

Algeria, cont'd

Lecture No. 0037 (April 26, 1974)

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Preliminary remarks

Well, I must say I'm amazed that as many of you have come [*laughter*], because I know full well that if I had the choice, I would not come to hear me [*laughter*].

A couple of things before I begin. Seriously: were any of you in Portugal yesterday? [*On April 25, 1974, the day before Goldberg's lecture, Portugal's right-wing dictatorship collapsed in what came to be known as the Carnation Revolution.*] ...

[*audio cuts out*]

... watch it, watch it.

We are concerned, then, with the Algerian nationalist movement [*laughter*]...

Lecture

We are concerned with that Algerian nationalist movement, in the first place, in terms of its emergence. Its emergence in the most difficult and the most dangerous circumstances: against, in the first place, the whole apparatus of force and repression by the French state; against the apathy, against the kind of passivity, against the fear, against the cultural backwardness of the Arab masses as they had developed under French colonialism.

And we are interested in that Arab nationalist movement, in the second place, in terms of its transformation: its transformation, very crucially, from a movement that was legalistic, that was peaceful, into a movement that armed struggle for autonomy and then for independence; that those that formed those organizations really had the idea that the French state might offer reforms, might be able to negotiate with the *colons*, and discovered they were up against a stone wall, and eventually knew that they had to take up arms, and mounted an armed struggle.

Interested in that Algerian nationalist movement, in the third, because we want to study the impact of that armed struggle upon the peoples in Algerian society. We want to study, in other words, the [Frantz] Fanon problem: "What happens to human beings when they take up arms?"

What happens to them when they manifest their selfhood? What happens to their health, which cannot be catered to by psychiatrists in a sick society?" — says Fanon — "What happens to them when they finally say no, and resist?"

And a movement that we want to study, fundamentally, in the fourth place, in terms of its tragedy. A tragedy, after all, which is the general tragedy of nationalism as a guiding ideology in the Third World. Or, more precisely, we are talking about the class limitations of the Algerian nationalist movement; in other words, of its class confusion, of its ideological uncertainty, of its failure, if you please, to develop at the very heart of that movement a party that resembled the party of Vietnam or the party of China — which really could not only direct the liberation movement, but ultimately chart the way to development, to keep the imperialist powers out, and finally to destroy the power of the elites within Algerian society itself.

And so we begin with its emergence. And to let you know how difficult it is for nationalist groups even to emerge in the 1920s and '30s, just think in your own mind of the problem of cadres, the problem of followers. Who were the nationalists to tap, after all? Who would be the nationalists? The peasants are the logical group, after all. And those Algerian peasants had been magnificent in the early decades of the French conquest, but they had been clobbered in that insurrection of 1871, and they fell somnolent. And they were a flotsam and jetsam, and a passive mass until they were catalyzed in the 1950s by the guerrillas that went into those mountains. Or the working class in the cities: they are a product of imperialism, they are a lumpenproletariat, they are not organized.

The cadre, the leadership, has to come from the Algerian intelligentsia, which is a relatively small intelligentsia, and which has a capacity to fall into one of two traps. Either it can become objectively reactionary; in other words, those Algerian intellectuals who have a sensitivity to colonialism and to the fact that they are being exploited, but who resist modernization, who clutch on to a certain kind of religious conservatism, who become, if you please, Islamic nationalists and who want to congeal history at the point of the Koran — something that is perfectly nostalgic and perfectly utopian. Or the other trap, which is the trap that is really adopted by the more modernist nationalists at that time, and that the trap of assimilation: the idea on the part of certain of these Algerian intellectuals that they can make it within French society. They are the beneficiaries, after all, of some French education; they are the beneficiaries of certain posts in the bureaucracy, or they get certain of the places in the municipal councils after the law of February of 1919, which gives them a token representation.

And we are talking, in terms of that problem, about an extremely important example: we are talking, if you please, about Ferhat Abbas. And Ferhat Abbas, after all, is the most visible Algerian nationalist in the period of the 1940s. And yet, to follow the trajectory of Ferhat Abbas

is to see how much mystification is possible for a small intelligentsia in a Third World society that can be so easily co-opted, so easily bought off. And, you see, Ferhat Abbas was bourgeois, and his father was a qaid; in other words, a high-ranking Muslim who worked for the French. And he had, Ferhat Abbas, a good French education. And he went to University of Algiers and he studied pharmacy, and in the city of Sétif he opened a pharmacy shop, and then he became a municipal councilor in Sétif. And he became a *conseiller général* (in other words, a departmental councilor); he went up the ladder as much as the ladder was provided by the French. And consequently, he had no notion of an Algerian nation, no notion of Algerian independence.

And he published in 1931 an important book called the *Le jeune Algérien* (*The Young Algerian*), and it is a collection of Ferhat Abbas' articles over the 1920s. And it really is an astonishing book, because it goes very much to the heart of the problem of whether Third World intellectuals — or black intellectuals, let us say, in America — over long periods of time, were not bemused about the possibilities within the framework of an exploitative society. And so you get no real distinction in Ferhat Abbas between colonialism and imperialism. He talks of colonialism, by which he means a cultural disadvantage, or by which he means a certain political disadvantage; but he doesn't talk about imperialism, which is the whole systematic underdevelopment of his country — the whole economic weight, after all, of that outside power. And so we read in the *Le jeune Algérien*, "Colonialism must be overcome to ensure the entente between the French and the Arabs." And how is that to be overcome? By assimilation, of course: "The full and meaningful participation of the Arabs into the French state." And so if he looks for nationalism, he doesn't find it in Algeria. He says this: "Algeria is French terrain. We are French, but we have an inferior status. Our task must be to evolve from a colony into a genuine French province."

Now, I want you to understand how illusory that is, and I want you to try to imagine how naive that is. Because you are dealing in Algeria with, after all, 9 million Arabs and 1 million *colons*, which means that any real advance by the Arabs will be a threat to this million *colons*. And that million is a big enough figure so that it's not only a question of a few commanding the heights of the economy; it's lots of *petits blancs*, lots of little people who are commanding little privileges, and who will fight like hell. Because, you see, what happened to those French *colons* in Algeria was that they became something quite different from being French: they are the *pièdes-noirs*, they are the blackfeet. They are those extraordinary, exceptional people of whom Pierre Nora has written such a splendid book [*Les Français d'Algérie*]. They are as reactionary as sin; they are perfectly hostile to the metropole, to Paris itself, because they think it's run by Communists or by anarchists, and resist every modicum of reform that Paris really may suggest in order to co-opt this colony or, in a sense, to adjust it.

Now, you know that you can't say that Jules Féry is anything but colonialist; he is the architect,

after all, of the colony in Tunisia, the architect of the colony in Indochina. And yet Jules Féry, in 1891, wrote about these *colons* in Algeria: "You just can't make the French *colons* in Algeria understand that the Arabs aren't clumps of dirt. You can't make them understand that the Arabs may have legitimate grievances." And why? Because the Conseil supérieur de l'Algérie, the highest council of Algeria, decreed in 1894, "The Arab is an inferior race. It cannot be educated." And that's that. And that's the hypothesis, and that's the working principle, and so everything by way of reform is opposed. And then isn't it illusory to talk about assimilation?

And yet, you see, Ferhat Abbas, as late as 1936 — in a text that has been often cited, because it is so much a kind of insight into how the history of a people is taken away from them — Ferhat Abbas, in a newspaper called *L'Entente* (the entente between French and Arabs, after all), on the 23rd of February of 1936, writes this very celebrated statement, and listen to it well: "If I had ever discovered the *nation algérienne*, if I had ever discovered an Algerian nation, I would be a nationalist and I wouldn't be afraid to say so. But I won't die for a *patrie algérienne* which doesn't exist and never has. I have interrogated history, I have interrogated the living and the dead, and I haven't found any national past." Now, that's terrific. Because this is an intellectual, and it shows you how a power can over-gloss the record of a people and simply bury its particular history.

And you see what that syndrome is. It's the syndrome that was so brilliantly described by Aimé Césaire in that magnificent work called the *Return of the Native*: this Martiniquais, this West Indian who went, you see, off to Paris, and studied and was so brilliant, and such a splendid poet and writer and dramatist, and who mixed with French intellectuals and thought that was his world, after all; and then finally, only in midstream, went back to his island of Martinique to say, "Well, these are my people, and how do I ever get a bridge to them?" That terrible gap, you see, that develops between a Europeanized or a Westernized kind of intelligentsia and the mass of illiterate people. Or it's the whole problem, after all, that's very well inscribed in a conversation that I had with [James] Baldwin, who lived in Paris for many, many years, and who, after all, absorbed all of that European culture. He sat always in that café, the Old Navy café (on the terrace of the Old Navy café) on Boulevard Saint-Germain, and he said one day, "You know, that I for years thought that I" — this black man, this American black novelist — "was much closer to Bach and Beethoven and Brahms," as he put it, "than to black people in America." And think of the trauma of going back and trying to discover that identity.

You see, it's the illusion that was exposed magnificently in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in that dialogue that Malcolm X has with a black sociologist at Harvard. And Malcolm X makes a speech at Harvard, you know, and he says that the black bourgeoisie in America is buying a myth: that it will never really be liberated within a structure of exploitation; that there has to be a

different kind of society if you are not to have the exploitation of these racial minorities or of the working class, or anybody who, after all, must work to make the surplus value go. And so there was an extremely well-groomed black sociologist, teaching then at Harvard, who said that he thought that Malcolm X was going much too far; that, after all, he was a black man and he had taken advantage of these studies, and he had gone and he had gotten a Ph.D., and there he was teaching at Harvard. And Malcolm X said, "You know what the ruling class calls very bright black men who go and get Ph.D's and teach sociology at Harvard?" And the professor asked, "What?" And Malcolm X said, "Nigger."

And that was the exposé that Aimé Césaire made of his own life, the exposé that Baldwin made of his, that Ferhat Abbas ultimately would make of his. I thought, you know, of that Malcolm X story a year ago. I was in France and I was trying to help a young comrade who was trying to come to America — I didn't know why, he felt it was this great rush to come to America and see how it is that we have made all these many years of progress. And consequently, this is a very, very good type: he said he wanted to wander to Kansas, that it seemed to be the most remote place from society [*laughter*]. And so I thought I would help him because he was being denied a visa, and he was being denied a visa — granted, he belonged to a small Maoist group. But I thought, if he were wandering in Kansas, he might have a reasonable message for those people [*laughter*].

I thought I would go, then, to the consulate and try to help him. And you know, when you go to the consulate or the embassy in a foreign country, then you know that you're paying for that building and paying for that ground. Well, you get very arrogant — or you get equal, that's even better [*laughter*]. So I went into the consulate. You go into the nice part when you're an American, and you are dealt with very politely; but when you're a foreigner, they put you in a building across the street, and it's very crowded and it looks like something out of the Nazis — disconsolate, you know, and everybody waiting there in line. And consequently, I went in, and I don't like lines, anyway, so I was pulling rank all over the place. And I went right immediately through various bureaucrats, and I said, "I want to see the consul." And they said, "Well, he's not here." I said, "Well, who is here?" And they said, "The vice consul." And so they ushered me into the office of the vice consul, and there he was: I mean, he could have been the twin of Sidney Poitier. And consequently, there was this extremely handsome, well-groomed, pinstriped man. And I said, "I'm trying to help this young man with a visa." Then he said to me, "Well, you know, there are certain things that we have to do to protect ourselves in America." And I said, "I hope it lasts for you" [*laughter*].

But that is to say, at any rate, that there is a problem. And the problem, or the framework, really begins to tell us something about how important it was in the middle of the 1920s when the first

bona fide nationalist organization really was founded by the Algerians, and was called the North African Star: the North African Star, or the Étoile nord-africaine. And it had an extraordinary leader who was, in many ways, something of a paradigm of what the problem was, because this Étoile nord-africaine — this North African Star — was led by Messali Hadj. And Messali Hadj, of whom we will speak momentarily, really has something very, very charismatic indeed. Now, the North African Star was founded in France — it was actually founded in Paris, and among Algerian workers who were working in the plants of France at that particular time — and it was founded, if you please, in 1926, in the shadow of the French Communist Party. In other words, it absorbed a lot of its inspiration, and in fact a lot of its early sort of semi-Marxist terminology, from the French Communist Party which encouraged it at that point.

Now, at this juncture, you really have to open a parenthesis and understand something. Now, we have obviously talked enough so that we can fill volumes about the kinds of compromises, the kinds of betrayals, that the Third International has made in regard to revolutions all over the world, and certainly in the Third World. But there's something that you must never forget, and that is that when Communist parties (or when the Comintern) grinds out a lot of literature — when it grinds out pamphlets that really are, in a sense, vulgarizations of Lenin; when it talks about imperialism — it's casting seed that falls on some soil somewhere. And consequently, in the Third World, very frequently it percolates into the working class, or more into the intelligentsia. And it sometimes goes into those bourgeois milieux where the people will not become Communist, but where they begin to get a better understanding of what imperialism is, and the fact that perhaps you have to have only a national but a social revolution in order to develop your country.

Listen to a text of [Egyptian nationalist Gamal Abdel] Nasser of 1954, which I call at random out of the little collection of his on the philosophy of revolution. And it shows you what I mean about those who do not become really Marxists and those who do not become Communists, but who find some kind of inspiration, terminologically and conceptually, from this casting of seed by the Comintern. Because Nasser said in that text: "Every people must pass through two revolutions: a political revolution, by which they oust the tyranny imposed by a foreign power and restore their right to govern themselves; a social revolution, where hostile classes face each other, and by which a just order can be established." Well, you see, that goes much beyond just pure nationalism, and it is a kind of *libéralisme socialisant*, as the French call it: something that has something of a socialist content within it.

Now, as far as the French Communist Party is concerned, it didn't have a very good record on Algeria at the very beginning. That French Communist Party established, in 1921, Communist sections in Algeria, and there never was an independent Communist Party of Algeria. They were

sections of the PCF, or sections of the French Party, and they were inscribed to by Frenchmen; they didn't really have Arabs in them, and there was a great deal of chauvinism. The idea was that these were Communists in Algeria who were French and who wanted a revolution in France, which they thought ultimately would resolve problems for the Arabs. But when, in 1922, the Comintern issued an appeal for independence in the Maghreb — for independence in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria — the section of Sidi Bel Abbès, which was the biggest Communist section in Algeria, protested and said that any such thing as Algerian independence is sheer nonsense and cannot be pursued.

But, you see, that changes by 1926, and by 1926 the French Communist Party is talking about the independence of Algeria, and that because it is changing within the cadre of the changing line of the Comintern. The Comintern is moving into its third strategic period, the period of *classe contre classe*, class against class. And the idea, now, of Stalin, is that capitalism, which had stabilized itself in the middle 1920s, is now in trouble; that coexistence will break down and there will be a war launched against the Soviet Union; and consequently, the obligation of the Communist parties of various countries is to push their workers to a revolutionary confrontation with the ruling class, and that means also to push revolution in the colonies, which will weaken these imperialist powers. Within that framework, the Comintern and the French Communist Party begin to encourage the independence idea in Algeria. The Executive Committee of the Comintern, in 1931, denounces the Communist parties of Maghrebian countries in these terms: "For its rank opportunism which capitulates before the imperialist powers and before bourgeois nationalism, in Tunisia and Algeria, the Communist organizations have been weakened by the fact that the Communist have been unable to inculcate in the masses the need for a struggle against French imperialism."

And so, you see, it's within that ambit that Étoile nord-africaine, the North African Star, really gets started in 1926: with the idea that it ought to center its efforts on Algerian workers, and with the idea that it ought to aim for independence and for a social republic — and not only for a national revolution, but indeed for a social revolution. Now, that North African Star by 1929 has 4,000 members, almost all of them in Paris and the *banlieues*, but it is putting out a lot of tracts and newspapers and holding meetings. And then, you see, what it has is Messali Hadj.

And Hadj is really something, because he's not an intellectual; that would really, in a sense, undercut the kind of mission he has. He has that kind of terrific, simple, direct communication. He tells the Algerian workers how they are exploited within the cadre of French imperialism; he speaks good French, he speaks good Arabic, and he speaks simply. He is also a good organizer, and he also has terrific will. Now, the French state knew that the North African Star might be a danger, and it dissolved it in 1929. And the organization went underground. It surfaced again in

1933, and Messali Hadj came out into the open and began holding meetings all over the place, and consequently was arrested in 1933, and kept in jail until the 1st of June of 1935. He came out in '35, and immediately, of course, began talking and organizing, and organized by September of '35 seven sections in the area of Paris and the *banlieues*. And consequently, was to be arrested again, and escaped to Geneva, and he began to direct the Étoile nord-africaine from Geneva.

All of which takes us to a most interesting problem, which is the Popular Front. And the Popular Front tells us a great deal about where the French are, even the French left, when it comes to the question of colonialism or of imperialism. Now, the Popular Front had a very ambiguous effect, as you know, on the workers of France, because they had strikes going which were finally done in by the Popular Front; it had an ambiguous effect on the Spanish Loyalists: all of that we know. But it also had a very ambiguous effect upon the colonial struggle.

Now, Messali Hadj and the North African Star joined the Popular Front; in other words, they joined the *rassemblement populaire* for the elections of May and June of 1936. And so, after the elections brought the Popular Front government to office in June of 1936, Messali Hadj was permitted to come back into France and then to travel in Algeria. Well, that was great. He looked at this as a tremendous cover for going down into Algeria and doing what he hadn't been able to do: here's a left-wing government in Paris, he will go down to Algeria, and he will hold these fantastic meetings. And so he holds, on the 2nd of August of 1936, a massive meeting in the stadium of Algiers. For the first time there is this massive nationalist meeting addressed by Messali Hadj on Algerian soil, and there are more than 10,000 Arabs who come out to hear him. And then he holds meetings in other cities. By October of 1936, he has enrolled 11,000 urban workers into his organization in Algeria itself. And then he comes to clash with the Popular Front, because the Popular Front is not into the business of colonial liberation.

And that was especially true of the Communists, because the Communists had to try to reconcile the grievances and demands of the Algerian people with the demands of an anti-fascist front. Could they threaten the bourgeois alliance? Could they threaten bourgeois interests when they were trying to make a political alliance in France and an anti-fascist front? The answer is no, and they would sacrifice the colonies, most certainly. And consequently, the Communists became assimilationists, and they became reformists in this question. You look at the collected works of [PCF General Secretary] Maurice Thorez, if you have a strong stomach, and you find that the references to independence and liberation which are strewn throughout those works stop with August of 1935, and after that you do not find it. And the idea is that the French will provide some kind of citizen status for the Algerians.

Now, this jibes very much with the will of a certain bourgeois elite in Algeria; it jibes with the

will of a Ferhat Abbas, for example. And those Arab elites hold a congress on the 7th of June of 1936, the First Arab Congress held in Algiers, and at that Congress they demand full assimilation into France. And so the Arabs and the Communists greet, with a touch of violence, what is called the Blum-Viollette proposal.

Maurice Viollette was in the Ministry of Colonies, and he had been a governor-general in Algeria, and he had been kind of a liberal. And now Blum brought him into the Ministry of Colonies, and he made a proposal to bring into citizenship a very limited number of Algerians: in other words, those with a certain education, those with certain wealth. It would have enfranchised or made French citizens out of 21,000 Arabs — that is all. But there was a method by which more would have become enfranchised or become French citizens later.

And the Algerian elite greeted that with enthusiasm; they said that this is what they wanted, and it never happened anyway. The *colons* in Algeria put heavy pressure on, and the Blum-Viollette proposal then failed. But the important thing for us is that, from the very beginning, Messali Hadj and the North African Star opposed that assimilation, and they opposed it on absolutely important conceptual grounds. Here is Messali Hadj writing in in September of 1935 in *El Ouma*, which is the paper of the North African Star — and here, you see, you get the whole dilemma of the nationalist movement: "We tell the people that the policy of assimilation is a grave danger, for we would lose all hope of independence." In other words, it is a critique, you see, of co-optation: "The economic, political, and cultural direction of our lives belongs to us, and we should organize ourselves solidly so that we take over the affairs of our country." And so they go on demanding independence, demanding a struggle of independence.

And finally, of course, they are dissolved. And the North African Star, by the Popular Front government, is dissolved on the 26th of January of 1937 under that very law which enabled the government to dissolve the proto-fascist leagues like the Croix-de-Feu. And when that happened, with the Communists taking the lead in that, *El Ouma* wrote on the 12th of February of 1937: "The Communists have taken the place of the imperialists. You Communists have become chauvinists of the worst sort: watchdogs of the colonial regime." And so what Messali Hadj did was rather clever: he said, "Oh well, we said we were a league. We've been dissolved under the law against leagues; we reconstitute ourselves as a party." And so they became the PPA — the Parti du peuple algérien, the Party of the Algerian People — formed in March of 1937. And there was Messali Hadj back in Algeria, propagandizing under this new banner called the Party of the Algerian People.

Well, he got about three months into it, began to hold monster rallies again, and finally, on the 27th of August of 1937, he was arrested once and for all. And when he was arrested,

L'Humanité, the French Communist paper, applauded that. And it did it with the usual terminology: "Messali and his nationalist party have pursued the adventurous policy of Trotskyism [*laughter*]. They were helped in their work of dividing the Algerian people by the fascist *colons*." And so, quite obviously, Messali Hadj called a Trotskyist and a fascist in one and the same breath, and that did him in good and proper at that point.

Alright, so the first effort fails. That first effort of the 1930s fails, but note it well: that what fails with it is assimilation. That assimilation does not work, that the Blum-Viollette reform does not go through, and consequently the whole movement, perforce, is going to move to the left. In other words, people like Ferhat Abbas are going to be disenchanted of the idea of what they can expect.

So, comes the war. Now, the war does damage to the prestige of France. France loses in the war, and consequently her prestige is down. The Algerian nationalists begin to make demands. And so it is Ferhat Abbas himself, note it well, on the 12th of February of 1943 who draws up his famous *Manifeste*, or the *Manifesto of the Algerian People*. This is February of 1943; it is a man who had been an assimilationist, and we read this in that *Manifesto*:

"The policy of assimilation, applied to a few and denied to most, has reduced Arab society to the most complete servitude. This colonization has destroyed the tribes and transformed the landowning fellah into a slave. But an avant-garde has emerged — intellectual, peasant, working-class — which raises demands for the entire people: the granting to Algeria her own constitution, to guarantee (a) freedom and absolute equality of all her inhabitants; (b) suppression of feudal property and distribution of land to the landless; (c) freedom of the press and the right of association; (d) free, compulsory education for children of both sexes; (e) the immediate participation of Algerian Arabs in the government of the country."

You see the point: that Monsieur Ferhat Abbas has now moved to the point of autonomy for Algeria, within a federation, with France — autonomy by its own constitution. And that *Manifesto* is weighted upon the French authorities.

Now, who are the French authorities? The French authorities, by that time, the Committee of National Liberation; in other words, it's De Gaulle, the Comité de libération nationale. And De Gaulle sends to Algeria in June of 1943 a governor-general, his representative, named General [Georges] Catroux, and General Catroux arrives on the 3rd of June of 1943. He reads this *Manifesto* of Ferhat Abbas, and he answers it on the 23rd of June this way, and you can begin to see the question of blockage: "Victory in the war must be the dominant preoccupation of the

Arabs as well as of the French. It is hardly opportune to raise extraneous issues." Now, freedom isn't really an "extraneous issue" with the Arabs; but it's "hardly opportune to raise extraneous issues — issues that can only damage the unity of France and Algeria, which is crucial to the war effort. And under no circumstances can France ever conceive of the independence of an Algeria which is part of her national patrimony."

Well, the elites got upset — Ferhat Abbas and his friends got upset. And consequently, when that response came, they began to withdraw from those agencies in which they had participated, in which they were token representatives. And finally De Gaulle felt he had to step in. Now, you know De Gaulle is magnificent; he always is there with a cooperative schema, and consequently arrives on the 7th of March of 1944 with his famous Ordinance. Now, the Ordinance is eight years after the Blum-Viollette proposal. And it's more extensive than that proposal, but it's much too late. What De Gaulle proposes is that all Algerians twenty-one years or older be able to vote in their electoral college. And that means that there are always two electoral colleges: all of the Arabs vote in one electoral college, all of the French vote in another, and they distribute the seats. And according to this Ordinance of March of 1944, in all of the elected organisms, two-fifths of the seats would go to the Arabs and three-fifths would then go to the French. Now, what the hell difference did it make if everybody voted, if they got two-fifths of the seats automatically? And that, the great Ordinance of De Gaulle on the 7th of March.

A week later, Ferhat Abbas and Messali Hadj together called a meeting and organized an association called the Friends of the Manifesto, Amis du manifeste. And that Friends of the Manifesto began to be a radical nationalist organization, in which the *messalistes* — the followers of Messali Hadj, much more radical than the followers of Ferhat Abbas — began to become the leaders. By the time you come to the end of the war, by the time you come to May of 1945, these Friends of the Manifesto have really appealed to a great number of urban dwellers, and they are demanding autonomy and a social republic.

And the French won't have it. And the answer comes at Sétif on the 8th of May of 1945, and Sétif, after all, is violence. Sétif is a city, and on the 8th of May, because it was the end of the war, the Algerian Arabs asked the subprefect for permission to hold a manifestation. The permission was granted. Now, who organized that? Whether it was organized by the followers of Messali Hadj, who wanted to push this movement to direct action, or whether it was organized by police agents, who really wanted to clobber the movement, we probably will never know in our lifetimes. It suffices to say that a big manifestation took place in the city of Sétif, and the Arabs walked with banners. And the banners said, "Down with Colonialism," they said, "Long live independent Algeria." And the French police force charged, and they tried to grab the banners; there was resistance, and the police opened fire and killed three Arabs. After that, the

Arabs ran wild. And they went through the streets, especially into the French quarter, and they simply found French, beat up on them — finally left, that day, twenty-seven French dead.

And that meant a reprisal of the most fantastic sort. Because for a week after Sétif, the Ministry of the Interior directed the harshest kind of repression. It meant that in the cities of Algeria, there were Arabs simply seized, beaten up, killed; it meant the strafing of forty-four villages. Finally, between 10- and 20,000 Arabs were killed in that single week and thousands arrested, and the leadership of these organizations struck down. And for the *colons*, it was a great day. And so you get that magnificent statement that comes out of one of the *colon* newspapers of that particular time, the *Écho d'Alger*, the Echo of Algiers, on the 8th of June of 1945: "*Pour l'Afrique du Nord, c'est l'heure du gendarme*" — "For North Africa, it is the hour of the *gendarme*."

1946, there is amnesty. Ferhat Abbas comes out of prison and organizes a new organization which is very moderate: it is an organization called the Democratic Union for the Manifesto. And that Democratic Union, the UDMA, is really a moderate organization to put pressure for real concessions by the French. In October, Messali Hadj comes out of prison and he organizes the MTLD, the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, a more left-wing organization. But you see the impasse: the impasse is that the Algerian nationalists have not mounted the question of the armed insurrection.

And the French force it. And they force it with a statute of the 20th of September of 1947. And that is a great turning point, because the statute of the 20th of September of 1947 is as far as the new French state — this new Fourth Republic — will go. It is a statute to give Algeria a new status, a status in which the Arabs participate. The banner under which it is conceived is the banner of assimilation. But by the time that statute went through, the pressure of the *colons* had been terrific, the pressure of De Gaulle had been terrific. Because here is De Gaulle on the 18th of August of 1947, making a speech about the imperative of keeping French sovereignty in Algeria, and he defines sovereignty this way: "The sovereignty of France: that means that there is no matter, no issue concerning Algeria, where the public powers of France can alienate their right and their duty to decide." Nothing for the 9 million.

And so comes the statute. And the statute is lovely, because you read that statute and you see something very, very interesting. The whole idea is, "We will make these Algerians assimilate themselves to France." But it isn't really that; there is a resident minister inscribed, and that resident minister is responsible only to the French government, and he has extensive powers. Alright, there is an Algerian parliament, and that Algerian parliament is so constituted that 50% of the representatives will be elected by the million French and 50% by the 9 million Arabs. And then it is decided that there will be sixteen categories of Algerians — those who have done

service for France, those who have money, those who have education — about 50,000 of them, who will become citizens. And the Algerians won't touch it.

They won't touch it; the few Algerian representatives of Ferhat Abbas' party who were in the French parliament refused even to participate in the debate. You see, that couldn't work. It couldn't work because no elections could be free so long as the resident minister and the *colons* ran them, and it couldn't work because the Arabs had no trust anymore in this kind of concession or this kind of assimilation. The only thing that that reform did was to create an effective myth; the myth was that Algeria was being assimilated to France, and that meant that whenever there was an apparent crisis in Algeria, the *colons*, the *pieds-noirs* could call in the power of the French state. All of which means that there will be, ultimately, blockage.

Now, there were some miserable freedoms given in that reform. You still have those 50% of the seats in the Assembly; there still was the possibility, if you couldn't make legislation, you could make propaganda. And in the elections to the municipalities in October of 1947, something rather remarkable happened, which was that the party of Messali Hadj — which was very radical, and speaking more and more radical — swept the elections. And consequently, the French *colons* and the French state said, "Look, in the April 1948 elections to this new Algerian parliament, who knows what will happen? Who knows what kind of mad people will come in?" And so the French sent down a governor-general (or a resident minister), named Edmond Naegelen. And he was a Socialist, and he went down and he organized the elections. And in those elections, if you can believe it, all of the government-selected representatives or candidates won with the exception of nine. It was what was called an *élection à l'algérienne*, which was a kind of comment made upon Naegelen and the regime in that country. Well, the result is the armed struggle.

And the armed struggle begins in 1954. And it comes out of a split in Messali Hadj's party. And the younger militants in that party, who were rather close to the mass — people like [Ahmed] Ben Bella, people like [Mohamed] Boudiaf, people who really are hungry — they're people that are petty-bourgeois, who have been in the army, who really want the struggle. By the beginning of 1954, they found a new organism, an organism called the United Committee for Action and for Unity [Comité révolutionnaire d'unité et d'action, CRUA]. And they break off from Messali Hadj's party, and they decide that the armed struggle has to begin. And by November of 1954, they go off into the Aurès mountains to begin that insurrection.

The French were absolutely catastrophic. The French didn't know what to expect. They had always had upset in the cities but not in the countryside, not in the mountains; they didn't know how to cope with this peasant uprising. [Prime minister Pierre] Mendès France sent down for

[Jacques] Soustelle as the minister in February of 1955, and Soustelle goes down with an astonishing statement as to how he is going to deal with this. He arrives in February of 1955; he says, "France is here! As the fiber of Algeria, France has made a choice, and that is integration." And consequently, the French will not yield. And the war begins in earnest in 1955.

Two things, you note. One is that, from the very beginning, the direction of the armed struggle was a direction organized by the Front of National Liberation. The Front of National Liberation is formed in April 1955; it is the FLN, the Front de libération nationale. And that Front of National Liberation does include all elements of Algerian society. It includes the elites of the cities; it includes the fellah of the countryside; it is a very broad front. But note it well: that what you gain in that broad unity, you lose in ideological direction. By 1958, that FLN had organized a Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, the *Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne*. And that provisional government represented this very broad spectrum, but it had no coherent ideological line.

You see, the whole import of French colonialism had been to create a whole group of disparate islands within Algerian society. There were peasants, there were workers, there were lumpenproletariat, there were petty-bourgeois, there were even landed rich people, there were certain *moyens-bourgeois*, all of them were together. They had conflicting interests; you can keep them together in the struggle, but what kind of Algeria would you have afterwards? You see, you have already built into the whole problem of a nationalist-led insurrection without a revolutionary party at its center; you've already built into the ambiguities of what really this Algerian revolution stood for besides simply independence from France. What kind of an Algeria, after all, would it ultimately create?

That is problem number one. But problem number two is fantastic, and that is the Fanon problem. And note it well: that, fundamentally, what you create in the armed struggle is a different people; that you have, through that struggle, something that really changes. And I want to see if you understand what Fanon means in this rather remarkable statement when he's talking about Algerian women in that book of his, *The Year Five of the Algerian Revolution*: "The militant Arab girls, now adopting new patterns of conduct, could not be judged by traditional standards. Old values, sterile and infantile phobias, disappeared." What you're talking about is a people that suddenly say no. All of these women with their damnable veils — all of these women in these families, after all, where they had been kept as chattel, and suddenly they are running messages and running relays and running weapons for the FLN — and suddenly they are going by themselves from Oran to Algiers, and they are keeping militants in their houses while their husbands are off fighting. And the whole pattern of family and of sexual relations and of mores begins to change. You see, all of that is the marrow of revolution. And all of that begins to

happen. And those Algerian girls who take off those veils, and begin to put on European costume, and begin to talk in the presence of their husbands, and begin to say that they too are independent and equal — well, that is the revolution in the making.

And Fanon saw that. He saw that you cannot possibly change people within the cadre of talk: that you have to change them within the cadre of action, within the cadre of some kind of collective process. And suddenly they see that that Potemkin's village, if you please, by which they have been living and behind which they have been hiding, that all of that is cardboard and goes like nothing.

You know, that's at the heart of the matter. And I thought of that when I was coming down and thinking about what the hell I was going to say today. And I thought, you know, because there was a very real and very important turning point in my life. And I had gone to teach, my first teaching job, and I was young enough so that I didn't very much care, but yet scared a little bit about "if you don't make it, you lose your work." And I went down there to Oberlin, and I lived my thing, as I'd always done; you can't do otherwise. And the dean called me in after about two months. And he was a good old guy; he came of another century, but it wasn't such a bad century [*laughter*]. And he said, "Harvey, they" — by which one always meant, in Oberlin, the people that filed into the First Congregational Church [*laughter*] — and he said, "They're upset." I said, "About what?" — "Well, about your politics." — "Oh, well, let them disprove it." — "Well, it's about your sex life." — "Well, let them not watch." [*laughter*] — "About your losing your job." And I said, "Carl, I was eating before I came to Oberlin, and I will eat after I leave."

And, you know, taking off that veil was one of the most important things that ever happened to me, because at that point you don't care about that. You care about lots of other things, but not that. And what I urge upon you in your lives is to take off that veil, because you will eat after you take it off. [*applause*]