

Algeria, cont'd

Lecture No. 0036 (April 24, 1974)

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Preliminary remarks

[*Inaudible*] ... What did you ask me the last go-round? Oh, about the make-up exams...

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Lecture

Why Algeria? Why do we detain ourselves on the question of Algeria? Well, let's look at it this way. In the first place, because it seems to me that from Algeria, from the history of that particular country — from the time of the French conquest in 1830 to 124 years later, to the time of the insurrection against French rule in 1954, over that long stretch of history — you really learn something that deepens your understanding of the colonial fact. By the "colonial fact," after all, I mean the systematic underdevelopment of those Third World countries by the mechanism of imperialism; I mean, if you please, the destruction of the institutions of the societies of those countries; I mean, if you please, the devaluation of the culture of those people; I mean, if you please — and it is something you must understand — the systematic deculturalization, the systematic dehumanization of the peoples that live in those countries.

And we are talking, in the first place, after all, about the question of land. We are talking about the sequestration of land that had belonged to the Algerian fellah, to the Algerian peasant, and had been the land that had been his subsistence, and we are talking about the weakening and ultimately the disappearance of the tribe. And it had been in the tribe, after all, that the Algerian fellah, or peasant, had found his identity and found his integration.

And there was thirty years of French conquest, between 1830 and 1860, which was very rapacious, and in which the French generals practiced the scorched-earth policy. And yet, in those first three decades, there was something about Algerian society that remained intact. The land was not taken away, and the institutions remained intact. And then came a kind of crucial decade, a decade from 1863 to '73 which in Algerian history is called the Period of Rupture: the period, after all, when there is a rupture with those institutions and practices of the past which make of the Algerian people something else.

Because it begins in 1863 with a law passed by the French government in the Second Empire, the famous *sénatus-consulte* of the 22nd of April of 1863. And what that law did was to break up the tribes: that the tribes would no longer be the administrative, recognizable units in Algerian society, but that those tribes would be subdivided into what were called douars. And those douars were artificial administrative units constructed by the French, and over those douars were placed certain Algerian puppets of the French who were called qaid. And those administrators, dominating the commissions of the douars, were given one objective over all others by this law of 1863: they were supposed to take collective land and make it individual land. That was to be their function.

By this law of 1863, there still was recognition of the division between what was called *arsh* land, which was collective land, and what was called *melk* land, which was individual private land. But the law said that these commissions of qaid in these douars were to try to encourage the tribes to give up their collective control over the land, and make it, you see, what the West understood: alienable property in the market so that it could be bought and sold, and so that the French *colons*, the European settlers, could come in and take land which had historically been under this collective control. And a great deal of land was alienated as a result under this law of 1863. Gradually, that *arsh* land turned into *melk* land in that decade. And consequently, you begin to get peasants who have to sell off their land or come into the grip of the French speculator.

And that is emphasized and fortified by a second fact. And that comes in 1871, and it is the retribution for that great insurrection of 1871. Now, you must understand that that insurrection of 1871 is an historic phenomenon in Algerian history. It is a massive kind of insurrection known as the Mokrani uprising, named after that chieftain who was to be the leader, essentially, of this insurrection. And it spread across most of Algeria, and it consumed an entire year of struggle. And finally, it held down 100,000 French troops until it was crushed. And there is good reason why Lacheraf — who is one of the great sociologists of Algeria and a militant to boot — why that Mostefa Lacheraf, in his book on Algeria, *Nation and Society*, should come down very hard on this insurrection of 1871, and tell us what we often forget: that it was a bona fide peasant insurrection, that they were the fellah of Algeria who really were the rank-and-file of this thing, and that they did remarkable things. That they threw out their qaid, these puppets that the French had established in the douars, and they established what were called *djemaâ*, which were freely elected assemblies, elected by these Algerian fellaheen — who were, after all, almost the poorest peasants in North Africa — and they elected these *djemaâ*, and they said that they would rally and gather together all of the resources for struggle until, finally, the French poured in enough to crush it.

And, you see, then — the retribution is terrific. And there is a general who is sent by [head of government Adolphe] Thiers to head up this expedition, who becomes the governor-general, and

his name is General [Louis Henri de] Gueydon. And he comes in with the idea of making the Algerians pay for what they have done, and he does three things: he imposes a very heavy indemnity upon the rebellious tribes; secondly, he takes the property of those tribes which had been the leaders of the rebellion; and third, he announces that all individuals who have been really mixed up in this insurrection shall likewise have their land sequestered. And you can understand what that means: that in one of the three regions of Algeria, in the region of Constantine or the Constantine wilaya, there were 569,000 hectare that were taken away. And that meant that whole tribes were dispossessed, and it meant that the fellah became tenant, or fell into the rank of agricultural worker.

And all of this is again fortified in July of 1873 by the third step in this kind of sequestration of the land. And there comes a law on the 26th of July, pushed through the Assembly (in Versailles at that particular time). And it is pushed through by two *colons*, one named [Marcel] Lucet, the other [Auguste] Warnier, two of the great landowners already, who are French and who are sitting in this Assembly in Versailles. And they push through a law which imposes the French Civil Code on Algeria. Now, I want you to understand what that means. You know that damnable French Civil Code — it really is the French Revolution. That's what happened in the French Revolution; every *arpent* of land was protected by the Napoleonic Code. And here a Code that had nothing to do with Algerian custom, with Algerian tradition, imposed upon the country with that famous Article 815, which says no land is to remain undivided, which means that there can be no collective land: all *arsh* land becomes *melk* land; all land now is onto the market to be bought and sold, to be alienated. And you see the consequence of that. In one decade of the 1870s, there was as much land alienated to European settlers as there had been from the beginning of the conquest, in the 1830s down to 1870. And you begin that process of turning the land away from the tribe and the fellah, and into the hand of the *colons*.

And what are the consequences of this kind of rupture? In the first place, of course, the European settlement. And Algeria is different than other colonies, than other Third World areas, from the point of view of the size of the European settlement: very much larger, proportionately, than in other places. And you go from 1880, when there are 200,000 Europeans, to 1900 when there are 400,000, and you begin to see an accretion, really, of settlement. And that means, you see, that you can push across that kind of myth that Algeria really is French: that Algeria really is part, an integral part, of the French mainland itself.

And those *colons* who come and settle are pushed, to a great extent, by a certain mechanism. And that mechanism is the crisis in the Midi in France, in the south of France, in vinegrowing. Now, viticulture, or vinegrowing, a terribly important part of the whole agricultural structure of France. And it suffered a crisis in the 1880s as a result of the so-called phylloxera. And the phylloxera was a terrible root disease, and it began to kill off the vine in France. And the result was that a lot of those vinegrowers went down into Algeria and began to reconstitute their

particular economy in that country. And so you get in the 1880s a lot of these little *colons*, who really are producing, in a rather modest way, for the wine market. But then, you see, comes a crisis in Algerian viticulture between 1887 and '93, and note it well, because it tells you something about what happens to the structure of land in Algeria. What happens is that the French structure in vinegrowing is reconstituted by the end of the 1880s, and the Algerian market begins to decline and disappear. And furthermore, at the beginning of the 1890s, the phylloxera, or this vine disease, begins to affect the Algerian structure itself. Now, the result of that is that the small *colons*, those who had come down from the Midi and were relatively petty farmers, had to sell out or abandon their land. And you get in the 1890s that very characteristic structure in the Algerian agricultural sector, which is the great concentration in the hands of big *colons* and in the hands of landed companies of these vinegrowing areas. You begin to get, if you please, capitalistic farming in the vine sector which concentrates land very heavily.

And what happens to the fellah? What happens to Algerian peasant? Note it well: that the Algerian peasant, after all, loses between 1880 and 1900 about 550,000 hectare more of land; that you get that falling into rank of tenant, or even more especially, into the rank of agricultural worker; that you get the fellah forced into the city to look for employment that isn't there, are forced to go into the immigration to France to look for work; that there is a disaggregation.

And the figures don't even tell it. Consider that the peace that the French brought was a peace in which the population increased: that the Algerian population increased from 2.75 million in 1880 to 4 million by 1900. And there is no land, and there is no industrial employment in the cities. And you understand that you are making flotsam and jetsam: that you are encouraging the fellah — uprooted — to become a criminal, to become an illiterate, to become what we know the contemporary Arab to be in those early decades of the twentieth century. Hell, the Arabs have a terrible press in history, and they are, after all, the most benighted population imaginable; to see them is to see superfluous people, to see benighted people. But who made them that way?

All of which, after all, brings us to a second important point about why this structure of imperialism appears in Algeria so well. And it's the point that Pierre Bourdieu makes in that excellent book *L'Algérie sociologique* — that book on the sociology of Algeria by someone who knew the *bled* and really went over the countryside of Algeria — and Bourdieu talks about the disaggregation of a population. And it is something that you really have to understand if you are to understand the colonial frame, or the colonial phenomenon. And when Bourdieu speaks about that, he talks about the essence of imperialism. And he defines it this way: "What is the essence of the colonial situation? The domination of a numerical minority which is a sociological majority over a technologically inferior mass." And what is it that he thinks is the primary nexus in the relationship of the colonized and the colonizer? It is what he calls "systematic deculturalization." Systemic deculturalization by which we mean, after all, that the Algerian

peasant lost his tribe; that he lost a great deal of that subsistence cereal agriculture that he had had; that he lost his artisan craft because he couldn't compete against French industry.

But something more than that: that conditions that had never existed in Algerian history were now his condition, and that the condition of the agricultural worker, or the condition of the unemployed urban worker — and of the worst of the lot, those who must go into the city. Because I want you to try to understand that when you talk about disaggregation, you're talking about the psychic effects of economic exploitation: that the Algerian, like any traditional personage, had had a psychic adaptability and a psychic security that depended upon the land and the tribe. And to be uprooted and put into the city — to be made a subject to a market, which was not understood at all; to become a superfluous person — is really to be so uprooted as to become dehumanized; and, in the final analysis, almost a non-person itself.

All of which leads us to a third aspect of what this colonial situation looked like in 1954, in those years between 1950 and '54, right before that insurrection was to take place in Algeria. And you are talking about a country in 1954 that has 8.5 million Arabs and about a million Europeans. And those 8.5 million Arabs, it's a population figure that has two interests to us. One is that it is increasing at a rapid rate: that in a twenty-year-period between 1936 and '54, there is an increase of 50% in the Arab population in Algeria, and that most of that population is rural; it is still 80%, in 1954, in the countryside. And what are the data of the countryside, and that important for us to understand: that you have 600,000 Arab landholdings in 1954 on 5.5 million hectare of land; that you have 22,000 European landholdings on 2 million hectare of land, and that the very best and the most fertile land. And of those 600,000 holdings, a very tiny minority of Arab holdings (that you called *arsh*) of more than 50 hectare, they total 4% of the total of Arab holdings. And then you have a stratum of 160,000 holdings that are called the rural petty-bourgeoisie. But don't exaggerate that: you are talking really about subsistence farming, about those holdings simply big enough to support a peasant family. And that leaves you, you see, with 420,000 peasant holdings that are poor, that are less than 5 hectare, in which the peasant family either has to work as agricultural labor part-time, or rent more land, or starve. And on top of that, the landless: and they total, in 1954, 2 million.

And what is it to be an agricultural worker in Algeria in 1954? And I cite for you this remarkable and magnificent book, called *Paysans algériens*, by my great comrade Michel Launay. And I talk about Launay and I talk about something very exceptional — very exceptional to me, anyway, in my own logic — because very much the first *copain* I ever had in France, and the first friend I ever had in France more than twenty years ago, remained that ever since. And there was something quite magnificent about the spirit of that man that really rubbed off on me. And it was, you know, a quite terrific thing to have that kind of animal energy in those days, because you were young and because you weren't afraid of anything, and you could do anything — and Launay was into doing everything — and consequently, those were really remarkable days. And

here it is, all these years later, you know, and he became — because he's very talented — a great authority, perhaps the best authority in the world, on [Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques] Rousseau. And I became, simply by default, an authority on [socialist politician Jean] Jaurès, and the revolution is still to be made [*laughter*].

But it suffices to say, then, that Launay went into the *bled*, and he was brought into the Algerian army, and he had that uniform on — and, you know, he was an absolutely superb person — and he went into the villages, and the villagers, quite obviously, talked to him. And they knew that he was a comrade, and consequently he recorded what they had to say. And he records a friend of his who was in the village of Berkèches, in the *bled*, and who tells him about what the status of the agricultural worker is. And really you have to try, in a sense, to let yourself inside the system and see if you know what this means:

"The agricultural worker must report to his boss at 6:00am, and he works the whole day under the surveillance of the *chef de chantier*, the most assiduous of foremen. Now, let this agricultural worker get one bit out of line, and he's fired. His workday ends thirteen hours later." Now, this is in the 1960s that Launay was there, 1961: "His work day ends thirteen hours later, and he walks his ten kilometers home. Brute tired, he enters a lodging where his family lives, a single room, dirt poor, covered with straw. Let a child become sick, and he must let it die. The worst, however, is to be unemployed — what never existed before 1830. For if unemployed, he will do anything and go anywhere, even beg from door to door."

So, you're talking about two million people who really have become superfluous in society, who are a sub-proletariat in the land, and who filter into the cities whenever they can, and so forth.

Now, in the urban sector in 1954, among the Arab population, you have no *grande bourgeoisie*. There are no big Algerian capitalists because, simply, the structure of the urban economy did not permit it. What you have — and note it well — from the point of view of the mixture of leadership in the liberation movement, what you have are, to the number of about 4,000, of what we call *moyens-bourgeois*: in other words, middle bourgeois types who are reasonably prosperous merchants, or very small manufactures, but mainly professionals; lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, and so forth. Then you have about 150,000, in the city, of what are petty bourgeois, and that's really where you get the leadership of the liberation movement. You're talking about schoolteachers and students; you're talking about lesser civil servants; you're talking, essentially, about artisans; you're talking about white collar workers in *bureaux*, and so forth. And that's really where the FLN [National Liberation Front] drew most of its leadership in the liberation struggle.

But also, you're talking about a working class rather larger than you find in many of these Third World areas, proportionately. In 1954, 450,000 workers in the urban sector, of whom about 300,000 worked only part-time; in addition, 150,000 permanently unemployed. And that, in a sense, branches off into two very interesting insights. One is that there is an emigration, and there are these urban workers who can't find work who go up into France. And you have in 1954 about 300,000 Algerian workers in France — an extremely important thing to note for reasons I'll point out later. And these, of course, tell us two very interesting things. These Algerian workers in France, who began to escalate in number all during the Algerian War — there are more and more of these Algerian workers until you get about a half million in 1962, at the time of the Évian Accords — they tell us that, you see, the reconstruction of European capitalism, and the expansion of European capitalism in the 1950s and especially in the '60s, really was based upon the exploitation of Third World labor. *En plus*, right in the countries themselves, you never have to stir out of France or out of Germany in order to exploit Third World labor; it was right there on the scene.

And consequently, the Algerians became terribly important from that point of view. But also from the point of view that there were a small minority of them who did make contact with the French syndicalist movement or with French left-wing circles. And that's going to have its effect, ultimately, in the ideological mélange that will come out of this movement. A second observation to make about these workers is that, more than in most places, there is pretty perfect fusion between patriotism and class consciousness. In other words, for the Algerian worker inside Algeria, to struggle against his master is to struggle against the imperialist and the capitalist at one and the same time. Because, after all, the heights of industry or the heights of enterprise, such as they are, are owned by the foreign master. And consequently, a national struggle for the worker also becomes a class struggle, because he struggles ultimately against those who own whatever means of production there are in the urban areas of Algeria.

Now, that the Arab population, as far as the European or French population, for the most part, is concerned — note it well, that the mass of the European population are what we call *petits blancs*, or they are really petty bourgeois types. They're not the great *colons*, they're not fantastically rich people. If you compare them, for example, with similar conditions in France, they live on a more modest level; they don't have what you would call riches. But the point is not to compare them that way. The point, unfortunately — and this really cuts right to the very marrow of the imperialistic bone — the whole problem is to compare them with the Algerian Arab. Because there they are privileged, there they are superior, there they are racist because they know they are superior. It is so awful, you see, it is so awful that the wall of imperialism is a wall that divides workers from each other: that after all, the French worker in Algeria simply had a racist attitude toward the Algerian worker, considered himself privileged, which he was; considered himself superior, which he was not. But the power doesn't belong there. The power

belongs to the *gros colons*, to the big colonists, and to metropolitan capital which invests in Algeria.

And you have a structure of the urban economy and the rural economy which reveals that story to you. Now, consider that in 1954, agriculture provides us with one-third of the gross national product in Algeria, and all of the marketable produce — all of the real cash crop — is in the hands of the Europeans. We're talking, basically, about the vine: we're talking about those 4,300 huge estate owners and companies that control 80% of the vine production in Algeria. All of which means a contraction of cereal production. And note it well: that the population of Algeria doubles between 1900 and 1950, and during that period of time the production in cereals declines by 20%. And what does that do for the hunger level? And what does that do for the nutritional quality, after all, of the Algerian Arab?

Or take the industrial sector, if you want to call it that. The industrial sector is, for the most part, mining: it is coal, it is iron, it is lead, it is zinc, it is phosphates, it is energy — petroleum discovered in the Sahara — it is building trades, all of that urban real estate. And very little is in what you would call industry. Yes, a tobacco industry; yes, a cement industry; yes, a minor textile industry. But nothing that will really compete with French production. And who owns it? Oh, well, the people who own it are called the *cent seigneurs de l'Algérie*, the hundred great lords of Algeria. And you're talking about powerhouses: you're talking about the Germain family, you're talking about the Borgeaud family, you're talking about the brute Bastos.

Oh, Bastos — you know, it was years before I understood that everything I was smoking in France (and that was a lot) was really being manufactured by those damnable Bastos people down in Algeria. And they monopolized that Algerian tobacco industry, and they were in cement, and they were in shipping, and they were in banking, and so forth. But for the most part, the *colons*, those who were the big settlers, really made their money and had their investment in land. That was their sector, in that marketable sector of land. And the way in which they kept their power was to control the top levels of the administration, and to send deputies into the Chamber of Deputies, or into the Assemblée générale. It is they who controlled the politics and they who controlled the public opinion, because they held the great daily newspapers that, after all, pressed the ultra-colonialist point of view.

The other part of what you would call the ruling structure comes from metropolitan investment, in other words, from the French banks that invest in Algeria. And that's especially true of the Banque de l'Union parisienne, the Bank of the Parisian Union, which was basically the Schneider family, the great iron and steel family of France. And they controlled the iron mines of the Ouenza, they controlled a land company that had 50,000 hectare of timber and so forth...

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... work hand-in-hand to keep Algeria a colony, to keep her benighted. And then, you see — and note it well, or you don't understand why De Gaulle got off into the path of decolonization — there comes to be a division between metropolitan capital and those who are the great *colons*. It's one of those kinds of French species of dinosaur, and it's just too bad that dinosaurs don't do each other in. But it suffices to say, at any rate, that for the big *colons* in Algeria, on the land, they had to keep it that way. They had to keep it a colony; they couldn't afford land reform, and they had to keep the workers on the land. But, you see, these metropolitan capitalists, they looked down on Algeria, and they thought, "Alright, a land reform means a bigger market in Algeria. Perhaps, you can sell more goods." And then, you see, is introduced oil.

And oil is discovered in the Sahara. And the Compagnie française des pétroles, the French Society of Petroleum, is in there. But it can't go in alone, because it's in the Middle East with a great cartel, and so the cartel is there too. Your old friends: Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of California, and Texaco and Gulf and Socony, and with them, of course, British Petroleum, and with them Royal Dutch Shell. And all the boys are there [*laughter*]. And consequently, they're in the Sahara, and obviously their concern is not with such a petty thing as whether Algeria has independence or not; with a proper deal with Algeria in order to keep the oil. Now, when the Bureau of Oil Research, a government agency, predicts that there are vast resources, then the Compagnie française des pétroles wants to make some kind of settlement. And you begin to get a division that becomes very clear between a certain urban interest in France that wants to negotiate its way, ultimately, out of this war.

And that becomes clear when De Gaulle takes into his administration, after 1958, certain people who have spoken for the proper exploitation by French interests of that Sahara oil. It was the *directeur général* of the Banque Rothschild, whose name you know as Georges Pompidou, and who is brought in and speaks very much for that developing of oil. But then it is the son of one of those incredible imperialistic holding companies — a thing called the Société financière pour la France et les Pays d'outre-mer, a society really to invest all over the French Empire — and his name, the son of this founder, is Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who now runs for the presidency of the French Republic.

And consequently, you get this element pushing De Gaulle for negotiation, and the *colons* don't like it. And there's an absolutely marvelous quotation that comes out of the *L'Écho d'Alger*, one of the big *colon* newspapers of Algiers, on the 7th of November of 1958, and it's Alain de Sérigny; the name doesn't mean anything to you, probably, but Sérigny is one of those big, big buffoons in Algeria — somebody that has lots, lots of money, lots of money — and he owns this newspaper. And, you know, his point in November of '58 was, "Well, why in the hell did we make this revolution on the 13th of May of '58, overthrow the Fourth Republic, bring in De Gaulle and the military? It was to crush this insurrection in Algeria. And now De Gaulle is making sounds as though he wants to negotiate." And so you get Sérigny writing in the *L'Écho*

d'Alger, "I want to say, bluntly, that the people of Algeria didn't make their revolution on the 13th of May of this year for the pleasure of Monsieur Pompidou's bright eyes and to fill the coffers of the Rothschild bank." But that's ultimately what happened. So there is a scene, and it's a scene to behold. And it's one reason why one detains oneself about Algeria.

But there is a second reason, and it comes a little bit closer to my nerve endings, and that second reason is because Algeria really is a microcosm. It is a microcosm of what racism is as a virus, not only in imperialism but in the countries that perpetuate imperialism; it is a microcosm of the violence that is in the rapport and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; it is a microcosm of the will and the capacity of ruling classes to mystify their publics and to get them to along with both that racism and that violence. And more than anything, it is a lesson: it is the lesson of how much you can transfer from the colony into your country — something that obsesses me, granted — how much you can transfer by way of the autonomy of police, the autonomy of army, and transport into your country.

Well, what I'm talking about is what, of course, Lacheraf talked about in his book *Algeria: Nation and Society*. And what Lacheraf said, in a chapter called "The Psychology of a Conquest," was that when the French military went into Algeria in the 1840s and '50s — and they left a lot of letters that they published, and they left a lot of memoirs that they published — and you get a certain psychology: that they couldn't stand the idea that the Algerian Arabs were resisting them. They resented it; they became very bitter. Why should this be true? And Lacheraf quotes from Colonel Dumontet in his memoirs *Campagnes d'Afrique*, published in 1861, and Dumontet says this: "What kind of future can we hope for from a colony where every three years we have to begin the conquest over again?" And, you see, the answer to that question: what we have to expect is the dehumanization of that public. We have to torture it; we have to beat it; we have ultimately to uproot it; we have to make it flotsam and jetsam and non-people to ensure that it will remain ours. And you turn the clock, then, a hundred years ahead to the period of the 1950s, and you see what the consequence of that position is.

And there are two books that I call to your attention, that are perfectly remarkable books that come out of this area. Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli put together a collection of texts in more than a thousand pages called *Le peuple algérien et la guerre : lettres et témoignages, 1954-62*, and these are letters and testimonials of Algerians, who lived both in Algeria and in France, as to what happened to them in the course of the war. The other, a book done by my good friend Pierre Vidal-Naquet, a book called *Raison d'État*. Vidal-Naquet, a superb historian of antiquity — great authority on Cleisthenes, but who has the good taste to participate every day of his life in reality [laughter] — and who consequently, in *Raison d'État*, published a list of texts, after all, that were the French state response, the ruling class response, to the charges that they were dehumanizing an entire population.

You see, here is the problem. And the problem is that once the insurrection in Algeria begins in 1954, it is immediately a police operation by the French authorities. And the police were perfectly prepared for that, because they had had an experience in Algeria of using torture, of using extraordinary means to control the population. That we know from a remarkable testimonial that was published right on the eve of the insurrection in 1954 — by a name that you should remember, anyway, if you don't already know it — and that, of course, name is Francis Jeanson. And Jeanson — who becomes so very important in what there was of a French resistance to this terrible catastrophe in Algeria — Jeanson published in 1954 a book called *L'Algérie hors la loi* (*Algeria Beyond the Law*). And the point that Jeanson, who incidentally is a philosophy professor — different from any philosophy professor, different from any philosophy professor you've ever met — and Jeanson has in this book the accusation that Algeria has become a police state, but one that is both despotic and anarchic. In other words, its despotism has no bounds: it doesn't go by any rules at all.

You see, there was what you would call a kind of a vicious cycle. Even the prisons in Algeria were under the control of the police. At least in France, the prison system is under the control of the Ministry of Justice; that gives it a little bit of decorum or a little bit of norm. Here you've got Algerian Arabs brought into the police station, beaten up and tortured, brought bodily into courts that were racist courts, then dragged off into prisons that also were under the control of the cops. Which meant that there was a *nuit blanche*: there was positively no exit for those Algerian Arabs. Now, what happened once the insurrection began was that there was a huge kind of roundup; it was a sort of Operation Zebra but on a very large scale. And consequently, all kinds of Algerian militants and non-militants were simply dragged in and tortured. And that wouldn't have gotten out into the French public except for a very brave lawyer, Maître [Pierre] Stibbe by name, who fed a lot of that information to a famous French novelist, François Mauriac. And Mauriac, who had a certain moral position about these things, published a celebrated article on the 15th of January 1955, an article called "La Question" ("The Question"), in which he said that what is happening is that Algerians are being dragged into police stations, they are being bloodily beaten and tortured, and that they are being dragged half-dead off into prison. "What are our police doing?" is what Mauriac asked. That was his question. Now, you have to answer that question.

Well, the government is the government of Pierre Mendès France. And this is a dignified guy; this is a guy, after all, who made the Geneva Accords with the Indochinese. And Mendès France did say — for the first and last time that you can find it in any French public figure — did say out loud that the torturers were excessive and that they had to stop. But his own minister of justice said that, "Yes, there are tortures and they're a bit excessive, but law and order is at stake." And I hate to tell you that that minister of justice was [Socialist Party politician] François Mitterand.

And so Mendès France falls on the 5th of February of 1955. And his successor Edgar Faure says, "Alright, there's some yapping about torture in Algeria, and what we will do: we won't lie, we'll investigate." They took a page out of the British, and consequently sent Monsieur [Roger] Guillaume. And Guillaume was a high-ranking civil servant, was one of those École Polytechnique guys, and was sent down. He was supposed to be a man of extreme integrity — well, he was — and Guillaume went down. And Vidal-Naquet has published the whole Guillaume report, and it's just absolutely terrific; you really ought to read it. And that report says yes, there are all kinds of tortures. And it lists them — it's a great catalogue of exquisite tortures — and having said that, it says, "We shouldn't be hypocrites; we should admit this." But the conclusion is, "They are necessary." And so the French state stands behind it.

And, rather quickly, the police are pushed to the side, you see, and the army takes over. Because this is a popular insurrection; it is a guerrilla war. And if it spreads into the countryside, if it spreads into the mountains, you have to have an army of 500,000 in order to flush it out. And so you have the army. But what army? Well, it's the Indochinese army, remember, and all of these officers have lost in Indochina. But not only that: they have learned in Indochina, and they called the Indochinese "intellectuals." And these officers, after all, have read pages of [North Vietnamese general Võ Nguyên] Giáp, and they've read some pages of Mao. And they constantly repeat that one quotation of Mao that "a guerrilla among the people is like a fish in the water"; in other words, that he swims and disappears, and that you have to flush him out from the midst of an entire people. And that brings us, after all, to that kind of intellectual formulation that Colonel [Antoine] Argoud makes, because Colonel Argoud is the great intellectual of how you deal with the Algerian population. He is the master of the French Army in terms of this particular tactic, and will become in 1961 one of the founders of the Organisation armée secrète: the OAS, which was such a proto-fascist organization. And what Argoud did, in his speeches and his interior bulletin, was to work out a kind of strategy in three parts.

And he talked, first of all, he talked about protection; he talked about engagement; and he talked about control. And by protection, what Argoud meant was that the population had to be protected against what he called the "foreign body in its midst": that it was being overrun by a foreign body, and that had to be flushed out. How do you do that? And Argoud proposed and put through two tactics. One was absolutely exemplary executions; in other words, get these militants and take them out into the public square and execute them there. And the other thing was regroupment, and regroupment became something that the Americans in Vietnam studied very closely. And regroupment was to get people out of the hills and get them down into the plain, and put them into concentration camps surrounded with barbed wire, so that you could control them; so that you could see them, in other words, to put them into concentration camps. Engagement: that meant to get certain Algerian Arabs on your side; in other words, to coerce them or to bribe them into working for you to flush out the militants. And the third thing, of course, was control, which meant these enormous *fichiers*: that everybody's history, everybody's

actions and movements, had to be put on file cards, had to be put in files, had to be watched and overseen.

Well, you know what happened. Algeria became, under this kind of armed control, absolutely a Nazi state. It became something in which Algerian Arabs were killed; they were tortured; there were simply no holds that were barred. But it could not happen without the complicity of Paris.

Well, alright. Now, between 1954 and 1958, we have a bunch of ministries. And they're good guys, you see; they're either of the Radical Party or of the Socialist Party. They're certainly republicans: Mendès France, Edgar Faure, Guy Mollet (the Socialist), [Maurice] Bourgès-Maunoury, Félix Gaillard, Pierre Pflimlin. Okay, they're all good guys. And the resident-generals down in Algeria: first, Jacques Soustelle, an anthropologist and a man of the left; and after him Robert Lacoste, who was, after all, a Socialist, an important member of the Socialist Party. But what is their attitude? Here is Lacoste, arriving in Algeria in 1956 and proclaiming, "My total confidence in the army, in the dignity which it has shown in Algeria, in its patriotism, in its noble comprehension of its mission." And then the Assembly, on the 12th of March of 1956, the French Assembly passes a law giving the resident minister, namely Lacoste, "exceptional powers to maintain order." And you have a kind of dictatorship.

Now, what is the point? The point is, you see, that a society or a state that says it is going to save itself by giving autonomy to police and autonomy to armies ends up by destroying itself, just as the Fourth Republic was destroyed in May of 1958. Now, listen to this. Here is a speech of the 10th of May of 1958, a speech which is made in Algeria before a group of officers, and it goes this way: "I consider that there will no longer be any French army, because there will no longer be any France if we lose here. I tell you, everything is in your hands, you the army officers. The French army is the central pillar of the nation." That is a speech of the 10th of May 1958. It is delivered before an academy, a counter-insurgency school where torture is the primary subject that is being taught, and the speech was made by Jacques Chaban-Delmas [prime minister under President Georges Pompidou in the early 1970s].

Now, the problem is crossing from Algeria into France — or, to put it in your terms, the problem is crossing the Pacific. And so it is General [Raoul] Salan — you remember General Salan, we left him in Indochina [*laughter*] — and it is General Salan who says in June 1958, "The Mediterranean cuts France the way the Seine cuts Paris." In other words, that France and Algeria are one, and what goes on in Algeria will go on in France. And he was quite right. Because, you see, in France there were 300,000 Algerians right in 1954. Now, they're poor slobs, and they're trying to work and trying to earn their living. But they are Algerian Arabs, and there is racism and it is very easy. And the cops have never had a neat relationship with the Algerian Arabs: that is, the kind of relationship that they would have with any common criminal, except worse because they don't even speak the same language.

And so all the way back to 1939, for example, the prefecture of police of Paris established a special body called the North African Brigade, which was so vicious and used torture so much that it became a prime collaborator of the Gestapo during the period of the Nazi occupation. Then you come down to 1953, and you begin to get some of these Algerian Arabs showing a little political interest. There was an organization in [Algerian nationalist leader] Messali Hadj called the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, the MTLD. And that organization, on Bastille Day of 1953 — which was the day in which there is the traditional workers' march that goes from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Nation — there were some Algerians of this nationalist organization that marched. The police simply opened fire on them, killed seven: six of them Algerian Arabs, one, by mistake, a Frenchman. And consequently, it showed the kind of spirit they had on the eve of the insurrection. Then, in 1954, comes into Paris a new prefect of police named Jean Baylot, and Jean Baylot is a Socialist who is ferociously anti-Communist, and who immediately sets up special brigades to flush out subversives in French society. And you can easily transfer that to the Arabs.

The whole question is: When will the whole full scale of Algerian tactic be applied in France? And that becomes apparent by 1958. And the police have autonomy, and the army that is there has autonomy. And they treat Algerians just as they treat them in France. And you get it in the famous case brought before the public of *La gangrène*, and you should know about that. And the texts of this are translated into English, and you should know about that because it really is a great prefiguration of what happens in Vietnam and what happens in these kinds of societies. *La gangrène* is this: what it means is the gangrene, or the corruption, and it is the title of a book that is published by Éditions de Minuit in 1959. And what had happened was that an edict had been passed by the French state, that was applied by the police, that it was possible — this edict passed on the 7th of October of '58 — that it was possible to take up any Algerian Arab and put him into protective custody without having to show due cause. In December, a group of forty Algerian students were simply picked up and brought into the commissariat of police near the Élysée Palace. And by the time they emerged two weeks later, they were all half-dead; they had been literally brutalized in the course of that time. Now, being Algerian students and a bit nationalist, they decided to file a complaint in the courts, and they published very detailed accounts of what happened to them.

And when you read those accounts you're really quite astonished, because the *commissaires*, when they were interrogated by these lawyers that were hired by these Algerian students, were rather proud of the fact that complaints were being filed. And one *commissaire* said, "Every time there is a complaint filed against us, we get a raise from our bosses." And consequently, there was a great sanguinity about that sort of thing. There should have been, because *La gangrène*, which was the book, was suppressed, and there never was any kind of trial that did justice to those particular people.

The point was, the French public let it pass. It was *laissez passer*; the French public simply accepted this. And it reaches its culmination in a date that I remember personally very well. I was in France at that time, and it happened on the 17th of November of 1961. And that really is the culmination point of what I'm talking about, about the brutalization of a society before we come to some kind of a conceptual understanding of this. And that simply was a great kind of manifestation that the FLN was demonstrating in France. And they marched, 30,000 silent, unarmed Algerians around the streets of Paris on the 17th of November: a kind of silent protest over open season on Arabs, because they were being hung from trees in the Bois de Boulogne, they were being thrown into the Seine; there literally was open season on the Algerians at that point, so there was this peaceful demonstration. On that 17th of November, there were over 10,000 Arabs in the city of Paris that were picked up and arrested, and literally hundreds killed. We don't know how many because there never were any records held.

What was the reaction to that? There was a municipal council meeting on the 23rd of November. And my very, very great friend Claude Bourdet — he's one of those elegant human beings I know, and he was a municipal councilor at that time — went to that municipal council and said, "Look: that Monsieur [Maurice] Papon" — who is the prefect of police — "in his office, in front of his eyes, there were literally forty Algerians who were killed, who were simply shot dead in front of the prefect of police, and he did nothing but encourage this." And the municipal council, in response, passed a resolution congratulating the police for keeping order.

Now, we come to the point. And Alain Geismar made the point when he said, "You see, the Third World is in our suburb." Well, that's where the Algerians were living, in the *banlieues* of Paris. But it's more than that. It isn't only the Third World: it's *l'autre*, it's the Other; it's the prisoner, it's the worker, it's the young person. I remember, in November of 1970, in a village in the department of the Isère, there was a fire in a dance hall, a dance hall that was crowded with young people. And those young people perished in a dance hall in which there were no safety devices and in which the doors had been locked to keep other people out, and that was so outrageous. And when the mayor of that commune spoke to the television, he said, "Well, after all, they were not our people, they were from the neighboring town. And they were young, and they didn't like the police." And so it was justifiable, no? Well, it's sick!

And that's my point — that imperialist societies are very sick societies. And they're sick in certain kinds of terms. They're sick in the terms, for example, that [Frantz] Fanon knows about. And Fanon, you know, is really one of the most ingenious people writing in our time. And here is a guy who was a psychiatrist and who was in this hospital in Blida, near the city of Algiers, and who turned in his resignation in 1956. And that letter of resignation is a masterpiece. And he said what psychiatrists, really, in the United States ought to begin to recognize, if they haven't already: that you can't cure sickness in a sick society of that kind. And what Fanon said: "If psychiatry is a medical technique which seeks to restore a man to a proper contact with his

environment, it must be stressed that the Arab, always treated as an alien in his own nation, is forced to live in an inhumane condition. The law in Algeria is, in fact, a systematic process of dehumanization. The social structure existing in Algeria makes it impossible to restore the human being to his proper place and to his health."

But so sick, you see, that when you get somebody that is really so brilliantly educated, that is so incisively intellectual as Albert Camus, that he cannot see the issue. And that is really a paradigm case about the whole Algerian War, because Camus put his writings on the Algerian question into one volume, *Actuelles, tome III (Actualities III)*. And you find in there not the perception of a Fanon: that between the colonizer and the colonized is a nexus of violence, and only violence will undo it; what you find in there is all of that Western claptrap that he absorbed: "The Arab personality will be recognized by the French personality. But in order for that to happen, France must exist in Algeria. 'You must choose your side,' cried the hate-filled. Oh, I have chosen it: I have chosen my country — I have chosen the Algeria of justice in which French and Arabs will associate freely." And so he hated violence, but he supported the Hungarian rebellion of 1956, and he said of that rebellion: "Their will to stand upright is pure." And he never could see that the will of Algerian Arabs to "stand upright" was pure. And so he said in Stockholm in December of 1957, when he picked up his money for the Nobel Prize, and he said, "I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice." And why in hell his mother needed Algeria, and why she needed the exploitation of those people, he doesn't quite ever explain.

And it goes on. And in Chambéry in December of 1968, and there was a young worker — white, not Arab at all, a Frenchman — [Jean-Pierre] Thévenin by name, who went into the commissariat of police after being in a strike line, at 6:30 in the evening, to be interrogated by the cops for no reason. And at 10:00 they carried him out dead. And lots of cases like that. And so, you see, there is something to be studied.

So, Algeria. And we think finally of the point that we really want to make...

[audio cuts out]

... and the mobilization that will work. And the theme that I work on and will take up with is the theme that Fanon again puts in that magnificent chapter "The Pitfalls of National Conscience" in *Damnés de la terre*. And that book should be studied, and not with the idea that it's a textbook for [Black] Panthers and so forth and so on. It should be studied because Fanon knew about neo-colonialism, and knew that what would happen if the new bourgeoisie or a people exploiting these national revolutions got into power was just awful: "They have come to power in the name of a narrow nationalism and representing a race. They will prove themselves incapable of triumphantly putting into practice a program with even a minimum of humanist content, in spite of all of their fine-sounding declarations." He's talking about Africa, talking about the Maghreb

of North Africa, talking about all of those places where the mobilization didn't lead to a bona fide revolution.

My good friend Ayi Kwei [Armah] — a Ghanaian novelist who wrote that superb book *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* — and he said to me on the steps of the library in front of Columbia University, he said to me, "What the hell? I went back to Ghana, and they have overthrown [Kwame] Nkrumah, and there are all these people who had been so-called 'in the liberation struggle,' and they're now, really — and now what, what, what? What really should we do? Or is there anything to do?" And, you know, I have enough literary culture, and I have long read [Paul] Éluard, and Éluard means a lot to me: "*Changer l'eau en lumière*," to change water into light; "*Changer le rêve en réalité*," to change the dream into reality. Okay, so I said that to Ayi Kwei. And he looked at me and he said, "Oh, brother, you are cool." [*laughter, applause*]