

## Colonial War and Mental Disorders

*Frantz Fanon*

But the war goes on; and we will have to bind up for years to come the many, sometimes ineffaceable, wounds that the colonialist onslaught has inflicted on our people.

That imperialism which today is fighting against a true liberation of mankind leaves in its wake here and there tinctures of decay which we must search out and mercilessly expel from our land and our spirits.

We shall deal here with the problem of mental disorders which arise from the war of national liberation which the Algerian people are carrying on. [...]

Today the war of national liberation which has been carried on by the Algerian people for the last seven years has become a favorable breeding ground for mental disorders, because so far as the Algerians are concerned it is a total war. [...] It seems to us that in the cases here chosen the events giving rise to the disorder are chiefly the bloodthirsty and pitiless atmosphere, the generalization of inhuman practices, and the firm impression that people have of being caught up in a veritable Apocalypse.<sup>1</sup> [...]

The observations noted here cover the period running from 1954-9. Certain patients were examined in Algeria, either in hospital centers or as private patients. The others were cared for by the health divisions of the Army of National Liberation. [...]

### *Case No. 1: Impotence in an Algerian following the rape of his wife.*

B—is a man 26 years old. He came to see us on the advice of the Health Service of the FLN for treatment of insomnia and persistent headaches. A former taxi-driver, he had worked in the nationalist parties since he was eighteen. Since 1955 he had been a member of a branch of the FLN. He had several times used his taxi for the transport of political pamphlets and also political personnel. When the repression increased in ferocity, the FLN decided to bring the war into the urban centers. B— thus came to have the task of driving commandos to the vicinity of attacking points, and quite often waited for them at those points to bring them back.

One day however, in the middle of the European part of the town, after fairly considerable fighting a very large number of arrests forced him to abandon his taxi, and the commando unit broke up and scattered. B—, who managed to escape through the enemy lines, took refuge at a friend's house. Some days later, without having been able to get back to his home, on the orders of his superiors he joined the nearest band of Maquis.

For several months he was without news of his wife and his little girl of a year and eight months. On the other hand he learned that the police spent several weeks on end searching the town. After two years spent in the Maquis he received a

message from his wife in which she asked him to forget her, for she had been dishonored and he ought not to think of taking up their life together again. He was extremely anxious and asked his commander's leave to go home secretly. This was refused him, but on the other hand measures were taken for a member of the FLN to make contact with B—'s wife and parents.

Two weeks later a detailed report reached the commander of B—'s unit.

His abandoned taxi had been discovered with two machine-gun magazines in it. Immediately afterward French soldiers accompanied by policemen went to his house. Finding he was absent, they took his wife away and kept her for over a week.

She was questioned about the company her husband kept and beaten fairly brutally for two days. But the third day a French soldier (she was not able to say whether he was an officer) made the others leave the room and then raped her. Some time later a second soldier, this time with others present, raped her, saying to her, "If ever you see your filthy husband again don't forget to tell him what we did to you." She remained another week without undergoing any fresh questioning. After this she was escorted back to her dwelling. When she told her story to her mother, the latter persuaded her to tell B— everything. Thus as soon as contact was reestablished with her husband, she confessed her dishonor to him. Once the first shock had passed, and since moreover every minute of his time was filled by activity, B— was able to overcome his feelings. For several months he had heard many stories of Algerian women who had been raped or tortured, and he had occasion to see the husbands of these violated women; thus his personal misfortunes and his dignity as an injured husband remained in the background.

In 1958, he was entrusted with a mission abroad. When it was time to rejoin his unit, certain fits of absence of mind and sleeplessness made his comrades and superiors anxious about him. His departure was postponed and it was decided he should have a medical examination. This was when we saw him. He seemed at once easy to get to know; a mobile face: perhaps a bit too mobile. Smiles slightly exaggerated; surface well-being: "I'm really very well, very well indeed. I'm feeling better now. Give me a tonic or two, a few vitamins, and I'll build myself up a bit." A basic anxiety came up to break the surface. He was at once sent to the hospital.

From the second day on, the screen of optimism melted away, and what we saw in front of us was a thoughtful, depressed man, suffering from loss of appetite, who kept to his bed. He avoided political discussion and showed a marked lack of interest in everything to do with the national struggle. He avoided listening to any news which had a bearing on the war of liberation. Any approach to his difficulties was extremely long, but at the end of several days we were able to reconstruct his story.

During his stay abroad, he tried to carry through a sexual affair which was unsuccessful. Thinking that this was due to fatigue, a normal result of forced marches and periods of undernourishment, he again tried two weeks later. Fresh failure. Talked about it to a friend who advised him to try vitamin B-12. Took this in form of pills; another attempt, another failure. Moreover, a few seconds before the act, he had an irresistible impulse to tear up a photo of his little girl. Such a symbolic liaison might have caused us to think that unconscious impulses of an incestuous nature were present. However, several interviews and a dream, in which the patient saw the rapid rotting away of a little cat accompanied by unbearably evil smells, led us to take quite another course. "That girl," he said to us one day, speaking of his little daughter, "has something rotten about her." From this period on, his insomnia became extremely marked, and in spite of fairly large doses of neuroleptics, a state of anxiety excitation was remarked which the Service found rather worrying. Then he spoke to us for the first time about his wife, laughing and saying to us: "She's tasted the French." It was at that moment that we reconstructed the whole story. The weaving of events to form a pattern was made explicit. He told us that before every sexual attempt, he thought of his wife. All his confidences appeared to us to be of fundamental interest.

I married this girl although I loved my cousin. But my cousin's parents had arranged a match for their daughter with somebody else. So I accepted the first wife my parents found for me. She was nice, but I didn't love her. I used always to say to myself: "You're young yet; wait a bit and when you've found the right girl, you'll get a divorce and you'll make a happy marriage." So you see I wasn't very attached to my wife. And with the troubles, I got further apart than ever. In the end, I used to come and eat my meals and sleep almost without speaking to her.

In the Maquis, when I heard that she'd been raped by the French, I first of all felt angry with the swine. Then I said "Oh, well, there's not much harm done; she wasn't killed. She can start her life over again." And then a few weeks later I came to realize that they'd raped her *because they were looking for me*. In fact, it was to punish her for keeping silence that she'd been violated. She could have very well told them at least the name of one of the chaps in the movement, and from that they could have searched out the whole network, destroyed it, and maybe even arrested me. That wasn't a simple rape, for want of something better to do, or for sadistic reasons like those I've had occasion to see in the villages; it was the rape of an obstinate woman, who was ready to put up with everything rather than sell her husband. And the husband in question, *it was me*. This woman had saved my life and had protected the organization. It was because of me that she had been dishonored. And yet she didn't say to me: "Look at all I've had to bear for you." On the contrary, she said: "Forget about me; begin your life over again, for I have been dishonored."

It was from that moment on that I made my own decision to take back my wife after the war; for it must be said that I've seen peasants drying the tears of their wives after having seen them raped under their very eyes. This left me very much shaken; I must admit moreover that at the beginning I couldn't understand their attitude. But we increasingly came to intervene in such circumstances in order to explain matters to the civilians. I've seen civilians willingly proposing marriage to a girl who was violated by the French soldiers, and who was with child by them. All this led me to reconsider the problem of my wife.

So I decided to take her back; but I didn't know at all how I'd behave when I saw her. And often, while I was looking at the photo of my daughter, I used to think that she too was dishonored, like as if everything that had to do with my wife was rotten. If they'd tortured her or knocked out all her teeth or broken an arm I wouldn't have minded. But that thing—how can you forget a thing like that? And why did she have to tell me about it all?

He then asked me if his "sexual failing" was in my opinion caused by his worries.

I replied: "It is not impossible."

Then he sat up in bed.

"What would you do if all this had happened to you?"

"I don't know."

"Would you take back your wife?"

"I think I would . . ."

"Ah, there you are, you see. You're not quite sure . . ."

He held his head in his hands and after a few seconds left the room.

From that day on, he was progressively more willing to listen to political discussions and at the same time the headaches and lack of appetite lessened considerably.

After two weeks he went back to his unit. Before he left he told me:

"When independence comes, I'll take my wife back. If it doesn't work out between us, I'll come and see you in Algiers."

*Case No. 2: Undifferentiated  
homicidal impulses found in a survivor  
of a mass murder.*

S—, 37 years old, a *fellah*. Comes from a village in the country around Constantine. Never took any part in politics. From the outset of the war, his district was the scene of fierce battles between the Algerian forces and the French army. S—thus had occasion to see dead and wounded. But he continued to keep out of things. From time to time however, in common with the people as a whole, the peasantry of his village used to come to the aid of Algerian fighting men who were passing through. But one day, early in 1958, a deadly ambush was laid not far from the village. After this the enemy forces went into operation and besieged the village, which in fact had no soldiers in it. All the inhabitants were summoned and questioned; nobody replied. A few hours after, a French officer arrived by helicopter and said: "There's been too much talk about this village. Destroy it." The soldiers began to set fire to the houses while the women who were trying to get a few clothes together or save some provisions were driven away by blows with rifle-butts. Some peasants took advantage of the general confusion to run away. The officer gave the order to bring together the men who remained and had them brought out to near a watercourse where the killing began. Twenty-nine men were shot at point-blank range. S—was wounded by two bullets which went through his right thigh and his left arm respectively; the arm injury gave rise to a fracture of the humerus.

S—fainted and came to find himself in the midst of a group of ALN. He was treated by the Health Service and evacuated as soon as it was possible to

move him. While on the way, his behavior became more and more abnormal, and worried his escort continually. He demanded a gun, although he was helpless and a civilian, and refused to walk in front of anybody, no matter who they were. He refused to have anyone behind him. One night he got hold of a soldier's gun and awkwardly tried to fire on the sleeping soldiers. He was disarmed rather roughly. From then on they tied his hands together, and it was thus that he arrived at the Center.

He began by telling us that he wasn't dead yet and that he had played a good trick on the others. Bit by bit, we managed to reconstruct his story of the assassination he had attempted. S—was not anxious, he was in fact rather overexcited, with violent phases of agitation, accompanied by screaming. He did not break anything much, but tired everybody out by his incessant chatter, and the whole Service was permanently on the alert on account of his declared intention of "killing everybody." During his stay in the hospital he attacked about eight patients with makeshift weapons. Nurses and doctors were not spared either. We almost wondered whether we were not witnessing one of those masked forms of epilepsy which is characterized by a wholesale aggressivity which is nearly always present.

Deep sleep treatment was then tried. From the third day on, a daily interview made it possible for us to better understand the moving force of the pathological process. The patient's intellectual confusion progressively toned down. Here are some extracts from his statements:

God is with me ... but he certainly isn't with those who are dead. ... I've had hellish good luck. ... In life you've got to kill so as not to be killed. ... When I think that I knew nothing at all about all that business. ... There are Frenchmen in our midst. They disguise themselves as Arabs. They've all got to be killed. Give me a machine-gun. All these so-called Algerians are really Frenchmen ... and they won't leave me alone. As soon as I want to go to sleep they come into my room. But now I know all about them. Everyone wants to kill me. But I'll defend myself. I'll kill them all, every single one of them. I'll cut their throats one after the other, and yours with them. You all want to kill me but you should set about it differently. I'd kill you all as soon as look at you, big ones and little ones, women, children, dogs, birds, donkeys ... everyone will be dead. And afterward I'll be able to sleep in peace. ...

All this was said in jerks; the patient's attitude remained hostile, suspicious, and aloof.

After three weeks, his state of excitement had disappeared, but a certain reticence and a tendency to seek solitude gave us grounds for fearing a more serious evolution of his disorder. However after a month he asked to be let out in order to learn a trade that would be compatible with his disability. He was then entrusted to the care of the Social Service of the FLN. We saw him six months after, and he was going on well. [...]

*Case No. 3. A European policeman in a depressed state meets while under hospital treatment one of his victims, an Algerian patriot who is suffering from stupor.*

A—, 28 years old, no children. We learnt that for several years both he and his wife underwent treatment, unfortunately with no success, in order to have children. He was sent to us by his superiors because he had behavior disturbances.

Immediate contact seemed fairly good. The patient spoke to us spontaneously about his difficulties. Satisfactory relations with his wife and parents-in-law. His trouble was that at night he heard screams which prevented him from sleeping. In fact, he told us that for the last few weeks before going to bed he shut the shutters and stopped up all the windows (it was summer) to the complete despair of his wife, who was stifled by the heat. Moreover, he stuffed his ears with cotton wool in order to make the screams seem less piercing. He sometimes even in the middle of the night turned on the wireless or put on some music in order not to hear this nocturnal uproar. He consequently explained to us at full length the whole story that was troubling him.

A few months before, he had been transferred to an anti-FLN brigade. At the beginning, he was entrusted with surveying certain shops or cafés; but after some weeks he used to work almost exclusively at the police headquarters. Here he came to deal with interrogations; and these never occurred without some "knocking about." "The thing was that they never would own up to anything." He explained:

Sometimes we almost wanted to tell them that if they had a bit of consideration for us they'd speak out without forcing us to spend hours tearing information word by word out of them. But you might as well talk to the wall. To all the questions we asked they'd only

say "I don't know." Even when we asked them what their name was. If we asked them where they lived, they'd say "I don't know." So of course, we have to go through with it. But they scream too much. At the beginning that made me laugh. But afterward I was a bit shaken. Nowadays as soon as I hear someone shouting I can tell you exactly at what stage of the questioning we've got to. The chap who's had two blows of the fist and a belt of the baton behind his ear has a certain way of speaking, of shouting, and of saying he's innocent. After he's been left two hours strung up by his wrists he has another kind of voice. After the bath, still another. And so on. But above all it's after the electricity that it becomes really too much. You'd say that the chap was going to die any minute. Of course there are some that don't scream; those are the tough ones. But they think they're going to be killed right away. But we're not interested in killing them. What we want is information. When we're dealing with those tough ones, the first thing we do is to make them squeal; and sooner or later we manage it. That's already a victory. Afterward we go on. Mind you, we'd like to avoid that. But they don't make things easy for us. Now I've come so as I hear their screams even when I'm at home. Especially the screams of the ones who died at the police headquarters. Doctor, I'm fed up with this job. And if you manage to cure me, I'll ask to be transferred to France. If they refuse, I'll resign.

Faced with such a picture, I prescribed sick leave. As the patient in question refused to go to the hospital, I treated him privately. One day, shortly before the therapeutic treatment was due to begin, I had an urgent call from my department. When A—reached my house, my wife asked him to wait for me, but he preferred to go for a walk in the hospital grounds, and then come back to meet me. A few minutes later as I was going home I passed him on the way. He was leaning against a tree, looking overcome, trembling and drenched with sweat: in fact having an anxiety crisis. I took him into my car and drove him to my house. Once he was lying on the sofa, he told me he had met one of my patients in the hospital who had been questioned in the police barracks (he was an Algerian patriot) and who was under treatment for "disorders of a stuporous nature following on shock." I then learnt that the policeman had taken an active part in inflicting torture on my patient. I administered some sedatives which calmed A—'s anxiety. After he had gone, I went to the house in

the hospital where the patriot was being cared for. The personnel had noticed nothing; but the patient could not be found. Finally we managed to discover him in a toilet where he was trying to commit suicide: he on his side had recognized the policeman and thought that he had come to look for him and take him back again to the barracks.

Afterward, A—came back to see me several times, and after a very definite improvement in his condition, managed to get back to France on account of his health. As for the Algerian patriot, the personnel spent a long time convincing him that the whole thing was an illusion, that policemen were not allowed inside the hospital, that he was very tired, that he was there to be looked after, etc.

*Case No. 4: A European police inspector who tortured his wife and children.*

R—, 30 years old. Came of his own accord to consult us. He was a police inspector and stated that for several weeks "things weren't working out." Married, had three children. He smoked a lot: five packets of cigarettes a day. He had lost his appetite and his sleep was frequently disturbed by nightmares. These nightmares had no special distinguishing features. What bothered him most were what he called "fits of madness." In the first place, he disliked being contradicted:

Can you give me an explanation for this, doctor: as soon as someone goes against me I want to hit him. Even outside my job, I feel I want to settle the fellows who get in my way, even for nothing at all. Look here, for example, suppose I go to the kiosk to buy the papers. There's a lot of people. Of course you have to wait. I hold out my hand (the chap who keeps the kiosk is a pal of mine) to take my papers. Someone in the line gives me a challenging look and says "Wait your turn." Well, I feel I want to beat him up and I say to myself, "If I had you for a few hours my fine fellow you wouldn't look so clever afterwards."

The patient dislikes noise. At home he wants to hit everybody all the time. In fact, he does hit his children, even the baby of 20 months, with unaccustomed savagery.

But what really frightened him was one evening when his wife had criticized him particularly for hitting his children too much. (She had even said to him, "My word, anyone'd think you were going mad.") He threw himself upon her, beat her, and

tied her to a chair, saying to himself "I'll teach her once and for all that I'm master in this house."

Fortunately his children began roaring and crying. He then realized the full gravity of his behavior, untied his wife and the next day decided to consult a doctor, "a nerve specialist." He stated that "before, he wasn't like that"; he said that he very rarely punished his children and at all events never fought with his wife. The present phenomena had appeared "since the troubles." "The fact is" he said:

nowadays we have to work like troopers. Last week, for example, we operated like as if we belonged to the army. Those gentlemen in the government say there's no war in Algeria and that the arm of the law, that's to say the police, ought to restore order. But there *is* a war going on in Algeria, and when they wake up to it it'll be too late. The thing that kills me most is the torture. You don't know what that is, do you? Sometimes I torture people for ten hours at a stretch. . . .

"What happens to you when you are torturing?"

You may not realize, but it's very tiring. . . . It's true we take it in turns, but the question is to know when to let the next chap have a go. Each one thinks he's going to get the information at any minute and takes good care not to let the bird go to the next chap after he's softened him up nicely, when of course the other chap would get the honor and glory of it. So sometimes we let them go; and sometimes we don't.

Sometimes we even offer the chap money, money out of our own pockets, to try to get him to talk. Our problem is as follows: are you able to make this fellow talk? It's a question of personal success. You see, you're competing with the others. In the end your fists are ruined. So you call in the Senegalese. But either they hit too hard and destroy the creature or else they don't hit hard enough and it's no good. In fact, you have to be intelligent to make a success of that sort of work. You have to know when to lay it on and when to lay it off. You have to have a flair for it. When the chap is softened up, it's not worth your while going on hitting him. That's why you have to do the work yourself; you can judge better how you're getting on. I'm against the ones that have the chap dealt with by others and simply come to see every hour or so what state he's in. Above all, what you mustn't do is to give the chap the impression that he won't get away alive from you. Because then he wonders what's the use of talking if that won't save his life. In that case you'll have no chance at all of

getting anything out of him. He must go on hoping; hope's the thing that'll make him talk.

But the thing that worries me most is this affair with my wife. It's certain that there's something wrong with me. You've got to cure me, doctor.

His superiors refused to give him sick leave, and since moreover the patient did not wish to have a psychiatrist's certificate, we tried to give him treatment "while working full time." The weaknesses of such a procedure may easily be imagined. This man knew perfectly well that his disorders were directly caused by the kind of activity that went on inside the rooms where interrogations were carried out, even though he tried to throw the responsibility totally upon "present troubles." As he could not see his way to stopping torturing people (that made nonsense to him for in that case he would have to resign) he asked me without beating about the bush to help him to go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behavior problems, and with complete equanimity.<sup>2</sup> [ . . . ]

*Case No. 5: The murder by two young Algerians, 13 and 14 years old respectively, of their European playmate.*

We had been asked to give expert medical advice in a legal matter. Two young Algerians 13 and 14 years old, pupils in a primary school, were accused of having killed one of their European schoolmates. They admitted having done it. The crime was reconstructed, and photos were added to the record. Here one of the children could be seen holding the victim while the other struck at him with a knife. The little defendants did not go back on their declarations. We had long conversations with them. We here reproduce the most characteristic of their remarks:

*a) The boy thirteen years old:*

"We weren't bit cross with him. Every Thursday we used to go and play with catapults together, on the hill above the village. He was a good friend of ours. He usn't to go to school any more because he wanted to be a mason like his father. One day we decided to kill him, because the Europeans want to kill all the Arabs. We can't kill big people. But we could kill ones like him, because he was the same age as us. We didn't know how to kill him. We wanted to throw him into a ditch, but he'd only have been hurt. So we got the knife from home and we killed him."

"But why did you pick on him?"  
 "Because he used to play with us. Another boy wouldn't have gone up the hill with us."  
 "And yet you were pals?"  
 "Well then, why do they want to kill us? His father is in the militia and he said we ought to have our throats cut."  
 "But he didn't say anything to you?"  
 "Him? No."  
 "You know he is dead now."  
 "Yes."  
 "What does being dead mean?"  
 "When it's all finished, you go to heaven."  
 "Was it you that killed him?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Does having killed somebody worry you?"  
 "No, since they want to kill us, so..."  
 "Do you mind being in prison?"  
 "No."

*b) The boy fourteen years old:*

This young defendant was in marked contrast to his schoolfellow. He was already almost a man, and an adult in his muscular control, his appearance, and the content of his replies. He did not deny having killed either. Why had he killed? He did not reply to the question but asked me had I ever seen a European in prison. Had there ever been a European arrested and sent to prison after the murder of an Algerian? I replied that in fact I had never seen any Europeans in prison.

"And yet there are Algerians killed every day, aren't there?"

"Yes."

"So why are only Algerians found in the prisons? Can you explain that to me?"

"No. But tell me why you killed this boy who was your friend."

"I'll tell you why. You've heard tell of the Rivet business?"<sup>3</sup>

"Yes."

"Two of my family were killed then. At home, they said that the French had sworn to kill us all, one after the other. And did they arrest a single Frenchman for all those Algerians who were killed?"

"I don't know."

"Well, nobody at all was arrested. I wanted to take to the mountains, but I was too young. So X—and I said we'd kill a European."

"Why?"

"In your opinion, what should we have done?"

"I don't know. But you are a child and what is happening concerns grown-up people."

"But they kill children too..."

"That is no reason for killing your friend."

"Well, kill him I did. Now you can do what you like."

"Had your friend done anything to harm you?"

"Not a thing."

"Well?"

"Well, there you are..."

*Case No. 6: Accusatory delirium and suicidal conduct disguised as "terrorist activity" in a young Algerian 22 years old.*

This patient was sent to our hospital by the French judicial authorities. This measure was taken after medical and legal advice given by French psychiatrists practicing in Algeria.

The patient was an emaciated man in a complete state of aberration. His body was covered with bruises and two fractures of the jaw made all absorption of nourishment impossible. Thus for more than two weeks the patient was fed by various injections.

After two weeks, the blank in his thoughts receded; we were able to establish contact and we managed to reconstruct the dramatic history of this young man.

During his youth he went in for scouting with unusual enthusiasm. He became one of the main leaders of the Moslem Scout Movement. But when he was 19 years old he dropped scouting completely in order to have no preoccupation other than his profession. He was a multicopying-machine maker; he studied hard and dreamt of becoming a great specialist in his profession. The first of November, 1954, found him absorbed by strictly professional problems. At the time he showed no interest at all in the national struggle. Already he no longer frequented the company of his former companions. He defined himself at that time as "completely bent on increasing [his] technical capacity."

However, about the middle of 1955, when spending the evening with his family, he suddenly had the impression that his parents considered him a traitor. After a few days this fleeting impression became blunted but at the back of his mind a certain misgiving persisted, a sort of uneasiness that he did not understand.

On account of this, he decided to eat his meals quickly, shrinking from the family circle, and shut

himself into his room. He avoided all contacts. It was in these conditions that catastrophe intervened. One day, in the middle of the street at about half-past twelve, he distinctly heard a voice calling him a coward. He turned round, but saw nobody. He quickened his pace, and decided that from then on he would not go to work. He stayed in his room and did not eat any dinner. During the night the crisis came on. For three hours he heard all sorts of insults coming from out of the night and resounding in his head: "Traitor, traitor, coward... all your brothers who are dying, ... traitor, traitor..."

He was seized with indescribable anxiety: "For eighteen hours my heart beat at the rhythm of 130 pulsations to the minute. I thought I was going to die."

From that time on, the patient could no longer swallow a bite. He wasted away almost visibly; he shut himself up in complete darkness, and refused to open the door to his parents. Around the third day he took refuge in prayer. He stayed kneeling, he told me, from 17 to 18 hours on end each day. On the fourth day, acting on impulse "like a madman," with "a beard that was also enough to make [him] be taken for a madman," wearing neither coat nor tie, he went out into the town. Once in the street, he did not know where to go; but he started walking, and at the end of some time he found himself in the European town. His physical appearance (he looked like a European) seemed then to safeguard him against being stopped and questioned by the police patrols.

As a contrast to this, beside him Algerian men and women were arrested, maltreated, insulted, and searched. Paradoxically, he had no papers on him. This uncalled-for consideration toward him on the part of the enemy patrols confirmed his delusion that "everybody knew he was with the French. Even the soldiers had their orders; they left him alone."

In addition, the glances of the arrested Algerians, who were waiting to be searched with their hands behind their necks, seemed to him to be full of contempt. The prey of overwhelming agitation, he moved away, striding rapidly. It was at this moment that he happened to walk in front of the building which was the French Staff Headquarters. In the gateway stood several soldiers armed with machine-guns. He went toward the soldiers, threw himself upon one of them and tried to snatch his machine-gun, shouting "I am an Algerian."

He was quickly overcome and was brought to the police, where they insisted on making him confess the names of his "superiors" and the different members of the network to which he (supposedly) belonged. After some days the police and the soldiers realized that they were dealing with a sick man. An expert opinion was sought which concluded that he was suffering from mental disorders and that he should be sent to the hospital. "All I wanted to do," he said, "was to die. Even at the police barracks I thought and hoped that after they'd tortured me they would kill me. I was glad to be struck, for that showed me that they considered that I too was their enemy. I could no longer go on hearing those accusing voices, without doing something. I am not a coward. I am not a woman. I am not a traitor."<sup>4</sup> [...]

It remains for us to give the explanation.

Should it be said that war, that privileged expression of an aggressivity which is at last made social, canalizes in the direction of the occupying power all congenitally murderous acts? It is a commonplace that great social upheavals lessen the frequency of delinquency and mental disorders. This regression of Algerian criminality can thus be perfectly explained by the existence of a war which broke Algeria in two, and threw onto the side of the enemy the judicial and administrative machine.

But in the countries of the Magrab which have already been liberated this same phenomenon which was noticed during the conflicts for liberation continues to exist and even becomes more marked once independence is proclaimed. It would therefore seem that the colonial context is sufficiently original to give grounds for a reinterpretation of the causes of criminality. This is what we did for those on active service. Today every one of us knows that criminality is not the consequence of the hereditary character of the Algerian, nor of the organization of his nervous system. The Algerian war, like all wars of national liberation, brings to the fore the true protagonists. In the colonial context, as we have already pointed out, the natives fight among themselves. They tend to use each other as a screen, and each hides from his neighbor the national enemy. When, tired out after a hard sixteen-hour day, the native sinks down to rest on his mat, and a child on the other side of the canvas partition starts crying and pre-



vents him from sleeping, it so happens that it is a little Algerian. When he goes to beg for a little semolina or a drop of oil from the grocer, to whom he already owes some hundreds of francs, and when he sees that he is refused, an immense feeling of hatred and an overpowering desire to kill rises within him: and the grocer is an Algerian. When, after having kept out of his way for weeks he finds himself one day cornered by the caid who demands that he should pay "his taxes," he cannot even enjoy the luxury of hating a European administrator; there before him is the caid who is the object of his hatred — and the caid is an Algerian.

The Algerian exposed to temptations to commit murder every day — famine, eviction from his room because he has not paid the rent, the mother's dried-up breasts, children like skeletons, the building-yard which has closed down, the unemployed that hang about the foreman like crows — the native comes to see his neighbor as a relentless enemy. If he strikes his bare foot against a big stone in the middle of the path, it is a native who has placed it there; and the few olives that he was going to pick, X—'s children have gone and eaten in the night. For during the colonial period in Algeria and elsewhere many things may be done for a couple of pounds of semolina. Several people may be killed over it. You need to use your imagination to understand that: your imagination, or your memory. In the concentration camps men killed each other for a bit of bread. I remember one horrible scene. It was in Oran in 1944. From the camp where we were waiting to embark, soldiers were throwing bits of bread to little Algerian children who fought for them among themselves with anger and hate. Veterinary doctors can throw light on such problems by reminding us of the well-known "peck order" which has been observed in farmyards. The corn which is thrown to the hens is in fact the object of relentless competition. Certain birds, the strongest, gobble up all the grains while others who are less aggressive grow visibly thinner. Every colony tends to turn into a huge farmyard, where the only law is that of the knife.

In Algeria since the beginning of the war of national liberation, everything has changed. The whole foodstocks of a family or a *mechta*<sup>5</sup> may in a single evening be given to a passing company. The family's only donkey may be lent to transport a wounded fighter; and when a few days later the owner learns of the death of his animal which has been machine-gunned by an airplane, he will not

begin threatening and swearing. He will not question the death of his donkey, but he will ask anxiously if the wounded man is safe and sound.

Under the colonial regime, anything may be done for a loaf of bread or a miserable sheep. The relations of man with matter, with the world outside, and with history are in the colonial period simply relations with food. For a colonized man, in a context of oppression like that of Algeria, living does not mean embodying moral values or taking his place in the coherent and fruitful development of the world. To live means to keep on existing. Every date is a victory: not the result of work, but a victory felt as a triumph for life. Thus to steal dates or to allow one's sheep to eat the neighbor's grass is not a question of the negation of the property of others, nor the transgression of a law, nor lack of respect. These are attempts at murder. In order to understand that a robbery is not an illegal or an unfriendly action, but an attempt at murder, one must have seen in Kabylia men and women for weeks at a time going to get earth at the bottom of the valley and bringing it up in little baskets. The fact is that the only perspective is that belly which is more and more sunken, which is certainly less and less demanding, but which must be contented all the same. Who is going to take the punishment? The French are down in the plain with the police, the army, and the tanks. On the mountain there are only Algerians. Up above there is Heaven with the promise of a world beyond the grave; down below there are the French with their very concrete promises of prison, beatings-up, and executions. You are forced to come up against yourself. Here we discover the kernel of that hatred of self which is characteristic of racial conflicts in segregated societies.

The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequence of the organization of his nervous system or of characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation. The fact that the soldiers of Algeria have discussed this problem; that they are not afraid of questioning the beliefs fostered among themselves by colonialism; that they understand that each man formed the screen for his neighbor and that in reality each man committed suicide when he went for his neighbor: all these things should have primordial importance in the revolutionary conscience. Once again, the objective of the native who fights against himself is to bring about the end of domination. But he ought

equally to pay attention to the liquidation of all untruths implanted in his being by oppression. Under a colonial regime such as existed in Algeria, the ideas put forward by colonialism not only influenced the European minority, but also the Algerians. Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of the personality. The ambush or the attack, the torture or the massacre of his brothers plants more deeply the determination to win, wakes up the unwary and feeds the imagination. When the nation stirs as a whole, the new man is not an *a posteriori* product of that nation; rather, he co-exists with it and triumphs with it. This dialectic requirement explains the reticence with which adaptations of colonization and reforms of the façade are met. Independence is not a word which can be used as an exorcism, but an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society.

#### NOTES

1 In the unpublished introduction of the first two editions of *Year V of the Algerian Revolution*, we have already pointed out that a whole generation of Algerians, steeped in wanton, generalized homicide with all the psycho-affective consequences that this

entails, will be the human legacy of France in Algeria. Frenchmen who condemn the torture in Algeria constantly adopt a point of view which is strictly French. We do not reproach them for this; we merely point it out: they wish to protect the consciences of the actual torturers who today have full power to carry on their work; they wish at the same time to try to avoid the moral contamination of the young people of France. As far as we are concerned we are totally in accord with this attitude. Certain notes here brought together [...] are sad illustrations and justifications for this obsession which haunts French believers in democracy. But our purpose is in any case to show that torture, as might well be expected, upsets most profoundly the personality of the person who is tortured.

- 2 With these observations we find ourselves in the presence of a coherent system which leaves nothing intact. The executioner who loves birds and enjoys the peace of listening to a symphony or a sonata is simply one stage in the process. Further on in it we may well find a whole existence which enters into complete and absolute sadism.
- 3 Rivet is a village which since a certain day in the year 1956 has become celebrated in the region around Algiers. For on that evening the village was invaded by the militia who dragged 40 men from their beds and afterward murdered them.
- 4 During the year 1955, cases of this type were very numerous in Algeria. Unfortunately not all the patients had the good fortune to be sent to a hospital.
- 5 Mountain village in Algeria. - *Trans.*