

## **“This Is the Voice of Algeria”**

By Franz Fanon, From "A Dying Colonialism" first published in French in 1959 and in English in 1965 Translated by Haakon Chevalier

We propose in this chapter to study the new attitudes adopted by the Algerian people in the course of the fight for liberation, with respect to a precise technical instrument: the radio. We shall see that what is being called into question behind these new developments in Algerian life is the entire colonial situation. We shall have occasion to show throughout this book that the challenging of the very principle of foreign domination brings about essential mutations in the consciousness of the colonized, in the manner in which he perceives the colonizer, in his human status in the world.

Radio-Alger, the French broadcasting station which has been established in Algeria for decades, a re-edition or an echo of the French National Broadcasting System operating from Paris, is essentially the instrument of colonial society and its values. The great majority of Europeans in Algeria own receiving sets. Before 1945, 95 per cent of the receivers were in the hands of Europeans. The Algerians who owned radios belonged mainly to the "developed bourgeoisie," and included a number of Kabyles who had formerly emigrated and had since returned to their villages. The sharp economic stratification between the dominant and the dominated societies in large part explains this state of things. But naturally, as in every colonial situation, this category of realities takes on a specific coloration. Thus hundreds of Algerian families whose standard of living was sufficient to enable them to acquire a radio did not acquire one. Yet there was no rational decision to refuse this instrument. There was no organized resistance to this device. No real lines of counteracculturation, such as are described in certain monographs devoted to underdeveloped regions, have been shown to exist, even after extensive surveys. It may be pointed out, nevertheless -and this argument may have appeared to confirm the conclusions of sociologists-that, pressed with questions as to the reasons for this reluctance, Algerians rather frequently give the following answer: "Traditions of respectability are so important for us and are so hierarchical, that it is practically impossible for us to listen to radio programs in the family. The sex allusions, or even the clownish situations meant to make people laugh, which are broadcast over the radio cause an unendurable strain in a family listening to these programs."

The ever possible eventuality of laughing in the presence of the head of the family or the elder brother, of listening in common to amorous words or terms of levity, obviously acts as a deterrent to the distribution of radios in Algerian native society. It is with reference to this first rationalization that we must understand the habit formed by the official Radio Broadcasting Services in Algeria of announcing the programs that can be listened to in common and those in the course of which the traditional forms of sociability might be too severely strained.

Here, then, at a certain explicit level, is the apprehension of a fact: receiving sets are not readily adopted by Algerian society. By and large, it refuses this technique which threatens its stability and the traditional types of sociability; the reason invoked being that the programs in Algeria, undifferentiated because they are copied from the Western model, are not adapted to the strict, almost feudal type of patrilineal hierarchy, with its many moral taboos, that characterizes the Algerian family.

On the basis of this analysis, techniques of approach could be proposed. Among others, the staggering of broadcasts addressed to the family as a whole, to male groups, to female groups, etc. As we describe the radical transformations that have occurred in this realm, in connection with the national war, we shall see how artificial such a sociological approach is, what a mass of errors it contains.

We have already noted the accelerated speed with which the radio was adopted by the European society. The introduction of the radio in the colonizing society proceeded at a rate comparable to that of the most developed Western regions. We must always remember that in the colonial situation, in which, as we have seen, the social dichotomy reaches an incomparable intensity, there is a frenzied and almost laughable growth of middleclass gentility on the part of the nationals from the metropolis. For a European to own a radio is of course to participate in the eternal round of Western petty-bourgeois ownership, which extends from the radio to the villa, including the car and the refrigerator. It also gives him the feeling that colonial society is a living and palpitating reality, with its festivities, its traditions eager to establish themselves, its progress, its taking root. But especially, in the hinterland, in the so-called colonization centres, it is the only link with the cities, with Algiers, with the metropolis, with the world of the civilized. It is one of the means of escaping the inert, passive, and sterilizing pressure of the "native" environment. It is, according to the settler's expression, "the only way to still feel like a civilized man."

On the farms, the radio reminds the settler of the reality of colonial power and, by its very existence, dispenses safety, serenity. Radio-Alger is a confirmation of the settler's right and strengthens his certainty in the historic continuity of the conquest, hence of his farm. The Paris music, extracts from the metropolitan press, the French government crises, constitute a coherent background from which colonial society draws its density and its justification. Radio-Alger sustains the occupant's culture, marks it off from the non-culture, from the nature of the occupied. Radio-Alger, the voice of France in Algeria, constitutes the sole center of reference at the level of news. Radio-Alger, for the settler, is a daily invitation not to "go native," not to forget the rightfulness of his culture. The settlers in the remote outposts, the pioneering adventurers, are well aware of this when they say that "without wine and the radio, we should already have become Arabized<sup>1</sup>."

In Algeria, before 1945, the radio as a technical news instrument became widely distributed in the dominant society. It then, as we have seen, became both a means of resistance in the case of isolated Europeans and a means of cultural pressure on the dominated society. Among European farmers, the radio was broadly regarded as a link with the civilized world, as an effective instrument of resistance to the corrosive influence of an inert native society, of a society without a future, backward and devoid of value.

For the Algerian, however, the situation was totally different. We have seen that the more well-to-do family hesitated to buy a radio set. Yet no explicit, organized, and motivated resistance was to be observed, but rather a dull absence of interest in that piece of French presence. In rural areas and in regions remote from the colonization centers, the situation was clearer. There no one was faced with the problem, or rather, the problem was so remote from the everyday concerns of the native that it was quite clear to an inquirer that it would be outrageous to ask an Algerian why he did not own a radio. A man conducting a survey during this period who might be looking for satisfactory answers would find himself unable to obtain the information he needed. All the pretexts put forth had of course to be carefully weighed. At the level of actual experience, one cannot expect to obtain a rationalization of attitudes and choices.

---

<sup>1</sup> Radio-Alger is in fact one of the mooring-lines maintained by the dominant society. Radio-MonteCarlo, Radio-Paris, Radio-Andorre likewise play a protective role against "Arabization."

Two levels of explanation can be suggested here. As an instrumental technique in the limited sense, the radio receiving set develops the sensorial, intellectual, and muscular powers of man in a given society. The radio in occupied Algeria is a technique in the hands of the occupier which, within the framework of colonial domination, corresponds to no vital need insofar as the "native" is concerned. The radio, as a symbol of French presence, as a material representation of the colonial configuration, is characterized by an extremely important negative valence. The possible intensification and extension of sensorial or intellectual powers by the French radio are implicitly rejected or denied by the native. The technical instrument, the new scientific acquisitions, when they contain a sufficient charge to threaten a given feature of the native society, are never perceived in themselves, in calm objectivity. The technical instrument is rooted in the colonial situation where, as we know, the negative or positive coefficients always exist in a very accentuated way.

At another level, as a system of information, as a bearer of language, hence of message, the radio may be apprehended within the colonial situation in a special way. Radiophonic technique, the press, and in a general way the systems, messages, sign transmitters, exist in colonial society in accordance with a well-defined statute. Algerian society, the dominated society, never participates in this world of signs. The messages broadcast by Radio-Alger are listened to solely by the representatives of power in Algeria, solely by the members of the dominant authority and seem magically to be avoided by the members of the "native" society. The non-acquisition of receiver sets by this society has precisely the effect of strengthening this impression of a closed and privileged world that characterizes colonialist news. In the matter of daily programs, before 1954, eulogies addressed to the occupation troops were certainly largely absent. From time to time, to be sure, there might be an evocation over the radio of the outstanding dates of the conquest of Algeria, in the course of which, with an almost unconscious obscenity, the occupier would belittle and humiliate the Algerian resistent of 1830. There were also the commemorative celebrations in which the "Moslem" veterans would be invited to place a wreath at the foot of the statue of General Bugeaud or of Sergeant Blandan, both heroes of the conquest and liquidators of thousands of Algerian patriots. But on the whole it could not be said that the clearly racist or anti-Algerian content accounted for the indifference and the resistance of the native. The explanation seems rather to be that Radio-Alger is regarded by the Algerian as the spokesman of the colonial world. Before the war the Algerian, with his own brand of humor, had defined Radio-Alger as "Frenchmen speaking to Frenchmen."

The year 1945 was to bring Algeria abruptly onto the international scene. For weeks, the 45,000 victims of Setif and of Guelma<sup>2</sup> were matter for abundant comment in the newspapers and information bulletins of regions until then unaware of or indifferent to the fate of Algeria. The tragedy of their dead or mutilated brothers and the fervent sympathy conveyed to them by men and women in America, Europe, and Africa left a deep mark on the Algerians themselves, foreshadowing more fundamental changes. The awakening of the colonial world and the progressive liberation of peoples long held in subjection involved Algeria in a process which reached beyond her and of which, at the same time, she became a part. The appearance of liberated Arab countries at this point is of exceptional importance. The first wholesale introduction of radio sets in Algeria coincided with the setting up of national broadcasting stations in Syria, Egypt and Lebanon.

After 1947-1948, the number of radios grew, but at a moderate rate. Even then, the Algerian when he turned on his radio was interested exclusively in foreign and Arab broadcasts. Radio-Alger was listened to only because it broadcast typically Algerian music, national music. In the face of this budding Algerian market, European agencies began to look for "native" representatives. The

---

<sup>2</sup> Setif and Guelma-two central points in a Moslem uprising that occurred in the region of Kabylia in May 1945. In the repression, which lasted some two weeks, aviation and artillery took a heavy toll of lives. (Translator's note)

European firms were now convinced that the sale of radio sets depended on the nationality of the dealer. Algerian intermediaries were increasingly solicited for the handling of radios. This innovation in the distribution system was accompanied by an intensification of the marketing of these sets. It was during this period that a certain part of the Algerian lower middle class became owners of radios.

But it was in 1951-1952, at the time of the first skirmishes in Tunisia, that the Algerian people felt it necessary to increase their news network. In 1952-1953 Morocco undertook its war of liberation, and on November 1, 1954, Algeria joined the anticolonialist Maghreb Front. It was precisely at this time, while radio sets were being acquired, that the most important development occurred in the defining of new attitudes to this specific technique for the dissemination of news.

It was from the occupiers' reactions that the Algerian learned that something grave and important was happening in his country. The European, through the triple network of the press, the radio and his travels, had a fairly clear idea of the dangers threatening colonial society. The Algerian who read in the occupier's face the increasing bankruptcy of colonialism felt the compelling and vital need to be informed. The vague impression that something fundamental was happening was strengthened both by the solemn decision of the patriots which expressed the secret yearning of the people and which embodied the determination, still devoid of content even yesterday, to exist as a nation, and more especially by the objective and visible crumbling away of the settler's serenity.

The struggle for liberation, reflected in the settler's sudden affability or in his unexpected, unmotivated bursts of temper, obliged the Algerian to follow the evolution of the confrontation step by step. In this period of setting up the lines of conflict, the Europeans committed many errors. Thus on the farms, settlers would assemble agricultural workers to announce to them that a given "gang of rebels," which was in fact unknown to the region, had been decimated in the Aures Mountains or in Kabylia. At other times the servants would be offered a bottle of lemonade or a slice of cake because three or four suspects had just been executed a few kilometers from the property.

From the first months of the Revolution the Algerian, with a view to self-protection and in order to escape what he considered to be the occupier's lying maneuvers, thus found himself having to acquire his own source of information. It became essential to know what was going on, to be informed both of the enemy's real losses and his own. The Algerian at this time had to bring his life up to the level of the Revolution. He had to enter the vast network of news; he had to find his way in a world in which things happened, in which events existed, in which forces were active. Through the experience of a war waged by his own people, the Algerian came in contact with an active community. The Algerian found himself having to oppose the enemy news with his own news. The "truth" of the oppressor, formerly rejected as an absolute lie, was now countered by another, an acted truth. The occupier's lie thereby acquired greater reality, for it was now a menaced lie, put on the defensive. It was the defenses of the occupier, his reactions, his resistances, that underscored the effectiveness of national action and made that action participate in a world of truth. The Algerian's reaction was no longer one of pained and desperate refusal. Because it avowed its own uneasiness, the occupier's lie became a positive aspect of the nation's new truth.

During the first months of the war, it was by means of the press that the Algerian attempted to organize his own news distribution system. The democratic press still existing in Algeria and the newspapers with an anti-colonialist tradition or a policy of objectivity were then avidly read by the native. It was in this sector of news distribution that the Algerian found balance-restoring elements. The power of the colonialist message, the systems used to impose it and present it as the truth were such that most of the time the colonized had only his own increasingly overshadowed inner

conviction to oppose to the eminently traumatizing offensives of the French press and the spectacular manifestations of the military and police power. Confronted daily with "the wiping out of the last remaining guerrilla bands," the civilian could fight off despair only by an act of faith, by an obstinate belief.

Progressively the moral (because objective) support provided by the democratic press ceased. The self-censorship of the local newspapers known for their traditional honesty strengthened this impression of incompleteness, of sketchiness, even of betrayal in the realm of news. It seemed to the Algerian that whole sections of truth were hidden from him. He felt the near certainty that the colonialist power was crumbling before his eyes and that the progress of its dissolution was being kept from him. He fell prey to the sudden fear that this thing, so often hated, wounded to the death in the djebel, its days probably numbered, would disappear without his being able to see at close hand its power and its arrogance in the process of disintegration. During this period the Algerian experienced a sense of frustration. His aggressiveness remained in suspense because he could not keep the score, because he could not register the setbacks of the enemy hour by hour, because, finally, he could not measure centimeter by centimeter the progressive shrinking of the occupying power.

The European, on the whole, sized up the dimensions of the rebellion rather objectively. He did not really believe that some fine morning the revolutionary troops would take over in the city. But he knew more or less precisely how great the forces of the Revolution were and he was constantly comparing them with those represented by the French troops. Every plane that streaked the sky, every armored tank advancing in the dawn were as many spots of sunlight in the settler's anxious and uncertain world. The European felt the shock, but in those first months of 1955 he believed that nothing was lost, that there was still a future for colonialism in Algeria. The official statements of the radio strengthened him in this position. The Algerian, on the other hand, especially if he lived in the rural areas, supplemented his absence of news by an absolutely irrational overestimation. Reactions occurred at that time which were so disproportionate to objective reality that to an observer they assumed a pathological character. In the first months of 1955 there were rumors in Constantine to the effect that Algiers, for example, was in the hands of the nationalists, or in Algiers that the Algerian flag was hoisted over Constantine, Philippeville, Batna....

In the small colonization centres the settlers could not always understand the *fellah's* fierce and sudden assurance, and there were times when they would telephone to the nearest city, only to have it confirmed that nothing unusual had happened in the country. The European became aware of the fact that the life he had built on the agony of the colonized people was losing its assurance. Before the rebellion there was the life, the movement, the existence of the settler, and on the other side the continued agony of the colonized. Since 1954, the European has discovered that another life parallel to his own has begun to stir, and that in Algerian society, it seems, things no longer repeat themselves as they did before. The European, after 1954, knew that something was being hidden from him. This is the period in which the old pejorative expression, the Arab telephone, has taken on an almost scientific meaning.

In the Maghreb country, the Europeans use the term *Arab telephone* in speaking of the relative speed with which news travels by word of mouth in the native society. Never at any time was the expression intended to mean anything else. But in 1955 Europeans, and even Algerians, could be heard to refer confidentially, and as though revealing a state secret, to a technique of long-distance communication that vaguely recalled some such system of signaling, like the tom-tom, as is found in certain regions of Africa. The Algerian gave the isolated European the impression of being in permanent contact with the revolutionary high command. He showed a kind of amplified self-assurance which assumed rather extraordinary forms. There were cases of real "running amuck."

Individuals in a fit of aberration would lose control of themselves. They would be seen dashing down a street or into an isolated farm, unarmed, or waving a miserable jagged knife, shouting, "Long live independent Algeria! We've won!" This aggressive kind of behaviour, which assumed violent forms, would usually end in a burst of machine-gun bullets fired by a patrol. When a doctor was able to exchange words with one of these dying men, the usual kind of expression he heard would be something like, "Don't believe them! We've got the upper edge, our men are coming, I've been sent to tell you they're coming! We're powerful and we'll smash the enemy!"

These hysterical cases were sometimes merely wounded and were given over to the police for questioning. The pathological nature of their behavior would not be recognized, and the accused would be tortured for days until the press reported that he had been shot trying to escape while being transferred to another prison, or that he had died of a recurring ailment. In the dominant group, likewise, there were cases of mental hysteria; people would be seized with a collective fear and panicky settlers were seen to seek an outlet in criminal acts. What made the two cases different was that, unlike the colonized, the colonizer always translated his subjective states into acts, real and multiple murders. We propose to deal with these different problems, arising out of the struggle for liberation, in a study directly based on psychopathology, its forms, its original features, its description.

On the level of news, the Algerian was to find himself caught in a network strictly confined in space. In a village everyone is informed as to the numerical size and the equipment of the National Army of Liberation. On request, information as to its striking power and plan of operations can be obtained. No one, of course, can give the source of such information, but the reliability is unchallengeable. The description that has been given, when a national army collapses, of the rapidity with which alarming, catastrophic, disastrous news spreads among the people can serve as a system of reference to appraise the opposite phenomenon. In 1940 segments of a Fifth Column may have been discovered which were assigned to inoculate the French people with the virus of defeat, but it must not be overlooked that the ground was already prepared, that there was a kind of spiritual demobilization, due to the setbacks suffered by democracy in Spain, in Italy, in Germany, and especially at Munich. The defeatism of 1940 was the direct product of the defeatism of Munich.

In Algeria, on the contrary-and this is true for all colonial countries that undertake a national war-all the news is good, every bit of information is gratifying. The Fifth Column is an impossibility in Algeria. It is the recognition of this fact that leads sociologists to rediscover the old explanation according to which the "native" is inaccessible to reason or to experience. War specialists observe more empirically that these men have an iron morale or that their fanaticism is incomprehensible. The group considered as a whole gives the impression of supplementing what it gets in the way of news by an assurance more and more cut off from reality. These manifestations, these attitudes of total belief, this collective conviction, express the determination of the group to get as close as possible to the Revolution, to get ahead of the Revolution if possible, in short *to be in on it*.

At the same time, as we have seen, especially in the urban centres, more complex patterns of behavior came to light. Avid for objective news, the Algerians would buy the democratic papers that arrived from France. This meant an undeniable financial benefit for these papers. L'Express, France-Observateur' Le Monde increased their sales three- and even five-fold in Algeria. The men running newspaper kiosks, almost all of them Europeans, were the first to point out the economic, and secondarily the political danger that these publications represented. In studying the problem of the press in Algeria, one must always bear in mind one peculiarity in the distribution system. The public criers, all young Algerians, sell only the local press. The European papers are not brought to the consumer. These papers have to be bought at the kiosks. The owners of the Algerian press immediately feel the competition of the press coming from France. Campaigns denouncing the

press for being "in cahoots with the enemy," and the repeated seizures of a certain number of these publications obviously assumed a special meaning. More and more newsdealers, when asked for these papers, would reply aggressively that the "s.o.b. papers haven't arrived today."

Algerians in the cities, but especially in the rural centers, then discovered that showing concern over the arrival or nonarrival of the said press was sufficient to label them. In Algeria as in France, but of course more markedly, the newspaper kiosk dealer, like the office clerk, is sure to be a veteran with strong backing in ultra-colonialist circles. For the Algerian to ask for L'Express, L'Humanite', or Le Monde was tantamount to publicly confessing-as likely as not to a police informer-his allegiance to the Revolution; it was in any case an unguarded indication that he had reservations as to the official, or "colonialist" news; it meant manifesting his willingness to make himself conspicuous; for the kiosk dealer it was the unqualified affirmation by that Algerian of solidarity with the Revolution. The purchase of such a newspaper was thus considered to be a nationalist act. Hence it quickly became a dangerous act.

Every time the Algerian asked for one of these newspapers, the kiosk dealer, who represented the occupier, would regard it as an expression of nationalism, equivalent to an act of war. Because they were now really committed to activities vital to the Revolution, or out of understandable prudence, if one bears in mind the wave of xenophobia created by the French settlers in 1955, Algerian adults soon formed the habit of getting young Algerians to buy these newspapers. It took only a few weeks for this new "trick" to be discovered. After a certain period the newsdealers refused to sell L'Express, L'Humanite, and Liberation to minors. Adults were then reduced to coming out into the open or else to falling back on L'Echo d'Alger. It was at this point that the political directorate of the Revolution gave orders to boycott the Algerian local press.

This decision had a double objective. First, to counter the offensive of the Algerian trusts by a measure having economic consequences. By depriving the Algerian papers of a large proportion of their native customers the revolutionary movement was dealing a rather effective blow to the market of the local press. But above all, the political directorate was convinced that, having to depend solely on colonialist news, the Algerians would gradually succumb to the massive and baneful influence of those pages in which figures and photographs were complacently displayed and where in any case one could clearly read every morning about the elimination of the Revolution. On the level of the masses, which had remained relatively uninvolved in the struggle since they couldn't read the press, the necessity of having radio sets was felt. It must not be forgotten that the people's generalized illiteracy left it indifferent to things written. In the first months of the Revolution, the great majority of Algerians identified everything written in the French language as the expression of colonial domination. The language in which L'Express and L'Echo d'Alger were written was the sign of the French presence.

The acquisition of a radio set in Algeria, in 1955, represented the sole means of obtaining news of the Revolution from non-French sources. This necessity assumed a compelling character when the people learned that there were Algerians in Cairo who daily drew up the balance-sheet of the liberation struggle. From Cairo, from Syria, from nearly all the Arab countries, the great pages written in the djebels by brothers, relatives, friends flowed back to Algeria.

Meanwhile, despite these new occurrences, the introduction of radio sets into houses and the most remote douars proceeded only gradually. There was no enormous rush to buy receivers.

It was at the end of 1956 that the real shift occurred. At this time tracts were distributed announcing the existence of a *Voice of Free Algeria*. The broadcasting schedules and the wavelengths were given. This voice "that speaks from the djebels," not geographically limited, but bringing to all

Algeria the great message of the Revolution, at once acquired an essential value. In less than twenty days the entire stock of radio sets was bought up. In the *souks*<sup>3</sup> trade in used receiver sets began. Algerians who had served their apprenticeship with European radio-electricians opened small shops. Moreover, the dealers had to meet new needs. The absence of electrification in immense regions in Algeria naturally created special problems for the consumer. For this reason battery-operated receivers, from 1956 on, were in great demand on Algerian territory. In a few weeks several thousand sets were sold to Algerians, who bought them as individuals, families, groups of houses, *duwars*, *mishtas*<sup>4</sup>.

Since 1956 the purchase of a radio in Algeria has meant, not the adoption of a modern technique for getting news, but the obtaining of access to the only means of entering into communication with the Revolution, of living with it. In the special case of the portable battery set, an improved form of the standard receiver operating on current, the specialist in technical changes in underdeveloped countries might see a sign of a radical mutation. The Algerian, in fact, gives the impression of finding short cuts and of achieving the most modern forms of news-communication without passing through the intermediary stages<sup>5</sup>. In reality, we have seen that this "progress" is to be explained by the absence of electric current in the Algerian *douars*.

The French authorities did not immediately realize the exceptional importance of this change in attitude of the Algerian people with regard to the radio. Traditional resistances broke down and one could see in a *douar* groups of families in which fathers, mothers, daughters, elbow to elbow, would scrutinize the radio dial waiting for the Voice of Algeria. Suddenly indifferent to the sterile, archaic modesty and antique social arrangements devoid of brotherhood, the Algerian family discovered itself to be immune to the off-color jokes and the libidinous references that the announcer occasionally let drop. Almost magically-but we have seen the rapid and dialectical progression of the new national requirements-the technical instrument of the radio receiver lost its identity as an enemy object. The radio set was no longer a part of the occupier's arsenal of cultural oppression. In making of the radio a primary means of resisting the increasingly overwhelming psychological and military pressures of the occupant, Algerian society made an autonomous decision to embrace the new technique and thus tune itself in on the new signaling systems brought into being by the Revolution.

The Voice of Fighting Algeria was to be of capital importance in consolidating and unifying the people. We shall see that the use of the Arab, Kabyle and French languages which, as colonialism was obliged to recognize, was the expression of a non-racial conception, had the advantage of developing and of strengthening the unity of the people, of making the fighting Djurdjura area real for the Algerian patriots of Batna or of Nemours. The fragments and splinters of acts gleaned by the correspondent of a newspaper more or less attached to the colonial domination, or communicated by the opposing military authorities, lost their anarchic character and became organized into a national and Algerian political idea, assuming their place in an overall strategy of the reconquest of the people's sovereignty. The scattered acts fitted into a vast epic, and the Kabyles were no longer "the men of the mountains," but the brothers who with Ouamrane and Krim made things difficult for the enemy troops.

Having a radio meant paying one's taxes to the nation, buying the right of entry into the struggle of an assembled people.

---

<sup>3</sup> Market or shop

<sup>4</sup> *mishta* – a hamlet

<sup>5</sup> In the realm of military communications, the same phenomenon is to be noted. In less than fifteen months the National Army of Liberation's "liaison and telecommunications system" became equal to the best that is to be found in a modern army



The French authorities, however, began to realize the importance of this progress of the people in the technique of news dissemination. After a few months of hesitancy legal measures appeared. The sale of radios was now prohibited, except on presentation of a voucher issued by the military security or police services. The sale of battery sets was absolutely prohibited, and spare batteries were practically withdrawn from the market. The Algerian dealers now had the opportunity to put their patriotism to the test, and they were able to supply the people with spare batteries with exemplary regularity by resorting to various subterfuges<sup>6</sup>.

*The Algerian who wanted to live up to the Revolution, had at last the possibility of hearing an official voice, the voice of the combatants, explain the combat to him, tell him the story of the Liberation on the march, and incorporate it into the nation's new life.*

Here we come upon a phenomenon that is sufficiently unusual to retain our attention. The highly trained French services, rich with experience acquired in modern wars, past masters in the practice of "sound-wave warfare," were quick to detect the wave lengths of the broadcasting stations. The programs were then systematically jammed, and the Voice of Fighting Algeria soon became inaudible. A new form of struggle had come into being. Tracts were distributed telling the Algerians to keep tuned in for a period of two or three hours. In the course of a single broadcast a second station, broadcasting over a different wave-length, would relay the first jammed station. The listener, enrolled in the battle of the waves, had to figure out the tactics of the enemy, and in an almost physical way circumvent the strategy of the adversary. Very often only the operator, his ear glued to the receiver, had the un hoped-for opportunity of hearing the Voice. The other Algerians present in the room would receive the echo of this voice through the privileged interpreter who, at the end of the broadcast, was literally besieged. Specific questions would then be asked of this incarnated voice. Those present wanted to know about a particular battle mentioned by the French press in the last twenty-four hours, and the interpreter, embarrassed, feeling guilty, would sometimes have to admit that the Voice had not mentioned it.

But by common consent, after an exchange of views, it would be decided that the Voice had in fact spoken of these events, but that the interpreter had not caught the transmitted information. A real task of reconstruction would then begin. Everyone would participate, and the battles of yesterday and the day before would be re-fought in accordance with the deep aspirations and the unshakable faith of the group. The listener would compensate for the fragmentary nature of the news by an autonomous creation of information.

Listening to the Voice of Fighting Algeria was motivated not just by eagerness to hear the news, but more particularly by the inner need to be at one with the nation in its struggle, to recapture and to assume the new national formulation, to listen to and to repeat the grandeur of the epic being accomplished up there among the rocks and on the djebels. Every morning the Algerian would communicate the result of his hours of listening in. Every morning he would complete for the benefit of his neighbor or his comrade the things not said by the Voice and reply to the insidious questions asked by the enemy press. He would counter the official affirmations of the occupier, the resounding bulletins of the adversary, with official statements issued by the Revolutionary Command.

Sometimes it was the militant who would circulate the assumed point of view of the political directorate. Because of a silence on this or that fact which, if prolonged, might prove upsetting and

---

<sup>6</sup> The arrival in Algeria by normal channels of new sets and new batteries obviously became increasingly difficult. After 1957 it was from Tunisia and Morocco, via the underground, that new supplies came. The regular introduction of these means of establishing contact with the official voice of the Revolution became as important for the people as acquiring weapons or munitions for the National Army.

dangerous for the people's unity, the whole nation would snatch fragments of sentences in the course of a broadcast and attach to them a decisive meaning. Imperfectly heard, obscured by an incessant jamming, forced to change wave lengths two or three times in the course of a broadcast, the ~Voice of Fighting Algeria could hardly ever be heard from beginning to end. It was a choppy, broken voice. From one village to the next, from one shack to the next, the *Voice of Algeria* would recount new things, tell of more and more glorious battles, picture vividly the collapse of the occupying power. The enemy lost its density, and at the level of the consciousness of the occupied, experienced a series of essential setbacks. Thus the Voice of Algeria, which for months led the life of a fugitive, which was tracked by the adversary's powerful jamming networks, and whose "word" was often inaudible, nourished the citizen's faith in the Revolution.

This Voice whose presence was felt, whose reality was sensed, assumed more and more weight in proportion to the number of jamming wave lengths broadcast by the specialized enemy stations. It was the power of the enemy sabotage that emphasized the reality and the intensity of the national expression. By its phantom-like character, the radio of the *mujahideen*<sup>7</sup>, speaking in the name of Fighting Algeria, recognized as the spokesman for every Algerian, gave to the combat its maximum of reality.

Under these conditions, claiming to have heard the Voice of Algeria was, in a certain sense, distorting the truth, but it was above all the occasion to proclaim one's clandestine participation in the essence of the Revolution. It meant making a deliberate choice, though it was not explicit during the first months, between the enemy's congenital lie and the people's own lie, which suddenly acquired a dimension of truth.

This voice, often absent, physically inaudible, which each one felt welling up within himself, founded on an inner perception of the Fatherland, became materialized in an irrefutable way. Every Algerian, for his part, broadcast and transmitted the new language. The nature of this voice recalled in more than one way that of the Revolution: present "in the a\*" in isolated pieces, but not objectively<sup>8</sup>.

The radio receiver guaranteed this true lie. Every evening, from nine o'clock to midnight, the Algerian would listen. At the end of the evening, not hearing the Voice, the listener would sometimes leave the needle on a jammed wave-length or one that simply produced static, and would announce that the voice of the combatants was here. For an hour the room would be filled with the piercing, excruciating of the jamming. Behind each modulation, each active crackling, the Algerian would imagine not only words, but concrete battles. The war of the sound waves, in the gourd-i, re-enacts for the benefit of the citizen the armed clash of his people and colonialism. As a general rule, it is the Voice of Algeria that wins out. The enemy stations, once the broadcast is completed, abandon their work of sabotage. The military music of warring Algeria that concludes the broadcast can then freely fill the lungs and the heads of the faithful. These few brazen notes reward three hours of daily hope and have played a fundamental role for months in the training and strengthening of the Algerian national consciousness.

On the psychopathological level, it is important to mention a few phenomena pertaining to the radio

---

<sup>7</sup> Fighters (originally in Moslem Holy War)

<sup>8</sup> Along the same line should be mentioned the manner in which programs are listened to in Kabylia. In groups of scores and sometimes hundreds around a receiver, the peasants listen religiously to "the Voice of the Arabs." Few understand the literary Arabic used in these broadcasts. But the faces assume a look of gravity and the features harden when the expression *Istiqlal* (Independence) resounds in the gourd-i (shack). An Arab voice that hammers out the word *Istiqlal* four times in an hour suffices at that level of heightened consciousness to keep alive the faith in victory.

which made their appearance in connection with the war of liberation. Before 1954, the monographs written on Algerians suffering from hallucinations constantly pointed out the presence in the so-called "external action phase" of highly aggressive and hostile radio voices. These metallic, cutting, insulting, disagreeable voices all have for the Algerian an accusing, inquisitorial character. The radio, on the normal level, already apprehended as an instrument of the occupation, as a type of violent invasion on the part of the oppressor, assumes highly alienating meanings in the field of the pathological. The radio, in addition to the somewhat irrational magical elements with which it is invested in the majority of homogeneous societies, that is to say societies from which all foreign oppression is absent, has a particular valence in Algeria. We have seen that the voice heard is not indifferent, is not neutral; it is the voice of the oppressor, the voice of the enemy. The speech delivered is not received, deciphered, understood, but rejected. The communication is never questioned, but is simply refused, for it is precisely the opening of oneself to the other that is organically excluded from the colonial situation. Before 1954, in the psychopathological realm, the radio was an evil object, anxiogenic and accursed.

After 1954, the radio assumed totally new meanings. The phenomena of the wireless and the receiver set lost their coefficient of hostility, were stripped of their character of extraneousness, and became part of the coherent order of the nation in battle. In hallucinatory psychoses, after 1956, the radio voices became protective, friendly. Insults and accusations disappeared and gave way to words of encouragement. The foreign technique, which had been "digested" in connection with the national struggle, had become a fighting instrument for the people and a protective organ against anxiety<sup>9</sup>.

Still on the level of communication, attention must be called to the acquisition of new values by the French language. The French language, language of occupation, a vehicle of the oppressing power, seemed doomed for eternity to judge the Algerian in a pejorative way. Every French expression referring to the Algerian had a humiliating content. Every French speech heard was an order, a threat, or an insult. The contact between the Algerian and the European is defined by these three spheres. The broadcasting in French of the programs of Fighting Algeria was to liberate the enemy language from its historic meanings. The same message transmitted in three different languages unified the experience and gave it a universal dimension. The French language lost its accursed character, revealing itself to be capable also of transmitting, for the benefit of the nation, the messages of truth that the latter awaited. Paradoxical as it may appear, it is the Algerian Revolution, it is the struggle of the Algerian people, that is facilitating the spreading of the French language in the nation.

In psychopathology, sentences in French lose their automatic character of insult and malediction. When they hear French voices, Algerians suffering from hallucinations quote words that are less and less aggressive. It is not uncommon, at a later stage, to note that hallucinations in the language of the occupier assume a friendly character of support, of protection<sup>10</sup>.

The occupation authorities have not measured the importance of the new attitude of the Algerian toward the French language. Expressing oneself in French, understanding French, was no longer tantamount to treason or to an impoverishing identification with the occupier. Used by the Voice of the Combatants, conveying in a positive way the message of the Revolution, the French language

---

<sup>9</sup> The appearance of themes of morbid protection, their importance as a technique of self-defense and even of self-cure in the historic development of mental disease, have already been studied in classic psychiatry. Piagued by his accusing "voices," the victim of hallucinations has no other recourse but to create friendly voices. This mechanism of transformation into its antithesis that we here point out has its counterpart in the disintegrating colonial situation.

<sup>10</sup> What is involved here is not the emergence of an ambivalence, but rather a mutation, a radical change of valence, not a back-and-forth movement but a dialectical progression.

also becomes an instrument of liberation. Whereas formerly, in psychopathology, any French voice, to one in a delirium, expressed rejection, condemnation and opprobrium, with the struggle for liberation we see the initiation of a major process of exorcizing the French language. The "native" can almost be said to assume responsibility for the language of the occupier<sup>11</sup>.

It was after the Congress of the Soummam, in August 1956, that the French became aware of this phenomenon. It will be remembered that on this occasion, the political and military leaders of the Revolution met in the Valley of the Soummam, precisely in the sector of Amirouche, the then Commander, to lay the doctrinal foundations of the struggle and to set up the National Council of the Algerian Revolution (CNRA). The fact that the discussions were carried on in French suddenly revealed to the occupation forces that the traditional general reticence of the Algerian with regard to using French within the colonial situation might no longer exist, when a decisive confrontation brought the will to national independence of the people and the dominant power face to face.

The French authorities were curiously baffled by this phenomenon. They first saw in it the proof of what they had always claimed-i.e., the incapacity of the Arabic language to handle the operational concepts of a modern revolutionary war. But at the same time, the decisions reached in the occupier's linguistic system forced the occupier to realize the relative character of his signs and created confusion and disorder in his defense system.

The advocates of integration, for their part, here saw a new opportunity to promote a "French Algeria" by making the occupier's language the sole practical means of communication available to Kabyles, Arabs, Chaouias, Mozabites, etc. This thesis, on the level of language, went back to the very basis of colonialism: it is the intervention of the foreign nation that puts order into the original anarchy of the colonized country. Under these conditions, the French language, the language of the occupier, was given the role of Logos, with ontological implications within Algerian society.

In either case, using the French language was at the same time domesticating an attribute of the occupier and proving oneself open to the signs, the symbols, in short to a certain influence of the occupier. The French have not made a sufficiently thorough study of this new behavior of the Algerian with regard to their language. Before 1954, most of the work of the congresses of the nationalist parties was carried on in Arabic. More precisely, the militants of Kabylia or the Aures would learn Arabic in connection with their national activities. Before 1954, speaking Arabic, refusing French as a language and as a means of cultural oppression, was a distinct and daily form of differentiation, of national existence. Before 1954, the nationalist parties sustained the hope of the militants and developed the political consciousness of the people by singling out and explaining, one by one, the value of the different configurations, the different characteristics of the occupied nation. The Arabic language was the most effective means that the nation's being had of unveiling itself<sup>12</sup>.

In August 1956, the reality of combat and the confusion of the occupier stripped the Arabic language of its sacred character, and the French language of its negative connotations. The new

---

<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the Voice of Algeria was imagined to be pronouncing death sentences by certain Algerian collaborators. Suffering from serious fits of depression, these men who usually belonged to the police services, would be attacked, insulted, convicted by the "rebel" radio. Likewise, European women as well as European men in outbreaks of anxiety would very clearly hear threats or condemnations in the Arabic language. Such phenomena were practically unknown before 1954.

<sup>12</sup> At the same period the political directorate decided to destroy the French radio in Algeria. The existence of a national voice led the heads of the movement to contemplate silencing Radio-Alger. Considerable damage was inflicted on technical facilities by the explosion of time bombs. But the broadcasts were soon resumed.

language of the nation could then make itself known through multiple meaningful channels.

The radio receiver as a technique of disseminating news and the French language as a basis for a possible communication became almost simultaneously accepted by the fighting nation.

We have seen that with the creation of the Voice of Fighting Algeria, radio sets multiplied to an extraordinary degree. Before 1954, the receiving instrument, the radiophonic technique of long-distance communication of thought was not, in Algeria, a mere neutral object. Looked upon as a transmission belt of the colonialist power, as a means in the hands of the occupier by which to maintain his strangle hold on the nation, the radio was frowned upon. Before 1954, switching on the radio meant giving asylum to the occupier's words; it meant allowing the colonizer's language to filter into the very heart of the house, the last of the supreme bastions of the national spirit. Before 1954, a radio in an Algerian house was the mark of Europeanization in progress, of vulnerability. It was the conscious opening to the influence of the dominator, to his pressure. It was the decision to give voice to the occupier. Having a radio meant accepting being besieged from within by the colonizer. It meant demonstrating that one chose cohabitation within the colonial framework. It meant, beyond any doubt, surrendering to the occupier.

We have mentioned the reasons invoked by the people to explain their reticence with respect to the radio. The desire to keep intact the traditional forms of sociability and the hierarchy of the family was then the main justification.

"We never know what program we are going to pick up." "There's no telling what they're going to say next." Sometimes a religious argument of a peremptory nature appears: "It's the infidels' radio." We have seen that such rationalizations are arbitrarily created to justify the rejection of the occupier's presence.

With the creation of a Voice of Fighting Algeria, the Algerian was vitally committed to listening to the message, to assimilating it, and soon to acting upon it. Buying a radio, getting down on one's knees with one's head against the speaker, was no longer just wanting to get the news concerning the formidable experience in progress in the country, it was hearing the first words of the nation.

Since the new Algeria on the march had decided to tell about itself and to make itself heard, the radio had become indispensable. It was the radio that enabled the Voice to take root in the villages and on the hills. Having a radio seriously meant going to war.

By means of the radio, a technique rejected before 1954, the Algerian people decided to relaunch the Revolution. Listening in on the Revolution, the Algerian existed with it, made it exist.

The memory of the "free" radios that came into being during the Second World War underlines the unique quality of the Voice of Fighting Algeria. The Polish, Belgian, French people, under the German occupation, were able, through the broadcasts transmitted from London, to maintain contact with a certain image of their nation. Hope, the spirit of resistance to the oppressor, were then given daily sustenance and kept alive. For example, it will be remembered that listening to the voice of Free France was a mode of national existence, a form of combat. The fervent and well-nigh mystical participation of the French people with the voice from London has been sufficiently commented upon to need no amplification. In France, from 1940 to 1944, listening to the voice of Free France was surely a vital, sought-for experience. But listening to the radio was not a new phenomenon of behavior. The voice from London had its place in the vast repertory of transmitting stations which already existed for the French before the war. From the global conflict, a pre-eminent figure emerges through the agency-that of occupied France receiving the message of hope

from Free France. In Algeria things took on a special character. First of all, there was the stripping from the instrument its traditional burden of taboos and prohibitions. Progressively the instrument not only acquired a category of neutrality, but was endowed with a positive coefficient.

Accepting the radio technique, buying a receiver set, and participating in the life of the fighting nation, all these coincided. The frenzy with which the people exhausted the stock of radio sets gives a rather accurate idea of its desire to be involved in the dialogue that began in 1955 between the combatant and the nation.

In the colonial society, Radio-Alger was not just one among a number of voices. It was the voice of the occupier. Tuning in Radio-Alger amounted to accepting domination; it amounted to exhibiting one's desire to live on good terms with oppression. It meant giving in to the enemy. Switching on the radio meant validating the formula, "This is Algiers, the French Radio Broadcast." The acquiring of a radio handed the colonized over to the enemy's system and prepared for the banishing of hope from his heart.

The existence of the Voice of Fighting Algeria, on the other hand, profoundly changed the problem. Every Algerian felt himself to be called upon and wanted to become a reverberating element of the vast network of meanings born of the liberating combat. The war, daily events of military or political character, were broadly commented on in the news programs of the foreign radios. In the foreground the voice of the djebels stood out. We have seen that the phantom-like and quickly inaudible character of this voice in no way affected its felt reality and its power. Radio-Alger, Algerian Radio-Broadcasting, lost their sovereignty.

Gone were the days when mechanically switching on the radio amounted to an invitation to the enemy. For the Algerian the radio, as a technique, became transformed. The radio set was no longer directly and solely tuned in on the occupier. To the right and to the left of Radio-Alger's broadcasting band, on different and numerous wave-lengths, innumerable stations could be tuned in to, among which it was possible to distinguish the friends, the enemies' accomplices, and the neutrals. Under these conditions, having a receiver was neither making oneself available to the enemy, nor giving him a voice, nor yielding on a point of principle. On the contrary, on the strict level of news, it was showing the desire to keep one's distance, to hear other voices, to take in other prospects. It was in the course of the struggle for liberation and thanks to the creation of a Voice of Fighting Algeria that the Algerian experienced and concretely discovered the existence of voices other than the voice of the dominator which formerly had been immeasurably amplified because of his own silence.

The old monologue of the colonial situation, already shaken by the existence of the struggle, disappeared completely by 1956. The Voice of Fighting Algeria and all the voices picked up by the receiver now revealed to the Algerian the tenuous, very relative character, in short, the imposture of the French voice presented until now as the only one. The occupier's voice was stripped of its authority.

The nation's *speech*, the nation's spoken *words* shape the world while at the same time renewing it.

Before 1954, native society as a whole rejected the radio, turned a deaf ear to the technical development of methods of news dissemination. There was a non-receptive attitude before this import brought in by the occupier. In the colonial situation, the radio did not satisfy any need of the

Algerian people<sup>13</sup>. On the contrary, the radio was considered, as we have seen, a means used by the enemy to quietly carry on his work of depersonalization of the native.

The national struggle and the creation of Free Radio Algeria have produced a fundamental change in the people. The radio has appeared in a massive way at once and not in progressive stages. What we have witnessed is a radical transformation of the means of perception, of the very world of perception. Of Algeria it is true to say that there never was, with respect to the radio, a pattern of listening habits, of audience reaction. Insofar as mental processes are concerned, the technique had virtually to be invented. The Voice of Algeria, created out of nothing, brought the nation to life and endowed every citizen with a new status, telling him so explicitly.

After 1957, the French troops in operation formed the habit of confiscating all the radios in the course of a raid. At the same time listening in on a certain number of broadcasts was prohibited. Today things have progressed. The Voice of Fighting Algeria has multiplied. From Tunis, from Damascus, from Cairo, from Rabat, programs are broadcast to the people. The programs are organized by Algerians. The French services no longer try to jam these powerful and numerous broadcasts. The Algerian has the opportunity every day of listening to five or six different broadcasts in Arabic or in French, by means of which he can follow the victorious development of the Revolution step by step. As far as news is concerned, the word of the occupier has been seen to suffer a progressive devaluation. After having imposed the national voice upon that of the dominator, the radio welcomes broadcasts from all the corners of the world. The "Week of Solidarity with Algeria," organized by the Chinese people, or the resolutions of the Congress of African Peoples on the Algerian war, link the fellah to an immense tyranny destroying wave.

Incorporated under these conditions into the life of the nation, the radio will have an exceptional importance in the country's building phase. After the war a disparity between the people and what is intended to speak for them will no longer be possible. The revolutionary instruction on the struggle for liberation must normally be replaced by a revolutionary instruction on the building of the nation. The fruitful use that can be made of the radio can well be imagined. Algeria has enjoyed a unique experience. For several years, the radio will have been for many, one of the means of saying "no" to the occupation and of believing in the liberation. The identification of the voice of the Revolution with the fundamental truth of the nation has opened limitless horizons.

---

<sup>13</sup> In this connection may be mentioned the attitude of the French authorities in present-day Algeria. As we know, television was introduced into Algeria several years ago. Until recently, a simultaneous bilingual commentary accompanied the broadcasts. Some time ago, the Arabic commentary ceased. This fact once again confirms the aptness of the formula applied to Radio-Alger: "Frenchmen speaking to Frenchmen."