hope to achieve a cessation of hostilities at once.

Such an action would indeed imply the taking of purely political positions which, at the moment, might divide us even more. But we can at least exert some action on the most hateful aspect of the fight: we can propose, without making any change in the present situation, that we refrain from what makes it unforgivable—the murder of the innocent. The fact that such an agreement would unite French and Arabs, both of them eager not to cause irreparable suffering, would give it a serious chance of succeeding in both camps.

If our proposal had a chance of being accepted—and it does have such a chance—we should not only have saved precious human lives but also have re-created a proper climate for a healthy discussion that would not be spoiled by ridiculously uncompromising attitudes; we should have prepared the ground for a fairer, subtler understanding of the Algerian problem. By bringing about such a slight thaw on a single point, we may hope someday to break altogether the block of hatreds and crazy demands in which we are all caught. Then the various policies would have a hearing and each individual would again have the right to defend his own convictions and to explain his difference.

That, in any case, is the narrow position on which we may hope, as a beginning, to get together. Any broader platform would, for the moment, provide us only an additional field of discord. We must be patient with ourselves.

But I do not believe that any Frenchman or any Arab would refuse to agree to such limited and yet capital action. To convince ourselves of this we have only to imagine what would happen if this enterprise, cautious and limited as it is, were to fail. We should have to face a definitive break, the destruction of all hope, and a carnage of which we have so far had only a slight foretaste.

Those of our Arab friends who courageously stand beside us in the no man's land where we are threatened on both sides and who are torn within themselves would be forced to adopt a policy of retaliation that would kill all possibility of free discussion. The essential dialogue between us could not take place. Directly or indirectly, they would enter the fray, whereas they could have been artisans of peace. Every Frenchman's interest, therefore, is to help them escape such a dilemma.

But, on the other hand, the direct interest of Arab moderates is to help us escape another dilemma. For if we fail in our undertaking and give proof of our impotence, the French liberals who think that French and Arabs can be made to coexist, who believe that such coexistence will do justice to the rights of both sides, who are sure in any case that it alone can save the people of this country from calamity, will be given the lie.

Instead of the broad community they long for, they will have to fall back on the only living community that justifies them—France. In other words, by our silence or by the stand we take, we too shall enter the fray. I cannot speak in the name of our Arab friends to illustrate both sides of that fearful evolution which gives an urgency to our action. But I have seen how possible such an evolution is in France.

Just as I have felt here the Arab's distrust of whatever is proposed to him, one can feel in France, as you are well aware, a growing doubt and similar distrust. The doubt and distrust may become permanent if the French, already disturbed by the continuation of the Rif war after the Sultan's return and by the revival of the Fellagha movement in Tunisia, are forced by the spread of a relentless struggle to think that the aim of the struggle is not only the Arab claim to justice but also the achievement of foreign ambitions—at the expense of France and her complete ruin.

Many Frenchmen would then indulge in reasoning exactly as the majority of Arabs would reason if, losing all hope, they had to accept the inevitable. The French reasoning would run like this: "We are French. Regard for what is just in the cause of our adversaries will not

lead us to do injustice to everything good and deserving in France and her people. We cannot be expected to applaud all forms of nationalism except French nationalism, to forgive all sins except those of France. In the extremity to which we have been driven and since a choice is necessary, we cannot choose anything else but our own country.”

Thus, through the same reasoning operating in contrary directions, our two peoples would separate once and for all and Algeria would become for a long time a mass of ruins, whereas a mere effort of reflection today could still change things and avoid catastrophe.

This is the double danger that threatens us, the mortal risk with which we are faced. Either we shall succeed, on one point at least, in getting together to limit the havoc and shall in this way bring about a satisfactory outcome, or we shall fail to unite and to persuade—and our failure will influence the whole future. Our enterprise needs no other justification; the urgency is evident. This is why my appeal will be as emphatic as possible.

If I had the power to give a voice to the solitude and anguish in each of us, that is the voice with which I should address you. As for me, I have passionately loved this land where I was born, I drew from it whatever I am, and in forming friendships I have never made any distinction among the men who live here, whatever their race. Although I have known and shared every form of poverty in which this country abounds, it is for me the land of happiness, of energy, and of creation. And I cannot bear to see it become a land of suffering and hatred.

I know that the great tragedies of history often fascinate men with approaching horror. Paralyzed, they cannot make up their minds to do anything but wait. So they wait, and one day the Gorgon devours them. But I should like to convince you that the spell can be broken, that there is only an illusion of impotence, that strength of heart, intelligence, and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it. One has merely to will this, not blindly, but with a firm and reasoned will.



People are too readily resigned to fatality. They are too ready to believe that, after all, nothing but bloodshed makes history progress and that the stronger always progresses at the expense of the weaker. Such fatality exists perhaps. But man's task is not to accept it or to bow to its laws. If he had accepted it in the earliest ages, we should still be living in prehistoric times. The task of men of culture and faith, in any case, is not to desert historical struggles nor to serve the cruel and inhuman elements in those struggles. It is rather to remain what they are, to help man against what is oppressing him, to favor freedom against the fatalities that close in upon it.

That is the condition under which history really progresses, innovates—in a word, creates. In everything else it repeats itself, like a bleeding mouth that merely vomits forth a wild stammering. Today we are at the stage of stammering, and yet the broadest perspectives are opening up for our century. We are at the stage of a duel with daggers, or almost, while the world is progressing at the speed of supersonic planes. The same day that our newspapers print the dreadful story of our provincial squabbles, they announce the European atomic pool. Tomorrow, if only Europe can come to an internal agreement, floods of riches will cover the continent and, overflowing even to us, will make our problems out of date and our hatreds null and void.

For that still unimaginable but not so distant future we must organize and stand together. The absurd and heart-breaking aspect of the tragedy we are living through comes out in the fact that, in order someday to reach those world-wide perspectives, we must now gather together in paltry fashion to beg merely, without making any other claims yet, that on a single spot of the globe a handful of innocent victims be spared. But since that is our task, however obscure and ungrateful it may be, we must tackle it decisively in order to deserve living someday as free men—in other words, as men who refuse either to practice or to suffer terror.

ALGERIA 1958

(For the sake of those who still ask me what future can be expected for Algeria, I have attempted, in the shortest possible space and staying as close as possible to the Algerian reality, to draw up a brief statement.)

IF THE Arab demands, as they are expressed today, were altogether legitimate, it is probable that Algeria would now be autonomous, with the approval of French opinion. If that opinion nonetheless accepts war and, even among Communists or Communist sympathizers, is limited to platonic protests, this is because, among other reasons, the Arab demands are equivocal. That ambiguity, and the confused reactions it arouses among our governments and throughout the country, explains the ambiguity of the French reaction, the omissions and the uncertainties the French use as an excuse. The first thing to do is to bring some clarity to those demands in order to try to frame clearly the reply that should be made.

A. What is legitimate in the Arab demands.

They are right, and every Frenchman knows this, to point out and reject:

1) Colonialism and its abuses, which are man-made.

2) The perennial lie of constantly proposed but never realized assimilation, a lie that has compromised every evolution since the establishment of colonialism. The faked elections of 1948 in particular both illustrated the lie and utterly discouraged the Arab people. Until that date the Arabs all wanted to be French. After that date a large part of them no longer wanted to be.

3) The obvious injustice of the agrarian allocation and of the distribution of income (sub-proletariat)—injustices that are, moreover, being irreparably aggravated by a rapid increase in population.

4) The psychological suffering: the often scornful or offhand manner of many French, and the development among the Arabs (through a series of stupid measures) of the complex of humiliation that is at the center of the present drama.

The events of 1945 should have been a warning signal; the pitiless repression of the area around Constantine, on the contrary, emphasized the anti-French movement. The French authorities judged that such repression put an end to the rebellion. In fact, it gave the rebellion a starting signal.

It is beyond doubt that the Arab demands on all these points, which in part summed up the historic condition of the Arabs of Algeria until 1948, are thoroughly legitimate. The injustice from which the Arab population has suffered is linked to colonialism itself, to its history and its administration. The French central power has never been in a position to make French law dominate in its colonies. It is beyond doubt, in short, that signal amends must be made to the Algerian people which will restore to them both dignity and justice.

B. What is illegitimate in the Arab demands.

The wish to recover a life of dignity and freedom, the total loss of confidence in any political solution guaranteed by France, the romanticism too that is natural to very young insurgents without political background have combined to lead certain combatants and their general staff to call for national independence. However well disposed one may be toward the Arab demands, one has to admit that, as far as Algeria is concerned, national independence is a conception springing wholly from emotion. There has never yet been an Algerian nation. The Jews, the Turks, the Greeks, the Italians, the Berbers would have just as much right to claim the direction of that virtual nation.

At present the Arabs do not alone make up all of Algeria. The size and seniority of the French settlement, in particular, are enough to create a problem that cannot be compared to anything in history. The Algerian French are likewise, and in the strongest meaning of the word, natives. It must be added that a purely Arab Algeria could not achieve the economic independence without which political independence is but a deception. However inadequate the French effort may be, it is so far-reaching that no country, at the present moment, would be willing to

take over. For this question and the problems it raises, I refer the reader to Germaine Tillion's admirable book.<sup>1</sup>

The Arabs can at least claim kinship, not in a nation,<sup>2</sup> but in a sort of Moslem empire, either spiritual or temporal. Spiritually that empire exists, its adhesive force and doctrine being Islam. But there also exists a Christian empire, at least as important, which there is no question of bringing back as such into temporal history. For the moment, the Arab empire does not exist except in the writings of Colonel Nasser, and it could not come about without world-wide upheavals that would mean the Third World War in a short time.

The claims for Algerian national independence must be seen in part as one of the manifestations of this new Arab imperialism in which Egypt, overestimating its strength, aims to take the lead and which, for the moment, Russia is using for its anti-Western strategy. The Russian strategy, which can be read on every map of the globe, consists in calling for the status quo in Europe (in other words, the recognition of its own colonial system) and in fomenting trouble in the Middle East and Africa to encircle Europe on the south.

The happiness and freedom of the Arab populations are of little account in the whole affair. One has only to think of the slaughter of the Chechenzes or of the Tartars in the Crimea or of the destruction of the Arab culture in the once Moslem provinces of Daghestan. Russia merely takes advantage of such dreams of empire to serve her own designs. Those nationalistic or, in the strictest sense of the word, imperialistic claims must in any case be responsible for the unacceptable aspects of the Arab rebellion—chiefly, the systematic murder of French civilians and Arab civilians killed without discrimination and solely because they were French or friends of the French.

Consequently, we are faced with ambiguous demands, which we can approve as to their basic causes and as to some of their formulations, but which we can in no manner accept in certain of their developments. The mistake of the French government from the

beginning was never to make any distinctions and consequently never to speak out clearly, and this justified every form of skepticism and retaliation on the part of the Arab masses. The result was to strengthen the extremist and nationalist factions on both sides.

The only chance of getting somewhere with the problem, today as yesterday, is therefore to speak clearly. If the elements of the problem are:

- 1) The amends that must be made to eight million Arabs who have lived until now under a particular form of oppression;
- 2) The right of 1,200,000 autochthonous French people to exist, and to exist in their native land without ever again being subjected to the discretion of fanatical military leaders;
- 3) The strategic interests that condition the freedom of the West:

then the French government must make it clearly known:

- 1) That it is ready to grant complete justice to the Arabs of Algeria and to liberate them from the colonial system;
- 2) That it will give up none of the rights of the Algerian French;
- 3) That it is unwilling for such justice to mean a prelude to a sort of historical death for the French nation, and for the West the risk of an encircling that would lead to the Kadarization of Europe and the isolation of America.

Hence it is possible to imagine a solemn declaration addressed exclusively to the Arabs and their representatives (it is worth noticing that since the beginning of hostilities no French chief of state or any governor has spoken directly to the Arab population) proclaiming:

- 1) That the era of colonialism is over, and that France (without blaming herself any more than other nations that grew up at the same time)

admits her past and present mistakes and declares herself ready to make amends;

2) That she refuses, however, to yield to violence, especially the forms it assumes at present in Algeria; that she refuses, in particular, to serve the dream of the Arab empire at her own expense, at the expense of the European population of Algeria, and, finally, at the expense of the peace of the world;

3) That she therefore proposes a regime of free association in which every Arab, on the basis of the Lauriol plan,<sup>3</sup> will truly find the privileges of a free citizen.

Of course, the difficulties begin here. But they may never be solved if this preliminary declaration is not solemnly made and directed (as I have said) toward the Arab population by every means of diffusion that a great nation possesses. That declaration would doubtless be heard by the Arab masses, who are today tired and disoriented, and, on the other hand, would reassure a large part of the Algerian French by keeping them from blindly opposing the structural reforms that are indispensable.

It remains to define the solution that might be suggested.

### New Algeria

The only regime that, in the present state of affairs, would do justice to all parts of the population has long seemed to me to be a federation based on institutions similar to those of the Swiss confederation, which make it possible for different nationalities to live in peace. But I think that an even more original system must be devised. Switzerland is made up of different populations living in different territories. Its institutions aim simply to articulate the political life of its cantons. Algeria, on the other hand, offers the very rare example of different populations overlapping in the same territory.

Hence it is essential to associate without fusing together (since federation is to begin with the union of differences), not different territories, but communities with different personalities. The solution proposed by M. Marc Lauriol, Professor of Law at Algiers (even without approving all his whereases) seems to me in this regard particularly adapted to Algerian realities and likely to satisfy the need for justice and freedom felt by all the communities.

In the main, his plan combines the advantages of integration and federalism. He proposes, on the one hand, to respect particularisms and, on the other, to associate the two populations in the administration of their common interest. For this purpose he suggests creating, in a first stage, two sections in the French Parliament, a metropolitan section and a Moslem section. The first would include those elected in metropolitan France and by the overseas French and the second would include the Moslems adhering to the Koran. The rule of proportionality would be strictly respected in the election. Thus it is probable that, in a Parliament made up of six hundred Deputies, there would be about fifteen Algerian French representatives and some hundred Moslems. The Moslem section would deliberate separately on all questions involving Moslems and on them alone.

The Parliament in full session, including both French and Moslems, would have authority over everything concerning the two communities (for instance, taxation and the budget) or the two communities and metropolitan France (for instance, national defense). The other matters, insofar as they involved only metropolitan France (in civil law particularly) would fall under the exclusive authority of the metropolitan section. Hence laws involving only the Moslems would be the work of the Moslem Deputies alone; laws applying to all would be the work of all; and laws applying solely to the French would be the work of the French Deputies alone. Still in that initial stage, in other words, the government would be responsible to each section or to the two together according to the nature of the questions raised.

During a second stage, after the trial period necessary to a general reconciliation, it would be essential to draw conclusions from such an

innovation. In fact, contrary to all our practices, contrary above all to the deep-rooted prejudices inherited from the French Revolution, we should thus have sanctioned within the republic two equal but distinct categories of citizens. From one point of view, this would mark a sort of revolution against the regime of centralization and abstract individualism resulting from 1789, which, in so many ways, now deserves to be called "Ancien Régime." M. Lauriol is right, in any case, to declare that this is nothing less than the birth of a French federal structure that will create a true French Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup>

Such institutions must by nature fit into a system that could include the countries of the Magrab and those of black Africa. An Algerian regional Assembly would then express whatever was peculiar to Algeria, while a federal Senate, in which Algeria would be represented, would hold legislative power for everything (army and foreign affairs, for example) involving the whole federation and would elect a responsible federal government. It is essential to see that this system will not be incompatible with the European institutions that may come into being in the future.

This, in any case, should be the French proposal, which would then be maintained permanently until a cease-fire is achieved. That cease-fire is at present made more difficult by the uncompromising attitude of the F.L.N. Their uncompromising attitude is in part spontaneous and unrealistic and in part inspired and cynical. Insofar as it is spontaneous, it can be understood and an attempt can be made to neutralize it by a really constructive proposal. Insofar as it is inspired from the outside, it is unacceptable. Under foreign prompting, independence can be achieved only by a refusal of any kind of negotiation and a challenge to the worst kind of warfare. France has no alternative, in this case, but to continue maintaining the proposal of which I have spoken, to get it approved by international opinion and by ever larger segments of Arab opinion, and to try to get it gradually accepted.

It is possible to imagine something like this for the immediate future. This solution is not utopian as far as Algerian realities are concerned. It



is made uncertain only by the state of French political society. It presupposes in fact:

1) A collective will in metropolitan France, and particularly acceptance of a policy of austerity that would have to be borne by the rich (the wage-earners already bear all the brunt of a scandalously unjust system of taxation);

2) A government that will reform the Constitution (which, by the way, has been approved by only a minority of the French) and that is willing or able to inaugurate the long, ambitious, and tenacious policy leading to a French federation.

These two conditions may make an objective observer skeptical. Yet the appearance in France and Algeria of new and considerable forces, in men and material resources, justifies hope of a rebirth. As a result, such a solution as the one just outlined has a chance of winning out. If not, Algeria will be lost and the consequences will be dreadful for the Arabs and for the French. This is the last warning that a writer who for twenty years has been devoted to the service of Algeria feels he can voice before resuming his silence.

1 Algeria: The Realities (New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 1958).

2 The Syrian "nation," the moment it got out from under the French protectorate, melted away, like sugar in water, in Nasser's Arab Republic.

3 See p. 149.

4 Le Fédéralisme et l'Algérie (La Fédération, 9, rue Auber, Paris).

The End