

BETWEEN HUMANISM AND TERROR: THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL
VIOLENCE IN POSTWAR FRANCE, 1944-1962

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As the wartime German occupation of France came to a close in 1944, the French Resistance became a symbol of the heroic use of violence for a just political cause. The subsequent reconstruction of a republican France, which involved a protracted and sometimes bloody campaign to bring collaborators to justice, further cemented popular support for the selective use of political violence – even violence by non-state actors, even violence that targeted civilians – if it could be associated with memory of the struggle against Vichy.

In this climate, leading postwar intellectuals on the French Left such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre articulated some of the most striking justifications for political violence, including revolutionary “terror,” in the history of twentieth-century thought. But despite their prominence, these figures did not represent the views of all left-leaning French thinkers: over time, the use of violence in politics became the object of increasing unease and contestation, particularly as the exigencies of the liberation faded, Cold War fears grew, and new forms of “terror” – labor militancy, the Soviet gulag, torture and terrorism in the Algerian War (1954-1962) – came to the fore of political debate.

This dissertation is an attempt to retell the history of France’s postwar intellectual Left in a way that reintegrates those who decided between 1944 and 1962 that violence was *not* a legitimate means of effecting political change. Drawing on an extensive source base of published and archival materials, I show that the position that

violence should be used to help build a more just society was maintained by some intellectuals on the Left but was substantively challenged by others. These latter figures – notably Albert Camus, David Rousset, and Jean-Marie Domenach – used what they self-consciously deemed “ethical” arguments to reject even those acts of violence committed for the sake of highly desirable ends. Their new discourses also drew on the memory of World War II, but instead of emphasizing Resistance heroism they stressed the suffering of victims. Meaningful action, they declared, need not involve violence: it could, rather, be a matter of “bearing witness” to violent assaults on bodily integrity and human dignity.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emma Kuby was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. She received her A.B. with honors in 2003 from Brown University, where she majored in History and Gender Studies. After a fellowship year in Paris, she began her graduate studies in History at Cornell University, earning her M.A. in 2007.

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INTRODUCTION

“Is there any other problem besides that of violence?” Such was the question the Parisian journalist Jean Daniel posed to himself as he lay in a hospital bed in late 1961, during the final months of the Algerian War (1954-1962). Daniel, Algerian-born and a significant figure in the anti-colonialist French Left, had been wounded that summer by stray paratrooper gunfire in Bizerte, Tunisia while covering the rampant devastation of North Africa for the weekly journal *L’Express*. To distract himself while he recovered from his injuries, Daniel began to fill a notebook with diverse reflections on French political, cultural, and intellectual life since World War II. Though this sprawling effort into personal and political memory took him in many directions, a single, insistent theme haunted his entries. Whether he was writing about Albert Camus or Charles de Gaulle, decolonization or the theater, there was only one real subject to consider about postwar France: political violence.¹

Surveying the works that major French intellectuals had produced over the previous fifteen years, it would seem that Daniel was not alone. Left-leaning French writers and philosophers in particular had been preoccupied since the end of World War II with the “problem” of the use of violence for political ends. Although conventional warfare between states had served as a backdrop for much of their adult lives, these intellectuals were especially concerned about violent acts between governments and their own citizens, such as torture, political executions, police repression, bombings, revolts, and insurrections. These kinds of political violence²

¹ Jean Daniel, *La Blessure; suivi de Le Temps qui vient* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 55: “Y a-t-il un autre problème que celui de la violence?”

² I necessarily maintain a certain flexibility in defining “political violence” since the actors whom I study employed the concept in multiple, shifting, and often contradictory ways. In general, however, “political violence” in this work can be taken to signify acts of physical constraint or destruction undertaken by both state and non-state actors with the intent of either altering or sustaining the

posed urgent questions for a generation that believed in social revolution but had been shaken by the cataclysms of the European twentieth century. Could such acts ever be justified? On what grounds? Was extralegal political violence necessarily illegitimate? Was it “terrorism”? Did society require normative limits concerning the use of violence, even if that violence was employed for the ultimate good of the collective? And if one refused to justify violence, what means of political action remained? These kinds of questions served as starting points for some of the most famous and enduring works of the era: Albert Camus’s *Les Justes* (*The Just*, 1949) and *L’Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*, 1951), Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Humanisme et terreur* (*Humanism and Terror*, 1947) and *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (*The Adventures of the Dialectic*, 1955), Jean-Paul Sartre’s plays *Les Mains sales* (*Dirty Hands*, 1948) and *Le Diable et le bon dieu* (*The Devil and the Good Lord*, 1951), and his explosive 1961 preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). From a variety of perspectives, all these texts considered whether or not moral problems arose when people used lethal violence in an attempt to alter their collective circumstances for the better.

Such concerns began to dominate French intellectual production in 1944, when Germany’s wartime occupation of France came to an end. As France’s collaborationist Vichy government (1940-1944) collapsed, the French Resistance became a symbol of the heroic use of violence for a just political cause. Whereas Vichy officials had dubbed the interior Resistance a “terrorist network,” large segments of the postwar

prevailing arrangements of collective life in a given community. This intent need not be “pure,” wholly rational, nor even fully consciously articulated, and it need not represent a desire to intervene in institutional politics at an exalted level. I do not, however, include under the rubric of “political violence” acts of physical force such as hooliganism and domestic violence that are deeply “political” in the sense of having to do with power relations but whose perpetrators do not directly seek to influence the rules or composition of the polity. Nor do I consider what is sometimes called “structural violence.” My definition is especially influenced by the arguments laid out in C.A.J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-8, 21-42.

French public saw the outcome of the war as a vindication of resisters' use of sabotage, executions, and guerilla warfare to help achieve national liberation.³ The subsequent reconstruction of a republican France, which involved a prolonged, sometimes bloody campaign to bring collaborators to justice, further cemented popular support for the selective use of political violence – even violence by non-state actors, even violence that targeted civilians – if it could be associated with the legacy of the Resistance struggle.

Intellectuals on the Left were especially inspired by the immense moral prestige that the Resistance now enjoyed. In the immediate postwar moment, figures as diverse as Camus, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, André Mandouze, Claude Bourdet, Louis Martin-Chauffier, and Julian Benda advocated violence as a means of achieving an irrevocable, “revolutionary” rupture with the passive, feminized “decadence” of prewar French politics – a politics that they believed had produced France’s 1940 rout and then the collaborationist politics of the Vichy era. These writers hoped that the Resistance would prove to be only the first stage in a process of radical change and renewal. The new battle cry of *Combat*, the journal for which Camus wrote, became “From the Resistance to the Revolution!”⁴ Camus and others explicitly accepted the

³ The real military contribution of the French Resistance to France’s liberation is a contested topic; most historians agree that it was modest in comparison to the role played by the Allies. But the notion that France had helped to free itself from German occupation was postwar orthodoxy, and of immense moral and political importance in the reconstruction of the country. See Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 554-558; Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990). It is also important to underline that postwar admiration for the Resistance was not simply a continuation of wartime attitudes – during the Occupation, much of the populace agreed with Vichy and the Germans that the kinds of violence the armed Resistance was engaged in constituted acts of “terrorism.” However, the interior Resistance enjoyed an immense wave of *retroactive* legitimation at the liberation. Pierre Laborie, *L’Opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris, Seuil, 1990), 285-329 and “Opinions et représentations: la Libération et la construction de l’image de la Résistance,” in *Les Français des années troubles, de la guerre d’Espagne à la Libération*, rev. ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 253-265, esp. 265.

⁴ This phrase – “De la Résistance à la révolution” – served as the motto and the daily banner for *Combat* beginning on August 21, 1944, the first issue published openly after years of clandestine publishing under the Occupation.

fact that this “revolution” would demand bloodshed. Pacifism and non-violence, influential ideologies in the interwar period, now held little appeal; both had been discredited by the shameful memory of France’s role in appeasing Hitler in 1938. Arguments for non-violence struck postwar intellectuals on the Left as morally suspect excuses for either passivity or frank collaboration with evil. In light of experience, they agreed that those who hoped to fight injustice and who dreamed of creating a better world should, in Julian Benda’s words, be “armed with a broadsword, and determined to make use of it...”⁵

The postwar period, here defined as the eighteen years between the Liberation of Paris and the end of the Algerian War, provided numerous further occasions for intellectuals to debate whether such violent means were indeed necessary and legitimate. Immediate postwar discussions of political violence revolved around the retributive state and extralegal violence involved in the “purge” (*épuration*) of collaborators from the French body politic. Later in the 1940s, in the midst of intense economic hardship and massive, uncommonly bloody Communist-directed strike waves, left-leaning intellectuals turned their attention to the politics and morality of both workers’ violence and a state repression that took up the banner of “republican legality.” Meanwhile, as the Cold War took form and a weakened France, dependent on Marshall aid, confronted a world dominated by the two superpowers, intellectuals on the Left also felt compelled to consider “revolutionary violence” in the Soviet context, from the Stalinist USSR’s execution of “traitorous” political elites to the gulag. Finally, with the onset of decolonization and especially Algeria’s long war for independence from France, these writers turned their attention to the myriad forms of

⁵ Julien Benda, “Justice ou amour? La trahison des laïcs,” *Les Lettres françaises* 47 (17 March 1945): “Pour nous, notre idéal est bien la paix, mais c’est la paix par la justice, celle-ci étant armée du glaive et décidée à s’en servir...”

violence employed by the French military and police (torture, collective repression, mass deportation, summary execution, attempted insurrection), the Algerian independence fighters (guerilla warfare, terror attacks on civilians, reprisal killings), and hard-line civilian defenders of French control of Algeria (bombings, assassinations, kidnappings).

Intellectual historians have long emphasized the post-1944 French Left's preoccupation with political violence, and particularly with violent revolution. Written just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tony Judt's 1992 book *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* paints a portrait of an "irresponsible" left-leaning postwar intelligentsia fascinated by Soviet communism and all too willing to shed "the blood of others" in the name of future-oriented political goals.⁶ Among the "charmed circle" that orbited around Sartre's journal *Les Temps modernes* and Emmanuel Mounier's *Esprit*, he writes, "anything that qualified under the heading 'revolutionary' was necessarily to be supported and defended."⁷ Judt charges that "the attractions of violence, the seductive appeal of terror in all its forms" exerted unprecedented force over French intellectual life in the period, and that not until the 1980s "did the idea take root that revolutionary terror might be an object of study rather than of emulation or admiration."⁸ François Furet, meanwhile, argues that the postwar French intellectual Left, communist and non-communist, defended the state terror of the USSR "tooth and nail," inspired by "anti-liberal passion" as well as "a hidden taste for power that could be joined to a masochistic passion for force."⁹

⁶ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 307 and 99. The book was published simultaneously in French as *Un Passé imparfait: les intellectuels en France, 1944-1956*, transl. Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 302 and 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 297. Judt places this shift "between the fall of Pol Pot and the celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution."

⁹ François Furet, *Le Passé d'une illusion. Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris: Laffont/Calmann-Lévy, 1995), 480-482.

Sunil Khilnani, in *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (1993), agrees with and extends this assessment, portraying the period from 1944 to the early 1970s as one of “intellectual consensus, founded upon a commitment to rapid and thorough-going social and political change through violent takeover of state power.”¹⁰ Arguing that the commitment to revolution entailed “very little indeed” in France itself, where “the promise of revolution receded with each passing year after 1945,” Khilnani claims that intellectuals turned their enthusiasm toward Soviet communism, as a twentieth-century heritor of the spirit of France’s own Revolution.¹¹ He makes his case through an analysis of the towering figure of Sartre, whose advocacy for revolutionary violence he presents as broadly representative of the attitude of the intellectual Left of the 1940s, 50s, and early 60s.

The portrait of the postwar leftist intellectual, typified by Sartre, as unremittingly revolutionary and enchanted with violence – particularly Soviet violence – has had a considerable influence on scholarship over the past two decades. Indeed, its authority has been indirectly consolidated even by historians who have tried to redirect our attention toward French intellectuals’ “ethical” concerns by looking either to other periods or to figures outside the Left. Julian Bourg’s *From Revolution to Ethics* (2007), for example, disputes the characterization of French left-leaning intellectuals as perpetually “irresponsible.” Nevertheless, by arguing that a “fading of revolutionary politics” occurred only after May 1968, when intellectuals underwent an “ethical turn” and made “the transition from revolutionary political violence to a non-violent ethos,” the book ultimately supports Judt’s characterization of the pre-1968

¹⁰ Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41. Furet also emphasizes this point: see *Le Passé d’une illusion*, 446-447 and 481.

period.¹² Meanwhile Samuel Moyn accepts Judt's account of the "left-leaning" portion of the postwar French intelligentsia, who he agrees "turned a blind eye to Stalinist horror, excusing evil in the name of the future good it would supposedly make possible," but he regrets that historians have left in comparative neglect "the minority, anti-Hegelian, moralistic project that gained momentum and popularity in the same years."¹³ Moyn attempts to rectify this situation by focusing on Emmanuel Levinas, but since Levinas did not identify with "*la gauche*" and shunned most recognizable forms of "politics" – he did not so much as sign a petition during the Algerian War – the study ultimately reinforces Judt's argument. To locate any postwar alternative to the "dominant strain in French thought" of morally bankrupt philo-communism, Moyn implies, we must look beyond those thinkers who consistently associated themselves with "the Left" and actually participated in the political debates of the era, from the *épuration* to Algeria.¹⁴

Must we really leave the France of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s or, alternatively, look to "apolitical" philosophers who avoided the arena of public debate in order to locate figures who do not match Judt's, Furet's, and Khilnani's description? The answer is no. Consider, for instance, the career of Buchenwald survivor and memoirist David Rousset. In the immediate postwar moment, Rousset was close to the *Temps modernes* team and collaborated with Sartre both on intellectual projects and on the founding of a "revolutionary" political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire. But by 1949 he had dramatically abandoned the agenda of remaking

¹² Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 15, 60, and 336. See also Jan Plamper, "Foucault's Gulag," *Kritika* 3.2 (2002): 255-280, esp. 259-260. Citing Judt, this article sets an analysis of Foucault's ethical opposition to the gulag in the 1970s against the backdrop of a postwar French intelligentsia tolerant of state terror and struck with "blindness" concerning the plight of their neighbors to the East.

¹³ Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 220.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the world through “combat” and embraced instead a project of “bearing witness” to the state terror of the Soviet gulag. He would no longer fight for a revolutionary utopia, he announced, but would instead devote himself to condemning all concentration camps, which he considered the single most extreme and pernicious form of state violence. Although often accused of being a defector to the capitalist “side” in the Cold War, Rousset continued to insistently identify himself as a member of the French Left – and indeed many aspects of his intellectual project set him apart from liberal or conservative writers. For example, he remained fiercely anti-colonialist and spearheaded the creation of an intellectual organization that did not confine itself to denouncing the gulag but – against dismayed opposition from Cold Warriors – conducted reports on concentration camps and atrocities in the Western bloc, from Greece and Spain to French Tunisia and Algeria.¹⁵

Nor was Rousset unique. Consider also the existentialist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose 1947 *Humanisme et terreur* Judt deems an emblematic text of the French postwar era of “irresponsibility.” Three years after the publication of that book, however, Merleau-Ponty quietly changed his mind, and by 1955 he had publicly renounced the very idea of revolution, embracing instead a strictly non-violent model of political praxis centered on public-sphere debate and parliamentary institutions. Or consider Jean-Marie Domenach, a protégé of Emmanuel Mounier at the Catholic progressive journal *Esprit* who was also a partisan of violence in the service of Marxist revolution during the 1940s but who became preoccupied with the troubling ethical implications of revolution during the Algerian War. Searching for a “solidarity that affirms itself otherwise than in a fraternity of terrorists,” he turned to theories of non-violent protest, opening the pages of *Esprit* to articles like “Gandhian Non-

¹⁵ Rousset also opposed the Algerian War as an individual writer and activist.

Violence: Mystique and Technique” and giving speeches himself under titles such as “Why Non-Violence.”¹⁶ Meanwhile sociologist Edgar Morin, a Communist Party member in the immediate aftermath of the war, left the Party in 1951 and proposed in 1959 that the “political renewal” of the French Left would arise not through the endorsement of revolution but through a crusade against French state violence, undertaken in “moral passion” about the suffering of victims.¹⁷

Clearly Rousset, Merleau-Ponty, Domenach, and Morin do not fit the portrait of a “consensus” in favor of revolutionary violence amongst the postwar intellectual Left.¹⁸ All these men did indeed undergo something that could be described as a “turn” away from revolution, but they did so in the late 1940s or 1950s, not after 1968. Moreover they remained actively involved in national political debates and deeply invested in their identity as members of an intellectual Left. They did not simply withdraw from “*la gauche*” when they renounced revolutionary violence (even if others announced their exile), but instead offered significant proposals for a “new

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Domenach, “‘Les Damnés de la terre’ I: Sur une préface de Sartre,” *Esprit* 304 (March 1962), 462: “Il y a moyen – et Sartre, qui ne se dispense pas d’écrire, doit en être convaincu – il y a moyen de sortir du cercle de cette violence bouclée sur elle-même: la parole, l’action politique, l’engagement révolutionnaire, la solidarité qui peut s’affirmer autrement que dans la fraternité des terroristes.” Hervé Chaigne, “La non-violence gandhienne: mystique et technique,” *Esprit* 286 (July-August 1960): 1189-1218; Jean-Marie Domenach, “Pourquoi la non-violence,” *Vérité-Liberté* 2 (June 1960).

¹⁷ Edgar Morin, “De la torture,” *France-Observateur*, 9 July 1959, reproduced in Morin, *Introduction à une politique de l’homme, suivi de Arguments politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 274-275: “Je veux dire qu’aujourd’hui le problème d’un renouveau politique de la gauche devrait s’effectuer autour du problème de la torture, en dessous et au-dessus de la vie politicienne. Il faut songer à l’affaire Dreyfus. De l’affaire Dreyfus est née une purification de la gauche, une énergie politique qui a affronté et brisé la Raison d’État et le Tabou de l’Armée, non pas certes en dehors des conditions politiques et sociales, mais en dehors des tactiques et des combinaisons, parce que la question de la vérité et de la justice n’a pas été subordonnée à d’autres questions, mais posée dans la passion morale.”

¹⁸ Judt and Khilnani are, of course, aware of the existence of these individuals. They simply do not treat their reversals as historically significant. For example Khilnani praises Merleau-Ponty’s *Les Aventures de la dialectique* as a “subtle political testament” that “eloquently confirmed” Merleau-Ponty’s break from Sartre (*Arguing Revolution*, 70). But because he takes Sartre and not Merleau-Ponty as the “spokesman” of the French intellectual Left (49), he does not recognize *Les Aventures* as providing counter-evidence to the notion of “consensus.” Judt, meanwhile, dismisses *Les Aventures* in a few brief sentences as “revealing weaknesses in [Merleau-Ponty’s] earlier arguments that had long since been obvious to outsiders” (*Past Imperfect*, 291).

Left” oriented around less violent principles.¹⁹ While these men sometimes rhetorically disowned “politics” in favor of “ethics,” they were in fact consummately interested in rethinking and re-enacting what meaningful political action might be. They are therefore not compatible with the received wisdom about the postwar intellectual majority, nor with Moyn’s picture of the putatively apolitical, non-leftist “minority” opposition embodied by Levinas.

What to do, then, with these cases? Can we simply treat them as exceptions that prove the rule? Going back to Judt himself, there already exists a substantial literature that does precisely this with the “exceptional” case of Albert Camus, treating him as a lonely ethical voice crying in the wilderness of postwar French intellectual debate.²⁰ Like the figures mentioned above, Camus never renounced the Left, which he considered his intellectual “family.”²¹ But already by 1946 he had reversed his earlier support for both “revolution” and the execution of wartime collaborators, announcing that he would no longer consider any form of political violence legitimate. This renunciation leads Judt to declare that Camus was “about a quarter century ahead of his time.”²² Dori Laub and Shoshana Feldman, meanwhile, celebrate the Camus of the late 1940s as a brave anti-totalitarian “voice crying in the desert” against Soviet

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 311.

²⁰ The desire to locate moral heroes is a persistent feature of Anglo-American literature on twentieth-century French intellectuals, and the designation of Camus is prevalent. For an autobiographical discussion of the appeal to the American-academic-in-Paris of Camus, brave opponent of “Sartre & Cie” (60), see Neal Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France: Albert Camus, Max Jacob, Simone Weil* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996). For a treatment of David Rousset that adopts a similar heroicizing approach, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Mémoire du mal, tentation du bien. Enquête sur le siècle* (Paris: Laffont, 2000), 161-172.

²¹ Camus, “Réponse à Domenach,” *Témoins* 9 (Summer 1955), reproduced in *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1753: “Car je suis né dans une famille, la gauche, où je mourrai, mais dont il m’est difficile de ne pas voir la déchéance.”

²² *Past Imperfect*, 150. Elsewhere Judt has called Camus, along with Raymond Aron and Léon Blum, one of “three Frenchmen who lived and wrote against the grain of these three ages of irresponsibility.” (The “three ages” in question overlap from 1918 to the mid-1970s.) *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20.

state terror in the gulag, compared to Sartre's "silence" and "refusal."²³ François Furet, too, uses the imagery of an intellectual "desert" to situate Camus as a lone voice of reason.²⁴ More recently, literary scholar David Carroll has argued that Camus's opposition to Algerian nationalists' use of terrorism against civilians during the Algerian War provided a much-needed counterweight to "what he considered the extremely dangerous praise of violence by intellectuals on the Left."²⁵ Because of this, Carroll tacitly declares himself a partisan of Camus in "the debate over who was more right about Algeria, Camus or Sartre."²⁶

While Camus certainly possessed admirable qualities, there are at least three scholarly problems with regarding those intellectuals who rejected violence as heroic figures, "ahead of their time" and thus more like "us," today. The first is that this genre of congratulatory work downplays any problematic or troubling features of its "exceptional" subjects. As Moyn points out, this opens the door to historically contingent and potentially questionable political philosophy being "partially and uncritically revived" outside of its full context.²⁷ Secondly, accounting for a past

²³ Dori Laub and Shoshana Feldman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 186.

²⁴ Furet, *Le Passé d'une illusion*, 448.

²⁵ David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁷ *Origins of the Other*, 220. David Carroll's treatment of Camus in *Albert Camus the Algerian* is a case in point here. Carroll suggests that Camus's writings on the Algerian War have important lessons for "us" today: they "dramatically show... why justice demands the recognition of limits and a respect for human lives that must come *before* the pursuit of any cause. Even *before* the cause of freedom, even *before* justice itself" (185, emphasis in original). Arguing that Camus convincingly demonstrates the correctness of this politico-philosophical stance, Carroll attempts to justify the writer's controversial opposition to Algerian independence. He does so by criticizing Sartre's support for the Algerian nationalists' use of terrorism and suggesting that the *only* alternative anyone offered at the time was Camus's condemnation of Algerian nationalism itself. This dualistic vision ("who was more right about Algeria, Camus or Sartre") is false: many French proponents of Algerian independence also loudly criticized Algerian nationalist terrorism. Sartre's extreme position was hardly the monolithic position of "the Left." But maintaining the fiction that Camus was "exceptional" in his rejection of terrorism makes his stance appear much more sympathetic and permits Carroll to sidestep or excuse some of the more troubling implications of Camus's politics.

phenomenon that will not easily “fit” into the prevailing narrative by insisting that it was an anachronism, ahead of its time, is not a historical explanation. Certainly Camus was an exceptional individual, but simply celebrating his exceptionality, his remarkable moral perspicacity, leaves unanswered how his “untimely” ideas arose. Likewise, no amount of admiration helps explain why Rousset, Merleau-Ponty, Domenach, and Morin all changed their minds about revolutionary violence in the 1940s and the 1950s. Finally, the language of exceptionality holds us back from revisiting the question of whether “commitment to rapid and thorough-going social and political change through violent takeover of state power,” really was the basis of “intellectual consensus” on the Left until the 1970s. Designating some writers as heroic, anachronistic exceptions relieves historians of the burden of incorporating them into our overall understanding of the period.

This dissertation is an attempt to rethink and retell the postwar history of France’s intellectual non-communist Left in a way that reintegrates those figures who decided between 1944 and 1962 that violence was not a legitimate means of effecting social or political change. Rather than treating writers like Camus, Rousset, and Domenach as independent beacons of ethical thought, my goal is to put them back in the picture as leading participants in an ongoing French debate about the problem of political violence from the onset of the Fourth Republic to the end of the Algerian War. Not only will this provide a more complete and grounded portrait of the French intellectual Left after World War II, but it will also allow us to reconsider the work of those within the group who continued to endorse violence as a viable political tactic, since that position was constantly being shaped in relation to the arguments of its detractors. The stories simply cannot be told apart from one another, nor from the context of protracted violence that affected France and its colonies during this period.

Although many scholars have raised conceptual, chronological, and normative objections to the narrative traced by Judt and Khilnani, this project offers a fresh interpretation of that history by dispelling the notion of a prolonged consensus among the Left about the legitimacy of revolutionary violence.²⁸ Furthermore, it shows that the rupture on this issue began not after the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary or France's own May 1968 uprising, but in the late 1940s.

My approach to this subject is based on four methodological tenets, which together reflect my view of how to meet the challenge of writing intellectual history without losing sight of the complex array of circumstances that motivate and condition intellectual expression. First, I heavily emphasize French intellectuals' relationship to the lived violence of the postwar world – in the hexagon, in the colonies, and abroad – and explore the ways in which this very real but often forgotten bloodshed affected their understandings of the legitimacy of enacting political change by violent means. When the hospital-bound Jean Daniel designated violence a “problem” in 1961, he did not mean only that it constituted a stimulating intellectual “*problématique*,” but also

²⁸ For notable conceptual and normative criticisms, see Martin Jay's chapter “Lafayette's Children: The American Reception of French Liberalism,” in *Refractions of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 149-162; Stanley Hoffman, “Battling Clichés,” *French Historical Studies* 19.2 (Autumn 1995): 321-329; Christophe Prochasson, review of *Passé Imparfait* in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 49.1 (January-February 1994): 159-162. For direct historical challenges, see Michael Scott Christofferson's work which, although it is largely about the 1970s, offers an important and explicit revision of Judt's and Khilnani's view for the period beginning in 1956: *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); “French Intellectuals and the Hungarian Repression of 1956: The Politics of a Protest Reconsidered,” in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. Julian Bourg (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 253-276. Key objections to more limited elements of the periodization presented in *Past Imperfect* include James Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: French Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2-3 and Peter Deli, “‘Esprit’ and the Soviet Invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia,” *Contemporary European History* 9.1 (March 2000): 39-58. Another kind of criticism comes from scholars who believe that Judt mischaracterizes Sartre: a significant example is Ian Birchall, *Sartre Against Stalinism* (New York: Berghahn, 2004). The publication of *Un Passé imparfait* also provoked a storm of objections from the French intellectuals who were its subjects. For example, see Jean-Marie Domenach, “Un inquisiteur mal informé,” *Commentaire* 16.2 (Summer 1993): 404-408.

that it was a social reality. Violent practices played a central role in shaping the postwar French polity, a fact too often obscured by histories of the so-called “Trente Années Glorieuses” from 1945 to 1975. As Judt himself shows in his more recent work, the end of World War II did not usher Western Europe smoothly into a period of prosperous harmony at home and abroad.²⁹ In France, the mid-1940s were marked by persistent acts of extralegal violence aimed at punishing those who had collaborated with the German occupiers: in addition to roughly 800 capital sentences carried out by the state, some 9,000 extralegal summary executions, thousands of bomb attacks on the homes and properties of “collaborators,” and the punitive head-shaving of about 20,000 women all took place. Then, just as this surge of retributive political violence was winding down, in 1947 and 1948 a series of massive, Communist-led strike waves shook the country. As the government mobilized tens of thousands of troops to battle the desperate and angry strikers, many French people believed they were witnessing the beginning of a civil war. Meanwhile, fears of an impending apocalyptic confrontation between global communism and capitalism, in which France would become a corpse-strewn combat zone, were on the rise. In the early fifties, French farmers, anticipating World War III, declined to invest in new projects. “Plant an apricot orchard so the Russians and Americans can use it as a battlefield?” asked one. “Thanks. Not so dumb.”³⁰

Even as the country slowly, unevenly recovered from the ravages of war and the privations of the immediate postwar years, political violence remained part of France’s day-to-day reality in the 1950s and early 1960s. The French army became engaged in protracted conflicts in colonial Indochina and Algeria, as well as shorter but brutal conflicts or “repressions” elsewhere. Millions of young metropolitan

²⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 13-99.

³⁰ Laurence Wylie, *Village in the Vaucluse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 33.

Frenchmen served in these colonial wars as conscripts, and thousands died. In Algeria, the French military engaged in systematic acts of torture and other war crimes, fighting enemies who themselves used blind terrorism against civilians and engaged in wholesale massacres. The bloodshed also spilled back into metropolitan France: by 1958 Algerian nationalist forces were setting off bombs in Marseille, Toulouse, and Paris and by 1959 the torture regime had become trans-Mediterranean. In fact, just weeks before Jean Daniel's query about whether there was any other problem besides that of violence, the Paris police engaged in a notorious massacre of French-Algerian protesters, unceremoniously dumping dozens of bodies into the Seine in October 1961. As the war went on, overt violence played an increasingly central role in national-level French political life: the Fourth Republic that had been inaugurated in 1946 collapsed in 1958 in the wake of a military coup in Algiers, and when Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic began to move toward accepting Algerian independence, military leaders plotted further armed insurrections. Meanwhile hard-line supporters of *Algérie française* repeatedly attempted to assassinate de Gaulle, while also bombing the homes and offices of intellectuals who supported Algerian independence.

In the midst of all this tumult, there was not one single French intellectual "discourse" about political violence, focused solely on revolution, but rather a series of context-specific debates, shaped by ongoing violent events of many kinds. French left-leaning intellectuals continued to invoke the legacy of the Resistance as they encountered new violent practices, but this legacy proved to be remarkably pliable: intellectuals refashioned it to offer up many different "lessons" and "meanings" over time, as they confronted fresh problems. Should the French state execute collaborators? Should private individuals do so? Was it acceptable for the French Communist Party to order working-class strikers to physically attack the troops sent in

to break their strike? What should French citizens do if the Korean War sparked a Cold War conflagration in Europe? Did morality dictate that Algerian nationalists abstain from terrorist bombings even if such acts contributed to their struggle for independence? As Michael Scott Christofferson has pointed out in a compelling critique of Judt and Khilnani, political philosophy is not a set of “ready-made solutions” but evolves through “historically determined efforts to confront particular problems” such as these.³¹ Once we see that intellectuals in the postwar period were engaged in an impassioned set of conversations about violent events occurring in the present, it becomes possible to explore the factors that impelled individuals like Camus, Merleau-Ponty, and Domenach to change their minds about political violence over time. The dissertation thus restores – through archival research where possible – the political violence that surrounded postwar French intellectuals and the rest of the French public.

This brings us to my second methodological point: although intellectuals frequently responded between 1944 and 1962 to violence in far-off locales, I insist that nevertheless French circumstances and debates were consistently of paramount importance to them. Their attitudes about violence were not, in other words, simply a function of their position on the USSR. Indeed, French political culture – in particular distinctive national understandings of concepts like “communism,” “anti-communism,” “revolution,” and “terror” – provided the lens through which they viewed the Cold War superpowers. Nor did their opinions on violence necessarily change in rhythm with events in the Soviet bloc. Camus, for example, renounced political violence in 1946 in the course of the internal French debate over the *épuration*. Protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur elaborated a theory of non-violent

³¹ Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, 4.

praxis in despair over the escalating murderous tactics of the Algerian War. Even Merleau-Ponty's "turn" was linked to his conviction, in a France gripped by "war psychosis,"³² that the Korea War was the opening volley in a worldwide battle that would once again devastate his own country. Parallel points can be made regarding those who supported revolutionary violence: for example, Sartre's 1952 *rapprochement* with the USSR was a response not to changing Soviet policy but to French state repression of the Parti Communiste Français. This project thus consistently stresses French material and symbolic contexts, and highlights the ways in which intellectuals unavoidably viewed even global events through the filter of specifically French concerns.

The third element of my methodology is directly related to this notion of a national political arena. My analysis approaches intellectuals as political actors engaged in what they understood as a broader "public sphere," and considers their works first of all as argumentative contributions to real or imagined political dialogues.³³ Tactical maneuverings internal to intellectual "fields" (attempts to achieve dominance over other writers, for example) certainly played a role in structuring intellectual production in this period, but individuals' texts concerning violence cannot

³² Maurice Rolland (préfet for Nièvre), "Rapport Mensuel du mois de Juillet 1950," 29 July 1950. F/1cIII/1303, Archives Nationales, Paris, France : "les événements de Corée donnent lieu à des commentaires pessimistes. Une psychose de guerre commence à poindre..."

³³ I agree with Harold Mah that Jürgen Habermas's notion of a public sphere, even as modified by historians to emphasize multiple publics, social contestation, and non-rational forms of discourse, should be considered an element of the "political imaginary," not a quasi-spatial "arena." Nevertheless, this notion of a larger discursive community in which political argumentation took place was a powerful guiding fiction for the figures I discuss here. Therefore even at those moments when they were writing primarily to and for one another, it is productive to read their texts as interventions in a "public sphere" where they presented themselves in multiple ways: as writers, as members of "the Left," as French citizens, and as universal moral subjects. See Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *The Journal of Modern History* 72.1 (March 2000), 168. For key critiques of Habermas by historians that challenge the bourgeois and rational nature of the public sphere, see Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America" and Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 259-288 and 289-339.

be reduced to these terms. For example, up to a point I can agree with sociologist Anna Boschetti that by advocating radical, illegal violence during the last years of Algerian War, Sartre was strategically trying to reestablish avant-garde credentials that were “in the process of escaping him.”³⁴ But Sartre’s pro-violence texts also – and more significantly for our purposes – constituted an actual attempt on his part to intervene effectively in French politics. It is only by interpreting Sartre as a participant in national political life and thereby taking into account a discursive arena much larger than the intellectual community that we can make sense of such an effort. The pages of this dissertation are thus populated not only by intellectuals but by government ministers and prefects, organizations of former resisters and clubs of concentration camp survivors, communist labor organizers and neo-Pétainist politicians, soldiers returned from Algeria and bombers defending *Algérie française*. My goal is not naively to situate all these actors as so many undifferentiated “voices” in an idealized public sphere of rational debate, nor to argue that there was a single national “conversation” about political violence in postwar France, but to highlight specific sites of dialogue or debate, as well as areas of overlap, competition, or agreement among the arguments made by members of different groups, with attention to the power differentials between various speakers.

Seeing intellectuals as participants in what they conceived to be a broader public debate not only draws non-intellectuals into the intellectual historian’s purview. It also makes it easier to see the significant role that “minor” or forgotten writers, journalists, academics, and political theorists played alongside the “stars” in the postwar intellectual firmament such as Sartre. My analysis does not seek to dispute Sartre’s influence over other intellectuals in this period – an influence that Boschetti

³⁴ Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et ‘Les Temps modernes’: une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 305.

has called a “*hégémonie sartrienne*”—nor his reputation amongst the contemporary French public as France’s foremost philosopher.³⁵ Nevertheless, a methodological perspective that highlights political argument shows clearly that many intellectuals disagreed vehemently with Sartre’s views about violence and the values the Left ought to promote. These figures were less famous than Sartre, and their writing was often far less dazzling, but their arguments disputing his positions were in many instances well-known and widely disseminated. Sartre himself certainly did not believe they were of negligible importance: for instance he did not ignore David Rousset’s 1949 appeal for opposition to the Soviet gulag but rebutted it in *Les Temps modernes* on two occasions and referred to it repeatedly in his writings over the next decade.³⁶ His 1961 “Preface” to *The Wretched of the Earth*, meanwhile, was in part a furious answer to “the non-violents,” chief among them Jean-Marie Domenach.³⁷ This was not an “abstract” debate about philosophy, moreover, but one about what was to be *done* by the anti-war movement. By reading all of these authors as engaged in a political dialogue with one another, we not only illuminate the work of lesser-known intellectuals but gain significant new perspective on famous texts like the “Preface.”

Finally, while the dissertation approaches intellectual texts as arguments in a dialogue, it resists the impulse to reduce these rich works to position statements or signposts of ideological allegiance. Acknowledging the presence of postwar French intellectuals who were less interested in espousing revolution than in problematizing

³⁵ Ibid., 298.

³⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty and J.-P. Sartre, “Les jours de notre vie,” *Les Temps modernes* 51 (January 1950): 1153-1168 ; T.M. [Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty], “L’Adversaire est complice,” *Les Temps modernes* 57 (July 1950): 1-11; Sartre, “Réponse à Albert Camus,” *Situations*, vol. 4 (Paris, Gallimard, 1964), 105, originally published in *Les Temps modernes* 82 (August 1952): 334-353; Jean-Paul Sartre, “Merleau-Ponty,” *Situations*, vol. 4, 230, originally published as “Merleau-Ponty vivant” in *Les Temps modernes* 184-185 (October 1961): 304-76.

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface” to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), lviii.

violence is an important task. But it is not, in itself, sufficient. We must also closely analyze the rhetoric that they used to make their case, and that their opponents used to respond, because these discourses opened up and promoted new (or reworked) terms for thinking and talking about violence. For instance, ultimately the long-term significance of someone like David Rousset lies not simply in the fact that he opposed the gulag – many did – but in the striking language he used to do so: one of “bearing witness” to the suffering of victims.³⁸ Other left-leaning intellectuals, too, expressed their newfound refusal to legitimize political violence in the 1940s and 1950s by insisting that there was an ethical imperative to “*témoigner*” (“bear witness” or “testify”) against the bodily suffering that violence produced. The project of “bearing witness” against violence became so prevalent by the mid-fifties that during the Algerian War, books, articles, and speeches “testifying” to the brutal violence of torture – texts that self-consciously operated within the genre of “*témoignage*” – became the primary mode of intellectual protest against the actions of the French state and military. A methodology focused on close reading of such texts with attention to rhetoric permits us to demonstrate the growth of this countervailing discourse about the task of the Left: not instigating violent revolution but bearing witness to the effects of violence. By emphasizing discourse and not only ideology, we can see that language commonly associated with the so-called 1970s “ethical turn” and with what historian of Holocaust memory Annette Wieviorka has labeled the contemporary “era of the witness” was already well-established within the French Left by the mid-1950s.³⁹

³⁸ This approach, focused on the language of texts as opposed to intellectual biography, means that I do not concern myself with whether the individuals under consideration changed their positions on violence at a later date – for example, around May 1968. Their discursive interventions between 1944 and 1962 remain relevant whether or not they were the “last word.”

³⁹ In *L'Ère du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998), Wieviorka influentially argued that the “era of the witness” began – in France and elsewhere in the West – in the 1960s, as “the witness” emerged as a privileged

My goal, however, is not to make a case that “the ethical turn” or the movement “from revolution to ethics” began earlier than historians have thus far acknowledged. It is to call these very concepts into question as overly schematizing and reductive, for two reasons. First, they rely on the notion of an early “consensus” to be subsequently overturned, a historical construction that I show cannot stand up to scrutiny. Second, I suggest that both proponents *and* detractors of revolutionary violence in the postwar period understood themselves to be motivated at least in part by “ethics” – that is, broadly speaking, by the desire to interact with others in the world in morally correct ways, approaching them as full human subjects deserving of respect. However, these intellectuals disagreed sharply about what constituted ethical behavior in given situations, and which people ought to be the subject of our ethical concern. In particular, they did not concur about the proper relationship between ethics and politics. I show that “ethics” was not simply the property of some intellectuals as opposed to others, but, rather, that appeals to “ethical imperatives” that decisively trumped political ones – in particular, appeals that stressed the bodily suffering of victims – constituted a prominent feature of the discourses of those intellectuals who came to renounce or delegitimize violence.

Through this approach, an alternative picture of postwar intellectual engagement with the problem of violence emerges. The immediate aftermath of the Occupation was indeed marked by widespread agreement among not only Left intellectuals but also

figure and “bearing witness” to victimization became the normatively privileged mode of addressing the genocide of the Jews (81). Wieviorka explains the timing of this “advent of the witness” by reference to the 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel as well as “banally enough, the passage of time, which in a sense metabolizes lived experience and permits it to be transformed into a literary object” (86). This dissertation suggests that the projects of “bearing witness” to the Soviet gulag and especially to torture in Algeria, not only the passage of time, prepared the ground in France for the “advent of the witness” to the Holocaust. Cf. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

much of the French populace that acts of lethal violence intended to combat injustice and create a more righteous society could be morally legitimate even when, as in the case of the armed Resistance, they were illegal. But in the face of new postwar forms of political violence, this agreement could not be sustained. As the exigencies of the liberation faded, Cold War fears set in, and new forms of “terror” – labor militancy, the Soviet gulag, bombing campaigns by the fighters opposing France in the Algerian War – came to the fore of political debate, the Resistance-based argument for the use of violence in politics became a site of increasing unease and contestation. Political violence remained an unremitting *problem* for the postwar intellectual Left, but not a unanimous *solution*: over the course of the postwar period, the position that violence could be a legitimate means of achieving political change was maintained by some intellectuals on the Left but was substantively challenged by others. These latter figures used what they self-consciously understood as “ethical” arguments to reject even those acts of violence committed for the sake of highly desirable ends. Their new discourses also drew on the memory of World War II, but instead of emphasizing the heroism of the Resistance they tended to foreground the tortured suffering of victims. Meaningful action to change the world, they declared, need not involve violence: it could, rather, be a matter of “bearing witness” to the assaults on human bodily integrity and dignity that violence wrought.

The dissertation relates this history over three sections. The first concerns a foundational period from 1944 to 1948, when the French reestablished republican governance, concentrated authority in the hands of the state, and attempted to put the haunting Vichy past to rest. This period was marked by persistent domestic political violence of various kinds. Chapter One, “Summary Judgments: Retributive Violence in the Reconstruction of Postwar France, 1944-1946,” considers the violence involved

in the *épuration*. Through analyzing the phenomenon of extralegal summary executions, it attempts to reconstruct French norms about violence in this period, shared assumptions about who could legitimately wield force and for what reasons. It also highlights the attempts of officials in France's Provisional Government to articulate why – despite the glorious example of the Resistance and the ignominious one of Vichy – the state once again ought to exercise a monopoly on legitimate violence. The chapter demonstrates that writers were participants in this broader national set of conversations, and that their nearly uniform support for the physical elimination of collaborators was not born of a fascination with violence unique to intellectuals. It was, rather, shared with wide swathes of the French populace, in a society deeply marked by the wartime experience. The chapter also draws out the experience of Albert Camus, a fierce defender of the *épuration* in 1944 who, in the light of bitter experience, by 1946 had disavowed the idea that any form of politically motivated violence could be considered legitimate.

Chapter Two, “‘Yesterday’s Duty Would Be a Crime Today’: Cold War, Domestic Crisis, and the French Strike Waves of 1947-1948,” likewise offers broader political and social context for intellectual debates. It considers the Communist-directed strikes that paralyzed French industry in 1947 and 1948 in a period of economic hardship and rising Cold War anxieties. Confrontations between strikers and the forces of order resulted in intense physical violence, including rioting, deadly industrial sabotage, bombings of strikebreakers’ homes, and strikers’ deaths at the hands of police and military. I explore ferocious battles waged over the strikes among government ministers, pro- and anti-strike unions, political parties, and non-union workers – and attempts by *both* sides to justify their own use of force by associating it with the Resistance – in order to demonstrate that widespread uncertainty about the

legitimacy of the state's putative monopoly on violence persisted into the lean, crisis-ridden late forties. Few intellectuals appear in this chapter, in part because non-communists who sympathized with the strikers but distrusted the Communist leadership tended to maintain a prudent silence as the clashes played out. Instead, I focus on Socialist ex-resisters in France's government, particularly Minister of the Interior Jules Moch. Ultimately, however, this history provides indispensable context for intellectual production. First, when we come in later chapters to endorsements of Soviet violence such as Merleau-Ponty's 1947 *Humanisme et terreur*, it is helpful to understand that such works were produced at a moment in which France's Socialist and Christian Democrat government was confronting working-class strikers with tens of thousands of troops. Little wonder that Merleau-Ponty would insist in this moment that all regimes, not merely the USSR, were violent! Second, and more broadly, the chapter provides evidence that Socialist Resistance veterans serving in the government began in this period to construct new narratives about what the "lessons" of the Resistance were, narratives strongly de-emphasizing illegal violence. They did so for reasons of state, of course; nevertheless their discourses promoted new ways of reading the Resistance and influenced intellectuals' subsequent debates.

The next section of the dissertation focuses on intellectual debate about political violence in the era of the Cold War. Chapter Three, "Politics as Violence: The 'Black Legend' of the *Épuration* and the Reframing of the French Resistance, 1947-1952," explores that ways in which intellectuals revisited the *épuration*, now largely over, as French political life re-oriented along a communist/anti-communist fault line. In this period a resurgent Right, emboldened by Socialists and centrists' receptiveness to anti-communism, began to loudly insist that the *épuration* had not been a project of rendering justice against the handful of real collaborators but rather a

free-for-all bloodbath in which tens or hundreds of thousands of people had been slaughtered for the “crime” of opposing communism. Some intellectual resisters, such as Jean Paulhan, joined this attack. Most did not. But in the changed political climate of the period, non-communist intellectuals such as Claude Bourdet, Rémy Roure, and Roger Stéphane responded to the perceived affront to the honor of the Resistance not by frankly defending the desirability of the extralegal purge but, instead, by disavowing the involvement of the “true” Resistance in post-Liberation violence, retrospectively blaming all acts of “terrorism” on communist criminals alone. I demonstrate that as they disowned the violence of the *épuration*, non-communist intellectuals increasingly redefined the Resistance itself in non-violent terms. Catholic intellectuals associated with *Esprit*, in particular, elaborated new discourses according to which the “real” Resistance had been an ethical project of bearing witness to the violence of Nazism, a project whose paradigmatic hero was not the virile *maquis* fighter but the suffering, unmanned concentration camp inmate.

Chapter Four, “The David Rousset Affair: The Soviet Gulag and the Nazi Camp Survivor as Witness to Suffering, 1949-1953,” analyzes David Rousset’s quest, beginning in late 1949, to build an organization of Nazi camp survivors to “bear witness” to the existence of the gulag. Rousset voiced his opposition to Soviet state terror exclusively by reference to the extreme bodily suffering of victims in the camps; an ethical imperative to testify to the fact of such suffering trumped any “political” reasons that could be offered for supporting Soviet violence, he argued. Rousset’s visceral language of solidarity in the face of limit-case human agony – he eschewed the more conventional liberal vocabulary of violated individual rights – offered an alternative vision of the moral mission of the Left to compete with that of the proponents of revolution.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty joined Sartre in condemning Rousset in 1950, arguing that Rousset's putative commitment to an ethical code that existed "beyond" politics barely screened his deeply political, and politically objectionable, goal of fomenting anti-communism. But less than a year later, Merleau-Ponty himself began to lose faith not only in the USSR but in the very idea of revolution. He broke off his friendship with Sartre, ended his association with *Les Temps modernes*, and in 1955 published *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, an extended renunciation and critique of his earlier politics in which he endorsed non-violent, dialogic norms for French political life. I offer an interpretation of his intellectual trajectory in relation to that of Camus in Chapter Five, "Cold War Adventures in Humanism and Terror: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, and the Question of Revolutionary Violence, 1946-1955." The two men disliked one another, but this chapter shows that there were significant similarities in their evolving critiques of Marxist revolution and in their attempts to rethink how one could claim to oppose capitalist society's *status quo* from "the Left" while at the same time insisting that using violence to alter it was ethically impermissible. Sartre once defined himself politically as "to the right of Merleau, to the left of Camus;" by 1955, they had converged, against Sartre, in their attempts to rethink the Left's relationship to violence.⁴⁰

The third and final section of the dissertation deals with French intellectuals and the multiform violence of the Algerian War. It demonstrates the complex, variable fashion in which the war shaped leftist French intellectuals' positions on the legitimacy of revolutionary violence. Chapter Six, "Proof in Hand: Bearing Witness to Torture and Terror in the Algerian War, 1954-1958," makes the case that in the face of government lies, obfuscation, and censorship, by 1957 "*témoignage*" to the fact of

⁴⁰ Sartre, "Merleau-Ponty," 216: "Il est vrai: j'étais à la droite de Merleau, à la gauche de Camus..."

torture and the suffering of its victims became the dominant strategy of the anti-war movement (as opposed to, for example, revolutionary arguments against imperialism). Even intellectuals such as Jean-Marie Domenach who initially hoped to ignore “excesses” like torture and agitate against the war in strictly anti-colonialist terms were eventually convinced that there existed a moral imperative to testify to the atrocities taking place in France’s name. Paradoxically, however, in the midst of this explosion of “*témoignage*” it became clear that “bearing witness” to French violence for the suffering it caused raised ethical quandaries of its own. In the context of a war marked by atrocities on both sides, was there not a moral imperative to testify to the suffering of *all* victims? How could one support the Algerian nationalists’ use of “revolutionary” terrorism, which after all harmed many people, if “suffering” was the criterion that one used to condemn the violence of the French? The chapter demonstrates that Sartre and Camus offered two categorically opposed responses to this question, while figures such as Domenach struggled to articulate a middle-way response that took into account both the intentions and the consequences of violent acts.

Lastly, Chapter Seven, “The War Comes Home: Jean-Paul Sartre and the French Intellectual Left, 1958-1962” deals with the astoundingly violent last four years of the Algerian War. Unlike the preceding six chapters, which decenter Sartre by focusing predominantly on other figures, this one offers an extended contextualization of his spectacular endorsement of violence in the “Preface” to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. The chapter demonstrates that after de Gaulle’s return to power in 1958, the small intellectual anti-war movement experienced a re-radicalizing crisis of confidence in the power of testimony (“useless speeches”) to

shake the rest of France into attentiveness to the outrages of the war.⁴¹ Believing that democratic norms were in crisis, activists spent less time discussing the ethical implications of the Algerian nationalists' use of terrorism and more time wondering whether they, themselves, could legitimately employ violent means to help end the war. Sartre was among those who argued in favor of such violence, particularly after the indictment of his old disciple Francis Jeanson for providing aid to the Algerian nationalists. The chapter seeks to situate Sartre's argument in the exceedingly violent context of the late stages of the Algerian War. However, it also seeks to position it in relation to the work of other intellectuals, such as Domenach, who responded to the same situation differently. Instead of abandoning "témoignage" for "pure action," these men and women steadfastly rejected violence and sought to make the project of bearing witness more robust, expanding it to encompass a wide variety of non-violent forms of protest, in what they claimed was "solidarity" with Algerian victims.⁴² These are "the non-violents" against whom Sartre rages in the "Preface." The chapter suggests that being attentive to their efforts not only helps us to read Sartre's text but also to understand better the intellectual history of the postwar period as a whole.

⁴¹ K.S. Karol [Karol Kewes], "Un entretien avec J.-P. Sartre. Jeunesse et guerre d'Algérie," *Vérité-Liberté* 3 (July-August 1960): "Mais la gauche, qui a embêté pendant quinze ans la nation par de vaines paroles a tellement dévalorisé leur portée que le régime n'a plus peur des mots. Au point où nous sommes, on ne peut plus influencer l'opinion qu'en la franchissant."

⁴² Domenach, "Pourquoi la non-violence."

CHAPTER ONE – Summary Judgments: Retributive Violence in the Reconstruction of Postwar France, 1944-1946

In the exultant weeks following the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Albert Camus wrote a series of editorials in *Combat*, a once clandestine Resistance paper now published openly under its triumphant banner “From the Resistance to the Revolution.”¹ Drunk on the joys of liberation, Camus believed that he was witnessing a radical reordering of French society. The Resistance would serve as the model for the future, he claimed, for it had taught men that there were ideals worth privileging above the abstract formalities of the law: “For four years, we judged not in the name of the written law but in the name of the law of our hearts. Law books were of use to no one but the executioner. And yet even those who placed themselves outside the law knew full well that they remained within the truth.”² This was so even when the Resistance had required the use violence to achieve its aims, Camus insisted, for some ends demanded such means; as he put it, certain acts of violence could be committed with “pure hands.”³ Would the revolutionary changes he desired for the postwar period demand violence as well? Camus remained open to the possibility. “Revolution is not inevitably the guillotine and the machine guns,” he wrote. “Or, rather, it is the

¹ On *Combat*'s transition from a clandestine Resistance organ to an openly-published daily on 21 August 1944, and on the decision to use the slogan “De la Résistance à la Révolution” see Yves-Marc Ajchenbaum, *A la vie, à la mort: l'histoire du journal Combat, 1941-1974* (Paris: Monde éditions, 1994) and Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, “Un journal dans l'histoire” in Albert Camus, *Camus à Combat: éditoriaux et articles d'Albert Camus, 1944-1947*, ed. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 41-45.

² Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 27 September 1944, reproduced in Albert Camus, *Camus à Combat*, 211: “Pendant quatre ans, ce n'est pas au nom de la loi écrite que nous avons jugé, c'est au nom de la loi des coeurs. Quant aux textes de lois, ils ne servaient qu'au bourreau. Et pourtant, ceux-là mêmes qui s'étaient mis hors de la légalité savaient bien qu'ils étaient restés dans la vérité.” In subsequent footnotes, I give the page number in *Camus à Combat* in brackets. I have consulted relevant published translations, but all translations in this chapter are my own.

³ Camus, “Le Sang de la liberté,” *Combat*, 24 August 1944 [149]: “mains pures.”

machine guns when they are necessary.”⁴ And one sort of violence, the execution of certain wartime collaborators, would unquestionably be necessary. “France,” Camus claimed, “bears within herself, like a foreign body, a minority of men who caused her recent unhappiness and who will continue to do so. They are the men of treason and injustice. It is therefore their very existence that raises the problem of justice, since they form a living part of this country, and the question is one of destroying them.”⁵

Such language on the part of Camus, better known for his later writings that contested the legitimacy of violence as a political means, points to the exceptional nature of the immediate postwar moment in France. The months following the liberation were extraordinary in many ways: they produced an atmosphere of ideological effervescence, outsized hopes and fears, institutional flux, and extreme socio-political conditions that no French person experienced as “normal,” ranging from the continuation of the war against Germany to profound economic hardship to extra-constitutional government to disrupted communication networks and the wild proliferation of rumor. In addition, the traumas of the recent past inescapably shaped French people’s attitudes about retribution. Various forms of everyday violence had marked civilian life under the Occupation, and these had intensified markedly in the months just previous to the Liberation. In some regions the conflict between the Resistance and Vichy’s hated paramilitary policing force, the Milice, had approached all-out civil war. German and Milice atrocities and reprisal killings had multiplied as Vichy lost control of the country. The populace, although unequivocally in favor of an Allied victory by the end of the war, nevertheless also had lived in terror of Allied

⁴Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 19 September 1944 [199]: “La révolution, ce n’est pas forcément la guillotine et les mitrailleuses, ou plutôt, ce sont les mitrailleuses quand il le faut.”

⁵Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 25 October 1944 [289]: “La France porte en elle, comme un corps étranger, une minorité d’hommes qui ont fait hier son malheur et qui continueront de le faire. Ce sont les hommes de la trahison et de l’injustice. C’est leur existence même qui pose donc le problème de la justice puisqu’ils forment une part vivante de ce pays et que la question est de les détruire.”

bombings: from May 26 to 27 alone, a series of raids on large cities killed nearly 6,000. As many historians have pointed out, it was hardly remarkable in the aftermath of such brutality that a certain amount of both state-directed and extralegal retributive violence took place in the postwar period – or that men like Camus applauded it. Indeed, it would have been far more surprising had this *not* occurred.

Historians thus tend to read the immediate postwar period as a transitional one in French history, and the retributive violence that occurred during it as a manifestation of the liminal suspension of communal norms.⁶ This has produced enormously insightful work – but it is only part of the story. For if the postwar moment was liminal, it was also, for future debates in the French public sphere about violence, foundational. This is true in two senses. First, the Provisional Government’s failure in the context of the postwar purges (*épuration*) to reestablish an ironclad monopoly on violence, and to impose its view that the legality of a violent act ought serve as the sole criterion for its legitimacy, would cast very long shadows through the subsequent history of France’s Fourth Republic, and even beyond. This is not to say that the state was threatened with the possibility of large-scale revolt, and certainly not to suggest that a communist revolution which would have transformed France into a “people’s democracy” was imminent (as proponents of “order” at the time worried it was). It is merely to point out that it was far from universally or automatically

⁶ Three excellent recent works that make especially effective use of the concepts of transition and liminality – understood in a Turnerian sense – are Megan Koreman, *The Expectation of Justice: France, 1944-1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*, transl. John Flower (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002); and a superb regional study, Luc Capdevila, *Les Bretons au lendemain de l’Occupation: imaginaires et comportement d’une sortie de guerre, 1944-1945* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1999). For a conceptualization of liminality linked to the carnivalesque, see Alain Brossat, *Libération, fête folle* (Paris: Autrement, 1994) and *Les Tondues: Un Carnaval Moche* (Levallois-Perret: Manya, 1992). A recent collection of essays, which does not deal extensively with violence, does attempt to conceptualize the period as foundational: see Andrew Knapp, ed., *The Uncertain Foundation: France at the Liberation, 1944-1947* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), esp. Philippe Buton, “Occupation, Liberation, Purges: The Changing Landscape of French Memory.”

accepted in postwar France that the state should always and absolutely function as the only agent permitted to use violence for political means, or the only appropriate arbiter of justice.

A first section of this chapter therefore examines the phenomenon of extralegal retributive violence in the postwar period from the perspective of the state's protracted attempt to put a halt to it. I focus on summary executions and bombings that continued long after legal instruments for judging collaborators had been put into place, and show that for a variety of reasons, prominently including the complicated legacy of Vichy "legality" and Resistance "terrorism," material and personnel shortages, and the ways in which central state interests clashed with local "moral economies" and demands for justice, the Provisional Government had to struggle mightily to impose itself as the sole legitimate dispenser of retributive violence – and, despite the overwhelming popular support that de Gaulle commanded, it did not always succeed. Thus ultimately, I argue, despite a surface return to "normalcy," in latent ways the state's monopoly on violence remained tenuous when the constitutional Fourth Republic officially came into being in October, 1946.

The second sense in which the postwar purges were foundational to the history we relate in this dissertation applies to intellectuals specifically. Arguments produced in the course of intellectual debates about the purges from 1944 to 1946, linking retributive bodily violence against collaborators to the sacralized memory of a morally pure Resistance, to a sense of revolutionary, nation-renewing political purpose, and to a cleansing ideal of justice, provided the basic vocabulary with which France's left-leaning intellectuals discussed violence in politics for the next two decades. We cannot simply extrapolate from intellectuals' attitudes about the retributive violence involved in the purges to discover their overall positions on "violence" – and we certainly

cannot determine where a given individual would stand in debates fifteen years later over, say, terrorism in Algeria based on whether he had been a “hard guy” or an “indulgent” about the purges. But all attempts from the late forties to the end of the Algerian War in 1962 to articulate more limited positions on the permissibility of violence as a political tool would have to acknowledge and struggle against the arguments intellectuals had made to support violence from 1944 to 1946.

In a second segment of the chapter, therefore, I focus on debates about the *épuration* amongst intellectuals and journalists with Resistance credentials, looking most closely at the figure of Camus. I demonstrate how these actors elaborated a very powerful justification for violence in politics, modeled on a mythologized, militant reading of the Resistance, and show that in the exceptional institutional and ideological circumstances of the postwar moment there was very little discursive “space” available for intellectuals to reject this argument without thereby appearing to reject the legacy of Resistance *in toto* and offer apologetics for collaboration. Thus, although intellectuals’ anxieties about the justifiability of violence in politics often bubbled just beneath the surface, these tended to be expressed only in elliptical terms, such as an obsessive concern that the death penalty be administered “without hatred,” and an insistent drawing of dichotomies between the impure, unacceptable desire for “vengeance” and the high-minded demand for “justice.” Very little critique of political violence as such was produced in this period by those who could claim even the most tenuous Resistance credentials. The French intellectual Left would require more distance from the experience of Resistance, a sharpening of Cold War battle lines, and fresh debates about different forms of violence, in different contexts, to begin to articulate readings of the war years which emphasized not the political potential of violence but rather a “humanitarian” concern with the suffering bodies of victims, and

a commitment to bearing witness to such suffering. For now, such developments remained in the future.

In the decades after World War II, two influential narratives emerged concerning the place of extralegal violence in France's postwar purges. Charles de Gaulle provided the first in his memoirs: although there had indeed been "reprisals in which the Resistance risked being dishonored," de Gaulle wrote, any isolated acts of summary justice that occurred after the inception of state judiciary proceedings in September 1944 were "final convulsions," and "very exceptional."⁷ The other narrative, largely produced by Vichy apologists and anti-communists and sometimes called the "Black Legend," treated the Liberation as a veritable bloodbath of vengeance enacted by the Communist Party and its supporters upon broad swaths of the defenseless population.⁸

The last four decades of historiography have been kinder to de Gaulle's account than to the "Black Legend."⁹ Most importantly, quantitative studies have debunked the absurdly inflated claims regarding numbers executed that the legend's proponents had insisted upon for decades. The figure de Gaulle offered as the total number killed by extralegal actions – that is, without trial – is not far off of historians' current best estimate of about 8,000 to 9,000.¹⁰ Historians have also established that

⁷ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 624: "Peu à peu, cessent les représailles où la Résistance risquait d'être déshonorée. Il y aura encore quelques séquestrations, pillages ou assassinats, dont leurs auteurs subiront, d'ailleurs, la rigueur des lois. Mais ces derniers soubresauts seront très exceptionnels."

⁸ See Chapter Three on the emergence of the Black Legend and the acceptance of it by a large portion of the non-Communist Left.

⁹ Although work in this school does continue to be produced – for example, see Philippe Bourdrel's *L'Épuration sauvage, 1944-1945* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), whose final line reads, "Hormis les traîtres patentés qui méritaient tôt ou tard un juste châtement, des milliers de victimes innocentes ont été sacrifiées à une perversion du noble idéal de la liberté" (539).

¹⁰ De Gaulle's estimate was *also* larger than the currently accepted figures: 10,842 killed without trial, "dont 6675 pendant les combats des maquis avant la Libération, le reste après, au cours de représailles." But he appears to have included here executions after court-martial or military tribunal sentencing, which historians generally no longer do. For key considerations of numbers of summary executions, see Peter Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New

the bulk of these deaths took place either before, during, or *immediately* following local liberations.¹¹ Moreover, they have shown that a large proportion of what are labeled “summary executions” in the summer and autumn of 1944 would likely be better understood as Resistance military combat operations against armed, brutal opponents – “acts of war rather than examples of ‘people’s justice,’” as Julian Jackson puts it – or as court-martial proceedings which, although “irregular,” represented the best approximation of procedural legality that could reasonably be arrived at in regions cut off from all communication with Paris and operating under emergency wartime constraints.¹² Work since the mid-1990s has also strongly emphasized the escalation of German violence against French civilian populations in the last months of the occupation as an indispensable context for making sense of the “*épuration sauvage*” (“wild” or extralegal purges).¹³

York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 202-208; Henry Rousso “L’*épuration* en France: Une histoire inachevée,” *Vingtième Siècle* 33 (January-March 1992): 78-105. The crucial department-by-department quantitative studies on summary executions were undertaken over a period of decades, beginning in the 1950s, by the Comité d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale – see especially Marcel Baudot, “L’*épuration*: bilan chiffré,” *Bulletin de l’IHTP* 25 (September 1986): 37-55. These numbers are – and will remain – contested: Bourdrel, for instance, insists (unconvincingly) on a revision upwards toward 10,000-15,000 summary executions; Jean-Paul Cointet is only marginally more persuasive in *Expier Vichy: l’*épuration* en France, 1943-1958* (Paris: Perrin, 2008). François Rouquet provides a good summary of the stakes in the controversy in “L’*épuration*: histoire d’un chiffre, mémoire d’un nombre” in *Une Poignée de misérables: l’*épuration* de la société française après la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, ed. Marc Olivier Baruch (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 515-529.

¹¹ Historians now estimate that 20 to 30 percent of the 8,000-9,000 killings commonly labeled “summary executions” of collaborators in France took place even before D-Day, while another 50 to 60 percent occurred between D-Day and the date of local liberation.

¹² Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 579. As one provincial commissaire later remarked, in the early weeks of liberated France the central government would have been better labeled “the regional commissariat of the Île-de-France,” so limited was its ability to communicate with the provinces. Ingrand, *La Libération de l’Auvergne* (Paris: Hachette, 1974), 164.

¹³ This historiographical development owes much to Henry Rousso’s agenda-setting 1992 article “L’*épuration* en France: Une histoire inachevée” (“The Purge in France: An Unfinished History”). For examples, see Laborie, “Entre histoire et mémoire, un épisode de l’*Épuration* en Ariège: le tribunal du peuple de Pamiers (18-31 août 1944),” in *Les Français des années troubles, de la guerre d’Espagne à la Libération* (Paris: Seuil, 2003): 227-239; Tzvetan Todorov, *Une tragédie française: été 1944, scènes de guerre civile* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); H.R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village:*

Conceptually, however, historians have come to recognize that de Gaulle's account falls short too, and that it is, in a sense, a "legend" of its own. Recent work by historians show a much more complicated picture of the extralegal purge than the one he painted, suggesting that acts of violence undertaken by ex-Resisters or ordinary people in the name of the purge need to be read as politically and culturally meaningful events for participants, not as "convulsions" of instinctive, uncontrollable emotion.¹⁴ Work on the shaving of women's heads at the Liberation – a punishment meted out to about 20,000 women accused of "horizontal" and other forms of collaboration – has been particularly important in moving historians toward examining the symbolic meanings of the purge for its various participants, as scholars have recognized that such acts of gendered, sexually-marked violence cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by a model of "natural," self-explanatory, instinctive anger.¹⁵ Even more importantly for our purposes here, recent work has slowly begun to acknowledge, in contrast to de Gaulle's narrative, that the extralegal purge did not simply peter out when the legal purge began in the early fall of 1944. True, the acts of "summary justice" in the days immediately after local liberations, before legal

Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 61-65.

¹⁴ The shift can be seen even in the titles of monographs about the purges: thus, whereas in 1986 Herbert Lottmann attributed summary justice at the Liberation to "the people's anger," Megan Koreman's outstanding 2004 book on three different French communities at the Liberation carefully limns the powerful "expectation of justice" that could motivate ordinary people to approve of and even participate in acts of retribution. Herbert Lottman, *The People's Anger: Justice and Revenge in Post-Liberation France* (London: Hutchinson, 1986); Koreman, *The Expectation of Justice*. Koreman prefers doing away with the term "extralegality" all together; she substitutes a language of "local" purges. In *Les Bretons*, Capdevila makes a similar gesture, referring to "neighborhood" purges.

¹⁵ Virgili, *Shorn Women*; Brossat, *Les Tondues*; Corran Laurens, "La femme au turban: les femmes tondues" in *The Liberation: Image and Event*, eds. H.R. Kedward and Nancy Wood (Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1995), 117-128. See also Capdevila's thoughtful consideration of head-shaving and the "social imaginary" in *Les Bretons*, 138-164. However, the influence of this work on non-specialists' perception of the purge has been incomplete, since it is often simply bracketed as a separate matter: thus, for example, a recent general history of the period treats head-shaving as unrelated to other forms of retributive violence, since it was "more complicated and less rational." Thomas R. Christofferson, *France During World War II: From Defeat to Liberation* (New York: Fordham, 2006), 187.

instruments with which to punish collaborators were fully and unambiguously available, constituted the bulk of the roughly 1,600 post-Liberation killings that occurred. But legal purge institutions and extralegal forms of violence against accused collaborators, including summary executions, coexisted for months – even years – in many communities.

Consider some figures from well after most of French territory was liberated.¹⁶ From December 15, 1944 to January 15, 1945, for example, there were at least 36 summary executions in France, 19 of them committed through break-ins to prisons and internment camps where accused collaborators were being held. From January 15 to February 15, 1945, there were at least 46.¹⁷ From May 15 to June 15, 1945, with the war in Europe now over, the number had declined to 31 – which still amounted to a rate of one extralegal retributive killing per day.¹⁸ These attacks were especially concentrated in the Rhône-Alpes and Bourgogne regions in the east, the Limousin, Auvergne, and Centre, the departments bordering Spain, and parts of the North.¹⁹ But

¹⁶ These numbers are from the “Exécutions sommaires (meurtres à caractère politique)” section of the War Ministry’s compilations of regional reports from gendarmerie units. This means that they pertain only to liberated territory, fully under French control, and do not inadvertently mix in killings that were happening in those pockets of France where fighting continued with the Germans. There was of course some confusion in the collection of data, but this declined over the course of the months as communications improved. Since details of place, date, etc., were provided for each case included in these monthly tallies, inaccuracy was most likely in the direction of additional cases the gendarmerie was unaware of being left out, rather than the tallies being inflated with false cases.

¹⁷ Ministère de la Guerre, Direction de la Gendarmerie, Bureau Technique (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), “Synthèse pour la période du 15 décembre 1944 au 15 janvier 1945” (no.06076/Gend. L.I.), Paris, 12 February 1945. 72 AJ 384, Archives Nationales, Paris, France (hereafter AN).

¹⁸ Ministère de la Guerre, Direction de la Gendarmerie, Bureau Technique (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), “Synthèse pour la période du 15 mai 1945 au 15 juin 1945” (no. 37.852/Gend. L.I.), Paris, 16 July 1945. 72 AJ 384, AN.

¹⁹ Accounting in a meaningful way for the geographical distribution of the extralegal purges is difficult. Speaking broadly about executions before, during, and after liberation, summary executions tended to be most concentrated in regions of France where internal Resistance forces played a real part in ending the Occupation. Fewer, meanwhile, occurred in regions liberated by the Allies. But other conjectural factors played a role as well – for example, whether a locality had experienced Milice atrocities in the final months of occupation – and intricate local geographies of power mattered: even within a single department, the map of summary executions could vary, mirroring the map of wartime Resistance “zones de force.” See Christian Bougeard, “Résistance et épuration sauvage en Bretagne,” in *La*

they occurred throughout the country. And as months passed, if summary executions tended to decline slightly, other forms of violence against perceived collaborators only increased. In particular, bomb attacks on the property (homes or businesses) of “collaborators” became altogether routine in some regions. For the first trimester of 1945, the national gendarmerie counted 701 bombings or arson attacks throughout the country, and reported with alarm that these acts “which at the beginning were localized in certain regions” – the same ones listed above as dense in summary executions – “are today extending over practically all of the territory.”²⁰ They only intensified into the spring. From April 15 to May 15, 1945, for example, gendarmerie reports recorded 346 bomb attacks in the country; the next month, 315.²¹ By autumn these numbers were declining, but by no means disappearing: from August 15 to September 15, 1945, 208 bombings and nine summary executions were reported (not including the kidnapping and execution of two German prisoners).²²

A glance at the period from August 14 to August 21, 1945 helps give some perspective on what these figures meant was taking place in the country on a day-to-day basis almost exactly one year since the liberation of Paris.²³ This week, the

Résistance et les Français. Enjeux stratégiques et environnement social, eds. Jacqueline Sainclivier and Christian Bougeard (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1995), 280. Cf. Cointet, *Expier Vichy*, 99-102.

²⁰ Ministère de la Guerre, Direction de la Gendarmerie, Bureau Technique (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), “Synthèse pour la période du 15 mars 1945 au 15 avril 1945” (no. 26.420/Gend. L.I.), Paris, 22 May 1945. 72 AJ 384, AN: “... les attentats par explosifs qui, au début, étaient localisés dans certaines régions, s’étendent aujourd’hui sur presque tout le territoire.” Some departments were entirely calm, however, and only 24 had ten or more bombings in these three months.

²¹ Ministère de la Guerre, Direction de la Gendarmerie, Bureau Technique (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), “Synthèse pour la période du 15 avril 1945 au 15 mai 1945” (no. 31.163/Gend. L.I.), Paris, 13 June 1945 and “Synthèse pour la période du 15 mai 1945 au 15 juin 1945” (no. 37.852/Gend. L.I.), Paris, 16 July 1945. 72 AJ 384, AN.

²² Ministère de la Guerre, Direction de la Gendarmerie, Bureau Technique (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), “Synthèse pour la période du 15 mars 1945 au 15 avril 1945” (unnumbered/Gend. L.I.), Paris, n.d. 72 AJ 384, AN. As for head-shavings, Fabrice Virgili estimates that about 2000 occurred more than three months after the Liberation – and finds scattered references to them until March 1946.

²³ Here, I draw on a different and quite detailed source base, a weekly summary report from the Sûreté Nationale giving statistics on “attentats et agressions de type politique.”

national police was pleased to report, was marked by only 37 confirmed politically-motivated attacks in the country, well down from the 78 that had been registered for the week of July 10-16. Thirty-three of the attacks were bombings with explosives, causing material damage to the homes or businesses of their victims, while the remaining four involved firearms and caused three deaths and one injury. They had occurred in 20 different departments; 13 were concentrated in the Lyon region, and eight near Dijon. Most of the acts appear to have been carried out against accused collaborators by individuals or small groups, but there were exceptions – for example, the lynching in the Ardennes of a man just released from his prison term for collaboration involved a crowd of about 200 people.²⁴

Why were such events still occurring in France on a daily basis a full year after the liberation of Paris? The central government, after all, struggled mightily to rein in such activity. Adrien Tixier, Minister of the Interior in the Provisional Government until January 1946, was the man at the heart of this battle; a self-proclaimed “Jacobin” who had spent most of the war abroad with de Gaulle’s Free French, Tixier had informed de Gaulle’s seventeen new regional Commissaires of the Republic in late September that “The period of regional administration is over. The central government is installed in Paris. It intends to govern. You are its representatives, you must execute its instructions... You must reestablish French unity,” including first and foremost “the unity of the law.”²⁵ This was easier said than done, and Tixier subsequently spent a

²⁴ Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale, “Les Attentats et Agressions (semaine du 14 au 20 août),” Paris, 25 August 1945. Relevé des attentats folder, F1a 3350, AN. Four of the bombings appear to have targeted the property of individuals currently suspected of black market involvement, suggesting that the use of explosives was to some extent becoming generalized to deal with local disputes born *after* the Liberation. A few may also have been counter-attacks by Vichy sympathizers against individuals associated with the Resistance and the *épuration*.

²⁵ Charles-Louis Foulon, “La Résistance et le pouvoir d’État dans la France libérée,” in *Le Rétablissement de la légalité républicaine, 1944*, eds. La Fondation Charles de Gaulle, et.al. (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1996), 200: “La période d’administration régionale est close. Le gouvernement central est installé à Paris. Il entend gouverner. Vous êtes ses représentants, vous devez exécuter ses

great deal of time lecturing the departmental prefects and Commissaires on their duty to suppress extralegal violence.²⁶ On December 2, 1944, for instance, he telegraphed angrily to the Commissaire in Marseille that “in a civilized country, it is impossible – without causing great national and international damage – to authorize or legalize the judgments of popular tribunals, attacks on prisons, and illegal executions of prisoners or hostages.”²⁷ On January 3, 1945, dismayed by a fresh wave of summary executions, he issued a stern communiqué to the entire prefectural corps: “In liberated France, where republican legality has been reestablished, force must rest with the law.”²⁸

National-level Resistance organizations and all the major political parties concurred. It is true that the Communist Party, the single most significant political force in the country at the Liberation, was not immediately enthusiastic in its embrace of legality: for example in late September 1944, the director of *L'Humanité*, Marcel Cachin, editorialized on the front page that extralegal acts of violence were functioning as “a guarantee of order for the population, which could not have survived in contact with these rotten elements.”²⁹ But the return of Party chief Maurice Thorez from the USSR in late November marked the end of any ambiguity in the PCF's position vis-à-vis de Gaulle's government: an ironclad line of “one state, one army,

instructions... Vous devez rétablir l'unité française: d'abord l'unité de la loi.” The Commissaires were an innovation of the postwar period; their extensive powers were defined by a January 10, 1944 decree. See also Foulon, *Le Pouvoir en province à la libération: les commissaires de la République, 1943-1946* (Paris: Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1975).

²⁶ Tixier often acted in concert with François de Menthon, Minister of Justice (Garde des Sceaux) at the Liberation, or Pierre-Henri Teitgen, who took over for de Menthon in May 1945.

²⁷ Télégramme officiel no.824 from M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur to M. le Commissaire Régional de la République à Marseille, 2 December 1945. Vaucluse folder, F1a 3350, AN: “Mais, dans un pays civilisé, il est impossible, sans causer grave dommage national et international, d'autoriser ou de légaliser les jugements de tribunaux populaires, les attaques de prisons et les exécutions illégales de prisonniers ou d'otages.”

²⁸ Circulaire officielle no. 191 from M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur to MM. les Commissaires Régionaux de la République and MM. les Préfets, “Objet: Répression des attaques contre les prisons et des exécutions illégales de prisonniers et condamnés,” 3 January 1945. F1a 3331, AN: “Dans la France libérée, où la légalité républicaine est rétablie, force doit rester à la loi.”

²⁹ Quoted in Lottmann, *The People's Anger*, 89. *L'Humanité*, the PCF's national daily paper, was the most popular newspaper in France at this moment.

one police” was implemented.³⁰ From here on, party members advocated for a harsh *legal* purge, but categorically described extralegal acts as playing into the hands of “reaction.” Here, for example, is a regional Party secretary in January, 1945: “These individual acts create a malaise that certain people will not fail to exploit...No personal vengeance, but rather orderly justice.”³¹ In regions where summary executions or bombings took place, the Party often distributed tracts or posted handbills proclaiming that such acts were “criminal activities,” and that “anti-patriots ought to be punished only through legal channels.”³²

Such “legal channels” were, from an early date, in place. Forcefully asserting state control over the administration of justice at the moment of the Liberation had been the object of much early, painstaking planning on the part of the Gaullist Resistance, and was an urgent priority for the unity Provisional Government at the Liberation. De Gaulle himself was adamant that the purges “be rendered solely in the name of the state.” Asserting absolute state control in this arena was critical for establishing his authority in the face of what he feared might be, to follow Peter Novick’s formulation, “a double challenge: from possible disorders provoked by the

³⁰ Philippe Buton, *Les Lendemain qui déchantent. Le Parti communiste français à la Libération* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1993). 180. Buton, whose work is the best study of the Party in this period, emphasizes that the PCF’s decision to throw its full support behind de Gaulle’s government at this juncture was strictly strategic: it did not indicate an abandonment of hopes for an eventual Communist takeover.

³¹ G. Julian, “Halte à la cinquième colonne,” *Le Travailleur Alpin*, 10 January 1945. Preserved in Mlle. Jeanne Devineau folder, F1a 3331, AN: “Ces actes individuels créent un malaise que certains ne manqueront pas d’exploiter...Pas de vengeances personnelles, mais de la justice dans l’ordre.”

³² Ministère de l’Intérieur, Service Central des Commissariats de la République, “Bulletin sur la situation dans les régions et les départements: La situation dans la région de Montpellier,” no.142, 3 September 1945, p.4. F Delta 1832/24, Fonds Robert Aron, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France (hereafter Aron BDIC): “il s’élève contre les attentats qu’il qualifie d’agissements criminels...il declare que les antipatriotes doivent être punis par les seules voies légales.”The prefect of the Jura also noted similar Communist Party activities in his region in the “Bulletin sur la situation dans les régions et les départements: La situation dans la région de Dijon,” no.131, 10 August 1945, p.11. Other Resistance organizations officially or unofficially affiliated with the Communists adopted the same line. For example, see Lampe, “À propos de l’épuration,” *Le Patriote résistant* no.4 (22 March 1946). *Le Patriote résistant* represented the Fédération nationale des déportés et internés résistants et patriots.

Resistance itself, and from the United States, which might decide to impose an Allied military government (A.M.G.O.T) either because of civil disturbance or in spite of its absence.”³³

The massive, elemental problem that both the interior Resistance and the Free French abroad had grappled with for years was how to punish people for actions that, under the laws of Vichy, had been perfectly legal. Although the idea of creating retroactive legislation was mentioned, de Gaulle’s team and the organizations of the interior Resistance that were consulted shied away from this solution. Instead, the Provisional Government in Algiers constructed an elaborate legal justification for trying collaborators under existing Third Republic laws related to treason; the only new ordinances passed were directives “to facilitate the Court’s interpretation of [the prewar] texts,” spelling out how certain forms of behavior under Vichy violated them.³⁴ In all of this, the Provisional Government relied heavily on jurist René Cassin’s argument that the armistice with Germany along with the dissolution of the Third Republic were illegal, and thus the entire Vichy regime was both illegitimate and illegal. This line of reasoning was precarious, since in 1940 the Third Republic’s National Assembly had voted to give Philippe Pétain power to revise France’s constitution according to perfectly normal procedures and by a large majority (569 to 80, with 17 abstentions). Cassin’s thesis was Resistance orthodoxy, but this did not stop defendants in collaboration trials from claiming that they had merely faithfully

³³ Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy*, 62.

³⁴ Alain Bancaud, “La construction de l’appareil juridique,” in *Une Poignée de misérables*: 61-97; Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy*, 143 and 191-197. Bancaud, and also Rousso (“L’épuration en France,” 86-87), see more major innovation in these interpretive ordinances than does Novick. For a detailed legal explanation, see Emile Garçon, *Code pénal annoté*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Paris: Sirey, 1952), 244-414. For a sophisticated and persuasive reading of the dilemma of retroactivity faced by the legislators of the *épuration*, which places the lesser punishment of “indignité nationale” not on the fringe but at the center of the meaning of the legal purge, see Anne Simonin, *Le Déshonneur dans la République. Une histoire de l’indignité, 1791-1958* (Paris: Grasset, 2008), esp. 408-428.

followed the laws of the land – an especially effective tactic if used in a courtroom presided over by a judge who had *also* served Vichy, as the great majority had. Camus, for one, would have preferred the creation of ex post facto laws to Cassin’s legal fiction: “[W]e should have gone all the way in our contradiction and resolutely allowed ourselves to appear unjust in order to do real justice.”³⁵

The Provisional Government had also planned extensively in advance for state *institutions* with which to dispense justice, and it attempted to install them immediately at the Liberation. Courts-martial were often established first, under the authority of the Commissaires of the Republic; these courts carried out approximately 769 death sentences throughout France before being gradually phased out in favor of civil courts, the *Cours de justice* (Courts of Justice).³⁶ In some locales, military tribunals also sat, either alongside the Courts of Justice or in their continued absence. Other judicial institutions were also put in place: *chambres civiques* to judge more minor offenses, and a High Court sitting in Paris to hear the most serious cases of treason. This motley set of tribunals represented “regular” institutions for meting out punishment – yet in the chaotic France of autumn 1944, there was nothing very regular about them: the Courts of Justice varied regionally in jury composition and procedure, and local government appointees improvised ways to simplify the courts’ cumbersome regulations and make them function more speedily under tremendously difficult

³⁵ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 5 January 1945 [432]: “Le résultat est là. C’est lui qui nous autorise à dire qu’il fallait aller jusqu’au bout de notre contradiction et accepter résolument de paraître injustes pour servir réellement la justice.”

³⁶ The courts martial were semi-improvised on the ground, but operated with the support of the Provisional Government: see Lottman, *The People’s Anger*, 69-70. The figure of 769 death sentences is likely an underestimate, as it is a total arrived at through an evaluation of only 77 departments (Rousso, “L’épuration en France,” 95). The courts martial were shut down gradually, following 19 and 21 September 1944 bulletins from Minister of Justice François de Menthon ordering their suspension.

conditions.³⁷ More extreme local irregularities could occur as well – for example, Justice Ministry staff discovered in January, 1945 that the Court at Angoulême was *still* not functioning, because the military tribunal there had simply refused to cede way to it.³⁸ In all, of 171,252 cases judged by the Courts of Justice, about 40,000 resulted in some prison or detention term; roughly another 95,000 people were sentenced to “national indignity” either by the Courts of Justice or the *chambres civiques*.³⁹ The Courts handed down approximately 6,760 death sentences (2,853 in the presence of the accused, 3,910 in absentia), of which approximately 767 were actually carried out.⁴⁰

Despite all this activity, the legal purge struck much of the French populace as inadequate. Opinion polls – not entirely reliable at this juncture, but suggestive – show that by December 1944 a sizeable majority (71%) was dissatisfied with the legal *épuration*, believing it was punishing only the “small fry,” taking too long, and offering weak penalties. One representative response, the survey authors noted, was “If this continues, it will be necessary for the people to join in.”⁴¹ And, time after

³⁷ De Menthon’s Justice Department, in turn, responded to these pressures from below in favor of speed and efficiency by altering the Courts’ procedures over time. Thus trials in 1944 differed from those in 1945 or 1946.

³⁸ Lottman, *The People’s Anger*, 129.

³⁹ On national indignity see Simonin, *Le Déshonneur dans la République*, 430.

⁴⁰ These figures, too, are contested, though the margins of difference are relatively small: a 1948 study concluded that 791 executions had been carried out, while the CHGM study claimed 714 death sentences carried out in just the 77 departments surveyed. See Rouso, “L’*épuration* en France,” 92-95.

⁴¹ *Sondages* 7 (1 January 1945), 5: “Si cela continue, il faudra que le peuple s’en mêle.” A small portion of the 71% were dissatisfied for the *opposite* reason, complaining of “arrestations arbitraires et sanctions trop graves.” But this response, according to *Sondages*, was “minime.” The *Sondages* of the immediate postwar period continued a project begun by sociologist Jean Stoetzel in 1938 and maintained in rather primitive fashion throughout the war years. They constitute an intriguing source for the historian, and they did employ adequate sample sizes, but they need to be analyzed with a critical eye toward the choice and construction of the questions asked as well as the way in which the pollsters interpreted the responses. What kinds of issues the survey-makers found pressing can be just as interesting as the pattern of answers they received. The methodology adopted was borrowed from American models, especially that of Paul Lazarsfeld. See Loïc Blondiaux, *La fabrique de l’opinion. Une histoire sociale des sondages* (Paris: Seuil, 1998) and Loïc Blondiaux, “Le nouveau régime des opinions,” *Mil neuf cent. Revue d’histoire intellectuelle* 22.1 (2004): 161-171

time, in regions where they did indeed “join in,” authorities reported that it was frustration with the legal *épuration* that motivated them. Most victims of summary executions and bomb attacks more than a few days after a local liberation were individuals who had been recently acquitted by the courts or had seen their death sentences commuted to hard labor. “The explanation is always the same,” sighed the prefect of Dordogne as his department was racked with bombings in July, 1945: “excessive leniency – or what is alleged to be such – of the purge.”⁴² Commutations of collaborators’ death sentences – de Gaulle commuted 1303, including all those of women – provoked a special sort of indignation, and were usually the reason behind prison break-ins.⁴³ Audacious local newspapers sometimes even seized on pardons and lenient sentences to call explicitly for popular intervention: the *MUR d’Auvergne*, for instance, published out of Clermont-Ferrand as “the weekly regional organ of the Resistance,” editorialized in late December 1944 that if the local Court continued to hand down light judgments, the Resistance “must force the prison doors and itself strike down the assassins, torturers, and traitors...”⁴⁴ The Garde Civique Républicaine

⁴² Ministère de l’Intérieur, Service Central des Commissariats de la République, “Bulletin sur la situation dans les régions et les départements: La situation dans la région de Limoges,” no.126, 1 August 1945, 1. F Delta 1832/24, Aron BDIC: “D’abord, j’ai eu encore ce mois-ci quelques attentats par bombe dont l’explication est toujours la même: mansuétude excessive ou prétendue telle de ‘l’*épuration*.” Prefects’ reports to federal officials on public opinion in their departments are not transparent representations of “realities on the ground.” The prefects not only interpreted the attitudes of citizens through a lens of their own biases, concerns, and beliefs, but presented this information to ministers in Paris in a way calculated to curry favor and influence decisions about policy. Nevertheless, taken as a composite and read critically, alongside other documents such as police briefings, these reports can serve as a rich source.

⁴³ Authorities in regions plagued by summary executions often dared to criticize de Gaulle’s commutations; those of his successors were greeted with still more brazen displeasure. For example, after ex-Resisters in Nice broke into a prison to execute a notorious local collaborator whose death sentence had been commuted in the fall of 1946, the prefect laid the blame squarely at the feet of the central government, complaining that “public opinion, which is hyper-sensitive right now for all kinds of reasons, truly does not need to be agitated by decisions which are, to say the least, inopportune and dangerous.” Report no.4660 from P. Haag to M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur and M. le Garde des Sceaux, 21 September 1946. Folder Mysenc, F1a 3331, AN.

⁴⁴ “Criminelle indulgence,” *Le MUR d’Auvergne* no.27 (30 December 1944). Preserved in Folder Poursuites à intenter à l’encontre du journal ‘Le Mur d’Auvergne’ (Puy-de-Dôme), F1a 3331, AN.

of Charente and Dordogne (a kind of local Resistance militia), in their journal *Ça Ira!* of January 14, 1945, gleefully celebrated the summary execution of two “traitors” by “some patriots” at Bourges: “Two more judgments that cannot be annulled on a ‘legal technicality’ [*vice-de-forme*],” the authors exulted, and they wondered – above a drawing of a Christmas tree decorated with gallows – “whose turn” it would be next.⁴⁵

That dissatisfaction with the legal purge actually translated into people taking matters into their own hands – and that local papers covered this outcome with casual, matter-of-fact approval – ought to serve as an indication that, despite its best efforts, in purely practical terms the Provisional Government did not quickly reestablish a thorough state monopoly on violence throughout the territory.⁴⁶ Hastily reconstituted local “forces of order” could not be properly armed, and in any case could not always be relied upon. Governmental control over the Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur (FFI), a motley mix of ex-maquis fighters and other eager citizens that numbered 400,000 men at its high point, remained spotty even after the FFI were officially amalgamated into France’s regular army in October 1944.⁴⁷ Local prisons could not all be reasonably secured. Mushrooming militias and “civil guards” made a nuisance of themselves; even after these were eliminated, government demands that arms be turned over to the authorities were often disregarded.⁴⁸ Some departmental Committees of Liberation

⁴⁵ “Deux traîtres exécutés à Bourges par des patriotes,” *Ça Ira!* 14 January 1945: “À qui le tour?” Preserved in Folder Dissolution et désarmement des groupements armés, milices patriotiques, Gardes Civiques, etc., F1a 3348, AN.

⁴⁶ Again, this is not to argue that an overthrow of the government was imminent or possible – merely to point out that in numerous localities, the state could not stop armed non-state actors from deploying force.

⁴⁷ The FFI had technically been under command of de Gaulle’s General Staff since March, 1944, but the meaning of this on the ground varied enormously depending on local conditions. The same was true of the amalgamation.

⁴⁸ The government’s disbanding of the civilian militias known as Milices Patriotiques aroused very serious opposition. An extended examination of this topic would underscore many of our key points here, but is beyond the scope of this chapter. For elements of a suggestive case study, see Maurice Agulhon and Fernand Barrat *C.R.S. à Marseille: “La police au service du peuple,” 1944-1947* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971).

(CDLs), rather than disbanding as expected when the insurrectionary phase of local liberations ended, continued to assert themselves. An example helps to give a sense of how these factors, combined with the moral authority local ex-Resistance forces continued to enjoy, could render government agents impotent. On June 1, 1945, in Saint-Brieuc in the Côtes-du-Nord, a Gestapo informer was sentenced by the Court of Justice to hard labor rather than to death, as local Resistance forces had wished. Following the verdict, a small band of ex-Resisters demanded, menacing a revolver, that the judge tell them where the prisoner had been transported so that they could force the prison doors and execute him themselves. The judge stood his ground, and the group retired; the department's prefect, however, instead of simply arresting the men involved, sent an urgent missive to the Ministry of Interior. The leader of the group, he wrote,

enjoys a considerable popularity in the department, having played a role in the first ranks of the clandestine Resistance. His auxiliaries in yesterday's action are all municipal councilors, members of the local Committee of Liberation. Legal pursuits against them would without a doubt provoke an immediate declaration of solidarity from the departmental Liberation Committee, from the C.G.T. [Confédération Générale du Travail, France's largest labor union], and from all the Resistance organizations. But here in the department, I only have available 370 gendarmes and a few units of the Compagnie républicaine de sécurité, whose attitude is not absolutely reliable. I would add that it is useless to expect worthwhile aid from the military formations stationed in the department. These forces are composed of young recruits from the FFI, on whom we cannot rely.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Note from M. le Préfet des Côtes du Nord to M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, June 2, 1945. Côtes du Nord folder, F1a 3350, AN: "Il jouit d'une popularité considérable dans le département, ayant joué dans la résistance clandestine un rôle de premier plan. Ses auxiliaires dans l'action d'hier sont tous conseillers municipaux, membres du Comité de Libération local. Des poursuites à leur encontre entraîneront à n'en pas douter, une déclaration immédiate de solidarité, du Comité départemental de Libération, de la C.G.T, et de toutes les organisations de la Résistance. Mais je dispose dans tout le département de 370 gendarmes et de quelques pelotons de la Compagnie Républicaine de sécurité dont l'attitude n'est pas absolument sûre. Je précise qu'il est inutile d'attendre un concours efficace des formations militaires stationnées dans le département. Ces forces sont composés de jeunes recrues ou de F.F.I. sur lesquels on ne peut compter."

The prefect suggested that the Saint Brieuc court simply be shut down: it could not operate under these conditions. The group that had threatened the judge, meanwhile, undaunted, posted handbills accusing those who were protecting the informer's life of being "assassins" and announcing that "the challenge is thrown down: to see if these authorities will dare to touch our comrades who have taken on the sacred task of avenging our martyrs, and who will not fail."⁵⁰

Tixier, when informed of such threats, reacted with outrage to any suggestion that the government cede ground. But summary violence could not simply be halted by decrees from on high. The Commissaires and prefects were indignant at the suggestion that their administrations bore any blame for the summary executions, prison break-ins, or bombings in their regions, and continually complained of the limited means at their disposal. Reconstituting a full, reliable police and gendarmerie after the collapse of Vichy – and with the country still at war – proved a major challenge for the Provisional Government, and the delicate task was not accomplished quickly.⁵¹ As the Commissaire at Lille wrote in June, 1945, "To be effective, the forces of law and order must first exist. Nothing would be more dangerous than to imagine that such forces, defined in their elementary form as police and army, presently constitute a satisfactory means of action."⁵² The regional administrators also

⁵⁰ Addendum to *ibid.*: "ASSASSINS ceux qui commandent aux Gendarmes de tirer sur les PATRIOTES pour PROTEGER le Traître ELOPHE... Le défi est lancé de savoir si ces autorités oseront toucher à nos camarades qui ont assuré le devoir sacré de VENGER LEURS MARTYRS et qui N'Y FAILLIRONT PAS."

⁵¹ Marc Watin-Augouard, "La gendarmerie et le rétablissement de la légalité républicaine" in *Le Rétablissement de la légalité républicaine*, 465-488; Jean-Marc Berlière and Laurent Chabrun, *Les Policiers français sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Perrin, 2001); Berlière, "L'épuration dans la police," in *Le Rétablissement de la légalité républicaine*, 489-508 and "L'épuration de la police parisienne en 1944-1945," *Vingtième Siècle* 49 (January-March 1996): 63-81; François Rouquet, *L'Épuration dans l'administration française* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1993).

⁵² Ministère de l'Intérieur, Service Central des Commissariats de la République, "Bulletin sur la situation dans les régions et les départements: La situation dans la région de Lille," no.105, 26 June 1945, 20. F Delta 1832/24, Aron BDIC: "Pour être utilisé la force publique doit d'abord exister. Rien ne serait plus dangereux que d'imaginer que la force publique, définie sous sa forme élémentaire de police et d'armée, représente actuellement un moyen d'action satisfaisant."

tried to explain to Tixier that prison guards, policemen, and especially FFI formations constituted largely of ex-maquis members might have commitments that trumped their loyalties to the regime of “republican legality.” Government officials thus often found themselves pitted against the very men who were *supposed* to constitute the local “forces of order.” The prefect of Basses-Alpes described a November 1944 incident at Digne in which 400 FFI soldiers broke into a prison to execute two collaborators: “Against the full battalion of FFI men who carried out this operation through the force of their automatic weapons, it was only possible to use twenty police officers and gendarmes – armed, for the most part, in a derisory fashion. The only weapon the Civil Authorities disposed of in this situation was persuasion. This was revealed to be useless...”⁵³

Even when local forces of order were sufficient, well-armed, and well-disciplined, this did not necessarily translate into a situation in which the state was unilaterally in control. For example, in the wake of public lynchings in the Allier in June 1945, led by esteemed returned deportees, an intelligence officer at Vichy explained to his superiors in Paris that it was impossible to blame the local police: “It is certain that, among the protesters, a great number were armed, and that if the police had tried to get involved, shots would have been exchanged.”⁵⁴ Everyone recognized,

⁵³ Note no.363 from M. le Préfet des Basses-Alpes to M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur, 16 January 1945. Folder Réponses des divers préfets, AN F1a 3331: “Au bataillon complet de F.F.I. qui a mené cette opération avec la force de ses armes automatiques, il n’a pas été possible d’opposer qu’une vingtaine de policiers et de gendarmes armés, pour la plupart, d’une façon dérisoire. La seule arme dont disposaient les Autorités Civiles en la circonstance, était la persuasion. Elle s’est révélée inefficace...” The government in the Digne region appears to have had particular trouble establishing the Court of Justice as the legitimate site for the punishment of collaborators: shortly after the incident described here, the entire local bar of *avocats* announced they had received anonymous threats on their lives and would no longer defend accused collaborators before the Cour.

⁵⁴ Report from M. le Commissaire principal chef des renseignements généraux, Vichy, to M. le Directeur des renseignements généraux, Paris, 4 June 1945, p.2. Folder Épuration/ Maison d’Arret de Cusset, 612 W 23, Archives Départementales de l’Allier, Yzeure (hereafter ADA): “Il est certain que, parmi les manifestants, un grand nombre de ceux-ci se trouvaient armés et qui si la police avait voulu s’interposer, des coups de feu auraient été échangés.”

without it being spelled out, that this would not have been an acceptable outcome. The state agents simply did not possess the moral capital to fire on Resistance heroes, especially not in the service of protecting accused collaborators.⁵⁵ Thus, some local authorities, even those with decent material forces, pleaded with the Interior Ministry to help them avoid direct confrontation with organizations associated with the Resistance (including the FFI). Tixier's office sometimes recognized the wisdom in these arguments: in January 1945, after a crowd of thousands descended on a prison in the Gard to exact summary executions, his canny Directeur du Cabinet endorsed a "politics of compromise" between local authorities and Resistance leaders in that region, and noted hopefully that the Resistance's "different elements are dividing amongst themselves, and their fragmentation and opposition frequently allow the representatives of order to impose their own views."⁵⁶

The Resistance as an organized movement did indeed fragment and lose coherence after the autumn of 1944, both on the national level, where party politics quickly reemerged to trump Resistance unity, and across France.⁵⁷ One prefect observed by the spring of 1945 that "the activity of Resistance organizations does not cease to decrease, and the gatherings and meetings organized by the Movements of the Resistance attract a smaller and smaller public;" another claimed that "it seems quite

⁵⁵ Nor, perhaps, did they possess the will: as the prefect involved in this particular case put it, the police "would have been repulsed to risk entering into a collision with the public in order, in short, to protect individuals who are traitors to their Country. This sentiment, simplistic perhaps, is difficult to oppose." M. le Préfet to M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, June 4, 1945. Folder Incidents à Cusset, Vichy (Allier), F1a 3331, AN. In this incident, in the end, the regional Commissaire could only stop the lynchings (after one man had died) by promising the protesters that their other two victims would not be removed from the town, that they would be tried and publicly executed rapidly, and that the protesters could continue to enter the prison to interrogate them about other members of their gang.

⁵⁶ Report from M. Serreules, Le Directeur du Cabinet, Ministère de l'Intérieur, to M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, 7 January 1945. Folder Gard, F1a 3331, AN: "Cette politique de compromise a abouti à des résultats tangibles. Nulle part, les Autorités ne sont entrés en conflit ouvert avec la Résistance. Les différents éléments de celle-ci se divisent et leur fragmentation et leur opposition permet fréquemment aux représentants de l'ordre d'imposer leurs vues."

⁵⁷ See Laborie, "Opinions et représentations: la Libération et la construction de l'image de la Résistance," in *Les Français des années troubles*, 253-265 passim.

difficult now to discuss the activity of Resistance organizations.”⁵⁸ But if this did in some ways make the work of government representatives easier, it did not translate into a situation in which they were able to unilaterally “impose their own views”: these very same prefects also continued to report bombings and executions in their departments. For the government’s problem in these years, ultimately, was not that Resistance organizations posed any sort of systematic challenge to state authority.⁵⁹ It was, rather, that an aura of legitimacy continued to envelop certain acts of retributive violence by non-state agents.

Why was this so? The answer lies, in large part, in the legacies of the Occupation era. Under the Occupation, the interior Resistance, systematically labeled a “terrorist” network by the Gestapo and by Vichy, had devoted a great deal of energy to defending the use of extralegal violence in the name of a “higher” moral authority, or an alternative understanding of legal realities. Here, for example, is the clandestine journal *Libération-Sud* in 1943: “To disobey is a duty, to strike out is an honor; our ‘terrorism’ is revolutionary legality.”⁶⁰ This logic spilled over into the postwar era; indeed, it intensified markedly as praise was heaped on “the Resistance” for having preserved France’s honor, and as even relatively conservative press and politicians asserted that, as the Vichy regime was swept aside, France was undergoing a

⁵⁸ Ministère de l’Intérieur, Service Central des Commissariats de la République, “Bulletin sur la situation dans les régions et les départements: La situation dans la région de Montpellier,” no.65, 6 April 1945, 1. F Delta 1832/24, Aron BDIC: “L’activité des organisations de résistance n’a cessé d’aller en décroissant et les réunions et meetings organisés par les Mouvements de Résistance attirent un public de moins en moins nombreux.” The prefect in question was from Hérault. Robert Fleury (Allier), Rapport mensuel du 15 avril-15 mai, 1945, 15. F1c III 1205, AN: “Il paraît bien difficile actuellement de parler de l’activité des organisations de résistance.”

⁵⁹ Much literature has been devoted to making this point. See especially La Fondation Charles de Gaulle, ed., *Le Rétablissement de la légalité républicaine*; Phillipe Buton and J.-M. Guillon, eds., *Les Pouvoirs en France à la Libération* (Paris: Bélin, 1994).

⁶⁰ “‘Terrorisme’ et Insurrection Nationale,” *Libération-Sud* 38 (30 October 1943), 1: “Désobéir est un devoir, frapper est un honneur; notre ‘terrorisme’ est la légalité révolutionnaire.”

“revolution.”⁶¹ National Resistance Council president Georges Bidault’s plea that it be “a revolution by the law” did not universally appeal. Thus, as one prefect put it, “The young people who, to escape from the so-called ‘French state,’ had to become outlaws – and who have been glorified precisely for that – do not realize that today, their civic duty is to return to the law.”⁶² And thus an FFI chief in Rodez announced in January, 1945 that the Resistance’s slogan still remained the same: “Death to the Boches, Death to Traitors! What does it matter if those who didn’t fight don’t understand us? We will again throw their so-called ‘legality’ in their faces. For us, legality, the true kind, is that which seeks to edify the youth of France.”⁶³ When three FFI members were punished for taking part in summary executions in Maubeuge (Nord) in October, 1944, the local Resistance leadership protested that the men had merely committed “an act which would have earned them congratulations a few months earlier.”⁶⁴ What, they demanded to know, had changed?

⁶¹ Pierre Laborie’s important work has shown that associations between non-state violence and “terrorism” were undermined in postwar France not by the mere fact that the Resistance had engaged in violent illegal actions during the Occupation – at the time, much of the populace agreed with Vichy and the Germans that such acts were “terror” – but by powerful *retroactive* legitimation at the time of the liberation. Pierre Laborie, *L’Opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris, Seuil, 1990), 285-329 (esp. 307, 312, 315, 325-329) and “Opinions et représentations,” esp. 265: “Ainsi, l’idée que les Français vont se faire de la Résistance semble moins dépendre des trois ou quatre années de son histoire que des derniers mois de 1944.” On the general problem of postwar constructions of the meaning of the Occupation era see Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

⁶² Robert Fleury (Allier), Rapport mensuel du 15 juin-15 juillet, 1945, p.21. AN F1cIII 1205: “Les jeunes qui, pour se soustraire au régime du soi-disant ‘État Français’ ont dû se mettre hors la loi et qui ont été précisément glorifiés pour cela, ne réalisent pas que le devoir civique est aujourd’hui de rentrer dans la loi.” “L’État Français” was Vichy’s label for itself (thus eliminating the word “republic”).

⁶³ Commandant “Charles,” “La colère du peuple,” *La Résistance* (Rodez), 1-7 January 1945. Preserved in Gard folder, F1a 3331, AN: “La colère du peuple est juste. Et nous montons pour sauver la France, que le souffle de 93 passe à nouveau sur le pays, nous crions bien haut notre formule de salut public: Mort aux Boches, Mort aux Traîtres! Qu’importe si ceux qui n’ont pas lutté ne nous comprennent pas. Nous lançons encore leur ‘soi-disant légalité’ à la face. Pour nous, la légalité, la vraie, est celle qui veut édifier la jeunesse de France.”

⁶⁴ Note from Comités départementaux du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, réunis en commun à la Préfecture du Nord, January 13, 1945 (signed M. Berthe, secrétaire du CDL du Nord). Folder “Infractions et opérations de police illégales commises par des FFI, septembre 1944-août 1945,” F1a 3350, AN: “...trois résistants authentiques ont, pour un fait qui leur aurait valu quelques mois plus tôt des félicitations, été condamnés plus qu’on ne condamne actuellement la plupart des collaborateurs et traîtres...”

The answer of the de Gaulle government to this question, of course, was that now the Resistance *had become* the state. In a nation led by “the man of June 18, 1940,” where the central government was manned by individuals with unimpeachable Resistance credentials, there was no longer any need to go outside the law to obtain justice. “Republican legality” had been reestablished. The logic here was powerful, but three kinds of problems arose in the state’s attempt to impose it on the ground. First, in localities where many state agents – from judges to police officers – had served Vichy, it was impossible to claim that these men, not the leaders of local maquis or returning political deportees from the concentration camps, now embodied the Resistance. The excellent Resistance credentials of de Gaulle’s new appointees, especially the Commissaires de la République, alleviated but did not eliminate this problem.⁶⁵ (It also could create fresh difficulties, as when prefects and Commissaires who had been active in local Resistance activities were asked to crack down on violent actors who a few months before had been their comrades-in-arms.) Second, as the above survey of the tortured legal framework of the “official” purge and its overlapping, patchwork array of instruments of justice suggests, the line between “legal” purging and “illegal” purging of collaborators at the Liberation could at times be a blurry one. (Think of historians’ continuing uncertainty as to which side courts-martial and military tribunals fall on.) In any case, the government operated without holding parliamentary elections until October 1945, and without a constitution until October 1946: its claim to represent a return to “republican legality” was largely reliant on the enormous legitimacy concentrated in the person of de Gaulle and on the goodwill of the parties, not on legal realities nor on Cassin’s tortured arguments about the unlawfulness of Vichy. And, finally, in a France where the “legality” of the past

⁶⁵ The prefectural corps was also entirely renewed: see Marc Olivier Baruch, “L’épuration du corps préfectoral,” in *Une poignée de misérables*, 139-171.

four years was now repudiated, while the outlaw acts of the interior Resistance were triumphantly vindicated, the legal/illegal distinction struck many as a decidedly less-than-crucial one anyway: one lesson of recent history that it was difficult to “unlearn” was that legitimacy did not necessarily hinge on an association with, or the approval of, the state.

A note of caution is necessary here, for I do not wish to give the impression that the French were running riot in the streets from 1944 to 1946, enacting vengeance willy-nilly. We do well to remember that if acts of “popular” justice did occur frequently, the inference in no way follows that a large portion of the population was involved. Some executions were indeed carried out by large, mixed-gender crowds: the February 15 lynching of the Vichy-era Commissaire de Police of Dijon, for instance, took place in the presence of several thousand people; so did prison executions in the Gard in late 1944 and three lynchings on the public square in the small town of Cusset, near Vichy, in June of 1945. Many other documented attacks involved groups of hundreds of men and women.⁶⁶ But most were the private work of small bands of armed ex-Resistance men and did not involve “the populace” in a meaningful sense at all. Overall, ordinary people in France between 1944 and 1946 are not well described as bloodthirsty, obsessed with vengeance, or violent – better terms would be hungry, miserable, and increasingly fearful for the future.⁶⁷ Most longed for order and strong, stable government.

However, as Megan Koreman has pointed out, we must understand that many people’s longing for “order” in the postwar period *included* a desire for retributive

⁶⁶ Estimated crowd sizes are often noted in reports in AN: 72 AJ 384, F1a 3350, F1a 3331.

⁶⁷ On the intense economic hardship of the immediate postwar years, often glossed over in accounts of France’s progression from the Occupation to “Les Trente Glorieuses,” see Dominique Veillon and Jean-Marie Flonneau, eds., *Les temps des restrictions en France (1939-1949) (Cahiers de l’IHTP no. 32-33)* (Paris: Institut de l’histoire du temps présent, 1996); Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et survivre en France, 1939-1947* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 1995).

violence against those who had killed and tortured other Frenchmen during the Occupation. And this desire consistently trumped concern for legality, particularly since association with “the Resistance” – its ideals and its actors – offered an enormously powerful alternative means of granting legitimacy to non-state acts of violence.⁶⁸ Reports from prefects, commissaires, the intelligence services, and the national gendarmerie offer a consistent portrait of a populace that longed ardently for a return to “normalcy” – in particular with regards to the desperate food situation – but nevertheless, in the matter of the *épuration*, was tolerant of a certain level of so-called “disorder” if it meant the punishment of hated local informers, Gestapo stoolies, and *miliciens*. The criterion of legality was not *absent* from ordinary people’s considerations, but it was secondary: if the state could not or would not satisfactorily punish those who had terrorized communities, then others would have to take up the task. As an official in the Gard put it, after a cluster of summary executions there in late 1944, the population as a whole “expresses its satisfaction that justice has been done, and hopes that in the future it will not be obliged to obtain it for itself.”⁶⁹ Especially in cases where acts of summary violence were directed against informers or *miliciens* despised for having targeted *locals*, prefects and commissaires continually reported to the Ministry of Interior that there was simply no hope of apprehending the culprits: no one in the population would speak against them.⁷⁰ After the June 1945 lynching of the unsavory proud parents of a *milicien* in the tiny village of Hauterive in

⁶⁸ Again, it is important to underline that despite the strength of this immediate postwar discourse, *during* the Occupation popular sympathy for Resistance violence had been limited.

⁶⁹ Commissariat des Renseignements Généraux d’Alès, Secteur de l’arrondissement d’Alès, “Rapport journalier,” 29 December 1944. 1 W 212, Archives Départementales du Gard, Nîmes (hereafter ADG): “L’opinion, en général, dit sa satisfaction que justice soit faite, et elle espère qu’à l’avenir elle ne sera plus obligée d’y pourvoir elle-même.”

⁷⁰ The governments’ agents recognized that the local factor was crucial: to avoid prison break-ins, the prefects regularly filed demands that collaborators be transferred out of the prisons in their own communities to other detention facilities, particularly when they had seen their sentences commuted.

the Allier, for example, the police commissioner at Vichy reported that the populace “shows a visible satisfaction to see the locality relieved of the presence of [the victims], judged by many as undesirables... Opinion would be unanimous in disapproving of the arrest of those responsible for the execution of [this] couple.”⁷¹

Cases in which the government actually attempted to prosecute those involved in summary executions provide an especially clear window onto the depth of public support for them. In Hauterive, where the nervous authorities attempted arrests only after ten months and countless precautions, local political actors and press mobilized intensely in favor of the defendants, now systematically labeled “heroes of the Resistance,” and large crowds attended rallies on their behalf. A Committee of Vigilance, with members drawn from across the political spectrum, took the line that the defendants were “hostages,” being used as scapegoats for “the collective action of the population” against pariahs who had “taunted, by their presence, the families of their victims.”⁷² The entire municipal council resigned to protest the arrests; municipal councils elsewhere in the Auvergne wrote letters of solidarity. The CDL roused itself from its increasing obsolescence to defend the “patriots of Hauterive,” and organizations of former resisters in the region held special meetings and issued

⁷¹ Report from M. le Commissaire de Police du Service des Renseignements Généraux de l’Allier détaché à Vichy to M. le Juge d’Instruction à Cusset, “Objet: État d’esprit dans la circonscription au sujet des incidents de Hauterive (Allier),” 22 June 1945. Folder Incidents de Cusset, Vichy (Allier), F1a 3331, AN: “Dans la région de Hauterive, où les incidents survenus au sujet des époux Gaurut ont eu un certain retentissement, l’opinion publique manifeste une visible satisfaction de voir la localité débarrassée de la présence des époux Gaurut jugés par beaucoup indésirables... “L’opinion serait unanime à reprove l’arrestation des auteurs de l’exécution des époux Gaurut.”

⁷² The five men put on trial had, in fact, been at the head of a crowd of about 200. Text reproduced in a Note d’Information “Objet: au sujet de l’affaire Gaurut, d’Hauterive – Activité du Comité de Vigilance,” Vichy, 6 July 1946. Folder Meurtre des époux Gaurut (Hauterive), 612 W 23, ADA: “Mais ses parents, libérés du Concours Hippique, virent narguer par leur présence, les familles de leurs victimes. Au même moment, les déportés, dont certains devaient à la famille Gaurut leur départ, revenaient et expliquaient à la population leurs souffrances. 400 personnes indignées se rendirent dans la nuit du 7 juin chez les Gaurut et les pendirent. Et la Justice se saisit, en otages, de 5 habitants d’Hauterive dont l’adjoint au Maire, tous résistants authentiques et les charge de la responsabilité de l’action collective de la population.”

statements.⁷³ A rally in support of the defendants on July 10, 1946 – two days before the trial – drew national-level Resistance speakers and three thousand attendees.⁷⁴ “The denouement of this affair,” local intelligence services reported after the men were hastily acquitted, “has profoundly calmed the opinion of the population of the Vichy region.”⁷⁵ This was a population that, in its vocal majority, nearly two years after the Liberation, did not interpret summary execution as “terrorism,” as evidence of moral depravity, or as crime: they instead associated it with the legacy of the Resistance and viewed it, as such, as justifiable and legitimate.

Such sentiments were shared by many others across the country from 1944 to 1946. The troubles that resulted were low-level, perhaps – scattered prison break-ins, bombings, and assassinations do not add up to organized revolt – but the underlying cracks in the state’s authority over violence that they revealed were nevertheless real. And they would have consequences in the years to come.

It is unlikely that many intellectuals outside of the localities themselves heard of the events rocking Digne, the Gard, or the Vichy-Hauterive agglomeration in 1944, 1945, and 1946. Intellectuals’ debates about the *épuration*, which largely revolved around

⁷³ Typical is the declaration of the Prisoners of War Association at Le Vernet, which protested that the five men were “being held responsible for the just punishment inflicted by the populace of Hauterive on a couple of traitors!” Telegram from the Comité départemental de l’Allier, Montluçon, 11 July 1946; Note from the Association des Prisonniers de guerre de l’Allier, Comité Local, Le Vernet, 10 July 1946. Folder Meurtre des époux Gaurut (Hauterive), 612 W 23, ADA.

⁷⁴ Note from Fleury to M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur, 12 July 1946. Folder Meurtre des époux Gaurut (Hauterive), 612 W 23, ADA. One of the speakers was Marceau Lambert (Commandant “Arthur”) one of the three Maubeuge FFI officers who in October 1944 had permitted a mob to enter a jail and kill two collaborators, and who in January 1945, as the central government struggled to crack down on extralegal executions, had been brought to trial in Paris and sentenced to seven years in prison. (The sentence was symbolic; they were pardoned in May.) Lambert now served as secretary of the Comité national pour la libération des patriotes emprisonnés, an organization with PCF, SFIO, and MRP support devoted specifically to urging clemency for resisters accused of such acts.

⁷⁵ Note d’Information no.2743, Moulins, July 13, 1946. Folder Meurtre des époux Gaurut (Hauterive), 612 W 23, ADA: “Le dénouement de cette affaire a fortement calmé l’opinion de la population de la région de Vichy.”

either sanctions internal to the writerly profession or high-profile cases involving other intellectuals – most famously, the trial of Robert Brasillach – took place in rather more abstract terms than did the case of the “patriots of Hauterive.”⁷⁶ Intellectuals who had come to prominence through their Resistance credentials fought vociferously with one another about “justice,” “charity,” and “responsibility,” but they did not ever decide to march on the homes of accused collaborators bearing hunting rifles and nooses. And concentrated in major cities (particularly Paris) where the central government’s influence was strongest and acts of extralegal violence were correspondingly rarer, intellectuals were much more overtly concerned with the *legal* purge; their worries were about whether, through the arm of the judicial system, French society *as a whole* (rather than a particular community, Resistance organization, or individual) could legitimately enact deadly violence in the name of ideals such as “justice,” “cleansing,” and “renewal.” More than other actors, intellectuals – even those who pushed most ferociously for a harsh *épuration* – acknowledged capital punishment by the state as a form of violence, not an alternative to it. Popular violence was a constant presence in their writings about the *épuration*, but it functioned as a lurking subtext, an “other” – sometimes desirable, sometimes feared – that helped organize dichotomies between

⁷⁶ Most of the extant literature on intellectuals and the *épuration* is primarily concerned with a problem this chapter engages only minimally: namely how writers responded to acts of collaboration on the part of *other writers*. This literature explores themes of writerly “responsibility” and debates about the social and political role of the intellectual as such. (Should writers be held responsible in a court of law for having published their political ideas, or is this a violation of basic freedoms and professional autonomy? Can writers sit in judgment of other writers? etc.) For example, see Phillip Watts, *Allegories of the Purge: How Literature Responded to the Postwar Trials of Writers and Intellectuals in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). To date, the most important work on French intellectuals and the *épuration* is that of Gisèle Sapiro, a historical sociologist who takes a Bordieuan approach to the intellectual “field” in France during and after the Occupation. Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953* (Paris: Fayard, 1999). Sapiro considers how the political choices made by French intellectuals from 1940 to 1953 played into relationships of dominance and subordination, autonomy and heteronomy, both amongst intellectuals and also between the intellectual community and structures of political and social power in the country. Her work is indispensable for our understanding of the postwar intellectual landscape.

“justice” and “vengeance,” “civilized” and “uncivilized” behavior, “virile” and “emotional” uses of force. These were, certainly, different discussions than those happening in the town square of Cusset, or at the Interior Ministry, and yet intellectuals did not live in a different country from their fellow Frenchmen; they did not talk only to one another, in a vacuum. In many ways, their debates about the *épuration* constituted part of a larger French conversation about violence, norms, and limits in the post-Resistance era.

The postwar intellectual “scene” in France was structured by the choices intellectuals had made during the Occupation: Resistance credentials burnished the reputations of some members of the generation of thinkers born before 1900 (Jean Paulhan, François Mauriac, Louis Martin- Chauffier, Rémy Roure), and functioned as the *sine qua non* for the postwar rise to prominence of younger non-Communist Party intellectuals (Camus, much of Sartre’s *Temps modernes* team, Claude Bourdet, David Rousset, and Catholic intellectuals Jean-Marie Domenach and André Mandouze, among many others), providing both symbolic credentials and access to clientelist networks of other ex-resisters. The actual wartime experiences of these men – and handful of women – varied widely, from the few who were in real positions of leadership in clandestine organizations to those who “resisted” in a far more nominal or problematic fashion. Many were involved in clandestine journalism or publishing ventures. A few survived the concentration camps. My concern here is not to trace intellectuals’ actual Resistance experiences.⁷⁷ Rather, I want to note that *regardless of*

⁷⁷ For works that do take up this task, see Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains*; Pierre Assouline, *L’Épuration des intellectuels* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1985); Albrecht Betz and Stefan Martens, eds., *Intellectuels et l’Occupation, 1940-1944: collaborer, partir, résister* (Paris: Autrement, 2004). On publishing activity specifically, see P. Fouché, *L’Édition française sous l’Occupation (1940-1944)* (Paris: Bibliothèque de littérature contemporaine de l’Université de Paris VII, 1987); Anne Simonin, *Éditions de Minuit, 1942-1955: le devoir d’insoumission* (Paris: IMEC Éditions, 1994). Various testimonials and texts from the intellectual Resistance are collected in Dêbu-Bridel, ed. *La Résistance intellectuelle* (Paris: Julliard, 1970). Fabienne Federini’s *Écrire ou combattre: des intellectuels prennent*

the widely varying content of those experiences, in the postwar moment non-communist intellectuals who had been associated (in however tenuous a manner) with the interior Resistance tended to share an ideological interpretation of the “meaning” of the past four years that conditioned their attitudes toward political violence in the present. This reading of recent history included an intense valorization of “the Resistance” (explicitly understood as a militant agent of illegal but morally laudable violence), a belief that pacifism had been permanently discredited at Munich (and further disgraced by the attitude of pacifist intellectuals during the Occupation), and an exultant reading of the Liberation as an insurrectionary moment that ought not simply restore the *status quo ante bellum* but rather usher in an era of revolutionary change.⁷⁸

After the Occupation, to borrow Donald Reid’s apt characterization, the Resistance came to function for many intellectuals as representative of a sublime “*jetztzeit*” (“now-time”) in which action and belief, ethics and politics, interior and exterior worlds, individual and community, essence and language, norm and transgression, mapped perfectly onto one another.⁷⁹ Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the inaugural issue of *Les Temps modernes*, explained that the Resistance had offered “a unique experience...because it finally escaped from the famous dilemma of being and doing which is that of all intellectuals confronted with action.” The Resistance was “this exceedingly rare phenomenon, a historical action that did not cease to be personal.” Merleau-Ponty went on to describe lyrically “the coexistence of men, to which these years awakened us,” in which “ethics, doctrines, thoughts,

les armes, 1942-1944 (Paris: Découverte, 2006) treats intellectuals’ *armed* involvement in Resistance activities.

⁷⁸ To this list could also be added a respectful attitude toward the French Communist Party based on its role in the Resistance. This point will become more relevant to our discussion – and we will elaborate on it further – in subsequent chapters.

⁷⁹ Donald Reid, *Germaine Tillion, Lucie Aubrac, and the Politics of Memories of the French Resistance* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008).

customs, laws, labors, words – all of them express one another, everything signifies everything. There is nothing outside this unique fulguration of existence.”⁸⁰ Elsewhere on the political spectrum, the Catholic literary critic André Rousseaux offered an ecstatic vision of Resistance fighters as removed “from the measures and references of ordinary life... [T]his rupture with all that is in the order of the quotidian, it is the sign of a life that rises up to a different order, that of heroism and sainthood... Their battles resembled a miracle, not only because they were won, but because they were transported outside of the world where positive laws reign.”⁸¹

Rousseaux here, like the overwhelming majority of intellectuals at this historical juncture, emphasized military heroism and conventional masculine virility in combat – not “spiritual” resistance, not subversive journalism or everyday acts of refusal – as the heart of what “the Resistance” had been. Defining the interior Resistance as a combat operation, and its members as soldiers just like the soldiers of the 1914-1918 war, was a strategic priority for Resistance leaders after the Liberation: this gave them crucial political leverage, and also helped to secure benefits, pensions, honors, and positions for Resistance “veterans.”⁸² But far more than these practical

⁸⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “La guerre a eu lieu,” *Les Temps modernes* 1 (October 1945), 64 and 66: “...L[a] résistance offrait ce phénomène si rare d’une action qui ne cessait pas d’être personnelle... L’expérience de la résistance a été pour eux une expérience unique et ils voulaient en garder l’esprit dans la nouvelle politique française, parce qu’elle échappait enfin au fameux dilemme de l’être et du faire qui est celui de tous les intellectuels devant l’action;” “Dans la coexistence des hommes, à laquelle ces années nous ont éveillés, les morales, les doctrines, les pensées et les coutumes, les lois, les travaux, les paroles s’expriment les uns les autres, tout signifie tout. Il n’y a rien hors cette unique fulguration de l’existence.”

⁸¹ Rousseaux, “L’Âme du maquis,” *Les Lettres françaises* 23 (30 September 1944): “Ce qu’il a fait apparaître échappe aux mesures et aux références de la vie ordinaire... Ce dépouillement de tout ce qui rattache un homme à sa famille, à son métier, à sa maison, cette rupture avec tout ce qui est de l’ordre quotidien, c’est le signe d’une vie qui s’élève à un autre ordre: celui de l’héroïsme et de la sainteté... Leurs batailles ont tenu du miracle, non seulement parce qu’elles ont été gagnées, mais parce qu’elles ont été livrées hors du monde où règnent les lois positives.”

⁸² Olivier Wieviorka, “Les avatars du statut de résistant en France (1945-1992),” *Vingtième Siècle* 50 (April - June 1996): 55-66. Wieviorka emphasizes the *Gaullist* strategic interest in emphasizing the military nature of the Resistance, as a means of exercising political dominance over the interior Resistance. But he also demonstrates how this, in turn, compelled the organizations of the interior

considerations was at stake in intellectuals' retrospectively militarized reading of the Resistance: portraying the movement as an "underground army" allowed them to restore a measure of virility and strength to the nation that had been so badly humiliated in 1940. France was no damsel in distress that had required rescue by the Allies, no passively suffering victim, but – thanks to the Resistance – a vigorous country that had helped win back its own freedom.⁸³ The violence that the armed elements of the Resistance had employed was thus not only acknowledged but systematically exaggerated and mythologized after the Liberation. In these early postwar years, non-violent means of resistance were often forgotten or disparaged: for example, as many historians have noted, women's contributions to the Resistance tended to be effaced from memory for many years because, despite taking other sorts of risks, they participated less often than men in armed actions. Meanwhile, intellectuals frequently assimilated disparate elements of the Resistance (including their own participation) into the militarized vision.⁸⁴ Even some treatments of the concentration camps emphasized inmates' heroic "battles" waged against guards.⁸⁵ Catholic venues were the only ones in which it was emphasized that "spiritual," non-

Resistance (including those that had not been armed, nor organized along military lines) to adopt the same logic, so as to be recognized as *bona fide* resisters.

⁸³ Few authors were as unsubtle in their gendering of the Resistance as the Abbé Folliet, who rejoiced that "after our feminine, petit-bourgeois, stockholder century," the maquis with their "savage and rude and sometimes violent" ways offered France, at last, "something more alive and more ardent and more virile." "Le sens du maquis," *Témoignage chrétien* 26 (25 November 1944).

⁸⁴ Louis Martin-Chauffier, for example, insisted that writers "had fought like other resisters, with the weapons that war and the occupation demanded," and claimed the experience had taught them all "that the exercise of thought – even in the service of justice – was not sufficient to satisfy the demands on them, and that the eminent duties of the spirit do not constitute a privilege that lets you off from the common responsibility." "Engagement Total," *Les Lettres françaises* 70 (25 August 1945).

⁸⁵ For example, see "Buchenwald, bagne maudit, mais page glorieuse de la Résistance française," *Le Patriote résistant*, numéro spécial (May 1946). Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005) provides a fascinating study of this phenomenon twenty years later. The assimilation of deportation into the narrative of a militant Resistance depended on the erasure of the specificity of Jewish experience, and an understanding of the deported as *political* opponents of Nazism. I closely examine this reading of the history of deportation, as well as ways it began to be contested in the 1940s and 50s, in Chapter Four.

violent forms of Resistance had been heroic in their own way as well. In journals like *Témoignage chrétien* and *Esprit*, some seeds were planted in these years for alternative readings of the Resistance as a movement defined not by its own acts of violence but rather by its insistence on bearing moral witness to the violence embodied by Nazism. Jean Lacroix, for example, suggested in *Esprit* in early 1945 that the value of the Resistance need not only be read in terms of its military “efficacy:” the choice of the individual to resist could alternatively be understood as a supreme form of bearing witness.⁸⁶ But such arguments did not appear much outside of Left Catholic publications, and even there they were subdued; as we will see in subsequent chapters, it would not be until the early fifties that a secularized version of this line of thinking began to appeal to a broader segment of the French Left, and it would be many years indeed until a “rewriting” of the war years in these terms was complete.

French pacifism, meanwhile, emerged from the Occupation terribly battered.⁸⁷ Pacifism was tainted in intellectual circles both by its association with the policy of appeasement and the spirit of “defeatism,” and also by the fact that a number of interwar integral pacifists had contributed to collaborationist journals during the Occupation. Intellectuals associated with the Resistance now tended to profess a belief that not only these individuals but pacifism as a whole had been definitively discredited by the world’s experience with Nazism. “We now know,” Camus wrote, “that there always comes a time when it [integral pacifism] is no longer tenable.”⁸⁸ Pride in French soldiers’ role in the final months of the war in Europe was universal, and fierce; so, conversely, was retrospective shame and scorn for the prewar “pacifist

⁸⁶ Jean Lacroix, “Témoignage ou efficacité” [“Witnessing or Efficacy”], *Esprit* 113 (December 1945): 849-855.

⁸⁷ See Norman Ingram, “Pacifism and the Liberation,” in *The Liberation: Image and Event*, 209-224.

⁸⁸ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 30 August 1945 [595]: “Le pacifisme intégral nous paraît mal raisonné et nous savons désormais qu’il vient toujours un temps où il n’est plus tenable.”

delirium” of too many of France’s elites.⁸⁹ The idea that violence could be banished from politics in a world that contained men like Hitler was absurd and dangerous. If they were to have any hope of winning, those who fought for justice would need, as the fierce octogenarian Julien Benda put it, to be “armed with a broadsword, and determined to make use of it...”⁹⁰

The uses that many intellectuals dreamed in 1944 might be made of the “broadsword” were not confined to finishing off Hitler’s Germany. Rather, these writers posited that the moment they were living in was a revolutionary one, from which a radically different France might emerge.⁹¹ The liberation of France from Nazi occupation – treated romantically by many writers in ecstatic descriptions of the people of Paris in arms on the barricades, as in 1792 and 1871 – would be only the beginning of a great liberatory moment. Among non-communist intellectuals who had been involved in the Resistance, the word “revolution” at this point tended to stand in for a mass of inchoate hopes for renewal, justice, a new leadership class issued from the Resistance, a different and more “human” France.⁹² Above all, in the words of André Mandouze, it signified the desire for “a definitive and decisive rupture with the

⁸⁹ Jean Rous, “La Leçon de juin 1936,” *La Pensée Socialiste* no.5 (June 1946), 12: “délires pacifiste.”

⁹⁰ Julien Benda, “Justice ou amour? La trahison des laïcs,” *Les Lettres françaises* 47 (17 March 1945): “Pour nous, notre idéal est bien la paix, mais c’est la paix par la justice, celle-ci étant armée du glaive et décidée à s’en servir...”

⁹¹ As we have seen, the idea that the postwar moment was ripe for a revolution that would complete the task undertaken with the overthrow of Vichy was not unique to intellectuals: indeed, it was ubiquitous, and barely controversial. The Jesuit priest at Notre Dame de Paris, for example, offered his annual series of radiodiffused lectures in 1945 on the theme of “Christ and Revolution.”

⁹² Intellectuals often expressed their desire for revolutionary change by demanding full implementation of the CNR Charter, a common program for the postwar period adopted by the united Resistance movements early in 1944. On the development of the Charter, see Claire Andrieu, *Le Programme Commun de la Résistance. Des idées dans la guerre* (Paris: Éditions de l’Érudit, 1984) and Andrew Shennan, *Rethinking France: Plans for Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). The Charter had called for “true economic and social democracy,” some kind of nationalization of industry and state direction of the economy, social security, and the punishment of traitors; as a document designed to please many different Resistance groups, it was, as Jackson writes, extremely “vague on details.” (*France: The Dark Years*, 516.) Different intellectuals interpreted the goal of its “full implementation” in different ways. Some emphasized economic justice and “social revolution;” others moral renewal; still others the promotion of new political elites, issued from the ranks of the Resistance.

world that died in '39.”⁹³ The interesting point for our purposes is that, in the period immediately after the liberation, these writers – whatever inflections they individually gave to the dream of “revolutionary” change – tended to accept, whether reluctantly or ecstatically, the possible need for violent means to achieve it. Many echoed the logic of an article written by Robert Salmon a few months before D-Day, in which he had reflected that “It is possible that the coming Revolution will not demand riots and arson,” but had gone on to assert that in any case “these evils would not matter much if they were necessary to give birth to a new world.”⁹⁴

All of these preliminary remarks on intellectuals and the general problem of violence can now guide our understanding of intellectuals and the more specific problem of violence in the purges. In sum, intellectuals with Resistance credentials shared an interpretation of the recent past that provided the “lesson” that lethal force (state force, as in the Allies fighting Hitler, *and* non-state force, as in the interior Resistance) would at times be necessary in order for justice to prevail, and moreover that arguments for non-violence were probably morally suspect. There was very little discursive “room” available in this ideological context – and, moreover, in the broader institutional context outlined in the first half of this chapter – to elaborate arguments against the use of any violence for the purpose of purging (without, that is, immediately appearing to make apologies for collaboration). What is more, intellectuals, as an article of faith, understood the purge as an indispensable *part of* the legacy of the Resistance and the revolutionary project of remaking France. The purge

⁹³ Mandouze, “Intransigeance doctrinale, volonté révolutionnaire,” *Témoignage chrétien* 19 (7 October 1944): “Mais elle attend que des chrétiens et des non-chrétiens, fraternellement unis pour construire un monde meilleur, travaillent ensemble à élaborer ce programme qui opérera d’une façon décisive et définitive une rupture avec un monde mort en 39.”

⁹⁴ Robert Tenaille [Robert Salmon], *Cahiers de Défense de la France*, March 1944, in Henri Michel and Boris Mirkine-Guetzitch, eds., *Les Idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1954), 156: “Il se peut que la Révolution à venir n’exige pas l’émeute et l’incendie encore que ces maux soient peu de choses s’ils sont nécessaires pour enfanter un monde nouveau.”

was conceptualized in terms of cleansing, purification, clearing out rot, and atoning for sin; to the intellectuals who emerged from the Resistance it was, as *Défense de la France* editorialized in early September, 1944, “in sum, the preliminary problem for the recovery [*relèvement*] of France.”⁹⁵

None of this should suggest that Left intellectuals called in an unqualified or unrestrained manner for deadly violence to be enacted against all those who had “betrayed” France during the Occupation. In fact, it is a strikingly common characteristic of texts on the *épuration* from this period to engage in elaborate distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable uses of lethal force. These distinctions tended to pivot on the *spirit* in which executions were carried out: the attitude, motives, feelings, and bearing of the executioners. Through laying out and constantly refining intricate dichotomies between “good” (legitimate, justifiable, necessary, pure) and “bad” (illegitimate, impure, tainted, criminal) ways of killing collaborators, intellectuals as diverse as Camus, Mandouze, Louis Martin-Chauffier, Simone de Beauvoir, and Benda managed to maintain a place for retributive violence in the polity.

By far the most common way of delimiting acceptable from unacceptable uses of violence in the *épuration* – and thus affirming that some forms of lethal retribution were indeed entirely legitimate – was to distinguish “justice” from “vengeance.” Those who used this formulation attempted to draw a bright line between acts of violence driven by suspect, feminized, “low” passions – hatred, sadism, instinctive rage, reveling in victor’s spoils – and those driven by a reasoned, cerebral, masculine commitment to the values that collaboration with the Nazis had betrayed. Certain phrases were adopted as conventions on the non-communist Left and functioned as

⁹⁵ Editorial, *Défense de la France*, 6 September 1944: “L’*épuration* est en somme le problème préliminaire au *relèvement* de la France.”

ubiquitous refrains: “Justice, not vengeance,” “Justice without hatred,” “Justice yes, vengeance no.” So, too, did rote claims that these demands were being made in the name of “the dead,” “memory,” or “our martyrs,” despite the authors’ personal distaste for violence of any sort: thus the demand for blood was displaced onto a set of ghosts. (Some authors literally conjured up the spirits).⁹⁶ Many editorialists felt compelled to spell out their own marked lack of sadism. Socialist deputy Édouard Depreux, calling for more death sentences in October of 1944, prefaced his demand by explaining “I feel a strong revulsion for the death penalty, especially in political matters. Cruelty sickens me. I am as little bloodthirsty as is possible.”⁹⁷ An editorialist in *Libération*, taking a similar position, insisted that “I write these words without hatred, for there has never been hatred in my heart.”⁹⁸ Father Riquet, a priest who had survived Mauthausen, led into his bitter disappointment at the leniency of the Nuremberg verdicts by first asking of his readers, “Would I be a priest worthy of Christ if the spectacle of a Goering or of a Goebbels, hung high and low, inspired in me the sadistic joy that our executioners at Mauthausen felt in seeing hang the strangled cadaver of one of our poor comrades? Precisely because I am French, Christian, civilized, I refuse myself that sad pleasure in the misfortune of another.” He went on to explain that the Germans had deserved “just sanctions, not to satisfy the animal instinct for vengeance,

⁹⁶ For example, see Georges Adam, “Les morts témoignent...” *Les Lettres françaises* 40 (27 January 1945); Bernard Severine, “Morts pour rien,” *Les Lettres françaises* 34 (10 December 1944); Claude Martial, “Ils sont encore en liberté,” *Libération*, 6 September 1944.

⁹⁷ Édouard Depreux, “Il faut frapper fort, viser juste et à la tête,” *Le Populaire*, 14 October 1944: “J’éprouve une vive répulsion pour la peine de mort, spécialement en matière politique. La cruauté me répugne. Je suis aussi peu sanguinaire que possible. Mon tempérament comme ma formation font de moi un avocat non un procureur. Mais en présence de telles horreurs, ma raison, plus encore que ma sensibilité, me fait déplorer que six semaines après la libération de Paris, nous n’ayons pas encore appris que quelques criminels avaient payé de leur vie, après un jugement régulier, des forfaits odieux entre tous. Je le dis après mure réflexion, de sang-froid et en ayant pleine conscience de ma responsabilité.”

⁹⁸ Martial, “Ils sont encore en liberté”: “J’écris ces mots sans haine, car il n’y eut jamais de haine dans mon cœur.”

but to make those who would be tempted to return to such acts of madness think about it.”⁹⁹

Albert Camus, more than any other single figure in the immediate postwar moment, exemplified the attempt to distinguish “pure” and therefore acceptable usages of violence. We have already seen that the young Algerian-born Camus maintained an open position on the general problem of violence in the immediate postwar moment. It was an issue he had wrestled with mightily during the Occupation; in his four 1943-1944 “Letters to a German Friend,” he ultimately announced that the Resistance could use lethal violence against the German occupants and yet maintain “clean hands.” This conclusion rested on the argument that the French had entered into the conflict not as aggressors but as “victims,” and had only slowly, against their own instinctive “liking for man, the image that we had fashioned for ourselves of a peaceful destiny,” reconciled themselves to the need to take up “the sword” for the sake of justice.¹⁰⁰ Camus’s distinction between the Resistance’s licit and the Germans’ illicit use of violence – the dichotomy at the heart of the famous “Letters” – relied less on an elaborated ethical logic than on an intuitive, impressionistic interrogation of the *feelings* involved in the exertion of force. Reluctance, scruples, reasoned and agonized choice, and most importantly the absence of any pleasure in the act of killing

⁹⁹ Le Père Riquet, “Le Crime appelle le châtement,” *Le Patriote résistant* 16 (15 October 1946): : “Serai-je un prêtre digne du Christ si le spectacle d’un Goering ou d’un Goebbels, pendus haut et court, m’inspirait la joie sadique qu’éprouvaient nos bourreaux de Mauthausen en voyant se balancer le cadavre étranglé de nos pauvres camarades? Précisément parce que Français, chrétien, civilisé, je me refuse à cette triste jouissance du malheur d’autrui...Mais d’autre part, tant de tortures, si savamment combinés, tant de massacres immenses et sanguinaires, tant de désordres accumulés dans notre monde appelaient de justes sanctions, non pour satisfaire l’animal instinct de la vengeance, mais pour faire réfléchir ceux qui, demain, seraient tentés de revenir à ces folies.” This article reproduced an earlier radio address.

¹⁰⁰ Camus, *Lettres à un ami allemand*, in *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 223: “Nous avons eu à vaincre notre goût de l’homme, l’image que nous nous faisons d’un destin pacifique...” The “Première lettre” was originally published in the *Revue Libre* no.2 in 1943; the second (signed Louis Neuville) was published in 1944 in *Cahiers de la Libération* no.3. The four letters together, *Lettres à un ami allemand*, were published by Gallimard in 1945.

functioned as the affective signposts of acceptable violences. The French Resistance's refusal to indulge in blind, dehumanizing "hatred" for the Germans – even as they accepted the necessary task of "destroying" them – provided a reassuring guarantee that resisters' hands remained clean.¹⁰¹ If the French had been compelled to "resemble [the Germans] a bit" in order to defeat them by arms, the essential distinction nonetheless remained intact.¹⁰² Unlike the Germans, who had quickly, eagerly embraced the role of aggressors, the French had "needed all this time to find out if we had the right to kill men, if it was permitted to us to add to the atrocious misery of this world," Camus wrote.

And it was this time, lost and found, this defeat, accepted and overcome, these scruples paid for in blood, that give us the right, us Frenchmen, to believe today that we entered into this war with pure [*pures*] hands – with the purity of victims and of the convinced – and that we are going to leave it with pure hands – but with the purity, this time, of a great victory won against injustice and against our own selves.¹⁰³

While the Occupation continued, Camus extended the same logic to Resistance assassinations of Frenchmen who were "traitors" to France. His editorial upon the occasion of Pierre Pucheu's execution in Algiers, like the "Letters to a German Friend," essentially argued that members of the Resistance had the right to kill Pucheu because they grasped the horror of their act: they (unlike their victim) understood "in the full light of the imagination" what it actually "that a man could be wiped off of this

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 242: "...je puis vous dire qu'au moment même où nous allons vous détruire sans pitié, nous sommes cependant sans haine contre vous."

¹⁰² Ibid., 242: "Il nous a fallu entrer dans votre philosophie, accepter de vous rassembler un peu."

¹⁰³ Ibid., 223: "Il nous a fallu tout ce temps pour aller voir si nous avions le droit de tuer des hommes, s'il nous était permis d'ajouter à l'atroce misère de ce monde. Et c'est ce temps perdu et retrouvé, cette défaite acceptée et surmontée, ces scrupules payés par le sang, qui nous donnent le droit, à nous Français, de penser aujourd'hui que nous étions entrés dans ce guerre les mains pures – de la pureté des victimes et des convaincus – et que nous allons en sortir les mains pures – mais de la pureté, cette fois, d'une grande victoire remportée contre l'injustice et contre nous-mêmes."

earth.” And yet, reasoning clearly, they chose to act, and executed Pucheu – Camus made this point twice in the brief article – “without hatred, but without pity.”¹⁰⁴

Once Camus had ascertained that violence against the Germans and their French supporters met his requirements for purity of feeling and purpose, he could be unstinting and, indeed, quite lyrical in his celebration of it. This was particularly true in the heady August days of the liberation of Paris. His editorials in *Combat* during this moment were full of awe-stricken battle imagery that mixed horrific violence with great beauty.¹⁰⁵ On August 24, he wrote, “This enormous Paris, dark and hot, with its two storms, in the sky and in the streets, seems to us more illuminated now than that City of Light that was once the envy of the entire world. It is aglow with all the fires of hope and pain, it has the flame of lucid courage and all the splendor not just of the liberation, but of the liberty to come.”¹⁰⁶ The next day, he added that “On the most beautiful and hottest of August nights, in the skies of Paris the ever-present stars mingle with tracer rounds, smoke from fires, and the multicolored rockets of the

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous [Camus], “Tout ne s’arrange pas,” *Les Lettres françaises*, May 1944. Reproduced in *Essais*, 1470: “Mais c’est dans la pleine lumière de l’imagination que nous apprenons en même temps, et par un paradoxe qui n’est qu’apparent, à admettre sans révolte qu’un homme puisse être rayé de ce terre... C’est le cri général, l’appel, le langage plein de choses et d’images vraies, la revendication de tous les inculpés que nous sommes depuis quatre ans, devenus soudain assez forts pour juger leurs juges eux-mêmes et pour le faire sans haine, mais sans pitié.” In addition to this piece in *Lettre françaises*, a number of articles in the clandestine *Combat* which can likely be attributed to Camus made reference to the future punishment of collaborators. These articles promised uncompromising justice for those who had collaborated with the Germans; in some cases, they explicitly advocated summary execution: e.g., “Les hors-la-loi,” *Combat* 56 (April 1944) [3]. Heeding Henri Michel’s point that the clandestine press is best approached as “a combat weapon, more than an instrument for the diffusion of thought,” I have refrained from engaging in extensive readings of these articles. Their “with us or against us” language can be accounted for in large part as tactical: in a situation approaching all-out war between the Resistance and the Milice, many members of the clandestine press attempted to use threats of future punishment to encourage support for the maquis and discourage denunciations. Michel and Mirkine-Guetzitch, *Idées politiques et sociales*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ On Camus’s role at *Combat*, his position as a writer-journalist, and the rules and inconsistencies in his use of “je” and “nous” in his editorials for the journal, see Jeanyves Guérin, ed., *Camus et le premier Combat (1944-1947)* (Garenne-Colombes: Éditions Européennes Erasme, 1990).

¹⁰⁶ Camus, “Le sang de la liberté” [151]: “Cet énorme Paris noir et chaud, avec ses deux orages dans le ciel et dans les rues, nous paraît, pour finir, plus illuminé que cette Ville Lumière que nous enviait le monde entier. Il éclate de tous les feux de l’espérance et de la douleur, il a la flamme du courage lucide, et tout l’éclat non seulement de la libération, mais de la liberté prochaine.”

people's joy.”¹⁰⁷ He sang the praise of “freedom's bullets,”¹⁰⁸ and heard the roar of the canons as the voice of “truth,” “the truth in arms and in battle, the truth in power after having been for so long a truth with empty hands and bared chest.” This was “the only truth that is valuable, the truth that consents to fight and win.”¹⁰⁹

Camus repeated in these articles his contention that the French “had not wanted to kill, and that they entered with clean hands into this war which they had not chosen.” But although he stressed their status as non-aggressors, Camus's insistence on the “purity” of the French in this conflict did not actually hinge on establishing the defensive, utilitarian necessity of their actions. Camus recognized, in fact, that it was unclear if the Parisian insurrection really aided the Allied military task of the liberation. But, he argued, fighting was necessary for the dignity – the masculine dignity – of the humiliated nation: “A people that wants to live does not wait for its freedom to be delivered to it...It was not us who made the choice to kill. But we were placed in a position where we either had to kill or to get on our knees [*nous mettre à genoux*]. And although they tried to make us doubt it, we know now, after these four years of terrible struggle, that we are not a race that kneels.”¹¹⁰ Fighting for their own freedom, Camus went on to argue, was a crucible from which the French people would emerge hardened and ready for the revolutionary tasks of the postwar world. It

¹⁰⁷ Camus, “La nuit de la vérité” [151]: “Dans la plus belle et la plus chaude des nuits d'août, le ciel de Paris mêle aux étoiles de toujours les balles traçantes, la fumée des incendies et les fusées multicolores de la joie populaire.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.: “les balles de la liberté.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. [152]: “La vérité en armes et au combat, la vérité en force après avoir été si longtemps la vérité aux mains vides et à la poitrine découverte. Elle est partout dans cette nuit où peuple et canon grondent en même temps. Elle est la voix même de ce peuple et de ce canon, elle a le visage triomphant et épuisé des combattants de la rue, sous les balafres et la sueur. Oui, c'est bien la nuit de la vérité et de la seule qui soit valable, celle qui consent à lutter et à vaincre.”

¹¹⁰ Camus, “Ils ne passeront pas,” *Combat*, 23 August 1944 [147-148]: “Un peuple qui veut vivre n'attend pas qu'on lui apporte sa liberté...Ce n'est pas nous qui avons choisi de tuer. Mais on nous a mis dans le cas de tuer ou de nous mettre à genoux. Et quoiqu'on ait tenté de nous en faire douter, nous savons après ces quatre ans de terrible lutte que nous ne sommes pas d'une race à nous mettre à genoux.”

was a guarantee of virile strength, a guard against decadence: “No one,” he explained, “can believe that a freedom won in this night, in this bloodshed, will have the tranquil and tame face of which some are pleased to dream. This terrifying childbirth is that of a revolution.”¹¹¹ And “they cannot hope,” he exulted, “that men who have fought for four years in silence and for entire days now in the din from the sky and from the rifles will consent to see the return of the forces of resignation and injustice in any form whatsoever... The Paris that is fighting tonight wants to assume command tomorrow.”¹¹² This logic – that a bloody liberation struggle would, through its very violence, produce a population ready for the demands of freedom – would be anathema to Camus by the time Frantz Fanon was using it in the Algerian context fifteen years later. But for a heady moment in 1944, he used it himself.¹¹³

Camus drew back quickly indeed from such language. But he did maintain through the fall and winter of 1944 that a certain measure of violence might be necessary to complete the process of radical renewal that had begun with the Resistance. France might be liberated, but the war was still on, and the shape of the new France had not yet been determined. He was vague on the specifics of the social and political changes he desired, sticking to socialist-humanist generalities (“what we want for France is a collectivist economy and liberal politics”) and to the idea that the

¹¹¹ “Le Sang de la liberté” [150]: “Il faut, au contraire, que cela devienne bien clair: personne ne peut penser qu’une liberté conquise dans cette nuit, dans ce sang aura le visage tranquille et domestiqué que certains se plaisent à lui rêver. Ce terrible enfantement est celui d’une révolution.” When he included this essay in *Actuelles: Écrits politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950) six years later, Camus quietly changed the language: “dans ce sang” became “dans ces convulsions.”

¹¹² Ibid.: “On ne peut pas espérer que des hommes qui ont lutté quatre ans dans le silence et les jours entiers dans le fracas du ciel et des fusils, consentent à voir revenir les forces de la démission et de l’injustice, sous quelque forme que ce soit... Le Paris qui se bat ce soir veut commander demain.”

¹¹³ Of course, the Paris insurrection was an altogether extraordinary moment of pride and joy for the city’s residents, and no one’s exaltation at this juncture ought to be considered their generalized “position” on insurrectionary violence. See Brossat, *Libération, fête folle*. Sartre also wrote a series in *Combat* from 28 August – 4 September, 1944, collectively titled “Un promeneur dans Paris insurgé,” which used similar heady language to celebrate the restored virility of the people-in-arms. See Susan Suleiman’s analysis: “Choisir son passé: Sartre mémorialiste de la France occupée,” in *La Naissance du ‘phénomène Sartre’ : Raisons d’un succès, 1938-1945*, ed. Ingrid Galster (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 213-236.

desired revolution's "true dimension" was ethical.¹¹⁴ But he was unwavering in his insistence that it was, indeed, still "revolution" that France needed. To those who began to call for greater order in the country as the autumn wore on, he responded that "We all had the impression, during those heart-rending days of August, that order began precisely with the first shots of the insurrection. Beneath their disorderly appearance, revolutions carry with them a principle of order. That principle will prevail if the revolution is total."¹¹⁵ He continued to provide a moral guarantee for the "purity" of his advocacy of certain uses of force by disavowing any satisfaction or pleasure on his part: on October 12, 1944, for example, echoing the "Letters to a German Friend," he wrote, "We have no perverse taste for this world of violence and tumult in which we use up what is best in ourselves in hopeless conflict. But since the contest has begun, we believe that it must be played out to the end."¹¹⁶

For Camus, the project of remaking France emphatically included a purge of those who had collaborated with the Germans, including – despite his lifelong abhorrence for the death penalty – the physical elimination of the most egregious offenders. Here, too, he attempted to stake out a place for violence to function legitimately in the polity by dichotomizing between good and bad objects, a "pure" and an "impure" manner of killing traitors. Again, the key difference was affect: legitimate punishment of collaborators was not an expression of hatred, rage, fury, or sadism; its executors did not enjoy it. Indeed, ideally, they allowed themselves to

¹¹⁴ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 1 October 1944 [223-224]: "...nous dirons donc que nous désirons pour la France une économie collectiviste et une politique libérale...[N]ous pensons que la révolution politique ne peut se passer d'une révolution morale qui la double et lui donne sa vraie dimension."

¹¹⁵ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 12 October 1944 [248]: "Car enfin, nous avons tous eu l'impression, pendant ces déchirantes journées d'août, que l'ordre commençait justement avec les premiers coups de feu de l'insurrection. Sous leur visage désordonné, les révolutions portent avec elles un principe d'ordre. Ce principe régnera si la révolution est totale."

¹¹⁶ Ibid. [250]: "Nous n'avons aucun goût pervers pour ce monde de violence et de bruit, où le meilleur de nous-mêmes s'épuise dans une lutte désespérée. Mais puisque la partie est engagée, nous croyons qu'il faut la mener à son terme."

experience no feelings about it at all – neither hatred *nor* pity– just a coolly reasoned understanding that their action would purify the body politic. Camus thus continually contrasted a tightly controlled *épuration* which could match these requirements with its passion-fueled, vengeful “other,” disavowing the latter to better validate the former.¹¹⁷

This attempt to draw a bright line between legitimate “justice” and illegitimate “vengeance” was racked with internal tensions and inconsistencies. The most significant of these involved the place of the dead and of memory in Camus’s arguments for retribution. As we have seen, many authors in this period ventriloquized their own passionate calls for retribution by placing them in the putative mouths of “the martyrs of the Resistance” or “our fallen comrades.” Those Resisters who had survived might be tempted to pardon “traitors,” the argument went – after all, they were not men of hatred! – but needed to remember that to do so would be to break faith with the dead. Camus took this line very strongly – indeed, from the beginning, he contrasted “memory” as a noble motivation for retribution with “hatred” as an ignoble one. On August 22, in the second issue of *Combat* published openly, he wrote that “we carried within us for four years” the visceral images of those tortured by the Nazis and their French helpers. “We are not about to lose our memory now. We are not men of hate. But we must be men of justice.”¹¹⁸ A few days later, he again

¹¹⁷ Thus, although he only rarely made direct comments about the “*épuration sauvage*,” a shadowy vision of unchained, unreasoned popular vengeance lurked beneath the surface of his work on the purges – as did an implicit endorsement of state violence as superior to non-state violence. When he did refer to extralegal acts it was with disdain, as a sign that the official purge was failing. (For example, in his editorial of January 5, 1945.) This should not be understood as a reversal of his defense of the “hors-la-loi” Resistance, because Camus’s understanding of “the state” in these articles was entirely schematic; until he became disillusioned with it, he essentially identified the Provisional Government with the Resistance itself. (Or, to be more precise, as one element of a new national elite issued from the Resistance, which also included the national press.) As for the practical matters involved in dispensing justice – courts-martial, courts, prisons, case backlogs – Camus was supremely uninterested.

¹¹⁸ “Le temps de la justice,” *Combat*, 22 August 1944 [146]: “Ces enfants morts qu’on faisait entrer à coup de pied dans des cerceuil, nous les avons portés en nous pendant quatre ans. Maintenant, nous

promised that “it is not hatred which will speak out tomorrow but justice itself, based on memory.”¹¹⁹ With this declared opposition between feeling and memory, Camus disavowed the extent to which his position was grounded in bereavement, guilt, and mourning, not simply a “reasoned” demand for justice.

Beginning in October of 1944, Camus was drawn into a much-publicized and increasingly strident debate about the *épuration* with the older Catholic writer and *résistant* François Mauriac; their point of disagreement is often synoptically described by historians as a dispute over whether the principle of “justice” or that of “charity” should govern the purges. The dispute in the pages of *Combat* and *Le Figaro* between Camus and Mauriac was in fact rather more nuanced than that.¹²⁰ Mauriac, with his towering literary reputation and impeccable Resistance credentials (despite class, family, and religious ties to many people implicated in collaboration) occupied a uniquely privileged position from which to speak against the *épuration* without being simply dismissed as an apologist for collaboration.¹²¹ In *Le Figaro* articles beginning in September 1944, he worried aloud about an excess of punishment, targeting not just those guilty of high treason but those who had made “mistakes;” he feared that political rancor and the desire for petty vengeance would undermine the necessary

aurons de la mémoire. Nous ne sommes pas des hommes de haine. Mais il faut bien que nous soyons des hommes de justice.” This editorial is probably but not definitively by Camus.

¹¹⁹ Camus, “Le temps du mépris,” *Combat*, 30 August 1944 [158]: “Ce n’est pas la haine qui parlera demain, mais la justice elle-même, fondée sur la mémoire.”

¹²⁰ A mention of this debate has become a fixture of even the most cursory histories of the purges. It has also been explored with great detail and insight by several scholars. Sapiro’s account is excellent (*La Guerre des écrivains*, 601-611), as, from a different perspective, is that of Stéphane Gaçon in *L’Amnistie, de la Commune à la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 171-182. Camus biographer Olivier Todd provides a strong exposition of the place of the debate in Camus’s postwar trajectory in *Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), as does Jeanyves Guérin in *Albert Camus: Portrait de l’artiste en citoyen* (Paris: Éditions François Bourin, 1993), 43-62. Jean Lacouture provides a helpful reading of the stakes of the debate for Mauriac in *François Mauriac* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 399-445.

¹²¹ He was, of course, nevertheless routinely accused of apologetics, and continues to be – see, for example, Alice Kaplan’s reductionist characterization of him as “an apologist for charity, forgiveness, and national unity in his regular front-page column in the conservative *Le Figaro*.” *The Collaborator*, 191.

work of rebuilding a unified, peaceful France. Mauriac suggested that the *realities* of the purge thus far gave the lie to the idealistic notion that “justice” could be executed on a plane of purity, utterly divorced from human passions, from the petty desire for “vengeance,” and from the political seeking of advantage. His stance fundamentally challenged the notion that there was a distinction to be drawn between “bad” political violence that dehumanized its victims and “good,” orderly, institutionalized political violence that could function as *part of* an integral humanism. It was this notion precisely that was central to Camus’s defense of the purge; this, I think, goes a long way toward explaining why Camus – who was by no means the most vociferous advocate of a harsh purge, occupying a decidedly moderate position on the spectrum of intellectual opinion – became Mauriac’s chief opponent.¹²²

Several historians, along with Mauriac biographer Jean Lacouture, have stressed that although Camus deliberately, systematically responded to Mauriac as an unbeliever addressing a Catholic, Mauriac’s position, in fact, did not rely most extensively on a Christian conception of charity and forgiveness, but rather on a Gaullist view of the national interest urgently requiring union, reconciliation, and a certain measure of forgetfulness.¹²³ Mauriac insisted repeatedly that his opposition to the course that the *épuration* was taking was not due to an excess of “sentimentality”

¹²² After the Liberation, Camus was the first to resign from the Executive Committee of the National Council of Writers, in part because his moderation on this issue brought him into conflict with the Communist members.

¹²³ Lacouture, *François Mauriac*, 407, 415; Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains*, 608; Gaçon, *L’Amnistie*, 171. Mauriac’s opinions on the *épuration* did put him in line with centrist Catholic press organs like *La Croix* (though in a much stronger position than *La Croix*’s writers to defend those opinions without appearing to be an apologist, because of his superior Resistance credentials). But there was no necessary one-to-one correlation between Catholic faith and a moderate position on the *épuration*: certain left-leaning Catholics resembled Camus much more than Mauriac in their thinking. In *Esprit*, for example, Jean Lacroix vigorously criticized Mauriac. André Mandouze, editor in chief of *Témoignage chrétien*, shared some of Mauriac’s concerns about the *épuration*, but on occasion, in his exasperation with more conservative Catholic thinkers and their calls for a return to “order,” he came close to celebrating violence in Christian terms: “Force is a Christian virtue, let’s not forget it, and there are holy violences.” “Levain,” *Témoignage chrétien* 40 (2 January, 1945).

on his part, but rather to “cool-headed” perception of what France needed. For example, in an October 17 reference to summary executions of prisoners pardoned by de Gaulle, he wrote: “In an era when arbitrary arrests are routine, is it necessary to take away from the condemned their last chance of recourse through pardon? Once again, do not accuse us of sentimentality. We say coldly, in speaking of pardons, that it is a matter of prerogative of the State, and that certain [capital] verdicts put the national interest in peril.”¹²⁴ But – as critics who have focused on the Gaullist dimension of Mauriac’s position have failed to sufficiently stress – the language he used in this and other editorials slipped uncontrollably into the register of sentiment; specifically, one might say that Mauriac betrayed an emotional and indeed an aesthetic distaste – even horror – for the violence of the *épuration*, especially for popular manifestations of the desire to see men be punished. In the public’s desire for “vengeance,” in the fact that “in the eyes of certain French people, today, the ultimate punishment is the only one that counts – condemnation to prison makes them shrug their shoulders,” Mauriac discerned a sort of primitive bloodlust emerging.¹²⁵ He compared this thirst for the punishment of others to the popular enthusiasm for bullfighting, and saw the veneer of civilization cracking as man’s empathic ability “to understand another man, to put himself in the other’s place” evaporated into objectification of the other.¹²⁶ He was most repulsed by the prospect of violence being

¹²⁴ Mauriac, “La justice et la guerre,” *Le Figaro*, 19 October 1944: “Est-ce dans une époque où les arrestations arbitraires sont la règle, qu’il faut enlever aux condamnés la chance dernière du recours en grâce? Encore une fois, qu’on ne nous accuse pas de sensiblerie. Nous disons froidement, en parlant du recours en grâce, que c’est d’une prérogative de l’État qu’il s’agit, et que certains verdicts mettent en jeu l’intérêt national.”

¹²⁵ Mauriac, “Justice,” *Le Figaro*, 12 December 1944: “C’est tout de même étrange qu’aux yeux de certains Français, aujourd’hui, le châtimeur suprême compte seul. La condamnation au bagnon fait hausser les épaules.”

¹²⁶ “Autour d’un verdict,” *Le Figaro*, 4 January 1945: “Mais le public était complice. La passion de la corrida, que les gens de ma province ont dans le sang, est, au fond, commune à tous les hommes;” “Le mépris de la charité,” *Le Figaro*, 7 January 1945: “Naguère, dire de quelqu’un qu’il était humain, cela signifiait qu’on le jugeait capable de comprendre un autre homme, de se mettre à sa place, d’entrer dans son destin particulier, dans son drame.”

treated as a desacralized communal spectacle in which another of God's creatures was reduced to mere abject flesh. (Later in the year he called the practice of displaying the corpses of executed collaborators "the sign of a regression far below that of the most primitive tribes, this sacrilege to which our children become accustomed: there where we used to get on our knees before a sacred relic, before a body called to be brought back to life on the final day, they see nothing anymore but a done-in animal.")¹²⁷ From all of this, Mauriac implicitly drew the conclusion that a "clean" retributive violence that expressed nothing but "justice," dehumanized neither victim nor perpetrator, and led to renewal rather than moral rot and rancor, was not actually possible in the real world; better, therefore, in most cases, for France to abstain from lethal forms of punishment.¹²⁸ His most forceful call was not for "charity" but for "respect for the human being, who, even if guilty, even if charged with crimes, must be punished without being debased [*avili*]."¹²⁹

Camus, as we have seen, abundantly shared Mauriac's horror at displays of unleashed "instinct," cruelty, and hatred. He also shared Mauriac's perception that, thus far, the purge was not going well. His disagreement with Mauriac thus revolved around the question of whether there was still a way to recuperate the purge, a way to use retributive violence in the service of pure justice, without a "regression" into the "primitive" emotions of dehumanizing vengeance and hatred or the petty impurities of politics. At this juncture, despite the increasingly glaring tensions in his logic, Camus continued to insist that such a project was possible. Against Mauriac's suggestion that

¹²⁷ Quoted in Louis Bartz, "Curiosité malsaine," *La Croix*, 15 August 1945: "... 'signe d'une régression très en deçà des tribus les plus primitives, que ce sacrilège à quoi nos enfants s'accoutument: là où nous nous mettions à genoux devant une relique sacrée, devant une chair appelée à ressusciter au dernier jour, ils ne voient plus qu'une bête crevée.'"

¹²⁸ Mauriac did claim that he was not categorically opposed to the death penalty in all cases.

¹²⁹ Mauriac, "La vraie justice," *Le Figaro*, 8 September 1944: "Ainsi, par diverses routes, nous aboutissons tous à ce respect de l'être humain qui, même coupable, même chargé de crimes, doit être châtié sans être avili."

the violence of the purge was contaminating the French body politic, Camus defended its purificatory nature. Like Mauriac, he stated his case in terms of the national interest. He used, however, a form of political reasoning that horrified Mauriac, for it relied on a brutal metaphor of extirpation, arguing that evil needed to be rooted out of the “body” of France for the country to be properly cleansed: The “terrifying law” of the age in which Frenchmen now lived, he wrote in late October, meant that “we will be obliged to destroy a still-living part of this country in order to save its very soul.”¹³⁰ In an editorial five days later treating the first death sentence handed down by the High Court he repeated this claim, making even more explicit the treatment of the nation-state as an organism infected with a “foreign body” [*corps étranger*] composed of traitors; these pathogens had to be destructed for health to return.¹³¹

Camus was adamant, despite Mauriac’s skepticism, that these necessary operations of purification could be carried out in a pure spirit. The key, once again, was to privilege reason over affect: France’s leaders needed to remain single-mindedly focused on the demands of justice and refuse to give in to feelings, whether of hatred or of misplaced compassion. He vigorously disavowed any sadistic motives on his own part, and was particularly annoyed, by January of 1945, that Mauriac’s defense of charity had made it appear “that in calling for justice I seemed to be pleading on behalf of hatred.” He protested: “I have no taste for hatred. The mere idea of having enemies seems to me the most tiresome thing in the world, and my comrades and I had to make the greatest efforts to put up with it.”¹³² As for compassion, forgiveness, and

¹³⁰ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 20 October 1944 [273]: “Notre conviction est qu’il y a des temps où il faut savoir parler contre soi-même et renoncer du même coup à la paix du coeur. Notre temps est de ceux-là et sa terrible loi, qu’il est vain de discuter, est de nous contraindre à détruire une part encore vivante de ce pays pour sauver son âme elle-même.”

¹³¹ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 25 October 1944 [289]. Mauriac responded, “The Inquisitors, too, burned the bodies to save the souls.” (“Réponse à ‘Combat,’” *Le Figaro*, 22-23 October 1944.)

¹³² “Justice et charité,” *Combat*, 11 January 1945 [439]: “Et la vertu de la charité est assez singulière pour que j’aie eu l’air, réclamant la justice, de plaider pour la haine...Je n’ai aucun goût pour la haine.

so on, Camus repeatedly wrote that these were, in fact, his own instincts, but that the good of the nation demanded that these, no less than the “passions” of hatred and vengeance, be ignored: they had no place in political decision-making. If condemning men to death “horrifie[d]” him, he sharply counseled himself in print – and it did indeed horrify him – “that is no one’s business but my own,” not a proper argument for the practice to be stopped.¹³³ Increasingly, despite his pronounced lack of interest in nuts-and-bolts policymaking, Camus offered *procedural* suggestions that might help guarantee that “justice” could operate with clean hands, within strictly-defined limits that would set it unmistakably apart from the debased world of politics and passions.

In the editorials responding to Mauriac, Camus continued to ground his commitment to “justice” not in an elaborated ethical logic but in the demands of memory. He continually conjured the dead to support his calls for the punishment of “traitors,” as for example in November 1944 when he demanded that the ultimate punishment be visited on Pétain: “It is the voice of tortures and that of shame that join with ours to demand here the most pitiless and decisive of justices.”¹³⁴ He also displaced responsibility for his own continued support for the purge onto dead comrades and others who mourned them: “I will pardon openly, alongside M. Mauriac, when Vélin’s parents and Leynaud’s wife have told me that I can. But not before, never before...”¹³⁵ Camus fetishized the martyrlike “purity” of those who had

La seule idée d’avoir des ennemis me paraît la chose la plus lassante du monde, et il nous a fallu, mes camarades et moi, le plus grand effort pour supporter d’en avoir.”

¹³³ Ibid. [441]: “Si j’ai l’horreur des condamnations, cela ne regarde que moi.”

¹³⁴ Editorial, *Combat*, 2 November 1944 [303]: “C’est la voix des tortures et celle de la honte qui se joignent à la nôtre pour réclamer ici la plus impitoyable et la plus déterminée des justices.”

¹³⁵ “Justice et charité” [169]: “Je pardonnerai ouvertement avec M. Mauriac quand les parents de Vélin, quand la femme de Leynaud m’auront dit que je le puis. Mais pas avant, jamais avant...” Vélin was the pen name of André Bollier, who had helped found *Combat*. He was arrested by the Gestapo in March 1944 and tortured for information on his comrades, but managed to escape. When he was recaptured in June, he committed suicide to avoid being tortured again. René Leynaud, a Catholic poet and a

fallen fighting for the Resistance – some of whom had been his dear friends – as a moral guarantee of the purity of the *épuration*. “We know full well,” he wrote on October 21, “that on the day the first death sentence is carried out in Paris we will feel repugnance. But then we will need to think about so many other death sentences imposed on pure men, about cherished faces returned to the ground, and about the hands we once loved to shake... [W]e will need the memory of the dead and the unbearable recollection of those among us whom torture turned into traitors.”¹³⁶ It is in passages like this, so evidently marked by grief and guilt at having survived when others had not, that we can see how the already tenuous opposition between vengeance motivated by hatred and justice motivated by memory that Camus had posited for many months began, despite his strenuous insistence to the contrary, to break down. As his debate with Mauriac continued into early 1945, Camus’s editorials increasingly called up the images of the Gestapo’s victims – in particular those who had been compelled to betray their comrades under torture – precisely in order to excoriate himself for his own disgusting weakness in not hating enough. He, too, if he gave in, would be engaging in an act of betrayal. And thus Camus continued to desperately insist that, somewhere between “the cries of enmity coming at us from one side and the tender solicitations that arrive at us from the other,” there *had* to be a path of pure, untainted justice.¹³⁷

treasured friend of Camus’s, had joined *Combat* early in the war; he was killed by the Gestapo in June 1944.

¹³⁶ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 21 October 1944 [275]: “Nous savons bien que le jour où le première sentence de mort sera exécutée à Paris, il nous viendra des répugnances. Mais il nous faudra penser alors à tant d’autres sentences de mort qui ont frappé des hommes purs, à de chers visages retournés à la terre et à des mains que nous aimions serrer...[N]ous aurons besoin de la mémoire des morts et du souvenir insupportable de ceux d’entre nous dont la torture a fait des traîtres.”

¹³⁷ “Justice et charité” [439]: “Nous sommes quelques-uns à refuser à la fois les cris de détestation qui nous viennent d’un côté et les sollicitations attendries qui nous arrivent de l’autre. Et nous cherchons, entre les deux, cette juste voix qui nous donnera la vérité sans la honte.”

Meanwhile, not all intellectuals understood the “good” kind of retributive violence to be that most cleansed of hatred and base, popular passions. A smaller segment of the intellectual class issued from the Resistance celebrated precisely those affects that Camus (and Mauriac) deplored, reading them as signs that the retribution being enacted was an authentic, healthy expression of the French people’s rejection of the Vichy years. The Communists – from deputies to Party intellectuals – were self-proclaimed proponents of hatred; although they were constrained by Party strategy to condemn summary executions, the vision of a spontaneous “people’s tribunal” hanging collaborators on every village square remained their implicit ideal. The readers of *L’Humanité* were instructed that “Hatred is a national duty;” the newspaper on one occasion criticized a prosecutor in a collaboration case who lacked “that indispensable vengeful flame.” Jacques Duclos, Thorez’s second in command, argued in the Assembly that the appropriate feeling for those who had betrayed France was “a sacred hatred.” (Non-Communist deputies drowned him out with cries of “Down with hatred!”)¹³⁸ In *Les Lettres françaises*, Claude Morgan made a similar case: “To the appeal ‘no hatred!’ we respond: we have lots of hatred, because we have lots of love. To save mankind, hatred is still necessary today.”¹³⁹ Nor was such language the exclusive preserve of Communists. Even *Témoignage chrétien* found itself divided here. Editor-in-chief André Mandouze repeatedly contrasted true justice to vengeance, with its “bloody passions,” and insisted that if “it is necessary to kill,” then “it is

¹³⁸ Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy*, 179 and 183.

¹³⁹ Claude Morgan, “Salut Public,” *Les Lettres françaises* 20 (16 September 1944): “À l’appel: pas de haine! nous répondrons: nous avons beaucoup de haine parce que nous avons beaucoup d’amour. Pour sauver l’homme, la haine est aujourd’hui encore nécessaire.” In the same venue, Communist fellow-traveller Julien Benda engaged in a complex consideration of the role of affect, or “passions,” in the purge. Benda argued that there was a certain feminized, voluptuous corruption to the partisans of “charity;” the “sublime” act, instead, was “to subordinate passion to reason,” “to experience pity and to silence it, so as to hear one’s duty.” (Benda, “Justice ou amour? La trahison des laïcs.”)

necessary to kill without hatred.”¹⁴⁰ Like Mauriac, he glimpsed a regression to barbarism in the popular desire for punishment, comparing the clamor around Pétain’s trial to “a scalping dance.”¹⁴¹ But other Catholic writers for the journal heartily defended the role of hatred in the purges: one argued that without hate as a motivating force, no one would find the strength to “exclud[e] forever from the French organism” those who had collaborated and were therefore now carriers of “mortal leprosy.”¹⁴² As the similarity between this language and that employed by Camus suggests, there was not in the end a great deal of difference between those who shunned hatred and those who valorized it: they all, ultimately, used their elaborate considerations of the proper spirit in which one ought to carry out punishment, their careful distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable kinds of killings, in the service of justifying lethal retributive violence.

Simone de Beauvoir stands as a particular case in point here. Alone among her peers, she managed, in an early 1946 article for *Les Temps modernes* titled “Oeil pour oeil” [“An Eye for an Eye”] to interrogate critically the concepts in play in the intellectual debate about violence in the *épuration* – justice, vengeance, hatred – rather than simply to employ the terms. Her inquiry brilliantly demonstrated the inevitable failure of any attempt to distinguish a “good,” pure kind of killing from a “bad,” impure kind. De Beauvoir’s article relentlessly steered the reader toward an impasse:

¹⁴⁰ André Mandouze, “Épuration, ou, à la recherche d’incorruptibles,” *Témoignage chrétien* 17 (23 September 1944): “Même lorsqu’il faut tuer pour faire vivre, il faut tuer sans haine.” As for the journal’s founder, Père Pierre Chaillet, he was so appalled by the “vindictive passions” on display in summary executions in late summer and early fall that he gave up any hope for distinguishing justice from vengeance, and proposed that France simply dispense with both. He wrote on September 16, 1944 (before the judicial *épuration* even took shape), “*That’s enough justice.*” (Editorial, emphasis in original.)

¹⁴¹ Editorial, *Témoignage chrétien* 61 (27 July 1945): “cette dans du scalp.” (Unsigned, but almost certainly by Mandouze.)

¹⁴² G. Varnet, “La justice viendra...” *Témoignage chrétien* 30 (22 December 1944): “C’est la lèpre mortelle d’une mentalité de veulerie et de trahison nationale que, dans les représentantes les plus typiques et les plus compromis, il faut exclure à jamais de l’organisme français.”

neither justice nor vengeance was possible, and all attempts to achieve them were destined to fail. And yet she nevertheless ultimately endorsed the killing of collaborators anyway.

De Beauvoir's article began with a consideration of "vengeance." She was not, like Camus, Mauriac, Mandouze, and others (including her partner Sartre), emotionally or aesthetically repulsed by the "uncivilized" or "medieval" aspect of non-state agents enacting justice.¹⁴³ In summary executions, lynchings, head-shavings, and other "acts of vengeance, either individual or collective, but in any case not codified,"¹⁴⁴ de Beauvoir glimpsed not barbarism but a popular humanist ethics: the hatred that indeed did motivate such acts, she claimed, "is not a capricious passion; it denounces a scandalous reality and imperiously demands that it is effaced from the world. One does not hate hailstorms, or the plague; one only hates men, and not as the material cause of a material loss, but as conscious authors of a true evil [*mal*]."¹⁴⁵ In acts of summary justice, she argued, the French responded to "a profound human need:" a former torturer now tortured by his victim "reestablishes this relationship of reciprocity among human consciences, the negation of which constitutes the most fundamental of injustices."¹⁴⁶ But de Beauvoir recognized that this ideal-type situation, in which "the victim avenges himself on his own," had only been realized in

¹⁴³ In *Combat* on September 2, 1944, for example, Sartre reported seeing a shaved woman led through the streets of Paris: "Even if she were guilty," he commented, "this medieval sadism was disgusting."

¹⁴⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, "Oeil pour oeil," *Les Temps modernes* 5 (February 1946), 816: "Dans la période révolutionnaire que nous avons traversée au lendemain de la libération, des vengeances individuelles ou collectives, mais en tout cas non codifiées, ont eu licence de s'exercer."

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: "La haine, en effet, n'est pas une passion de caprice; elle dénonce une réalité scandaleuse et réclame impérieusement que celle-ci soit effacée du monde. On ne hait pas la grêle, ni la peste; on ne hait que les hommes, en non en tant que cause matérielle d'un dégât matériel, mais comme auteurs conscients d'un véritable mal."

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 817: "la fameuse loi du talion...répond avant tout à une profonde exigence humaine...[R]éellement et concrètement il rétablit ce rapport de réciprocité entre consciences humaines dont la négation constitue la plus fondamentale des injustices."

exceptional instances.¹⁴⁷ Far more often, summary justice had taken the form of vengeance *on behalf of* dead comrades or friends. And here, she suggested, there was something “disquieting,” for the violent actor was *not* simply restoring reciprocity but instead “claim[ing] to establish himself as a judge.”¹⁴⁸ How, she asked, if such acts are permitted, can we be “sure that the avenger is not letting himself be carried away by that desire for power that sleeps in every man?”¹⁴⁹ How can we prevent innocents from being accidentally killed, as “more than one” certainly had been in the extralegal *épuration*?¹⁵⁰ And how can we run the risk that “vengeance calls forth another vengeance, evil engenders evil, and the injustices pile up instead of mutually destroying one another”? Because of all these well-founded anxieties, de Beauvoir claimed, civilized society had necessarily banned private vengeance and replaced it with systems of judicial sanction, loudly proclaimed to be coldly dispassionate and “without hatred.”¹⁵¹

But de Beauvoir ultimately argued that official, state-sanctioned violence against collaborators in the form of death-penalty verdicts was no more satisfactory; indeed, she found it a good deal *more* disturbing than communal outbursts of vengeance. The pomp and “dramatic comedy” of a trial, de Beauvoir explained, sounding a good deal like Hannah Arendt fifteen years later in *Eichmann in*

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 820: “Le cas privilégié, c’est celui où la victime se venge pour son propre compte.” Her specific ideal was “quand, à l’heure de la libération, les internés des camps de concentration massacrèrent les geôliers S.S.” On her continued attachment to this particular example, see her preface to Georges Steiner, *Treblinka* (Paris: Fayard, 1966), and Sam Moyn’s discussion of it in *A Holocaust Controversy*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.: “Mais elle devient suspecte dès que le vengeur prétend s’ériger en juge.”

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 821: “comment être sûr que le vengeur ne se laisse pas emporter par cette volonté de puissance qui sommeille en tout homme?”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 830: “Est-ce bien le coupable que l’on punit? Est-ce vraiment une faute qu’il a commise? Il est facile de se tromper et une erreur peut être irréparable: dans la fièvre de la libération plus d’un innocent a été fusillé.”

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 821: “La vengeance appelle une autre vengeance, le mal engendre le mal, et les injustices s’additionnent sans s’entre-détruire. C’est pourquoi la société n’autorise pas la vengeance privée...[O]n déclare qu’il faut punir sans haine, au nom de principes universels.”

Jerusalem, rendered the issues at stake abstract rather than concrete, and blurred the connection between the crime that had been committed and the punishment for it.¹⁵² Without the tonic of righteous hatred, the misdeeds of the men in the dock were difficult to hold on to; spectators at the High Court saw only tired, defeated, flesh-and-blood individuals being murdered impersonally by the state. The regrettable result was that “the punishment then takes on the look of a symbolic demonstration, and the condemned man is not far from appearing to be an expiatory victim; for, in the end, it is a human being who is going to experience in his conscience and his flesh a punishment destined for that social and abstract reality: the guilty one.”¹⁵³ Taking Brasillach’s execution as an example, de Beauvoir explained that she personally had wanted the death of the editor of the scurrilous *Je suis partout*, but not the death of the surprisingly sympathetic and courageous man on trial many months later. In a France where tens of thousands of “collaborators” had been symbolically excluded from the polity through sentences of “national indignity,” de Beauvoir pointedly praised Brasillach for “the dignity with which he comported himself;” the juridical categories being used in the *épuration*, she thereby suggested, did not do justice to the complex human realities.¹⁵⁴ She thus ended up partially defending hatred for at least preventing a formalized, unreal relation to violence: “[I]t is necessary to punish without hatred, they tell us. But I believe that this, precisely, is the error of official justice. Death is a real and concrete event, not the accomplishment of a rite. The more the trial takes on

¹⁵² Ibid., 824: “les interrogatoires, les plaidoiries se déroulent avec l’apparat d’une comédie dramatique.”

¹⁵³ Ibid., 822: “Le châtement prend alors la figure d’une manifestation symbolique est le condamné n’est pas loin d’apparaître comme une victime expiatoire; car enfin c’est un homme qui va ressentir dans sa conscience et dans sa chair une peine destinée à cette réalité sociale et abstraite: le coupable.”

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 823: “[Q]uelle que fût cette vie, quelles que fussent les raisons de sa mort, la dignité avec laquelle il se comportait en cette situation extrême exigeait notre respect dans le moment où nous aurions le plus souhaité le mépriser.” For an extended consideration of the concepts of “dignity” and “indignity” in republican French juridical contexts since 1791, see Simonin, *Le Déshonneur dans la République*.

the aspect of a ceremony, the more it seems scandalous that it can end in a real spilling of blood.”¹⁵⁵

De Beauvoir’s consideration of violence in the form of improvised vengeance versus violence in the form of death penalties handed down by the state led her, then, not to the privileging of one term over the other but to despair in both. “It is true,” she admitted, “that vengeance degenerates almost inevitably in tyranny; but in its concern for purity, legal sanction fails to reach the concrete goal that it must aim for: it is only an empty form even though the entirety of its content is the only thing that could justify it.”¹⁵⁶ She could not see a way out of the problem: “every punishment,” she concluded, whether carried out by an angry crowd in the heat of passion or a disinterested judge, “brings a portion of failure.”¹⁵⁷ Every attempt to use violence to address the trauma of the recent past revealed itself to be impossible.

But de Beauvoir’s solution was not to renounce violence. “Charity” and forgiveness were not viable escape hatches, she argued, at least not for secular humanists who believed, in existential terms, that man was a free being and ought to be considered responsible, here on earth, for his choices. (Interestingly, in a way that indicates the degree to which Catholic concepts continued to permeate even resolutely non-Catholic French thought in this period, de Beauvoir’s secularist rejection of Mauriac’s “charity” used the theological language of “absolute evil” and “sin” to describe the wrongs that had been committed during the Occupation.)¹⁵⁸ Christians,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 824: “Aussi bien, faut-il punir sans haine, nous dit-on. Mais je crois que c’est précisément là l’erreur de la justice officielle. La mort est un événement réel et concret, non l’accomplissement d’un rite. Plus le procès revêt l’aspect d’un cérémonial, plus il semble scandaleux qu’il puisse aboutir à une véritable effusion de sang.”

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 824-825: “Il est vrai que la vengeance dégénère presque fatalement en tyrannie; mais dans son souci de pureté, la sanction légale manque le but concret qu’elle devait se proposer; elle n’est qu’une forme vide alors que la plénitude de son contenu pouvait seule la justifier.”

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 830: “et c’est pourquoi tout châtement comporte une part d’échec.”

¹⁵⁸ Again, a comparison with Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is instructive. Arendt actively struggled to articulate a justification for human justice that relied only on secular concepts. *Eichmann* was riddled

she argued, could perhaps be charitable in the face of evil, but charity was “forbidden to men who affirm a human ethics, human values.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, in an unsatisfactory final paragraph, de Beauvoir attempted to dismiss the paradox her entire article had so devastatingly outlined, by sweepingly assimilating the problem to the general existential issue of “the ambiguity of the human condition.” If any form of retributive violence was destined to at least partially fail, she shrugged, this was in the end a feature of *all* human action, and it did not follow that we should cease to act. She thus offered a qualified, conflicted, but ultimately unflinching endorsement of the execution of “authentic criminals.” “To punish,” she wrote in closing, “is to recognize man as free in evil as in good, it is to distinguish evil from good in the use man makes of his freedom, it is to desire the good.”¹⁶⁰

Thus, although de Beauvoir went further than any of her peers in elucidating why no form of retributive killing could ever be “pure,” in the end she closed ranks with the vast majority of the non-communist French intellectual class associated with the Resistance. Anxieties about the normative treatment of retributive violence as legitimate and desirable produced disavowals of the violence’s “political” content, a preoccupation with purity and “clean hands,” and the creation of elaborate distinctions, based on affect, between civilized justice and barbaric vengeance. But in the end there was very little possibility at this moment of rejecting the overall position, without appearing to reject the entire legacy of the Resistance. That Mauriac did manage it, from his altogether unique subject position, is merely the exception that

with performative contradictions, but did attempt to insist that one could sit in judgment of Eichmann and condemn him to death *without* employing a language of sin and radical evil.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 828: “la charité...est interdite aux hommes qui affirment une morale humaine, des valeurs humaines.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 830: “Et cependant nous devons encore vouloir le châtement des authentiques criminels. Car châtier c’est reconnaître l’homme comme libre dans le mal comme dans le bien, c’est distinguer le mal du bien dans l’usage que l’homme fait de sa liberté, c’est vouloir le bien.”

proves the rule. As Gisèle Sapiro has astutely shown, Mauriac’s defense of “charity” did not, simply because it was one side in a very public debate between two men with excellent Resistance credentials, therefore represent the position of roughly half of Resistance-identified intellectuals in this moment. It is true, for example, that fifty-nine intellectuals signed a petition in January, 1945 in favor of sparing condemned writer Robert Brasillach from the death penalty – but the average age of the signatories was sixty-two, and many who signed were conservative writers or academicians with no Resistance connections at all.¹⁶¹ Moreover, these men and women did not necessarily share Mauriac’s motivations: some had personal connections to Brasillach, others rated him an outstanding talent who should not be lost, and most importantly many believed that they were standing up not for a less lethal purge *in general* but rather for the principle of a *writer’s* freedom to put down on paper whatever he pleased. “Against them,” as Sapiro writes, “the generation of the Resistance stood as a bloc – with the exception of Camus.”¹⁶² For Camus, nearly alone among his contemporaries, had indeed signed. The fact that he did so – despite the fact that he *did* believe writers should be held politically responsible for their work, and that he detested Brasillach – should be read as a signal that something had begun to change in his understanding of the legitimacy of lethal violence in the *épuration*.

The change was driven by Camus’s observations of the empirical reality of the purge: over time, it became unavoidably obvious to him that what was actually happening in courtrooms and in front of firing squads had distressingly little to do

¹⁶¹ See Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains*, 614-615; Kaplan, *The Collaborator*, 189-201. Kaplan points out that language in a first draft of the petition claiming Resistance credentials for the signatories had to be hastily removed as it became clear who was actually willing to sign. Using a slightly different list of signatories from Kaplan’s, Sapiro gives the average age of the signatories as fifty-eight.

¹⁶² Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains*, 615.

with his lofty vision of justice. His disappointments in the realities of the purge went much deeper than those suffered by figures like de Beauvoir, who had accepted from the start that to purge meant, by definition, to enact a messy form of political justice – and hence his response to them was much more radical. By the time of his final exchanges with Mauriac, in early January, 1945, he had ceased to speak prescriptively about how the *épuration* ought to be carried out, and instead begun to speak in the past conditional about what could and should have been done. On January 5, he asserted at the beginning of his editorial that “it is very likely too late now for justice to be done;”¹⁶³ by the end of the piece he put it more flatly: “Now it is too late.”¹⁶⁴ When he returned to the issue in August of 1945, he was yet more categorical: “You will excuse us for beginning today with a basic fact: it is now certain that the *épuration* in France has not only failed but is also discredited. The word ‘*épuration*’ was already rather painful in itself. The actual thing has become odious.” Camus admitted no possibility for future improvement: “The failure, in any case, is complete.”¹⁶⁵ He criticized the government’s inept execution of the policy of purging well before he eventually came around to admitting that the policy itself might have been flawed: ex post facto laws that honestly confronted the moral failures of the Occupation period ought to have been produced, he protested; justice ought to have been implemented far more quickly; penalties ought to have been rendered uniform. And yet these were all only straws grasped in an attempt to maintain the position that an untainted, pure justice *could have been possible* – that killing men *could* be a legitimate act.

¹⁶³ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 5 January 1945 [430]: “très probablement, il est maintenant trop tard pour que la justice se fasse.” “

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. [432]: “Maintenant, il est trop tard.”

¹⁶⁵ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 30 August 1945 [594]: “On nous excusera de commencer aujourd’hui par une vérité première: il est certain désormais que l’*épuration* en France est non seulement manquée, mais encore déconsidérée. Le mot d’*épuration* était déjà assez pénible en lui-même. La chose est devenue odieuse...L’échec en tout cas est complet.”

Camus's abandonment of even this strictly theoretical, abstract defense of the *épuration*-that-could-have-been was a long and tortuous process. Speculatively, given the role memory had played in his justification for retribution, we might wonder if it was tied to the private work of mourning his lost friends – and the public work of finding other ways to commemorate their lives and sacrifices.¹⁶⁶ In any case, Camus did cease to use the images of his dear friend René Leynaud and others who had died to goad himself on in advocating the purge. In January, he privately explained in a letter that he had signed the petition for Brasillach because of his “horror for the death penalty,” but did not publicly indicate any change in position – indeed, this was only a few weeks after he had asserted in the pages of *Combat* that neither his nor anyone's “horror” for the death penalty should be relevant to decisions about whether or not it should be used.¹⁶⁷ On August 2, he retracted his previous support for the capital punishment of Pétain, noting quietly that “we do not believe that the death penalty is desirable in this case [*ici*]. First, because we must resolutely say what is true, namely, that every death sentence is an affront to morality [*D'abord, parce qu'il faut bien se décider à dire ce qui est, à savoir que toute condamnation à mort répugne la morale*] and next, because in this particular case, the death penalty would give this vain old man a reputation as a martyr...”¹⁶⁸ Clearly, Camus understood himself to be taking a significant leap here, but the “*ici*” and the inclusion of a second, case-specific reason

¹⁶⁶ See Camus's Introduction to René Leynaud's *Poésies posthumes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), which Camus wrote over the summer of 1945, reproduced in *Essais*: 1472-1482, esp. 1479 and the manuscript variant on 1482, as well as Roger Quilliot's suggestive introductory comment, 1471-1472.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Albert Camus to Marcel Ayme, 27 January 1945; cited in Guérin, *Albert Camus*, 56.

¹⁶⁸ Camus, Editorial, *Combat*, 2 August 1945 [563]: “Nous ne croyons pas, par exemple, que la peine capitale soit ici souhaitable. D'abord parce qu'il faut bien se décider à dire ce qui est, à savoir que toute condamnation à mort répugne la morale, et ensuite parce que, dans ce cas particulier, elle ajouterait à ce vieillard vaniteux une réputation de martyr...”

to avoid the death penalty *for Pétain* softened the statement.¹⁶⁹ It was not until the late fall of 1946 that Camus would announce that “after the experience of these last two years, I could no longer accept any truth that might place me under an obligation, direct or indirect, to condemn a man to death.”¹⁷⁰ And it was not until 1948 that he would publicly avow that “in the essentials, and on the precise point of our controversy, M. Mauriac was right against me.”¹⁷¹ Camus continued to believe that the experience of the Resistance should serve as evidence that violence for political ends was sometimes, sorrowfully, necessary, but the judicial *épuration* had convinced him that this fact did not mean violence should ever be *legitimized* for any purpose, whether by intellectuals, parties, or governments. Looking back, he referred to his different position in 1944 and 1945 as a grandiose mistake, a result of “the fever of those years, the difficult memory of two or three assassinated friends.”¹⁷² The fever had passed.

Camus’s lonely, groping attempt, from 1946 onward, to articulate a politics that refused to legitimize political violence – an attempt that resulted in his embrace of a pointedly modest humanitarian agenda of, in Camus’s own words, “saving bodies” – is in part the subject of Chapter Five. The trajectory that we have traced here, as he worked his way through the challenges posed by the *épuration*, represents a sort of compressed version of the path that other intellectuals would follow as well in

¹⁶⁹ It is worth noting that his trajectory on the question of the death sentence for Pétain was the opposite of that of a great number of French people: a bare 3% of the population favored a capital sentence in September 1944 polling, but by August 1945, 40.5% hoped for this outcome.

¹⁷⁰ Camus, “Sauver les corps” [“Saving Bodies”], *Combat*, 20 November 1946 [613]: “je ne saurais plus admettre, après l’expérience de ces deux dernières années aucune vérité qui pût me mettre dans l’obligation, directe ou indirecte, de faire condamner un homme à mort...”

¹⁷¹ Speech at the Latour-Maubourg convent in 1948, reproduced as “L’incroyant et les chrétiens” in *Actuelles*, 172: “pour le fond, et sur le point précis de notre controverse, M. Mauriac avait raison contre moi.”

¹⁷² “Ibid.: “La fièvre de ces années, le souvenir difficile de deux ou trois amis assassinés, m’avaient donné cette prétension.”

subsequent years: from tolerance (even enthusiasm) for violence in the service of noble ends, to disillusionment, to a dramatic retrenchment involving the explicit abandonment of the pursuit of political ends that might require violent means. Camus arrived there first, through his agony over the problem of the purges, and the fact that he did so is part of what makes him a moral hero to harsh critics of postwar intellectual “irresponsibility” and illiberal revolutionary bloodthirstiness like Tony Judt.¹⁷³ Camus himself, though, hardly experienced his trajectory as a heroic or triumphal one: he was bitterly disappointed as he watched hopes for revolutionary change modeled on the Resistance fail, and disgusted with the mediocrity of the postwar world. He had tried desperately to maintain a space for “pure” acts of violence in the polity, and he had failed. When he announced, on the second anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, that “the Age of the Apocalypse is over,” it was with determination, but not without regrets.¹⁷⁴

By the time Camus took up the project of defining a “modest” politics that refused to legitimize violence, a measure of normalcy had returned to France. On the level of national government, Resistance unity increasingly dissolved into partisan squabbling; to protest this return to “politics as usual” de Gaulle resigned in January, 1946, believing he would soon be called back. (In fact, he would remain “in the desert” until 1958.) After some false starts, a compromise Constitution that satisfied no one was narrowly accepted by the electorate in October 1946, and the period of extra-constitutional government ended. Not long after, in the spring of 1947, the Communists were expelled from the government: France’s short-lived experiment

¹⁷³ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 69-70; see also his *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁴ Camus, “Anniversaire,” *Combat*, 8 May 1947 [667]: “Le temps de l’Apocalypse n’est plus.”

with “post-partisan” Resistance unity was officially over. Cold War politics changed the calculus of interests around the *épuration*, re-emboldening the Right and making moderates and even many Socialists reluctant to continue with a project of purging that appeared to strengthen the Communists’ hand. In any case, the judicial *épuration* was winding down. Most departmental courts closed up shop in 1946; by 1947 only those at Paris, Colmar, Toulouse, and Lyon remained in operation. The High Court pronounced its last death sentence early in 1947. By then, the Assembly had already begun to debate the possibility of amnesty for certain convicted collaborators; successive amnesties were produced in 1947, 1951, and 1953. In October 1952, only 1500 people remained in prison for collaboration; in 1956, only 62. Acts of summary justice, meanwhile, including even bombings of property, also eventually tapered off.

In some ways, though, the situation in France remained deeply unsettled, and several factors indicate that the “excesses” of the immediate postwar period should not be shrugged away as fleeting features of the transition. For one thing, economic conditions did not improve quickly, and for many people the food situation remained wretched long past the end of the war. Periodic rationing did not end until 1949; prices spiraled dizzyingly upward as salaries froze; the housing shortage was unprecedented. The population as a whole did not believe that conditions had returned to “normal” – indeed, in a May 1946 survey, only 14% believed that they would do so within the following year. By November 1947, this had sunk to 5%. Prefects’ reports from throughout the country noted a mixture of popular discontent, disappointment, and resignation regarding the realities of the postwar world. And if their leaders were ready for an end to the purges, the majority of French people were not: in the summer of 1947 only 31% of those surveyed (and only 17% of those who identified as “workers” or as economically poorly off) thought it was time for the *épuration* to stop;

a typical response to the question, according to the pollsters, was “First, it would have to start.”¹⁷⁵ Nor did acts of summary justice entirely disappear. Weekly bulletins from the War Ministry continued to report retributive bombings through all of 1946: for example, at least eight took place between August 24 and August 27, 1946 (that is, two full years after the liberation of Paris).¹⁷⁶ Even scattered summary executions went on: on September 6, 1946, for instance, a group broke into the Detention Center in Limoges and succeeded in killing an *ex-milicien* in a “burst of machine-gun fire.” Finding those guilty would be difficult, the report indicated, because “the population is not hostile to the authors of this attack, and complains about the delays of justice and the many pardons granted.”¹⁷⁷

There are, then, three important conclusions to underline here about the France that emerged from the most intensive phase of the *épuration*, the France of early 1947. First, the state’s claim to be the only source of “legitimate” violence in society remained at least somewhat tenuous. Much of the population retained a level of tolerance for the use of force by those non-state actors who could still manage to associate themselves with the organizations or ideals of the Resistance. Moreover, particularly after de Gaulle resigned, this was coupled with a growing disdain for a government which had failed to vigorously enact justice against traitors and was also failing to improve people’s quality of life. Second, the portion of the intellectual class that had emerged with credibility from the war years – with a few exceptions, like Mauriac and a still hesitant Camus – remained committed, in theory, to hopes for “revolution,” and shared a belief, born of their collective understanding of the

¹⁷⁵ *Sondages* 38 (15 July 1945), 563: “Mais avant de continuer, il faut d’abord la commencer.”

¹⁷⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements no.44264, Ministère de la Guerre (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), 2 September 1946. 72 AJ 384, AN.

¹⁷⁷ Bulletin de Renseignements no. 46178, Ministère de la Guerre (signed Col. Meunier, Directeur de la Gendarmerie), 13 September 1946. 72 AJ 384, AN: “La population n’est pas hostile aux auteurs de cette attaque et se plaint des lenteurs de la justice et de nombreuses grâces accordées.”

Resistance, that violence would sometimes be necessary in order for good to triumph among men. Finally, no fully elaborated, emotionally persuasive alternative reading of the meaning of the Resistance had yet been produced in the public sphere. All three of these facts would come into sharp focus as they shaped the way that the country experienced the massive strike waves and worker-government clashes of 1947 and 1948.

CHAPTER TWO – “Yesterday’s Duty Would Be a Crime Today”: Cold War, Domestic Crisis, and the French Debate on Political Violence, 1947-1948

In June of 1947, the decorated Resistance hero and activist in the left wing of the Socialist Party Léon Boutbien attempted to paint a picture of France’s current situation. It was exceedingly dark. “The man in the street is discontented,” Boutbien wrote. “Discontented with his salary, with prices, with restrictions; he wants bread, wine, tobacco. He wants to be able to feed his children, to have sufficient housing, heated in winter...Revolt— unconscious, sporadic, clumsy, anarchist — is in people’s hearts, their spirits. The anxieties pile up.” Given this wretched state of affairs, Boutbien pointed out, one might wonder, “Who, then, won the war?” Indeed, was the war even over? “Today’s peace,” Boutbien warned, “is no peace: the battlefield has moved. It has left the military terrain, and is now in the social terrain.”¹ Events were about to prove him right.

In November of 1947 and again in October of 1948, the French Communist Party helped to unleash massive strike waves in France; these extraordinary episodes of labor unrest were, as Charles Tilly and Edward Shorter put it, “of such intensity...as to suggest civil war rather than the give-and-take of industrial relations.”² The strike wave of November and December 1947 was of epic proportions, rivaling those of the Popular Front era strikes: about 1.8 million workers

¹ Léon Boutbien, “Pour une politique socialiste au gouvernement,” *La Pensée socialiste* 15 (June 1947), 4: “L’homme dans la rue est mécontent. Mécontent de son salaire, des prix, des restrictions; il veut du pain, du vin, du tabac. Il veut pouvoir nourrir ses enfants; avoir un logement suffisant, chauffé l’hiver...La révolte est dans les coeurs, dans les esprits, inconsciente, sporadique, maladroite, anarchiste. Les inquiétudes se rassemblent. Les Césars tentent à nouveau leurs chances; les trafiquants s’enrichissent, le marché noir prospère. La trahison est oubliée. L’argent reste roi. Qui donc a gagné la guerre? ...La paix actuelle n’est pas la paix; le champ de bataille s’est déplacé; il a quitté le terrain militaire, il est maintenant sur le terrain social.”

² Tilly and Shorter, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137.

participated, resulting in the staggering loss of nearly 18 million man-days of work.³ The 1948 strikes were concentrated in the nationalized coal mining industry and thus involved a smaller proportion of the total labor force, but were even more economically disruptive; Robert Lacoste, the Minister of Industry and Commerce, called them “the most serious events that we have ever experienced in the history of social struggle in France.”⁴ Compared to other strikes in modern French history, which have overwhelmingly been peaceful, those of both 1947 and 1948 also involved an extraordinary level of violence – including lethal violence – between strikers and the “forces of order” (police, gendarmerie, military) called in to confront them.⁵ As we will see, the strikes were fueled by working-class misery and want, exacerbated by angry disappointment over the postwar elite’s unkept promise to create a radically more just society. However, they were neither spontaneous nor an expression of strictly economic demands: the work stoppages and linked protests were closely directed by the Communist Party and the Communist-controlled unions, in pursuit of political aims. To the leaders of the young, weak, and unpopular Fourth Republic –

³ Marie-Renée Courty-Valentin, *Les Grèves de 1947 en France, recherche centrée sur le secteur public et nationalisé*, thèse de 3e cycle, IEP de Paris, 1981. These figures are subject to debate: some historians rely on lower numbers provided by the *Revue française du travail*, although Courty-Valentin has convincingly shown that the *RTF* failed to properly consider nationalized industries and the public sector. Still others use unaccountably higher numbers: William Hitchcock, for example, refers to strikes “which at their peak involved over three million workers.” William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 85. I am aware of no substantiation for such claims.

⁴ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 18 November 1948, 7091: “les événements les plus graves que nous ayons jamais constatés dans l’histoire des luttes sociales, en France.”

⁵ Michelle Perrot calculates that 3.6 percent of strikes from 1870-1890 involved violence against persons (excluding fellow workers) or property; Charles Tilly and Edward Shorter calculate that by this definition 3.2 percent of strikes were violent from 1890-1914; from 1915-1935, this falls to 0.5 percent. Tilly and Shorter, as well as Stéphane Sirot in his *La Grève en France*, specifically acknowledge the anomalous status of the 1947-48 strike wave with regards to long-term trends in the use of violence. See Perrot, *Jeunesse de la grève, France 1871-1890* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 178; Tilly and Shorter, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137, 378; Tilly and Shorter, “Le déclin de la grève violente en France de 1890 à 1935,” *Le Mouvement social* 76 (July-September 1971): 95-118; Stéphane Sirot, *La grève en France: une histoire sociale (XIXe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), 163-174, esp.164.

who with Charles de Gaulle and the Communists both in opposition now struggled on in the absence of the two major forces that had initially conferred upon the state the Resistance's mantle of legitimacy – successfully putting down the strikes appeared a matter of the life or death of the regime. Tilly and Shorter's language of civil war echoes that used widely at the time: the violent confrontations during the strikes appeared to many frightened contemporaries as the first skirmishes in a Cold War battle that could tear France apart.

Curiously enough, to date little scholarship has dealt with this dramatic chapter in French history: the strike waves are, as Robert Mencherini puts it, “the forgotten parts of the national memory,” subject to an “inhabitual discretion” on the part of scholars.⁶ Those studies that exist are generally oriented around a single question (to which the answer has been a consistent and convincing “no”): did the Communists' political aims in propelling the two strike waves extend to launching a full-scale insurrection? This chapter, in contrast, is concerned less with the motives and intentions of the Communist Party leadership than with non-communist political elites' reactions to the *perceived* threat of politically-motivated violence directed against the state. The strikes represent a pivotal moment in the postwar debate over

⁶ Robert Mencherini, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges: Parti communiste, stalinisme et luttes sociales en France. Les grèves “insurrectionnelles” de 1947-1948* (Paris: Syllepse, 1998), 10. This book, along with Courty-Valentin's thèse *Les Grèves de 1947*, provides the most thorough account of the 1947 strikes. Oddly, however, despite its subtitle, it does not even touch on the unrest of 1948. Other works that deal with the strike wave of 1947 include case studies of industries or localities: of particular merit are Maurice Agulhon and Fernand Barrat, *CRS à Marseille: “le police aux service du peuple,” 1944-1947* (Paris: A. Collin, 1971); Marie-Renée Valentin, “Les grèves des cheminots français au cours de l'année 1947,” *Le mouvement social* 130 (January-March 1985): 55-80; Jean Merley and Monique Luillard, “Les grèves de 1947 à Saint-Étienne,” in *Histoire, économies, et sociétés*, ed. Centre Pierre Léon (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1978), 151-185. Danielle Tartakowsky considers the street demonstrations that were “liées” to the strikes in *Les Manifestations de rue en France, 1918-1968* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997), 552-559. The most useful study of the miners' strike of 1948 is Darryl Holter, *The Battle for Coal: Miners and the Politics of Nationalization in France, 1940-1950* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 152-179. Holter's excellent account is *not* primarily concerned with PCF motives but with miners' experience in nationalized industry. Other studies include Denis Lefebvre, “Les socialistes et les grèves minières de 1948,” *Communisme* 35-37: 43-65.

violence: as ministers in the beleaguered regime deployed military-level force against working-class protesters and declared the use of violence by non-state actors “terrorism,” they not only definitively shattered remaining vestiges of Resistance unity and reoriented French political life around the communist/non-communist dividing line. They also explicitly rejected any lingering Resistance legacy of tolerance for extralegal violence; from this point on, for approximately a decade, Communists alone among political actors on the national stage would continue to use the “logic of resistance” to justify illegal, politically-motivated violence and to stigmatize the state’s use of force against citizens.

There is nothing theoretically surprising, of course, about this sort of normative retrenchment occurring among the French Socialists, Christian Democrats, and Radicals who suddenly found themselves charged with ensuring the survival of the regime. But appreciating the significance of the strikes to the postwar French debate about violence in politics requires going beyond commonplaces about “*raison d’état*” and bureaucratic self-interest to a more nuanced reading. In particular, the dynamics of the unrest and its repression must be placed in the context of the Fourth Republic’s fragility and contested legitimacy, as well as in the context of outsized fears about renewed catastrophic violence brought on by the Cold War. This chapter thus begins by examining the domestic and international tumult leading up to November 1947, emphasizing the growing vulnerability of the regime. I then consider the strike period, placing at the center of my narrative Jules Moch, the Socialist Minister of the Interior who directed the government’s repression of the strikes and emerged with the unshakeable nickname “France’s Head Cop.” By refraining from demonizing Moch and, instead, taking his experience seriously, I draw out the uncomfortable ambiguities in the position of anti-communist, anti-Gaullist ex-Resisters who found themselves

confronted with the possibility of “insurrectional” violence. Finally, I analyze the ways in which the Communists marshaled memory of Resistance and collaboration to condemn the government’s handling of the strikes, while Moch and his associates struggled to produce alternative readings of the Resistance that could divorce it from its extralegal associations and assimilate it to the Cold War struggle against communism.

In the two years following the Liberation, strikes and other forms of overt social conflict had been essentially suppressed in France: there was negligible strike activity in 1945, and only about 312,000 man-days were lost to strikes in all of 1946, a remarkably low figure.⁷ Credit for this state of affairs largely belonged to the French Communist Party. Communists had effectively taken control of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), France’s largest labor union confederation, by mid-1945; by the CGT’s April 1946 convention they could muster four times as many votes as the non-communist “reformists.”⁸ In this period of Communist participation in France’s “tripartite” unity government (Socialist, Christian Democratic MRP, and Communist), both the Party and the CGT mobilized against strikes, insisting that the only battle workers ought to be waging was the “battle for production.” The CGT’s 1946 convention manifesto read: “The first duty is to raise production...In the present state of the country, the effort of production by labor must be considered the indisputable right of workers to participate in the renaissance of France.” The head of

⁷ “Statistiques,” *Revue française du travail*, 1.11 (February 1947), 200. This figure is probably somewhat low, for the same reason mentioned in footnote 3.

⁸ In 1945, the CGT had 5 million members by its own count, 3,775,000 according to the (considerably more reliable) analysis of Antoine Prost. See Prost, “Les effectifs de la CGT en 1945,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 41.1 (January-March 1994): 82-100. The next-largest syndicat in France, the Catholic Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens, claimed 750,000 members; historians put the figure closer to 300,000.

the miner's union within the CGT announced that, for the moment, "the highest form of our class duty is to develop production to the maximum."⁹ Party chief Maurice Thorez and CGT co-general secretary Benoît Frachon both glorified a stakhanovite worker ethic; *L'Humanité* and CGT papers like *La Vie ouvrière* and *Le Peuple* systematically treated attempts to foment strikes as conspiracies on the part of reactionaries and "trusts" who wanted to "demonstrate the incapacity of the working class to fulfill its national mission, to pit the peasant masses against it, to isolate it, to bring it in line and to subjugate it, thus subjugating the nation."¹⁰

The Communists' successful suppression of strike activity in 1945 and 1946 was no mean feat, for this was a period of unrelieved hardship for French workers. The economy and infrastructure had been devastated by World War II; with food supplies choked, transport networks destroyed, a rationing regime governing access to basic commodities like bread and milk, shortages rampant, and wages for the most part frozen, ordinary people struggled to secure even life's necessities. In January 1946, 49% of people polled said that simply satisfying basic daily needs was their principal anxiety. Trapped in a dismal inflationary cycle, workers found any meager wage gains they achieved eroded by rising prices: thus by 1947, although the economy showed certain signs of recovery – notably, industrial output once again achieved 1938 levels – nevertheless the purchasing power of workers' wages was down 30 percent since the Liberation.¹¹ In 1946 and early 1947 workers could expect to spend

⁹ Cited in Val Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 106. For remarkable documentation of the CGT's role in the "battle for production," see Benoît Frachon, *La Bataille de la production. Nouvelle étape de combat contre les trusts. Rapports, articles, discours* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1946).

¹⁰ Gaston Monmousseau, "Préface" to Frachon, *La Bataille de la production*, 10: "Le but des trusts, en sabotant la production, est de démontrer l'incapacité de la classe ouvrière à remplir sa mission nationale, à dresser contre elle les masses paysannes, à l'isoler, à la mâter et à l'asservir, en asservissant la nation."

¹¹ Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol. 1, *L'ardeur et la nécessité* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 103.

from half to two-thirds of their wages on food.¹² Moreover, the persistence of the black market and the ready availability of luxury goods to those who could afford them served as glaring reminders that burdens were not equally shared by all. The disappointment, frustration, and rage that Léon Boutbien signaled were unsurprising results of this situation.

Thus, even as the Communist Party and the Communist-dominated CGT preached labor discipline, some strike activity broke through in 1946. By early 1947 wildcat strikes were occurring in many industries – including, notably, those that had been nationalized at the Liberation. 530,000 man-days were lost to strikes in the first four months of 1947 alone.¹³ In April a strike called by Trotskyists, and explicitly opposed by the CGT, broke out in the nationalized Renault plant at Boulogne-Billancourt, the symbolic epicenter of working class identity in France. The Communist Party leadership, increasingly internally divided about the advantages of remaining in the struggling government,¹⁴ now had to face the threat of being “outflanked on the left;” at the Party’s behest, the CGT thus abruptly reversed course and endorsed the Renault strikers’ demands, including wage increases.¹⁵ The

¹² Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement*, 112. For a vivid discussion of alimentary hardship in the postwar moment, particularly around the “annus horribilis” of 1947, and also of its political implications, see Steven L. Kaplan, *Le pain maudit. Retour sur la France des années oubliées, 1945-1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 64-84. On the absolute centrality of food supply to public opinion see Christian Bachelier, “De la pénurie à la vie chère, l’opinion publique à travers les premiers sondages 1944-1949,” in *Les Temps des restrictions en France (1939-1949)*, eds. Dominique Veillon and Jean-Marie Flonneau (Paris: Cahiers de l’IHTP, 1995), 479-500; Danielle Tartakowsky, “Manifester pour le pain, novembre 1940-octobre 1947,” in *Les Temps des restrictions*, 465-478.

¹³ Irwin M. Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1962* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 55.

¹⁴ See Philippe Buton, “L’Éviction des ministres communistes,” in *L’Année 1947*, eds. Serge Berstein and Pierre Milza (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2000), 341-347. Buton also provides an interpretation of the considerations that kept the Communists in government until spring of 1947, highlighting their desire to implement ministerial decisions that increased Communist presence in state apparatuses like the army. Cf. Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du parti Communiste*, vol. 2, 1945-1972 (Paris: Fayard, 1981); Annie Kriegel, *Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991); Jean-Jacques Becker, *Le Parti communiste veut-il prendre la pouvoir?* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

¹⁵ On the political dynamic around the Renault strike, see Philippe Fallachon, “Les grèves de la Régie Renault en 1947,” in *Le Mouvement social* 81 (October-December 1972): 111-142.

Communist Party then formally came out against Paul Ramadier's government's wage-freezes, voting no confidence in the government's economic policy in the Assembly on May 4, 1947.¹⁶ Ramadier – a Socialist who had served in Léon Blum's first Popular Front government in 1936 – expelled the Communist ministers from his government the following day.¹⁷ The “tripartism” amongst the Communists, Socialists and MRP that had provided a fragile basis for government since de Gaulle's resignation in early 1946 was now shattered. And, two and a half years after the liberation of Paris, the two major forces universally associated with the French Resistance – Communism and Gaullism – now both stood in opposition to the remaining parties of government.

At the time, Ramadier's decision was regarded by most observers as a tactical maneuver of moderate importance; many, including the Communists themselves, assumed that eventually Communist ministers would be invited back, and the PCF continued to loudly proclaim itself a “government party.”¹⁸ Some more prescient witnesses, however, understood immediately that the departure of the Communists from the governing coalition, and their renewed open endorsement of labor militancy, symbolically marked the inglorious end of the postwar experiment in Resistance-based

¹⁶ The Communists were by spring of 1947 also more-or-less openly opposed to the government's line in other areas besides economic and social policy: most importantly, they stood against France's pursuit of war in Indochina. See Marc Michel, “L'Empire colonial dans les débats parlementaires,” in *L'Année 1947*, 189-217; Grégoire Madjarian, *La Question coloniale et la politique du Parti communiste français. Crise de l'impérialisme colonial et mouvement ouvrier* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), 214-236 (which emphasizes Madagascar policy as well); Buton, “L'Éviction des ministres communistes,” 339-340; Wall, *French Communism*, 53-54. Jacob Moneta assembles an interesting selection of relevant documents in *La Politique du Parti communiste français dans la question coloniale, 1920-1963* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), 144-169.

¹⁷ A point of contention in the historiography of these events has been whether Ramadier seized on the Communists' vote of no confidence as an excuse to carry out an American demand that Communists be removed from government before Marshall Aid could be proffered. Non-Communist scholarship is in consensus that this was not the case. See Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 67-71; Buton, “L'Éviction des ministres communistes,” 352-53; Hitchcock, *France Restored*, 224-225 (n2).

¹⁸ Wall, *French Communism*, 58; Buton, “L'Éviction des ministres communistes,” 348-349.

unity politics, and the ominous beginning of France's entry into the logic of the Cold War. The developments of that spring, Catholic writer Jean-Marie Domenach claimed in *Esprit*, "signal a defeat...that of the State, that of a hope formed during the Resistance, and of a politics attempted since the Liberation..."¹⁹ Indeed, in this "year that the earth trembled," the hardening of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union shattered many grandiose hopes born in France with the Liberation, and placed the fundamental conflict between Communists and anti-communists back at the heart of French political debate, where it had been before World War II.²⁰ Now, though, the conditions of the struggle – and the stakes – were very different.

At first the Communist Party retained a certain degree of moderation in both rhetoric and action even as it moved into the opposition, since (at least in the eyes of the Communists themselves) the possibility of reentering government was by no means yet closed off. At the Party conference at Strasbourg in late June 1947, Thorez and others continued to insist on the primacy of the "battle for production" and to claim that they wanted to participate in governance.²¹ Yet May and June nevertheless witnessed an explosion of strike activity in many sectors, particularly transport: in June alone, strikes caused the loss of 6,416,000 man-days. "In reality," Domenach wrote that July, the eviction of the Communist ministers had signaled to the working class that "a barrier falls – a kind of inhibition, stronger, perhaps, than any orders, disappears..."²² The resultant shift in the climate of French social and political life

¹⁹ Jean-Marie Domenach, "1849?" *Esprit* 135 (July 1947), 1: "36 était une conquête; ces grèves signent une défaite. Non pas celle des patrons, mais celle de l'État, celle d'une espérance formée sous la Résistance et d'un politique tentée depuis la Libération – une défaite aussi, toute partielle, toute provisoire, de la classe ouvrière."

²⁰ Dominique Desanti, *L'Année où le monde a tremblé, 1947* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976).

²¹ Robrieux, *Histoire Intérieure*, 203.

²² Domenach, "1849?" 5: "En réalité l'élimination des ministres communistes créait comme un appel d'air: une barrière tombait – une sorte d'inhibition, plus forte peut-être que les consignes, disparaissait; sans qu'il y eût besoin d'aucune excitation, l'une des conditions les plus importantes était créée."

was palpable: the frail tethers that had held postwar French society together despite economic hardship seemed to be fraying. Domenach described a Paris in which “the old bourgeois terror resurges: we hoard canned goods, and at the least racket, nice people close the shutters, persuaded that gangs with machine guns have already taken to the streets seeking to gain power.”²³ In fact (as Domenach himself understood perfectly well), this was no typical eruption of class resentment, and workers’ anger was not directed at “nice people,” nor even at employers in the private sector: it was focused on the weak, fumbling regime and its abject failure to create conditions for recovery. Léon Boutbien put it succinctly: “These social conflicts no longer put workers in opposition to Capitalists, but to the State.”²⁴ The demands voiced were narrowly economic, a desperate response to desperate living conditions. They were accompanied by widespread food riots of alarming vehemence; these too, targeted state officials and *dirigiste* food policies rather than private enterprise. In Nevers, for instance, a crowd of six thousand – having heard a false rumor of grain destined for exportation rather than local consumption – overran the prefecture and vandalized its contents.²⁵ In La Roche-sur-Yon (Vendée), thousands of demonstrators invaded the offices of the rationing services and set records on fire. Similar incidents occurred in Dijon and Lyon.²⁶ “There is no doubt,” France’s Socialist president Vincent Auriol

²³ Ibid., 1: “Les ouvriers s’agglomèrent dans les cours des usines et les grilles se ferment, la vieille terreur bourgeoise ressurgit: on entasse les boîtes de conserve et au moindre vacarme, les braves gens referment leurs volets, persuadés que des bandes à mitraillette sont déjà parties dans les rues à la conquête du pouvoir.”

²⁴ Boutbien, “Pour une politique socialiste,” 5: “Les conflits sociaux opposent les ouvriers non plus aux Capitalistes mais à l’État.”

²⁵ André Siegfried, *L’Année politique 1947* (Paris: Éditions du grand siècle, 1948), 96.

²⁶ Ibid., 97. Siegfried claims 20,000 demonstrators participated, though this figure seems rather high. On the extraordinary reappearance of “bread riots” in wartime and postwar France, see Danielle Tartakowsky, “Manifester pour le pain;” Kaplan, *Le Pain maudit*, 69-71. Kaplan’s overall treatment of the state’s regulatory role in relation to the bread supply helps illuminate why popular anger was focused on state agents.

fretted, “that difficulties with the food supply are creating a disastrous psychological climate, open to all demands.”²⁷

At almost the same moment, the nascent republican regime was being attacked from another direction as well: on April 14, 1947, Charles de Gaulle founded an oppositional political movement christened the Rassemblement du peuple français (RPF). Declaring that “it is clear that the nation does not have as a guide a State whose cohesion, efficiency, and authority are equal to the problems that press upon her,” he called for all people of good faith to join him in a “grand effort for the common good and the profound reform of the State.”²⁸ De Gaulle made it clear that he desired not merely to obtain power within the current system but to transform institutions, primarily by rewriting the Constitution and installing a much stronger executive. Toward this end, as Serge Bernstein has noted, he described France’s current state of affairs as nothing short of “apocalyptic”: he presented the country as veering into anarchy – and, therefore, in desperate need of a savior.²⁹ To an exhausted populace, he held out the promise of “order” – including economic order – under his leadership. The RPF caught on at a stunning rate: by May 15, it reported 810,000 requests for membership. Polls that month suggested that 28% of the population supported a return of de Gaulle to power: “He saved France once, he will save it a second time,” some

²⁷ Vincent Auriol, *Journal du septennat, 1947-1954*, vol. 1, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: A. Collin, 1970), 227: “Il n’est pas douteux que les difficultés de ravitaillement créent un climat psychologique désastreux et propre à toutes les revendications.”

²⁸ Speech at Strasbourg, 7 April 1947, reproduced in Siegfried, *L’Année politique 1947*, 324 and 326: “Toutefois il est clair que la nation n’a pas pour la guider un État dont la cohésion, l’efficacité, l’autorité soient à l’ hauteur des problèmes qui se pressent devant elle... Il est temps que se forme et s’organise le rassemblement du peuple français, qui, dans le cadre des lois, va promouvoir et faire triompher, par-dessus les différences des opinions, le grand effort de salut commun et la réforme profonde de l’État.”

²⁹ Serge Bernstein, “L’objectif politique du RPF: changer les institutions,” in *De Gaulle et le Rassemblement du peuple français, 1947-1955*, ed. La Fondation Charles de Gaulle (Paris: A. Collin, 1998), 382.

commented; others, “We need order in France.”³⁰ Only the barest of majorities – 51% of those polled that spring – told pollsters that “faced with the current difficulties,” they did not believe that an evolution of France toward dictatorship was a possibility.

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In the October municipal elections, the Gaullist movement’s success was nothing short of spectacular: its candidates gained control of France’s largest thirteen cities and garnered 38% of all votes, more than those of all the “Third Force” parties that now composed the government combined. (The Communists held nearly steady with close to 30% of votes.)³² A euphoric de Gaulle spoke out against the regime with increasingly forceful rhetoric: “The current public Powers find themselves deprived of the legitimate foundation, which is the confidence of the nation. Indeed, these Powers arise from an arrangement established among the parties, who it is clear together represent only a weak national minority.” He demanded – in a move interpreted by many as an ultimatum – that the Assembly dissolve itself immediately and that a new Constitution be produced.³³ It seemed increasingly that, confronted by challenges from the two great Resistance forces of Communism and Gaullism, the center could not hold.

The economic situation, by the fall of 1947, was also grave: grain supplies were low, and a fresh wave of social unrest throughout September and October

³⁰ *Sondages* 36 (15 May 1947), 513: “Il a sauvé la France une fois, il la sauvera une deuxième fois;” “On a besoin d’ordre, en France.”

³¹ *Sondages* 35 (15 April 1947), 523. The somewhat leading question posed was: “Devant les difficultés actuelles, certains parlent d’une évolution du pays vers la dictature. Croyez-vous à une telle possibilité?”

³² However, because SFIO did not throw support to them, the Communists nevertheless lost control of 842 cities (34% of those they had controlled before the election.) See Wall, *French Communism*, 63.

³³ Cited in Christian Purtschet, *Le Rassemblement du peuple français, 1947-1953* (Paris: Cujas, 1965), 299: “Voilà condamné le régime de confusion et de division qui plonge l’État dans l’impuissance. En même temps, les Pouvoirs publics actuels se trouvent privés de la base légitime qu’est la confiance de la nation. Ces pouvoirs, en effet, procèdent d’une combinaison établie entre les partis dont il est clair qu’ils ne représentent ensemble qu’une faible minorité nationale.”

brought still more strikes, food riots, and protests aimed at local state authorities. At Mans on September 11, protesters upset by rising prices and a decrease in the bread ration attacked the prefecture; police responded with tear gas. At Verdun police clashed violently with men and women who erected barricades in a frantic effort to keep sugar from being removed from the town. On September 15, Auriol wrote in his journal (after a pathetic entry in which he reflected on the possibility of making “excellent white bread” for the entire population from potatoes) that “the unrest is close to panic...The government does not seem fully armed to get its authority respected...This regrettable state of affairs seems much more like a true crisis of the regime than like a crisis involving the temporary unpopularity of a government.”³⁴

In this unhappy context the Communists now, at last, abandoned talk of returning to the governing coalition and instead endorsed labor militancy and mass direct action. This tactical shift had more to do with Stalinist directives designed to deal with the threat posed to Soviet interests by the United States’ recent Marshall Aid proposal than with domestic French politics. September had seen the creation of the Cominform, a Soviet-directed organization to coordinate policy among European communist parties; at the first meeting the French and Italian parties were subjected to blistering criticism for their legalistic, participatory line since the Liberation. Thorez subsequently renounced the Party’s collaboration in government, denounced the Marshall Plan, and rededicated the Party to aggressive pursuit of working-class demands. The epic strike wave of November 1947 began, significantly different from the strikes that had already rocked France for months because, now, the Communist-

³⁴ Auriol, *Journal du septennat*, vol. 1, 440-441: “L’affolement n’est plus loin de la panique...Le gouvernement ne paraît pas toujours armé pour faire respecter son autorité...Ce regrettable état de fait peut s’assimiler beaucoup plus à une véritable crise de régime qu’à une crise d’impopularité passagère du gouvernement.”

controlled CGT was at the forefront, directing and channeling workers' discontent rather than attempting to suppress it.

The strike wave began in Marseille on November 12, growing out of tumultuous protests of an increase in the city's tramway fare by the newly RPF-controlled city government. In the days to come, following a deliberately provocative CGT appeal for salary hikes and improvement in the food situation, it spread to the mining regions of the North; by November 17, the Paris steelworkers – including those at Renault – had joined in. Provincial metal workers, construction, textile, and chemical workers throughout the country, transport workers, and, finally, some public employees followed suit. The strikes reached their highest pitch of intensity, predictably enough, in industrial, port, and mining regions where both the Communist Party and the CGT were strong – particularly where the CGT was most firmly in the hands of Communists. Large demonstrations accompanied strike activity in urban centers: the intelligence services reported crowds of up to 15,000 at Marseille and Lyon protests, 12,000 at Saint-Etienne, 7,000 at Nice and Hénin-Liétard, 6,000 at Béziers and Perpignan.³⁵ Forty-four different *manifestations* in the Nord department between November 20 and December 8 each drew more than 400 participants.³⁶ Large sectors of the economy came to a standstill. According to government intelligence, about 97 acts of sabotage “worthy of being mentioned” occurred;³⁷ by far the most serious of these was the December 3 derailment of a Paris-Lille train at Arras, which caused 16 deaths.

³⁵ Ministère de l'Intérieur/Direction Générale de la Surêté Nationale/Direction des Renseignements Généraux, “Genèse et déroulement des grèves de novembre et décembre 1947,” Paris, 23 February 1948, 22-23. 484 AP 14, Fonds Jules Moch, AN. Maurice Thorez was present at Hénin-Liétard.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁷ “Genèse et déroulement des grèves,” 17.

The strike wave – from initial work stoppages to continued protests – was largely orchestrated from the “top down” by Communists within the CGT, who in turn took their cues from the Party hierarchy. These party militants were drawing on a well of deeply felt, genuine frustration and even desperation on the part of workers; nevertheless, this strike wave was not “spontaneous,” and the intentions animating it were clearly political. The PCF, acting under Cominform orders (like the Italian Communist Party, which launched massive social agitation at the same moment), hoped to achieve a variety of vaguely defined offensive and defensive aims: to disrupt Marshall Aid’s impending implementation and thus the Atlantic alliance, to reaffirm the Party’s role as champion of the French working class (thereby safeguarding its source of electoral strength), and to finish cementing Communist control of the CGT.³⁸

Insurrectionary takeover of the French state was *not* among these aims. But members of the Socialist and centrist parties now in control of the government – and other political and journalistic elites who continued to support the Fourth Republic – nevertheless responded to the strikes as a threat to the continued existence of the regime. And, indeed, given the fragile and battered state of France in late 1947, it is not difficult to understand why. Moreover, domestic tensions had been immeasurably exacerbated by the international situation: throughout the autumn talk of a “third world war” between the US and the USSR, in which France would be helplessly swept up, proliferated. *La Pensée socialiste* struck a world-weary tone: “Today, it is a secret to no one that the third world war is in the process of developing.”³⁹ Elsewhere on the

³⁸ Cf. Mencherini, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges*; Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol. 1, *L’ardeur et la nécessité*, 184-185; Stéphane Courtois et Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), 279-280. Irwin Wall’s sympathetic attempt to portray Communist goals as purely defensive is unsatisfactory – see *French Communism*, 67.

³⁹ P.L. Tomori [Étienne Balasz], “Pourquoi l’initiative de la 3e guerre mondiale appartient aux États-Unis?” *La Pensée socialiste* 16-17 (July-September 1947), 11: “Aujourd’hui, ce n’est plus un secret

political spectrum, Louis le Bartz at the Catholic *La Croix* agreed: “We accept the idea of a new cataclysm as an inevitability. This is the disconcerting drama of modern souls, and its repercussions penetrate even into the dullness of daily life.”⁴⁰ For those who believed that the world was inexorably dividing into armed pro-capitalist and pro-communist camps, it appeared entirely plausible that the French Communist Party would attempt to launch an internal war to bring the struggle home to France. Already in July, pollsters reported that a common reason given for disapproving of strikes in general was that “they could lead to civil war.”⁴¹ As the strike wave of November-December gained momentum, an MRP deputy from Marseille noted with grim self-satisfaction that “We were right to have insisted on the danger in which a clash between the two blocs could put the country. We were right to provide a glimpse of the consequences of such a shock: civil war. Events prove it: the drama that is beginning will not cease until much blood has been spilled.”⁴²

The disorder associated with the strikes was thus interpreted not merely in terms of labor conflict but through the lens of these existential threats. “France is cracking. France is whirling,” wrote novelist Henri Queffelec in *Esprit*. “The worst is still not definite, but perhaps it is better to expect it – even if deep down we don’t believe it will happen – because the decision, for many of us, is no longer in our

pour personne que la 3e guerre mondiale est en train de se faire. Et tout le monde est enclin d’acquiescer à l’accomplissement de l’inéluctable destin.”

⁴⁰ Louis le Bartz, “Devant l’incertitude de l’avenir,” *La Croix*, 20 November 1947: “Car on accepte comme une fatalité l’idée d’un nouveau cataclysme. C’est le drame déconcertant des âmes modernes, drame dont les répercussions jouent jusque dans la grisaille de la vie quotidienne.”

⁴¹ *Sondages* 35 (July 1947), 564: “Les grèves, cela peut mener à la guerre civile.”

⁴² Alexandre Chazeaux, Editorial, *Le Méridional*, 18 November 1947: “Nous avons raison d’insister sur le danger que pourrait faire courir au pays un heurt entre deux blocs. Nous avons raison de laisser entrevoir les conséquences d’un tel choc: la guerre civile. Les événements le prouvent, le drame qui commence ne cessera que lorsque beaucoup de sang aura coulé.” (We will later refer to *Le Méridional* as a right-wing publication: it changed hands at the end of 1947.)

hands.”⁴³ In *Combat* on November 15, Guy Marester declared that the threats from both the right and the left meant that “republican legality is threatened, and with it the democratic type of regime that it guarantees.”⁴⁴ Ten days later, in the same publication, Jean Texcier insisted that “disorder” in France was now “putting in peril not only the permanence of republican institutions – that is to say, the law – but also the physical life of the country.”⁴⁵ Edouard Dépreux, the Socialist Minister of the Interior (until November 19), announced on November 17 that “The Republic is now in a position of self-defense [*état de légitime défense*].”⁴⁶ Outright supporters of de Gaulle, meanwhile, engaged in still more exaggerated portrayals of the threat posed by the “insurrectionary” and “separatist” Communists (while insisting, naturally, that the RPF represented not a part of the problem but the sole solution to it).⁴⁷

This rhetoric was partially motivated, of course, by a desire to justify repressive anti-communist responses. But the sense that anarchy, revolution, and civil war now lurked just beneath the surface of French society, threatening to burst through at any moment, was real and widespread. It helps to account for the extraordinary media response to events in Marseille in mid-November, just at the beginning of the strike wave.⁴⁸ The facts were these: a Gaullist mayor had taken power in Marseille

⁴³ “La vie quotidienne avec nous,” *Esprit* 140 (December 1947), 955: “La France craque. La France tournoie. Le pire n’est pas toujours sûr, mais il vaut peut-être mieux s’y attendre même si l’on n’y croit pas au fond de soi, car la décision, pour beaucoup, n’est plus entre nos mains.”

⁴⁴ Marester, “Revue de la presse”: “La légalité républicaine est menacée et par-delà la forme démocratique du régime qu’elle garantit.”

⁴⁵ Jean Texcier, “L’ordre public,” *Combat*, 25 November 1947: “Il est à peine besoin d’ajouter que le désordre dessert la nation en mettant en péril non seulement la permanence des institutions républicaines, c’est-à-dire de la loi, mais jusqu’à la vie physique du pays.”

⁴⁶ “La République est aujourd’hui en état de légitime défense,” *Le Populaire*, 18 November 1947.

⁴⁷ François Mauriac, for one, abandoned his habitual loyalty to de Gaulle in this moment because he believed the general and his followers were already reconciled to the imminence of the Cold War’s transformation into a world war, and “If we admit that possibility, then we are already living in an apocalyptic period.” Louis Pauwels, “François Mauriac: ‘Je ne songe pas sans épouvant que nous pourrions voir, comme en 1848, l’armée dressée contre le peuple,’” *Combat*, 22-23 November 1947.

⁴⁸ The Marseille case has garnered more scholarly attention than other aspects of the 1947 strike wave; not only does Mencherini build much of *Guerre froide, grèves rouges* around it, but in *CRS à Marseille*,

(traditionally a stronghold of the Left) in the October municipal elections, and had raised tram fares in the city. At a November 10 protest of the increase, four CGT metal-workers were arrested. On the morning of November 12, a crowd of about 5,000 protesters assembled outside the Palais de Justice where the four were to be tried; after an unfavorable verdict,⁴⁹ the crowd burst into the Palais, forcing the release of two of the detainees. Later in the afternoon, under physical threat from an even larger crowd – some scaled the Palais walls and draped red flags from the windows – the Court acquitted one man and sentenced the other three to nominal terms. Meanwhile that same afternoon, the tense, packed Municipal Council meeting at the Marseille Hôtel de Ville degenerated into an outright brawl. When the swollen crowd from the Palais de Justice arrived, having been alerted by rumors of trouble, it broke past police barricades to invade the building and subjected the Gaullist mayor to a violent beating. As night fell groups of protesters then took to the streets, vandalizing some of the city’s notorious nightclubs that stood as symbols of excess and corruption in a period of generalized want. In the course of this disorder, one of the protesters – a young worker named Vincent Voulant – was killed by shots fired anonymously from inside one of the nightclubs.

The local and national press coverage of these events was intense, vivid, and revealing. While communist papers focused on the death of Voulant, treating it as the martyrdom of a working-class hero at the hands of RPF “fascists” acting under orders from Marseille’s mayor, the non-communist press was far more concerned with *other* acts of violence that had marked the period of protest in Marseille. Mainstream papers across the non-communist political spectrum – *Combat*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *La*

Maurice Agulhon and Fernand Barrat devote a whole study to it. This book sparked a polemical exchange with René Gallissot in *Le mouvement social* 92 (July-September 1975).

⁴⁹ One of the four was freed; the other three were held over in jail pending judgment the following week. The crowd had expected all four to simply be released.

Croix, and Marseille's local dailies – did duly report on the street scuffles, which they described with words like “riots,” and on Voulant's shooting. But, in an atmosphere in which fear of communist “insurrection” was thick in the air, they devoted much more attention to acts on the part of protesters that could be interpreted as attempts to disrupt or dislodge local government agents in the very spaces where, in theory, they reigned sovereign. Brawls in the street – even the one that had resulted in the death of a protester – were thus of much less interest than the violence that had occurred at government buildings. The narrative non-communist journalists developed therefore centered on the events at the Palais de Justice and the Hôtel de Ville. It took as symptomatic those moments in which, symbolically, the normal functioning of state authority – indeed, of the entire social order – had appeared to be most threatened by the eruption of anarchy. For example, two major Marseille papers, *Le Méridional* (Centrist/Christian Democrat) and *Le Provençal* (Socialist), both chose to illustrate their stories on the “riots” with photographs of a female Communist Party member of the Municipal Council climbing atop a conference table to spit on a male RPF member. This act of violence, in its symbolically rich, “carnavalesque” reversal of multiple norms of behavior and hierarchies of authority, functioned as a more alarming depiction of what had gone wrong in Marseille that day than a photo of hundreds of protesters in the street would have done.

In many venues, discussion of the November 12 events in Marseille took on a panic-stricken character, out of proportion to the actual level of disorder that had taken place in the city that day. Prime Minister Ramadier proclaimed that the protests in Marseille had been directed “against the Republic,” and told the Communist deputies in the National Assembly, “If you want to kill the Republic, we will defend it against

you. We will go all the way.”⁵⁰ In *Combat*, Jean Texcier wrote that proof had been provided that the Communists “have deliberately chosen to place themselves in the territory of illegality and violence.”⁵¹ Right-leaning commentators were still more vociferous: *France Libre*, for example, declared that the incidents in Marseille had sounded the alarm that “France must be saved from her ruins, and the Republic from Bolshevik dictatorship.”⁵² Within twenty-four hours, moreover, a still more ominous interpretation of the events had taken shape. On the floor of the Assembly, Gaston Defferre, a Socialist deputy from Marseille, accused the heavily Communist Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité (CRS) state security units in Marseille of active complicity with the protesters and dereliction of duty. In fact, although they had failed to keep the crowd out of the Hôtel de Ville, the CRS companies had not aided the protesters or committed any offense.⁵³ But in the atmosphere of intense fear that reigned in the autumn of 1947— about the strength and stability of the regime, and about the creeping ambitions of the Communists — the story appeared only too plausible. The CRS disbanded the units in question.

As the unrest mounted in November, and as Ramadier himself became convinced that “we are on the eve of a revolutionary situation,” the Ramadier government collapsed; it was replaced by one headed by MRP member Robert Schuman.⁵⁴ Schuman placed

⁵⁰ See “Séance orangeuse,” *Combat*, 14 November 1947: “...et si vous voulez abattre la République, nous la défendrons contre vous. Nous irons jusqu’au bout.”

⁵¹ Texcier, “Installation du désordre,” *Combat*, 14 November 1947: “un certain parti...a délibérément choisi de se placer sur le terrain de l’illégalité et de la violence.”

⁵² Quoted in “Ce que disent les journaux...” *La Croix*, 15 November 1947: “Il faut sauver la France de ses ruines et la République de la dictature bolchevique.”

⁵³ Agulhon and Barrat, *CRS à Marseille*, is intended as a definitive debunking of this accusation. But see Éric Kocher-Marboeuf, “Le maintien de l’ordre public lors des grèves de 1947,” in *L’Année 1947*: Kocher-Marboeuf believes that a lack of injuries among the CRS units demonstrates that “ces unités n’ont pas donné le maximum de leurs possibilités” (385). Luillard and Merley insist that fraternization did indeed occur at Saint-Étienne. (“Les grèves de 1947 à Saint-Étienne,” 178).

⁵⁴ Auriol, *Journal du septennat 1947*, 555: “Ramadier prend aussitôt la parole et dit qu’on est à la veille d’une situation révolutionnaire...”

at the key Ministry of Interior post the fifty-four year-old Socialist Jules Salvador Moch; for the next thirteen months, Moch took charge of the government's efforts to restore order in the country. Moch, memorably described by Swiss observer Herbert Lüthy as a "technocrat by nature, strategist by inclination, and Socialist because of his love of organization," possessed a prodigious energy and intelligence that were recognized even by the many who disliked him.⁵⁵ He was not, perhaps, an enormously sympathetic character, but for our purposes he was an important one. A Popular Front Socialist who had promptly answered de Gaulle's 1940 call to resist, by early 1946 he had already consciously, painfully, but without regrets sacrificed his loyalty to the General because he believed that the Fourth Republic would only survive without him. By 1947 he was a rising intellectual force in his party and, moreover, in part because of his son's heroic death at the hands of the Gestapo, his Resistance credentials were unimpeachable. A fervent anti-communist, Moch claimed that Socialism and Communism had the same ultimate goals, but that Socialists understood it would require a peaceful and lengthy "maturation of the spirit" to create the necessary conditions for social revolution.⁵⁶ He was also a vocal critic of the RPF. Moch believed that the militantly extralegal aspects of the Resistance's legacy would

⁵⁵ Herbert Leuthy [Lüthy], *France Against Herself*, transl. Eric Mosbacher (New York: Meridian Books, 1955; 1957), 143. For example, see Jean-Marie Domenach, *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d'or. Journal d'un réfractaire (1944-1977)*, eds. Nicole Domenach and Goulven Boudic (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 93. David Rousset, always exceedingly sharp-tongued with opponents, perhaps stands as an exception to this rule: he once described Moch as "le petit oeuf crânién vide de substance, qu'est Jules Moch." "D'abord, gagner la bataille," *La Gauche 7* (October 1948). Éric Méchoulan has provided a solid, sympathetic biography of Moch: *Jules Moch, un socialiste dérangeant* (Brussels: Bruylant, 1999), and Moch penned an autobiography as well, *Une si longue vie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976).

⁵⁶ Jules Moch, *Confrontations, doctrines, déviations, expériences, espérances* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 188: "une longue maturation de l'esprit." Moch maintained, however, that "La fin doctrinale du communisme est sans doute la même que celle du socialisme, de Marx à Jaurès et à Leon Blum. Il s'agit, dans les deux cas, de mettre fin aux iniquités sociales, donc d'abolir leur cause principale, le prélèvement capitaliste sur le travail humain; de créer une société sans classes fondée, non sur la poursuite du profit, mais sur la satisfaction de besoins, où chaque homme possèdera les mêmes chance de s'épanouir pleinement dans la démocratie intégrale étendue du politique à l'économique. Une telle société ne peut se réaliser que par l'appropriation collective des moyens de production."

need to be exorcised for France to achieve political stability: “Yesterday’s duty,” he once declared, “would be a crime today.”⁵⁷ The challenge at hand in November 1947, as he understood it, was twofold: it involved a physical defense of the regime in a variety of locales, through the effective deployment of forces of order, and also an ideological defense of the state as the sole legitimate source of authority – and the sole legitimate agent of violence – in France.⁵⁸

Meeting the first element of the challenge proved somewhat easier than expected (this because, as we have said, the Communists were not actually attempting to foment an insurrectional takeover). Strikers and demonstrators did engage in minor acts of violence directed toward government officials or government sites in many towns and cities: skirmishes with the forces of order (primarily gendarmerie, Garde Républicaine, and Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité) were common, as were occupations of rail stations and telephone centers. And protesters did take over the Hôtel de Ville in Marseille, Béziers, and Antibes; in Marseille they also erected barricades in the streets. But nowhere, at any point, did they occupy a prefecture or even a sub-prefecture; moreover, as intelligence services later acknowledged, protesters “aimed much less to paralyze the action of the public powers than to interrupt rail traffic and telephone and telegraph transmissions,” for reasons relating

⁵⁷ Speech to Chefs de service des Renseignements Généraux, Paris, 1 April 1949. Folder “Notes de service émanant du Ministre de l’Intérieur,” 484 AP 16, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: “devoir d’hier serait crime aujourd’hui.” For a taste of Moch’s anti-communism, which persisted to the end of his long life, see his *Le Communisme, jamais!* (Paris: Plon, 1978). A Socialist militant since the 1920s, Moch quit the party in 1974 over its electoral alliance with the PCF.

⁵⁸ Moch biographer Éric Méchoulan, attempting to counter a Communist historiography that has painted Moch as a paranoid, insists that he never feared for “la pérennité de l’État,” and understood from the beginning the limited nature of the Communist threat (Méchoulan, *Jules Moch*, 240). I find this a selective reading: although Moch was a cool-headed minister, like other members of the government he considered the fall of the regime a genuine possibility. In a 27 November 1947 telegram to the prefects, for example, he told them that his instructions were intended to help them defend “les institutions républicaines et d’empêcher que s’instaure dans le pays une ère de violence et d’anarchie dont tous les Français souffriraient.” Folder “Grèves,” 19860581, art. 28, Archives Nationales, Fontainebleau (hereafter CAC).

strictly to helping the strike continue.⁵⁹ For the most part, protesters and picketers were not armed.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, under Moch's direction the government responded as if to a military-level threat. The Assembly approved the call-up of 80,000 reservists; Moch designed contingency plans for the government to take refuge in Brittany if Paris fell. For the first time in French history, the government authorized the use of tear gas grenades against domestic protesters and troops employed this tactic on a nationwide scale.

The results of all this were disappointing to Moch, and revealing of the regime's material weakness. Rebuilding of the military and internal security services (in particular the structure of command) was incomplete at this juncture, and the forces of order lacked adequate means of transport and communication, satisfactory uniforms, and sufficient arms and training in how to use them.⁶¹ "In general," the intelligence services later reported, "in the first days of the strike, and especially on the occasion of the first imposing protests, the police – even when reinforced by troops – were not up to the task of assuring order in the streets... In many departmental administrative centers, the Prefects were only able to prevent incursions into public buildings at the price of painful efforts, and through the use of many tear gas canisters."⁶² The "numeric insufficiency" of the forces of order was the greatest

⁵⁹ "Genèse et déroulement des grèves," 26: "Les manifestants, dans les assauts qu'ils ont donnés contre les points sensibles, ont visé beaucoup moins à paralyser l'action des pouvoirs publics qu'à interrompre le trafic ferroviaire et les transmissions téléphoniques et télégraphiques; cela démontre que l'agitation n'avait pas un caractère insurrectionnel."

⁶⁰ According to a "Synthèse des rapports des préfets sur les grèves de novembre-décembre 1947" produced for Moch (likely as an early outline version of "Genèse et déroulement des grèves") *no* protesters had been found armed. Folder "Résumé des rapports des préfets à la suite des grèves de décembre 1947 dans toute la France," 484 AP 14, Fonds Jules Moch, AN.

⁶¹ See Kocher-Marboeuf, "Le maintien de l'ordre," 381-382, on these deficiencies. It is worth noting as well that much of the troop force was in Indochina – where the parties of government very much wanted it to be able to remain. On November 19, for example, Ramadier privately called for appeasement of the social unrest because "If we create a climate of civil war, it will be necessary to make the troops come from Indochina." Auriol, *Journal du Septennat*, 559.

⁶² "Genèse et déroulement des grèves," 28: "Dans les grandes villes (Marseille, Lyon, St-Étienne...), en général, la police – même renforcée par des unités de la troupe – n'a pas été en mesure, les premiers

problem.⁶³ At Valence on December 3, for example, a mere sixty-five gendarmes and police officers attempted to remove around 2500 protesters from the train station; the result was chaos, panicked police who resorted to gunfire, and three protester deaths. In Paris the same day, the intelligence services reported that workers being harassed by strike militants as they attempted to return to the factories were “now convinced that the public powers are helpless to assure the freedom to work.”⁶⁴ The troops fared little better than the CRS: the general in charge of the Ninth Military Region (Tours) wrote to Moch in a “*très secret*” report that his forces had suffered a “severe ordeal [*rude épreuve*]” and warned that “behind a façade...hides an Army with weak technical skill [*de faible valeur technique*], which could hold in store for the Country, and for the Government, some disappointing surprises.”⁶⁵ If, in fact, an armed and organized Communist movement had seriously attempted to take power, great bloodshed – even a coup – might conceivably have occurred. Happily for Moch and his associates, no such attempt was made, and by 10 December the strike wave had died a gradual death without ever posing any physical challenge to the regime’s continued existence. Publicly, members of government and those elements of the media who supported them gave great credit to governmental “firmness” in producing

jours de la grève, et surtout à l’occasion des premières manifestations imposantes, d’assurer l’ordre dans la rue. Cette insuffisance a surtout été sensible dans les départements du Sud-Est... Dans plusieurs chefs-lieux de départements, les Préfets ne sont parvenus à interdire les incursions dans les édifices publics qu’au prix de pénibles efforts et par l’usage de nombreuses ampoules lacrymogènes. Ils ont éprouvé davantage de difficultés pour empêcher l’occupation des gares et dépôts S.N.C.F. ou procéder à leur évacuation.”

⁶³ Ibid.: “insuffisance numérique.”

⁶⁴ Note from Service départemental [Bouches-du-Rhône] to the Direction générale des renseignements généraux à Paris, 5ème section, 3 December 1947. Folder “Intérieur, Marseille (SN-RG) 3-12-47,” 484 AP 15, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: Ils sont convaincus aujourd’hui que les pouvoirs publics sont impuissants à assurer la liberté du travail.”

⁶⁵ “Synthèse personnelle du général commandant la 9ème région militaire,” November 1947. Folder “A. Nat.,” 484 AP 15, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: “... derrière une façade... se cache une Armée de faible valeur technique, pouvant réserver au Pays comme au Gouvernement des surprises décevantes.” He was here apparently quoting himself from an earlier report.

this outcome.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, privately Moch understood that the clashes between strikers and the forces of order had tended to highlight the weakness and disorganization of the state in the eyes of a populace already desperately frustrated with successive governments' impotence in improving the economic situation. Thus, synthesizing the reports of prefects from throughout the country in the aftermath of the strikes, his office concluded that "the affirmation of the authority of the State" remained an unaccomplished imperative.⁶⁷

Throughout 1948, successive governments – each formed, by strategic necessity, by parliamentary coalitions further and further to the Right – struggled unsuccessfully to improve the economic situation, while popular disillusionment only grew and black markets proliferated. In June, according to *Sondages*, a scant 21% of the population believed life was improving; in the fall a dismal 9% of those polled hoped for a "return to the conditions of normal existence" in the following year.⁶⁸ By early September, the prefect of Pas-de-Calais reported that, in his impoverished department, the populace now responded to all events through the lens of their hunger, and regarded the latest failure to improve supply as:

the definitive sign of an irremediable governmental weakness... Thus, it is almost exclusively the problems of milk and meat that the Government ought to act upon, through a rigorous policy implemented before winter; without this, we may go gently into true and total anarchy. And isn't it so that this dangerous tendency toward anarchy is the mark of our era in France: local protests against economic or fiscal inspectors, bread rationing strikes in certain departments, milk or butter

⁶⁶ For example, see Louis le Bartz, "La 'révolution' n'aura pas lieu," *La Croix*, 5 December 1947, who exulted that French "indépendance" and "liberté" would live on because "il s'est trouvé un gouvernement ferme pour les défendre." The government had shown, he went on, "en ces heures graves où nous avons frisé la guerre civile, d'une fermeté, d'une patience et d'une compréhension auxquelles le pays rend hommage."

⁶⁷ "Synthèse des rapports des préfets," 14: "l'affirmation de l'autorité de l'Etat."

⁶⁸ *Sondages* 44 (June-July 1948), 662; *Sondages* 45 (October-November 1948), 667. The question posed was: "Dans combien de temps croyez-vous qu'on reviendra à des conditions d'existence normale?"

strikes in others, inadmissible ultimatums from new economic feudalities, etc. In all classes of society, we are losing more and more the sense of our most solid values, and especially our respect for the law and for governmental authority.⁶⁹

De Gaulle seized on the situation, again proposing himself as an alternative to the “illegitimate” regime – and implying that, just as under Vichy, active resistance had now become the only alternative to a morally untenable collaboration: “Just as guilty are those who, although they disapprove of the regime, contribute to prolonging it.”⁷⁰ The Communist-led CGT, meanwhile, playing on the paradoxical fact that working-class anger at the government’s failures was provoking anti-*dirigiste* sentiment (belief in the need for *less* government intervention), encouraged challenges to state authority by workers in nationalized industries.

Moch – who stayed on at the Interior Ministry through the governmental changes – recognized the economic basis for the regime’s difficulties but nevertheless remained focused on the threat of future physical clashes with Communists and the RPF.⁷¹ He developed a number of strategies that he hoped would prevent any recurrence of the humiliations of 1947, or any French version of the Czech coup of February 1948, an event regarded with horror by France’s non-Communist political

⁶⁹ M. le Préfet du Pas de Calais, “Rapport mensuel d’information, mois de septembre 1948,” 5 October 1948. F/1cIII/1307, AN: “On y a vu le signe définitif d’une impuissance gouvernementale irrémédiable... C’est donc presque uniquement sur les problèmes du lait et de la viande que doit agir le Gouvernement par une politique rigoureuse instaurée avant l’hiver: faute de quoi, on irait doucement à une véritable et totale anarchie. Cette dangereuse tendance à l’anarchie n’est-elle d’ailleurs pas la marque de notre époque en France: manifestations locales contre les contrôleurs économiques ou fiscaux, grève des tickets de pain dans certains départements, grève du lait ou du beurre dans d’autres, ultimatums inadmissibles des nouvelles féodalités économiques, etc. On perd de plus en plus, dans toutes les classes de la société, la notion des valeurs les plus solides et, surtout, du respect de la loi et de l’autorité gouvernementale.”

⁷⁰ Siegfried, *L’Année politique 1948*, 177 (“On est déjà sorti de la légitimité”) and “De Gaulle réservait sa liberté d’action;” *Combat*, 2-3 October 1948.

⁷¹ Moch’s concerns about the RPF were not as publicly voiced as his anti-communist beliefs, but monitoring the RPF – and, in particular, attempting to determine whether de Gaulle’s supporters were amassing arms and organizing themselves along paramilitary lines – was a major undertaking within the Ministry.

elite.⁷² The Czech case not only provided alarming evidence of expanding Soviet influence but also appeared to demonstrate that the “participatory” attitude of Communist parties in Europe’s postwar democracies was only a sly means of biding time until, one by one, they found opportunities to mobilize their working-class constituents and seize power. Moch kept a keen eye on prosecutions of “agitators” arrested during the strike wave, personally protesting judgments he viewed as too lenient,⁷³ and oversaw an in-depth study, based on prefectural reports, of the “lessons” of the strikes. He watched closely, and with satisfaction, as much of the non-communist portion of the labor movement split from the CGT in the aftermath of the strikes, creating a new organization, Force Ouvrière (CGT-FO, or simply FO), that was secretly sponsored by the American CIA and much more sympathetic to the parties of government.⁷⁴ To counter confusion in the chain of command over the forces of order, he created a new category of regional administrator, responsible

⁷² Moch recognized that the underlying problem was economic: in December 1947, just after the strikes, he wrote, “The Prefects ought to know very well that the fight for the reestablishment of public order is not over. It is moving now from the strictly political plane to the economic plane. The success achieved in the first domain would remain without a future if a failure were to be recorded in the second domain.” M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur to MM. les préfets, “Note d’orientation politique no.1,” Paris, 26 December 1947, 4. Folder “Notes d’orientation politique,” 484 AP 14, Fonds Jules Moch, AN.

However, at the Interior Ministry he worked more narrowly on the problems of maintaining order.

⁷³ The repression was considerable: according to “Genèse et déroulement des grèves,” up to 25 December 1947, 1375 people had been arrested – nearly half from the Paris and Marseille regions. The overwhelming majority of arrests (1113) were for “impeding the freedom to work” for non-strikers. Only 147 of those arrested were freed without trial (44-45). An example of Moch intervening to protest a verdict can be found in his letter to the Minister of Justice, “Objet: Poursuites contre les auteurs de troubles,” Paris, 29 August 1948. Folder “Grèves,” 19860581 art.28, CAC.

⁷⁴ On the CGT schism, a momentous event in its own right, see Annie Lacroix-Riz, *La CGT de la Libération à la scission de 1944-1947* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1983); Georges Lefranc, *Les Expériences syndicales en France de 1939 à 1950* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1950); René Mouriaux, “Les rapports de la CGT et de FO (1948-1962)” in *La CGT dans les années 1950*, eds. Élyane Bressol, Michel Dreyfus, Joël Hedde et Michel Pigenet (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 355-370; Michel Dreyfus, Gérard Gautron, and Jean-Louis Robert, eds, *La Naissance du Force ouvrier. Autour de Robert Bothereau* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003); Jack Kantrowitz, “L’influence américaine sur Force Ouvrière,” *Revue française de science politique* 28.4 (August 1978): 717-739. Recrimination in the aftermath of the strikes rendered the schism inevitable, but the split had loomed since the mid-1930s, and anti-communist, pro-schism organizing had gone on within the CGT since 1946.

directly to the Interior Minister: the Inspectors General of the Administration on Extraordinary Mission (IGAME).

Most interestingly, Moch also developed a new doctrine, inspired by a maxim he credited to General Lyautey that armies should “show off their force in order to never have to make use of it.”⁷⁵ He systematically instructed his colleagues and subordinates that in the future, agitators would need to be massively overwhelmed *without* resort to lethal force. What was behind this commitment? We need not dismiss out-of-hand as an explanation Moch’s lifelong ideological commitment to a certain socialism and his genuine revulsion at the idea of the forces of order firing on hungry, desperate workers who were merely, he believed, being duped and instrumentalized by the Communists. But in 1947 and 1948, Moch consistently acted as a defender of the regime first, and as a socialist distantly second.⁷⁶ Like Tixier in 1945, he understood that, in the eyes of the French public, the state still simply did not possess the moral capital, the aura of unquestionable legitimacy, to risk deploying lethal violence against citizens. Moch thus called for a delicate balancing act. For the police to exhibit a stunning array of force was a way to signal the state’s monopoly on violence; for them to refrain from using it, however, avoided further undermining the regime’s grasp on legitimacy.

Thus, as if France were a hostile foreign territory inhabited by recalcitrant natives, Moch adapted a credo voiced by a far-right military commander in the context of colonial conquest to the task of governing policing operations in the metropole. The forces of order, he instructed the prefects, should always numerically overwhelm

⁷⁵ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 16 November 1948, 6996: “Lyautey a eu raison de proclamer qu’il fallait ‘montrer sa force pour n’avoir point à en faire usage.’ La formule vaut dans la ‘guerre froide’ qui, hélas!, a été déclarée à la nation.”

⁷⁶ It is interesting – and startling – to note that President Auriol, likewise a Socialist in name, praised Moch thusly in his journal: “in him, the bourgeoisie has found a last intelligent and devoted defender.” *Journal du Septennat*, vol. 2, 475.

protesters, creating an awe-inspiring display of crushing state strength. In the event that local authorities could not muster a large enough force, Moch insisted, abstaining from any confrontation at all was preferable to risking a humiliating defeat: a “failed operation” would “seriously damage the public order in the given region, the morale of the forces involved, and the authority of the Government in the entire country.”⁷⁷ But, Moch wrote, the security services should not actually *use* their arms: creating working-class “martyrs” at the hands of state agents would be the most serious “failed operation” of all. After a serious battle between tire-factory strikers and the forces of order in Clermont-Ferrand in June – dozens of CRS and Gardes Républicaines were injured – Moch triumphed in the fact that no strikers had been killed: “if, in the course of these seven hours, a single CRS had lost his patience, ceded to the provocations, or to the temptation to return fire, or to fear, there would doubtless have been a large number of deaths and the Government would have found itself in a particularly painful position.”⁷⁸ Thus although by the end of June Moch believed that the PCF understood that “in a test of force, the advantage would inevitably remain with the Government,” he was painfully aware that the successive fumbling governments of 1947-1948 could ill afford such a test.⁷⁹

The PCF and CGT leadership appeared equally aware of this handicap, and exploited it to the best of their ability. Drawing on the Communists’ towering

⁷⁷ M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur to MM. les IGAME et les préfets, “Note d’orientation politique no.12,” Paris, 20 October 1948, 3. Archives Nationales, Fonds Jules Moch, 484 AP 16 Folder “Notes de service émanant du Ministre de l’Intérieur”: “...une opération manquée du genre de laquelle je rédige cette note nuit gravement à l’ordre public dans la région intéressée, au moral des forces engagées et à l’autorité du Gouvernement dans tout le pays.”

⁷⁸ M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur to MM. les IGAME et les préfets, “Note d’orientation politique no.8,” Paris, 30 June 1948, 6. Folder “Notes d’orientation politique,” 484 AP 14, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: “Il y a lieu de souligner enfin que si, au cours de ces sept heures, un seul C.R.S. avait perdu patience, cédé aux provocations, à la tentation de riposter ou à la peur, il y aurait sans doute eu un grand nombre de morts et le Gouvernement se serait trouvé dans une position particulièrement pénible.”

⁷⁹ Moch, “Note d’orientation politique no.8”: “Les dirigeants du P.C. ont reconnu, à la lumière des événements de Clermont-Ferrand (voir ci-après), que même si la classe ouvrière suivait localement ses mots d’ordre, l’avantage, dans une épreuve de force resterait fatalement au Gouvernement.”

reputation as resisters, they systematically attempted to associate the 1947 strikers and protesters with the legacy of the Resistance, and the regime with Vichy-era terror. *L'Humanité* called Moch's methods "Hitlerian" and insisted that he had used ex-SS men against strikers. *Action* called for a new resistance to oppose government "terror;" in *Les Lettres françaises* Claude Morgan sounded the call for "friends from our clandestine struggles" to "unite in action, as before, to save the country from servitude."⁸⁰ Pamphlets distributed in the Marseille tram stations announced that on the strikers' side there were no "POORLY PURGED KOLLABOS, no MILICIENS ESCAPED FROM PRISONS or GESTAPO informers;"⁸¹ a different poster from the region (produced by the Communist-controlled committees of the deportees' federation) was illustrated with a skeletal concentration-camp inmate and the legend "Never again!" It announced that "The deportees have already sacrificed everything in the fight for Liberty against Fascism. They will remain united to continue the same combat."⁸² In the tumultuous December 1947 Assembly debates over the call-up of reserve troops, Communist deputies adopted similar language, peppering their filibustering speeches with liberal references to Hitler, Pétain, *miliciens*, "*boches*," and the Gestapo. "Viva the French Communist Party, the party of the Resistance!" cried out one Communist deputy. "All the other parties collapsed in surrender, even the

⁸⁰ "Contre les mineurs Jules Moch envoie les SS et les soudards d'Anders," *L'Humanité*, 9 December 1947; Maurice Kriegel-Valmont, "Le passé et l'avenir," *Action*, 10 December 1947; Claude Morgan, "Ils menacent parce qu'ils ont peur," *Les Lettres françaises*, 27 November 1947: "Amis de nos luttes clandestines...unissez-vous, comme naguère dans l'action, pour sauver le pays de la servitude."

⁸¹ *Echo des tramways*, 3 December 1947, preserved in Folder "Proclamations, informations, tracts," 484 AP 15, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: "Qu'il n'y a pas, chez nous, des KOLLABOS MAL ÉPURÉS; des MILICIENS EN RUPTURE DE PRISONS et des donneurs de la GESTAPO. Nos âmes sont pures et nos fronts sereins, car nous savons que nous combattons pour la bonne cause."

⁸² FNDIRP, Comités Départementaux des Bouches-du-Rhône, Var, Gard, Vaucluse, Hautes et Basses-Alpes, "Plus jamais ça!" preserved in "Proclamations, informations, tracts," 484 AP 15, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: "Les déportés ont déjà tout sacrifié dans le combat pour la Liberté contre le Fascisme. Ils restent tous unis pour continuer le même combat."

Socialists.”⁸³ Opponents were accused of past and present outrages: Pierre André, for example, had been a “dealer in the [confiscated] goods of Jews,” and Edmond Michelet was currently “trampling underfoot” the dead corpses of Dachau.⁸⁴ When Prime Minister Schuman argued that the government had the right to defend itself “against all those who are trying to break up the forces of the State and to sap the authority of the government,” Communist leader Charles Tillon shouted him down: “The workers were armed in 1944 to liberate you!”⁸⁵ They therefore retained the right to arm themselves indefinitely.

All of this language may strike us as melodramatic posturing – and, to a point, of course, it certainly was. But it is important to recall that the experiences of Occupation, resistance, and clandestinity were at this point barely three years’ distant, and hardly seemed to belong to a far-off fantasy world. Moreover, in 1940s France Hitlerian fascism was commonly conceptualized as an anti-working-class ideology, and the Resistance as a movement in which workers – especially Communist workers – had dominated. It was not difficult to impute ominous intentions to a government calling up 80,000 reservists to confront men and women attempting to exercise their right to strike. Jean-Marie Domenach, who sympathized with the Communists but was not a Party member, wondered seriously in his private journal during the events of late

⁸³ *Journal Officiel - Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 29 November 1947, 5338: “Vive le parti communiste français, le parti de la résistance!...Tous les autres partis étaient effondrés dans la capitulation (*Applaudissements à l’extrême gauche*) même le parti socialiste.”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5293: “Vous [M. Michelet] avez oublié ceux de Dachau et vous piétez les cadavres de ceux qui sont restés là-bas.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5246: “Schuman: Il faut que nous soyons armés –...contre tous ceux qui s’efforcent de dissocier les forces de l’État et de saper l’autorité du Gouvernement (*Vives protestations à l’extrême gauche*). Charles Tillon: Les ouvriers étaient armés en 1944 pour vous libérer!”

November, “Will I finish this journal, begun lying in the straw in the *maquis*, in another *maquis*, or in prison?”⁸⁶

The parties of government thus found themselves intensely vulnerable in the face of charges that they were seeking to renew Vichy-era repression. Some fought back by assimilating the Communists to common criminals: the governmental response was not political repression, they insisted, and certainly not class warfare on French workers, but simple policing. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, for example, an MRP representative, exclaimed on the floor of the Assembly that the battle was not one “between labor and capital, as you claim, but a conflict between the Republic, law, republican legality, and gangs that are outlaws because of the means they use and the goals they pursue.”⁸⁷ The December 3, 1947 derailing of the Paris-Lille express and the sixteen civilian deaths it caused, although the Communists vigorously denied their involvement, provided unexpected support for this position: resister and Buchenwald survivor Rémy Roure, for example, claimed in *Le Monde* that this act of sabotage proved that, under the Communists’ direction, the strike wave had lost any social content and become “a criminal work of social disintegration, an association of organized, methodical crime, a bloody terror that some true mental cases want to impose on our country.”⁸⁸ Those who took this line often brandished their own Resistance credentials to make the point that they were hardly suspect of being neo-

⁸⁶ *Beaucoup de gueule*, 44: “Ce cahier commencé dans la paille du maquis, le finirai-je dans un autre maquis, ou en prison?”

⁸⁷ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 29 November 1947, 5289: “Ces gard-voies sont appelés à intervenir, non pas dans un conflit entre le travail et le capital, comme vous le dites, mais dans un conflit entre le République, le droit, la légalité républicaine et des bandes qui sont hors la loi, par les procédés qu’elles utilisent et les buts qu’elles poursuivent.”

⁸⁸ “Leurs déclamations,” *Le Monde*, 5 December 1947: “...[I]l ne s’agit plus d’une grève générale moribonde, mais d’une oeuvre criminelle de désagrégation sociale, d’une organisation du banditisme planifié, méthodique, d’une terreur sanglante que de véritables déséquilibrés mentaux voudraient imposer au pays.” No arrests were ever made for the sabotage. It is likely, though by no means certain, that strike militants were indeed responsible; it is *not* likely that they were acting under CGT instructions.

Hitlerians. (Moch's own outstanding Resistance past, and his son's "martyrdom," proved useful here.)⁸⁹

The government's supporters also tentatively experimented with another rhetorical strategy, one which they would perfect in 1948: using the language of "resistance" to describe not the strikers but those workers who, despite Communist pressures, continued to report for duty. Anti-communist national newspapers like the conservative *L'Aurore* and the Catholic *La Croix* rejoiced that "everywhere, resistance is being organized against Communist dictatorship;" *L'Aurore* columnist Robert Bony saw "resistance among the railway men, resistance among the postmen, resistance among the miners, resistance among the steelworkers, resistance among the civil servants."⁹⁰ This language relied on a recast vision of the Resistance as a non-partisan patriotic movement, motivated strictly by love of "France": its legacy thus now belonged to those who continued to defend the nation's hopes for economic recovery and its liberty from nefarious Soviet interference. According to such logic, the USSR, like Germany in 1940, threatened France's independence and survival; the French Communists were therefore analogous to wartime collaborators. The patriotism of the Resistance, meanwhile, had been transmitted to the regime, which was trying to rebuild the nation, and to those many workers willing to help defend "French democracy" against Stalin's designs. Indeed, the governments' defenders were exceedingly careful to aim their critiques not at the working class— the vast majority of workers, they insisted, longed for law and order — but at the "Stalinists" who, in the service of a foreign power, wanted to destroy France and install "a terrible Stalinist

⁸⁹ Robert Schuman's extraordinary biography, however — he was born in Lorraine and thus, in World War I, fought on the side of Germany — was not.

⁹⁰ Quoted in "Ce que disent les journaux..." *La Croix*, 28 November 1947: "Résistance chez les cheminots, résistance chez les postiers, résistance chez les mineurs, résistance chez les métallurgistes, résistance chez les fonctionnaires."

dictatorship.”⁹¹ In the Assembly, Schuman solemnly thanked the workers and non-communist syndical organizations “who have the courage, the immense courage, to resist these solicitations.”⁹²

Such continued to be the rhetorical battle lines as the 1948 miners’ strike began on October 4. The strike was concentrated in the nationalized mines of the great coal regions of the North as well as in Lorraine, the Gard, and around Saint-Étienne, and involved one of the most culturally distinct segments of the French working-class – and one that had historically been the object of fierce competition between Communist and Socialist-dominated labor organizing.⁹³ Despite receiving still less attention from historians than the convulsions of 1947, the miners’ strike was in many ways an even more traumatic event for the Fourth Republic.⁹⁴ Its proximate cause was an ill-timed government decree attempting to impose greater discipline in the mines and make cuts to the workforce: Minister of Industrial Production Robert Lacoste was seeking to stymie CGT-encouraged absenteeism and insubordination, but the strategy backfired. The CGT called the strike and also quickly added wage demands. The other unions participated briefly; quickly, however, they retreated and the strike turned into a bitter,

⁹¹ *Journal Officiel - Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 29 November 1947, 5255 (Maurice Viollette): “Non, mesdames, messieurs, ni pour le pain ni pour l’indépendance; on les appelle à la lutte politique, à la lutte pour Staline. Nous voulons sauver le prolétariat de ce pays de la terrible dictature stalinienne dont nous connaissons les effets troubles.”

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5247: “Avant de quitter la tribune, je veux au nom du Gouvernement de la nation toute entière, remercier les travailleurs et les organisations syndicales qui ont le courage, le grand courage de résister à ces sollicitations.”

⁹³ See Holter, *The Battle for Coal*, 17-39.

⁹⁴ The reasons for this imbalance are likely due to the events’ relevance to the internal history of French labor. The 1947 strikes not only involved a much broader swathe of the working population, they also provided the immediate catalyst for the momentous CGT/FO split. A discussion of them is thus inevitably included in any chronicling of the evolution in the organization of the labor movement in twentieth-century France. Another factor in the lesser interest in the strikes of 1948 is that they were regionally contained: as Hubert Lüthy commented, with some exaggeration, “so far as the rest of France was concerned, all this took place in a foreign, unknown land; it was as if there had been a rebellion in Madagascar.” (*France Against Herself*, 152.)

weeks-long test of strength and endurance between the Communist-controlled CGT and the government. The miners' reasons for striking were legion: not only were their real wages deteriorating, but, thanks to the government's removal of Communists and other labor leaders from administrative posts in the Charbonnages de France (a course of action adopted under pressure from the Americans), labor-management relations in the nationalized mines were in what historian Darryl Holter calls a full-blown "crisis of authority."⁹⁵ Nevertheless the major Communist aim – in promoting the strike, in stubbornly continuing it, despite immense hardship for striking miners,⁹⁶ well past the point when any possibility of obtaining concrete satisfactions had disappeared, and in promoting forms of sabotage that essentially demanded repressive intervention – was most likely to disrupt France's economic recovery and thus the Franco-American aid relationship. And the impact of the abrupt stoppage in coal production on French industry was indeed serious: various American officials estimated direct losses of 5.5 million tons of coal and indirect losses of over \$150 million (that is, 12% of the total amount of European Recovery Program support to France for the year).⁹⁷

As in 1947, to actually topple the regime was not one of the Communists' goals. But to many observers at the time – including Moch– this was by no means clear. Certainly, just as Moch had feared, strikers and protesters attempted in a still more extreme fashion than the previous autumn to draw state agents into bloody confrontations that might undermine the Fourth Republic's authority. Moch's sense

⁹⁵ Holter, *The Battle for Coal*, 123-124 and 154.

⁹⁶ See Holter, *The Battle for Coal*, 172, on the terrible food shortages in the Northern mining regions. The PCF and the CGT organized for some miners' children to be removed from their starving households and sent to board in other regions. Even government officials most strongly in favor of repression were eventually alarmed at its effects on mining communities: according to Auriol by 20 October Robert Lacoste was fretting that "Des régions importantes du Nord manquent d'eau, d'électricité et même de pain. Le gouvernement ne peut pas laisser souffrir les populations" (*Journal du septennat*, vol. 2, 491).

⁹⁷ Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement*, 130.

that the stakes were high for the regime was exacerbated by information he received on public opinion. Polls showed that a plurality of the French populace (and a majority of workers) believed that the parties of government, with their failed economic policies and inability to curtail unrest, had only themselves to blame for matters having come to such a head.⁹⁸ The populace, the prefect in one affected region explained, understood the events unleashed by the strikes as constituting “a profound crisis, because they analyze it as a crisis of authority.”⁹⁹

In the early stages of the miners’ strike, Moch was hopeful that the standoff would come to a close quickly, and that the measures he had taken over the previous ten months would on their own prove sufficient to deter violence. Although the government’s preemptive efforts to occupy coking plants created a few tense moments between CRS units and picketing miners, by mid-October there had been no major clashes. In an October 15 note to the prefects and the Inspectors General, Moch celebrated that “nowhere, except in very limited cases, have we been overwhelmed...A policy constructed equally of firmness and prudence has borne fruit.” They could now hope for “a happy denouement, much more rapid and less costly than ten months ago.”¹⁰⁰ Events quickly proved him wrong. From October 18,

⁹⁸ Asked who they held “responsible” for the current strikes in October, 1948, 35% of respondents blamed the government exclusively; 14% blamed the strikers, 4% the owners, and 33% “everyone at once.” Among respondents in the “worker” category, 52% blamed the government exclusively. The *Sondages* editors commented, “this *tableau* seems to prove that the current social conflicts do not especially pit workers and owners against one another but, rather, put both of these at once against the Government. The conflict tends toward indicting the regime itself.” *Sondages* 45 (October-November 1948), 669.

⁹⁹ M. le Préfet, Bouches du Rhône, to M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur, “Rapport d’ensemble sur la situation du département, pour la période du 5 septembre au 5 octobre 1948” (no.3025), 5 October 1948. F/1cIII/1253, AN: “La crise parait profonde, parce qu’elle s’analyse en une crise d’autorité.”

¹⁰⁰ M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur to MM. les préfets, “Note d’orientation politique no.11,” Paris, 15 October 1948, 4-5. Folder “Notes d’orientation politique,” 484 AP 14, Fonds Jules Moch, AN: “Je veux souligner que la situation n’a jamais revêtu le caractère de gravité qu’elle a eu au mois de novembre et décembre 1947. Nulle part, sauf en cas très limités, nous n’avons été débordés...Une politique faite à la fois de fermeté et de prudence ont porté leurs fruits...Nous pouvons espérer un dénouement hereux, beaucoup plus rapide et moins coûteux, qu’il y a dix mois.” On October 14, Moch reported on his activities as Interior Minister and proudly claimed that “The current organization of the forces of order

the mining federation of the CGT ordered the abandonment of security measures in the mines – an unprecedented measure in the history of French labor militancy, and one that put the mines (which had been nationalized at the Liberation and were the property of the French people) at risk of devastation from flooding. Moch, surprised and alarmed,¹⁰¹ urgently requested a call-up of troops to help gendarmes, CRS, and police units already on the ground to occupy and clear the mines; he also reluctantly asked for and received authorization for the forces of order to fire their weapons, after giving warning, if they were attacked.

As the troops rolled in, the atmosphere at the mine-heads was abruptly transformed into a battle zone: “Police forces, the army, and assault tanks penetrated into the mining basins yesterday,” *Combat* reported soberly on the 19th. “For the first time since it was begun, the strike in the mines has taken on a violent, willfully fierce character, which will certainly get worse in the coming days.”¹⁰² The paper’s own subsequent headlines bore out this prediction: On the 20th, “Bloody Fights Between Miners and CRS;” On the 22nd, “Grand’Combe: Pitched Battle – 60 CRS Wounded;” “Bethune: The Strikers Seize the Under-Prefect;” “Counter-Attack of Miners, Who Seek to Reconquer Many Pits;” On the 23rd and 24th, “Measures of a State of Siege: Immediate Recall of 30,000 to 40,000 Reservists;” “At Firminy, the CRS Fire on the Miners: Two Dead, Thirty Wounded;” “Violent Combats in the Loire Region; The

is far superior to that of November 1947. A perfect liaison exists with the army...[I]t will never be necessary to have recourse to a state of siege.” “JM/DB 14-10-48, Intervention de M. Jules Moch,” Paris, 14 October 1948. Folder “Sécurité et autorité de l’État (rapports) (documents divers),” 484 AP 16, Fonds Jules Moch, AN. See also Auriol’s account of Moch’s confidence at this stage in *Journal du septennat*, vol. 2, 475.

¹⁰¹ Some accounts of the sequence of events that are more sympathetic to the PCF and the CGT suggest that Moch had planned all along to transform the miners’ strike into a massive test of force. Wall, for instance, claims that by the October 18 abandonment of security measures, “Moch had long since decided the issue” of bringing in troops to forcibly break the strike (*French Communism*, 86). Moch’s records – in particular his October 15 note to the prefects and IGAMEs confidently expecting a rapid and peaceful end to the conflict – demonstrate this was not the case.

¹⁰² “Les bassins houillers occupés par la troupe,” *Combat*, 19 October 1948: “Les forces de police, la troupe, les chars d’assaut ont pénétré hier dans les bassins houillers.”

Police Forces Evacuate the Gard.” On the 26th, they announced the “Military Occupation of the Mines of the Nord;” on the 27th, “Bloody Incidents in the Alès Basin: One Miner Killed, Many Strikers and CRS Wounded.”¹⁰³

In absolute terms, the forces of order emerged crushingly victorious from these vicious confrontations: the mine shafts were cleared by November 2, and the miners – defeated, angry, bewildered – gradually gave in and returned to work, having earned only a minor concession (a 20% pension increase) to their original strike demands. In some regions, strikers and their supporters deployed extreme forms of symbolic violence and humiliation against the forces of order: miners’ wives slapped and spit on CRS agents; some police and soldiers were subjected to mock executions; others were stripped of their clothes, weapons, and belongings. The miners also fought police and troops bitterly in hand-to-hand combat, with clubs, sticks, stones, and other improvised weapons. But these weapons were ultimately worth little in the face of armored vehicles. Although nearly 500 members of the forces of order were injured, none died;¹⁰⁴ moreover, the “Moch doctrine” of overwhelming force displayed but held in abeyance appeared to have held sway. Despite the ferocity of combat at the mine heads, and the fact that Moch had at last been compelled to give the forces of order formal permission to fire their weapons, the CGT could ultimately claim only two “martyrs” in the entire period. Judicial forms of punishment, however, were

¹⁰³ “Bagarres sanglantes entre mineurs et CRS,” *Combat*, 20 October 1948; “Les mineurs tentent de reconquérir de nombreux puits; La Grand’Combe: Bataille rangée – 60 CRS blessés; Bethune: Les grévistes s’emparent du sous-préfet,” *Combat*, 22 October 1948; “Mesures d’état de siege: rappel immédiat de 30.000 à 40.000 réservistes,” *Combat* 23-24 October 1948; Edmond Dilliat, “A Firminy, les CRS tirent sur les mineurs; 2 morts, 30 blessés,” *Combat* 23-24 October 1948; “Violents combats dans la région de la Loire; les forces de police évacuent le Gard,” *Combat*, 23-24 October 1948; “Occupation militaire des mines du Nord,” *Combat*, 26 October 1948; “Incidents sanglants dans le bassin d’Alès: 1 mineur tué, plusieurs grévistes et CRS blessés,” *Combat* 27 October 1948. These headlines were largely but not entirely accurate – notably, only one protester was killed at Firminy.

¹⁰⁴ It appears that two CRS agents did die in accidents, though not in combat. “Rapport relatif à l’utilisation des Compagnies républicaines de sécurité en octobre-novembre 1948,” n.d. Folder “Sécurité et autorité de l’État (rapports) (documents divers),” 484 AP 16, Fonds Jules Moch, AN.

heavily meted out: at least 1041 “agitators” were arrested, and a high proportion of these were prosecuted and sentenced; miners and some mine administrators who had supported the strikes lost their jobs; arrested foreign nationals were expelled either “*sur-le-champ*” or after being convicted of fomenting disorder.¹⁰⁵ Coal production slowly returned to normal. In the bleak face of failure, CGT membership dropped and internal recriminations among Communist Party leaders abounded as factions blamed one another for the disappointing outcome. The Party officially repudiated the continuation of the strike into a second month, blaming it on a “sectarian minority.” President Auriol exulted that “the success has been complete.”¹⁰⁶

Auriol was right in a certain sense: the miners’ strike marked the end of the mass labor unrest of the French forties, the end (for approximately a decade) of serious challenges to the authority of the Fourth Republic. The reasons for this were myriad and complex; most importantly, the improvements in food supply that accompanied the beginning of economic recovery, tentative and uneven as this development remained in the late forties and early fifties, allowed the regime to gain a growing measure of acceptance from the populace.¹⁰⁷ (In this sense, the Marshall Plan worked precisely as envisioned.) At the same time, a Cominform-directed shift in French Communist Party strategy entailed less emphasis on militant pursuit of working-class demands in favor of “peace movement” organizing in defense of the USSR’s interests. And changes internal to the labor movement – most notably, the steady flow of workers out of the CGT in the wake of its successive defeats of 1947 and 1948 – also

¹⁰⁵ The number of arrests is likely higher: 1041 was the number quoted by Moch in the Assembly on November 16 (*Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, 7001).

¹⁰⁶ Auriol, *Journal du septennat*, vol. 2, 511: “Le succès a été total.”

¹⁰⁷ Economic recovery from 1949 had real but halting and extremely variable effects on the living standard of different French people according to region and class: see Kaplan, *Le pain maudit*, esp. 72-73 and Henri Brousse, *Le niveau de vie en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962). On the political significance of the overall late-forties shift from public preoccupation with food supply to preoccupation with cost of living, see Bachelier, “De la pénurie à la vie chère.”

made reprises of the sweeping labor unrest of those years impossible. The decisive nature of the regime's victory of 1948 also certainly played a role in discouraging subsequent politically-motivated strike activity. This is not to say that Moch's display of massive state force increased the regime's *popularity* among the politically militant portions of France's working class – in the eyes of many workers, state agents' use of massive force (the limited death count notwithstanding) against desperate working people with real grievances only served to *weaken* the regime's moral authority. Rather, it is to point out that in general, from 1948 on, workers recognized the futility of opposing the state with arms. As Jean-Pierre Rioux puts it, although “behind these bruised miners, the working class separated itself from the Republic,” nevertheless “in the process workers lost the taste” for forms of militancy that required them to act literally as martyrs.¹⁰⁸ The miners themselves expressed this “double lesson” of 1947-48 quite clearly in the strike's aftermath: one man, for instance, explained that the miners' loss was no source of shame because “there's nothing you can do against tanks. We were beaten by force, by that bastard Jules Moch.”¹⁰⁹

Among some portions of the populace however, the regime's triumph over the strike waves *did* ultimately build upon its aura of moral authority. Non-communists were reassured to see that the parties of government were, after all, capable of vigorous action and able to face down serious threats without flinching. Many (particularly in 1947) had feared outright civil war; to them, it appeared that the

¹⁰⁸ Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol. 1, 213.

¹⁰⁹ Aimé Sostren and Paul Parisot, “Interview d'un mineur du Gard,” *La Gauche* 8 (15-30 November 1948): “Contre les tanks, il n'y a rien à faire. Nous avons été battu par la force, par ce salaud Jules Moch.” It is interesting that years later, writer Dominique Desanti remembered, “Personally, over the years, [remembering] that strike helped me get through periods of doubt in the Communist Party”: Moch's “class warfare” had confirmed for her that “the Party was the only organization that allowed the worker to keep his head above the battering waves of assembly-line work, or the everyday hell of the mines, or the hot furnaces.” Desanti, *Les Staliniens, 1944-1956: une expérience politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1975).

government had ably defused an explosive situation.¹¹⁰ This helped to lessen the temptation of Gaullism from 1948 onward: thanks in part to Moch's forcefulness, calling on de Gaulle to rescue the country from the communist threat and restore "order" came to seem an increasingly unnecessary expedient.¹¹¹ Prefects' reports from late 1948 heralded the population's relief that the existing regime had, after all, risen to the task at hand; there appears to be at least a kernel of truth within their obsequious statements of praise. The Tarn prefect, for example, claimed that in his department the public "noted with satisfaction the firmness of the government and the success of its undertaking."¹¹² The Pas-de-Calais prefect believed that everyone in the department, with the exception of the Communists, "congratulated themselves on the government's firmness."¹¹³

As the strikes died their lingering death, the French Communist Party used the elements of the press it controlled and, especially, the Assembly floor to denounce this "firmness" as no more than naked violence against France's workers. Once again, the primary tactic was to associate government action with Vichy-era repression. Communist deputies called the actions taken against the miners "measures of

¹¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, politicians further to the right than the governing coalition criticized the government for not having gone far *enough* in their repression – in particular, Moch's insistence that the Communist Party not be banned outright, as in 1939, was the object of tirades on the part of individuals like Louis Rollin.

¹¹¹ The reasons for decline of the RPF were, however, complex. As Rioux notes, Third Force parties took advantage of their control of government to block the Gaullists *procedurally* (most importantly, changing election rules to make it much harder for RPF members to win). See Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol. 1, 219. It is worth noting that De Gaulle resented Moch personally for the role he played, calling him "This character who is part of what they still call the government, and who allows himself...to speak of his old leader in disrespectful terms in what they're still calling the Parliament" (Quoted in Méchoulan, *Jules Moch*, 264).

¹¹² M. le Préfet, Tarn, "Rapport mensuel d'information, mois de novembre 1948," 4 December 1948, 1. F/1cIII/1307, AN: "Le public, un moment inquiet du développement de la situation, a constaté, avec satisfaction, la fermeté du Gouvernement et le succès de son entreprise..."

¹¹³ M. le Préfet du Pas-de-Calais, "Exposé Sommaire de la situation du Département du Pas-de-Calais au cours du mois de novembre 1948," 5 December 1948, 13. F/1cIII/1307, AN: "À l'annonce de l'intervention militaire, presque toute la population (exception faite de la fraction ouvrière communiste) s'est félicitée de la fermeté du Gouvernement."

terror,”¹¹⁴ “fascist terror,”¹¹⁵ and a “pogrom against the working class.”¹¹⁶ They equated Moch with Doriot and Laval, or alternatively, labeled him one of Hitler’s “sad imitators,” and tried to smear his Resistance credentials with the charge that he had spoken against the execution of Pierre Pucheu.¹¹⁷ Other members of the government proved still more vulnerable to attack: “How to be surprised,” one PCF deputy mused, “at this new edition of Hitler’s executions of French workers, and of provocations inherited from Goebbels, when the government includes men like [Antoine] Pinay, a national counselor of Pétain until the end...”¹¹⁸ The CRS were maligned as “the sad successors of Hitler’s SS,”¹¹⁹ or with the pithier formulation (to be revived in May 1968) “CRS=SS.”¹²⁰ They had “tortured women;” they “went into homes at night, knocked down cribs, hit the women, and forced the men to the pits.”¹²¹ Roger Garaudy compared this alleged forced labor with wartime roundups of men for work camps in Germany. “Wolf-dogs have been unleashed on the picketers,” he charged, “just as the Gestapo used to unleash them against patriots.”¹²² As for the criminal judgments being

¹¹⁴ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 17 November 1948, 7042 (Auguste Lecoœur): “ces mesures de terreur.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7048 (Marius Patinaud): “La terreur fasciste règne dans les bassins miniers.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7038 (Auguste Lecoœur): “un atmosphère de pogrom contre les ouvriers mineurs en particulier.”

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7041 (Fernand Grenier): “tristes imitateurs.”

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7048 (Marius Patinaud): Comment s’étonner de la réédition des fusillades hitlériennes contre les ouvriers français et des provocations héritées de Goebbels, puisque ce gouvernement comprend des hommes comme M. Pinay, qui fut jusqu’au bout conseiller national de Pétain.” Antoine Pinay had served on Pétain’s Conseil National. He was stripped of the right to hold office in the aftermath of Vichy; after an intervention by René Cassin, a *conseil d’honneur* restored his ability to serve. In a sign of France’s political realignment rightward, Pinay would become Prime Minister in 1952.

¹¹⁹ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 17 November 1948, 7050 (Marius Patinaud): “[Ils] resteront dans l’histoire comme les tristes successeurs des SS hitlériens!”

¹²⁰ Auguste Lecoœur, cited in Méchoulan, *Jules Moch*, 256.

¹²¹ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 17 November 1948, 7042 (Auguste Lecoœur): “Ils constateraient la barbarie sans nom des CRS, qui ont torturé les femmes... Montés sur des chenillettes et des automitrailleuses, les hommes des CRS s’en vont dans les coronas, montent sur les trottoirs; ils rentrent la nuit dans les maisons, renversent les berceaux, frappent les femmes et entraînent de force les mineurs sur les carreaux de fosse.”

¹²² *Ibid.*, 7044 (Roger Garaudy): “Et savez-vous qu’aujourd’hui d’énormes chiens-loups sont lâchés sur les piquets de grève, comme les lâchait autrefois la Gestapo contre les patriotes?”

handed down against the accused agitators and saboteurs, “the analogy with the Vichy past [is] striking.”¹²³ In short, as a Communist deputy from the Gard put it, “We denounce your Government as a government of police terror, of hatred for the working class and for the people.”¹²⁴

All of this language worked to delegitimize the regime’s use of violence against civilians – and, by extension, the regime’s very existence – by tying it to Vichy’s “legal” violence.¹²⁵ Conversely, the Communists and the CGT used the language of “resistance” to justify the use of extralegal force on the side of the miners. “From the Resistance to the Miners’ Strike,” announced *Le Peuple*.¹²⁶ In the same CGT newspaper, in an article titled “I Return to the Occupied Zone,” Annie Noel wrote that Carvin, a mining town outside Lille, “has reacquired its wartime face. Since Friday October 26, as the town’s main square, transformed into a headquarters for the takeover of the basin, has seen hundreds of trucks, armored carriers, and armored cars of all kinds parade and backfire, while a two-star general marches in the midst of a general staff mixed in with all sorts of police officers, the population braces against this invasion. Accompanied by memories, the resistance has returned to the heart of mining country.”¹²⁷ In the next issue an author stressed the heroic Resistance credentials of those at the front line of the miners’ strike: “women deported to

¹²³ Ibid.: “L’analogie avec le passé vichyssois était frappante.”

¹²⁴ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 17 November 1948, 7057 (Gabriel Roucaute): “[N]ous dénonçons votre Gouvernement comme un gouvernement de terreur policière, de haine contre la classe ouvrière et contre le peuple.”

¹²⁵ Because of the overlap in institutions and actors, this was not simply a matter of drawing historical analogy – it did not function the way that, for example, a comparison to the repression of the Paris Commune would have. Members of the government could be smeared both for being *like* Vichy officials *and*, in the same breath, for having actually once supported those Vichy officials.

¹²⁶ Pierre Detoef, “De la résistance à la guerre des mineurs,” *Le Peuple* 227 (2-9 December 1948).

¹²⁷ Annie Noel, “Je rentre en zone occupée,” *Le Peuple* 223 (4-11 November 1948): “Carvin a retrouvé son visage de guerre. Depuis vendredi 26 octobre que sa grand’place, transformée en quartier général d’investissement du bassin, a vu défiler & pètarader des centaines de camions, de chenillettes et blindés de toute sorte, tandis qu’un général à deux étoiles & paradait au milieu d’un état-major mélangé aux officiers de police de tout poil, la population s’est raidie devant cette invasion. Avec les souvenirs, la résistance est revenue au coeur du pays minier.”

Auschwitz” and their similarly-minded menfolk were struggling against “policemen who served Vichy and the Nazis well.”¹²⁸

Much more fiercely than in 1947, members of government fought back by attempting to paint the Communists as the true inheritors of the Nazi legacy. This demanded a “totalitarian” reading of recent European history, whereby Nazism and Stalinism functioned as two sides of the same coin, two political systems equally devoted to terror at home and aggressive conquest abroad – including, of course, in France. Before and again after the 1948 strikes, Moch made a great display of revealing the contents of “intercepted” orders to the PCF from the Cominform, instructing French Communists to sabotage the Marshall Plan.¹²⁹ The PCF, Moch charged, was no defender of the interests of the French working class, but a tool of a dictatorial foreign power that wanted to make France the next Czechoslovakia. Moch and his counterparts went to great lengths to insist that they were not suppressing the right to strike, only acting to protect the nation’s hopes for renewed grandeur – embodied in the nationalized mines – from massive sabotage directed entirely from abroad. According to this narrative, a small number of violent, fanatical operatives for the CGT (now systematically relabeled the CGTK by Socialist organs like *Le Populaire*) had compelled helpless miners to participate in the strike through coercion,

¹²⁸ Victorin Duguet, “Les mineurs tiennent bon,” *Le Peuple* 224 (11-18 November 1948): “Au nom du patriotisme, des policiers qui ont bien servi Vichy et les nazis, continuent leur sale besogne, en matraquant des femmes déportées à Auschwitz; des ingénieurs, qui ont sur la conscience la déportation et la mort dans les camps nazis de nombreux ouvriers s’acharnent aujourd’hui sur les rescapés en les désignant à la flicaille de Moch; des ouvriers cagouleurs et miliciens de Darnand se livrent à leur barbare passion de tortionnaires.” The view that CRS agents were likely to have been Vichy-era miliciens was not only expressed by Party leaders and propaganda organs, but appears to have been held at the base as well: a CRS agent wounded at Alès, for example, reported one of the shouts of the protesters had been “Kill them, they were *miliciens!*” Unsigned report, “GPM/DB,” 25 October 1948. Folder “Notes de service émanant du Ministre de l’Intérieur,” 484 AP 16, Fonds Jules Moch, AN.

¹²⁹ The full text of Moch’s accusations in the National Assembly on November 16, 1948 was published as *Le Communisme et la France* (Paris: Société parisienne d’imprimerie, 1948).

threats, attacks on the persons and homes of strikebreakers, and other forms of “terror.”¹³⁰

Moch’s summary of the strike period in front of the National Assembly placed heavy emphasis on these alleged acts of violence; he quoted long strings of official figures about attacks (“often with grenades or gunfire, [or] by throwing explosives at homes”) on those who bravely insisted on going to work, but warned that the numbers represented a drastic understatement of the real extent of the violence since many terrified miners “refuse to bring complaints, or even to make known the abuses to which they were victims.”¹³¹ French workers, who in their “immense majority” rejected the “Stalinists’” aims, were thus the victims, not the perpetrators, of the autumn’s treasonous activity: they had suffered intensely during the CGT’s meaningless prolongation of the strike and would suffer more if the Communists’ sabotage of French recovery succeeded.¹³² Regional-level operatives of the governmental parties echoed these ideas: the Socialist confederation of Pas-de-Calais, for example, accused the “madmen and criminals that place the interests of Russia above the lives of little French children” of committing “crimes against humanity” by allowing the strike to continue even as water and electricity supplies failed.¹³³

More explicitly than in 1947, the parties of government presented the battle *against* Communist intrigues as the true legacy of the Resistance. For instance, in a

¹³⁰ This narrative contained a grain of truth, but was misleading: violence against strikebreakers had certainly occurred, but it had been an angry, hopeless phenomenon of late October and November, as the strike failed; this narrative placed it at the *origin* of the strike, eliding the fact that the decision to strike was democratically voted.

¹³¹ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 16 November 1948, 7000: “Encore ce dernier chiffre est très inférieur à la réalité, bon nombre de mineurs se refusant à porter plainte ou même à signaler les sévices dont ils sont victimes.”

¹³² *Ibid.*, 7001.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 6991 (read aloud by Louis Rollin): “La fédération socialiste du Pas-de-Calais demandait aux pouvoirs publics de ne pas laisser perpétrer de tels crimes contre l’humanité et d’agir en conséquence contre les fous et les criminels qui font passer l’intérêt de la Russie avant la vie de petits enfants de France.”

widely reprinted editorial in *Nord Matin*, Socialist cabinet member and Buchenwald survivor Eugène Thomas solemnly summoned the working class to join in “the resistance against another destroyer” whose “servile soldiers” were “stabbing and assassinating France.” Apostrophizing resisters who had died at Buchenwald, Thomas informed them that they might have perished for nothing, since “this France that you believed you were saving, some criminals are now in the process of coldly, hatefully killing it, because in their hearts love of Russia has replaced love of France.”¹³⁴ The legacy of the Resistance, according to this rhetoric, was not its internal undermining of Vichy, but rather its fierce patriotism and desire for French independence from foreign incursions. This was, fundamentally, a legacy that now belonged to the *state*, supported by loyal citizens. Thus, as if in direct rebuttal of Annie Noel’s *Le Peuple* article, Moch read aloud on the Assembly floor what he claimed was a letter from a Northern miner. “In this region that was once so hostile to police forces,” the writer opined, “the Compagnies républicaines de sécurité and the troops are welcomed with great relief. We use the words ‘liberation’ and ‘liberated territory’ wherever there are police forces, and ‘occupation’ or ‘occupied zone’ where the Stalinists still dominate.”¹³⁵

As we saw in Chapter One, ex-resisters had been claiming since late 1944 that with the restoration of “republican legality” the legacy of the Resistance – and the aura

¹³⁴ Eugène Thomas, “Un crime contre la France,” reprinted in *Le Provençal*, 23-24 October 1948: “...Moscou a donné l’ordre de faire périr la France. Et les Thorez, Lecoœur, Martel, Frachon, etc., soldats serviles du nouveau tsar Staline, poignardent et assassinent la France...Devant le crime qui se commet, j’ai l’horrible chagrin de me dire: mes chers compagnons morts, vous êtes morts pour rien: cette France que vous avez cru sauver, des criminels sont en train de l’assassiner, froidement, haineusement, parce que dans leur coeur, l’amour de la Russie a remplacé l’amour de la France...[J]’ai la conviction absolue de répéter [l’appel] que je lançais dès 1940, à tous ceux qui voulaient lutter contre le destructeur allemande. C’est un appel à la résistance contre un autre destructeur.”

¹³⁵ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 16 November 1948, 7001: “Il est symptomatique dans cette région autrefois si hostile aux forces policières, les compagnies républicaines de sécurité et les troupes soient accueillis avec un très grand soulagement. On emploie les mots de ‘libération,’ de ‘territoire libéré,’ partout où se trouvent les forces de police, et ‘d’occupation,’ de ‘zone occupé’ ...là où les staliniens dominent encore.”

of legitimacy that came with it – had been transferred to the regime and no longer ought to attach itself to extralegal action. This assertion, in itself, was not new in 1947-1948. But it signified quite differently now that de Gaulle, “the man of June 18, 1940,” stood in opposition to the state and the Communists, “the party of 75,000 executed,” were excluded from government. There was, moreover, a considerable distance between 1944’s hopes for the continuation of the Resistance through “a revolution by the law” and 1948’s assimilation of “resistance” to military-scale police action against workers. As in 1939, the Communists were once again referred to on the floor of the National Assembly as “terrorists,” and some deputies – though not Moch – called for the Party to be banned. Among national-level political figures, the Communists were now fully isolated in readings of the Resistance that celebrated its extralegal violence and revolutionary ideology; for members of the Third Force parties, meanwhile, personal Resistance credentials became a useful tool for demanding law and order in the present. Moch, for example, explained that his prominent Resistance role now gave him the “right” to lecture government employees that “today, there is no place for any clandestine activity whatsoever... Today, just as before the war, government functionaries have one essential duty: fidelity to the constitutional regime and to the regularly-constituted Government of the Republic.”¹³⁶ The Resistance had marked a period of exception; it was now over. No listener to such speeches could doubt that the heady hopes for a postwar politics that drew on Resistance unity to go “beyond” the partisan conflicts of the prewar period had

¹³⁶ Speech to Chefs de service des Renseignements Généraux: “J’ai parlé de Résistance à dessein. Pas plus que vos deux chefs, je ne suis suspect à ce point de vue. J’ai donc le droit de vous dire, avec beaucoup de gravité, qu’il n’y a plus de place aujourd’hui pour une clandestinité quelconque. L’époque est révolue où le devoir consistait à saboter les décisions du pseudo gouvernement illégal, à s’associer dans le secret, à masquer ses propres sentiments vis-à-vis des chefs ou des camarades, bref, de jouer double jeu... Aujourd’hui comme avant guerre, les fonctionnaires ont un devoir essentiel: la fidélité au régime constitutionnel et au Gouvernement régulier de la République.”

vanished. The communist/anti-communist divide had moved back to the heart of French political life. And with it had come new discourses about what the Resistance had really been and had really meant.

The Fourth Republic, meanwhile, did survive the strike waves intact – indeed, the victory of 1948 was overwhelming. And yet it was an ambiguous victory as well, one accomplished in large part through sheer force. The regime was able to muster tens of thousands of troops and security services to crush the strikes – and able, thanks to American support, to calmly countenance a dire coal shortage without bending to a single one of the 1948 strikers’ demands. It was also able to mobilize anti-communism and class-based loyalties to gain the ideological support of that sector of the populace that feared a Czech-style coup. But the fact that the Socialist Minister of the Interior emerged from the confrontation with the lifelong nickname of “France’s Head Cop” signals that the regime’s material victory was hardly universally viewed as a reflection of its moral authority and inherent right to wield violence as it chose. And if non-Communist politicians now disowned the aspects of the Resistance legacy that could be mobilized to justify extralegal violence, this does not mean that a unanimous nation did. An ambivalence on the part of the French working-class – and much of France’s intellectual class, as well – about the regime’s legitimacy, authority, and *right* to a monopoly on violence would plague the unloved Fourth Republic up through its May 1958 collapse. De Gaulle, later recounting the course of events that ended in his own return to power and the founding of the Fifth Republic, noted with regal scorn that Moch (once again Interior Minister) had urgently deployed tanks, armored trucks, and police battalions as de Gaulle arrived in Paris on May 19, 1958, as if the regime might again be saved in this fashion.¹³⁷ It was, of course, useless. A decade after the mining

¹³⁷ De Gaulle, *Memoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 898.

strike, with the specter of “civil war” looming once again, the Fourth Republic would find itself without the unquestioned authority and the deep and broad-based popular support to stand down a threat that, this time, could not be quelled with tanks

CHAPTER THREE – Politics as Violence: The “Black Legend” of the *Épuration* and the Reframing of the French Resistance, 1947-1952

In early 1948 the Abbé Desgranges, a conservative Third Republic parliamentarian, launched a “*J’accuse*” against the nefarious “crimes” committed by Communists during the postwar purges. The tide was finally turning in France, Desgranges claimed, and the *épuration* was being recognized as the massacre it had truly been: mouths that had been forced shut by fear of Communist reprisals for three years were at last opening. Since 1944, Desgranges wrote, “the most painful laments were not even breathed among relatives, under the pretext that the walls have ears.”¹ But now, finally, “for the last three months,” he exalted, “in the countryside, we not only speak of the crimes of the Resistance: we offer specifics on the thefts, the rapes, the tortures, the assassinations.”² Desgranges was exuberant: “The trial of *résistantialisme* has begun in the court of French public opinion.”³

Of course, these references to a groundswell of public revulsion for the memory of the *épuration* functioned in Desgranges’s text, of course, as a rhetorical device to prop up his own position. And yet the Abbé’s assertion that in late 1947 and early 1948 something had definitively changed in retrospective discourses about the purges in itself marked a significant discursive shift. This is because Desgranges was the first public figure with any claim to even minimal Resistance credentials who took up the neo-Pétainist extreme right’s criticism of the *épuration* as a criminal bloodbath masterminded by the Communists. Although Desgranges, as an aging Morbihan

¹ L’Abbé Desgranges, *Les Crimes masqués du “résistantialisme”* (Paris: Déterna, 1948; 1998), 51: “Dans les villages, les plaintes les plus douloureuses n’étaient même pas exhalées entre parents, sous prétexte que les murs ont des oreilles.”

² Ibid., 53: “Il n’est pas que temps pour les cœurs purs de se dégager, car, depuis trois mois, dans les campagnes on ne parle pas seulement des crimes de la Résistance, on détaille les vols, les viols, les tortures, les assassinats.”

³ Ibid., 51: “Le procès du résistantialisme est ouvert devant l’opinion française.”

deputy, had voted full powers to Pétain, he had subsequently rejected the Vichy regime fairly early in the war and participated in Resistance networks, experiences he referred to ceaselessly in his postwar writings.⁴ He therefore signaled with his publication of *Les crimes masqués du “résistantialisme”* that condemnation of the political violence involved in the purges was no longer taboo in more mainstream French political discourse. His gesture, though extreme, was symptomatic of a broad normative retrenchment on the part of France’s non-communist political class,⁵ and of a reevaluation of the events of the recent past – the *épuration* and the Resistance itself – in light of changed circumstances and new anxieties.

The Cold War, particularly in its French domestic manifestations explored in the last chapter, was central to this process. As French political life realigned along the communist/anti-communist fault line, this all-consuming distinction came to seem paramount in assessing the country’s history, too. Thus, increasingly, the *épuration* – now winding down – was reconceptualized through the lens of Cold War logic. The most spectacular manifestation of this came, unsurprisingly, from various erstwhile hard-line supporters of Vichy, who from 1946 onward fashioned a narrative about the *épuration* which featured themselves as the hapless victims of an orgy of murderous vengeance exercised by the Communists. Purveyors of this “Black Legend,” or “counter-*épuration*,” claimed that tens or even hundreds of thousands of ordinary French people had died at the Liberation, in assassinations or after rigged verdicts,

⁴ He apparently spent part of the Occupation hidden in a convent, eluding the Gestapo. Thus in 1945 the Jury d’honneur, citing his service to the Resistance, had restored his eligibility for political office. He did not, however, run again.

⁵ I use the term “political class” according to Gaetano Mosca’s classic theory, but to signify something slightly broader than Mosca does: I mean the small segment of the postwar French population whose professional lives involved participating in or commenting on institutional politics at a national or state level: hence politicians, statesmen, administrators, political journalists (and their editors and publishers), and intellectuals. See Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur D. Livingston, transl. Hannah D. Kahn (New York: McGraw Hill, 1939).

having been guilty of nothing more than courageous political opposition to communism. In this chapter I show that this narrative, at first confined to the pages of far-right journals, gradually seeped into mainstream French political discourse. Anti-communists with claims to Resistance credentials, such as Desgranges and André Mutter, adopted a modified version of it, in which “false” Communist resisters had, at the eleventh hour, subverted the “true” Resistance and enacted bloody vengeance on their political enemies. Other ex-resisters with rather more complicated motives – most famously, the prewar *Nouvelle revue française* editor Jean Paulhan – joined in the attack. Several spectacular trials were mounted against Communist *maquisards* accused of summary executions at the Liberation. By 1948, André Siegfried’s *Année politique* announced “the revenge of the *épuration*.”⁶ Debates in the Assembly and the press over the passage of successive amnesty bills for collaborators in 1947 and especially in 1951 and 1953 were marked by incessant references to the “crimes” and “excesses” of “red maquis” and “bandits” involved in the purge; the Right took to labeling the victims of the purge “new Dreyfuses” who, as innocent victims of systemic injustice, deserved the sympathy of all good republicans.

The elaboration of the “Black Legend” was overwhelmingly the work of a resurgent non-Gaullist, socially conservative, anti-communist French Right, increasingly vocal, visible, and “respectable” as the forties went on. But Cold War imperatives did more than permit the Right to reemerge as a serious political and intellectual force in France, and thus to disseminate its own stories about the nature of the purges: they also compelled the non-communist *Left* to subtly revise its set of retrospective arguments and narratives about the use of retributive violence in the *épuration*. As Resistance organizations disappeared or splintered into Communist-

⁶ André Siegfried, *L'Année politique 1948* (Paris: Éditions du grand siècle, 1949), 58: “La revanche de l’*épuration*.” Siegfried also used the term “contre-*épuration*” (59).

controlled and non-communist factions, and as fears of World War III – or simply of continued social unrest – increasingly trumped fading desires for revolutionary social change, more and more intellectuals quietly moved toward a philosophical orientation on the purges that loosely resembled the one an isolated, defeated Camus had arrived at by late 1945. Thus from 1947 forward, even as they angrily condemned the Right for slandering the Resistance with its claims that the purge had been a bloodbath, certain non-communist Left intellectuals developed a far more negative set of discursive tropes about the forms of legal and extralegal violence involved in the purges; they obsessively interrogated – and in some cases fully rejected – the notion of “political justice,” and openly fretted over the legitimacy of violence employed for political ends in a way that, just a few years earlier, would have been unthinkable.

As we have seen, the intellectual Left’s immediate postwar understanding of these issues relied heavily on an understanding of the wartime Resistance as an absolutely legitimate, though illegal, agent of politically-motivated violence and “terror.” I argue that now, as non-communist intellectuals reinterpreted the *épuration*, so too did they offer fresh narratives about the Resistance. Their new retrospective readings deemphasized the Resistance’s use of force, and its politically revolutionary character, and placed it within a historical tradition of ethical or spiritual, “apolitical” defense of the elemental human rights of innocent victims. Within this emergent discourse – up to 1952 largely concentrated among Catholics, though it would soon migrate further – intellectuals on the non-communist Left reconceptualized the Resistance *not* primarily as the virile and formidable opponent of Vichy and the Nazis, but as a moral entity that had borne solemn witness to unimaginable human suffering and stood on the side of human dignity. Focusing primarily on Catholic writers associated with the small, intellectually influential journal *Esprit*, but showing their

broadening influence on non-Catholic intellectuals, I demonstrate how by 1952, a fully-elaborated narrative of the Resistance as a “moral act” motivated only by “a desire to bear witness” shattered the earlier Left consensus that the Resistance was defined by its use of force.⁷

One consequence of the 1947 realignment of national-level French politics was the resurgence of a non-Gaullist Right, which had temporarily been marginalized at the liberation. Many historians have described how, to produce governing majorities while shutting out both Communists and Gaullists, the Socialists and Christian Democrats were compelled over time to form alliances further and further to the center-right and the right, thus drawing Radical and moderate or conservative politicians who had been prominent during the Third Republic (and, in some cases, had been formally barred from holding office in the early postwar period because they had voted full powers to Pétain) back into positions of power.⁸ At the same time, conservative voices filtered back in to the French media and intellectual life: in his study of postwar newspaper publishing, Jean Mottin finds that by 1949, 15.1% of the national daily print run belonged to papers in the “Moderate and Right” category (up from 7.3% in 1944); 17.4% expressed Radical or similar political tendencies (up from 5.4% in 1944).⁹ Serious intellectual journals of the right reemerged – notably, *Table Ronde* – and were

⁷ Jean Cassou, “La Résistance niée,” *Esprit* 188 (March 1952), 457; Roger Stéphane, *France-Observateur*, 28 August 1952. On the significant role played by *Esprit* in the postwar intellectual landscape, see Goulven Boudic, *Esprit, 1944-1982. Les métamorphoses d’une revue* (Paris: Éditions de l’IMEC, 2005); Michel Winock, *Esprit: des intellectuels dans la cité (1930-1950)* (Paris: Seuil, 1996); Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et ‘Les Temps modernes’: une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), esp. 193-197.

⁸ On this parliamentary dynamic, Philip Williams, *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic* (Hamdon, Conn.: Archeon Books, 1964) remains a helpful guide.

⁹ Jean Mottin, *Histoire politique de la presse, 1944-1949* (Paris: Éditions “Bilans Hebdomaires,” 1949), 143. Partly responsible for this shift was fact that from March 1947 government approval was no longer necessary for publication.

rendered “respectable” by their commitment to anti-communism. Small extreme-right clubs, reviews, and books, some single-mindedly devoted to defending the legality, legitimacy, and patriotism of Vichy, began to crop up as well.

In these latter farthest-right venues, from approximately 1947 forward, Vichy apologists began to systematically attack the *épuration*, which was now essentially finished. This, in itself, was hardly a surprising development – they had, after all, been its targets. Moreover, as Anne Simonin has pointed out, by developing a trope of victimization around the alleged horrors of the *épuration*, and portraying themselves as no more or less than an unfortunate collection of the “vanquished” at the mercy of history’s “victors,” far-right-wing writers elided the ethical and ideological dimensions of the struggle that had been waged (fascism, anti-Semitism, etc.), along with the atrocities for which Vichy was responsible.¹⁰ There were important ideological differences within this far-right postwar universe, and fierce wartime divisions between Vichyites and Paris-based collaborators were not erased. But, as Raoul Girardet put it, “the aftermath of the war quickly found us a common denominator: it made us all the vanquished.”¹¹ This self-perception as “the vanquished” would consistently be the guiding subject position for the postwar far right as they criticized the conduct of “the victors.”

¹⁰ Simonin, “1815 en 1945: Les formes littéraires de la défaite,” *Vingtième Siècle* 59 (July-September 1998), 51.

¹¹ Philippe Méry [Raoul Girardet], “Sur les *Mémoires de guerre* du général de Gaulle,” *La Nation française*, 18 July 1956, quoted in Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Refus et violences: politique et littérature à l’extrême droite des années trente aux retombées de la Libération* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 35: “Pour apaiser nos divergences d’un temps, l’après-guerre nous a bientôt trouvé un dénominateur commun: elle a fait de nous tous des vaincus.” On the composition and organization of the Pétainist and neo-collaborationist right in postwar France, see Richard Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945-1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch.8 (“Opposition nationale”), 102-114; Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990); Joseph Algazy, *La Tentation néo-fasciste en France de 1944 à 1965* (Paris: Fayard, 1984); Jean-Pierre Rioux, “Des clandestins aux activistes (1945-1965)” in *Histoire de l’extrême-droite*, ed. Michel Winock (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 215-241; Jean-Yves Camus, “Nostalgia and Political Impotence: Neo-Nazi and Extreme-Right Movements in France, 1944-1964,” transl. Edward J. Arnold, in *The Development of the Radical Right in France, From Boulanger to Le Pen*, ed. Edward J. Arnold (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000): 195-216.

These members of the neo-collaborationist or neo-Pétainist far right (sometimes grouped together by historians under the title “Opposition Nationale”) were highly critical of the legal elements of the *épuration* – a particular cult grew up around protest of Pétain’s sentence – and passionately denounced the “justice” meted out by the *épuration* courts as flimsily disguised political vengeance. Their two primary objectives in the short term, moreover, were amnesty for those sentenced in the judicial purge who remained in prison and the rescinding of judgments of “national indignity.” Nevertheless, extralegal violence and bloody “terror,” not courtroom affairs, were at the heart of their historical narrative of the purges.¹² The Union of Civil Victims, for example, founded in April, 1948 under the leadership of some minor collaborationist writers, denounced the “true Terror” that, at the moment of liberation, had “beat down on France.” The group charged that “with impunity, under the mask of patriotism but under the sign of cupidity, hatred, partisan passion, envy, or even lesser reasons, an audacious minority was able to assassinate, steal, rape, pillage, extort, torture, brutalize, terrorize, hold hostages, despoil.”¹³ Books like the 1947 *L’Age de Caïn* by Jean-Pierre Abel (a pseudonym for “collaborationist Left” Déat

¹² On the centrality of “indignité nationale” to the meaning of the purge as a “republican Restoration,” and consequently the importance of debates over “indignité” to the struggle for amnesty, see Anne Simonin’s *Le Déshonneur dans la République. Une histoire de l’indignité 1791-1958* (Paris: Grasset, 2008). Simonin reads the application of “indignité nationale” during the *épuration* as the manner in which the Resistance “a contribué à donner un avenir démocratique à la Terreur,” by using political justice to produce a “virtuous” republican national community from which the unvirtuous were excluded (597). One might build on her observation and reflect that the victims and opponents of the purge expressed their anger at this procedure through conflating such symbolic violence (“civil death”) with actual violence (summary executions, rape, torture, etc.) See also Anne Simonin and James F. Austin, “The Right to Innocence: Literary Discourse and the Postwar Purges, 1944-1953,” *Yale French Studies* 98 (2000): 5-28, esp. 14-18.

¹³ “ ‘Défense et justice’: Union des victimes civiques,” n.d., and Renseignements Généraux, Direct. 4ème Section to M. le Directeur de la Surété Nationale, “Objet: Activité de ‘L’Union des victimes civiles,” Paris, 2 July 1948. 19860581 art.42, CAC: “Avec la tolérance, ou par l’impuissance, des autorités qui s’étaient instituées, une véritable Terreur s’est abattue sur notre France. Impunément, sous le masque de patriotisme, mais sous le signe de la cupidité, de la haine, de la passion partisane, de l’envie, ou moins encore, une minorité audacieuse a pû assassiner, voler, violer, piller, rançonner, torturer, brutaliser, terroriser, séquestrer, spolier.”

supporter René Château), J.-F. Mauloy's *Les Nouveaux Saigneurs* (1948) and Sacha Guitry's *60 jours de prison* (1949) offered lengthy, gruesome accounts of carnage and torture allegedly carried out by rogue FFI and FTPF men against innocent men, women, and children. The journals *Paroles françaises*, *Aspects de la France*, and *Écrits de Paris* specialized in dark references to the "indescribable horrors" of the purges;¹⁴ they were all eventually surpassed by the far-right *Rivarol*, founded by the *Écrits de Paris* team under René Malliavin in 1951. *Rivarol* – named for counterrevolutionary pamphleteer and 1792 emigré Antoine de Rivarol – not only published a notorious special issue titled "The Atrocities of the Liberation, or, The Season of the Executioners," which detailed alleged massacres and crimes in every region of France, but regularly claimed that the *épuration* had claimed tens of thousands – even millions – of victims.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Robert Brasillach's brother-in-law Maurice Bardèche gave an intellectual sheen to such claims in *Lettre à François Mauriac* (1947), a two hundred-page putative missive to Mauriac urging him to take his objections to the *épuration* further. Bardèche maintained, with extensive legal and philosophical argument, that Vichy had been both a legal and a legitimate regime; the Resistance "might have been useful, might have been salutary," but "in every case was *an act of rebellion*."¹⁶ Its members therefore had possessed no possible justification for punishing Vichyites at the Liberation for having faithfully carried out their duties. Thus the *épuration*, with

¹⁴ "L'imposture," *Paroles françaises*, 15 June 1946, cited in Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Refus et violences*, 423: "indescriptables horreurs."

¹⁵ "Les atrocités de la Libération ou la Saison des bourreaux," *Rivarol*, numéro spécial, n.d. [2 August 1951]. See also Verdès-Leroux, *Refus et violences*, 443.

¹⁶ Maurice Bardèche, *Lettre à François Mauriac* (Paris: La Pensée Libre, 1947), 26, emphasis in original: "Et inversement, nous dirons et soutiendrons que tout ce qui a été fait contre les ordres de l'autorité légitime et en exécution des consignes d'un poste de radio étranger ou d'organisations clandestines, a pu être utile, a pu être salutaire, c'est ce qui n'est pas moins discutable que le premier point, mais en tout cas, était un *acte de rébellion* d'autant plus grave que le pays tout entier risquait de le payer plus cher."

its “massacres of September” and obscene use of a judicial apparatus to carry out political assassination, was no more than a thinly-concealed revolutionary purge by the Communists.¹⁷ Bardèche’s attack on the *épuration* unmistakably targeted the entire wartime Resistance as well: by glorifying the Resistance’s extralegal violence (violence which, according to Bardèche, had done nothing to actually aid the Allies’ military effort) while permitting those who had faithfully served the Vichy state to be ruthlessly punished for their proper loyalty, Bardèche told France’s political elite,

You have sown for the future the seeds of permanent rebellion, you have justified all the mutinies to come. You have made triumph the principle that, in any serious crisis, the individual is now the judge of the honor and interest of the nation, that it is permitted to him to refuse to obey and even to fight against the legitimate power in the name of his own conception of the honor and interest of the country – and that, not only is this rebellion permitted, but it is even obligatory, and whoever was not a rebel will be punished for his loyalty. Do you not see that these flowers that you toss so lightly, you are tossing them on the cadaver of our country?¹⁸

Buttressing this essential charge – that the logic of Resistance and purge would now destroy France – were gruesome depictions of the tortures, executions, and rapes that had accompanied the *épuration*.

It is perhaps of only limited interest here that the marginalized “losers” of 1944-45 went on to produce such a literature.¹⁹ Far more significant, for our purposes,

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., 64: “Car enfin vous avez semé pour l’avenir un germe de rébellion permanent, vous avez justifié toutes les mutineries à venir. Vous avez fait triompher le principe que dans toute crise grave, l’individu est désormais juge de l’honneur et de l’intérêt national, qu’il lui est permis de refuser l’obéissance et même de combattre le pouvoir légitime au nom de sa propre conception de l’honneur et de l’intérêt du pays, que non seulement cette rébellion est permise, mais qu’elle est même obligatoire, et que quiconque n’aura pas été rebelle sera poursuivi pour sa loyauté. Est-ce que vous ne voyez pas que ces fleurs que vous jetez avec tant de légèreté, vous les jetez sur le cadavre de notre pays?” Interestingly, Bardèche pointed to the colonial rebellions in Indochina and Madagascar as distressing evidence that the “lessons” of the Resistance had been learned too well, and were now undermining the Empire (123).

¹⁹ Although, as Vinen points out, we should not dismiss the Pétainist far-right of this period as entirely marginal. *Écrits de Paris* is estimated to have had a circulation of between 100,000-200,000 copies, and *Paroles françaises* a circulation of 30,000. See *Bourgeois Politics*, 104.

is the way that the hyperbolic revisionism produced by right-wing journals and disgraced collaborators found its way over time into the mainstream of French political discourse, such that by the early fifties even many former resisters came to believe unquestioningly that tens of thousands of people had been slaughtered in late 1944, and such that by 1959, Robert Aron could produce an authoritative historical account of the Liberation that readers (including prominent Left intellectuals) regarded as moderate and evenhanded because it concluded that “only” 30-40,000 people had been summarily executed – that is, over three or four times the real figure.²⁰ This development is inexplicable outside of the Cold War context we explored in the previous chapter, for two reasons. First, accusations of wanton killing and “political justice” at the liberation, once stripped of their usual overtones of hysterical hatred for de Gaulle, proved to be immensely useful anti-communist tropes and thus migrated from the erstwhile Pétainist right to the “respectable” right (distinct groups with, however, close connections and considerable overlap) and then the center, where they were ceaselessly touted.²¹ If care was taken to describe communists – and communists alone – as having been responsible for the “horrors,” it was difficult for non-

²⁰ *Histoire de la Libération de la France, juin 1944-mai 1945* (Paris: Fayard, 1959), 654-655. See Chapter One for an extended consideration of the actual number of executions. It is worth noting that the numbers taken as authoritative today – around 9,000-10,000 deaths from summary executions, courts martial, and civilian-court death sentences combined – were in fact produced by governmental studies in the late forties and early fifties, and were freely available then. For a devastating critique of Aron’s “split-the-difference” methodology for arriving at his much higher figures, see Peter Novick, *The Resistance Versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 202-208. At the time, however, even intellectual ex-resisters of the non-Communist Left embraced the conclusion. Here is Jean-Marie Domenach in an otherwise somewhat critical review of the book: “Sur deux autres points contestés, on admirera aussi le discernement, l’esprit de justesse et le souci de justice historique de l’auteur. L’un concerne les exécutions sommaires que R. Aron, après une minutieuse enquête, situe entre 30 et 40.000 pour l’ensemble de la France.” *Esprit* 274 (June 1959), 1147.

²¹ I do not wish to exaggerate the distance between the “extreme” right and the “respectable” right: their overlap of ideology and personnel was in fact considerable. Nevertheless, denunciations of the *épuration* emanating from unapologetic ex-Pétainists resonated differently from those voiced by conservative men with at least minimally plausible Resistance credentials. Cf. Mathias Bernard, *La Guerre des droites, de l’affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007), 102-117.

communist ex-resisters to protest: after all, hadn't a Socialist Interior Minister whose son had been killed by the Gestapo himself announced in 1947 that the Communist Party was composed of criminal "terrorists"? By this logic, surely they had been terrorists in 1944 as well.²²

Second, as we saw in the previous chapter, from 1947 onward the portion of the French political class that still hoped for the survival of the regime – and hoped to avoid world war or civil war – underwent a normative retrenchment regarding their tolerance for extralegal violence; as a consequence, their retrospective evaluations of the violence involved in the *épuration* – and even in the wartime Resistance – became far more anguished. Bardèche's charge that a regime founded on valorization of "terrorism" and punishment of those who had followed orders was fated to descend into chaos touched on powerful anxieties in a France that did indeed seem to teeter on the brink of anarchy or communist insurrection. What non-communists who had participated in the Resistance had found acceptable and, indeed, utterly unremarkable, in the service of "justice," in 1944 or 1945 now appeared to them, in memory, to have marked a deplorable level of disorder, a frightening and traumatic founding for the Fourth Republic. This second factor was not simply a matter of cold, conscious political calculation: the normative shift concerning extralegal violence affected not only avowedly anti-communist politicians, but also intellectual ex-resisters who, though non-communist, would have been indignant to hear themselves described as "anti-communist." A brief example makes this point: when journalist and writer Édith Thomas published her journal of the war years in 1945, she described personally witnessing the rough shaming of a head-shaved "horizontal collaborator" without

²² It is also worth noting that small parties of Trotskyites or syndicalists – that is, the PCF's opponents to the *left* – also found great utility to this right-wing narrative of tens of thousands of Communist-directed summary executions at the Liberation. For example, see "Parti des fusillés ou parti des fusilleurs?" *La Révolution prolétarienne* 5 (August 1947), 45.

offering any critical commentary – indeed, she noted exuberantly that “The people of Paris prove again today that they are still very much those who took the Bastille.”

When she republished her account of the scene in 1952, she felt compelled – whether in conscious conformity to changed conventions, or through an unconscious rewriting of memory – to add that she had, naturally, been horrified and disgusted to see such barbarism.²³

The first important indictment of the *épuration* from a non-collaborationist author was Desgranges’s *Les Crimes masqués du résistancialisme*, which came out in early 1948. It was issued from the same small publisher (L’Élan) that was responsible for Guitry’s book as well as volumes from notorious figures like Pierre Taittinger. But Desgranges himself, although he was certainly a man of the right, could not be described as a “collaborator” or a “Pétainist” – indeed, he had genuinely participated in Resistance activities. His book offered a devastating vision of the cruelties of the “*épuration sauvage*,” viewed as a campaign of vengeance and outright massacre waged by communist criminals not against real traitors but against their political opponents. “In fact,” Desgranges claimed, “in France, for three years, anti-communism has been the unforgivable crime, and has been punished under the name of treason as cruelly as it is possible.”²⁴ Without the Communists’ “partisan hatred of Asiatic origin, the twin sister of Nazism, France would have recovered her unity a

²³ Thomas had left the Communist Party between the two publications. *Le Témoin compromis*, ed. Dorothy Kaufmann (Paris: Éditions Viviane Hamy, 1995), 169-170: “Oui, le peuple de Paris prouve aujourd’hui encore qu’il est toujours bien celui qui prit la Bastille.” (This text is provided by Kaufmann in a footnote.) The later version reads instead: “Ce visage fou de femme rasée suffirait à me faire prendre la victoire en horreur. Je me dis qu’une tête rasée vaut mieux qu’une tête proménée au bout d’une pique, le symbole de la vengeance plutôt que la vengeance elle-même. Mais c’est parce que je suis bien décidée à me consoler de tout aujourd’hui.”

²⁴ Desgranges, *Crimes masqués*, 25: “En fait, l’anticommunisme a été depuis trois ans, en France, le crime irrémissible, et châtié sous le nom de trahison aussi cruellement qu’il a été possible.”

long time ago.”²⁵ Instead, 80,000 men and women had been summarily executed, others had been tortured at the hands of FTPF members “expert” in the art, and millions of families had suffered unimaginably. Desgranges described individual acts of “terror” that had taken place in the name of the purge in painstaking detail, explaining that he had been emboldened to finally speak the truth by the events of “these tragic final months of 1947” when the strike wave appeared to make the PCF’s goal of destroying France unmistakably clear to all.²⁶

Desgranges’s book was notable for two reasons. First, it popularized a distinction between “real” or “authentic” resisters and “*résistantialistes*”: men who had opportunistically used the cover of Resistance to engage in horrendous crimes during and, especially, just after the war.²⁷ These “*résistantialistes*” were, of course, primarily Communists with political motivations (the Frenchmen among them supported by Spanish refugees who were characterized by “their total absence of moral sense, their habits of cruelty and sadism, their odd customs”).²⁸ But they also included common criminals with a lust for blood who were only too happy to serve the Communists’ needs. By setting these actors apart from “authentic” resisters, and by heaping elaborate praise on the latter, Desgranges granted himself rhetorical

²⁵ Ibid., 23: “Sans cette haine partisane, d’origine asiatique, soeur jumelle du nazisme, la France aurait depuis longtemps retrouvé son unité.”

²⁶ Ibid., 12: “[Des faits] ont parlé, durant ces tragiques derniers mois de 1947, avec une netteté décisive, arrachant les masques et les déguisements, brisant les mensonges où nous demeurions empêtrés. On a identifié les mains criminelles qui sabotèrent l’outillage national, paralysèrent la production au sein d’un peuple déjà affaibli par la famine, et qui auraient ‘brisé les reins de notre économie’ sans la sagesse intrépide de la classe ouvrière et du gouvernement. Qui doute que ces mains, plus prudentes, plus dissimulées, déboulonneront également les principes et les assises des nobles institutions judiciaires pour précipiter, dans les bagnes surpeuplés, des trains entiers de Français innocents!”

²⁷ Popularized, but did not invent: see Michel Dacier [René Malliavin], “Le résistantialisme,” *Écrits de Paris*, 1 January 1947. “Résistantialisme” should not be confused with the analytical term “résistancialisme” coined by Henry Rousso to designate a set of myths involved in the “construction of an object of memory” out of the Resistance. See *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, 19.

²⁸ Desgranges, *Crimes masqués*, 46: “Leurs absence totale de sens moral, leurs habitudes de cruauté, de sadisme, leurs moeurs tres spéciales exercent sur leurs jeunes camarades l’influence la plus profonde de toutes, celle de l’exemple vécu.” Desgrange’s special vitriol toward the Spanish was an extension of the French Right’s interwar criticism of Spanish republican émigrés during the Spanish Civil War.

permission to polemicize against the *épuration* while insisting that he was in no way impugning the honor of the Resistance. Indeed, he went shockingly further: he attacked not only the postwar purges but the Resistance use of “terrorism” against German soldiers and French collaborators and informers *during* the war years, arguing that individual assassinations, while doing nothing to speed the day of liberation, had provoked bloody German reprisals, cost the lives of mistakenly targeted innocents, and alienated the frightened populace.²⁹ This was a line of criticism that, as we saw in Chapter One, had in the immediate postwar period been entirely taboo.³⁰ Only a few figures, all on the Right, followed Desgranges down this particular path.³¹ But around this time many people, across the non-communist political spectrum, took up the distinction between the “real” Resistance and the “false” one, and employed it to condemn the *épuration* “in the name of” the Resistance. Conservative deputy André Mutter, for example, spoke in the Assembly during the 1947 amnesty debates denouncing “those who, under cover of the Resistance, committed crimes or offenses that mar our image of it,” and argued that, in speaking out about the tens of thousands of summary executions that had swept the country in late 1944, “we defend the Resistance.”³² From 1948, language of “false” or “pseudo-” resisters became commonplace on the Left and the Right alike.

²⁹ Ibid., 44: “Il reste que, jusqu’au jour où le général Eisenhower donna l’ordre ‘de passer à l’offensive contre toute force ennemie circulant vers les champs de bataille’ (août 1944), les attentats individuels contre des militaires allemands, que d’ailleurs le général de Gaulle et mon vieux collègue Marcel Cachin ont blâmés avec une égale fermeté, s’appartenaient beaucoup plus au terrorisme qu’à la guerre.”

³⁰ This is not to say that the populace had univocally supported such methods during the war –see Chapter One.

³¹ These included Bardèche, Louis Rougier, Alfred Fabre-Luce, and Jean Galtier-Boissière and Charles Seider (pseud. Charles Alexandre) of *Le Crapouillot*. See *Crapouillot, numéro spécial. Histoire de la guerre 1939-1945, t.IV* n.d. [1949], 256-258; *t.V* n.d. [1950], 342. Cf. Nicholas Hewitt, “Non-Conformism, ‘Insolence,’ and Reaction: Jean Galtier-Boissière’s *Le Crapouillot*,” *Journal of European Studies* 37.3 (2007): 277-294.

³² *Journal Officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 18 June 1947, 2188-2189: “Et notre réflexe de résistant de 1940 ne devrait-il pas être de dire ici que, si la Résistance a eu un rôle magnifique, notre devoir est de dénoncer les erreurs, de déceler certaines ombres de ce tableau magnifique et de nous désolidariser de ceux qui, sous couvert de la Résistance, ont commis des crimes ou des délits et faussent

Les crimes masqués de la résistantialisme also offered a rather more complex narrative reimagining of the recent past. In portraying Communism as the “twin sister” of Nazism, Desgranges sweepingly indicted both of them for producing in twentieth-century Europe a single, undifferentiated field of ruin and suffering. This was a “totalitarian” reading of the period, but one that did not concern itself with structural similarities between Nazism and Stalinism nor even with historical events such as the Molotov-Rippentrop pact. Rather, Desgranges simply insisted that Hitler’s victims and the victims at the hands of Communists in the postwar purges were morally equivalent since, in one way or another, they had all suffered. Indeed, the purge victims had suffered *more*, for “it was the splendid consolation of those crucified by Nazism to feel themselves, up to the end, the redeemers of the Homeland.” The purge’s victims, however, remained despised and could claim no martyrdom. Thus, “for seven years,” Desgranges wrote (that is, continuously since 1940), there was

not a day when we haven’t been torn apart by immense lamentation: unjust verdicts first crushed the families of Jews [*Israélites*], communists, Alsace-Lorrainers, outcasts of all origins. The Liberation, which raised so many hopes, did not put an end to the judges’ mistakes. The victims do not belong to the same classes, the same religions, the same political formations. Their despair is still more distressing...It is not only corporal punishment, but a kind of yellow star of ignominy that the jurisdictions of exception inflict today on political convicts.³³

l’image que nous nous sommes faits d’elle...Ce faisant, on défend la Résistance et non la lâcheté.” Mutter’s distance from the “Opposition nationale” should not, however – despite his strong Resistance credentials – be exaggerated. A single-minded anti-communist, Mutter in fact founded *Paroles françaises*, although he appears to have quickly lost control of its editorial policy and content.

³³ Desgranges, *Crimes masqués*, 84: “Depuis sept ans, pas un jour où nous n’ayons été déchirés par l’immense plainte: des verdicts injustes broyèrent d’abord des familles d’Israélites, de communistes, d’Alsaciens-Lorrains, de proscrits de toutes les provenances. La Libération qui éveilla tant d’espoirs ne mit pas un terme aux erreurs des juges. Les victimes n’appartiennent pas aux mêmes classes, aux mêmes confessions, aux mêmes formations politiques. Leur désespoir est plus navrante...Ce n’est point seulement un châtement corporel, mais une sorte d’étoile jaune d’ignominie que les juridictions exceptionnelles infligent aujourd’hui aux condamnés politiques.”

Several pages later, Desgranges brought up the Vichy Milice's 1944 kidnapping and assassination of Victor Basch (the Jewish prewar president of the Ligue des droits de l'homme) and his wife. Precisely this type of murderous "procedure," he wrote,

survived the Liberation, costing the lives of numerous inhabitants of the cities and, especially, the countryside...The difference between these two periods – the 'before' and the 'after' of the Liberation –consists in the fact that the authors of the masked assassinations committed during the first have been sought out and pitilessly punished; in the second case, however, their impunity to date is practically assured.³⁴

Desgranges's emphasis on the experience of victims provided a high-minded, "non-partisan" means of condemning the purge: by drawing an ahistorical equivalence between the "procedure" by which Victor Basch had been killed by the Milice and that by which various *miliciens* had subsequently been assassinated at the Liberation, he argued that there was no reason to be more outraged by one than by the other. Eliding the complex chain of causality that in fact *linked* these two different moments of violence, he insisted that the common suffering of the victims rendered contextual differences between their deaths immaterial to ethical judgment. In his hands, this form of moral reasoning, by which production of victims served as the sole criterion for judgment and obliterated other distinctions, functioned only as a clumsy tool with which to smear the Communists with charges of "Nazism." But more subtle thinkers than Desgranges would, in the coming years, begin to use a form of precisely this logic to express their own growing discomfort with the memory of the purge.

Desgranges not only assimilated the legal and extralegal mechanisms of the purge to those of Nazism – the punishment of "national indignity" handed down by

³⁴ Ibid., 88: "Horrible procédure devenue classique...Elle a survécu à la Libération, coûtant la vie à de nombreux habitants des villes et surtout des campagnes...La différence entre ces deux périodes, d'avant et d'après la Libération, consiste en ce que les auteurs de ces assassinats masqués commis dans la première ont été recherchés et impitoyablement châtiés; au lieu que dans la seconde, l'impunité leur est jusqu'à présent à peu près assurée."

the purge courts, he wrote, “is in sum only the transfer [*décalque*]... of the infamous statute imagined by Hitler to kill, in civic and political terms, the Jews who escaped from his massacres” – but also suggested that the *personnel* changed little.³⁵ Sadists with “talents” for torturing had had no trouble passing smoothly from the Milice to the *maquis* as the tide of history shifted.³⁶ If the exact same men had worked for both sides, how could we possibly differentiate, ethically, between the forms of violence enacted by the two? How could we valorize some victims, while claiming that others had deserved their punishment? Desgranges condemned such distinctions as a product of partisan hatred: all who had suffered were innocents. Looking back on the last seven years, he saw “constellations of Dreyfus affairs.”³⁷

From 1948 to 1953, conversations about the purge became inextricably caught up in high-profile, emotional debates over successive amnesty bills for different groups of *épurés*.³⁸ Very minor amnesty provisions – for minors, for example – had already been voted by 1948.³⁹ But from this date forward, as the reemboldened Right took advantage of a rising tide of anti-communism and conservative retrenchment (as well as of the general consensus that the *épuration* had been wildly uneven) amnesty

³⁵ Ibid., 70: “Ce châtement immoral et inhumain, qui entre pour la première fois sous cette forme massive dans notre législation criminelle, n’est en somme que le décalque, contre ses adversaires politiques français, de l’infâme statut imaginé par Hitler pour tuer, civilement et politiquement, les Juifs échappés à ses massacres.”

³⁶ Ibid., 60: “Parmi les miliciens montalbanais exécutés après la Libération, et dont j’ai suivi la liste avec quelque attention, je n’ai pas vu figurer ce misérable. Il n’est pas exclu que, comme tant d’autres, il soit passé dans le camp adverse pour y exercer ses talents de tortionnaire.” This was a theme developed still further by Galtier-Boissière and Seider: for example, after a lengthy description of torture techniques, including sexual torture, employed at the Liberation, they wrote, “All of these butcheries appear complementary to those that Darnand’s henchmen [i.e., the Milice] accomplished. There is no doubt that in some locations *they were performed by the same people*. The killers in all camps were interchangeable.” (*Histoire de la guerre*, t.V, 390. Emphasis in original.)

³⁷ Ibid., 84: “Nébuleuses d’affaires Dreyfus.”

³⁸ Stéphane Gaçon’s discussion of these debates is superb – see *L’Amnestie de la Commune à la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 186-251. See also Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, 66-75 and Rioux, “Des clandestins aux activistes.”

³⁹ Loi no. 47-1054, 16 August 1947, *Journal officiel – Lois et décrets*, 17 August 1947, 8055.

became a major issue on the floor of the National Assembly; the two major amnesty bills of 1951 and 1953 ultimately left only 62 people in prison for acts of collaboration in all of France. The 5 January 1951 law, opposed only by the Socialists and the Communists, amnestied all those who had suffered the lesser punishment of “national indignity” or had been sentenced to prison terms of less than fifteen years. The 24 July 1953 act – endlessly debated and amended throughout 1952 – was (with very small exceptions) a total amnesty. It was passed in the Assembly by 394 votes to 212 under the rallying cry of “National Unity,” “by which,” as Henry Rousso observes, “was meant a holy alliance against the Communists.”⁴⁰

For both the traditional anti-communist right and the increasingly vocal “Pétainist” far-right, amnesty for the *épurés* was a central demand of this period. And – despite the fact that the amnesty campaign sought to vacate *judicial* punishments – depictions of the *épuration* as a Communist-directed bloodbath during which tens of thousands of innocents had been slaughtered came to function as a staple of pro-amnesty discourse.⁴¹ This “Black Legend” gained traction even on the floor of the National Assembly, where – despite vigorous contestation – conservative deputies repeatedly referred to tens of thousands or one hundred thousand summary executions. It was no coincidence that this discourse burst into the French mainstream at the same moment as the grave disorders associated with the strike waves (see Chapter Two), and the anti-communist sentiment that accompanied it: communist criminality in the present was now decried by members of every party except the PCF itself, so accusations of communist criminality in the recent past hardly seemed far-fetched. Moreover, as ex-resister politicians like Pierre Mendès-France impotently lectured

⁴⁰ Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours*, 68.

⁴¹ See “À l’Assemblée Nationale, le débat sur l’amnistie tourne à la polémique historique,” *Le Monde*, 7 November 1950.

strike militants that “*Citizens must obey the law,*”⁴² Vichy sympathizers gleefully seized on the opportunity to point out that they could not agree more, “but not long ago, humble agents of public force were prosecuted for having committed the crime of obedience. For having served as modest instruments of the Vichy government’s policy, detestable as it was in some of its facets, men were fired, imprisoned, sometimes executed.”⁴³ With the reign of law and order and, indeed, the existence of the regime now threatened by the Communists, was it not time to admit that France needed to reintegrate these loyal servants of legality?

Desgranges himself campaigned vigorously for amnesty, founding multiple organizations in 1948 and 1949 to this effect: his *Fraternité Notre-Dame de la Merci* advocated for the rights of “political prisoners” and made pilgrimages to Lourdes to pray for amnesty; meanwhile, his *Association des Représentants du Peuple de la Troisième République* fought against the exclusion from political life of men who had voted full powers to Pétain. This latter group launched a “banquet campaign,” where speeches drew heavily on anti-communist themes to call for amnesty for the “new Dreyfuses” wasting away in French prisons. These initiatives never garnered widespread interest. But in the context of the changed political imperatives of Cold War-era France – in particular, the need for center-right and conservative participation if viable governing coalitions were to be formed – and of intense anti-communist anxieties, the general concept of amnesty gained broad-based support fairly quickly (although, interestingly, given their antipathy for the PCF, the Socialists remained

⁴² Pierre Mendès-France, “Ça ne peut pas durer!” *La Dépêche d’Evreux*, 23 October 1948 (emphasis in original), reproduced in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 249: “*Les citoyens doivent obeir la loi.*”

⁴³ Editorial, “Guérillas,” *Le Méridional*, 23-24 October 1948: “Mais le temps n’est pas éloigné où d’humbles agents de la force publique furent persécutés pour avoir commis ce crime d’obéissance. Pour avoir servi en modestes instruments la politique du gouvernement de Vichy, si haïssable fut-elle en certains de ses aspects, des hommes furent révoqués, emprisonnés, parfois exécutés.”

unwaveringly in opposition).⁴⁴ Desgranges's talk of "new Dreyfuses" migrated to the political mainstream during this process, providing an ethical language of human rights and human dignity with which ex-resisters could articulate their support for amnesty. Most importantly, the MRP – the centrist Catholic party born out of the Resistance – justified its eventual conversion to the cause of amnesty by coupling anti-communist rhetoric with references to the party's ethical commitment to Christian charity and republican human rights.

Casting a reassessing backward glance at the *épuration* in the late forties was not an activity reserved for politicians and parliamentarians. Intellectuals participated as well. The most venerable figure to emerge as a proponent of the "Black Legend" was Jean Paulhan (b.1884), the influential writer and literary critic who had directed the prewar *Nouvelle revue française*. Paulhan, a strong anti-fascist who particularly abhorred racism, had entered the intellectual Resistance extremely early. After founding the journal *Résistance* and co-founding *Les Lettres françaises*, he had survived one arrest and escaped another, ending the war in hiding. Like his friend and contemporary François Mauriac, Paulhan quickly became uncomfortable with the internal politics of the professional (non-judicial) purge of writers, directed by the Comité National des Écrivains through a mechanism of black-listing; he began quarreling openly with his communist and *communisant* counterparts within the group. Paulhan finally resigned in anger in late 1946, and from 1947 to 1952 he waged a public war against the CNE.⁴⁵ Paulhan's opposition to the blacklists was articulated in the name of literature's autonomy from politics, and offered specifically from his

⁴⁴ The Socialist position was laid out by Léon Blum in *Le Populaire* on 5 July 1949: recognizing that mistakes had been made in the course of the *épuration*, the Party was willing to countenance some form of pardon. But amnesty – which in French law is actually defined as "legal forgetting" or "legal oblivion" (*oubli juridique*) – implied rehabilitation and was therefore impossible to support.

⁴⁵ Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), details Paulhan's wartime and postwar role in the CNE; the course of events that led to his resignation is covered from 575-624.

position as an author and editor: as John Flower has pointed out, unlike Mauriac, in the immediate postwar period Paulhan was narrowly interested in writerly responsibility, in the artist's "right to make mistakes," and in the distinction between literary skill and ideological "correctness," but *not* in the more general problem of political justice.⁴⁶ To put it another way, his quarrels were with Louis Aragon and Claude Morgan (and with literary "fellow-travelers" and Party sympathizers like Vercors, Martin-Chauffier, and Jean Cassou), not with FTPF commanders who had permitted summary executions. But, as he became involved in seeking amnesty or pardon for specific writers like Lucien Rebatet who had been punished by the state as well as by the CNE, his criticisms of "*l'épuration*" as a whole came increasingly to resemble those of far-right Vichy apologists.

Paulhan began publishing attacks on the CNE in 1947 and 1948, in venues like *Le Figaro littéraire*, *Nouvelles épîtres*, and *Cahiers de la Pléiade*; in February 1948 versions of some of these were published by Gallimard in book form as *De la paille et du grain (Of Chaff and Wheat)*. One of the polemic essays allegorically described France as a country divided between "Whites" and "Reds," where after years of rule by the "Whites," "The Reds return to power, it's their turn to exterminate some Whites. They should feel free: they have the force." However, Paulhan wrote, these "Reds" ought not pretend that their massacre is motivated by the principle of justice: "Tell the truth. You exterminate them because they're white."⁴⁷ Paulhan here echoed the far-right practice of depicting the recent past in a fashion utterly drained of

⁴⁶ John Flower, ed., *Autour de la "Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance" de Jean Paulhan* (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2003), 18.

⁴⁷ Jean Paulhan, *De la paille et du grain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 111-112: "Les Rouges reviennent au pouvoir, c'est leur tour d'exterminer un peu les Blancs. Libre à eux: ils ont la force... Avouez donc la vérité. Vous les exterminerez parce qu'ils sont blancs." The book is available in English as *Of Chaff and Wheat*, ed. Richard Rand (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). This text was originally used by Paulhan in a 1947 "open letter" to the members of the CNE: see the facsimile version in Flower, *Autour de la Lettre*, 72-84.

ideology, with toy armies of “victors” and “vanquished” (but no “fascists”) populating the imagined landscape.⁴⁸ Given the *épuration*’s failures, Paulhan went on to wonder if, in retrospect, the grand vision of the Resistance had proved “worth the life of one man” or, indeed, “worth ten days in the life of one man.”⁴⁹ This rhetorical question echoed Camus’s earlier announcement that he could no longer endorse any politics that demanded the sacrifice of human life, but the connection was faint and distorted: Camus had fully recognized that in choosing to privilege human life above all, he was making a difficult decision that might entail renouncing cherished hopes for radical political change. Paulhan, however, was expressing cynicism about the nature of politics and the possibility for men to live up to hopes of transforming their collective circumstances in a meaningful way: his championing of “life” was more of a nihilistic gesture than a life-affirming one.

Five years later, in 1952, Paulhan delivered a much more thorough broadside, a *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance* (*Letter to the Directors of the Resistance*). This work, as its title suggested, took on not only the literary purge but the *épuration* as a bloc.⁵⁰ Written in the style of a “pamphlet,” the *Letter* was self-consciously

⁴⁸ Jean Pouillon aptly described a similar tactic in Maurice Bardèche’s 1947 *Lettre à François Mauriac* as a false formalism, a rhetorical reduction of the world of political action to “the politics of pure diplomats.” He contrasted Bardèche’s wholly disingenuous claim to perceive the political world in this way with Stendhal’s trajectory at the Restoration (Bardèche claimed to take Stendhal as his inspiration): “He forgets that Stendhal discovers the baseness of *all* powers, and in this sense their equivalence; refusing his present, [Stendhal] detaches himself also from the past, which he had loved...[H]is formalism is real and drives him to political nihilism, to total contestation.” Review of *Lettre à François Mauriac* in *Les Temps modernes* 26 (November 1947), 954.

⁴⁹ Paulhan, *De la paille et du grain*, 108: “Ah, je me demande encore, je ne me demande pas sans anxiété, si votre idée de la patrie est aujourd’hui devenue si ferme et si juste, qu’elle vaille la vie d’un homme, qu’elle vaille dix ans de la vie d’un homme, qu’elle vaille dix jours de la vie d’un homme.”

⁵⁰ Anne Simonin, “La *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance* de Jean Paulhan,” in *Les écrivains face à l’histoire (France, 1920-1966)*, ed. Antoine de Baecque (Paris: La BPI en actes, 1998), 45-69 is an excellent reading of the *Letter*, to which she adds nuance in *Le Déshonneur dans la République*, 643-650; see, too, her discussion of Paulhan’s usefulness to the far right in “The Right to Innocence,” 19-24. Flower’s “Introduction” to *Autour de la “Lettre”* is also indispensable. On Paulhan’s struggle to find a publisher for this text, and Jérôme Lindon’s decision to accept it at Éditions de Minuit, see Anne Simonin, *Les Éditions de Minuit, 1942-1955: le devoir d’insoumission* (Paris: IMEC Éditions, 1994),

modeled on Restoration-era protest literature concerning the 1815 “White Terror.” Yet this work, which overtly adopted the generic characteristics of political polemic, explicitly disavowed its own political content. After establishing his Resistance credentials – the first sentence was “Gentlemen, I am a *résistant*”⁵¹ – Paulhan announced that “I will not pose the smallest political or social question. That is not my business.”⁵² The claim that he was not engaging in “politics,” but rather *criticizing* the base role that political considerations had played in what ought to have been utterly disinterested proceedings was central to Paulhan’s self-presentation in these years. *Others* had let political considerations blind them to human rights abuses; he, however, was blessedly free of political bias and could thus clearly see the outrages being perpetrated.

Paulhan here relied on an exceedingly narrow, yet internally confused, definition of “politics.” It was, according to his logic, a debased arena of passion and affect, the binary opposite of Voltairean rationality. At different points in the text, however (without Paulhan ever acknowledging the slippage), it was also a form of *hyper*-rationality that privileged utilitarian grand schemes above ethical consideration for human subjects: here, Paulhan assimilated Nazis and Communists as equally ethically problematic “political” actors since they were both willing to sacrifice their lives – “or better still, the lives of others” – for an abstract “Doctrine.”⁵³ In both cases – politics-as-irrationality and politics-as-hyper-rationality – “politics” for Paulhan was,

398-407. Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains*, 682-685, helps to place the uproar over the *Lettre* in the context of the internal politics of the Conseil National des Écrivains.

⁵¹ Paulhan, *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1952), reproduced in Flower, *Autour de la “Lettre,”* 43: “Messieurs, je suis résistant.” An English translation is available in Jean Paulhan, *Of Poetry and Politics*, eds. Jennifer Bajorek and Eric Trudel, transl. Jennifer Bajorek, Eric Trudel, and Charlotte Mandell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

⁵² Ibid., 44: “Eh bien, je ne poserai pas la moindre question politique ou sociale. Ce n’est pas mon affaire.”

⁵³ Ibid., 51-52: “Ainsi ces extrêmes se touchaient... Par ailleurs, prêts à sacrifier au triomphe de la Doctrine leur paix et leur vie (mieux encore, la vie des autres).”

in itself, a form of violence against the individual. The “apolitical” defense of the human against the violence of “politics” was a trope that would be heavily adopted by anti-communists in the coming years – in the next chapter, we will see how it functioned at the heart of David Rousset’s condemnation of the Soviet gulag. Paulhan, of course, in part employed the insistence that he neither understood nor cared about “politics” to peremptorily defend against charges that he was allying himself with an indefensible far right – or, as Mauriac (horrified with Paulhan’s extremism despite his own critique of the *épuration*) bluntly put the charge, that Paulhan was now on the side of “those who were left wanting more after twelve million massacred Jews” [“*Vous êtes avec ceux que douze millions de Juifs massacrés laissent sur leur faim*”].⁵⁴ Paulhan responded indignantly: “*Mais non*, not at all! It is the opposite. Politics does not agree with me.”⁵⁵ Paulhan’s claim that the “opposite” of the charge was the case, not merely that Mauriac was mistaken, should be taken seriously: he believed that by abjuring “politics” he was condemning *all* violent historical actors, including Hitler’s minions. By his own logic, he was only on the “side” of abstract justice for unmarked individuals, à la Alfred Dreyfus, against all those – Nazi or Communist, it made no difference – who would contaminate Justice’s workings with the violence of politics.⁵⁶

The *Letter to the Directors of the Resistance* drew on far-right literature – in particular the work of Michel Brille, a Pétainist legal scholar – to offer a nightmare

⁵⁴ Jean Paulhan and François Mauriac, *Correspondance, 1925-1967*, ed. John Flower (Paris: C. Paulhan, 2001), 289-291: “Vous êtes avec ceux que douze millions de Juifs massacrés laissent sur leur faim.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 292: “Mais non, pas du tout! C’est le contraire. Je ne m’entends pas à la politique.”

⁵⁶ Mauriac, interestingly, was skeptical about the possibility of an “apolitical” approach to the world. When Jean Cocteau informed him in 1951 that “my only politics is friendship,” Mauriac responded: “Non: il n’appartient à personne de ne pas être pris par la politique.” *Lettres d’une vie*, May 1951, cited in Violaine Massenet, *François Mauriac* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 332.

vision of the *épuration*.⁵⁷ Paulhan accepted the far Right's figures on numbers killed in extralegal assassinations: with weighty footnotes citing sources he cannot have been unaware were dubious, such as *Le Crapouillot*, he referred to at least 60,000 and possibly 200,000 *épurés* "tortured, shot, burned alive."⁵⁸ But he insisted that the judicial *épuration* was still more objectionable, for it had *pretended* to proffer the abstract-ideal of wholly rational Justice while in fact merely functioning as a "cloak" for Communist-directed political assassination.⁵⁹ This polemic depended, of course, on a view of Vichy as a legal regime, participation in which had not been criminal but merely politically offensive to those who, by the turn of history's wheel, happened to emerge as victors in 1944. It also hinged on a deliberately formalist understanding of "Justice" as a pure entity constantly under risk of being contaminated by base "passions": thus, even had some men put on trial at the Liberation committed straightforward criminal acts (not merely "political" crimes, a category Paulhan refused to countenance), nevertheless *none* of the judgments handed down by the purge courts were valid. This was because juries had been composed of resisters – that is, Paulhan explained, of the *victims* of those on trial. And victims, even if they had the best intentions in the world, by virtue of their suffering could not possibly serve as properly rational, impartial judges (any more than could Communists, blindly committed to the hyperrational project of eliminating political enemies). The *épuration* had thus been a bloody farce. And, in countenancing this development, ex-resisters had rendered themselves "no less cowards and traitors, no less unjust, than he

⁵⁷ See Simonin, "1815 en 1945."

⁵⁸ Paulhan, *Lettre*, 48: "...les quelques soixante mille Français qui ont été par la Libération torturés, fusillés, brûlés vifs." Paulhan inserted a footnote after "les quelques soixante mille Français" claiming (based on evidence from *The American Mercury* and *Le Crapouillot*) that "Les évaluations courantes varient entre 60.000 et 200.000 morts." Paulhan's method of accounting was so outrageous that, as Anne Simonin has documented, Paul Rassinier sent him a letter that called it "vraiment abusif" (*Le Déshonneur dans la République*, 644).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: "manteau légal."

among them who, on the torturer's table, gave up his comrades. (But with fewer excuses.)”⁶⁰

It must be acknowledged that Paulhan's *Letter* was not, in comparison with his important prewar literary criticism, a sophisticated intellectual product – indeed, it carried out its anti-communist agenda hardly less clumsily than did Desgranges's *Crimes masqués*. The polemic – directed to an imagined interlocutor who Paulhan himself admitted was a “idiot,” not a serious intellectual opponent – swung between focused criticism of the purge and broad swipes at postwar communism as analogous to Nazism.⁶¹ The argument relied on inflated numerical allegations (in addition to insisting that 60,000-200,000 summary executions had taken place, Paulhan suggested that, with the legal purge taken into account, 1.5 million French people should be considered “victims” of the *épuration*),⁶² on smugly literal readings of the legal code, and on sweeping generalizations to accomplish the conflation of Nazism and communism: for example, that both involved “the enslavement of conquered races (or classes).”⁶³ Invective aside, Paulhan's most insistent contention throughout the text was that emotional involvement as “victims” disqualified men from participation in the purely rational activity of meting out Justice. But except for an analogy to a man who “sees red” when he hears his wife has betrayed him and thus cannot soberly assess whether the charge is true, he offered no intellectual explanation of the problems “passion” posed to justice, and never acknowledged that he was slipping

⁶⁰ Ibid., 43: “C'est aux résistants que je parle. Je me permets de leur dire qu'ils sont tombés dans le piège: non moins lâches et traîtres, non moins injustes que celui d'entre eux qui, sur la table de torture, livrait ses camarades. (Mais avec moins d'excuses.)”

⁶¹ Simonin, “La *Lettre aux directeurs de la Résistance*,” offers a good analysis of the text as self-consciously producing a “pastiche” by playing with the conventions of the “political pamphlet” genre, but by my reading the argumentative weaknesses and internal inconsistencies of the *Lettre* cannot simply be accounted for by an attentiveness to genre.

⁶² Ibid., 44: “Si l'on songe, par là-dessus, qu'un homme tué, ou seulement déshonoré, entraîne dans la ruine sa famille entière, l'on arrivera vite à quinze cent mille victimes.”

⁶³ Ibid., 52: “la mise en esclavage des races (ou des classes) vaincues.”

between criticism of the irrationality of victims and criticism of the cold, calculating hyperrationality of Communists. Moreover, he made no attempt to square the contention that victims could not be judges with his own bizarre lament five years earlier, in *De la paille et du grain*, that he longed to be a Jew – that is, a member of the category of purest victim – so that he could have the moral authority to formally absolve all France “once and for all” of its guilt.⁶⁴ Victims, it seems, only lacked the ability to judge if they could not utterly transcend their traumatized subjectivity to achieve a kind of Christ-like posture of forgiveness – or, to put it more cynically, if they could not produce judgments to Paulhan’s liking. Because of these various weaknesses and contradictions, much of the *Letter* read as a grab-bag of Pétainist talking-points, articulated pell-mell by a crabby contrarian. This particular contrarian, however, was no Pétainist himself but an anti-fascist who had resisted early and courageously. Paulhan’s subject position, far more than his arguments, rendered the *Letter* significant.

Paulhan’s trajectory was highly unusual; certainly no other intellectual resister as prominent or respected as he offered such full-throated denunciation of the *épuration*. Indeed, from early 1948, a large and varied group of intellectuals mobilized to defend the “honor” of the Resistance in the face of what they labeled the “counter-*épuration*.” *Combat* – still published under the masthead “From the Resistance to the Revolution” – sounded the alarm in late February, with articles by Claude Bourdet and Louis Delmas (“Watch Out, Free Men! Let’s Not Let Them Accomplish the Counter-*Épuration*”); the *Patriote résistant*, the Communist-dominated deportees’ weekly,

⁶⁴ *De la paille et du grain*, 58: “Ah, je voudrais être juif, pour dire – avec plus d’autorité que je n’en puis avoir – que j’ai pardonné à la France, une fois pour toutes, son impuissance à me défendre. Je voudrais être juif pour travailler – avec plus de force que je n’en ai – à rendre à la France toutes ses voix, toute sa voix. Je voudrais être juif pour devenir le meilleur des Français.”

quickly joined in, wondering “Will We Soon Be Speaking of the Crime of Resistance?” and announcing that “The Counter-Épuration Has Begun.” This latter article darkly observed that “What was venomously insinuated in 1945 is being openly asserted in 1948...[T]he heroes of the *maquis* have again become the ‘terrorists’ that they once were – and that, in the minds of some people, they never ceased to be.”⁶⁵ Rémy Roure, the Catholic *Le Monde* journalist and Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor (his wife had died at Ravensbrück), contributed an article later that month charging that “the adversaries of the Resistance” were focusing attention on the supposed crimes of the *épuration* with “a well-determined goal: that of soiling the Resistance, of debasing it, of making it lose out in public opinion, of transforming it into a criminal enterprise. After this, the terrain will be cleared, the way will be unblocked. The title of ‘résistant’ will become a blemish, and that of ‘collaborator’ a virtue.”⁶⁶ Anxiety about this slippage of normative categories was plainly mobilizing: within a few days of one another, communist and non-communist intellectual figureheads respectively helped found two separate national organizations to defend the memory of the Resistance and oppose the rehabilitation of Vichy. The non-communist group, the Comité d’action de la Résistance (CAR), included actors like Roure, Claude Bourdet (now editor-in-chief at *Combat*), Louis Marin, and Jean Bloch-Michel.

⁶⁵ “La Contre-épuration a commencé,” *Le Patriote résistant* 49 (6 March 1948): “Ce qu’on insinuait fielleusement en 1945, on l’affirme ouvertement en 1948. Des livres, des revues, des tribunaux, des hommes politiques ne cachent plus leur mepris des ‘pillards,’ comme ils disent: les héros du maquis sont redevenus les ‘terroristes’ qu’ils étaient autrefois et que, dans la tête de certains, ils n’ont jamais cessé d’être. La contre-épuration est une réalité, il faut le dire.”

⁶⁶ Rémy Roure, “L’Anti-épuration,” *Le Patriote résistant* 50 (23 March 1948): “La ‘contre-épuration’ est organisée fortement, avec un but bien déterminé: celui de salir la Résistance, celui de l’avilir, de la perdre dans l’opinion, de la transformer en une entreprise criminelle. Après quoi, le terrain sera déblayé, la voie sera libre. Le titre du résistant deviendra une tare, et celui de collaborateur une vertu.”

The CAR adopted an aggressive tone as it intervened in debates over amnesty for the next five years, in particular with regards to the “Black Legend”: a public resolution in late 1952, for example, insisted that only approximately 3,000 summary executions had occurred at the Liberation, “most often legitimated by the law because inspired by the fight against the enemy, [and] in the rare cases to the contrary, never covered for by the Resistance.” Complaints about the violated human rights of the thousands of “political prisoners” still wasting away in Bastilles throughout France, moreover, were disingenuous and wildly overblown: of the prison sentences pronounced by the Courts of Justice, “ONLY 2,500 OF THEM REMAIN IN EFFECT.”⁶⁷ The CAR was particularly indignant that some had proposed an amnesty for “crimes” committed in the course of the *épuration* in exchange for an amnesty for wartime criminals, insisting the normative equivalence being drawn was obscene. The organization proclaimed that it “in no way admits this common measure, which is a sacrilege; it affirms, moreover, that the Resistance has never called for anything other than Justice under existing laws for those who might have abused its name.” If it were not for these false resisters, the CAR announced, the Resistance would have had “no need for a cloak” to cover its honor.⁶⁸

But such aggressive language in fact signaled a defensive posture⁶⁹ and a new anxiety in retrospectively evaluating the *épuration*. Certainly by 1947 no one was

⁶⁷ “Résolution du Comité d’action de la Résistance,” 1 February 1952. Folder “Combat: varia,” Boite 33, NAF 28091, Claude Bourdet Papers, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France (hereafter Bourdet BNF): “Le C.A.R. rappelle: que les Cours de Justice ont prononcé un totale de 800 peines de mort exécutées; qu’elles ont prononcé un total de 38.000 peines de détention; DONT IL N’EN RESTE EN COURS QUE 2.500.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.: “Il refuse, au contraire, à une amnistie de résistants, paraissant échangée contre celle des complices de l’ennemi; il n’admet en rien cette commune mesure, qui est un sacrilège; il affirme, bien plus, que la Résistance n’a jamais réclamé rien d’autre que la Justice et la loi existantes vis-à-vis de ceux qui auraient abusé de son nom, sans que, pour couvrir son honneur, elle n’ait besoin d’aucun manteau.” A law sheltering certain otherwise criminal acts undertaken in the course of the Resistance had, in fact, already been passed on 16 April 1946.

⁶⁹ One major concern of the CAR’s founders *had*, in fact, been to protect agents of the purge from prosecution, as evidenced by a 24 February 1948 letter from François de Menthon to Bourdet urging

interested in championing the legacy of the legal purges, which after all had been criticized as a failure by the non-communist Left since late 1944 – though for very different reasons than those now being offered by the far right. Many, like Camus in 1945, were bitterly disappointed that their initial hopes for serene and imposing justice had been so thoroughly disappointed by the uneven realities of the purge, and the fact that “small fry” seemed to have paid for the sins of their better-connected superiors. Consider the response of Claude Serreulles to the 1950 attempt to finally convict René Hardy, the man suspected of having betrayed Resistance hero Jean Moulin to the Gestapo. (Hardy had already been acquitted once immediately following the Liberation; now he was being tried by a military court.) Serreules, who had replaced Jean Moulin as head of the Conseil de la Résistance after Moulin’s assassination, wrote in a private letter to Claude Bourdet in 1950:

Five years have passed. The Justice of this country has provided a new illustration of what all human justice is: uncertain, changeable, capricious, fickle, sensitive to passions and to gusts of wind, complaisant with power, blind, incoherent, absurd. It put [Robert] Brasillach to death in 1945 when in 1949 it would have condemned him, like [Horace de] Carbuccia [publisher of the notorious wartime *Gringoire*], to a laughable sentence... The list of such contradictions and challenges to common sense would be interminable. This is no longer justice, it is an aberration!”⁷⁰

him to unite with Roure and others to “definitively protect a certain number of comrades for acts committed in connection with their Resistance activity.” Folder “Courrier lecteurs 1947-1948.” Boite 34, NAF 28091, Bourdet BNF.

⁷⁰ Letter from Claude Serreulles to Claude Bourdet, Paris, 17 January 1950. Folder “Courrier lecteurs 1948-1950,” Boite 34, NAF 28091, Bourdet BNF: “Pourtant, cinq ans ont passé. La Justice de ce pays a donné une illustration nouvelle de ce qu’est toute justice humaine: incertaine, flottante, capricieuse, volage, sensible aux passions et aux sautes de vent, complaisante au pouvoir, aveugle, incohérente, absurde. Elle a mis à mort Brasillach en 1945 qu’en 1949 elle eut condamné comme Carbuccia à une peine pour rire. Elle a fusillé Darnand mais elle classe le dossier Sainrapt et Brice et demain sans doute elle libérera Maurras! La liste de ces contradictions, de ces défis au bon sens, serait interminable. Ce n’est plus de la justice, c’est de l’aberration!”

Serreulles heartily wished, “despite the horror that summary executions always inspired in me,” that Hardy had simply been assassinated by the Resistance in 1943.⁷¹ But today, Serreulles explained, “in the face of this *tableau* of failure,” he had no interest in testifying against Hardy in court. He believed, at last, that “forgiveness is more valuable than justice.” Indeed, he would be willing to stand up as a witness for Hardy’s defense, and “*la mort dans l’âme*,” say to “this man who had the misfortune to survive: ‘I have no grudge against you anymore.’”⁷² Bourdet, meanwhile, summed up his own attitude: “Our struggle is no longer in looking backward but in looking forward.”⁷³ A spring 1949 *Combat* survey of ex-Resistance politicians and intellectuals on the amnesty question revealed a group by-and-large reluctantly reconciled to the inevitability of measures of clemency of one kind or another.⁷⁴

But non-communist resisters’ retrenchment about the *épuration* in this period, and their grudging acceptance of some form of amnesty or pardon, was not simply a bowing to the inevitable march of time, a cooling of old passions. In the France of 1947 and beyond, it was no longer a simple matter for non-communists to offer unapologetic defenses of extralegal violence. Many CAR members, along with legislators affiliated with SFIO or the MRP, thus felt strategically compelled to disavow its occurrence at the Liberation. Moreover, like Édith Thomas, these ex-resisters, too, often felt genuinely troubled or embarrassed by the memory of acts that had seemed unremarkable to them in 1944 or 1945, as norms concerning violence

⁷¹ “En conscience, j’en viens même à me demander s’il n’eût pas été préférable qu’elle fût suivi d’effet, en dépit de l’horreur que m’ont toujours inspiré les exécutions sommaires. Préférable pour le bon renom de la Résistance, préférable pour Hardy.”

⁷² Hardy was again acquitted.

⁷³ Claude Bourdet, *Combat*, 7-8 May 1949, cited in Gaçon, *L’Amnistie*, 215: “Notre combat n’est plus en arrière mais en avant.”

⁷⁴ See *Combat* from 23-24 April 1949 through 7-8 May 1949. Many, like the Socialist Party members discussed above, favored executive pardon over amnesty because it did not imply innocence or rehabilitation.

shifted later in the 1940s and early 1950s. They thus adopted the same distinction between “real” and “false” resisters that Desgranges had employed, and insisted that the latter were alone responsible for extralegal executions, tortures, and pillage: Rémy Roure, for example, stated flatly that any criminal incidents of bloodshed at the Liberation were “acts that were committed by imposters in the Resistance, and that all real *résistants* condemn.”⁷⁵ This was the official position of CAR as well.⁷⁶ Even those who did not “disown” the *épuration*’s violence increasingly *problematized* it – that is, treated it as a worthy object for extended ethical, political, and philosophical consideration, as something in need of justification or explanation: one result of this was an outpouring of discourse about Liberation-era summary executions in venues like *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit* that (as we saw in Chapter One) had barely mentioned extralegal violence from 1944 to late 1947, focusing instead on the judicial purge. In November, 1947, for example, Pierre Emmanuel offered a rebuttal to Maurice Bardèche in the pages of *Esprit* and Jean Pouillon did the same in *Les Temps modernes*; in June of 1948, historian Jean-Henri Roy wrote a remarkable critique of *L’Age de Caïn* and “résistantialisme” in *Les Temps modernes*.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Roure, “L’anti-épuration”: “On voudrait précisément faire endosser à la Résistance des actes qui ont été commis par des imposteurs de la Résistance et que tous les vrais résistants condamnent.”

⁷⁶ I have found no cases of sustained intellectual critique or frank dismantlement of the “real/false” resister binary – with, however, one interesting exception (produced, it is worth noting, *before* the projection of extralegal violence at the *épuration* onto “false” resisters was adopted by the non-Communist left as a defensive tactic against the “Black Legend.”) This was the article “Petiot ‘faux résistant’” by Albert Palle in *Les Temps modernes* in July 1946. In reflecting on the trial of a wartime criminal who had claimed his murders and pillage were acts of “resistance,” Palle acknowledged a “fuzzy zone where crime touched on resistance, and resistance touched on crime” (162). “The necessities of the resistance,” Palle wrote, “demanded not only the destruction of a particular social order – that of the Germans, or that of Vichy – but of all social order.” The Resistance had by necessity accepted the precepts “that human life was no longer sacred, that respect for the law was a crime.” In this atmosphere, the line between legitimate and illegitimate use of violence “was necessarily uncertain” (161). Neither crime nor resistance, Palle suggested were “as pure as one would wish” (160).

⁷⁷ Pierre Emmanuel, “La Résistance comme catharsis,” *Esprit* 139 (November 1947): 629-639; Pouillon, Review of *Lettre à François Mauriac*; Jean-Henri Roy, “Les Deux justices,” *Les Temps modernes* 33 (June 1948): 2261-2266.

This latter article dealt with the newly-recognized “problem” of extralegal violence at the Liberation by relying on an interpretation of the immediate aftermath of the war as an exceptional, “emergency” moment in which everyday norms did not apply. “We know,” wrote Roy, “that this summary justice made mistakes. It was too fast and too impassioned to stay impartial.”⁷⁸ But, in the context of late 1944, after the desperate years of struggle – not, that is, considered in ahistorical terms or measured in relation to abstract ideals of justice – this was understandable. Tacitly acknowledging that he was now writing in a context in which norms about violence had definitively shifted since the immediate postwar, Roy wrote, “That justice was the justice of fire. It might seem cruel to us today. It seemed natural to my comrades, who were not, as far as I know, sadists or freaks. They had companions to avenge, atrocities to punish.”⁷⁹ The author of *L’Age de Caïn*, Roy wrote, claimed to condemn “suffering in general, cruelty in general...He claims to represent a humanism that embraces the entire universe, including traitors and executioners. He denies hating anything except war.”⁸⁰ But this “universalizing” humanism was disingenuous and willfully amnesiac, Roy wrote, transforming the *épuration* into an original sin when it was in fact a counter-violence enacted in extreme circumstances after years of victimhood, suffering, and struggle. While admitting that “errors” may have been committed, Roy thus defended the extralegal *épuration* and the phenomenon of summary execution as ultimately forgivable given the liminal, “emergency” context of

⁷⁸ Roy, “Les Deux justices,” 2264: “Nous savons que cette justice expéditive a commis des erreurs. Elle était trop rapide et trop passionnée pour rester impartiale.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2266: “Cette justice-là était celle du feu. Elle peut nous sembler cruelle aujourd’hui. Elle paraissait naturelle à mes camarades qui n’étaient, que je sache, ni des sadiques ni des anormaux. Ils avaient des compagnons à venger, des atrocités à punir.”

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2262-2263: “C’est la souffrance en général, la cruauté en général, que l’auteur reproche à la Résistance...Il se réclame d’un humanisme qui englobe l’univers entier, y compris les traîtres et les bourreaux. Il se défend de haïr autre chose que la guerre.”

the immediate postwar period – a context which, he made abundantly clear, was now gone.

The notion of “political justice” was no less difficult to defend from a non-communist position in this period than was that of extralegal violence. Indeed, they were of a piece: new Cold War anxieties about political justice *were* anxieties about violence – that is, about the justifiability of states or other actors using violence against civilian subjects to achieve political ends. The explicitly political and, indeed, revolutionary intent of the purges – a goal that had been acknowledged by the interior Resistance in straightforward terms in 1944 and 1945 – was now projected entirely onto the PCF by many ex-resisters. Writer Jean Cassou, for example, claimed that the Communists had contaminated the purge with politics: he still maintained that the purge ought to have worked “in a revolutionary way,” but “on the moral plane,” not the political one the PCF had tragically introduced.⁸¹ Pierre-Henri Teitgen (MRP, and the Minister of Justice from 1945-46) was much more categorical: he demanded to know why the Resistance as a whole should be criticized for the handiwork of Communist “pseudo-resisters” who, alone, had “hoped to make the *épuration* an instrument of political subversion.”⁸² The rest of the Resistance had simply hoped to offer criminal sanctions for criminal behavior.

⁸¹ “La Résistance niée,” 456-457: “Alors, c’est sur le plan moral, et révolutionnairement, qu’il eût fallu juger et exécuter les hommes les plus responsables de la collaboration. . . . Aujourd’hui. . . la politique, et ses conflits et ses pratiques, domine la scène. Elle avait déjà commencé de l’occuper lorsque le parti communiste, en tant que parti, était entré dans la Résistance.”

⁸² “À l’Assemblée Nationale”: “M. Teitgen reconnaît qu’un ‘malaise’ a pesé sur la répression de la collaboration. ‘Cela tient d’abord aux actes de banditisme commis par de pseudo-résistants. Comment ose-t-on jeter à la face des résistants des crimes qu’ils étaient les premiers à condamner? . . . En second lieu, une fois la légalité rétablie, la répression s’est parfois déroulée dans un climat de passion imputable au parti communiste qui, en France comme dans les pays dont il s’est emparé, a voulu faire de l’*épuration* un instrument de subversion politique et déshonorer les gens pour donner leurs places aux petits camarades.”

Teitgen, of course, was defending his own work as Minister of Justice during the high point of the legal purges; few others went this far in disowning the revolutionary impulse of the Resistance and of the *épuration*. Indeed, at this juncture some towering figures of the intellectual left, Maurice Merleau-Ponty at *Les Temps modernes* and Emmanuel Mounier and Jean-Marie Domenach at *Esprit*, responded to the increasingly vocal criticism of the “political justice” exercised in the judicial *épuration* by, in essence, “doubling down”: they insisted that if the *épuration* had failed, it was because it had not been political *enough*, having hesitated to fully embrace the purificatory model of the Terror in the French Revolution.⁸³ But historians like Tony Judt who judge the intellectual atmosphere of the late forties by looking strictly to these figures – figures who at this point remained deeply sympathetic to the Communist Party – miss the very real winds of change quietly blowing through the larger non-communist Left. These were winds that would eventually shift Merleau-Ponty’s and Domenach’s courses as well (Mounier died in 1950): by the mid-fifties both men would formally renounce “terroristic” state violence. We will analyze their intellectual trajectories separately in later chapters. For the moment, it is simply worth noting that if theirs were prominent voices in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they were also increasingly isolated. There were many to agree with wartime *Combat* founder Roger Stéphane, who by 1952 responded with indignation to Paulhan’s charge that the *épuration* had been a form of social-revolutionary justice, insisting that in fact it had been a straightforward process of trying traitors for criminal offenses, in the service of a political *restoration*: “I was an insurgent,” Stéphane wrote, “but an insurgent against imposture, against a usurpation,

⁸³ For example, Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur, essai sur le problème communiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); Mounier, “Y a-t-il une justice politique?” *Esprit* 136 (August 1947): 212-238; Domenach, “La justice sans la révolution et sans l’église,” *Esprit* 136 (August 1947): 183-194; Mounier and Domenach, “Second dossier sur la justice politique,” *Esprit* 139 (November 1947): 654-684.

and the judicial work at the Liberation consisted of punishing that imposture and that usurpation.”⁸⁴

In the course of defending the *épuration* in such markedly conservative terms, texts like Stéphane’s subtly redefined the nature and meaning of the pre-Liberation Resistance as well, obscuring both revolutionary goals and the willingness to employ “illegal” violence to achieve them. These features of the Resistance were, as we argued in Chapter One, central to intellectuals’ immediate postwar “reading” of the years of Occupation. Now, in the context of Cold War anxieties and law-and-order retrenchment, they began to fade somewhat, tentatively giving way in certain venues to alternative “ethical” or “spiritual” discourses about the Resistance that barred its conflation with “terror.” These discourses reimagined the Resistance as an ethical and humanitarian movement. A “resister” was, accordingly, someone who had borne solemn moral witness to the immense human suffering brought on by Nazi violence, not a “political” actor: thus his use of lethal counter-violence was incidental, not essential or defining. We might trace the beginnings of this retrospective shift of emphasis in any number of texts by non-communist intellectuals from the period. It was most marked, however (despite Mounier’s and Domenach’s own attitudes) in the pages of the small but influential “progressive” Catholic journal *Esprit*.

Pierre Emmanuel’s “La Résistance comme catharsis” from 1947 – written as a refutation of Bardèche’s *Lettre à François Mauriac* – provides a good early example of the emergent narrative. Emmanuel, a Catholic poet who would go on to play an important role in French cultural policy until the late 1970s, suggested that the entire Occupation period had occurred in an unrepresentable realm of “catastrophe” and

⁸⁴ Roger Stéphane, “Le renégat appliqué,” *France-Observateur*, 7 February 1952, reproduced in Flower, *Autour de la Lettre*, 103: “J’étais un insurgé, mais un insurgé contre l’imposture, contre une usurpation et l’oeuvre judiciaire de la Libération a consisté à châtier cette imposture et cette usurpation.”

“nightmare” that was outside of and immeasurably beyond politics.⁸⁵ The “essential” drama of the period had been a “spiritual combat” for people’s souls, analogous to a struggle between the forces of heaven and hell. At stake had been not a political difference nor even what might be described as an ideological one (Emmanuel’s article did not refer at all to national socialism, fascism, socialism, or communism, for example, and used the word “Nazism” exactly once), but a moral question about the universality of human dignity. Thus Emmanuel cut through the Gordian knot of definitional and legalistic arguments about Vichy’s “legitimacy” in one sentence by declaring that “a government that says to me, ‘You thought that Jews were men, you were mistaken, they are animals that must be exterminated,’ commits a despotic act against my conscience and the universal conscience; it can reign through terror but never by virtue of its legitimacy.”⁸⁶ The Resistance had been constituted of men who

⁸⁵ Emmanuel, “La Résistance comme catharsis,” 630: “...il n’était nulle sagesse, nulle volonté créatrice qui pût tenir *en dehors* de la catastrophe où tout homme était remis en question; mais comment penser la catastrophe dans l’éclair où elle fond sur vous?...C’est à dessein que j’emploie, pour dégager le sens de cette guerre, les mêmes images qui me servirent pour analyser la Descente aux Enfers: un grand symbole massif contenant implicitement tous les autres, une obsession qu’il faut briser, mais au prix d’un long cauchemar.”

⁸⁶ Ibid., 633: “Un gouvernement qui me dit: tu pensais que les Juifs étaient des hommes, tu te trompais, ce sont des bêtes qu’il faut exterminer, commet un acte d’arbitraire contre ma conscience et la conscience universelle: il peut régner par la terreur mais non point en vertu de sa légitimité.” Conventions of French historiography hold that the Holocaust and, especially, Vichy’s role in it, played a minimal part in French memory of World War II in the decades after 1944. But in fact references to yellow stars and racial laws, and also to extermination and gas chambers, were relatively commonplace in the late forties, particularly when ex-Resistance authors attacked Vichy apologists’ “sword-and-shield” defense of Pétain’s regime. (This defense held that if de Gaulle had acted admirably as a “sword” against the occupier, Pétain had also served France well, by “shielding” it from a fate like Poland’s.) Discussions of Jewish suffering were also surprisingly prevalent in non-Pétainist anti-communist discourses, since insisting that Jews had been Nazism’s primary victims undermined the PCF’s narrative according to which *Communists* had suffered most. Thus, for example, *Le Crapouillot*’s history of the war had a section on “The Extermination of the Jews,” which included an admirably clear explanation of the difference between concentration camps and extermination camps (*Histoire de la guerre, t.V.*, 395). Claims by historians such as Annette Wieviorka that postwar French discourses of deportation were marked by silence about Jewish suffering and failed to distinguish between concentration camps and death camps might be tempered by a further consideration of such anti-communist literature. Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l’oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992), 19; see also Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), which offers a limited critique of the historiographical discourse of postwar “silence” about Jewish suffering but nevertheless implicitly relies upon it for periodization. François

had refused this sort of moral despotism, no more and no less; it had been a form of bearing witness enacted by all those who embraced human solidarity and hoped to reawaken “the vigorous universalism that was sleeping in the French soul;”⁸⁷ far from being a political affair, it was “in the first place a spiritual insurrection.”⁸⁸ Emmanuel thus shrugged away charges of crimes committed at the Liberation: even if they had occurred, they were epiphenomenal and “not inscribed in a system.”⁸⁹ They had nothing to do, in fact, with the *refusal* of violence toward “the human” that the Resistance had truly signified.

By 1952, when Paulhan published his *Letter*, multiple authors – including non-Catholics, like Jean Cassou – used the pages of *Esprit* to rebut him with more fully articulated versions of Emmanuel’s arguments. Alban-Vistel (the “nom de guerre” of Auguste Vistel, military commander of the FFI in the region around Lyon during the Liberation) penned the most significant of these, “Fondements spirituels de la Résistance.” This article defined the Resistance as a “volontariat engaged in the affirmation of values that we judged essential.”⁹⁰ The values in question were not political in any partisan sense: Alban-Vistel made a great point of listing early resisters from across the political spectrum (significantly omitting the Communists). Indeed, they were not “political” at all, but touched on an vital realm that existed beyond the debased, passion-driven, inevitably violent world of politics: Alban-Vistel commented

Mauriac also deserves mention as an exceptional case: in a Christological key, Jewish “martyrdom” quickly became central to his understanding of the war years. See his extraordinary “Préface” to Elie Wiesel, *La Nuit*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 639: “Elle avait réveillé l’universalisme vigoureux qui sommeillait dans l’âme française...”

⁸⁸ Ibid., 636: “La résistance, née de l’inconscient blessé, de la fidélité trahie, fut d’abord une insurrection spirituelle.”

⁸⁹ Ibid., 637: “Quant aux crimes de la Résistance, le moins qu’on en puisse dire c’est qu’ils ne s’inscrivaient pas dans un système comme ceux des miliciens.”

⁹⁰ Alban-Vistel, “Fondements spirituels de la Résistance,” *Esprit* 195 (October 1952), 480: “Pour nous, le mot *résistance* aura signifier à un moment donné de notre destin: volontariat engagé dans l’affirmation de valeurs que nous jugeons essentielles.”

that “the purely political option signifies absolutely nothing anymore when the essential is in play.”⁹¹ Having argued that the ends pursued by the Resistance were not political, Alban-Vistel, despite his military role in the Resistance – this was a commander of troops, not the author of clandestine poetry – insisted in turn that violence had been merely an incidental means to achieve them. “Even if the English planes had not delivered tools of combat, even if a network of emissaries had not been woven between the headquarters of the Leader of the Free French [De Gaulle] and the Movements of the Interior,” he wrote, “The Resistance would have been a reality. Not having the means of violence, it would have found other techniques of action besides those commonly adopted in wars.” Indeed, Alban-Vistel claimed,

Many of us, in the solitude of the beginning stages, had seriously pondered the teachings of Gandhi on non-violence and had considered their efficacy. The objection that this technique of action could only be applied in the ‘spiritual’ climate particular to India fell away in the face of the growing conviction that the Resistance was, before all else, a revolt of the spirit. As Gandhi taught, non-violence is not a refuge for cowards, quite the opposite: it almost always demands more courage than violence itself.⁹²

That the Resistance had ultimately opted for the use of force to carry out its “spiritual revolt” was, according to Alban-Vistel’s narrative, of only passing interest. Likewise, its *effectiveness* in deploying violence was immaterial to its legacy, and was not how

⁹¹ Ibid., 481: “C’était bien la preuve que l’option purement politique ne signifie absolument plus rien, lorsque l’essentiel est en jeu.”

⁹² Ibid., 489: “Même si les avions anglais n’avaient pas apporté les moyens de combat, même si entre le Quartier Général du Chef de la France Libre et les Mouvements de l’Intérieur n’avait pas été tissé un réseau d’émissaires, la Résistance eût été une réalité. N’ayant pas les moyens de la violence, elle aurait eu à trouver d’autres techniques d’action que celles communément adoptées dans les guerres. Nombre d’entre nous, dans la solitude de commencements, avaient sérieusement pensé aux enseignements de Gandhi sur la non-violence et en avaient mesuré l’efficacité. L’objection que cette technique d’action ne pouvait être appliquée que dans le climat ‘spirituel’ particulier de l’Inde tombait d’elle-même devant la conviction grandissante que la Résistance était avant toute chose une révolte de l’esprit. Comme l’avait enseigné Gandhi, la non-violence n’offrait pas de refuge aux lâches, bien au contraire, elle exigeait presque toujours, plus de courage que la violence elle-même.”

the movement ought to be memorialized: “It is because it was first of all a construction with spiritual foundations that this Resistance deserves to hold the attention of future historians...Even if the military efficacy of the Resistance had been negligible, there would remain in it a lesson that will never be exhausted.”⁹³ The “meaning” of the Resistance, for Alban-Vistel as for Emmanuel, was its universalizing humanist impulse to testify to man’s dignity in the face of supreme forms of degradation and suffering.

For Alban-Vistel, therefore, the paradigmatic figure of Resistance was not the *maquis* fighter, but rather the militant who had been captured and deported to a concentration camp. This man or woman stood as the symbol of unimaginable, Christ-like suffering that, at the same time, miraculously signified the triumph of the human: “Little by little,” he wrote, the deportees “took on the face of Christ...[T]heir unconquerable revolt, which drove them to remain men, despite everything, saved humanity from despairing in itself.” Like Christ, these “simple women and men from among us” had “taken up the entirety of the human” in order to restore humanity’s “faith in itself.”⁹⁴ Alban-Vistel’s unusual inclusion of women, too, at the heart of the Resistance project was not accidental: he repeatedly referred to women as resisters throughout the article, at one point evoking a “frail woman” who, in choosing the “road to Damascus” of resisting, had discovered that she in fact possessed “courage of the hardest steel.”⁹⁵ In sharp contrast to the militarized narratives of Resistance in the

⁹³ Ibid., 492: “C’est parce qu’elle fut tout d’abord une construction aux fondements d’ordre spirituel que cette Résistance mérite de retenir l’attention des historiens futurs...Même si l’efficacité militaire de la Résistance eût été négligeable, il demeurerait d’elle une leçon qui ne sera jamais épuisée.”

⁹⁴ Ibid., 488: “Les Déportés gravissaient les stations de leur calvaire, et voici que, peu à peu, sans qu’ils en eussent conscience, ils prenaient le visage du Christ...[L]eur révolte indomptée qui les avait conduits à demeurer des hommes, malgré tout, sauvait l’humanité de la désespérance d’elle-même. Comme le Christ avait assumé tout l’humain pour lui restituer la révélation de son origine, eux, femmes et hommes simples de chez nous, avaient assumé tout l’humain, pour lui restituer sa foi en lui-même.”

⁹⁵ Ibid., 487: “Combien d’hommes et de femmes, politiquement indifférents, socialement sans inquiétudes parce que, pour eux, tout était facile, rencontrèrent un dur chemin de Damas?...Tel homme

immediate postwar period that had obsessively insisted on “virility” in combat,⁹⁶ Alban-Vistel’s “spiritualized” vision of Resistance as an activity epitomized by the suffering concentration camp inmate was able to accommodate the notion of female participation.

Clearly, Emmanuel and Alban-Vistel both inscribed their narratives of the Resistance into a distinctly Catholic vision of France’s sin and redemption; both described the catastrophic loss of 1940 as a form of divine punishment for France’s interwar moral rot, and the Resistance as a painful spiritual journey toward collective salvation. (Alban-Vistel, especially, was perfectly aware of how much this narrative echoed Pétain’s own speeches after the armistice, which had linked physical defeat to France’s spiritual and sexual degeneration; he insisted that “it matters little that the first speeches of Maréchal Pétain expressed similar judgments for less noble purposes – the truth remains the truth.”⁹⁷) Both Emmanuel and Alban-Vistel trafficked in Christological language and symbolism – Jesus on the cross, the road to Damascus, martyrdom – and both focused heavily on the interior struggles of the individual *résistant* as he wrestled with his demons and moved from spiritual darkness to light, “up to sainthood.”⁹⁸ But if their interpretation was unmistakably Catholic, it was also – like most work in *Esprit* in this period – unmistakably influenced by Jacques Maritain’s 1930s theological-philosophical work that sought to reconcile Christianity

simple parvint, sans affirmation hautaine jusqu’au plus pur héroïsme, telle femme frêle affirma le courage d’acier le plus dur...”

⁹⁶ See Chapter One.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 485: “Une telle contestation peut sembler injuste, elle n’est que sans complaisance et peu importe que les premiers discours du Maréchal Pétain aient exprimé pour des fins moins dignes des jugements semblables, la vérité demeure la vérité.” Alban-Vistel’s diagnosis of France’s prewar sickness was, of course, distinct from that of Pétain and other architects of Vichy’s “National Revolution”: for example, one of the primary symptoms he identified was “the shameful abandon of the Spanish republic” (484). Nevertheless, the structure of the narrative was the same, from sin (metaphorically represented as disease) to redemption (metaphorically represented as health).

⁹⁸ Ibid., 487: “...tel jouisseur, tel cynique, peu à peu purifié, poursuivit son effort d’exhaussement jusqu’à la sainteté.”

with humanism and a “natural law” approach to human rights. Both men placed defense of the inherent dignity of the human being at the core of the spiritual project of the Resistance: to resist, as Alban-Vistel put it, was to enter into France’s long universalizing tradition of affirming “the total, the essential dignity of the human.”⁹⁹

This discourse, despite its heavy symbolic reliance on images of Christ, the crucifixion, and the Communion of Saints, and despite Emmanuel’s and Alban-Vistel’s own religious commitments, was readily open to secularizing appropriations that, with varying degrees of sophistication, aspired to substitute language of “moral” or “ethical” commitment to human dignity where Emmanuel and Alban-Vistel had referenced spiritual commitment. The same purpose was accomplished: partisan “politics” was disowned, and with it the Resistance’s use of violence. Thus, for instance, in 1951 Jean Bloch-Michel insisted that although *collaboration* had been a “political act,” *resistance* was “a moral revolt.”¹⁰⁰ In 1952 Jean Cassou, having recently broken off his “fellow traveler” relationship to the PCF, described the Resistance as “in the domain of pure morality, an act of conscience, isolated, raw, without impact.”¹⁰¹ According to Cassou, the Communist Party – and the Communist Party alone – had tragically contaminated this moral revolt with “*la politique*.” Quoting another Catholic (Charles Peguy, in the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair) Cassou complained that all pure, morally-inspired “*mystique*” was fated to end in debased, partisan “*politique*.”¹⁰² Also in 1952, the secular Jew Roger Stéphane,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 482: “Et cette imprégnation mystérieuse est la résultante de toute l’histoire: celles des rois, des princes, du peuple entier, et cette histoire dit, par delà des moments de régression, d’obscurantisme, de guerres civiles, le geste des hommes pour affirmer dans la liberté et la tolérance, la totale, l’essentielle dignité humaine.”

¹⁰⁰ Jean Bloch-Michel, Editorial, *Contemporains* 4 (April 1951).

¹⁰¹ Jean Cassou, “La Résistance niée,” *Esprit* 188 (March 1952), 457: “La Résistance a été une révolte morale sans lendemain, elle reste du domaine de la morale pure, un fait de conscience, isolé, brut, sans portée...”

¹⁰² Ibid.: “Cette distinction que fait Bloch-Michel, et que je fais avec lui, entre un fait moral et un fait politique, est, si je ne me trompe, du même ordre que la fameuse distinction de Péguy entre mystique et

borrowing from a vocabulary of “witnessing” or “testimony” that had earlier been confined to Left Catholics and used in an explicitly religious sense (in the clandestine Resistance journal *Témoignage chrétien* [*Christian Testimony*], for example), asserted that the Resistance *as a whole* had been motivated by “the desire to bear witness.”¹⁰³

By a complex process of attack and defense, then, by the early 1950s a hysterical critique of the *épuration* as a partisan-inspired bloodbath, born on the neo-Pétainist right, had gained purchase in mainstream French political and intellectual discourse, provoking defensive responses from non-communist Left ex-resisters that deemphasized the “political” content and the violent means both of the *épuration* and, eventually, of the Resistance itself. This development was not simply driven by temporal distance and the cooling of passions: it owed a great deal to the ways in

politique. La Résistance fut un fait moral, rien de plus comme rien de moins, une prise de conscience, un choix, qu’il ne sied point de déprécier, mais dont nul ne saurait non plus prétendre se prévaloir à des fins de vanité ou de domination.”

¹⁰³ Roger Stéphane, *France-Observateur*, 28 August 1952. Camus’s *La Peste* [*The Plague*] (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) has also been read by Dori Laub and Shoshana Feldman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing* as an allegorical representation of Resistance-as-bearing-witness; Dominick LaCapra’s criticism of this reading as oversimplifying is apt, but nevertheless the work might be mentioned as another secularizing appropriation of the language of “witnessing” from this period – and another revision of the “essence” of Resistance as moral and even humanitarian as opposed to “political” or violent. (Could Rieux be the first “Doctor Without Borders”?) I explore these issues when we return to Camus in Chapter Five. See LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 75. With respect to translation, I should note here that Michael Barnard-Donjals and Richard Glazjer have suggested that an analytical distinction be drawn between “witnessing” and “testimony.” Their proposal for this conceptual distinction, though intriguing, is difficult to uphold when considering French texts, where the word “*témoigner*” is used interchangeably to mean “to witness,” “to bear witness,” and “to testify.” I am inclined to think that this linguistic fact reflects a real fluidity of concepts in the discourses I am analyzing, such that it is not *always* possible (though, of course, it sometimes is) to definitively assign the meaning of “witnessing” to certain uses of “*témoignage*” and “testifying” to others. I believe that this fluidity, in turn, reflects a tension between the categories of “victim” (he who can testify to his own suffering) and “witness” (he who can speak out about the suffering of others) in the texts I am examining here. The clandestine *Témoignage chrétien* is significant in this regard: some articles clearly use the language of “*témoignage*” to describe the activity of bearing witness to the suffering of others (“Nos *Cahiers* ne disent pas tant notre témoignage que le Témoignage de ceux qui, dans l’Allemagne nazie et dans les pays occupés, souffrent en leur chair et en leur âme pour la vérité et la justice”); other articles, meanwhile, entirely conflate the figures of the “*témoin*” and the “*martyr*” (“Être témoin et être martyr, c’est d’ailleurs primitivement la même chose”). See Barnard-Donjals and Glazjer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

which Cold War anti-communism reshaped the French political landscape. Intellectuals responded considerably less directly to these changed conditions, of course, than did politicians like Teitgen. But by 1952, Left Catholics and other non-communist intellectuals of the Left were producing discourses about the Resistance as a humanitarian project of bearing witness that were unmistakably different from any representation of resistance that had appeared in the immediate postwar period. Rather than celebrating the Resistance's potent, illegal use of force for noble revolutionary ends, these later texts highlighted *Nazi* violence, and portrayed the Resistance as a purely religious or ethical response to its inhumanity. Alban-Vistel's vision of the tormented but internally unbowed concentration camp inmate as the essential symbol of resistance marked a new reading of the war years – one in which victims of violence or witnesses to it (or both at once, as in the case of the concentration camp survivor testifying to his experience) as opposed to righteous, fierce aggressors took center stage.

CHAPTER FOUR – The David Rousset Affair: The Soviet Gulag and the Nazi Camp Survivor as Witness to Suffering, 1949-1953

In the last chapter, we saw that Catholic writers like those who contributed to *Esprit* began in the early Cold War period to reframe the French Resistance as a project of bearing witness to the suffering of victims, and thereby to move French conversations about violence into the terrain of ostensibly “apolitical” considerations of ethics. The most striking and, ultimately, the most significant example of this new type of discourse about violence and victimhood, however, came from a secular ex-Trotskyist named David Rousset. In late 1949, Rousset, who had survived as a political prisoner in Buchenwald and Neuengamme and subsequently authored two highly celebrated books on the Nazi camps, issued an “Appeal” to his fellow survivors to come together to investigate the existence of a “concentration camp universe” in the Soviet Union. Rousset insisted that he was motivated neither by anti-communism nor by any desire to intervene in Cold War geopolitics, but simply by the dictates of his own memory of abjection in the Nazi camps, according to which he could not stand by while fellow men met the same hideous fate. He elaborated a visceral language of bearing witness to extreme bodily suffering – of standing guard against limit-cases of incommensurable human debasement – with which to intervene on the world stage while asserting an “apolitical” attachment to human life.

Like the Abbé Desgranges in the previous chapter, Rousset focused on the common wretchedness of victims of “terror” – not on any structural or ideological similarities – to propound a thesis of “totalitarian” equivalence between Nazism and Soviet Communism. But Rousset was no Desgranges: he was a camp survivor and, moreover, unquestionably a member of the intellectual Left. His arguments thus implicitly challenged that intellectual Left to reorient itself around a minimalist ethical

commitment to saving “the human” from the most extreme forms of suffering rather than pursuing the revolutionary-utopian project of fighting to create a socialist society. Moreover, Rousset grounded the intellectual’s imperative to “engage” in *experience* – specifically, the experience of abjection that “we carry in our flesh” as embodied memory – rather than ideology or commitment to any philosophical set of values or principles.¹ Notably, unlike many other Cold Warriors, he never attacked the Soviet gulag in the name of “human rights.” Nor was Rousset interested in combating “injustice” in general. His intervention sent shock waves through the French intellectual community, prompting lengthy responses from Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the *Esprit* team, fellow camp survivors like Claude Bourdet, Louis Martin-Chauffier, and Robert Antelme, and a number of communist writers.

This latter group was vehement in denouncing Rousset’s project as “a new ideological basis for the mobilization of peoples to continue Hitler’s war” against the USSR.² In December 1949 Rousset sued for defamation regarding claims by the Communist Mauthausen survivor Pierre Daix in *Les Lettres françaises* that he had fabricated his evidence of the existence of forced labor in Soviet camps; a highly publicized trial followed in late 1950, which – to no one’s surprise – Rousset won. He meanwhile did proceed to form an international commission of Nazi camp survivors to investigate the Soviet camps – a commission that would go on to investigate abuses in the USSR, China, and the West as well for the better part of the decade.

¹ Déclaration de M. David Rousset, Stenotypie (Cabinet Bluet), fascicule 1, Cour d’Appel de Paris, 11ème chambre, Audience du 3 juin 1953. F Delta 1880/56/3/2, Fonds David Rousset, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre, France (hereafter Rousset BDIC): “...tant que nous portons dans notre chair le souvenir de ce que nous avons vécu...”

² Pierre Daix, “Pierre Daix, Matricule 59.807 à Mauthausen. Pourquoi M. David Rousset a-t-il inventé les camps soviétiques? Une campagne de préparation à la guerre,” *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 November 1949: “une nouvelle base idéologique de mobilisation des peuples pour continuer la guerre d’Hitler.”

The Rousset-*Lettres françaises* trial is sometimes mentioned in discussions of Cold War French communism and intellectual life, along with other *causes célèbres* like the superficially similar libel suit between Soviet defector Viktor Kravchenko and *Les Lettres françaises* that took place the previous year.³ Rousset is also frequently invoked in passing by critics who work on Sartre's relationship to communism or on his ethics, since his commentary on Rousset's "Appeal" provides striking evidence of his thinking at this juncture.⁴ More recently, certain scholars – notably, Tzvetan Todorov and Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison – have taken an interest in Rousset as a commendable or even heroic example of a Nazi camp survivor who succeeded in "universalizing" his own experience to subsequently speak out for others rather than remaining locked in a backward-glancing obsession with his own identity as a traumatized victim.⁵ This chapter takes none of these approaches and in particular seeks to avoid the latter, highly problematic one: I am concerned with exploring the argumentative logic that Rousset mobilized in his condemnation of the Soviet gulag – on the proper relationship between past and future, ethics and politics, victimhood and

³ For example, see the brief discussions in David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Postwar France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 63-72; Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1986), 184-185; and David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 182-183. Irwin Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1962* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983) does not mention the Rousset case as following the Kravchenko Affair (see 94-96). Tony Judt acknowledges that the Rousset trial was "significantly different" from the Kravchenko Affair, but treats both strictly in terms of their import for the Sartreian circle. See *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 112-115. A sustained treatment of the Rousset case is provided in Thomas Wieder, "David Rousset contre 'Les Lettres françaises,' 1949-1951: les anciens déportés des camps nazis et les intellectuels français face au Goulag" (Mémoire, IEP de Paris, 2001).

⁴ For example, see Ian H. Birchall, *Sartre Against Stalinism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 110; Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 110-111 and 150.

⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mémoire du mal, tentation du bien. Enquête sur le siècle* (Paris: Laffont, 2000), 161-172; Todorov, "Une éducation concentrationnaire," *Lignes 2* (May 2000): 71-81. Le Cour Grandmaison praises Rousset for placing forced labor rather than the extermination of the Jews at the heart of the concentration camp experience, thus rendering possible "universalizing" and politically mobilizing readings of the camps. See his "Sur l'Univers concentrationnaire," *Lignes 2* (May 2000): 26-46, esp. 41-42.

witnessing, “the human” and the violence that can be done to it – as an element of postwar French intellectual history, not in celebrating it as a “correct” or “exemplary” model of how other survivors, too, could and should have behaved.⁶

Specifically, I seek to demonstrate that Rousset’s attack on the gulag reframed the Cold War debate about violence through insisting that the experientially-grounded imperative to bear witness to victimization made all sordid partisan political considerations moot. It also offered a narrative of recent history that centered on the unarmed, unmanned, undone concentration camp inmate rather than the heroic Resistance fighter: the “lessons” of the World War II period, according to Rousset, called upon men to prevent any recurrence of Buchenwald, not to remake the world in a dramatically more just image through revolutionary violence. His “Appeal,” his defamation suit, and his subsequent tireless investigation of concentration camps worldwide did not gain him wide influence in intellectual circles: indeed, his overt criticism of the USSR left him largely friendless (particularly because he was not interested in having any “friends” who had collaborated under Vichy.) But he was hardly an irrelevant figure: France’s major leftist intellectuals and journals continued to engage with his arguments, even if only to disagree, and some towering figures in

⁶ Todorov’s celebration of Rousset’s putative avoidance of trauma (“he passed through the camp without being excessive damaged by it, and even benefited”), the supposed lack of traumatic affect in Rousset’s writings on the camps (“his books do not give off that anguished atmosphere that characterizes so many other narratives by former deportees”), and Rousset’s ability to transform his experience into a program for future-oriented “action” is unmistakably intended as a favorable comparison to those survivors who were driven by trauma to “remember, reiterate, brood over, or keep alive the past.” See *Mémoire du mal*, 171 and 167. In this chapter I hope to demonstrate some of the pitfalls in this reading of Rousset as a moral hero. See also the entry on “David Rousset” by Colin Davis in Lillian Kremer, *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia and Writers and Their Work* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1048-1052, which provides an interesting and more dispassionate consideration of the startling absence of trauma in Rousset’s two major works on the Nazi camps. On the more general problems inherent in setting up certain victims as “good” or “real” victims because of their “appropriate” response to trauma and their avoidance of an “excess” of memory (with this excess sometimes coded as a specifically Jewish response), see Carolyn J. Dean, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim After the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) and Carolyn J. Dean, “Recent French Discourses on Stalinism, Nazism, and ‘Exorbitant’ Jewish Memory,” *History and Memory* 18.1 (2006): 43-85.

the deportee community – Germaine Tillion, Louis Martin-Chauffier, Rémy Roure – joined his crusade.

Still more importantly, if Rousset’s positions put him on the margins of French left-leaning intellectual life in the 1950s, many of them nevertheless would become mainstream by the end of the century: the French Left now strongly identifies itself with a universalizing ethical commitment to bear witness to human suffering, and explicitly uses the language of “witnessing” to express this commitment. When Rousset himself died in 1997, for example, *L’Humanité*, the Communist daily that had once argued he was trying to start World War III on behalf of bloodthirsty Americans, offered him a long, respectful eulogy under the banner “Death of a Great Witness.”⁷ Historiography has placed this normative shift among French intellectuals – a movement “from revolution to ethics,” as intellectual historian Julian Bourg puts it in an overly sweeping formulation – considerably later than the Cold War period we examine in this dissertation. We have already seen that Bourg himself, for example, contrasts the “ethical turn” taken in post-1968 French thought with the relative lack of interest in ethical questions in the earlier postwar years.⁸ From another angle, Annette Wieviorka has argued that the contemporary “era of the witness,” which has recast “bearing witness” as the overwhelmingly normatively privileged response to violence, did not begin until the mid-1960s, in the wake of the Eichmann trial.⁹ Other historians

⁷ “David Rousset: mort d’un grand témoin,” *L’Humanité*, 15 December 1997.

⁸ Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007). I should note that I am not the only scholar to question Bourg’s periodization of French ethical thought: see the reviews by Rosemary Wakeman, Michael Scott Christofferson, and Jonathan Judaken of *From Revolution to Ethics* in *H-France Forum* 4.3 (Fall 2009), No. 5: 57-60; 61-68; 73-77. See also Bourg’s response, 78-89. The introduction to Christofferson’s *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2004) also offers a thoughtful critique of the closely related dominant historiographical narrative according to which French anti-totalitarian or liberal politics only came into being after 1968 and, especially, 1974.

⁹ Annette Wieviorka, *L’Ère du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998), 81-86. Wieviorka is primarily concerned with Holocaust memory. But other discourses of “bearing witness” can offer relevant context for the

have treated 1974, which saw the publication in French of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, as a massive fault line in the history of the intellectual left, which, at last disillusioned with the USSR, rejected political violence and embraced "humanitarian" enterprises such as Médecins sans frontières (founded in 1978), human rights campaigns, and "witnessing."¹⁰ Considering Rousset's role in postwar intellectual history substantially complicates such neat periodization – and, concomitantly, calls into question any sharp line we may wish to draw between "political" and "ethical" approaches to violence. Let us examine the extraordinarily politically charged circumstances in which Rousset first offered his putatively "apolitical" intervention in the Cold War.

David Rousset was born in 1912 in Roanne, to a religiously observant Protestant family of modest means. When his father's bicycle business failed, the family moved to Paris and his father took a job as a metalworker at Citroën; the young adult David found that he preferred Gide to his parents' beloved Bible and eventually took courses in philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne. As a student in the tumultuous early 1930s, he quickly became politically engaged, joining first SFIO and then the tiny Trotskyist movement, populated by men like Pierre Naville, Yvan Craipeau, and Gérard Rosenthal.¹¹ Following Trotsky's 1934 "*entrisme*" dictate that French Trotskyists should militate from within the Socialist party to create a "Front unique," the group assigned Rousset to organize the Seine section of the Socialist Youth while

history she traces, and in particular can throw light on the timing of what Wieviorka labels the "advent of the witness" around the time of the Eichmann trial in 1961.

¹⁰ For an overview and critique of this historiographical trope of a 1974 "awakening," see Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, 89-92.

¹¹ Further biographical detail on Rousset's early years can be found in David Rousset and Émile Copfermann, *David Rousset: Une Vie dans le siècle, fragments d'autobiographie* (Paris: Plon, 1991).

keeping his Trotskyist loyalties under cover.¹² He and the other Trotskyists were, however, expelled from the SFIO at the July 1935 Party congress, as the Socialist leadership cleared the way for a “popular front” alliance with the PCF. An independent Trotskyist party, the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste (POI), was founded in July of 1936; Rousset became a founding member of the Political Bureau and was assigned to work on colonial questions, a task that put him in regular contact with North African nationalist leader Messali Hadj. He also participated in the subsequent founding of the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1939: he held down occasional teaching and freelance writing jobs to make a living but was essentially a fulltime (if unpaid) party militant.

When France fell, Rousset entered into resistance along with his comrades almost as a matter of course. In the POI newsletter’s first clandestine issue under the Occupation, on August 31, 1940, the group proclaimed “Neither Pétain Nor Hitler, A Worker and Peasant Government.”¹³ The Trotskyists chose to focus their energies on attempting to foment dissent and desertion among members of the German occupying forces. Rousset, who had been charged with surreptitiously collecting information for his comrades on the German economy and German public opinion, was arrested by the Gestapo at the same moment as several other POI leaders on October 12, 1943. He was held in Fresnes prison near Paris, which he would later describe as “paradise” compared to the camps, until January, 1944.¹⁴ He then passed the next fifteen months in Nazi concentration camps and satellite camps in Germany, including first

¹² On French Trotskyism in the 1930s, see Frédéric Charpier, *Histoire de l'extrême gauche trotskiste. De 1929 à nos jours* (Paris : Éditions n°1, 2002) ; Gilles Vergnon, “Le mouvement trotskiste et la culture de guerre,” in *Cultures communistes au XXe siècle. Entre guerre et modernité*, eds. Jean Vigneux and Serge Wolikow (Paris : La Dispute, 2003), 96-99 ; Daniel Bensaïd, *Les Trotskysmes* (Paris: PUF, 2002); Jean-Jacques Marie, *Le Trotskysme et les trotskystes* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2002).

¹³ Rousset and Copfermann, *Une Vie dans le siècle*, 56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

Buchenwald and later Porta Westfalica, Helmstedt, and finally Neuengamme. He survived, and returned to France in May 1945; as he convalesced, he began work on a series of articles on his experience in the camps for Maurice Nadeau's newly founded *Revue internationale*, articles that would be republished in 1946 as the slim Renaudot prize-winning book *L'Univers concentrationnaire*. The book's title subsequently became common currency in France for describing the "world" of the camps. In 1947, he published a much longer "novel" about the camps, *Les Jours de notre mort*.¹⁵ Both books received a magnificent reception from nearly all quarters (including the Communists) and brought Rousset into more lofty intellectual circles than those in which he had moved prewar: Sartre and Merleau-Ponty became friends and occasional collaborators. Excerpts from *Les Jours de notre mort* appeared in preview in *Les Temps modernes*, along with various other pieces by Rousset; Sartre also interviewed him for the short-lived *Temps modernes* radio program.¹⁶ Rousset gave press conferences, speeches, and lectures, commanding immense respect despite – or perhaps in part because of – his devastated physical appearance: one admiring report exclaimed, "Stocky, powerful, a black patch on his left eye, his teeth ravaged but without it affecting his pronunciation, he speaks with authority – and what authority!"

¹⁵ *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Pavois, 1946); *Les Jours de notre mort* (Paris: Pavois, 1947). The titles of these books translate roughly as *The Concentration Camp Universe* (there is no elegant English equivalent for the adjective *concentrationnaire*) and *The Days of Our Death*. The two different English-language translations of *L'Univers concentrationnaire* are, however, actually titled *The Other Kingdom*, transl. Ramon Guthrie (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947) and *A World Apart*, transl. Yvonne Moysé and Roger Senhouse (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951). *Les Jours de notre mort* has not been translated into English.

¹⁶ The "fragments" of *Les Jours de notre mort* appeared in *Les Temps modernes* 6 (March 1946): 1015-1044 and *Les Temps modernes* 7 (April 1946): 1231-1261. Other pieces by Rousset in the journal included "La signification de l'affaire Dotkins-Hessel," *Les Temps modernes* 6 (March 1946): 1084-1088; "Humour noir," *Les Temps modernes* 32 (May 1948): 2092-2100 (this was a collection of Nazi documents similar to those Rousset published in *Le Pitre ne rit pas*); the excerpt "Nos positions politiques (interview publiée dans *Le Semeur*)," *Les Temps modernes* 34 (July 1948): 189-191; and an 18 June 1948 interview between Sartre and Rousset, "Entretien sur la politique," *Les Temps modernes* 36 (September 1948): 385-428. The radio interview never aired, because the *Temps modernes* show was cancelled before its scheduled date; a transcript of the interview can be read in *Une vie dans le siècle*, 89-97.

That of a survivor.”¹⁷ Rousset would long be viewed in France as having provided the single most important literary representation of the camps: many regarded *L’Univers concentrationnaire* and, especially, *Les Jours de notre mort* as masterpieces. Rousset was granted the status, in the words of his friend Gérard Rosenthal, of “a witness among witnesses.”¹⁸

To understand the grounding for Rousset’s later attack on the “concentration camp universe” in the Soviet Union, it is important to be familiar with his representation of the Nazi camp experience in *L’Univers concentrationnaire* and *Les Jours de notre mort*. Rousset depicted the camp as an obscene, Ubuesque, Kafkaesque world of absurdity, where mechanisms of terror and suffering aimed deliberately to render inmates abject: intense bodily suffering, an atmosphere of constant fear and loathing, unending physical exhaustion, degradation that relentlessly stripped away human dignity and civilized norms, life reduced to biological processes – all of this produced the “the total dissolution of the individual,” not merely his physical death.¹⁹ Rousset’s account was, however, essentially a political and sociological one, which ultimately had little to say about the traumatizing effects of imprisonment on the

¹⁷ Bertrand D’Astorg, “Réflexions d’un survivant,” *Esprit* 139 (November 1947), 691: “Trappu, puissant, un bandeau noir sur l’oeil gauche, la dentition ravagée mais sans qu’elle nuise à la prononciation, il parle d’autorité: et quelle autorité! Celle d’un survivant.” Rousset’s heft – he returned from Neuengamme weighing 114 pounds but in this respect recovered quickly – was later mocked by his Communist opponents and, indeed, sometimes invoked to suggest that he had somehow betrayed his identity as a survivor.

¹⁸ Déclaration de M. Gérard Rosenthal, Stenotypie (Cabinet Bluet), fascicule 4, Cour d’Appel de Paris, 11ème chambre, Audience du 10 juin 1953. F Delta 1880/56/3/2, Rousset BDIC: “témoin entre les témoins.” On the major influence of Rousset’s narrative on the postwar French understanding of the Nazi camps, see Samuel Moyn, “From *l’Univers Concentrationnaire* to the Jewish Genocide: Pierre Vidal-Naquet and the Treblinka Controversy,” in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. Julian Bourg (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 277-324; Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), esp. 52-57; Annette Wieworka, “L’Expression ‘camp de concentration’ au 20e siècle,” *Vingtième Siècle* 54 (April-June 1997), 4-12; Wieworka, *Déportation et genocide. Entre la mémoire et l’oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992), 182 and 285-286.

¹⁹ Rousset, *L’univers concentrationnaire*, 109: “cette désagrégation totale de l’individu qui est l’expression la plus totale de l’expiation.”

individual subject. He instead laid great emphasis on the complicated, life-and-death internal hierarchies of camp life among common criminals and various sorts of “political;” his analysis of camp society, with its “aristocrats” and “plebes,” its national groups and political parties, devoted much attention to explicating prisoners’ own implication in the brutality of the camps. Rousset’s portrait of camp society was heavily influenced by Marxist and Gramscian concepts: not only did he analyze relations among prisoners and guards in terms of “class,” but he accounted for the very existence of the camps as a product of the disintegration of a late-stage capitalist world in crisis. He therefore emphasized forced labor unto death, not gas chamber extermination, as the single most paradigmatic feature of Nazi evil.

Rousset was aware of and indeed quite vocal about the genocide of the Jews – in 1948, with the aid of the archives and staff of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, he put together an edited volume, with commentary, on Nazi anti-Semitism and the Final Solution.²⁰ Nevertheless (like the majority of non-Jewish French survivors at the time), he simply did not perceive Jewish victimhood as constituting the essence of the Nazi project, insisting the difference between extermination camps and concentration camps had been “not one of nature but only of degree.”²¹ The representative inmates, for him, would always be anti-fascist political prisoners engaged in forced labor, those who “became slaves of the SS uniquely because of their convictions and their commitment to them. *Voilà* the new fact, historically speaking, whose sociological importance is considerable and which introduces into modern history a new procedure of dehumanization.”²² Although

²⁰ Rousset, *Le Pitre ne rit pas* (Paris: Pavois, 1948).

²¹ *L’Univers concentrationnaire*, 51: “Entre ces camps de destruction et les camps ‘normaux,’ il n’y a pas de différence de nature, mais seulement de degré.” See Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy*, for an extended discussion of this issue.

²² Rousset, “Le sens de notre combat,” in Paul Barton [pseud.], *L’Institution Concentrationnaire en Russie (1930-1957)* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 15: “ces travailleurs forcés étaient exclusivement composés, ou

Rousset's elision of the particularity and extremity of Jewish suffering was entirely common at this historical juncture, it was not incidental to his reading of the camps, and should not be dismissed merely a "product of his times."²³ Rather, this elision was essential to his intellectual project: it permitted him to situate Nazi violence as a new but historically intelligible development in a human history driven by class struggle, to paint anti-fascist "politicals" such as himself as Hitler's primary victims, and to locate universalizable "lessons" in his experience. His understanding of the Nazi camps as defined, in their essence, by politically-motivated imprisonment and forced labor, not by the genocide of Europe's Jews, would be precisely what later made possible his "totalitarian" interpretation of twentieth-century history and his condemnation of the gulag.²⁴

du moins représentaient dans la très grande majorité des cas, des hommes considérés par le régime nazi comme des adversaires politiques arrêtés pour leurs opinions et devenus ainsi esclaves de la SS uniquement en raison de leurs convictions et de l'attachement qu'ils leur portaient. Voilà le fait nouveau, historiquement parlant, dont l'importance sociologique est considérable et qui a introduit dans l'histoire moderne une nouvelle procédure de déshumanisation."

²³ It is important to stress that it was not in any way a controversial perspective: there were almost no voices in mainstream French discourse that placed extermination and genocide at the heart of the Nazi project. Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison is thus mistaken to treat Rousset's emphasis on forced labor by political prisoners as a valiantly minority view, writing that "he was not understood on this point, even if he was read...Neither [Robert Antelme] nor the author of *l'Univers concentrationnaire* were, on this question in particular, heard at the Liberation" (41). Le Cour Grandmaison blames French readers' supposed "incapacity or refusal to think about this *travail-déstruction*" on "a vaster political strategy: to forbid all comparison between the Nazi and Soviet camps and, beyond that, to prevent all comparison between the two regimes." These claims are problematic on a number of levels. First, Le Cour Grandmaison (despite insisting that his goal is not "to banalize the destruction of Jews in the gas chambers") appears to be suggesting that those who foreground the Holocaust in discussing the Nazi regime somehow thereby deliberately deny the suffering occasioned by the gulag. (In the course of making this argument, he also insists that death-by-labor in the Nazi concentration camps was "less spectacular than the gas chambers, but just as effective," an argument that cannot stand up to an examination of comparative death rates [31].) Moreover, these claims also misrepresent the history of French *perception* of Rousset's work in particular and of the Nazi crime in general. Rousset's perspective was indeed "understood": it was the overwhelmingly *dominant* one in postwar France, and it was not until much later that the French came to see Jewish victimhood as unique or defining. For a critical analysis of similar claims that an excess of "Jewish" memory interferes with recognizing other forms of suffering, see Dean, *Aversion and Erasure*; Dean, "Recent French Discourses on Stalinism, Nazism, and 'Exorbitant' Jewish Memory."

²⁴ Samuel Moyn has thus pointed out, against Todorov's celebration of Rousset's "correct" relationship to past trauma as guide for future behavior, that inspirational as Rousset's "universalism" may be, it

Rousset's portrayal of the camps was notable in that he insisted on locating redeemable, recoverable meaning or value in what survivors had undergone, and focused much attention on the "lessons" about humanity that he and other deportees had learned. In this sense, despite the disjointed modernist style of *L'Univers concentrationnaire* and *Les Jours de notre mort*, Rousset's account of the camps was more conventional than much survivor literature: by insisting that one could recuperate transmissible meaning and useful lessons from the suffering one had undergone in a place like Buchenwald, Rousset placed the camps in an intelligible and, indeed, a traditional narrative of heroic sacrifice.²⁵ The camps, whatever their horrors, functioned for him as a site of *bildung*, in which men had gained access to "truths" which would continue to serve them well once the suffering was over. Survivors, he wrote, possessed otherwise inaccessible knowledge of human nature because in the hell of Buchenwald and Neuengamme human beings had been stripped down to their unvarnished essentials. Those who had lived were now "set apart from others by an experience impossible to communicate;"²⁶ they alone now possessed a "dynamic awareness of the power and beauty of the sheer fact of living, in itself, brutal, entirely stripped of all superstructures."²⁷ Moreover, unlike "normal men," they

involved significant distortions of historical truth, most importantly by eliding the particularity of Jewish victimization (*The Treblinka Affair*, 167).

²⁵ This is precisely the ground on which Todorov praises Rousset as a moral hero in *Mémoire du mal* and "Une éducation concentrationnaire," implicitly criticizing survivor testimony that fails or refuses to find recuperable "meaning" and "lessons" in Auschwitz.

²⁶ *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 182: "Ils sont séparés des autres par une expérience impossible à transmettre." Some critics have made a great deal of Rousset's reference here to incommunicability, and of his claim that he wrote *Les Jours de notre mort* as a novel rather than as nonfiction "out of distrust of words" (*Les Jours de notre mort*, [11]). I think these turns of phrase on his part are better understood as commonplaces or clichés, as indeed they already were in the mid-to-late 1940s: Rousset was never overly troubled by the problems involved in attempting to represent trauma in ordinary language, and indeed neither trauma nor language were issues that interested him greatly.

²⁷ *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 184: "Prise de conscience dynamique de la puissance et de la beauté du fait de vivre, en soi, brutal, entièrement dépouillé de toutes les superstructures, de vivre même à travers des pires effondrements ou des plus graves reculs."

now understood, with heavy hearts, that “everything is possible.”²⁸ Indeed, Rousset was adamant that the truths about human nature that had been revealed to him in the camps made it obvious that “it would be a deception – and a criminal one – to believe that, for reasons of natural opposition, it would be impossible for other peoples to try a similar experiment...Under a new guise, similar effects could reappear tomorrow.”²⁹ This last belief would condition Rousset’s choices for the following half century.

Probably by 1947 and certainly by the final years of the 1940s, Rousset appears to have been aware of the possible existence of a “similar effect” – a constellation of forced labor camps – in the USSR.³⁰ This would have required no great digging on his part: as historian Pierre Rigoulot has documented, reports of Soviet repression had been flowing into France since as early as 1919.³¹ Some interventions occurred directly within French leftist circles: Soviet defector Victor

²⁸ Ibid., 181: “Les hommes normaux ne savent pas que tout est possible.”

²⁹ Ibid., 186-187: “Ce serait une duperie, et criminelle, que de prétendre qu’il est impossible aux autres peuples de faire une expérience analogue pour des raisons d’opposition de nature... Sous une figuration nouvelle, des effets analogues peuvent demain encore apparaître.” Sam Moyn sees this insistence on Rousset’s part as a precursor to contemporary radical political theory, notably that of Giorgio Agamben: Moyn calls Agamben “Rousset’s most significant if unwitting disciple today.” He thereby glosses over a fundamental difference between Rousset’s assertion that “concentration camps,” wherever they exist, are the same sort of thing (and that, now that they have been invented, they will always remain a possibility) and Agamben’s assertion that Auschwitz is “everywhere”: these may both be “universalizing” appropriations of the Nazi project but they otherwise do not resemble one another. Rousset rejected any formulation that even vaguely endorsed the idea that Auschwitz was “everywhere”: indeed he insisted that drawing analogies between the forms of injustice, violence, state control, and suffering present in late capitalist society and the Nazi camps or the Soviet gulag was a dangerous conflation of what was, to his mind, the single most essential distinction in the post-1944 world. His crusade against “the camps” was not in any sense metaphorical and was not an element of a radical postapocalyptic critique of modernity. See Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy*, 160. An eagerness to see Agamben *avant-la-lettre* also produces a misreading of Rousset in Alain Brossat, “Le peuple nu,” *Lignes* 2 (May 2000):13-25, in which Brossat ignores the entire sociological, intensely hierarchical dimension to Rousset’s depiction of camp society and insists that Rousset shows us an undifferentiated “*peuple-masse*.” Brossat might appear to be approaching Rousset through Georges Bataille’s reading of him, which strongly reflected Bataille’s own greater interest in themes of abjection and limit-transgression than in Rousset’s other topics. See Georges Bataille, “Réflexions sur le bourreau et la victime,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol.11: 262-267, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg as “Reflections on the Executioner and the Victim” in *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), 15-19.

³⁰ See D’Astorg, “Réflexions d’un survivant,” 695.

³¹ Pierre Rigoulot, *Les Paupières lourdes, Les Français face au goulag: aveuglements et indignations* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1991), 11-18.

Serge began publishing on Soviet forced labor in venues like *Esprit* in 1937, Camus insisted on the existence of Soviet concentration camps in *La Gauche* in 1948, and the topic had even been broached in the pages of *Les Temps modernes*, though largely in terms of whether the USSR's economy might be partially dependent on penal labor.³² Perhaps most importantly, in 1947, *I Chose Freedom*, a sensationally damning account of the entire Soviet system (not only or primarily the camps) by a defector to America named Victor Kravchenko, was translated into French as *J'ai choisi la liberté*. The book, an immediate best-seller, was attacked by PCF intellectual André Wurmser (writing under the name Sim Thomas) in *Les Lettres françaises*; Wurmser charged that Kravchenko was a fascist traitor to the land of socialism and that the book had actually been written by American Secret Service agents. It was nothing but a propagandistic collection of anti-Soviet lies, Wurmser wrote, "entirely falsified at the core."³³ Kravchenko sued *Les Lettres françaises* for defamation, and in the two-month trial that followed (Kravchenko eventually won), a remarkable cast of pro- and anti-Soviet witnesses appeared, including some who testified to the existence of a Soviet concentration camp archipelago.³⁴ With his pomposity and persistent "haut

³² See Victor Serge, *Destin d'une Révolution: U.R.S.S. 1917-1936* (Paris: Grasset, 1937); Albert Camus, "Réponses à Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie," reprinted in *Actuelles: Écrits politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950); Victor Serge (posthumous), "Pages de journal," *Les Temps modernes* 44 (June 1949): 973-993 and 45 (July 1949): 71-96 and Claude Lefort, "Kravchenko et le problème de l'URSS," *Les Temps modernes* 29 (February 1948): 1490-1516. Other important voices included those of Boris Souvarine and Arthur Koestler. See Rigoulot, *Paupières Lourdes*, 36, 40-41 and 56-57.

³³ Reproduced in *Le Procès Kravchenko contre les Lettres françaises: Compte rendu des audiences d'après la sténographie* (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1949), 4: "entièrement faussé à la base." On the Kravchenko case, see Guillaume Malaurie and Emmanuel Terrée, *L'Affaire Kravchenko* (Paris: Laffont, 1982); and Jean-Pierre Rioux, "Le procès Kravchenko," in *Staline à Paris*, eds. Natacha Dioujeva and François George (Paris: Ramsay, 1982): 148-169.

³⁴ See *Le Procès Kravchenko*, 701-703, for the lengthy list of witnesses. On the question of the camps, the testimony of Margaret Buber-Neumann was particularly important: see 550-565. Historical interpretations of who "won" the Kravchenko case not in legal terms but as a battle of propaganda have been curiously varied: while Judt writes that "the impression left was of a Communist moral victory," Irwin Wall claims that "the Kravchenko trial attracted widespread publicity, widened the gap between Communists and other Frenchmen, and symbolized eloquently the PCF's absolute isolation. The PCF's ghetto was now intellectual as well as political and social." See Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 113; Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin*, 96.

fonctionnaire” mannerisms, Kravchenko was relatively easy for French leftists to dismiss as a dupe of the Americans. In a short piece in *Esprit*, Albert Béguin noted wryly that that whole case had played out “like a parody...of the great Russian-American confrontation,” and called it a “comedy” from start to finish.³⁵ In an article in *Les Temps modernes* on “The Kravchenko Trial,” Jean Pouillon insisted that “we do not really know what is happening in the USSR.”³⁶ Nevertheless, the issue of the gulag had been raised.

Rousset’s dramatic intervention in this debate in late 1949 was the product of a long political and intellectual progression for him. After breaking with the Trotskyists in 1947 he did not shed his hostility to the French Communist Party or the Stalinist Soviet Union. Indeed, from 1948 onward he began to refer pointedly and often to “forced labor” in the USSR. After the Communist takeover in Prague in 1948, he and *Franc Tireur* journalist Georges Altman helped to found a “movement” called the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR), intended not as a party but as a supra-party “assembly of free men for revolutionary democracy” that rejected alignment with either the US or the USSR.³⁷ With the vocal support of Sartre, as well as the involvement of other luminaries like Camus, Claude Bourdet, and members of the *Esprit* team, the RDR and its journal *La Gauche (The Left)* elicited real excitement among certain segments of the intellectual left, from non-communist syndicalists to

³⁵ Albert Béguin, “La bonne affaire Kravchenko,” *Esprit* 155 (May 1949), 699: “Les interminables audiences du procès Kravchenko se sont déroulées dans une atmosphère de scandale, de révélations tragique et de bouffonnerie judiciaire qui en firent comme une parodie, sur les tréteaux de la foire, du grand affrontement russo-américain. Béguin did except the testimony of Margaret Buber-Neumann from this assessment: when she spoke, he wrote, “la comédie s’est interrompue.”

³⁶ Jean Pouillon, “Le procès Kravchenko,” *Les Temps modernes* 43 (May 1949), 955: “Sans toujours s’en apercevoir, communistes, non-communistes, anticommunistes s’accordent tous sur ce point: on ne sait pas ce qui se passe au juste en Russie.”

³⁷ “Appel du RDR,” *Franc-Tireur*, 27 February 1948. This appeal would also be reproduced in other venues, including *Esprit* and *Les Temps modernes*.

progressive Catholics.³⁸ Rousset drafted the group's program statement, inviting "all the dynamic elements of this country, from whatever political horizon they might come" to engage in a new battle modeled on the Resistance: "The Rassemblement takes up the tradition of a community of struggle that was tested under the Occupation. It takes it up precisely on a terrain of combat."³⁹ The challenge was to locate a revolutionary path that would lead France out of "the current capitalist barbarism" without taking the side of the Soviet Union, where the existence of forced labor demonstrated conclusively that men could remake relations of production and yet retain "forms of exploitation often more ferocious than those of capitalism."⁴⁰

Rousset threw himself passionately into the work of the RDR, briefly believing – as did Sartre – that it really might provide a way to be a revolutionary without being a Stalinist.⁴¹ In the pages of *La Gauche*, at public meetings, and in *Entretiens sur la politique*, a 1949 published volume of rambling conversations between him, Gérard Rosenthal, and Sartre, Rousset took militantly pro-worker positions: he supported the 1948 miners' strike "without reserves" despite the PCF's involvement, for instance.⁴²

³⁸ The original "comité d'initiative" included Rousset, Sartre, Altman, Paul Fraisse (of *Esprit*), Daniel Bénédict, Charles Ronsac, Jean Ferniot, Bernard Lefort, Roger Stéphane, four parliamentarians, and six representatives of workers and unions. Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia provides an overview of the group's founding and its short-lived existence in *Histoire politique des intellectuels en France (1944-1954)*, vol. 2, *Le temps de l'engagement* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1991), 110-116.

³⁹ David Rousset, "Notre programme," *La Gauche* 1 (15-30 May 1948): "Le Rassemblement reprend la tradition de communauté de lutte éprouvée sous l'occupation. Il le reprend précisément sur un terrain de combat."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: "Aucun d'entre nous ne croit que l'humanité n'a plus d'autre avenir que la barbarie capitaliste présente... La cruelle expérience de ces vingt dernières années a montré que l'on peut modifier profondément les rapports de production dans un sens qui détruit la propriété privée sans détruire l'exploitation mais au contraire en développant des formes d'exploitation souvent plus féroces que celles du capitalisme."

⁴¹ On Sartre's involvement with, and short-lived high hopes for, the RDR see d'Appollonia, *Histoire politique des intellectuels*, 111-115 and Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 390-407.

⁴² Jean-Paul Sartre, David Rousset, and Gérard Rosenthal, *Entretiens sur la politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949); David Rousset, "D'abord, gagner la bataille," *La Gauche* 7 (October 1948). It is worth underlining, as d'Appollonia does, that despite the putative commitment to "revolution" and workers' demands on the part of the RDR's leadership, in reality the group was composed primarily of intellectual elites, not all of them socialists. She estimates that less than 30% of the organizations'

But increasingly he focused his attention on the failings of the Soviet bloc: in August, 1948, for example, he alluded to “concentration camps and forced labor” in the USSR, and in December of that year he threw down a direct challenge to his fellow deportees who remained in the PCF. “In the name of which political explanations,” he asked, could they excuse “the existence of concentration camps in the Soviet Union? ...One cannot construct a future of emancipation with tortured slaves from concentration camps!”⁴³ He began to use in his writing and speech the word “totalitarian” – one coded as anti-communist in late-1940s France, because it suggested that the Nazi and Soviet regimes could be conceptualized under the same rubric.⁴⁴ Rousset also increasingly expressed the RDR’s “socialism” in the language of sympathy or moral solidarity with all the oppressed and downtrodden rather than in Marxist terms: “Our morality,” he proclaimed in one article, “is to be on the side of slaves everywhere in the world” – including in the Soviet bloc.⁴⁵

This rhetoric, in itself, did not place Rousset beyond the pale in non-communist French intellectual circles of the late forties: he continued to share podiums and journal pages with figures like Sartre. Certainly, Rousset and those figures in the RDR ideologically closest to him (Rosenthal and Altman’s *Franc Tireur* team) never praised capitalism, renounced their “revolutionary” identity, or aligned themselves with the geopolitics of the US. Nevertheless, the growing Cold War

members came from the PCF or SFIO, and that 17% were working class. *Histoire politique des intellectuels*, 115.

⁴³ Rousset, “La révolution doit se réaliser dans la pratique démocratique des travailleurs manuels et intellectuels,” *La Gauche* 10 (December 1948): “Je leur dis: Comment pouvez-vous admettre, au nom de quelles explications politiques, l’existence des camps de concentration en Union Soviétique? ...On ne peut pas construire un avenir d’émancipation avec les esclaves torturés des camps de concentration!”

⁴⁴ For example, see *ibid.* Sartre, however, at this juncture, did the same: see “Il faut que nous menions cette lutte en commun,” *La Gauche* 10 (December 1948).

⁴⁵ Rousset, “Pour pratiquer la démocratie révolutionnaire, il faut d’abord dénoncer les mensonges et rompre les silences,” *La Gauche* 3 (16-30 June 1948): “Notre moralité, c’est d’être partout dans le monde aux côtés d’esclaves...”

imperative to “choose sides” – combined with the defensive response of political parties that barred their members from joining the RDR – did eventually leech the organization’s strength, energy, and numbers, in the process swinging it rightward. After an American physicist who defended the use of nuclear deterrence was permitted to address the group’s public meeting in the December, 1948, Sartre and other influential figures jumped ship; the RDR collapsed shortly thereafter.

It was at this juncture, politically “homeless” and disillusioned with the non-communist Left’s timidity in criticizing the USSR, that Rousset published his famous “Appeal” to his fellow survivors. He did so not in the pages of a left-wing journal nor in a survivors’ group’s newsletter, but on the front page of Pierre Brisson’s conservative, pro-Atlantic Alliance *Le Figaro littéraire*. From this fact alone, it is tempting to conclude – as many did at the time – that Rousset had definitively abandoned the Left and thrown in his lot with the propagandists of the capitalist bloc in the Cold War. Certainly, other evidence points in this direction as well: most importantly, John Jenks’s study of the Cold War-era anti-Soviet propaganda service of the British Foreign Office reveals Rousset’s long-term association with the Office and the fact that he relied on it for all sorts of support, from locating witnesses for the court case and organizing press conferences to, later, clinching publication deals. Jenks makes plain the fact that Rousset’s attack on the gulag took part in a British-led attempt to draw attention to the evils of forced labor in the USSR so as to “draw unflattering comparisons between the Communists and the Nazis.”⁴⁶ Moreover, the evidentiary sources that Rousset drew upon in the “Appeal” to argue for the existence of camps in the USSR were provided by the British: Rousset’s personal friend Corley Smith, Britain’s counselor to the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council and an

⁴⁶ John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 138.

anti-gulag crusader, first alerted him to their existence. And later, during the *Lettres françaises* court case, Rousset directly appealed to the British for help – which was eagerly granted – in gathering documentation and witnesses.⁴⁷ He also had connections with AFL anti-communist labor organizers in France (notably Irving Brown, who was also a CIA agent) and in the period that the court case was unfolding, he joined the executive board of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a covertly CIA-funded international organization celebrating freedom of thought and expression.⁴⁸ Rousset must have been aware that the Congress was receiving CIA support (and thereby was in embarrassing contradiction to its own purported privileging of intellectual freedom from state interference).⁴⁹ Overall, it is perfectly fair to say that by the time the RDR collapsed in 1949, Rousset the ex-Trotskyist was sympathetic to the US in the emergent Cold War and eager to help embarrass the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, his intervention cannot simply be assimilated to the large body of French liberal and conservative anti-Soviet propaganda. To understand why, we must look closely at the language of the November 12, 1949 “Appeal.”⁵⁰

The piece was titled “Help the Deportees in the Soviet Camps. An Appeal to the Former Deportees of the Nazi Camps.” It was addressed to “former political deportees” and their major organizations, to “all those who, after having survived the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁸ On Rousset’s involvement with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, see Giles Scott Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Post-War American Hegemony* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 96-97 and 106; Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 6-7, 37.

⁴⁹ See Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 49; see also Frances Stonor Saunders’s exhaustive study, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

⁵⁰ David Rousset, “Au secours des déportés dans les camps soviétiques. Un appel de David Rousset aux anciens déportés des camps nazis,” *Le Figaro littéraire*, 12 November 1949. The “Appeal” can be found reproduced in full in Rousset and Copfermann, *Une Vie dans le siècle*, 198-209, as well as in *Lignes 2* (May 2000): 143-160.

concentration camp universe, bore witness to it [*en portèrent le témoignage*].”⁵¹ Louis Martin-Chauffier, Jean Cayrol, Agnès Humbert, Robert Antelme, Eugen Kogon, Rémy Roure, and Claude Bourdet were mentioned by name. Amassing a variety of evidence for the existence of forced labor camps in the USSR – he drew especially on the portion of the Soviet Labor Codex dealing with “corrective labor” – Rousset issued a resounding call to his fellow survivors in the first-person plural: together, they were responsible for investigating whether other men now suffered the horrors that they had once endured. Based on inmates’ common experience of bodily suffering and wretchedness, Rousset drew an unnuanced equation between the Nazi and Soviet camps, painting them as a single undifferentiated landscape of victimization.⁵² To know that he must bear witness to the gulag, Rousset insisted, a former deportee needed only to understand that the Soviet “*homme concentrationnaire*” was undergoing an experience of grinding, slow physical destruction just like “ours”:

He is hungry. All of the illnesses brought on by physiological misery work on his body. He is frightened. He lives in the same wooden barracks as us, or under a tent, or in earthen houses that are dark as caves. His destiny is enclosed by the same barbed wire, the same watch towers. He toils until well beyond the endurance of his muscles under the menace of dogs and guns. Like us, he wears squalid rags, like us he

⁵¹ Rousset’s “Appeal” was directed only to political/Resistance deportees – that is, to those for whom deportation now provided impeccable evidence of their anti-fascist credentials – but he did not disdain the support of “racial” deportees as well. In a letter he sent to Julius Margoline in Israel on 17 July 1950, he opined menacingly that the Jewish people and in particular Jewish survivors of the Nazi camps had an obligation to support his initiative since “they less than anyone can compromise with the concentration camp system...Such a compromise would be fatal for all of us, but above all, perhaps, for the Jewish people. I allow myself to add, because you and I understand one another on these questions, that such an attitude of ‘neutrality’ on the part of our Jewish friends would not only risk being utterly misunderstood, but could become – at least in today’s sick Europe – an argument in favor of anti-Semitism. I am among those who have always fought to affirm their solidarity with persecuted Jews, but who demands today that there be this complete solidarity among former victims, Jewish or not...” BDIC, DRP, F Delta 1880/56/1/2.

⁵² He did occasionally point out differences between the two – but only as evidence that the testimonies he produced about the gulag were not (as Communist critics charged) simply deviously retitled pieces by Nazi camp survivors. Cf. Buber-Neumann, “Qui est pire, Satan ou Belzébuth?” *Le Figaro littéraire*, 25 February 1950.

has neither the means nor the time to wash. He wakes up – he, too – before daybreak, and in the evening, upon the exhausted return of the work brigade, he gets in line, an endless line, at the entrance of a hospital without any medicine... I tell you that I am summing up literally hundreds of reports, and that there exist thousands of them.⁵³

Based on this similitude of day-to-day sensory suffering, this universalizing vision of the human body disintegrated and humiliated by “the camp,” be it in Poland or Siberia, Rousset obstinately, explicitly dismissed the notion that the Soviet camps were different from the Nazi ones because they had different *ends*: “For the inmates, this difference is empty [*vaine*], because the same living conditions drive them unavoidably to that particular death which was ours, the dirty and despairing death.”⁵⁴ According to the insistent language Rousset used in “Appeal” and in subsequent writings – language that heavily featured the word “*même*” (“same”) – the suffering of the Soviet victims was not merely *like* that of the Nazi camp survivors, but was collapsed into it, as an indistinguishable extension of that single entity, the “concentration camp universe.” Thus the helpless souls in the gulag did not only deserve French survivors’ sympathy but their unqualified identification. “We were that abandoned throng,” Rousset wrote, “that could do nothing to defend itself – that, tossed wholesale to the dogs, could only move faster, in a crazy fear. If I am to believe what they say, it is the same throng that haunts the Soviet camps.”⁵⁵ Rousset thus used

⁵³ Rousset, “Au secours des déportés” [202 in *Une Vie dans le siècle*]: “Il a faim. Toutes les maladies engendrées par la misère physiologique travaillent son corps. Il a peur. Il vit dans les mêmes baraques de bois que nous, ou sous la tente, ou dans des maisons de terre qui s’enfoncent comme des caves. Son destin s’enferme entre les mêmes barbelés, les mêmes miradors. Il peine jusque bien au-delà du pouvoir de ses muscles sous la menace des chiens et des fusils. Comme nous il porte des loques infâmes, comme nous il n’a ni les moyens ni le temps de se laver. Il se lève, lui aussi, avant le jour, et le soir, au retour épuisé des chantiers, il fera queue, une queue interminable, aux abords d’un hôpital sans médicaments... Je vous affirme que je résume littéralement des centaines de rapports, et il en existe des milliers.”

⁵⁴ Ibid. [207]: “pour les déportés, la différence est vaine puisque les mêmes conditions de vie conduisent inmanquablement à cette mort particulière qui fut la nôtre, la mort sordide et désespérée.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., [201]: “Mais nous avons été cette foule abandonnée qui ne peut rien préparer pour sa défense, qui ne peut, tout entière livrée aux chiens, que se précipiter dans la peur démente. Si j’en crois ce qu’on en dit, c’est la même foule qui hante les camps soviétiques.”

the common experience of suffering and terror (again, predicated on the erasure of any specifically Jewish victimhood) to produce an absolute equivalence between the Nazi and Soviet camps – and, by implication, Nazism and Stalinism *tout court*.

In Rousset's vision, the responsibility that the Nazi camp survivor possessed toward the Soviet camp inmate was boundless, and grounded not in abstract moral codes but in a remembered experience to which the survivor was forever called to bear witness. Rousset employed a quasi-sacralizing (and, we might say today, deliberately re-traumatizing) invocation of the shared memory of suffering and victimhood as he sought to awaken his fellow survivors' sense of responsibility: near the end of the "Appeal," for example, in a deeply unsettling paragraph, he demanded that his fellow survivors engage in a conscious, willful *act* of traumatic memory by imagining themselves once again in the Nazi camps. He wrote, "I would like each one of us to take himself back: imagine that we are, again, reunited on the large plaza of Buchenwald, under the lights and under the snow, to hear the orchestra and to wait to be counted." This terrifying exercise was intended, first of all, to persuade survivors that, in epistemological terms, they alone possessed the painful, embodied *knowledge* with which to evaluate the Soviet camps: "The others," Rousset wrote, "those who were never *concentrationnaires*, can plead poverty of imagination, incompetence. Us, we are the professionals, the specialists."⁵⁶ But, even more importantly, it was intended to force recognition of ethical responsibility through total identification with the suffering other, "the millions of men [who] are what we were yesterday."⁵⁷ "You know," Rousset told his fellow deportees, that the mounting evidence of Soviet

⁵⁶ Rousset, "Au secours des déportés" [208]: "Je voudrais que chacun d'entre nous se reprenne: imaginez que nous sommes, de nouveau, réunis sur la grande place de Buchenwald, sous les phares et sous la neige, à entendre l'orchestre et à attendre d'être comptés... Les autres, ceux qui ne furent jamais concentrationnaires, peuvent plaider la pauvreté de l'imagination, l'incompétence. Nous sommes, nous, des professionnels, des spécialistes."

⁵⁷ Ibid.: "aujourd'hui des millions d'hommes sont ce que nous avons été hier..."

prisoners' suffering "stalks you... Each paragraph of [the Soviet Labor Codex] forbids us from playing at Pontius Pilate."⁵⁸ To bear witness, eternally, was the duty and the "difficult privilege"⁵⁹ of yesterday's victims: "This is the price that we must pay for the surplus of life that we have been granted... Otherwise we no longer have any right to exist."⁶⁰

As Olivier Lalieu has shown, references to survivors' special duties ("*devoirs*") – duties directly born, paradoxically enough, from having already suffered so greatly – were a staple of late-forties discourse among former political prisoners.⁶¹ Like an insistence on "lessons" learned in the camps, the language of "*devoirs*" placed survivors' experience in an intelligible framework of meaningful sacrifice, of suffering that in the end had a higher purpose. Thus Rousset played into an existing set of tropes among former political deportees. His language may now strike us as troubling, even shocking, since it called deliberately on his fellow survivors' traumatic memory, in all its immediacy – and, moreover, played upon their guilt at having escaped alive when so many perished. But this did not render it unique at the time. Indeed, other former deportees with anti-communist sympathies had already voiced strikingly similar "appeals" to their comrades regarding their "duties" toward Soviet inmates.⁶²

Rousset's innovation lay elsewhere, in two senses.

⁵⁸ Ibid. [199]: "Vous savez bien que cette accumulation de témoignages vous traque... Et voilà que la législation soviétique elle-même ne vous offre pas de salut... Chaque paragraphe de ce code nous interdit de jouer les Ponce Pilate."

⁵⁹ Ibid. [208]: "notre privilège difficile."

⁶⁰ Ibid.: "C'est le prix que nous devons payer le surplus de vie qui nous a été accordé... Autrement nous n'avons plus aucun droit à exister."

⁶¹ Olivier Lalieu, *La Déportation fragmentée: les anciens déportés parlent de politique, 1945-1980* (Paris: Boutique de l'histoire, 1994), 32. See also Lalieu, "L'invention du 'devoir de mémoire,'" *Vingtème siècle* 69 (2001):83-94.

⁶² The Père Michel Riquet, for example, had raised the issue repeatedly within the Fédération Nationale des déportés et internés résistants et patriotes, of which he was a Vice-President, and had also commented on it in "À quelques inquiets," *La Croix*, 21 September 1948. It had also been discussed within the competing umbrella organization, the Fédération Nationale des déportés et internés de la Résistance, notably at the organization's March 1948 annual conference in Algiers. (I discuss these federations below.) The existence of this discourse within the survivors' organizations in 1948 tempers

First, he employed the discourse of “*devoirs*” in a widely disseminated general-readership periodical, not a circular to fellow survivors: his exclusive “audience” of Nazi camp survivors – the omnipresent “*nous*” in the text – was a rhetorical device, not a reality. The “Appeal” *performed* a call-to-arms of survivors, but in fact its language of common suffering was directed to a far broader audience. Rousset thus implicitly offered to general readers a narrative of recent history in which the Nazi camps and the forms of physical and psychic violence they had visited upon their victims constituted the overwhelmingly central event of the war years, the one from which “lessons” for the future could be gleaned. The camp inmate robbed of all human dignity, not the *maquis* fighter, was the towering symbol of the past; it was *his* past relationship to violence (as victim) that mattered, and his present relationship to it (as identificatory witness) that deserved emulation.

Second, Rousset made the real and symbolic violence done to the human subject in “the camps” the *sole* criterion for ethical engagement in the present: he insisted that the single, deliberately minimal imperative in a post-Buchenwald world was to prevent the recurrence of that particular limit-case of dehumanization. This was an imperative that existed both beyond politics as conventionally understood – ideological commitments were rendered irrelevant by the existence of concentration camps – and also beyond everyday ethics: he would not be speaking, Rousset explained, of “injustice in general, but of this precise injustice that we call *concentrationnaire*.”⁶³ This was because “the concentration camp” represented an incommensurable wrong, one that he later would call “the worst evil, which is

the heroicizing reading of Rousset by Todorov, who claims that “it was him, amongst all the former victims, who in 1949 engaged in political combat against the camps that still existed” (*Mémoire du mal*, 163).

⁶³ Rousset, “Au secours des déportés” [199]: “Nous ne parlons pas de l’injustice en général, mais de cette injustice précise qu’on nomme concentrationnaire.”

incomparable with other political evils that humanity can fear.”⁶⁴ From the perspective of the survivor-witness, the fact that concentration camps might still exist on the face of the earth made all other considerations superfluous: as Rousset would state during the *Lettres françaises* trial, “This experience of concentration camps became, for a certain number of men in Western Europe, the decisive experience. It is the criterion that is beyond all ideological or political criteria; it is the essential criterion. There where camps exist, there cannot be the least future for man...”⁶⁵ Rousset did not claim (as some of his followers would) that fighting the gulag would in fact help to create a socialist world more quickly, nor did he celebrate the perfect freedom possible in the capitalist bloc: he was happy to admit that the West was a “bad, mediocre world” full of injustices and sorrows.⁶⁶ But he professed to no further interest in addressing all the world’s woes. In place of fighting for a revolutionary utopia, he would fight to set one single, solitary boundary to human debasement: if his campaign succeeded, he wrote,

⁶⁴ Déclaration de M. David Rousset, Stenotypie (Cabinet Bluet), fascicule 1, Cour d’Appel de Paris, 11ème chambre, Audience du 3 juin 1953. F Delta 1880/56/3/2, Rousset BDIC: “Le plus grand mal, qui est incomparable avec les autres maux politiques que peut redouter l’humanité, c’est ce danger du monde concentrationnaire.”

⁶⁵ Stenotypie, “Audience Vendredi 1 décembre 1950, 17ème chambre correctionnelle,” 82. F Delta 1880/56/2/1, Rousset BDIC; reproduced in David Rousset, Théo Bernard, and Gérard Rosenthal, *Pour la vérité sur les camps concentrationnaires (Un procès antistalinien à Paris)* (Paris: Ramsey, 1990), 39. *Pour la vérité*, originally put out by Pavois in 1951, accurately reproduces the portions of the trial transcript that it contains, but does not include the entirety of the proceedings. I cite it, instead of the archival transcript, wherever possible. Rousset’s statement here would seem to mirror Hannah Arendt’s position that “the fear of concentration camps and the resulting insight into the nature of total domination might serve to invalidate all obsolete political distinctions from right to left and to introduce beside and above them the politically most important yardstick for judging events in our time, namely: whether they serve totalitarian domination or not.” Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1968), 442. Indeed, the renewed interest in Rousset among scholars like Le Cour Grandmaison is predicated on the fact that he served as an important source for Arendt. Rousset’s position, however, is different from Arendt’s, for it privileges the past *experience* of the survivors of the camps as the mobilizing factor, whereas Arendt quite explicitly insists that (future-oriented) *fear* on the part of the population at large instead must play this role: “the experiences themselves can communicate no more than nihilistic banalities,” she writes (442). Arendt thus rejects Rousset’s ethics of experience, despite sharing many of his assumptions about Nazi/Soviet similarities.

⁶⁶ Rousset et. al., *Pour la vérité*, 243-244: “monde mauvais, médiocre.”

“It will be established that in our society the only impassable frontier is this extreme limit, the refusal to allow the world of the camps.”⁶⁷ And this would be enough.

Rousset’s language of extreme suffering and total human debasement stood in sharp contrast to rights-centered discourses that were then being used against the USSR in liberal French anti-communist circles. During the Kravchenko trial the previous year, for example, centrist politician René Pleven had proclaimed, “This trial is not any longer that of Kravchenko against *Les Lettres françaises*, it is that of the Rights of Man against the Reason of State.”⁶⁸ The anti-communist “Amis de la Liberté” group (a loose organization that included figures like Pleven, Altman, Gabriel Marcel, Paul Claudel, Robert d’Harcourt, Claude Mauriac, Jules Monnerot, Jean Paulhan, and Remy Roure) asserted that the Soviet system constituted “the negation of the elementary, imprescriptible, sacred rights of the human person.”⁶⁹ In the pages of *Preuves*, a pro-Atlantic Alliance journal that operated with support from the Congress for Cultural Freedom, writer Denis de Rougemont minutely enumerated all of the rights that men enjoyed to the west of the Iron Curtain (“the right to circulate, to work, to strike...the right to applaud or to boo according to one’s taste, to listen to the radio station one prefers and to turn it off if one is bored, without being denounced by the neighbors...”) and that the Soviet bloc cruelly denied its peoples.⁷⁰ The late-forties

⁶⁷ David Rousset, “Les camps de concentration seront mis hors la loi,” *Le Figaro littéraire*, 4 March 1950: “Il est donc dit que les camps de concentration seront mis hors la loi; qu’il sera établi que dans notre société la seule frontière infranchissable est cette limite extrême, le refus d’admettre le monde des camps.”

⁶⁸ “Ce qu’ils pensent de l’affaire Kravchenko: René Pleven,” *Combat*, 4 March 1949: “Le procès n’est plus celui de Kravchenko contre ‘Les Lettres Françaises,’ c’est celui des Droits de l’Homme contre la Raison d’État.”

⁶⁹ Les Amis de la liberté, “Appel à ceux qui veulent rester libres,” 7 May 1951. Preserved in “Tracts de partis et organisations politiques diverses,” MFILM 4-LB60-364 (1) 1947-1955, Bibliothèque Nationale Française, Paris: “la négation des droits élémentaires, imprescriptibles et sacrés, de la personne humaine.”

⁷⁰ Denis de Rougemont, “Mesurons nos forces,” *Preuves* 2 (April 1951): “A des degrés divers, parfois jusqu’à l’excès, nous avons une multitude de droits: droit de circuler, de travailler, de faire la grève... le droit d’applaudir ou de siffler selon ses goûts, de prendre à la radio le poste qu’on préfère, et de le boucler si l’on s’ennuie, sans être dénoncé par les voisins...”

British propaganda campaign against the gulag also used the language of rights, charging the Soviets with using prisoners “as forced labor in conditions denying to them the basic human rights.”⁷¹ In contrast, Rousset, who published in all the same venues as writers like de Rougemont and directly collaborated with the British campaign, appears to have studiously avoided any use of the term “rights” in his condemnation of the gulag: he often referenced “the human” or “man,” but never as a rights-bearing entity, only as a figure capable of great suffering.⁷² In rejecting “rights talk,” Rousset avoided grounding his objection to the camps in republican universalism or any abstract system of values whatsoever, even one as seemingly intuitive as the natural law tradition. It was his own experience of suffering that went beyond the “extreme limit,” not reason, which produced the call to bear witness.⁷³

It is worth briefly underlining that Rousset’s language was not “humanitarian” (in the contemporary sense) any more than it was rights-based. He was uninterested in providing direct aid or palliative succor to the USSR’s victims; he did not propose “rescue” missions or medical care. Concentration camp prisoners were, for Rousset, political prisoners and were in no way analogous to victims of natural disasters or other misfortunes. The organization he sought to found would seek to expose the existence of camps, and would pressure governments to destroy them – it would, in other words, bear witness in the *name* of victims. It would not, itself, seek to alleviate their bodily pain. And if its actions proved to have no concrete effect on policy – well, then, it would *nevertheless* have fulfilled the imperative to bear witness. When questioned by skeptics at a November 15, 1949 press conference as to what real

⁷¹Parliamentary Undersecretary Christopher Mayhew addressing the UN Economic and Social Council in October 1948, cited in Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media*, 137.

⁷²In rare instances, later in the 1950s, he also did refer to humanity as possessed of certain inherent “freedoms.” For example, see Rousset, “Le sens de notre combat,” 26.

⁷³“Les camps de concentration seront mis hors la loi.”

service he hoped to offer to inmates of the gulag with his “Appeal,” he insisted that “our simple appearance here today is already a help...For me, a former deportee, this thought – that, despite everything, over there [in the gulag], they will at some point know that in Paris someone spoke for them – is important.”⁷⁴

For anti-communist readers of the “Appeal,” perhaps the most compelling thing the text offered was a lofty, “ethical” justification for intervening in Cold War politics and equating Stalinism with Nazism while simultaneously disavowing any interest or involvement in “the political.” Rousset’s terms of condemnation of the USSR provided a rhetoric that not only avoided “political” attacks but putatively rose above them, to a higher plane of concerns. Léon Blum, the aging figurehead of the Socialists, was one of many who celebrated Rousset’s “Appeal” for its disinterestedness: “The action of David Rousset and the men who have responded to his appeal is situated outside of the parties and, in a sense, above them ... At the origin of David Rousset’s initiative, there is not and there never has been any political machination. There is simply the revolt of those who were the victims, the sufferers [*les patients*], the witnesses of the Hitlerian abomination, who cannot tolerate the idea that it could go on in other places, or under other names.”⁷⁵ Rémy Roure, one of the survivors who most enthusiastically supported Rousset’s campaign, contrasted “the political plane” and “the human plane,” and insisted that the action Rousset was taking

⁷⁴ Transcript of “Conference de presse donnée par M. David Rousset mardi 15 novembre 1949.” F Delta 1880/53/2, Rousset BDIC: “Notre simple manifestation d’aujourd’hui est déjà une aide...Pour moi, ancien déporté, cette pensée que quand même, là-bas, on va savoir à un moment qu’à Paris on a parlé pour eux, c’est important.”

⁷⁵ “Quand les staliniens plaident coupable,” *Le Populaire*, 7 March 1950: “L’action de David Rousset et des hommes qui ont répondu à son appel se situe en dehors des partis et même, en un sens, au-dessus d’eux...À l’origine de l’initiative de David Rousset il n’y a pas, il n’y a jamais eu de la machination politique. Il y a tout simplement la révolte de ceux qui ont été les victimes, les patients, les témoins de l’abomination hitlérienne, et qui ne peuvent tolérer l’idée qu’elle puisse se prolonger dans d’autres lieux ou sous d’autres noms.”

was situated “*uniquement*” upon the latter.⁷⁶ Politics had no place here – indeed, as one of Rousset’s defenders claimed, lauding Rousset on the floor of the National Assembly, “it would be criminal to use these memories for political ends.” To use them to come to the aid of a “brother in suffering,” however, was a different matter.⁷⁷

For French Communist Party members, meanwhile, Rousset’s disavowal of “political” motives was laughable: his “Appeal” was obviously pro-American Cold War propaganda by a man who had once been a Trotskyist. Communist intellectuals, centered around the journal *Les Lettres françaises*, mobilized the counter-attack; Pierre Daix, as a fellow Nazi camp survivor, was selected to serve as the chief opponent to Rousset.⁷⁸ The headline of his initial response was a shot across the bow: “Pierre Daix, Identification Number 59,807 at Mauthausen. Why Has David Rousset Invented the Soviet Camps? A Campaign of Preparation for War.”⁷⁹ In denouncing Rousset as a warmonger and a probable agent of the Americans, Daix –summoning his own authority as a survivor – ridiculed the notion of an apolitical, purely ethical concern about Soviet violence. *All* choices were political; one was either for the socialist utopia promised by the Soviet Union or one was against it (and thereby a supporter of capitalist exploitation). In his memoirs, written years later (after leaving the Party) Daix remembered the worldview that he and his fellow writers at *Les Lettres françaises* had abided by: “We posed to everyone the question: Who are you with? With the peoples of the Soviet Union who want to build a new society, or with

⁷⁶ Statement of Rémy Roure, transcript of “Conference de presse donnée par M. David Rousset mardi 15 novembre 1949.” F Delta 1880/53/2, Rousset BDIC.

⁷⁷ *Assemblée Nationale, compte rendu analytique officiel*, séance du 12 December 1950, 12: “Il serait criminel d’utiliser ces souvenirs à des fins politiques.”

⁷⁸ *Les Lettres françaises* was founded as a clandestine Resistance journal in 1941 by Jean Paulhan and Jacques Decour; at the Liberation, under the editorship of Claude Morgan, the journal functioned as the organ of the Comité national des écrivains (of which Morgan was the Secretary General). The journal’s rapid transformation into an exclusively Communist publication is discussed by Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 561-701, esp. 571-581, and 594-599.

⁷⁹ Daix, “Pierre Daix.”

their enemies?”⁸⁰ The correct “lesson” to have brought away from the camps, Daix asserted in 1949, was *precisely* a political one: the camps were a product of degenerate late capitalism, and thus served as further evidence for the need to support socialism. Indeed, had it not been the communist inmates who had organized resistance to the guards at Buchenwald? And had it not been the Red Army that had first begun to liberate the camps? “Monsieur Rousset,” Daix charged, “has ‘depoliticized’ the Nazi camps. He has turned them into an entity for which Man with a capital M was responsible.”⁸¹ And this, of course, not out of any genuine “apoliticism” – such a thing did not exist – but out of a profoundly political desire to mystify and obscure. As another communist camp survivor put it, “The ‘apoliticals’ ...are a race that has never seen the light of day on this earth.” Those like Rousset who claimed to be above politics, he wrote, simply “want to make us carry out *their* politics,” which included support for “the atrocious war against Vietnam” and “the liberation of collaborators.”⁸²

These communist intellectuals rejected out of hand the possibility that the USSR did, indeed, contain a camp system of forced labor. Such exploitation of workers was simply unthinkable in the world’s most advanced socialist society. Concentration camps outside of the capitalist world made no sense; an ex-Trotskyist joining forces with the Americans and British to smear the USSR with allegations of such camps, however, made a great deal of sense. The French Communists therefore asserted that Rousset must have manufactured his evidence wholesale or maliciously

⁸⁰ Pierre Daix, *J’ai cru au matin* (Paris: Laffont, 1976), 257: “Nous posions à tous la question: Avec qui êtes-vous? Avec les peuples de l’Union Soviétique qui veulent édifier une société nouvelle, ou avec leurs ennemis?”

⁸¹ Daix, “Pierre Daix”: “M. Rousset avait ‘dépolitisé’ les camps nazis. Il en avait fait une entité dont l’Homme avec un grand H était responsable.”

⁸² André Leroy, “Trois points marqués contre les diviseurs,” *Le Patriote résistant*, 26 March 1950: “Les ‘apolitiques,’ nous l’avons déjà démontré, sont d’une race qui n’a pas encore vu le jour sur cette terre, tant et si bien que ceux qui prétendent s’y rattacher voudraient nous faire faire ‘leur’ politique.”

doctored Soviet documents to produce it – the charge for which he would subsequently accuse *Les Lettres françaises* of defamation and bring Daix and his editor Claude Morgan to trial. It is beyond our ken here to untangle the threads of willful blindness, good faith, bad faith, ignorance, and fervor that drove Party intellectuals like Daix to reject charges about the gulag out of hand. It is, however, clear that even Rousset's closest Communist friends and fellow survivors were not shaken in their Party loyalty by his "Appeal": for example, the German Emil Kunder, whom Rousset believed had saved his life in the camps (*Les Jours de notre mort* was dedicated to him), broke off their friendship. Although he was already slowly moving away from the Party, writer Robert Antelme, a colleague whom Rousset had singled out by name, wrote to him privately "with black rancor...terrible rancor" to complain that the Appeal was "pitiful, truly sinister," and "before all else a particularly serious manifestation of anti-communism."⁸³ What else could it be?

While the Communists flatly dismissed Rousset's allegations, non-Communist "progressives," from fellow-travelers to sympathetic critics of the Party like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, took a different tack. This was to deplore the fact that Rousset, a man who still claimed to be on the Left, had denounced only *Soviet* violence, only *Soviet* crimes against humanity, without acknowledging abuses in the Western bloc. Thus, these respondents did not deny the existence of a gulag (as Party members were compelled to do) but relativized it. The *résistant* and camp survivor Claude Bourdet, for example, now editor-in-chief at *Combat*, responded to Rousset's "Appeal" with an

⁸³ Letter from Robert Antelme to David Rousset, n.d., and attached copy of response to be published. (The latter would appear in *Le Figaro littéraire* on 19 November as "J'accepte sous conditions.") F Delta 1880/53/4, Rousset BDIC: "Mon cher David, Je trouve ce que tu as fait, dans les conditions où tu l'as fait, désolant, véritablement sinistre...C'est dans une noire amertume que je te lève la main. Une amertume atroce." The typed response continued, "Dans ces conditions, il saute aux yeux que cette proclamation ne peut pas ne pas constituer avant tout une manifestation d'anticommunisme, particulièrement grave."

article entitled “Sweep in Front of Our [Own] Door;” in it, he proposed that “righteous men” in France should begin by addressing atrocities in the French empire. “‘Political’ prisons, police arrests – don’t we have some of those to our own name right now, from Madagascar to Indochina, to say nothing of what is going on in North Africa?” It would be preferable to fight these nearby forms of state violence than to “participate in a crusade with a single target, today ideological and tomorrow military.”⁸⁴ A number of the survivors from whom Rousset had demanded an individual response fell in line with Bourdet’s general position, informing Rousset that they would support his commission on the condition that it investigated repressive state violence wherever it might be occurring, including French territory. Jean-Marie Domenach’s response in *Esprit* was in the same vein, although more hyperbolically worded: “‘All nations are in a pre-concentrationary situation [*situation préconcentrationnaire*],’ ” he approvingly quoted Jean Cayrol, “ ‘and are capable, if they have not already done it, of [producing] similar camps’ ...When the whole school has scarlet fever, one does not content oneself with putting the sickest one in quarantine.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bourdet, “Balayer devant notre porte,” *Combat*, 14 November 1949: “Nous sommes, Français, responsables, me semble-t-il, d’abord de ce que fait notre pays. Des prisons ‘politiques,’ des arrestations policiers, n’en avons-nous pas quelques-uns à notre actif à l’heure actuelle, de Madagascar en Indochine, en tenant pour négligeable ce qui se passe en Afrique du Nord?... Si notre pays redevenait la nation de la Révolution Française, il aurait bien plus pour lutter contre les bagnes politiques et sociaux qu’en participant à une croisade à sens unique, aujourd’hui idéologique et demain militaire.”

⁸⁵ J.-M. Domenach, “David Rousset accuse,” *Esprit* 162 (December 1949), 985-6: “‘Tous les nations sont dans une situation pré-concentrationnaire et sont capables, si elles ne l’ont déjà fait, semblables camps.’ Jean Cayrol a raison de rappeler cela. Quand toute l’école a la rougeole, on ne se contente pas de mettre le plus malade en quarantaine.” Although Domenach would shortly undergo his definitive break with the Communists and embrace positions on political violence that were not dissimilar from Rousset’s, particularly with regards to Algeria (see Chapter Six), a persistent enmity between the two men was born in this moment. In 1956, Domenach still charged that Rousset had “seized hold of true things in order to lead a polemic campaign in bourgeois papers starving for anti-communism; he contributed to creating, with true facts, a climate of intimidation, in which the truth was destroyed.” Originally published in Italian in *Tempo Presente*; reproduced in French in *Le Figaro littéraire*, 12 January 1957, and in *Saturne* 11 (January-February 1957), 137.

A similar but considerably more detailed response came from Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in a joint editorial in *Les Temps modernes*. Here, they acknowledged in frank terms the likely existence of an expansive concentration camp system in the Soviet Union – indeed, they considerably overestimated the imprisoned proportion of the Soviet population – and asserted, “What we say is, there is no socialism when one citizen out of twenty is in a camp.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, they were indignant at their former friend and colleague Rousset, with whom “our collaboration [is] today definitively terminated.”⁸⁷ They objected to the “Appeal” on a number of counts: the equivalence it insidiously drew between fascism and communism (“we have nothing in common with a Nazi and we have the same values as a communist”),⁸⁸ the succor it offered to bourgeois anti-communist readers of the despicable *Figaro littéraire*, and the fact that – in focusing exclusively on Soviet state violence – it offered “absolution” to “the capitalist world” for unspeakable crimes like colonialism.⁸⁹ One could, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty explained, criticize the USSR – but “one cannot in any circumstances form a pact with its enemies,” who were also the enemies of the French working class

⁸⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty and J.-P. Sartre, “Les jours de notre vie,” *Les Temps modernes* 51 (January 1950), 1155: “Ce que nous disons, c’est qu’il n’y a pas de socialisme quand un citoyen sur vingt est au camp.”

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1165: “Rousset quitte la ligne politique qui avait été la sienne et entame une propagande dans laquelle nous n’entendons en aucun cas être impliqués par le souvenir qu’on a pu garder de notre collaboration avec lui, aujourd’hui définitivement terminée.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1611: “Cela signifie que nous n’avons rien de commun avec un nazi et que nous avons les mêmes valeurs qu’un communiste.”

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1163: “...et toute politique qui *se définit* contre la Russie et localise sur elle la critique est une absolution donnée au monde capitaliste.” Most of Rousset’s critics attacked the choice of publishing in *Le Figaro littéraire*, which was an anti-communist publication, not a neutral venue. The question of why he chose to do so is something of a puzzle, since – as Ian Birchall points out – he could easily have used *Franc-Tireur*, for example, instead (*Sartre Against Stalinism*, 110). Rousset himself insisted (somewhat unconvincingly) that “it was necessary not only to speak but to speak so as to be heard,” and that for this purpose *Figaro littéraire* became, “because of our situation in France, the only possible tribune.” Letter from Rousset to Robert Antelme, 21 November 1949. F Delta 1880/53/4, Rousset BDIC.

and all oppressed or colonized peoples in the West.⁹⁰ This was what Rousset had chosen to do, and “we absolutely disapprove.”⁹¹

Not only did Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, “disapprove” of Rousset’s actions, in fact; they also disputed the implicit philosophical grounding that he had given to his choice. The experience of extreme suffering, they asserted, contained no “lessons” at all to guide future behavior: having been a victim of violence did not provide one with special insight into the legitimacy of future violent acts. And pure identification with victims could in no way replace or go “beyond” the need to reason about violence in political terms. The editorial asserted, “They will say that the concentration camp experience, absolute of horror, compels the man who has survived it to look first to the country that prolongs it.” But, in fact, “the truth is that even the experience of an absolute like the horror of the concentration camp does not determine a politics. The days of life are not the days of death.” Rousset, the author of *The Days of Our Death*, in other words, had not been absolved from the need to approach the problem of violence in political terms by what he had experienced in the camps; he had not learned “lessons” that gave him claim to loftier concerns or more profound solidarities than other men possessed. “When one comes back to life,” Sartre and Merleau-Ponty wrote, “for better or for worse, one begins again to reason, one chooses one’s loyalties...One always forgets death when one lives.”⁹² This flat rejection of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1162-3: “D’où nous ne concluons pas qu’il faut montrer de l’indulgence au communisme, mais qu’on ne peut en aucun cas pactiser avec ses adversaires.”

⁹¹ Ibid., 1165: “Nous désapprouvons absolument cet usage...” Simone de Beauvoir appears to have disapproved as well: she would describe Rousset in *La Force des choses* as “possessed by an ambition all the more disturbing for being empty; his assurance covered over abysses of uncertainty and ignorance; his complacency with himself was vertiginous; the sound of his own voice exhilarated him; for him, it was necessary only to speak in order to believe himself.” *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 189.

⁹² “Les Jours de notre vie,” 1168: “L’expérience concentrationnaire, absolu d’horreur, impose, dira-t-on, à celui qui l’a vécue de regarder d’abord au pays qui la prolonge...La vérité est que même l’expérience concentrationnaire ne détermine pas une politique. Les jours de la vie ne sont pas les jours de la mort. Quand on rentre dans la vie, bien ou mal, on recommence de raisonner, on choisit ses

witnessing as an alternative to reasoned political engagement was the heart of their critique of Rousset; to underline the fact, they titled their editorial “The Days of Our Life.”

Rousset’s response to this criticism, over the course of two articles in *Le Figaro littéraire*, is revelatory: in many ways, it echoed the justifications that Camus provided from 1946 onward for his decision to privilege an ethics of suffering in determining a politics. Like Camus, Rousset held up “human life,” by which he meant not only biological life but also a sort of bare dividing line between human and animal existence, as the value that trumped ideological concerns and thus demanded the turn to witnessing.⁹³ This value had been at the heart of the Resistance’s project, he insisted: “Who actually acted against the Nazis because he was on the right or the left?”⁹⁴ And it now needed to be at the heart of postwar engagement. “We,” he wrote in direct response to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, referring to the community of survivors that the *Temps modernes* editors stood outside,

were introduced to dehumanization not by discourse but by life...Politics expresses the power of our interests and the weakness of our imagination. We know today, for the living future, that interests are nothing without life, and that it is not possible to live there where the meaning of the human that we hold ceases to be intelligible... Certain people have written that the concentration camp experience does not determine a politics. Of course – it signifies much more. In today’s world –so far have we been dragged along by the debacle – it denounces that which cannot be accepted; that which tolerates no pact, no compromise, under pain of death. Into a society suffocated by

fidélités, et, à l’égard de ceux que l’on quitte, on a l’air froid, on a l’air d’oublier. On oublie toujours la mort quand on vit.”

⁹³ Camus himself, who had already denounced the Soviet camps, did not directly intervene in the debate over Rousset’s Appeal: his *Carnets* show that he believed that it was not appropriate for him to interfere since he was not a camp survivor. It is clear from his notebooks, however, that he admired and sympathized with Rousset, and it seems possible that he spoke privately about the affair with Sartre, since Sartre would invoke Rousset during their 1952 friendship-ending fight. See Chapter Five.

⁹⁴ Rousset, “Réponse à ceux qui ne veulent pas de l’ouverture d’une enquête,” *Le Figaro littéraire*, 14 January 1950: “Sous l’occupation, qui agissait véritablement contre les nazis, parce qu’il était de droite ou de gauche?”

political sophisms, the concentration camp experience interjects the human-too-human in its desperate fight for existence.⁹⁵

The historical significance of such claims on Rousset's part does not lie in their veracity as a representation of his motivations: depending on one's definition of "politics," one can make a very strong case that Rousset's putative concern for "human life" in the USSR was profoundly "politically" motivated and was determined less by empathy for Soviet victims than by the particular conjunction of geopolitical and domestic circumstances in late-1940s France. The notable element here is Rousset's rhetorical framing of the problem: his use of the language of victimhood, identification, experience, and witnessing – all linked to the "true" meaning of the Resistance, the "true" lessons of the war years – in order to lay powerful claim to an ethically-motivated path "beyond" politics and violence.

While he squabbled with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in *Le Figaro littéraire* articles and waited for his defamation suit against *Les Lettres françaises* to come to trial, Rousset meanwhile moved forward with the creation of his investigatory commission of Nazi camp survivors. On January 24, 1950, a French Commission of Inquiry Against the Concentration Camp Regime was constituted under the presidency of Buchenwald survivor Prof. A.S. Balachowsky; later in the year, the organization internationalized and became the International Commission of Inquiry Against the Concentration Camp Regime (CICRC), with headquarters in Brussels and delegates from France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Spain, Norway, Denmark, and the Saar

⁹⁵ Rousset, "Les camps de concentration seront mis hors la loi": "Nous avons été introduits non par le discours mais par la vie dans la déshumanisation...La politique exprime la puissance de nos intérêts et la faiblesse de notre imagination. Nous savons aujourd'hui, pour l'avenir vécu, que les intérêts ne sont rien sans la vie et qu'il n'est pas possible de vivre là où le sens de l'homme qui est le nôtre cesse d'être intelligible...Certains ont écrit que l'expérience concentrationnaire ne détermine pas une politique. Certes, elle signifie bien plus. Dans le monde actuel, si loin nous sommes entraînés par le débâcle, elle dénonce ce qui ne peut être admis; ce qui ne tolère aucun pacte, aucun compromis sous peine de mort. Dans une société asphyxiée par les sophismes politiques, l'expérience concentrationnaire projette l'humain trop humain dans sa lutte désespérée pour être."

protectorate. The first president was not Rousset himself – he did not desire this role – but Georges André, a prominent Belgian *résistant*. Several French political survivors became heavily involved with the CICRC, and remained so throughout the 1950s: most notably, Rémy Roure, the Père Michel Riquet, Ravensbrück survivor Germaine Tillion, and Neuengamme/Bergen-Belsen survivor Louis Martin-Chauffier. This last participant was a Catholic writer who had until very recently been a fellow-traveler (Jean Paulhan once described him as the Communists’ “house Christian”) and, indeed, had testified in defense of *Les Lettres françaises* at the Kravchenko trial. Now, however, he informed Rousset that “your proposition to constitute a commission of inquiry, it seems to me, ought to be approved by all of the former political deportees.”⁹⁶ He would become one of the CICRC’s most indefatigable investigators.

Aside from these prominent individuals, what were the general responses of French camp survivors to Rousset’s appeal? The answer was almost entirely determined by Party membership: Rousset gained the enthusiastic adherence of non-Communist survivors and the organizations that they dominated, and the bile and taunts of the Communists. Much depended on the internal balance of power within different camps’ survivor communities: for example, while the Ravensbrück survivors’ group (the Association des anciennes déportées et internées de la Résistance) and that of Dachau both gave Rousset their support, the associations of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, more heavily populated by Communists, officially

⁹⁶ “Après l’appel de M. David Rousset: Pour une enquête internationale dans les camps de concentrations soviétiques,” *Le Monde*, 17 November 1949: “Votre proposition de constituer une commission d’enquête doit, me semble-t-il, être approuvée par tous les anciens déportés politiques.” Martin-Chauffier had begun to move away from the Party over the issue of Yugoslavia in early 1949; he would, however, despite his involvement with Rousset, be drawn back into the Communist orbit through the Peace Movement initiative. See Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals*, 179 and 187-189; Caute, *The Fellow Travelers*, 242 and 285-293.

condemned the “Appeal” as an anti-Soviet provocation.⁹⁷ These organizational decisions did not imply unanimity, however: for example, Rousset received private letters of support from non-communist members of the Auschwitz Amicale, while meanwhile some members of the Ravensbrück group protested that “this appeal of David Rousset is inscribed in a political context of anti-communism.”⁹⁸ Two umbrella national federations of political survivors existed in France at this time, the Fédération nationale des déportés et internés de la Résistance (FNDIR) and the Fédération nationale des déportés et internés résistants et patriotes (FNDIRP).⁹⁹ The former, dominated by non-communists, offered its “total adhesion” to Rousset’s proposal, citing “the principles that were dictated to [our members] by the horror of servitude.”¹⁰⁰ The latter, dominated by Communist Party members and presided over by the formidable Buchenwald survivor Colonel Henri Manhès, launched a full-blown campaign of vitriol against Rousset.

This campaign not only reprised the themes taken up by Communist journalists in general-readership venues like *Les Lettres françaises* and *L’Humanité* – Rousset’s warmongering, his suspect pro-American or even fascist motives – but also adopted another strategy. This was to discredit Rousset as a “witness” to the horrors of the Nazi camps by maligning his behavior while he was an inmate. Thus Rousset’s status

⁹⁷ Lalieu gives a good overview of the responses of the Ravensbrück, Dachau, and Auschwitz groups in *La Déportation fragmentée*, 90-95. The Buchenwald group’s condemnation was communicated to Rousset in a 16 November 1949 letter from the Bureau of the Amicale. F Delta 1880/53/6, Rousset BDIC.

⁹⁸ Letter from Christian Lazard, G. Franses, S. Lattes, F. Modiano, R. Weill, R. Budor, Mlle. Heftler, and M. Cahen to David Rousset, 22 November 1949. F Delta 1880/53/6, Rousset BDIC; Lalieu, *La Déportation fragmentée*, 93.

⁹⁹ On the complicated history of the two organizations and the hostilities that existed between them – hostilities which were originally *not* a matter of Communist Party membership and anti-communism but of deportee status – see Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 225-234.

¹⁰⁰ Statement of Léon Mazot, transcript of “Conférence de presse donnée par M. David Rousset mardi 15 novembre 1949.” F Delta 1880/53/2, Rousset BDIC: “principes qui leur a dicté l’horreur de la servitude.”

as a blameless victim of Nazi violence was thrown into question: he had been a “bad” victim, a suspect victim, even a sort of perpetrator. He therefore had no authority with which to bear witness to the meaning of his experience. Manhès led the charge, publishing an “open letter” to Rousset in the organization’s paper, *Le Patriote résistant*, in which he stated “You do not have the right to speak ‘in the name of the survivors of the death camps.’” Manhès demanded of Rousset, “What role did you play in mutual aid and solidarity in the camps? You passed through Buchenwald so little noticed that even the inmates of Block 48 [Rousset’s block] remember you vaguely or not at all.”¹⁰¹ Manhès went on to promote more serious allegations that in Neuengamme Rousset had betrayed fellow Frenchmen, through cozy relations with the camp’s kapos. Other rumors about his wartime behavior circulated as well: some Communist politicians, for example, claimed (baselessly) on the floor of the National Assembly that Rousset had written articles early in the Occupation for a Trotskyist newspaper urging Frenchmen to go work in Germany to support the Nazi war effort.¹⁰²

Although Rousset and his defenders responded to such accusations vigorously, they were damaging to his status as a “witness among witnesses” – as a blameless victim who had unambiguously “earned” the right to speak on the basis of his experience – and they cost him some support. As Carolyn J. Dean has argued, dichotomies between “good” and “bad” victims – the purely, powerlessly innocent versus those somehow complicit in or responsible for their own suffering – have

¹⁰¹ F.-H. Manhès, “Lettre ouverte du président de la FNDIRP à David Rousset,” *Le Patriote résistant*, 27 February 1950: “Votre cas est grave, David Rousset, car vous n’avez pas le droit de prendre parole ‘au nom des survivants des camps de la mort.’... Vous avez beaucoup appris sur les camps, depuis le retour, mais quel rôle d’entr’aide et de solidarité avez-vous joué dans les camps? Vous êtes passé tellement inaperçu à Buchenwald que même les anciens du block 48 se souviennent très vaguement ou pas du tout de vous.”

¹⁰² “Le dernier slogan communiste: David Rousset est hitlérien,” and “La riposte de l’écrivain,” *L’Aurore*, 27 December 1949.

organized postwar perceptions up to the present day about who can offer trustworthy testimony.¹⁰³ Thus the Paris Amicale of Neuengamme survivors, for instance, voted unanimously to withhold backing from Rousset's initiative because, in the words of the organization's national president, "M. Rousset was ill-founded to pose as righter of wrongs, given the memories that he had left among his companions at Neuengamme."¹⁰⁴ Even non-communists expressed concern, demonstrating the cultural power of tropes of "good" and "bad" victims who in turn could serve as reliable and unreliable witnesses.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, however, Party affiliation overwhelmingly determined whether survivors backed Rousset. Non-communists – including important figures such as Vice-President Père Riquet – defected from the FNDIRP as a result of the organization's intransigent opposition to Rousset's campaign, forming a new group (to which FNDIR members also adhered, but without leaving the FNDIR). This group embraced Rousset's language of "apoliticism" as the ethical alternative to the Communists' machinations, announcing that their new

¹⁰³ Carolyn J. Dean, *Aversion and Erasure*, Chapter One. See also Alyson M. Cole, *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ Letter from M. Prenant, President de l'Amicale de Neuengamme, to M. le Secrétaire Générale de l'UNADIF, 27 December 1950. F Delta 1880/56/1/2, Rousset BDIC: Cette motion, votée à l'unanimité, sans même une abstention, constatait, en substance, que M. Rousset était mal fondé à se poser en justicier, étant donné les souvenirs qu'il avait laissés à ses compagnons de Neuengamme." A letter from Manhès was also read aloud by the *Lettres françaises* lawyers during the trial which asserted that the Neuengamme survivors "vomissent" Rousset. *Pour la vérité*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from M. le Secrétaire Générale de l'UNADIF to M. le Président de l'Amicale de Neuengamme, 21 December 1951. F Delta 1880/56/1/2, Rousset BDIC: "Très ému des accusations portées contre notre Camarade David Rousset par le Lieutenant Colonel Manhès lors du Procès des *Lettres Françaises*, le Bureau de l'UNADIF m'a chargé en tant que Secrétaire Générale, de vous demander de bien vouloir me transmettre toutes les pièces en votre possession concernant David Rousset. Le Bureau de l'UNADIF est en effet décidé à prendre toutes mesures qui s'imposeraient dans le cas où les accusations de Lieutenant Colonel Manhès seraient justifiées." It is important to underline that in a slightly different way, as we have already seen, Rousset himself was hardly exempt from engaging in such distinctions between "good" and "bad" victims: although he did not cast aspersions on individuals' comportment in the camps, he often retroactively labeled some survivors as unworthy victims based on their postwar attitudes and behavior (namely, their unwillingness to respond positively to his "Appeal"). In Rousset's eyes, survivors could lose their privileged status based on the use to which they were willing to put the "lessons" they had learned.

organization “brings together, essentially, all the Victims of the deportation resolved to continue to take action outside of any of the preoccupations of partisan politics.”¹⁰⁶

The trial between Rousset and *Les Lettres françaises* finally began in November of 1950, just as the Korean War was bringing US-Soviet tensions to new heights. The case, tried in the Seventeenth Correctional Chamber of the Seine, proved to be a full-blown Cold War media spectacle, seized upon by both Communists and anti-communists in France to tarnish their opponents. The case generated widespread reportage: according to Rousset’s press-clipping agents, from November 1950 to its conclusion in January 1951, the trial was discussed 49 times in *Le Monde*, 52 times in *Le Figaro*, 32 in *France Soir*, 36 in *L’Aurore*, and 38 in *Combat*. The Communist press was even more voracious: 73 articles in *L’Humanité* dealt with the trial, and 58 in *Ce Soir*. Nor was the case neglected by the provincial press: there were 29 articles in *Nord-Matin*, 20 in *La Croix du Nord*, 33 in Toulouse’s *Le Dépêche de Midi*, and 17 in Marseille’s *Le Provençal*.¹⁰⁷ Both sides tried to make the most of the media spotlight. Daix and Morgan, for their part, declined to defend their specific “defamatory” statements about alleged falsehoods in Rousset’s appeal; instead, with their lawyers Paul Vienney and Joë Nordmann, they sought to embarrass the other side while singing the praises of the Soviet workers’ paradise.¹⁰⁸ As Daix later remembered, “We did not fight to win the trial, but to totally obstruct the exposés of the anti-Soviet witnesses” by demonstrating that they were motivated strictly by

¹⁰⁶ UNADIF (signed by Michel Riquet and Edmond Debeaumarché), “Mise au Point,” 27 November 1950. Folder “Manifestations 1950-1951,” 19860581, Art. 24, CAC. “L’U.N.A.D.I.F...rassemble, effectivement, toute les Victimes de la déportation résolues à maintenir leur action en dehors de toutes préoccupations de politique partisane...”

¹⁰⁷ “Coupures de presse concernant le procès David Rousset c/ ‘Les Lettres Françaises.’” F Delta 1880/56/1/3, Rousset BDIC.

¹⁰⁸ See Nordmann’s recollections of the trial in “David Rousset contre les *Lettres françaises*. Après coup (Entretien),” *Lignes 2* (May 2000): 110-114.

“resentment and political hatred.”¹⁰⁹ The result was a series of theatrical interventions on topics as diverse as Daix’s outstanding Resistance credentials, the intention of the Truman administration to drop atomic bombs on North Korea, the use of anti-Soviet propaganda by Goebbels in the 1930s, and the joys of ordinary people’s lives in the USSR. The judges’ half-hearted attempts to steer the trial back to the subject of defamation repeatedly failed.

Rousset and his lawyers, Théo Bernard and Gérard Rosenthal, meanwhile, offered a veritable parade of internationally-culled witnesses testifying not to Rousset’s good character nor to the veracity of his citations from the Soviet labor codex (appropriate topics for witnesses at a defamation trial) but to the existence of concentration camps in the USSR, in which each of them had been imprisoned. This cast of characters – Poles, Spaniards, Austrians, Jews, Czechs, and Germans – included unimpeachable figures like Margaret Buber-Neumann (the dignified widow of the German communist Heinz Neumann and survivor of both the Soviet camps and – after the Soviets turned her over the Gestapo – of Ravensbrück) along with lesser-known gulag survivors. All spoke to the reality of the Soviet camp system on the basis of their own experience. Several of these witnesses, including Buber-Neumann, had already testified in the Kravchenko case against *Les Lettres françaises* the previous year;¹¹⁰ for this and other obvious reasons, it has generally appeared to historians that the Rousset trial was a second and somewhat repetitive follow-up act to the Kravchenko affair. The difference, however, was marked: here, it was not the entire

¹⁰⁹ Daix, *J’ai cru au matin*, 257.

¹¹⁰ The Communist lawyers were at least gentler here on Buber-Neumann than they had been when she testified in the Kravchenko case: there, they had argued that Heinz Neumann was “one of those responsible for the rise of Hitlerism in Germany,” insinuating that Buber-Neumann herself was to blame as well, and therefore was probably deserving of any punishment she received from the Soviets. *Le Procès Kravchenko*, 563.

Soviet system that was “on trial,” with various wrongs and abuses highlighted willy-nilly. Ostensibly, the sole object of criticism was the camp system.

What is more, the *terms* of criticism were the “apolitical” ones, focused on extreme limit-case abjection and the imperative to witness, that Rousset had begun to develop in his “Appeal.” Rousset himself continually insisted upon this in the courtroom. The “moral significance” of the case, he informed the judges early in the trial, “comes from the fact that Pierre Daix is a former Mauthausen deportee and the fact that I am a former deportee of Buchenwald and Neuengamme.”¹¹¹ They thus represented the two possible responses to this limit experience – one ideological, the other “beyond” ideology, in a realm that Rousset, his lawyers, and his witnesses referred to as “the human.” In choosing this latter course, Rousset insisted passionately, he was not warmongering: he hated war, since it created “conditions which are precisely the necessary conditions for concentration camps.”¹¹² He was simply carrying out the overriding imperative to bear witness, an imperative born of extreme suffering that trumped political concerns and indeed revealed that they were trivial. He had no choice but to speak out against the camps, he explained, “because I was a concentration camp slave, because I lived through this misfortune, because it has become the obsession [*hantise*] of my life, because it is the greatest misfortune that man can know...incomparably worse than all others.”¹¹³ At stake, therefore, were not political differences but “a question of humanity.”¹¹⁴ The trial thus provided a

¹¹¹ *Pour la vérité*, 37-38: “Mais, précisément, messieurs, l’importance morale de cette affaire tient en ce que M. Pierre Daix est un ancien déporté de Mauthausen et en ce que je suis un ancien déporté de Buchenwald et de Neuengamme.”

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 40: “les conditions qui sont précisément les conditions de base des camps de concentration.”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 244: “...parce que j’ai été un esclave concentrationnaire, parce que j’ai vécu ce malheur, parce qu’il est devenu la hantise de ma vie, parce que c’est le plus grand malheur que l’homme puisse connaître...sans mesure avec tous autres.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99: “question d’humanité.”

venue for Rousset's reframing of the issues that confronted men in a postwar world as fundamentally ethical ones.

Rousset's victory in the trial, by a decision handed down on 12 January, 1951, was not surprising: it had been essentially guaranteed by the *Lettres françaises* team's decision not to defend against the charges of defamation.¹¹⁵ (They would, however, appeal; the case wended its way through the courts until 1953, with the judges' original verdict reaffirmed.) Anti-communist organs such as *Le Figaro* crowed triumphantly over the outcome; Rousset provided them with still more grist for the mill when the newly-formed CICRC held a mock "trial" of the USSR for the crime of concentration camps in Brussels in May, 1951. All roles in the simulated courtroom, from judges to witnesses, were filled by political prisoners who had survived the Nazi camps; Rousset himself took the task of prosecutor, while Germaine Tillion served as a member of the tribunal. The anti-communist journal *Preuves* (founded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, with secret funding from the US government) congratulated the group on the "irrefutable proof of its objectivity" provided throughout the proceedings.¹¹⁶ The British Foreign Office took great advantage of the group's activities for its own anti-Soviet propaganda; its officers were extremely pleased with the outcome of their efforts with Rousset.¹¹⁷

Interestingly enough, the CICRC did not simply fade away in the early fifties as a completed publicity stunt. The group, which in 1952 gained official "B" level consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council (a status which

¹¹⁵ The penalty assigned was relatively light, since, as the judges explained, they took into consideration Daix's suffering in Mauthausen as a mitigating factor.

¹¹⁶ P[aul] P[arisot], "Les camps soviétiques ont été jugés à Bruxelles," *Preuves*, 4 June 1951, 23: "le preuve irréfutable de son objectivité." Adopting the practice we saw in Ch.3 of centering the memory of the Resistance as a whole on the experience of deportation, Parisot categorized the CICRC as acting "in the name of the dead of the Resistance."

¹¹⁷ See Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media*, 142-143.

permitted it to make public reports both to that Council and to the Human Rights Commission), remained astonishingly active throughout the fifties.¹¹⁸ It not only produced multiple “white book” studies on camps, detention conditions, and forced labor in the USSR and communist China, but also works on abuses by members of the Western bloc, from Greece and Spain to French Tunisia and French Algeria. These were also documented in the organization’s journal, *Saturne*. Rousset himself – accused by so many in 1949 and 1950 of providing “absolution” for the crimes of capitalist states – continued to insist that he was a man of the Left and an anti-colonialist and proved to be a tireless organizer of the association’s missions. As he explained in his memoirs, “I rarely investigated. Rather, I led the preliminary negotiations with the States, I generally provided the diplomatic relations with the powers in question, and I tried to eliminate the difficulties (which was hardly simple, for more of them always came up).”¹¹⁹

Rousset did throw himself with particular passion into the investigations of the communist regimes: the China inquiry, especially, consumed him. But looking back on his handiwork from the late fifties, one could hardly accuse him any longer of having neglected to “sweep in front of his own door.” Indeed, his insistence that the CICRC carry out a mission to examine detainment conditions in French Algeria in 1957 (see Chapter Six) cost the organization important financial backing from anti-communist organizations, and ultimately led to its collapse.¹²⁰ It also cost Rousset the

¹¹⁸ On the organization’s activities, see Thomas Wieder, “La commission internationale contre le régime concentrationnaire 1949-1959: des rescapés des camps nazis combattent les camps de concentration” (Mémoire de maîtrise, Paris-I, 2001).

¹¹⁹ Rousset and Copfermann, *Une Vie dans le siècle*, 133: “J’ai rarement enquêté. En revanche, je menais les négociations préalables avec les États, j’assurais généralement les rapports diplomatiques avec les pouvoirs en question et je tentais d’éliminer les difficultés (ce qui n’était guère facile car il en surgissait toujours de nouvelles.)” One can acknowledge the achievements of the CICRC without engaging in hyperbole, as Todorov does when he claims in *Mémoire du mal* that “without realizing it, Rousset had invented the idea of NGOs,” 164.

¹²⁰ Rousset, “Propos sur l’heur et le malheur des temps,” *Saturne* 19 (Jan-March 1959), 5-6.

treasured support of fellow survivor Rémy Roure, a staunch supporter of French Algeria who resigned from the organization over its Algerian investigation. In a remarkably frank series of notes to Rousset in the spring of 1956, Roure expressed his dismay that *Saturne* had begun to publish information on the “repression” in Algeria, information he found “at the least inopportune.”¹²¹ The CICRC’s mission, he claimed, had been to “target above all the concentration camp system as applied by totalitarian governments...But the investigation that has begun concerning Algeria throws into relief, first of all, just or unjust accusations against France. Involuntarily, of course, it is part of a defeatist campaign mounted against our country, from the interior and the exterior ...Your reasoning in regards to principles is, as far as I am concerned, too absolute.”¹²² Rousset was unmoved: he maintained the position, outlined best in an earlier letter to Roure, that “From the beginning, we have affirmed that we would establish the truth wherever a problem existed, without occupying ourselves with social, political, or historical questions. To put it differently, we have always believed that none of these considerations could justify a concentration camp system.” He reassured Roure that although he personally was an anti-colonialist, “The political and social Algerian problem is not in the jurisdiction of the CICRC. The competence of the CICRC extends only to the examination of conditions of arrest, internment, and the life and work of detainees or inmates.”¹²³ Of course, the fact that Rousset was correct

¹²¹ Letter from Rémy Roure to David Rousset, 22 March 1956. F Delta 1880/99/2, Rousset BDIC.

¹²² Letter from Rémy Roure to David Rousset, 20 April 1956. F Delta 1880/99/2, Rousset BDIC: “Sur période de paix rien de mieux – et notre mouvement visait surtout le système concentrationnaire appliqué par les gouvernements totalitaires...Tel était bien le sens de notre campagne en ce qui concerne l’URSS, les pays satellites, etc. Mais l’enquête commencée sur l’Algérie met en relief d’abord les accusations, justes ou injustes, contre la France. Elle rejoint, involontairement bien sûr, le campagne défaitiste menée contre notre pays, à l’intérieur et à l’extérieur. Pour cette seule raison elle me paraît inopportune. D’autant plus qu’elle passe sous silence...les atrocités bien réelles de l’adversaire. Votre raisonnement à propos des principes est à mon sens trop absolu.”

¹²³ Letter from David Rousset to Rémy Roure, 16 April 1956. F Delta 1880/99/2, Rousset BDIC: “Le problème politique et social algérien n’est pas du ressort de la CICRC. La compétence de la CICRC porte exclusivement sur l’examen des conditions d’arrestation, d’internement, de vie et de travail des détenus ou des internés.” Note that Rousset does not mention torture here specifically, although he

on this point meant that the CICRC's reporting on torture in Algeria, although factually extensive, was considerably milder in tone and less incisive about causality than contemporaneous discourses of other anti-colonial French leftists, who viewed torture and mass detention not simply as abuses but as the final and unsurprising manifestations of an oppressive imperialism. We will return in Chapter Six to the ways in which the CICRC's intervention in Algeria indeed illustrated the constraints of an "apolitical," purportedly strictly ethical approach to political violence; for the moment, let us simply note that despite these limitations, to an extent at least, Rousset enacted his commitment to an experientially-grounded ethics of bearing witness to all victims' suffering, an ethics that superseded politics. As his conflict with Roure again illustrates, Rousset's position cannot be easily assimilated to those of other Cold Warriors or anti-communists of his period. Indeed, it can scarcely be assimilated to that of any other figure: Rousset was, in many senses, an iconoclast.

Thus, whereas more orthodox anti-communists were summarily dismissed by the French intellectual Left of the early 1950s, Rousset's intervention could not be so easily ignored. We have seen how even those figures like Bourdet, Domenach, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre who strongly disagreed with the reasoning of his "Appeal" were compelled to publicly respond to it in considerable detail. In fact, Sartre would continue to return in his writings to the challenge raised by Rousset for over a decade, much as one continues to worry an aching tooth. The degree to which Rousset came to act as an imagined opponent in Sartre's political writings signals the degree to which

certainly believed that it was occurring in Algeria. The CICRC, unlike the majority of the French critics of French military/police action in the Algerian War, was more concerned with the problem of France's detention policy in general – that is, with whether it could be considered to constitute a "concentration camp regime" – than with that of torture. Rousset himself believed that torture, although certainly an evil, was not commensurable with the evil of concentration camps. See Rousset, "Le sens de notre combat," 21. The organization's perspective interestingly mirrors recent developments in the historiography of the conflict, which has increasingly attempted to broaden our understanding of French abuses in Algeria beyond the issue of torture.

he provided a significant and compelling alternative vision of the ultimate purpose of a non-communist French Left. Just six months after publishing “Les Jours de notre vie,” in July 1950 Sartre and Merleau-Ponty again penned a joint editorial addressing the issues Rousset had raised. This piece, “L’Adversaire est complice” [“The Adversary Is Complicit”], was explicitly concerned with contrasting “political” and “ethical” approaches to the violence embedded in the Soviet system. “We,” they wrote, “have never been either Trotskyists or Communists, and it is precisely the question of the exercise of violence that is one of the things that has dissuaded us.”¹²⁴ By this they meant that they were indeed troubled by the Soviet state’s use of violence to advance the aims of the revolution, from executing high-level political “dissidents” to deporting citizens for “reeducation.” But, they insisted, one could not responsibly condemn a given form of political violence on ethical grounds simply because it produced suffering victims, as Rousset was doing. Violence could not be deemed illegitimate or unjustifiable simply by invoking suffering. Responding to the charge that they should have written on the Soviet camps much sooner – before Rousset forced their hand – Sartre and Merleau-Ponty responded that they had not been aware of the extent of the Soviet forced labor system until the beginning of 1950. “It is certainly cruel,” they wrote,

to tolerate the camps so long as they’re *not too populated*. But ultimately, all of the regimes that history has shown to us, or now shows us, tolerate or admit horrors. So long as one could think that the violence of Russian communism only exercised itself against a political elite, so long as one did not know that it maintained at the heart of Russian production a servile worker whose importance to the economic yield of the system was appreciable, one could accept that the existence of the camps did not place in question the nature of the Soviet state...[Trotsky] knew, from having governed, and from having made

¹²⁴ T.M. [Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty], “L’Adversaire est complice,” *Les Temps modernes* 57 (July 1950), 6: “Nous n’avons jamais été ni trotskysyes [*sic*], ni communistes, et précisément la question de l’exercice de la violence est une de celles qui nous en détournent.”

the revolution in 1917, that Revolution brings horrors with it, that political judgment is a statistical judgment, and finally that the political question is to know what, of the horror and of the worthwhile, tends to predominate in a system, and what the *direction* [*sens*] of the system is.¹²⁵

Thus, against Rousset, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty assumed that there was a necessary opposition between experience and judgment and that an appeal to ethics was merely a mask for a dubious politics. As a result, to use one of Sartre's favorite expressions, one must choose. They curiously joined Rousset in conflating compassion or empathy with identification. And again they rejected the notion that violence necessarily demanded identification with the suffering of victims, calling upon all men to bear witness. They insisted instead on the exercise of political and historical judgment.

Though Merleau-Ponty quietly abandoned this position in the early fifties (see Chapter Five), Sartre continued not only to reject Rousset's putatively "ethical" approach to violence but to insist strenuously that such a position was *not* innocent of Cold War motives – and, moreover, that it tended to obscure and thus excuse the structural forms of violence prevalent in the West. Sartre's letter of farewell to Camus, for example, published in *Les Temps modernes* in August 1952, dwelt extensively and uncomfortably on the Rousset Affair. Here, Sartre *again*, this time as an open PCF sympathizer (he had become a fellow-traveler earlier in 1952), attempted to articulate the flaws in Rousset's stand against the Soviet camps. Shifting his line of attack, he now ridiculed the premise that Rousset and his supporters actually experienced any

¹²⁵ "L'Adversaire est complice," 5-6. Emphasis in original: "Il est assurément cruel de tolérer les camps tant qu'ils ne sont *pas trop peuplés*. Mais enfin, tous les régimes que l'histoire nous a montrés ou nous montre tolèrent ou supposent des horreurs. Tant qu'on pouvait penser que la violence du communisme russe ne s'exerçait que contre une élite politique, tant qu'on ne savait pas qu'elle entretient au coeur de la production russe une main-d'oeuvre servile dont l'importance est appréciable dans le rendement économique du système, on pouvait admettre que l'existence des camps ne mettait pas en cause la nature de l'État soviétique... [Trotsky] savait, pour avoir gouverné, et fait la révolution de 1917, que la Révolution entraîne avec elle des horreurs, que le jugement politique est un jugement statistique, enfin que la question politique est de savoir ce qui, de l'horreur et du valable, tend à prédominer dans un système, et quel est le *sens* du système."

sort of identificatory response to the suffering of the inmates in the gulag. “I have seen the anti-communists rejoice in the existence of these prisons,” he wrote. “Be serious, Camus, and tell me if you please what emotion the ‘revelations’ of Rousset could have evoked in the heart of the anti-communist. Despair? Affliction? The shame of being a man? Go on, go on!” In fact, he claimed, French racism and lack of imagination meant that “it is difficult for a Frenchman to put himself in the place of a Turkestani” imprisoned in a Soviet camp, and to “experience sympathy for this abstract being which is a Turkestani seen from here.”¹²⁶ Rousset’s appeal to a viscerally-experienced brotherhood of shared suffering was disingenuous, mystificatory, and exploitative. In any event, Sartre claimed, a truly meaningful response to human suffering involved not moral solidarity with victims but political action that could radically transform the world, eventually eliminating exploitative human relations. “It seems to me,” he wrote, “that the only way of coming to the aid of the enslaved over there is to take the side of those who are here.” For Camus, who refused to “take sides,” “I see only one solution: the Galapagos Islands.” There was no meaningful space “outside” of geopolitics and ideological conflict in which to bear witness in ethical terms. “Apolitical” solidarity with abject victims everywhere was a false option.¹²⁷

This remained Sartre’s underlying position when he revisited the Rousset Affair yet another time in 1961, in his remembrance essay for the recently deceased Merleau-Ponty. No longer a fellow-traveler to the Party, he now qualified the Soviet

¹²⁶ Sartre, “Réponse à Albert Camus,” *Situations*, vol. 4 (Paris, Gallimard, 1964), 105. This piece was originally published in *Les Temps modernes* 82 (August 1952): 334-353 in response to a letter to the Editor by Camus, printed in the same issue. “Je les ai vus se réjouir, les anti-communistes, de l’existence de ces bagnes... Soyons sérieux, Camus, et dites-moi, s’il vous plaît, quel sentiment les ‘révélations’ de Rousset ont pu susciter dans un cœur d’anti-communiste. Le désespoir? L’affliction? La honte d’être homme? Allons, allons! Il est difficile pour un Français de se mettre à la place d’un Turkmène, d’éprouver de la sympathie pour cet être abstrait qu’est le Turkmène vu d’ici.”

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 107: “[J]e ne vois qu’une solution pour vous: les îles Galapagos. C’est qu’il me semble à moi, au contraire, que la seule manière de venir en aide aux esclaves de là-bas c’est de prendre le parti de ceux d’ici.”

camps as “inadmissible,” but still insisted that in 1950 he and Merleau “couldn’t [have] disavow[ed] them, at least not within our old capitalist countries, without resigning ourselves to a kind of betrayal.” Sartre now articulated the problem in rather different, seemingly aporetic terms: “There is a morality of politics – a difficult subject and never clearly treated – and when politics must betray its morality,” as in the case of the Soviet gulag, “to choose morality is to betray politics. Now find your way out of that one...”¹²⁸ Implicit in this haunted and elegiac piece, of course, was that by 1961, if Sartre himself continued to regard this as a fundamental dilemma, the old confederates about whom he wrote – from Rousset to Camus to Merleau-Ponty himself – had already “found their way out of it” years earlier.

We will turn to Camus and to Merleau-Ponty in the following chapter; here, it is useful to conclude our examination of Rousset with an acknowledgement of the strength of Sartre’s claims against him. To a degree, in 1950 Sartre was correct in charging that Rousset’s project was an anti-communist political intervention wrapped in high-minded language; it certainly is difficult to imagine it having come into being outside of the extraordinary political climate of France at that moment. And, as we know, Rousset in fact if not in theory did not hover on an exalted plane “above” the polarized geopolitics of the era: he received the considerable support of the British and the Americans. As Roure’s 1956 letters to Rousset indicate, Sartre was also correct to cast doubt on the limitless sympathy of many of Rousset’s supporters for “victims” everywhere, and to suspect that they would be much less eager to highlight the suffering of, say, French imperial subjects. Sartre’s signaling of the problematic nature

¹²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Merleau-Ponty,” *Situations*, vol. 4, 230. Originally published in *Les Temps modernes* 184-185 (October 1961) as “Merleau-Ponty vivant”: 304-376. “Il y a une morale de la politique – sujet difficile, jamais clairement traité – et, quand la politique doit trahir sa morale, choisir la morale c’est trahir la politique. Allez vous débrouiller de cela: surtout quand la politique s’est donné pour but l’avènement du règne humain.”

of Rousset's implicit conflation of Nazism and Stalinism – and even of the Nazi and Soviet camp systems – also gave voice to a valid criticism (although the terms in which Sartre expressed it were themselves problematic in some respects). Sartre and Merleau-Ponty may seem to us to have lacked moral perspicacity about Soviet state violence; nevertheless, their insistence that the gas chambers forever defined the Nazi camps as a different sort of enterprise than the gulag places them more in line with mainstream contemporary historical scholarship than Rousset's emphasis on political prisoners and forced labor. Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's intervention accurately highlighted the degree to which Rousset was obliged to distort and flatten the Nazi "concentration camp universe" – most importantly, by downplaying the specificity of the Jewish genocide – in order to compare it convincingly to the gulag. In other words, despite his own many blindnesses, Sartre does help us to locate some of the blind spots in the recent literature that uncritically celebrates Rousset as a rare moral hero in the bleak postwar French intellectual landscape.

Yet this should not serve to diminish Rousset's historical significance. Restoring him to the intellectual history of the postwar era – not as a heroic, supremely moral example to be invoked in contrast to his "irresponsible" compatriots like Sartre, but rather as a significant, sophisticated interlocutor for them – demonstrates the complicated and multivocal nature of French political and ethical thought in these years. When we take Rousset into consideration, it becomes more difficult to treat the period as a blank, morally bankrupt "before" to the "era of the witness" and the "ethical turn." Of course Rousset's influence was not that of Sartre; nevertheless, the fact that Sartre himself was compelled to attack Rousset's position on at least four occasions, over the span of more than a decade, indicates that Rousset was not an insignificant presence. Moreover, over the long term, the language Rousset

used to articulate the proper response to political violence has indeed become a prevalent if not a dominant language.

Ultimately, Rousset contributed in important ways to the shift during the 1950s in representations of the “meanings” and “lessons” of the war years: like the Catholic authors we considered in chapter 3, but with secular grounding and with still greater authority, the author of *L’Univers concentrationnaire* and *Les jours de notre mort* saw the devastated, supremely suffering victim of Nazi violence as the figure in recent history whose memory ought to dictate our action in the present. Pieter Lagrou has argued convincingly that from the late 1940s onward, France experienced “the growing appeal of Deportation,” as opposed to armed Resistance, “as a mythical concept depicting the collective experience of French society during the Second World War.”¹²⁹ Rousset’s intervention, by placing deportation instead of clandestine combat at the moral center of the war years and by treating it as the privileged experience that possessed “lessons” for the present, both took advantage of this movement in collective memory and helped to advance it. This shift helped made the legacy of “resistance” available to be appropriated for discourses of ethical opposition to all violence. It would only accelerate during the Algerian War, as more and more French intellectuals confronted the agonizing choices that did indeed arise “when politics must betray its morality.”

¹²⁹ *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 234. Lagrou argues that deportation, “increasingly the object of sacralisation” and increasingly associated with the “extraordinary atrocities” of the camps, came to *replace* resistance (“subject to devaluation and delegitimation”) as emblematic of the war years (235). I formulate the issue somewhat differently: resistance was not precisely devalued, but rather came to be *redefined around* the experience of the deportees. To have “resisted,” in the full moral sense, was to have held onto one’s humanity in the face of the unimaginable violence and degradation of the camps.

CHAPTER FIVE – Cold War Adventures in Humanism and Terror: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, and the Question of Revolutionary Violence, 1946-1955

In the previous three chapters, we have demonstrated the development of new, more critical discourses about political violence on the non-communist Left in the late forties and early fifties by highlighting figures from far outside Sartre's famous circle of "existentialists": SFIO Minister of the Interior Jules Moch, Catholic authors associated with the journal *Esprit* such as Alban-Vistel and Pierre Emmanuel, Buchenwald survivor David Rousset, and others. It is, indeed, a premise of this dissertation that to understand in their full scope and complexity French postwar debates about political violence, we *must* look beyond the tiny group loosely associated with Sartre, *Les Temps modernes*, and the cafes of the Left Bank. If we assume that the arguments that these figures made about political violence are representative of the overall intellectual production of the postwar non-communist Left, we truncate and thus misinterpret the range of opinion and argumentation available in the period.

Nevertheless, it is also important to our thesis to demonstrate that *even within* Sartre's small coterie, intellectuals looked upon political violence with increasing skepticism as the forties and fifties wore on. We have already seen in Chapter One that by 1946, Sartre's friend Camus had decided that he could no longer endorse political projects that might require the sacrifice of human life. Camus, however, had never considered himself one of the "existentialists" and seemed to represent a special case: far more representative of the *Temps modernes* circle was the argument in favor of political violence laid out by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's closest intellectual collaborator, in the essays that comprised his 1947 *Humanisme et terreur* (*Humanism and Terror*). Here, Merleau-Ponty provisionally defended Soviet "terror"

in the name of humanism, writing that so long as the USSR's violence was authentically revolutionary in its aims, it was justified by the fact that it was helping to produce a socialist world in which all violence would be eliminated. The book was nuanced in its endorsement of the USSR but, all the same, it established Merleau-Ponty as France's strongest intellectual defender of Soviet "terror" outside of the Communist Party. Yet about three years after it was published, Merleau-Ponty, too, decided that he no longer believed political violence could be justified by the purported humanist aims of the revolution. By the mid-fifties he had joined Camus in seeking, without outside hopes, a modest political agenda for the non-communist Left that would allow it to reject violence without entirely abdicating the struggle for social change. Critics of postwar French intellectual "irresponsibility" certainly dismiss this move as too-little-too-late. Tony Judt writes that Merleau-Ponty was simply "revealing weaknesses in his earlier arguments that had long since been obvious to outsiders."¹ But whether or not Merleau-Ponty's revelations were belated in this particular sense – and the point is debatable – the fact that by 1955 he was closer to Camus than to Sartre on the problem of political violence suggests that, even among those figures most commonly evoked as exemplars of "irresponsibility," there is a strong case to be made that a so-called turn "from revolution to ethics" came earlier than is commonly acknowledged. To make this case more thoroughly, this chapter draws out common elements in the trajectories of Camus and Merleau-Ponty up to the eve of the Algerian War.

At first glance, Merleau-Ponty and Camus appear to be the two members of Sartre's postwar circle with the least in common. Certain details of their biographies certainly coincide – notably, the loss of their fathers in World War I and their own

¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 291.

tragic early deaths, in 1961 and 1960 respectively, at the ages of 53 and 46. But intellectually they operated in different registers. Merleau-Ponty was a philosopher who, unlike many of those associated with *Les Temps modernes*, never wrote plays or novels: “The day I entered a philosophy class,” he told an interviewer, “I understood that it was philosophy that I wanted to practice. Neither then, nor since then, have I ever had the slightest hesitation about this.”² Meanwhile Camus, whose fictional work is perhaps his greatest legacy, refused the label of philosopher, preferring “moralist,” and decided soon after the war that “it doesn’t bother me to be in contradiction. I don’t desire to be a philosophical genius.”³ Merleau-Ponty embraced the labels “existentialist” and “humanist” while Camus regarded both with the utmost suspicion. The two men were not friends or interlocutors, and seemed to have little respect for one another’s work: on one of the rare occasions that he referred to Camus, Merleau-Ponty summarily dismissed him as one of “the apoliticals,”⁴ while Camus placed Merleau-Ponty, mockingly, among “our philosopher-spectators.”⁵ We will see that they quarreled angrily in 1946 and never reconciled.

Working in different frameworks, however, the two men were in fact concerned in the late forties and early fifties with similar problems: first, potential justifications for revolutionary violence; second, political justice (and political trials in

² Interview with Madeleine Chapsal *Les écrivains en personne* (Paris: Julliard, 1960): “À la question biographique, je réponds que le jour où je suis entré en classe de philosophie, j’ai compris que c’était de la philosophie que je voulais faire. Alors, ni depuis, je n’ai jamais eu la moindre hésitation là-dessus.” For this chapter I have in all cases consulted the relevant published translations, but for the sake of consistency across the many works by each author that I discuss, translations are my own.

³ Camus, *Carnets II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 172: “Mais je crois que cela m’est égal d’être dans la contradiction, je n’ai pas envie d’être un génie philosophique.”

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Les cahiers de la Pléiade,” *Les Temps modernes* 27 (December 1947), 1151: “Je sais bien qu’on trouve au sommaire des apolitiques comme Malraux et Camus.”

⁵ Albert Camus, “Première réponse à Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie,” originally published in *Caliban* 16 (1948) and reproduced in *Actuelles. Écrits politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 151: “Même si la violence que vous préconisez était plus progressive, comme disent nos philosophes-spectateurs, je dirais encore qu’il faut la limiter.” The allusion to Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between more or less “progressive” kinds of violence is unmistakable.

particular) in both France and the USSR; third, the extent to which Marxism retained value in a world much changed from that in which Marx had lived; and, finally, the precise nature of the relationship between means and ends. Both saw lethal violence justified in the name of revolution as the fundamental problem of the epoch, and both – working without the frameworks or guidelines that might have been available to thinkers who possessed either PCF affiliation or religious faith – devoted immense intellectual effort to the attempt to address it.⁶ From 1946, Camus’s primary concern was to articulate a political morality and a set of political projects that rejected the existing distribution of power in Western society while nevertheless refusing to legitimize those acts of violence aimed toward altering it. The Merleau-Ponty of the mid-to-late 1940s took a thoroughly different position, insisting that because violence was present, if unavowed, in *all* extant political regimes, “the question for the moment is not to know if one accepts or refuses violence, but if the violence with which one

⁶ Very little literature exists that considers Merleau-Ponty and Camus together. An interesting joint reading of *Humanisme et terreur* and Camus’s “Ni victimes ni bourreaux” series can be found in Maurice Weyembergh, *Albert Camus ou la mémoire des origines* (Brussels: De Boeck and Larquier, 1998), 101-136. In general, the philosophical literature on Merleau-Ponty has not tended to privilege his political philosophy – when Diana Coole’s *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics After Anti-Humanism* was published in 2007 (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield), the publishers proudly described it as “the first major work on Merleau-Ponty’s political philosophy in over two decades.” This is not entirely true: Duane Davis, ed., *Merleau-Ponty’s Later Works and Their Practical Implications: The Dehiscence of Responsibility* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001) brings together into a coherent volume a number of perceptive essays on Merleau-Ponty and politics. See also Coole, “Philosophy as Political Engagement: Revisiting Merleau-Ponty and Reopening the Communist Question,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 2 (2003): 327-350. Important earlier treatments that focus specifically on Merleau-Ponty’s political philosophy include Barry Cooper, *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism: From Terror to Reform* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979); Kerry H. Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Sonia Kruks, *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981). From the perspective of intellectual history, see Mark Poster’s discussion of Merleau-Ponty in *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), esp. 144-160 and 174-179; H. Stuart Hughes, *The Obstructed Path: French Social Thought in the Years of Desperation, 1930-1960* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 189-211; Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 361-384. Raymond Aron’s critiques also remain indispensable: see *L’Opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955) and *Marxism and the Existentialists*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). Surprisingly, there exists no real intellectual biography of the philosopher.

makes a pact is ‘progressive’ and tends toward suppressing itself.”⁷ His *Humanisme et Terreur* infuriated Camus with its claim that to “renounce” the use of force while one lived in the capitalist, imperialist West could only be the position of the “Quaker hypocrite”: according to Merleau-Ponty a Western pacifist might *believe* that he was opposing violence but was in fact offering his implicit support to a system of invisible but intense structural violence.⁸ Although Camus was not technically a pacifist, this charge touched a nerve in him, and his tortured 1951 work *L’Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*) can be read as an extended attempt to challenge Merleau-Ponty’s argument that only complicity with power, not meaningful political contestation, was possible for the man who refused to legitimize any violence.

By the time Camus’s book came out, however, Merleau-Ponty had already quietly begun to change his mind, thanks largely to the onset of the Korean War. His revised, critical position on revolutionary political violence, voiced most thoroughly in *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (published in 1955 but written in 1953 and 1954), spelled the end of his friendship with Sartre and his collaboration with *Les Temps modernes*. *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (*The Adventures of the Dialectic*) is a difficult, opaque, and somewhat disjointed amalgam of reflections on political philosophy: Raymond Aron commented that “out of 330 pages I do not think there are more than half a dozen that would allow a reader who was not a professional philosopher to clearly grasp the point of these subtle analyses or the purpose of this long discussion.”⁹ Even the professional philosophers have tended to find *Les Aventures* something of a slog, and have pointed out important ways in which the

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur: essai sur le problème communiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947; 1980), 83: “[L’anticommuniste] oubliait...que la question pour le moment n’est pas de savoir si l’on accepte ou refuse la violence, mais si la violence avec laquelle on pactise est ‘progressive’ et tend à se perpétuer...”

⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹ Raymond Aron, *Marxism and the Existentialists*, 46.

various strands of argument fail to cohere; in particular, they have stressed that book's abrupt political conclusions appear only tenuously linked to the extended discussion of political philosophy that precedes them.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the work's interest and significance lies largely in those conclusions, for they lay out with devastating understatement Merleau-Ponty's renunciation of *Humanisme et terreur* and of his earlier justification for violence in politics.

This chapter proceeds from a consideration of *Humanisme et terreur* to a reading of Camus's implicit rebuttal in *L'Homme révolté* and then to an analysis of *Les Aventures de la dialectique* that emphasizes its points of newfound convergence or agreement with Camus. I follow this structure not because I am interested in defending Merleau-Ponty from Judt's charges by narrativizing a triumphal or teleological progression from blindness to sight – nor, on the other hand, because I hope to contrast unfavorably his belated recognitions concerning the USSR with Camus's considerably earlier ones. Rather, I seek to demonstrate parallels between Camus's and Merleau-Ponty's politico-intellectual trajectories – trajectories that carried both men away from endorsing revolutionary violence and toward a tentative alternative politics defined by democratic, ethical exchange with others and avowedly “modest” aspirations toward changing the world. While acknowledging the profound differences between Camus and Merleau-Ponty – they remained, until their early deaths, thinkers with divergent or even antagonistic worldviews, intellectual priorities, and philosophical commitments – I argue that we can see in their eventual shared rejection of revolution the degree to which the immediate postwar consensus on violence within the non-communist Left

¹⁰ For example, in *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Kruks describes *Les Aventures* as “incoherent and unsatisfactory, a weak case for the abandonment of Marxism and a still weaker one for the advocacy of liberalism as the alternative” (104). Whiteside is a more sympathetic reader but nevertheless concludes that “the way [Merleau-Ponty] revises his philosophy of history after rejecting the Marxian hypothesis ends up hindering political thinking” (*Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*, 251).

stood in tatters by the mid-1950s, before both Budapest and Algeria. The cases of these two inarguably prominent figures, perhaps even more than the case of David Rousset, help show that in the context of concrete Cold War forms of violence and diffuse but intense Cold War fears, it was increasingly possible for French intellectuals to abandon support for violence while insisting that they were *not* abandoning the political Left but rather seeking to reorient it, by insisting on the primacy of ethical concerns and attentiveness to suffering. Sartre, who once considered himself “to the right of Merleau, to the left of Camus,” by 1955 stood flanked by neither.¹¹

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was born in 1908 into a well-off, observant Catholic family in Rochefort-sur-Mer (Charente-Maritime). After his father’s death in World War I, the family relocated to Paris. Merleau-Ponty’s education was rigorous, beginning with lycée at Louis-le-Grand and continuing with the neo-Kantian philosophy curriculum at the École Normale Supérieure, where he studied with Sartre, de Beauvoir, Paul Nizan, and Simone Weil; from early on, peers and professors recognized his brilliance in philosophy. After graduating in 1930 and teaching lycée in Beauvais and Chartres, he returned to the ENS as an agrégé-répétiteur in 1935, and remained there until he was called up to serve as a second lieutenant in 1939. The young Merleau-Ponty was influenced by Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel, and he flirted with Mounier’s *Esprit* movement in the 1930s.¹² By the time World War II broke out, however, he had rejected Christianity and embraced atheism; one proximate cause for his loss of faith may have been his four years’ attendance at Alexandre Kojève’s famous lecture series on Hegel and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

¹¹ Sartre, “Merleau-Ponty,” *Situations*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 216: “Il est vrai: j’étais à la droite de Merleau, à la gauche de Camus...” This piece was originally published as “Merleau-Ponty vivant” in *Les Temps modernes* 184-185 (October 1961): 304-376.

¹² See Jean Lacroix’s obituary for him in *Le Monde*, 6 May 1961.

(Kojève's humanist reading of Hegel – which interprets him through Marx and Heidegger – presents the history of the *Geist* in secularizing terms).¹³ At the same time, Merleau-Ponty also began engaging seriously with Marx. His critical but sympathetic exploration of these thinkers in the late thirties, and in particular his consideration of the master-slave dialectic, provided the basis for his commitment to humanism: rejecting transcendence, Merleau-Ponty embraced interhuman relations as the only kind available to men. “Interhuman *praxis*,” he would write after the war, “is the absolute.”¹⁴ This “intersubjective” realm in which men encountered one another was the space in which individual freedom had meaning: “One dies alone but one lives with others; we are the image they have made of us; there, where they are, we are as well.”¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty never fully elaborated his understanding of humanism, but he consistently emphasized that central to it was the perception of others as subjects and not objects: true humanism entailed, in the vague phrase Merleau-Ponty was particularly fond of, “mutual recognition” between men. He took the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as his model for how, through struggle, such a mutually affirmative back-and-forth gaze might be produced.

In 1942 Merleau-Ponty published his first major work, *La Structure du comportement*, which engaged with psychology in an attempt to “understand the relationship of consciousness and nature.”¹⁶ This was followed in 1945 by what

¹³ There are signs in Merleau-Ponty's later work of a renewed openness to dialogue with theology, and he was buried as a Catholic. On Kojève's Hegel and his influence on Merleau-Ponty, see Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 99-109. In addition to his attendance at Kojève's lectures, Merleau-Ponty was also drawn to Hegel by the work of his friend Jean Hippolyte; see John Heckman, “Hippolyte and the Hegel Revival in France,” *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973): 128-145.

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur*, 102, emphasis in original: “Par notre praxis totale, sinon par notre connaissance, nous touchons l'absolu, ou plutôt la *praxis* interhumaine est l'absolu.”

¹⁵ Quoted in Cooper, *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism*, 22.

¹⁶ *La Structure du comportement* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1942), 1 : “Notre but est de comprendre les rapports de la conscience et de la nature.”

arguably remains his most significant philosophical text, *La Phénoménologie de la perception*. The *Phénoménologie*, a work in close dialogue with Husserl's philosophy, criticized both empiricism and idealism (or, as Merleau-Ponty termed it, "intellectualism") from a phenomenological perspective. He was particularly concerned to relativize the subject-object dualities inherent in both these traditions, and drew on the notion of the body as incarnated subjectivity as a way of disrupting the Cartesian *cogito*. *La Structure du comportement* and *La Phénoménologie de la perception* earned Merleau-Ponty his degree Docteur ès lettres, and he began teaching at the Université de Lyon in 1945, where he would remain until he was summoned to the Sorbonne in 1949.

In the meantime, of course, to borrow the title of Merleau-Ponty's own famous 1945 article, "the war took place" and the world of French intellectual life changed irrevocably.¹⁷ Unlike many other members of the postwar Left whom we have encountered, Merleau-Ponty participated little in the active Resistance: his only notable involvement was belonging in 1941 to the short-lived group Socialisme et Liberté organized by Sartre and others connected to the ENS. Nevertheless he experienced the Occupation as a rupture and, as Kerry Whiteside has observed, as "a process of Hegelian *Bildung*...that moved men closer to universality and self-consciousness by forcing them to encounter and surmount problems."¹⁸ In the inaugural issue of *Les Temps modernes*, which Merleau-Ponty co-founded with Sartre, he wrote of the pre-1940 world as a lost Eden: "We did not yet live in the presence of cruelty and death; we had never been placed before the alternative of submitting to

¹⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "La guerre a eu lieu," *Les Temps modernes* 1 (October 1945): 48-66, and reproduced in *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1948). The article's title was a play on that of Jean Giraudoux's 1935 play *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (Paris: Grasset).

¹⁸ Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*, 40.

them or confronting them.”¹⁹ For the postwar Merleau-Ponty, as for the postwar Sartre, the Occupation represented the occasion for a political awakening: it made clear that one could not simply remain “outside” the realm of intersubjective relations that constituted politics. For Merleau-Ponty the war years demonstrated in particular the folly of a commitment to non-violence or pacifism, for these in fact equaled an implicit choice in favor of the status quo – a choice for which one was wholly responsible. “In this combat,” Merleau-Ponty wrote, “it was no longer permitted to us to be neutral. For the first time, we were led not only to observe but to assume the life of the society.” Writing in the midst of the purge trials of 1945, whose death sentences against figures such as Robert Brasillach he supported, Merleau-Ponty provided an example of this newly-realized responsibility with telling implications: “Before ’39,” he wrote,

The police did not concern us. They existed, but we would never have dreamed of engaging in policing. Who among us would have lent a strong hand to arrest a thief, or agreed to be a magistrate and render sentences? For our part, we wanted to be neither criminals nor thieves, because we had decided so. But how could our freedom have had the right to suppress another one, even if the assassin had himself disposed of another life? ... It was indeed necessary for us to change our opinion: we saw very well that it was up to us to judge. If it had depended on us to arrest or to condemn an informer [*dénonciateur*], we couldn’t have left the task to others.”²⁰

¹⁹ “La guerre a eu lieu,” *Sens et non-sens*, 282: “Nous ne vivions pas encore en présence de la cruauté et de la mort, nous n’avions jamais été mis dans l’alternative de les subir ou de les affronter.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 292-293: “Or, dans ce combat, il ne nous était plus permis de rester neutres. Pour la première fois, nous étions amenés non seulement à constater, mais encore à assumer la vie de société. Avant 39, la police ne nous concernait pas. Elle existait, mais nous n’aurions jamais songé à la faire. Qui d’entre nous aurait prêté main forte pour arrêter un voleur, ou accepté de se faire magistrat et de rendre des sentences? Nous voulions bien, pour notre compte, n’être ni criminels, ni voleurs, parce que nous en avions décidé ainsi. Mais comment notre liberté aurait-elle eu le droit d’en supprimer une autre, même si l’assassin avait lui-même disposé d’une autre vie? ... Il nous a bien fallu changer d’avis: nous avons bien vu qu’il nous appartenait de juger. S’il avait dépendu de nous d’arrêter et de condamner un dénonciateur, nous n’aurions pas pu laisser à d’autres cette besogne.”

To judge and to condemn others were responsibilities that had to be assumed once men recognized that they lived not in Eden but in a violent, contestatory History. And, concomitantly, Merleau-Ponty wrote, the Occupation had demonstrated the painful truth that in the world as it was presently constituted, a purely ethical relation to others was not *yet* possible: a political orientation that “is a statistical treatment of men...like substitutable objects” would at times be necessary. “From the perspective of conscience,” he admitted, “politics is impossible.”²¹ But in the fight against the inhuman evil of Nazism, he wrote, he had realized that it was better to betray conscience and acquire “dirty hands” than to betray the hopes of the Resistance to create a better future: “we unlearned ‘pure morality’ and learned a sort of popular immorality, which is healthy.”²² Merleau-Ponty insisted that this “unlearning” did not constitute an abandonment of the values held dear in the prewar Eden: “We were not wrong, in 1939, to want freedom, truth, happiness, transparent relations between men, and we do not renounce humanism. The war and the occupation only taught us that values remain nominal, and indeed are worth nothing, without a political and economic infrastructure that makes them enter into existence...It is not a matter of renouncing our 1939 values, but of accomplishing them.”²³

This final declaration can be read as a kind of mission statement for *Les Temps modernes*. In 1945 Merleau-Ponty threw himself into his role as an editor of the new

²¹ Ibid., 293-294: “Avant la guerre, la politique nous paraissait impensable parce qu’elle est un traitement statistique des hommes et qu’il n’y a pas de sens, pensions-nous, à traiter comme une collection d’objets substituables et par règlements généraux ces êtres singuliers dont chacun est pour soi un monde. Dans la perspective de la conscience, la politique est impossible.”

²² Ibid., 298: “Nous avons désappris la ‘pure morale’ et appris une sorte d’immoralisme populaire, qui est sain.”

²³ Ibid., 308-309: “Nous n’avions pas tort, en 1939, de vouloir la liberté, la vérité, le bonheur, des rapports transparents entre les hommes, et nous ne renonçons pas à l’humanisme. La guerre et l’occupation nous ont seulement appris que les valeurs restent nominales, et ne valent pas même, sans une infrastructure économique et politique qui les fasse entrer dans l’existence...Il ne s’agit pas de renoncer à nos valeurs de 1939, mais de les accomplir.”

journal, working closely with Sartre and de Beauvoir to produce a forum for writers “who want to change both the social condition of man and the conception that he has of himself.”²⁴ If the original Comité Directeur of the journal contained figures with views as divergent as Raymond Aron and Jean Paulhan, nevertheless *Les Temps modernes* was intimately tied to the defense of existentialism; and if Sartre’s own public interventions on this account are better known today (most notably his 1946 lecture “L’existentialisme est un humanisme”) Merleau-Ponty was likewise a tireless promoter of existentialism, which in his eyes provided an account of man as a historically and socially situated but nevertheless free being who, because he is without predetermined essence, can choose how he engages with the world and can create his own values.²⁵

For Merleau-Ponty, Marxism was theoretically compatible with existentialism. Moreover, when properly interpreted, it was a form of humanism. The moral core of Marx, in Merleau-Ponty’s reading, was the movement toward a socialist world in which “the recognition of man by man” – that is, a true humanist intersubjectivity – could be achieved.²⁶ Indeed, in demonstrating that in a society organized by class and marked by alienation such mutual recognition did not yet exist, and that therefore

²⁴ Sartre, “Présentation,” *Les Temps modernes* 1 (October 1945), 4: “Pour nous qui, sans être matérialistes, n’avons jamais distingué l’âme du corps et qui ne connaissons qu’une réalité indécomposable, la réalité humaine, nous nous rangeons du côté de ceux qui veulent changer à la fois la condition sociale de l’homme et la conception qu’il a de lui-même.”

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty’s existentialism, even in his phase of closest collaboration with Sartre, was different from Sartre’s in significant ways; these differences can be best understood through reading his later critiques of Sartre’s reliance on an overly Cartesian formulation of the thinking, choosing subject. A clear overview can be found in Margaret Whitford, *Merleau-Ponty’s Critique of Sartre’s Philosophy* (Lexington: French Forum, 1982). On Merleau-Ponty’s unstinting defense of “existentialism” and his embrace of the label, see Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*, 35-42.

²⁶ The phrase “reconnaissance de l’homme par l’homme” occurs on three occasions in *Humanisme et terreur*, and was also used by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre in “Les jours de notre vie,” *Les Temps modernes* 51 (January 1950), 1161, to designate one of the “values” that distinguished communists from fascists. See Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*, 156-159, for a critique of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the “ethical content” of Marxism.

social revolution would be necessary to bring it about, Marxism had become “the only humanism that dares to develop its consequences.”²⁷ Merleau-Ponty was particularly drawn to Marxism for its critique of capitalism and attendant ideologies. In 1947 he wrote, “As a critique of the existing world and of other humanisms, it remains valuable. In this regard at least, *it cannot be surpassed*. Even incapable of giving form to world history, it remains strong enough to discredit the other solutions...In this sense, it is not a philosophy of history, it is the philosophy of history, and to renounce it is to say goodbye to historical Reason.”²⁸ If Marx was wrong, in other words, then history was meaningless and random: it had no direction, no purpose, no “end.”

Merleau-Ponty’s Marxism did not, however, translate easily into a well-defined position in the contemporary political landscape. *Les Temps modernes* was proudly “unaligned” – it “will serve no party,” Sartre had announced in the first issue – and Merleau-Ponty was never either a member of the PC nor a fellow-traveler.²⁹ Indeed, some of his fiercest debates were with Party intellectuals who attacked existentialism as decadent and whose Marxism Merleau-Ponty saw as dogmatic and thereby at odds with Marx himself. As the Cold War hardened, he thoroughly rejected the “realist” notion that Europeans ought to join either the communist or the capitalist “bloc,” and he became exasperated with “contemporary communism” in France, “which has ceased to be a confident interpretation of spontaneous history to withdraw

²⁷ *Humanisme et terreur*, 270: “Le marxisme a un premier titre, tout subjectif, à bénéficier d’un sursis: c’est qu’il est le seul humanisme qui ose développer ses conséquences.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 266, emphasis in original: “Comme critique du monde existant et des autres humanismes, il reste valable. A ce titre au moins, *il ne saurait être dépassé*. Même incapable de donner forme à l’histoire mondiale, il reste assez fort pour discréditer les autres solutions...En ce sens, ce n’est pas une philosophie de l’histoire, c’est la philosophie de l’histoire, et y renoncer, c’est faire une croix sur la Raison historique. Après quoi, il n’y a plus que rêveries ou aventures.”

²⁹ “Présentation,” 4: “elle ne servira aucun parti.”

into the defense of the USSR.”³⁰ He was, however, respectful of the role the Party had played in the French Resistance: *Humanisme et terreur* was dedicated to two friends who had perished while resisting with the PCF during the war.³¹ He was also mindful of the fact that much of the French working class supported the Communists (“they remain in the Party because it is there and so long as it is there, the Communist Party remains the party of the proletariat”), and he was viscerally disgusted with the domestic politics of anti-communism, particularly on the part of the SFIO.³²

The essays on “the communist problem” that comprise *Humanisme et terreur*, first published in *Les Temps modernes* in 1946 and 1947, are clearly situated in the postwar, Cold War intellectual context of intense debate about communism, the USSR, and the potential for Marxist revolution to truly “accomplish” humanist values of mutual recognition. However, Merleau-Ponty’s decision to focus his attention on the Moscow Trials nearly a decade after their occurrence (they had already been the subject of an outpouring of French commentary before the war) rendered *Humanisme et terreur* an oddly belated text; this effect is intensified by the fact that Merleau-Ponty eschewed almost any mention of certain common wartime and postwar points of reference about the Soviet Union – the Nazi-Soviet pact, the contributions of the Red Army against Hitler, the victory at Stalingrad, Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, the Cominform, and so on. In part, this quality of belatedness can be explained by recalling the contingencies produced by restrictions on publication under Vichy.

³⁰ *Humanisme et terreur*, 56: “Cette timidité, cette sous-estimation de la recherche est liée au changement profond du communisme contemporain qui a cessé d’être une interprétation confiante de l’histoire pour se replier sur la défense de l’U.R.S.S.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 78: “Nous écrivions pour des amis dont nous voudrions inscrire ici le nom, s’il était permis de prendre des morts pour témoins.”

³² *Ibid.*, 274: “Quant au prolétariat urbain et industriel...il reste dans le parti parce qu’il y est et que, tant qu’il y est, le parti communiste reste le parti du prolétariat.”

Humanisme et terreur was, in large part, a critical reading of Hungarian-born ex-Communist Arthur Koestler's explosive *Darkness at Noon*, a fictional treatment of the Moscow Trials which had been first published in English in 1940; Koestler's book was not, however, put out in French translation until 1945 (by Calmann-Lévy, under the title *Le Zero et l'infini*). At this point, in a France passionately interested in the USSR and "the communist problem," it became a literary sensation, selling over 300,000 copies by 1948.³³ Thus, in responding promptly to Koestler's work, Merleau-Ponty was nevertheless compelled to return to the problems raised a decade earlier by the Moscow Trials.

To this explanation of timing we must add that that the *épuration* had fueled Merleau-Ponty's interest in the problem of political justice: throughout the text of *Humanisme et terreur*, he referred repeatedly to parallels between the trial of Bolshevik leader Nikolai Bukharin in 1938 during the Stalinist Great Purge and the 1945 trials of Pétain and Laval. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty argued that the extraordinary experience of France from 1940 to the Liberation had provided Frenchmen with a new understanding of the "limit-situation" experienced by political actors in the Soviet Union.³⁴ Of course France had not experienced anything precisely like a Marxist revolution, Merleau-Ponty wrote. But the defeat of 1940, the Occupation, and the installation of the Vichy government paralleled the Russian Revolution and its state-building aftermath because they "*placed back in question what was uncontested.*"³⁵ For the French, the experience "stripped bare the contingent foundations of legality,

³³ See Martine Poulaine, "A Cold War Best-Seller: The Reaction to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* in France from 1945 to 1950," *Libraries & Culture* 36.1 (2001): 172-184.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 133: "L'expérience de la guerre peut nous aider à comprendre les dilemmes de Roubachof et les procès de Moscou." (Roubachof was Koestler's fictionalized Bukharin.)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125, emphasis in original: "Or, depuis 1939, nous n'avons certes pas vécu une révolution marxiste, mais nous avons vécu une guerre et une occupation, et les deux phénomènes sont comparables en ceci que tous deux *remettent en question l'incontesté.*"

because it showed how one constructs a new legality. For the first time in a long time we saw formal legality and moral authority dissociated, the apparatus of the State was emptied of its legitimacy and lost its sacred character.” In this context the individual, dragged out abruptly from “under the shadow of a constituted State, was invited to discuss the social contract with himself and to reconstitute a State by his choice.”³⁶ Merleau-Ponty suggested that, having undergone this extraordinary experience, the French were now perhaps better equipped to judge fairly the Soviet Union, “a country that has hardly experienced anything *except* limit-situations since 1917.”³⁷

The central problem of *Humanisme et terreur* was whether the Soviet state’s use of violence could be justified by the humanist aims of the Russian Revolution. Merleau-Ponty used the general language of “violence” extensively throughout *Humanisme et terreur* (he originally planned to title it *Humanisme et violence*), and he defined “violence” in extremely broad terms as any form of objectification of human beings that denied them their full subjecthood. This definition of violence allowed Merleau-Ponty to problematize structural, “invisible” phenomena such as capitalist economic “exploitation” and colonial legal regimes alongside overt acts of bloodshed. However, expanding the notion of “violence” in this way also meant that *Humanisme et terreur* tended toward extreme abstraction: this bloodless “violence” was everywhere and nowhere. The single more specific form of violence that interested Merleau-Ponty was the Soviet state’s political execution of elites, an issue he approached through the case of Bukharin’s trial, confession, and execution. (Aside

³⁶ Ibid.: “La défaite de 1940...mettait à nu les fondements contingents de la légalité, parce qu’elle montrait comment on construit une nouvelle légalité. Pour la première fois depuis longtemps on voyait dissociées la légalité formelle et l’autorité morale, l’appareil d’État se vidait de sa légitimité et perdait son caractère sacré au profit d’un État à faire qui ne reposait encore que sur les volontés. Pour la première fois depuis longtemps chaque Français et en particulier chaque fonctionnaire, au lieu de vivre dans l’ombre d’un État constitué, était invité à discuter en lui-même le pacte social et à reconstituer un État par son choix.”

³⁷ Ibid., 133: “un pays qui n’a guère connu depuis 1917 que des situations-limites.”

from a lone reference to “the deportation of a family,” he did not directly discuss nor even acknowledge the Soviet state’s mass violence against ordinary people.³⁸) The text thus slipped often between considering the role of “violence” in history in grand philosophical terms and examining the much more contained issue of a particular revolutionary regime’s justification for suppressing high-level dissent.

The key premise for Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of violence was that in our not-yet humanist world, the interactions of both individuals and collectivities everywhere on the globe were marked by – indeed, drenched in – violence. Violence in *Humanisme et terreur* functioned as something inescapable and inherent to the human condition, akin to original sin for a believer: it was “our lot,” and “the originating situation common to all regimes. Life, discussion, and political choice only take place on this basis.”³⁹ Some forms of violence were certainly less visible than others, but this did not make them less invidious. The anti-communist who condemned the USSR because the regime employed violence “forgot that all regimes are criminal, that Western liberalism sits on the forced labor of the colonies and on twenty wars...that communism does not invent violence, that it finds it established...”⁴⁰ But if capitalist and communist regimes were both guilty of violence, of treating men as objects, then how could one choose which system’s violence to support? For sooner or later one must choose: Merleau-Ponty rejected the idea that individuals could recuse themselves from supporting one form of violence or another by claiming ethical

³⁸ Ibid., 300.

³⁹ Ibid., 213: “La violence est notre lot en tant que nous sommes incarnés...La violence est la situation de départ commune à tous les régimes. La vie, la discussion et la choix politique n’ont lieu que sur ce fond.”

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83: “[L’anticommuniste] oubliait que tous les régimes sont criminels, que le libéralisme occidental est assis sur le travail forcé des colonies et sur vingt guerres, que la mort d’un noir lynché en Louisiane, celle d’un indigène en Indonésie, en Algérie ou en Indochine, est, devant la morale, aussi peu pardonnable que celle de Roubachof, que le communisme n’invente pas la violence, qu’il la trouve établie...”

concerns “outside” or “beyond” politics and history. “One then claims,” he wrote with distaste, “to preserve the human beyond the miseries of politics; in fact, in that exact moment, one endorses a certain politics.”⁴¹ An absolute commitment to non-violence, Merleau-Ponty argued further, “rests, at the end of the day, on the idea of a world that is *made* and *well-made*,” an absurdly complacent position when, in fact, it was clear that men had not yet built a humanist society marked by mutual recognition.⁴² “If we condemn all violence, we place ourselves outside the domain where there is justice and injustice, we curse the world and humanity – a hypocritical malediction, because he who pronounces it, from the moment he was born, has already accepted the rule of the game.”⁴³

Given, then, that “it is inevitable that one choose” which violence to prefer (even if this choice is made by default for those who try to abstain from choosing), the question is what our guiding criterion ought to be.⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty answered by invoking the value of humanism. If one accepted the Marxist view of history as dialectical movement that “has a direction [*sens*],” he argued, then one believed that, through the rise of the proletariat to power, humanity could ultimately “go beyond social and national antagonisms and the conflict of man with man.”⁴⁵ The classless future society would at last instantiate (or, to use Merleau-Ponty’s own term,

⁴¹ Ibid., 52: “On prétend alors préserver l’humain par delà les misères de la politique; en fait, à ce moment même, on endosse une certaine politique.”

⁴² Ibid., 197, emphasis in original: “Nous avons jusqu’ici délimité notre terrain de discussion: nous savons maintenant qu’il ne peut être question d’opposer simplement au révolutionnaire la non-violence absolue, qui repose en fin du compte sur l’idée d’un monde *fait et bien fait*.”

⁴³ Ibid., 214: “Si l’on condamne toute violence, on se place hors du domaine où il y a justice et injustice, on maudit le monde et l’humanité, – malédiction hypocrite, puisque celui qui la prononce, du moment qu’il a déjà vécu, a déjà accepté la règle du jeu.”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 214: “...il est inévitable que l’on choisisse...”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 236-237: “Le marxisme est pour l’essentiel cette idée que l’histoire a un sens – en d’autres termes qu’elle est intelligible et qu’elle est orientée – qu’elle va vers le pouvoir du prolétariat qui est capable, comme facteur essentiel de la production, de dépasser les contradictions du capitalisme et d’organiser l’appropriation humaine de la nature – comme ‘classe universelle,’ de dépasser les antagonismes sociaux et nationaux et le conflit de l’homme avec l’homme.”

“accomplish”) the humanism of mutual recognition: it would allow for “the beginning of a true human coexistence” in which no man treated another as an object. Thereby violence would at last be expelled from history.⁴⁶ It was clear, Merleau-Ponty wrote, that this state of affairs could not be achieved without fierce struggle: “One cannot go beyond violence except in creating something new through violence.”⁴⁷ He was dismissive of the possibility of socialist revolution occurring by peaceful means: the “Marxist response” to such fantasy, he wrote, had to be, “Either one wants to do something, but it is on condition of exercising violence – or one respects formal freedom, one renounces violence, but one can only do this by renouncing socialism and the society without classes...”⁴⁸ Ultimately, since “we do not have a choice between purity and violence but between different sorts of violence,”⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty wrote, revolutionary destruction had to be judged preferable to the “retrograde” violence of the capitalist system, because it moved toward creating a humanist future.⁵⁰ It could therefore, in relative terms, be justified. “We say,” Merleau-Ponty wrote, “that one could go that way if it were for creating a society without violence.”⁵¹

Therefore, for Merleau-Ponty any meaningful discussion of the communist regime in the USSR “consists of researching not if communism respects the rules of liberal thought – it is too evident that it does not – but if the violence that it exercises

⁴⁶ Ibid., 217: “le commencement d’une vraie coexistence humaine.”

⁴⁷ Ibid., 122: “Le développement du communisme à son tour n’est pas un commencement absolu, il exprime l’aggravation de la lutte sociale et la décomposition du monde libéral tout autant qu’il en est en cause, et, s’il la précipite, c’est parce que l’on ne saurait restaurer en histoire, on ne peut dépasser la violence qu’en créant du nouveau à travers la violence.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 210: “La réponse marxiste à ces questions sera d’abord: c’est cela ou rien. Ou bien on veut faire quelque chose, mais c’est à condition d’user de la violence – ou bien on respecte la liberté formelle, on renonce à la violence, mais on ne peut le faire qu’en renonçant au socialisme et à la société sans classe, c’est-à-dire en consolidant le règne du ‘quaker hypocrite.’”

⁴⁹ Ibid., 213: “Nous n’avons pas la choix entre la pureté et la violence, mais entre différentes sortes de violence.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., 199: “violence rétrograde.”

⁵¹ Ibid., 67: “Nous disons: on pourrait en passer par là, si c’était pour créer une société sans violence.”

is revolutionary and is capable of creating human relationships among men.”⁵²

According to Merleau-Ponty, this was not a matter of justifying the means with the ends (the Marxist dialectic, he wrote, surpassed these crude categories, demonstrating that means and ends were always intertwined in the unfolding dynamic of history) nor of banking on “the future” to explain away immense human suffering in the present. Instead, it was a rational choice based on probabilities and observation of the lived world. Nevertheless – and however much Merleau-Ponty denigrated “utopias” – it is difficult to deny that the provisional justification for revolutionary violence in *Humanisme et terreur* did indeed rely heavily on a kind of blank utopianism, an unelaborated reference to a future, genuinely “human” society that would come into being through the quasi-sacrificial, regenerative logic of revolutionary violence-to-end-violence and would be unimaginably different from the present. This hazy, unspecified realm of universal intersubjectivity, of ill-defined “mutual recognition” amongst all men, would be *actually* free of violence, unlike the liberal West which only *pretended* to be. Conflict, since it had been driven throughout human history by the class struggle, would disappear: thus, if Merleau-Ponty’s description of “history” was a virtual equation between this term and “violence,” figured in extremely abstract terms, then his “future” (provided Marxism proved correct) was an even more abstractly configured *pax mundi*.

Merleau-Ponty took care to treat the Marxist narrative of history and its endpoint as an unconfirmed hypothetical – an open question for humanity. He insisted that the possibility of achieving the post-revolutionary society, which would retroactively demonstrate that the sacrifice of human life in the present had been

⁵² Ibid., 44: “[La discussion] ne consiste pas à rechercher si le communisme respecte les règles de la pensée libérale, il est trop évident qu’il ne le fait pas, mais si la violence qu’il exerce est révolutionnaire et capable de créer entre les hommes les rapports humains.”

justified, remained in every moment radically contingent, never assured. This uncertainty was precisely what made evaluating Soviet violence today so difficult. But if he was adamant that “there is no science of the future,”⁵³ *Humanisme et terreur* undoubtedly betrayed a deep *longing* for Marx’s view of history to be correct. If Marx and Hegel were wrong, he wrote at one point, and the master-slave dialectic ended not in mutual recognition but simply in an endless cycle of new masters and new slaves, then “the world and our existence are a senseless tumult [*tumulte insensé*]...Outside of Marxism, there is only the might of some, and the resignation of others.”⁵⁴

Merleau-Ponty thus turned to the Moscow Trials to discover “if violence over there is the infantile disorder of a new history, or only an episode in immutable history” – the latter thereby providing depressing evidence that history was indeed merely “a senseless tumult” with no endpoint or escape.⁵⁵ He treated the Trials as a sort of case study in the Soviet state’s use of violence that might provide clues as to whether or not Soviet communism was engaged in a genuine revolutionary dialectic of terror and humanism. Indeed, the language of “case study” is not entirely appropriate here: it may be more accurate to say that Merleau-Ponty attempted to read the Moscow Trials as one read tea leaves, searching hopefully for a hidden but discernible pattern that could confirm the Marxist prophecy – for, he believed, “if there is then a theory of violence and a justification for the Terror, ...the violence that it legitimates

⁵³ Ibid., 63: “À supposer même que sans la mort de Bukharine Stalingrad fût impossible, personne ne pouvait prévoir en 1937 la suite des conséquences qui, dans cette hypothèse, devaient conduire de l’une à l’autre, pour la simple raison qu’il n’y a pas de science de l’avenir.”

⁵⁴ Ibid., 269: “Mais, au cas où ce développement ne se produirait pas, cela ne signifierait pas que la philosophie marxiste de l’histoire doit être remplacée par une autre, cela signifierait qu’il n’y a pas d’histoire si l’histoire est l’avènement d’une humanité et l’humanité la reconnaissance mutuelle des hommes comme hommes – en conséquence pas de philosophie de l’histoire, et qu’enfin, comme le disait Barrès, le monde et notre existence sont un tumulte insensé...Hors du marxisme, il n’y a que puissance des uns, et résignation des autres.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 199: “Il nous reste donc à replacer les crises du Parti Communiste russe dans les perspectives qui sont communes au gouvernement soviétique et aux opposants, et à rechercher si la violence est là-bas la maladie infantile d’une nouvelle histoire, ou seulement un épisode de l’histoire immuable.”

ought to bear a sign [*porter un signe*] that distinguishes it already from retrograde violence.”⁵⁶

As he searched expectantly for this “*signe*,” much of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the Moscow Trials operated through repeated analogy between the violence exercised by the Soviet state and that exercised by the French Resistance both during and after the Occupation. Rhetorically, this was an excellent strategy for an author whose agenda was sympathetic to the USSR: in the France of 1947, as we have seen, exceedingly few voices dared to level any criticism at the use of violence in the Resistance. Lending the Resistance’s brilliant aura of legitimacy to Soviet violence thus indeed helped to make the case that the USSR was not engaged in anything “retrograde.” Substantively, however, the analogy Merleau-Ponty constructed was problematic – for one thing, even at its most organized the interior Resistance had had precious little in common with the USSR’s vast state apparatus. The waters were muddied further by the fact that Merleau-Ponty never distinguish between acts of violence that the Resistance committed against its opponents *during* the Occupation and its involvement in the post-Liberation punishment of collaborators: like many on the French Left, he treated the *épuration* as an indistinguishable element of the Resistance project.

For him, both the wartime Resistance and the *épuration* helped to justify the Moscow Trials because they laid bare that in extreme situations in which the future of the polity itself was threatened, a revolutionary justice motivated by political efficacy and unconcerned with individuals’ “good intentions” might be necessary.⁵⁷ The Nazi

⁵⁶ Ibid., 198-199: “Si donc il est une théorie de la violence et une justification de la Terreur, il fait surgir la raison de la déraison, et la violence qu’il légitime doit porter un signe qui déjà la distingue de la violence rétrograde.”

⁵⁷ Ibid., 121: “...en période de tension révolutionnaire ou de danger extérieur, il n’y a pas de frontière précise entre divergences politiques et trahison objective, l’humanisme est en suspens, le gouvernement est Terreur.”

Occupation of France, he wrote, had placed the French in an emergency context of fundamental political choice, in which the decision to collaborate or to resist, for whatever reason, constituted an acceptance of responsibility and indeed a commitment to “fight to the death.” In this “limit-situation,” there was “no longer any ‘legitimate diversity of opinions.’ Men condemned one another to death as traitors because they did not envision the future in the same way. Intentions no longer counted, but only acts.”⁵⁸ In the light of this new experience the French could at last recognize, Merleau-Ponty suggested, that Robespierre, Saint-Just and their comrades had been right to insist in 1793 that in an emergency situation, a revolutionary justice motivated by political efficacy was necessary: “In periods of revolutionary tension or exterior danger, there is no precise frontier between political differences and objective treason, humanism is in suspense, the government is Terror.”⁵⁹

Thus Merleau-Ponty, while recognizing the existence of a kind of ethical judgment that took into account only men’s intentions, insisted that such an ethics had been impracticable in the “*situation-limite*” of the Resistance’s struggle, when the fate of the French nation hung in the balance. This remained true even after the most acute moment of danger had passed: at the Liberation, he insisted (again simply echoing

⁵⁸ Ibid., 126: “[L]es consciences se trouvaient replacées dans le dogmatisme de la lutte à mort... Il n’y avait plus de ‘diversité légitime des opinions.’ Les hommes se condamnaient à mort l’un l’autre comme traîtres parce qu’ils ne voyaient pas l’avenir de la même façon. Les intentions ne comptaient plus, mais seulement les actes.”

⁵⁹ Ibid., 121: “...en période de tension révolutionnaire ou de danger extérieur, il n’y a pas de frontière précise entre divergences politiques et trahison objective, l’humanisme est en suspens, le gouvernement est Terreur.” Although the distinction he drew between “limit” situations and normal times was strikingly similar to Robespierre’s notion of revolutionary versus constitutional government, Merleau-Ponty did not acknowledge the affiliation and offered no sustained “reading” of the French Revolution or the Terror – indeed, *Humanisme et terreur* contains surprisingly few references to France’s own revolution. It is worth noting, however, as evidence for the ambivalence of the book, that at one point much further on in the text, he did offer a more critical comment on the Terror than the one quoted above: “Partant de la liberté, de la vertu, de la Raison, les hommes de 93 aboutissent à l’autorité pure parce qu’ils se savent porteurs de la vérité, que cette vérité, incarnée dans les hommes et dans le gouvernement, est aussitôt menacée par la liberté des autres et que le gouverné en tant qu’autre est un *suspect*. La Révolution de 93 est Terreur parce qu’elle est abstraite et veut passer immédiatement des principes à l’application forcée de ces principes” (261).

contemporary Left orthodoxy), Pétain and Laval had deserved to hang regardless of whether they had *believed* that by collaborating they were acting in the best interests of the country. “Good or bad, honest or venal, courageous or cowardly, the collaborator is a traitor for the resister, and thus objectively or historically a traitor the day that the Resistance is victorious.”⁶⁰ Intentions were not relevant in assigning political responsibility. As we saw in Chapter Three, Jean Paulhan would insist in 1952 that the *épuration* had been illegitimate because it had been “political”: victims-turned-vanquishers rather than impartial observers had sat in judgment of their political opponents and had condemned them for their opinions. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty asserted that the *épuration* made sense *only* if recognized as a “political” form of justice, wholly distinct from regular criminal proceedings; he insisted, further, that using “impartial” judges and juries to try collaborators was in fact a terrible injustice, since men who had remained “impartial” during the war were hardly different from the collaborators themselves: “only resisters have the right to punish or absolve the collaborators,” he claimed, because they alone had taken on the risk and responsibility of saying “no” to collaboration.⁶¹

Thus the Occupation and its aftermath provided proof, in Merleau-Ponty’s eyes, that loyally-intentioned acts could nevertheless constitute treason; that men were wholly responsible for the “objective” effects of their political actions no matter what their motives had been; that with the future of the collective at stake, it was not a scandal to execute those who had bet on the wrong side of history – and lost. The

⁶⁰ Ibid., 132-33: “Bon ou mauvais, honnête ou vénel, courageux ou lâche, le collaborateur est un traître pour le résistant, et donc un traître objectivement ou historiquement le jour où la résistance est victorieuse.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 131: “Demander que les jurys d’*épuration* présentent des ‘garanties d’impartialité,’ c’est prouver qu’on n’a jamais absolument pris parti, car, si on l’avait fait, on saurait que, quand elle est radicale, la décision historique est partielle et absolue, que seule une autre décision peut s’en faire juge, et pour finir que seuls les résistants ont le droit de punir ou d’absoudre les collaborateurs.”

analogy to the Soviet situation, and to Nikolai Bukharin's "objective guilt" specifically, were clear. The only problem, Merleau-Ponty explained, was that whereas in postwar France "by the fact of the Allied victory"⁶² there was no question as to which side had been "wrong," it was impossible to *know* whether Bukharin's dissent from the Stalinists was indeed an "objective" betrayal of the dialectical movement of the revolution-in-progress in the USSR. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty suggested, there would *never* be any way to know this with absolute certainty. Even if the revolution succeeded and the USSR established a glorious realm of "recognition of man by man," it would not retroactively prove that the execution of Bukharin had been "necessary." (Perhaps this end would have been achieved still more quickly or easily had he *not* been executed!) In the absence of a science of history, therefore, the assigning of political guilt would always be an affair of probabilities, a subjective judgment "in the eyes of others."⁶³

Merleau-Ponty did not attempt to argue his way beyond this fact. He simply accepted it as an unchangeable element of political action in the world, though with a caveat: "Since, as for the future, we have no other criterion except probability, the difference between more and less probable suffices as the basis of a political decision, but not [as a basis] for placing all the honor on one side, and all the dishonor on the other."⁶⁴ The Stalinist state was therefore justified in executing Bukharin for the sake of the revolution, he explained, and yet this did not mean that Bukharin was a villain in any conventional sense; Bukharin himself – as a consummate Marxist who grasped

⁶² Ibid., 129: "Par le fait de la victoire alliée. Il démontre péremptoirement que la collaboration n'était pas nécessaire..."

⁶³ Ibid., 118: "Tant qu'il y aura des hommes, une société, une histoire ouverte, de tels conflits seront possibles, notre responsabilité historique ou objective ne sera que notre responsabilité aux yeux des autres..."

⁶⁴ Ibid., 118-119: "Puisque nous n'avons, quant à l'avenir, pas d'autre critérium que la probabilité, la différence du plus au moins probable suffit pour fonder la décision politique, mais non pas pour mettre d'un côté tout l'honneur, de l'autre tout le déshonneur."

that in politics only actions, not intentions, mattered – had understood this: hence his confession. Like Oedipus, Merleau-Ponty suggested, Bukharin had accepted the tragic existence of an “involuntary responsibility,” a “fundamental risk,” that made men “all innocent and all guilty.”⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty thus ultimately faulted the Soviets not for “killing men for their ideas” but for being insufficiently *forthright* about the political character of their violence.⁶⁶

What attitude, then, did Merleau-Ponty ultimately adopt toward the Soviet Union in *Humanisme et terreur*? He admitted that “one would have difficulty supporting” the claim that Stalin’s USSR “is going toward the recognition of man by man, internationalism, the withering away of the State and the actual power of the proletariat.”⁶⁷ But the home of the revolution had faced undreamed-of challenges from the outside. Merleau-Ponty deemed it impossible to discern with any degree of confidence whether the historical dialectic of the revolution was moving the USSR in some byzantine, as-yet unclear fashion toward genuine proletarian dictatorship. Meanwhile, anti-communism “today brings together the brutality, the pride, the vertigo, the anguish that already found their expression in fascism”: it was a reactionary, hierarchical movement driven by dread of the other and fear of change, committed to the continued subjugation of some portion of society.⁶⁸ Thus he stated, in a famous summation of the painful position of the postwar unaffiliated French Left,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 69: “C’est le cauchemar d’une responsabilité involontaire et d’une culpabilité par position qui soutenait déjà le mythe d’Oedipe: Oedipe n’a pas voulu épouser sa mère ni tuer son père, mais il l’a fait et le fait vaut comme crime. Toute la tragédie grecque sous-entend cette idée d’un hasard fondamental qui nous fait tous coupables et tous innocents parce que nous ne savons pas ce que nous faisons.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 122: “En réalité, ce qui est grave et menace la civilisation, ce n’est pas de tuer un homme pour ses idées (on l’a souvent fait en temps de guerre), c’est de le faire sans l’avouer et sans le dire, de mettre sur la justice révolutionnaire le masque du code pénal.”

⁶⁷ Ibid., 48: “Si l’on essaye d’apprécier l’orientation générale du système, on soutiendrait difficilement qu’il va vers la reconnaissance de l’homme par l’homme, l’internationalisme, le dépérissement de l’État et le pouvoir effectif du prolétariat.”

⁶⁸ Ibid., 49: “La critique marxiste du capitalisme reste valable et il est clair que l’antisoviétisme rassemble aujourd’hui la brutalité, l’orgueil, le vertige et l’angoisse qui ont trouvé déjà leur expression dans le fascisme.”

“One cannot be an anti-communist, one cannot be a communist.”⁶⁹ He proposed what he would later label a “Marxist *attentisme*,”⁷⁰ a wait-and-see neutrality that nevertheless required firm opposition to aggression against the USSR and also barred “any criticism of communism or of the USSR that makes use of isolated facts, without situating them in their context and in relation to the problems of the USSR – any apology for democratic regimes that is silent about their violent intervention in the rest of the world...”⁷¹ For the present, Western intellectuals “must retain our freedom, while waiting for a new pulsation of history that will perhaps permit us to engage with it through a popular movement without ambiguity.”⁷²

In approaching Albert Camus’s post-1946 political thought in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s, it is crucial to understand that the two men in fact agreed on one of the central contentions of *Humanisme et terreur*: that every revolution “is a forced revolution, is violence.”⁷³ Camus – who before the war briefly belonged to the Algerian Communist Party and who continued to identify as a member of the Left – thus accepted with open eyes that he was sacrificing the goal of socialist revolution when he decided in 1946 that he could no longer justify murder. In his eyes, this was a synonym for “violence,” and he subsequently operated under the assumption that all forms of “violent” contestation would sooner or later demand the literal act of murdering a fellow

⁶⁹ Ibid.: “On ne peut pas être anticommuniste, on ne peut pas être communiste.”

⁷⁰ This phrase does not in fact appear in *Humanisme et terreur*, but in *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 316: “Nous avons essayé au lendemain de la guerre de formuler une attitude d’attentisme marxiste.”

⁷¹ Ibid., 299: “Toute critique du communisme ou de l’U.R.S.S. qui se sert de faits isolés, sans les situer dans leur contexte et par rapport aux problèmes de l’U.R.S.S. – toute apologie des régimes démocratiques qui passe sous silence leur intervention violente dans le reste du monde...ne peut servir qu’à masquer le problème du capitalisme, vise en réalité l’existence même de l’U.R.S.S. et doit être considérée comme un acte de guerre.”

⁷² Ibid., 51: “Il nous faut garder la liberté, en attendant qu’une nouvelle pulsation de l’histoire nous permette peut-être de l’engager dans un mouvement populaire sans ambiguïté.”

⁷³ *Humanisme et terreur*, 192: “Une révolution, même fondée sur une philosophie de l’histoire, est une révolution forcée, est violence...”

creature: hence deeming murder illegitimate meant abandoning organized revolutionary politics. But he found that he could not simply let the matter rest there. He was determined to demonstrate that abstaining from murder (“violence”) did not require abandoning all hope of changing the world: he sought to locate a form of contestatory politics that remained possible to the man who refused to justify killing. He therefore gropingly attempted over the course of several years to articulate a limited, modest set of projects and commitments that might reorient and revive his French Left “family.”⁷⁴ His 1951 *L’Homme révolté* marked the climax of this quest.

As Camus turned his attention from the bitter disappointments of the *épuration* to the frightening state of world politics in late 1946, revolution was the central problem with which he grappled. “Since August 1944,” he observed in *Combat*, “everyone here is talking about revolution.”⁷⁵ Indeed, Camus himself had talked about it a great deal, in glowing terms, until quite recently: at the Liberation, for example, he had sung the praises of “this word” that “gives direction to our taste for energy and for honor, to our decision to be done with the spirit of mediocrity and the powers of money, with a social state in which the ruling class has betrayed all its duties and has lacked intelligence and heart at once.”⁷⁶ In 1945 he published a “Remark on Revolt” that he had written during the Occupation; the piece treated revolution as a possible collective outcome, or “passage...into historical experience” of individual acts of

⁷⁴ Camus, “Réponse à Domenach,” *Témoins* 9 (Summer 1955), reproduced in *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1753: “Car je suis né dans une famille, la gauche, où je mourrai, mais dont il m’est difficile de ne pas voir la déchéance.”

⁷⁵ Camus, “La révolution travestie,” *Combat*, 23 November 1946 [621]: “Depuis août 1944, tout le monde parle chez nous de révolution – et toujours sincèrement, il n’y a pas de doute là-dessus.”

⁷⁶ Camus, “De la Résistance à la Révolution,” *Combat*, 21 August 1944 [143]: “C’est dans les jours qui viendront, par nos articles successifs comme par nos actes, que nous définirons le contenu de ce mot Révolution. Mais pour le moment il donne son sens à notre goût de l’énergie et de l’honneur, à notre décision d’en finir avec l’esprit de médiocrité et les puissances d’argent, avec un état social où la class dirigeante a trahi tous ses devoirs et a manqué à la fois d’intelligence et de coeur.”

“revolt.”⁷⁷ The essay – which, much transformed, would form the basis for *L’Homme révolté* – pointed out that as it maintained itself through force, revolution could potentially enter into tension with the impulse toward human solidarity at the heart of revolt. But at this stage Camus certainly did not disavow revolution in general.

By 1946, however, Camus began to express fundamental skepticism about the concept of revolution, which he now associated less with continuing the “moral” project of the Resistance in France than with the prospect of joining the Soviet bloc. Even before he decided that all lethal violence was illegitimate, little in Camus’s character or intellectual makeup predisposed him toward sympathy with the USSR and the PCF: his youthful PCA membership had been inspired chiefly by his desire to fight against racism in Algeria and fascism abroad, and he had not been sorry when he was expelled from the Party in 1937.⁷⁸ The behavior of the French Communist intellectuals in the postwar Comité National des Écrivains had repulsed him (his was the first resignation from the organization’s Comité Directeur),⁷⁹ and he found Stalin both terrifying and ridiculous. More fundamentally, even as a Party member Camus had never felt the pull of Marxism: he found Marx himself sympathetic as a critic of both capitalism and bourgeois hypocrisy, but Camus was so little a materialist⁸⁰ or a historicist that Marxist ideology simply did not exert an attraction over him. As Roger Quilliot has observed, Camus “hardly thought except in images and according to

⁷⁷ Camus, “Remarque sur la révolte,” *Existence* 1945, reproduced in *Essais*, 1689: “Exactement, elle est le passage de l’idée dans l’expérience historique...”

⁷⁸ He seems to have been expelled primarily for his support of Algerian nationalist leader Messali Hadj.

⁷⁹ See Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains: 1940-1953* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 570-571.

⁸⁰ Camus was indeed “materialist” in a certain sense: he was passionately interested in the physical world, and his reflections on natural beauty are a consistently moving and important part of his work. He also frequently wrote on the technology of weaponry. But he viewed ideas and ideals as the motor forces of human history, and insisted that these could not be explained purely as products of particular material contexts: nature and “*les choses*” formed part of the eternal, as opposed to the historical, for Camus. He ridiculed the idea of dialectical materialism (“Il ne peut y avoir de dialectique que de la pensée”), accused Marx of economic “determinism,” and accounted for both the French and the Russian Revolutions as results not of economic change but of metaphysical longing for lost unity, a longing he believed was produced by secularization.

experience,” and the categories he used to make sense of the world had always been moral ones oriented toward the present.⁸¹ He instinctively distrusted appeals to rationality over feeling, grand schemes, and totalizing “scientific” narratives.⁸² If “poverty,” “suffering,” and “misery” were central terms in Camus’s portrait of contemporary society, nevertheless class-based analysis – and especially the notion of “class struggle” – did not enter into his thinking. Thus unlike Merleau-Ponty, Camus approached the problems posed by the Soviet Union in the postwar world without any sense of longing or dread of loss, and certainly without any apprehension that to condemn the USSR would be to “betray” the French working class.⁸³ Instead, he wrote as a critical outsider.

And critical he was indeed: from 1946 forward, the polemical picture Camus painted of Soviet society was a hyperbolically nightmarish landscape peopled by terrorized, silent ghosts under the boot of a monstrously omnipresent police force. Of course, the disappointed and angry Camus of this period wrote in dystopic terms about Europe as a whole, insisting that “we” in *both* the capitalist and the communist blocs “live in terror” in “a world where murder is viewed as legitimate and where human life

⁸¹ Quilliot in *Essais*, 1612.

⁸² This is not to say, however, that he did not himself implicitly rely on grand narratives of history. One might argue that *L’Homme révolté* simply replaces the Marxist “master narrative” of class struggle with an account of modernity-as-secularization, which Camus employs to account for everything from the French Revolution to fascism.

⁸³ One can speculate that Camus’s freedom from this particular fear owed something to his decidedly modest background in a working-class neighborhood of Algiers: he did not identify as bourgeois, and thus did not experience bourgeois guilt. Camus hardly ever brandished his origins as left-wing credentials or as evidence of authenticity, though in his 1948 debate with Emmanuel Astier de la Vigerie he did remind his opponent that “je suis né dans une famille ouvrière. Ce n’est pas un argument (je n’en ai jamais usé jusqu’ici). C’est une rectification. Tant de fois, la feuille où vous m’avez répondu et celles qui essayent de rivaliser avec elle dans le mensonge m’ont présenté comme fils de bourgeois, qu’il faut bien, *une fois au moins*, que je rappelle que la plupart d’entre vous, intellectuels communistes, n’ont aucune expérience de la condition prolétarienne et que vous êtes mal venus de nous traiter de rêveurs ignorants de réalités.” See Camus, “Deuxième réponse à Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie,” originally published in *La Gauche*, October 1948, and reproduced in *Actuelles*, 161.

is considered futile.”⁸⁴ But, over time, his portrayal of the Soviet bloc became more apocalyptic than his treatment of capitalist society. Raymond Aron once commented that, “in vulgar terms,” the disagreement between Sartre and Camus ultimately boiled down to very little: in the end, the former preferred the USSR and the latter the US.⁸⁵ But this formulation of differing preferences seriously understates the degree of Camus’s aversion to the Soviet state. The concentration camp, in Camus’s writings on the USSR, represented the unfree essence of communist rule. Soviet socialism, for Camus, was no more and no less than “*le socialisme concentrationnaire*,”⁸⁶ and nearly two years before Rousset issued his “Appeal,” Camus condemned the USSR on these terms alone: “The camps...are part of the State apparatus in Soviet Russia,” he wrote, and “there is not a reason in the world, historical or not, progressive or reactionary, that could make me accept the fact of concentration camps [*le fait concentrationnaire*].”⁸⁷ For Camus the Soviet bloc not only *had* concentration camps, as Rousset had complained: it essentially *was* a concentration camp.⁸⁸ In Eastern

⁸⁴ Camus, “Le siècle de la peur,” *Combat*, 19 November 1946 [610, 612]: “Entre la peur très générale d’une guerre que tout le monde prépare et la peur toute particulière des idéologies meurtrières, il est donc bien vrai que nous vivons dans la terreur;” “[La peur] signifie et elle refuse le même fait: un monde où le meurtre est légitime et où la vie humaine est considérée comme futile.”

⁸⁵ Raymond Aron, *L’Opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955), 64: “Où est la différence? En termes vulgaires, la réponse serait: en suprême recours, Camus choisirait plutôt l’Ouest et Sartre plutôt l’Est.” A footnote here added, “À condition de vivre à l’Ouest, bien entendu.”

⁸⁶ Camus, “Deuxième réponse,” 165.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 163: “Les camps faisaient partie de l’appareil d’État en Allemagne. Ils font partie de l’appareil d’État en Russie soviétique, vous ne pouvez l’ignorer...Il n’y a pas de raison au monde, historique ou non, progressive ou réactionnaire, qui puisse me faire accepter le fait concentrationnaire.”

⁸⁸ On Camus’s “obsession” with “the camp,” see Weyembergh, “L’obsession du clos et le thème des camps,” in *Albert Camus: oeuvre fermée, oeuvre ouverte?*, eds. Raymond Gay-Crossier and Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 361-375. It is interesting to note that Camus’s *Carnets II* and *III* are peppered with ideas for book projects on concentration camp life or concentration camp survivors, none of which came to fruition. His correspondence with Jean Grenier, moreover, reveals that in response to Grenier’s advice he omitted a direct reference to concentration camps from the manuscript of *La Peste*: see Albert Camus and Jean Grenier, *Correspondance, 1932-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 136. It appears that Camus ultimately published little on the camps because, taking a reverential approach to the experience of inmates, he believed that he had no access to adequate language about what they had lived through. Thus his *Carnets II* entry from 1948: “Rousset. Ce qui me ferme la bouche, c’est que j’ai n’ai pas été déporté. Mais je sais quel cri j’étouffe en disant ceci” (235). And thus his “refusal” to write a preface for Jeanne Héon-Canonne’s *Devant la mort* (his letter of refusal became

Europe's horrifying, grey "world of rational terror," he wrote in *L'Homme révolté*, "dialogue, the relation between people, has been replaced by propaganda or polemic, which are two kinds of monologue... The ticket substituted for bread, love and friendship made subject to doctrine, destiny to the plan, punishment called the norm, and production substituted for living creation, describes reasonably well this emaciated Europe, peopled by the victorious or subjugated phantoms of power."⁸⁹ No less than Hitler's realm, Camus insisted, this was indeed "*l'univers concentrationnaire*" in which violence was legitimized in the name of an abstract ideology and living, breathing men, women, and children suffered unspeakably and died in silent obscurity.⁹⁰

For Camus, all history could be more or less explained by the circulation of ideas across time and space. Because Marxist ideology was being used to justify murder in the USSR, he insisted, this indicated by an inexorable logic that Marx's thought itself contained fatal, murderous flaws: we had to seek the worm, so to speak, in the apple. The Soviet Union's use of concentration camps, according to Camus, was necessarily a sign of the faulty *ideas* upon which the regime was based. In similar fashion, he insisted that the French Revolution had inevitably produced the Terror because its ideological sources – notably, Rousseau's concept of "general will" – were *in their essence* terroristic and totalitarian. In 1948 he wrote to Quilliot: "I have arrived at the conclusion that the conception of the world that belongs to Marxism is

the book's preface), on the grounds that: "C'est qu'en vérité il y a une sorte de malheur dont il est déjà difficile de bien parler quand on l'a soi-même éprouvé, mais qui devient inexprimable pour qui ne l'a partagé."

⁸⁹ Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 300: "Ces transformations progressives caractérisent le monde de la terreur rationnelle où vit, à des degrés différents, l'Europe. Le dialogue, relation des personnes, a été remplacé par la propagande ou la polémique, qui sont deux sortes de monologue... Le ticket substitué au pain, l'amour et l'amitié soumis à la doctrine, le destin au plan, le châtiement appelé norme, et la production substituée à la création vivante, décrivent assez bien cette Europe décharnée, peuplée des fantômes, victorieux ou asservis, de la puissance."

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 307.

not only false but becomes murderous.”⁹¹ He fleshed out the case three years later in *L’Homme révolté*, borrowing a popular anti-communist trope of the period (most famously employed by Arthur Koestler and others in *The God That Failed*) to describe Marxism as an ersatz religion or “prophecy” imbued with “the most contestable messianic utopianism.”⁹² Marxism shared with Christianity a narrative of redemption at the endpoint of history, Camus pointed out; if Marx proclaimed himself an atheist, nevertheless his socialism was “an enterprise of divinization of man,” a “religion without transcendence” in which the proletariat served as “the human Christ who redeems the collective sin of alienation.”⁹³ Although Camus was happy to admit that Marx himself “did not imagine such a terrifying apotheosis” of his theory as the USSR had in fact provided,⁹⁴ he argued that a police state ruled by terror was indeed the ineluctable consequence of Marx’s attempt to remake the world radically along “rational” lines, thereby justifying the death of innocent victims in the present through pointing to a glorious future. Thus, in an odd echo of Merleau-Ponty’s argument about Bukharin’s “objective” responsibility regardless of his subjective desires, Camus condemned Marx as “responsible” for the Soviet reign of terror.⁹⁵ He and Merleau-

⁹¹ Camus, “Lettre à Roger Quilliot,” 30 June 1948, in *Essais*, 1579: “J’admets avec vous le précieux enseignement critique du marxisme; mais je suis arrivé à la conclusion que la conception du monde qui est celle du marxisme non seulement est fautive mais devient meurtrière.”

⁹² *L’Homme révolté*, 239: “On ne s’étonnera donc qu’il ait pu mêler dans sa doctrine la méthode critique la plus valable et le messianisme utopique le plus contestable. Le malheur est que la méthode critique qui, par définition, serait adaptée à la réalité, s’est trouvée de plus en plus séparée des faits dans la mesure où elle a voulu rester fidèle à la prophétie.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 244; 248; 260: “Sous cet angle, le socialisme est ainsi une entreprise de divinisation de l’homme et a pris quelques caractères des religions traditionnelles;” “Marx a seulement compris qu’une religion sans transcendance s’appelait proprement une politique;” “Par ses douleurs et ses luttes, [le prolétariat] est le Christ humain qui rachète le péché collectif de l’aliénation.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 284: “Marx n’imaginait pas une si terrifiante apothéose.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265: “Il est possible que Marx ne l’ait pas voulu, mais c’est là sa responsabilité qu’il faut examiner, il justifie, au nom de la révolution, la lutte désormais sanglante contre toutes les formes de révolte.” Camus even used Merleau-Ponty’s specific language of “responsabilité involontaire” elsewhere in *L’Homme révolté*, with regards to Nietzsche.

Ponty appeared to agree, for very different reasons, that in the tragic history of modern Europe, the best of intentions were no excuse for the consequences of one's actions.

Camus would likely have been furious at this suggestion of common ground between *Humanisme et terreur* and *L'Homme révolté*: the latter book should be read as, in large part, an attempt to refute the former. Camus was scandalized by *Les Temps modernes*'s 1946 publication of Merleau-Ponty's "Le Yogi et le prolétaire," the article that would later constitute the fifth chapter of *Humanisme et terreur*. As both Sartre and de Beauvoir later recounted, he confronted Merleau-Ponty angrily at a party one evening, accusing him of "justifying the trials" and treating dissent as treason.⁹⁶ Camus stormed out, enraged; in late 1948 he made his agreement to address an RDR meeting contingent on the exclusion of Merleau-Ponty.⁹⁷ When *Humanisme et terreur* was published, Camus fumed in his notebook at the book's outrages and wondered whether Merleau-Ponty's demand in the introduction that his critics "learn to read" was a direct jab at him.⁹⁸ The two men would die unreconciled. But Camus studied *Humanisme et terreur* while preparing to write *L'Homme révolté*, and his arguments in the 1951 book often appear crafted to respond directly to Merleau-Ponty's points. At one important juncture, for example, he took the same quote from Saint-Just that Merleau-Ponty had used approvingly to justify terror in the service of humanism – "A patriot is he who supports the republic as a bloc; whoever fights it over details is a traitor" – and called this "the grand principle of the tyrannies of the twentieth century."⁹⁹ While not mentioning Merleau-Ponty by name, he denounced "our

⁹⁶ Sartre, "Merleau-Ponty," 215; see also de Beauvoir's account of the confrontation in *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 126.

⁹⁷ Olivier Todd, *Camus, une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 452.

⁹⁸ Camus, *Carnets II*, 211-212.

⁹⁹ Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, 163: "Saint-Just proclame alors le grand principe des tyrannies du XXe siècle. 'Un patriote est celui qui soutient la république en masse; quiconque la combat en détail est un traître.'" Merleau-Ponty quotes this line in *Humanisme et terreur* on 121.

existentialists” for their worship of the god of “history” and raged against any attempt to excuse the Moscow Trials.¹⁰⁰ Bukharin’s confession, in his eyes, did not need to be explained at great and tortuous length as a function of the old Bolshevik’s subtle, supremely dialectical understanding of his own guilt: it was easily accounted for by his fanaticism. The condemnation of the Moscow defendants as “objective” criminals, Camus wrote, showed that the USSR was not only a “*univers concentrationnaire*” but a “*univers du procès*.”¹⁰¹ In this terrifying world, “the faithful are gathered regularly at strange fêtes where, according to scrupulous rites, victims full of contrition are proffered as an offering to the historical god.”¹⁰² Here, all men were suspects and lived in fear; dissent was an outrage and even neutrality was a hanging offense. Camus did agree with Merleau-Ponty that all human action involved risk, since the future could not be known: “Every historical enterprise,” he wrote, “cannot be anything but an adventure more or less reasonable and well-founded.”¹⁰³ But, against Merleau-Ponty, he saw in this fact a *limit* on permissible choices for man, and a powerful argument for moderation: history, inherently open and uncertain, ought never serve to justify “any implacable and absolute position.” Camus declared, ultimately, that the historically situated human being, as “he who cannot know everything, cannot kill everything.”¹⁰⁴

Did this latter position mean that Camus saw not only Marxist revolution but revolution *tout court* as always impermissible on ethical grounds, since, as Merleau-Ponty insisted, there was no revolution without violence? Camus’s earliest arguments

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 310.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 301.

¹⁰² Ibid., 304: “En attendant, les fidèles sont conviés régulièrement à d’étranges fêtes où, selon des rites scrupuleux, des victimes pleines de contrition sont offertes en offrande au dieu historique.”

¹⁰³ Ibid., 361: “Toute entreprise historique ne peut être alors qu’une aventure plus ou moins raisonnable ou fondée.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.: “Celui qui ne peut tout savoir ne peut tout tuer.”

against revolution, in his 1946 “Ni victimes, ni bourreaux” series for *Combat*, were voiced not in philosophical terms but as “realist” political analysis. Technological development, he suggested, had rendered nineteenth-century notions of political action not only anachronistic, but dangerously so. “Taking power by violence,” he wrote, “is a romantic idea that the progress of weaponry has rendered illusory. The repressive apparatus of a government has all the strength of tanks and planes,” and would never again be toppled by men armed with sticks and hunting rifles constructing makeshift barricades in the streets. Camus, who had written eloquently on the tragedy of Hiroshima, was presumably not happy with this new world of overwhelming state armories, but here he did not express any regret over it. It was simply the “objective” state of affairs – and, because of it, “1789 and 1917 are still dates, but they are no longer examples” for men who hoped to change their collective circumstances.¹⁰⁵ Even if by some improbable accident a revolutionary movement did momentarily come to power in one country, this national revolution would be short-lived in a global situation dominated by the two antagonistic great powers: the US, he believed, would simply crush the economy in question by suspending aid. Meanwhile there was an “extreme risk” that any international revolution under the auspices of the USSR would produce a worldwide “ideological war.”¹⁰⁶ If Marx had been able to justify the use of lethal force for the sake of proletarian revolution, Camus wrote, “the vertiginous progress of weaponry, a historical fact unknown to Marx, forces us to pose the problem of end and means in a new fashion.”¹⁰⁷ He asked readers to “give a bit of

¹⁰⁵ “La révolution travestie,” 622: “D’une part, la prise de pouvoir par la violence est une idée romantique que le progrès des armements a rendue illusoire. L’appareil répressif d’un gouvernement a toute la force des tanks et des avions. Il faudrait donc des tanks et des avions pour l’équilibrer seulement. 1789 et 1917 sont encore des dates, mais ne sont plus des exemples.”

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 623-624.

¹⁰⁷ Camus, “Démocratie et dictatures internationales,” *Combat*, 26 November 1946 [628]: “Marx pouvait justifier comme il l’a fait la guerre de 1870, car elle était la guerre du fusil Chassepot et elle était localisée. Dans les perspectives du marxisme, cent mille morts ne sont rien, en effet, au prix du

imagination to what a planet, where there are already thirty million fresh cadavers, would be like after a cataclysm that would cost us ten times more.”¹⁰⁸ If they continued to support “revolution,” he informed readers, they ought to “recognize themselves consciously responsible for the war to come.” *This* kind of reflection, informed by the new global realities, Camus insisted, and not abstract ponderings about the movement of the dialectic, constituted “properly objective” reasoning.¹⁰⁹

While Camus did continue at incidental junctures in *L’Homme révolté* to make the case against revolution in terms of specific global contingencies, in truth his objection was fundamentally an ethical one that could not be measured by counting cadavers. Thus to understand Camus’s approach to revolution in this text, we must first survey his treatment of a related but distinct concept: the ethics of revolt. Camus loosely organized *L’Homme révolté* as a historical study of “revolt” in the modern world; he defined (and celebrated) “revolt” as in the first instance a moral impulse. It constituted an individual movement of negation or refusal, of drawing a line in the sand or saying “no,” that was also a powerful affirmation of human solidarity: the man who revolted implicitly invoked as his motive a “value” shared throughout the human community, a value for which it was worthwhile to risk his own neck. “If the

bonheur de centaines de millions de gens. Mais la mort certaine de centaines de millions de gens, pour le bonheur supposé de ceux qui restent, est un prix trop cher. Le progrès vertigineux des armements, fait historique ignoré par Marx, force à poser de nouvelle façon le problème de la fin et des moyens.”

Camus was adamant that Marx himself would have grasped this point better than postwar French Marxists did. In his first “Réponse” to Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, he wrote: “Il y avait aussi dans Marx une soumission à la réalité, et une humilité devant l’expérience qui l’auraient sans doute conduit à reviser quelques-uns des points de vue que ses disciples d’aujourd’hui veulent désespérément maintenir dans la sclérose du dogme. Il me semble impensable que Marx lui-même, devant la désintégration de l’atome et devant la croissance terrifiante des moyens de destruction, n’eût pas été amené à reconnaître que les données objectives du problème révolutionnaire aient changé. C’est aussi que Marx aimait les hommes (les vrais, les vivants, et non ceux de la douzième génération qu’il vous est plus facile d’aimer, puisqu’ils ne sont pas là pour dire quelle est la sorte d’amour dont ils ne veulent pas)” (157).

¹⁰⁸ “La révolution travestie” [624]: “Je crois d’une importance définitive qu’on en fasse la balance et que, pour une fois, on apporte un peu d’imagination à ce que serait une planète, où sont encore tenus au frais une trentaine de millions de cadavres, après un cataclysme qui nous coûterait dix fois plus.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: “Je ferai remarquer que cette manière de raisonner est proprement objective... Si elle [la révolution] est accepté, on doit se reconnaître responsable conscient de la guerre à venir.”

individual, in fact, accepts dying – and occasionally dies – in the movement of his revolt,” Camus wrote, “he thereby shows that he sacrifices himself for the benefit of a good that he feels goes beyond his own destiny.”¹¹⁰ The language of self-sacrifice – the only kind of sacrifice Camus recognized as ethically valid – was pervasive in the text. Although Camus strenuously insisted that revolt only took on meaning in a secular world, since it represented a quest for purely human values and human “unity” in the absence of the sacred, he tended to treat it, in its highly elusive “pure” form, in partially sacralizing terms. Revolt, in its essence, “is nothing more than witnessing without coherence [*n’est qu’un témoignage sans cohérence*];” it was not violent toward any person, and was certainly not “political.”¹¹¹

This was where revolution entered into Camus’s analysis. Revolution, as “nothing more than the logical result of metaphysical revolt,” marked the form that revolt took when it entered into history, embraced politics, and surreptitiously replaced the search for unity with a quest for totality – a quest that in concrete terms meant seeking “a new government.”¹¹² In Camus’s idealist vision of history, this desire for new government was never an outcome of material conditions – references to the material world were glaringly absent from the text – but was necessarily a *metaphysical* urge, a manifestation of the desire “to model the act on the idea, to fashion the world according to a theoretical framework,” which in Camus’s eyes amounted to a desire to deify man and create a heavenly city here on earth.¹¹³

According to *L’Homme révolté*, this blasphemous attempt led inexorably to nihilism

¹¹⁰ *L’Homme révolté*, 30: “Si l’individu, en effet, accepte de mourir, et meurt à l’occasion, dans le mouvement de sa révolte, il montre qu’il se sacrifie au bénéfice d’un bien dont il estime qu’il déborde sa propre destinée.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140: “Il n’est qu’un témoignage sans cohérence.” This sentence also appeared in the 1945 “Remarque sur la révolte,” 1689.

¹¹² *Ibid.*: “Il signifie exactement ‘c’est la certitude d’un nouveau gouvernement.’”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: “...une révolution est une tentative pour modeler l’acte sur une idée, pour façonner le monde dans un cadre théorique.”

and terror, and thus to revolution's "forgetting" of its origins in revolt, as the revolutionaries betrayed instead of affirming human solidarity. If "pure" revolt legitimately demanded the sacrifice of the self, Camus suggested, revolution illegitimately demanded the sacrifice of others.

To make this case, Camus considered both the French and the Russian revolutions at some length; he drew a number of distinctions between the two, but treated both as object-lessons in the nightmare that resulted from men's attempts to substitute politics for theology, humans for lost gods. His primary focus in both cases was the revolutionaries' abstract justification of murder for the sake of their cause. From this perspective, he suggested, our judgment not only of Stalin but even of the founders of French republicanism had to be severe; thus Camus, a self-described man of the Left, condemned not only the Soviet gulag, and not only the 1793-1794 Terror in France, but even the execution of Louis XVI, describing it in essentially counterrevolutionary terms as "a repugnant scandal" that this "public assassination of a weak and good man" continued to be presented as "a great moment in our history."¹¹⁴ Murder, which destroyed human solidarity, was never legitimate; hence the revolutionary project of using violence to found a new political order could never be justified.

Camus later insisted that *L'Homme révolté* did not rule out revolution but merely demanded that it refuse to betray the originary impulse of revolt (and refuse to punish those who revolted against it);¹¹⁵ in a narrow sense this was true, but it is

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 156: "Certes, c'est un répugnant scandale d'avoir présenté comme un grand moment de notre histoire l'assassinat public d'un homme faible et bon." The French Revolution had always served as a point of reference for Camus, though his allusions to it elsewhere tended to be highly symbolic rather than an occasion for historical analysis: for example in 1948 he described writers as "éternels Girondins, aux menaces et aux coups de nos Montagnards en manchettes de lustrine." ("Le témoin de la liberté," *Actuelles*, 215.)

¹¹⁵ Camus, "Défense de 'L'Homme révolté,'" *Essais*, 1709: "Cette critique ne s'achève pas dans une condamnation de la révolution, mais seulement du nihilisme historique qui, en vouant la révolution à

extremely difficult to imagine what sort of revolution could possibly have met Camus's ethical criteria. Privately, he appears to have understood this: it was meaningless, he wrote in his notebook in 1949, to label oneself a revolutionary but in the next breath condemn the violent practices that revolution unquestionably required. "One must therefore declare," he wrote, "that one is not revolutionary – but, more modestly, reformist. An intransigent reformist. In short...one can call oneself *révolté*."¹¹⁶

But what was an intransigent reformist, or a *révolté*, to *do* in order to express his revolt? How could one be "intransigent" and yet refuse to justify killing for one's cause? What, in short, was left of political action if violence was delegitimized? In *Humanisme et terreur*, Merleau-Ponty had insisted that the answer was "nothing": "Either one wants to make a revolution, and in that case it is necessary to [use violence] – or, one wants at every instant to treat every man as an end in himself, and in that case one does nothing at all."¹¹⁷ Camus, who was hardly more enthusiastic than Merleau-Ponty about the current state of the world, simply could not accept this judgment. Nor could he ever think conceptually about "violence" as anything except the act of directly murdering another man. And so, throughout the late forties and early fifties, he desperately sought a way out of the "apparent dilemma" between

nier aussi l'esprit de révolte, est arrivé à contaminer l'espoir de millions d'hommes...J'ai en effet conclu, et c'est seulement cela qu'il faut discuter, que la révolution a besoin, pour refuser la terreur organisée et la police, de garder intact le principe de révolte qui lui a donné naissance, comme la révolte elle-même a besoin d'un prolongement révolutionnaire pour trouver un corps et une vérité. Chacune, pour finir, est la limite de l'autre."

¹¹⁶ *Carnets II*, 271: "Se dire révolutionnaire et refuser par ailleurs la peine de mort (citer préface Tolstoï – on ne connaît pas assez cette préface de Tolstoï que j'ai l'âge de lire avec vénération), la limitation des libertés, et les guerres, c'est ne rien dire. Il faut donc déclarer que l'on n'est pas révolutionnaire – mais plus modestement réformiste. Un réformisme intransigeant. Enfin, *et tout bien pesé*, on peut se dire révolté." Cf. "Interview non publiée," *Actuelles*, 190.

¹¹⁷ *Humanisme et terreur*, 183: "Ou l'on veut faire une révolution, et alors il faut en passer par là – ou l'on veut à chaque instant traiter chaque homme comme fin en soi, et alors on ne fait rien du tout."

“silence or murder.”¹¹⁸ Before we examine the answer he offered in *L’Homme révolté*, it is useful to trace briefly the course of his thinking on this subject from the moment when he first decided that murder might at times be necessary but was always and unconditionally illegitimate.

In the 1946 “Ni victimes, ni bourreaux” series in *Combat* where Camus announced that he could accept no truth that would place him under the obligation to condemn men to death, he suggested that messianic politics be replaced with the far more “modest” project of “saving bodies so that the future remains possible.”¹¹⁹ Men could not build a terrestrial paradise, Camus wrote, but they *could* refuse the cataclysm of another world war, thereby “saving blood and pain as far as it is possible, in order to give only their chance to other generations who will be better armed than us.”¹²⁰ Convinced that catastrophe of unimaginable proportions loomed if Europe again went to war, Camus advocated for various projects in support of international governance, peace, and the curbing of US-Soviet tensions: he challenged those who mocked him to articulate a value that was actually more precious than human life – or, as he put it once, “what goes beyond all history: the human flesh [*la chair*], whether it is suffering or joyous.”¹²¹ “We must save as many lives as we can,” he wrote in 1948.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *L’Homme révolté*, 359: “Au stade historique qui est le nôtre, dans l’impossibilité d’affirmer une raison supérieure qui ne trouve sa limite dans le mal, son apparent dilemme est le silence ou le meurtre.”

¹¹⁹ Camus, “Sauver les corps” *Combat*, 20 November 1946 [615]: “Ma conviction est que nous ne pouvons plus avoir raisonnablement l’espoir de tout sauver, mais que nous pouvons nous proposer au moins de sauver les corps pour que l’avenir demeure possible.”

¹²⁰ Camus, “Vers le dialogue,” *Combat*, 30 November 1946 [641]: “...épargner autant qu’il est possible le sang et la douleur pour donner seulement leur chance à d’autres générations qui seront mieux armées que nous.”

¹²¹ “Le témoin de la liberté,” 216: “...ce qui dépasse toute histoire, et qui est la chair, qu’elle soit souffrante ou qu’elle soit heureuse.”

¹²² “Albert Camus à François Mauriac,” *Combat*, 25-26 December 1948 [702]: “Il faut sauver le plus de vies que l’on peut pour préserver les énergies qui changeront peut-être la face de la guerre et de la paix.”

His great novel *La Peste* (*The Plague*), begun during the Occupation and finished in 1947, allegorized the Resistance as an attempt, led by a doctor, to “save bodies” during a deathly plague in the Algerian city of Oran. The “sanitary groups” that fought back against the plague did not aspire to provide their fellow men with salvation (“the salvation of man is much too big of a word for me,” the protagonist Dr. Rieux says at one point),¹²³ but only “to prevent as many men as possible from dying and knowing the definitive separation.”¹²⁴ Much like the Catholic intellectuals we considered in Chapter Three, in *La Peste* Camus redefined “resistance,” presenting it as an ethical project of bearing unwavering witness to victimhood rather than a political or revolutionary venture of armed opposition. The medical profession provided a powerful metaphor for Camus to articulate the ideal response of men to the hideous injustices of the world: Rieux’s vocation allows him to “resist,” taking a courageous, intransigent stand against the suffering of others and standing in absolute solidarity with all victims (“there was not one anxiety of his fellow citizens he did not share, not one predicament of theirs that was not also his”), but *without* using violence.¹²⁵ When Francis Jeanson later accused the novelist of defending a “Red Cross morality” in *La Peste*, Camus retorted: “One can certainly feel that the ideal of this estimable organization lacks panache – well, one can feel that way in a well-heated newsroom – but one cannot deny, for one thing, that it rests on a certain number of values and one cannot refuse to prefer, for another thing, a certain form of action to contemplation alone.”¹²⁶ Rieux, moreover, fulfills the ethical duty of

¹²³ Camus, *La Peste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 238: “ ‘Le salut de l’homme est un trop grand mot pour moi.’ ”

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 150: “Toute la question était d’empêcher le plus d’hommes possible de mourir et de connaître la séparation définitive.”

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 325: “C’est ainsi qu’il n’est pas une des angoisses de ses concitoyens qu’il n’ait partagée, aucune situation qui n’ait été aussi la sienne.”

¹²⁶ Letter from Albert Camus to “Monsieur le Directeur” of *Les Temps modernes*, 30 June 1952. Published in *Les Temps modernes* 82 (August 1952) and reproduced under the title “Révolte et

“resisting” the plague not only through his healing arts but through *testimony*: in the novel’s final chapter it is revealed that he has been our narrator all along. “Rieux decided to write the account that ends here,” we learn, “in order to not be among those who keep silent, to bear witness [*témoigner*] in favor of the plague-stricken, to leave behind at least a memory of the injustice and the violence that were done to them, and to say simply what one learns in the midst of scourges: that in men there are more things to admire than things to despise.”¹²⁷

Of course, the question that *La Peste* left unanswered – and, in consequence, the sense in which “plague” fell short as a metaphor for injustice – was what men were to do when the suffering around them was caused not by invisible microbes but by other human beings: could it possibly be sufficient to offer victims succor and bear witness to their pain but refuse to lift a hand against their tormentors? This question agonized Camus, for although he celebrated witnessing in *La Peste* and elsewhere¹²⁸ he was also worried that it could provide a too-comfortable alibi for the writer, a passive and privileged response to the pain of others.¹²⁹ In 1952, he sketched in his notebook a tragic fictional portrait of “*le témoin*” reduced to impotence as he watched German soldiers drag innocents off to be killed.¹³⁰ In a 1953 interview he denied that,

servitude” in *Actuelles II. Chroniques 1948-1953* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 94: “On peut trouver certainement que l’idéal de cette estimable organisation manque de panache (enfin, on peut le trouver dans une salle de rédaction bien chauffée), mais on ne peut lui refuser de reposer, d’une part, sur un certain nombre de valeurs et de préférer, d’autre part, une certaine forme d’action à la simple contemplation.”

¹²⁷ *La Peste*, 331: “Rieux décida alors de rédiger le récit qui s’achève ici, pour ne pas être de ceux qui se taisent, pour témoigner en faveur de ces pestiférés, pour laisser du moins un souvenir de l’injustice et de la violence qui leur avaient été faites, et pour dire simplement ce qu’on apprend au milieu des fléaux, qu’il y a dans les hommes plus de choses à admirer que de choses à mépriser.”

¹²⁸ For example, see “Le témoin de la liberté,” as well as “Persecutés-Persécuteurs,” the preface to Jacques Méry’s *Laissez passer mon peuple* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), reproduced in *Actuelles II*, 19.

¹²⁹ For example, see *Carnets II*, 155: “Voilà la question: puis-je être seulement un témoin? Autrement dit: ai-je le droit d’être seulement un artiste? Je ne puis le croire.” Moreover, Camus shared with Rousset, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty a tendency to conflate empathy with pure identification, which he distrusted, and thus shied away from “bearing witness” to forms of victimization which he had not personally experienced such as the camps (see note 86).

¹³⁰ *Carnets III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 37.

as a literary artist, he had chosen “the comfortable role of witness.”¹³¹ As we will see in the following two chapters, during the Algerian War, Catholic progressives would tackle head-on the pitfalls of the passive-observer model of “witnessing,” through working to redefine “*témoignage*” as a consummately *active* and unabashedly *political* practice, one which emphasized the definition of “*témoignage*” as a speech-act (“giving testimony”). These Christian intellectuals sought a way to place the witness in total solidarity with victims, transforming witnessing into something akin to Gandhian non-violent resistance; Camus declined to make this leap (to follow Gandhi’s example, he believed, “grandeur is needed, which I do not have”), instead seeking some form of action for the intellectual that could be more than *témoignage* but less than cheerleading for murder.¹³²

The provisional solution that he arrived at in the late forties and elaborated in *L’Homme révolté* depended on the distinction between, on the one hand, recognizing that violence would at certain moments in human history like the French Resistance be *necessary* and, on the other, treating any violence as *legitimate*. “I believe that violence is inevitable,” he wrote. “The years of occupation taught me that...I will not say therefore that we must abolish all violence, which would be desirable but utopian indeed. I say only that we must refuse any legitimation of violence, whether that legitimation comes from an absolute *raison d’État* or from a totalitarian philosophy. Violence is at once inevitable and unjustifiable.”¹³³ Thus, Camus announced, “I will

¹³¹ “L’Artiste et son temps,” *Actuelles II*, 174: “Les tyrannies d’aujourd’hui se sont perfectionnées: elles n’admettent plus le silence, ni la neutralité. Il faut se prononcer, être pour ou contre. Bon, dans ce cas, je suis contre. Mais ce n’est pas là choisir le rôle confortable de témoin. C’est seulement accepter le temps tel qu’il est, faire son métier en un mot.”

¹³² Quoted in Todd, *Camus, une vie*, 251: “J’ai étudié...la théorie de la non-violence et je ne suis pas loin de conclure qu’elle représente une vérité digne d’être prêchée par l’exemple. Mais il y faut une grandeur que je n’ai pas.”

¹³³ Camus, “Première réponse,” 149-150: “Je crois que la violence est inévitable, les années d’occupation me l’ont appris. Pour tout dire, il y a eu, en ce temps-là, de terribles violences qui m’ont posé aucun problème. Je ne dirai donc point qu’il faut supprimer toute violence, ce qui serait

not preach non-violence;”¹³⁴ instead he would continually insist that murder was a limit-case, a “rupture,”¹³⁵ a “desperate exception,”¹³⁶ an “impossible”¹³⁷ and “inexcusable”¹³⁸ action that always took place outside norms, beyond the bounds of justification or legitimation, and for which the murderer had to take absolute personal responsibility. Camus proposed a strikingly original method for ensuring this responsibility: once a man killed in order to express his “revolt,” he would be required to commit suicide as well.¹³⁹ Murder thus would indeed remain a possible means of fighting injustice, but could never become “systematic”: it would stand, rather, as “the limit that one could only reach once, and after which it is necessary to die.”¹⁴⁰ This was not only a matter of “paying” for the death of the other with the sacrifice of self, thus ensuring that no one could kill without acknowledging the extremity of their act, but also of forging a subsequent communal solidarity and normativity that murder alone could not accomplish: “When the murderer and the victim have disappeared, the community will remake itself without them. The exception will have been lived, and the rule will again become possible.”¹⁴¹

souhaitable, mais utopique, en effet. Je dis seulement qu’il faut refuser toute légitimation de la violence, que cette légitimation lui vienne d’une raison d’État absolue, ou d’une philosophie totalitaire. La violence est à la fois inévitable et injustifiable.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.: “Je ne prêche donc ni la non-violence, j’en sais malheureusement l’impossibilité, ni, comme disent les farceurs, la sainteté: je me connais trop pour croire à la vertu toute pure.”

¹³⁵ *Carnets II*, 214: “Garder à la violence son caractère de *rupture*, de crime – c’est-à-dire ne l’admettre que liée à une responsabilité *personnelle*.”

¹³⁶ *L’Homme révolté*, 352: “Au niveau de l’histoire, comme dans la vie individuelle, le meurtre est ainsi une exception désespérée ou il n’est rien.”

¹³⁷ Ibid.: “Il tue et meurt pour qu’il soit clair que le meurtre est impossible.”

¹³⁸ Ibid., 217: “Nécessaire et inexcusable, c’est ainsi que le meurtre leur apparaissait.”

¹³⁹ Interestingly, the *Carnets* suggest that this solution initially struck Camus as admirable but nevertheless inadequate: in 1947, he wrote: “La grande pureté du terroriste style Kaliayev, c’est que pour lui le meurtre coïncide avec le suicide... Une vie est payée par une vie. Le raisonnement est faux, mais respectable. (Une vie ravie ne vaut pas une vie donnée.)”

¹⁴⁰ *L’Homme révolté*, 352: “Il est la limite qu’on ne peut atteindre qu’une fois et après laquelle il faut mourir.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid.: “Quand le meurtrier et la victime auront disparu, la communauté se refera sans eux. L’exception aura vécu, la règle redeviendra possible.”

What could such a violence possibly look like in the real world? Camus's primary example was the Revolutionary-Socialist Russian terrorist movement that had assassinated Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovitch in 1905.¹⁴² He was inspired by two features of the assassination: first, the group had held back from bombing the Grand Duke's coach when it would have killed the Duke's two young nephews along with him, and, second, the man who had thrown the bomb (Ivan Kalyayev) had subsequently refused to repent and been hung. Thus the terrorists had recognized both that there were limits to violence and also that violence itself stood as a sort of extreme limit to human action, one that could never be assimilated or excused. These "*hommes révoltés*," Camus believed, had truly grappled with the meaning of their deeds: "They were never lacking doubts," he wrote, and "in 1950 we do not know how to pose a single question to them that they did not pose to themselves."¹⁴³ In the absence of other criteria Camus once again – as in his *Lettres à un ami allemand* and his early writing during the *épuration* – relied on purity of intentions and on affect to assess the morality of violence: the most sympathetic killers were those who agonized the most over their act, who most fully understood the import of taking a life, and who interrogated most insistently their own motives. Now, though, Camus portrayed the literal sacrifice of the self as the only real guarantor of such purity: a true rebel like Kalyayev, who has killed an oppressor out of solidarity with his victims, "has only one way to reconcile himself to his murderous act if he lets himself be carried into it: to accept his own death and sacrifice. He kills and dies so that it will be clear that murder

¹⁴² In addition to his discussion of this group in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus also dramatized their assassination of the Grand Duke in his 1949 play *Les Justes* (Paris: Gallimard).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 214: "Le plus grand hommage que nous puissions leur rendre est de dire que nous ne saurions, en 1950, leur poser une seule question qu'ils ne se soient déjà posée..." *Les Justes* showed the terrorist cell's members engaged in endless dialogue and hand-wringing about murder, ethics, and limits (making for an interesting exposé of ideas but a frankly wearisome piece of theater). The most likable characters among them vigorously reject "hatred" as a motive for their acts and insist upon "love."

is impossible.”¹⁴⁴ It is no difficult matter, particularly in an age of suicide bombers, to point toward the potential flaws in this schema. And a revolutionary movement that enacted Camus’s dictum rigorously and uniformly, not just in exemplary cases, would be unlikely to get very far before it self-annihilated. But as Camus himself later explained in the unpublished “Défense de *l’Homme révolté*,” his intention in holding the murder-suicide sequence up as a model was not precisely literal: he had only hoped to demonstrate, against those like Merleau-Ponty who insisted that a true humanist ethics would have to wait until after the revolution, that “a morality is possible, and that it costs a great deal.”¹⁴⁵

As is well known, *L’Homme révolté* was not widely appreciated: the book was assailed from many quarters, and Camus had polemical exchanges about it with everyone from communist Pierre Hervé to surrealist André Breton to the editor-in-chief of *France-Observateur* Claude Bourdet to the anarcho-syndicalist Gaston Leval.¹⁴⁶ Most famously, the book’s publication was the last straw in Camus’s friendship with Sartre. After *Les Temps modernes* published a negative review of *L’Homme révolté* by Francis Jeanson, Camus penned a furious, lengthy letter to “Monsieur le Directeur” of the journal – that is, to his friend Sartre – holding him personally responsible for the attack. Sartre’s withering response, published in *Les Temps modernes* in August 1952, began “Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it.”¹⁴⁷ The piece was a masterful, cruel – and, at several junctures, cruelly funny –

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 352: “Le révolté n’a qu’une manière de se réconcilier avec son acte meurtrier s’il s’y est laissé porter: accepter sa propre mort et le sacrifice. Il tue et meurt pour qu’il soit clair que le meurtre est impossible.”

¹⁴⁵ “Défense de ‘L’Homme révolté,’” 1713: “Il affirme seulement qu’une morale est possible et qu’elle coûte cher.”

¹⁴⁶ See the exchanges documented in the “Lettres sur la révolte” section of *Actuelles II*.

¹⁴⁷ Sartre, “Réponse à Albert Camus,” *Les Temps modernes* 82 (August 1952): 334-353, reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 4, 90: “Notre amitié n’était pas facile mais je la regretterai.” The Sartre-Camus

dissection of the writer whom Sartre now accused of carrying at all times a “portable pedestal” and serving as the “public prosecutor” for the “Republic of Beautiful Souls.”¹⁴⁸ Sartre’s four year-long rapprochement with the PCF was already underway at this point (initiated in July by the publication of Part I of “Les communistes et la paix”) and he had no patience for what he insisted was Camus’s “quietism” in the face of history. As we saw in the previous chapter, Sartre sarcastically recommended the Galapagos Islands as the ideal residence for a philosopher of revolt who refused to endorse either Soviet communism or American capitalism, since he “does not know how to see in today’s struggles anything but the imbecilic duel between two equally abject monsters.”¹⁴⁹ Vague abstractions about hypothetical, metaphysical “revolts” were no substitute for concrete political engagement, Sartre wrote to Camus, for the proletariat could not recognize “their too-real angers in your ideal revolt.”¹⁵⁰ People existed who were oppressed by *other men*, not only by plague, he explained with considerable exasperation; for them, “your books and your example can do nothing.”¹⁵¹ As always, Sartre insisted that one had to make difficult choices – and, moreover, that one had to do so based on the options available in the real world, not on ideals: “To deserve the right to influence men who fight, it is first necessary to

relationship – and especially its abrupt end – has been the topic of much scholarship. See especially Ronald Aronson, *Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 92 and 97: “En nous faisant l’honneur d’entrer dans ce numéro des *Temps modernes*, vous y amenez avec vous un piédestal portatif.” “La République des Belles-Âmes vous aurait-elle nommé son accusateur public?”

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 110: “...mais quand un homme ne sait voir dans les luttes actuelles que le duel imbécile de deux monstres également abjects, je tiens que cet homme nous a déjà quittés...”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 119: “...vous étiez déjà devenu un privilégié pour dix millions de Français qui ne reconnaissent pas leurs colères trop réelles dans votre révolte idéale.”

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 120: “...vos livres ni votre exemple ne peuvent rien pour lui [l’opprimé]...”

participate in their combat; it is first necessary to accept many things, if one wants to try to change some of them.”¹⁵²

While Sartre loudly made himself heard, the voice of Merleau-Ponty was conspicuously absent from the flurry of criticism aimed at *L'Homme révolté*, even though his own *Humanisme et terreur* had been an implicit target of Camus's book. When Sartre's response to Camus appeared in *Les Temps modernes* in August of 1952, a little over two years had passed since Sartre and Merleau-Ponty had published their final editorial together on the Rousset “affair” and the problem of the gulag. Now, only Sartre (and Jeanson) spoke for the journal and defended its orientation toward the USSR: Merleau-Ponty had gone mum on political questions since October 1950. In fact, although it was not yet apparent, by the time *L'Homme révolté* was published, Camus's antagonist had begun to revisit the arguments of *Humanisme et terreur*, and to change his mind about revolutionary violence.

In the absence of a great deal of published or unpublished political writing from Merleau-Ponty himself between 1950 and approximately 1954, it is difficult to analyze precisely how, when, or why the shift in his thinking about the USSR, Marxism, and the role of violence in history occurred. The philosopher's 1952 appointment at the Collège de France, where he became the youngest scholar ever to hold a chair in philosophy, may possibly have encouraged him to revisit his more radical political commitments.¹⁵³ Speculatively, we might also wonder if, despite his harsh dismissal of Rousset, the problem of the Soviet camps did after all damage his “*attentiste*” Marxism. And certainly it is tempting to think that the 1949 Rajk show

¹⁵² Ibid., 110: “...pour mériter le droit d'influencer les hommes qui luttent, il faut d'abord participer à leur combat; il faut d'abord accepter beaucoup de choses, si l'on veut essayer d'en changer quelques-unes.”

¹⁵³ For an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's break from Sartre and *Les Temps modernes* that nicely emphasizes such concrete factors of placement in the intellectual “field,” see Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et 'Les Temps modernes': une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 255-57.

trial in Hungary and the 1952 Slánský show trial in Czechoslovakia may have compelled Merleau-Ponty to begin to reconsider his stance on the Moscow Trials. But by all accounts, including Merleau-Ponty's own, the key external event that provoked a watershed in his politics was in fact the Korean War, the first "hot" conflict of the Cold War. This began on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea. As the conflict escalated throughout 1950 and into 1951, it became a "proxy war" between the US and the USSR, with North Korea aided by the Soviets and the Chinese, South Korea by the Americans. It is difficult to understand the impact that this distant battle had on Merleau-Ponty's intellectual trajectory without recognizing the extraordinary fear that the war provoked amongst the French. Although general French histories of the postwar era do not generally dwell on Korea, ominous headlines about the US-Soviet confrontation dominated news coverage from the period, and prefects' reports from throughout France depicted communities terrified that World War III was finally at hand.¹⁵⁴

According to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty was among those who believed that a general conflagration was imminent: "Tomorrow they will be fighting everywhere," Sartre remembered him predicting in 1950.¹⁵⁵ In this fearful state of pessimism, Merleau-Ponty had what he would later describe as a "*prise de conscience*" about the way he had been approaching intellectual and political problems that touched on Soviet communism. This was sparked by his observation that the unfolding of events in Korea demonstrated an equivalence between the two sides in the Cold War: both were simply pursuing their interests as states. Up until Korea, Merleau-Ponty had

¹⁵⁴ I base this assertion on my examination of numerous prefectural reports from 1950-1951 in the French National Archives; a sampling of those particularly vehement about the "psychose de guerre" includes F/1cIII/1253 (Bouches-du-Rhône), F/1cIII/1303 (Nièvre), F/1cIII/1307 (Pas-de-Calais), and F/1cIII/1327 (Tarn).

¹⁵⁵ Sartre, "Merleau-Ponty," 236: " 'Demain, on se battra partout.' "

steadfastly refused to treat the capitalist and the communist worlds as two “blocs,” insisting that this was the language of “generals or ambassadors” who wanted to reduce Soviet socialism to an “imperialism” on par with that of the United States.¹⁵⁶ Now, abruptly, he abandoned this position: the last political comment he wrote for *Les Temps modernes*, a brief two-paragraph introduction to a piece on US foreign policy in October 1950, identified the communist world as “the Eastern bloc.” It no longer deserved to be treated, he seemed to imply, on different terms than the Western one.¹⁵⁷ His introduction sharply criticized the article’s author for “concentrat[ing] all his attention on the actions of American diplomacy” without any discussion of “the initiatives of the other bloc...Even if one thinks that the Americans ‘started it,’ it is peculiar to present things as if they were faced with an entirely imaginary adversary and were only fighting against dreams.”¹⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty now came to believe that the USSR and US were not acting as living manifestations of socialism, on the one hand, and capitalism, on the other, but were both simply pursuing their interests. Moreover, they were doing so by confused and labyrinthine means that looked nothing like “history” according to Marx. As Merleau-Ponty put it in a rare political comment in 1951, “It seems to us that the governments are getting lost and that, in the extraordinary subtlety of relations between means and ends, they do not themselves actually know what they are doing. The dialectic invades our newspapers, but it is a

¹⁵⁶ “L’Adversaire est complice,” *Les Temps modernes* 57 (July 1950), 10: “Nous ne sommes pas incertains entre deux blocs; nous pensons que les blocs n’ont qu’une existence diplomatique et militaire. Cette ‘position ambiguë’ dont vous parlez, et qui autoriserait toutes les ruses et tous les reniements, elle ne l’est qu’aux yeux des généraux et des ambassadeurs.”

¹⁵⁷ “T.M.,” introduction to E.-N. Dzelepy, “Le drame de la politique américaine,” *Les Temps modernes* 60 (October 1950), 603: “bloc oriental.”

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: “Pourtant nous sommes frappés du fait que l’auteur concentre toute son attention sur les actes de la diplomatie américaine et *n’expose* jamais les initiatives de l’autre bloc, qui résultent quelquefois de ces actes, mais quelquefois aussi les précèdent. Même si l’on pense que les Américains ‘ont commencé,’ il est singulier de présenter les choses comme s’ils avaient en face d’eux un adversaire tout imaginaire et ne se battaient qu’avec des songes.”

demented dialectic, which turns in on itself and does not resolve problems.”¹⁵⁹ He would later explain why this altered his feelings about the Soviet Union in particular: “We do not claim that the USSR wanted or started the Korean War: but because it brought an end to it, it doubtless could have prevented it – and from the moment that it did not prevent it, and we moved on to military action, our attitude of sympathy was discredited [*déclassée*] because it changed meaning.”¹⁶⁰

Thus, in this moment of abrupt demystification, the Soviet Union simply lost all privilege for Merleau-Ponty: he became an “agnostic” on the topic.¹⁶¹ And, even more critically, he began to turn a skeptical eye on Marxism as a philosophy of history. Merleau-Ponty had never considered Marxism simply a “theory” but rather had approached it as a prophecy for the future; if its predictions were not being borne out by events, then its validity had to be reconsidered. Moreover, interestingly, whereas the struggles of the Third World would, in the years to come, renew the socialist faith of intellectuals like Sartre and Jeanson, for Merleau-Ponty, Korea (and tumult in Asia in general in the early 1950s) provoked the realization that, whatever the Cold Warriors claimed, neither capitalist nor communist doctrine had a great deal

¹⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, “L’Homme et l’adversité” (10 September 1951), *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 301-302: “Il nous semble que les gouvernements s’y perdent et que, dans l’extraordinaire subtilité des rapports des moyens à fin, ils ne peuvent plus savoir eux-mêmes ce qu’ils font effectivement. La dialectique envahit nos journaux, mais une dialectique affolée, qui tourne sur elle-même et qui ne résout pas les problèmes.”

¹⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, 317: “Nous savons tout ce qu’on peut dire sur le régime de la Corée du Sud, nous ne prétendons pas que l’U.R.S.S. ait voulu déclenché la guerre de Corée: mais puisqu’elle y a mis fin, elle pouvait sans doute l’empêcher, et dès lors qu’elle ne l’empêchait pas et que l’on passait à l’action militaire, notre attitude de sympathie était déclassée parce qu’elle changeait de sens.”

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 256. Sartre’s 1961 “Merleau-Ponty” tells the story of this transition in rather more dramatic terms, suggesting that, because of Korea, Merleau suddenly “thought he was seeing Stalinist doctrine without its mask, and that it was bonapartism. Either the USSR was not the homeland of socialism – in which case it didn’t exist anywhere and, doubtless, was not viable – or else socialism was *this*, this abominable monster, this police regime, this beast of prey” (237). This is compelling as a narrative, but it misleadingly overstates the case: Merleau did not recoil in horror from the “unmasked” USSR in 1950, but experienced a more mundane variety of disappointment and disillusionment – one which did *not* lead him to believe that the USSR was a “beast of prey” but which *nevertheless*, over time, transformed his politics and his political philosophy.

to do with the daily problems of people in poor, underdeveloped peasant countries.

“The real problems in the present world,” he declared in 1951,

have less to do with the antagonism between the two ideologies than with their common disarray when faced with certain major facts that neither the one nor the other control...It is not Satanism on the part of one government or the other that has made countries like India and China, where they died of hunger for centuries, come to reject famine, debility, disorder, or corruption: it is the development of the radio, a minimum of education and press, communication with the outside world, [and] the growth of population that render suddenly intolerable an age-old situation. It would be shameful if our obsessions, as Europeans, hid from us the real problem over there: the drama of countries being set up, in which no humanism can fail to be interested.¹⁶²

With regards to the problems of these poor countries, Merleau-Ponty now claimed, Marxist theory was hardly more useful than classic liberal economics: “*all the Western doctrines are too narrow to face up to the problem of the development [mise en valeur] of Asia...As for Marxism, it was intended to assure the passage of an existing economic apparatus from the hands of a bourgeoisie that had become parasitical to those of an old proletariat, highly conscious and cultivated. It is an entirely different thing to move a backwards country to modern forms of production...Thus, in the moment that Asia intervenes as an active factor in world politics, none of the concepts that Europe has invented allows us to think about its problems.*”¹⁶³ To deal clearly with world politics today, new and better concepts

¹⁶² “L’Homme et l’adversité,” 302: “Car les vrais problèmes du monde présent tiennent moins à l’antagonisme des deux idéologies qu’à leur commun désarroi devant certains faits majeurs que ni l’une ni l’autre ne contrôle...Or, ce n’est pas le satanisme d’un gouvernement ou d’un autre qui fait que des pays comme l’Inde et la Chine, où l’on mourait de faim depuis des siècles, en sont venus à refuser la famine, la débilité, le désordre ou la corruption, c’est la développement de la radio, un minimum d’instruction, de presse, les communications avec dehors, l’augmentation de la population qui rendent soudain intolérable une situation séculaire. Il serait honteux que nos hantises d’Européens nous cachent le problème réel qui est posé là-bas, le drame des pays à équiper dont aucun humanisme ne peut se désintéresser.”

¹⁶³ Ibid., emphasis in the original: “Mais ce qui est grave, c’est que *toutes* les doctrines occidentales sont trop étroites pour faire face au problème de la mise en valeur de l’Asie...Quant au marxisme, il a été conçu pour assurer le passage d’un appareil économique constitué, des mains d’une bourgeoisie

would unavoidably be necessary, including a reworked humanism that might have something to offer third-world people to whom the notion of proletarian revolution was meaningless. Marxism could no longer offer the *telos* for this multi-dimensional, fast-changing world.

From this initial realization, Merleau-Ponty began a long and arduous process of self-critique – one which, in his case, could not avoid also being a critique of Sartre, his closest interlocutor for a decade.¹⁶⁴ The results were his 1952 resignation from *Les Temps modernes*, his estrangement from Sartre and, in 1955, the publication of *Les Aventures de la dialectique*. This book, a collection of essays – including one on “Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism” that took up half the text – was rather loosely tied together with a short preface and a slightly longer epilogue. The book was avowedly a repudiation of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier political thought, though the explicit avowal came only late in the epilogue, when the author announced that “whoever has published his opinions on vital problems is obliged, if he changes them, to say so and to say why.”¹⁶⁵ The new book dealt at length with some of the same problems that he had discussed in *Humanisme et terreur*, but it offered markedly different conclusions. I will not, here, offer a full reading of the rich, varied philosophical themes of *Les Aventures* – a book-length project in its own right – but will only highlight the ways in

devenue parasitaire, entre celles d’un prolétariat ancien, hautement conscient et cultivé. C’est tout autre chose de faire passer un pays arriéré aux formes modernes de la production...Ainsi, au moment où l’Asie intervient comme un facteur actif dans la politique mondiale, aucune des conceptions que l’Europe a inventées ne nous permet de penser ses problèmes.”

¹⁶⁴ On Merleau-Ponty’s break from Sartre, see especially Whitford, *Merleau-Ponty’s Critique of Sartre’s Philosophy*; Jon Stewart, ed., *The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998); Duane Davis, ed., *Merleau-Ponty’s Later Works*. This latter book includes the full text of the 1953 exchange of letters between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre ending their collaboration, as well as a number of essays on the political and ethical implications of Merleau-Ponty’s “turn.”

¹⁶⁵ *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, 315: “Mais, par ailleurs, quiconque a publié ses opinions sur des problèmes vitaux est obligé, s’il en change, de le dire et de dire pourquoi.”

which the text exhibited the evolution in Merleau-Ponty's thinking on revolutionary violence from the time of *Humanisme et terreur*.

Les Aventures did not, unlike that earlier work, openly take violence per se as its object of inquiry, but its critique of Marxism – and Marxist revolution in particular – made plain that Merleau-Ponty no longer believed that humanism could justify terror. His newly critical stance vis-à-vis the USSR need not *necessarily* have led him to reject Marxism: he could have simply argued, as many did, that the Soviets had betrayed the revolution and that their communism had nothing any more to do with what Marx had intended. Indeed at certain moments in the text, as when he called Marxism in the USSR “an idea in the shadow of which something else happens,” or when he drew on Claude Lefort's critique of the Soviet bureaucracy, this was precisely what he appeared to do.¹⁶⁶ But elsewhere, he insisted forcefully, against Lefort, that the fault had to lie within Marxism itself: “There is not much sense,” he wrote, “in restarting with Marx if his philosophy is to blame for this failure, in acting as if this philosophy emerges intact from the affair...”¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty was entirely dismissive of the compromise position of suggesting that Marxism could still be valuable as *critique* even if one rejected it as prophecy, which was essentially Camus's attitude. “In history,” the philosopher wrote, “Marxist critique and action are a single movement...If one ascertains that it is not keeping the promises of its critique, one cannot conclude: let's keep the critique and drop the action.”¹⁶⁸ This did not mean that one had to embrace the “defects” of capitalism; nevertheless, “the critique that denounces them ought to be free from all compromise with an absolute of negation

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 104: “De toute façon, une pensée à l'ombre de laquelle se fait autre chose.”

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 129: “Mais il n'y a pas grand sens non plus à recommencer Marx si sa philosophie est en cause dans cet échec, à faire comme si cette philosophie sortait intacte de l'affaire...”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 320: “Dans l'histoire, la critique et l'action marxistes sont un seul mouvement...Si l'on constate qu'elle ne tient pas les promesses de la critique, on ne peut en conclure: gardons la critique et laissons l'action.”

that eventually prepares for new oppressions.”¹⁶⁹ But why did Merleau-Ponty now join Camus in thinking that Marxism *necessarily* led to these “new oppressions”? His explanation was elliptical, but essentially revolved around the charge that there was an unresolved tension in Marx’s thought, between extreme objectivism (socialism as the inevitable dialectical outcome of the material conditions of capitalism) and extreme subjectivism or voluntarism (the need for violence to “extract” this future from the present).¹⁷⁰ This tension, Merleau-Ponty charged, provided *a priori* license for the Party leadership in the USSR to use violence however they pleased, even against the proletariat, for “if the revolution is in things [*dans les choses*], how would one hesitate to remove, by all methods, resistances that are no more than apparent? If the revolutionary function of the proletariat is inscribed in the infrastructures of capital, the political action that expresses it is justified, like the Inquisition by Providence.”¹⁷¹ With this religious reference, Merleau-Ponty was not terribly far from Camus’s critique of Marxism as a faith – and a murderous one at that.

Merleau-Ponty also sounded surprisingly like the author of *L’Homme révolté* in his new explanation of why revolutions in general were doomed to fail and dissolve into terror. Although he did not adopt Camus’s morally differentiated categories of “*révolté*” versus “*révolutionnaire*,” he did now argue that there was an initial impulse in revolution that was *unavoidably* betrayed when the revolutionaries attempted to

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.: “...les tares du capitalisme restent des tares, mais la critique qui les dénonce doit être dégagée de tout compromis avec un absolu de la négation qui prépare à terme de nouvelles oppressions.” In the preface to *Signes*, Merleau-Ponty would modify and somewhat soften this position, suggesting that Marx’s oeuvre had taken on the status of a “classique,” and that in the future asking someone if he was a Marxist would be akin to asking him if he was a Cartesian: “La question n’a pas grand sens, puisque ceux qui rejettent ceci ou cela dans Descartes ne le font que par des raisons qui doivent beaucoup à Descartes. Nous disons que Marx est en train de passer à cette vérité seconde” (17).

¹⁷⁰ *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, 122.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: “Car si la révolution est dans les choses, comment hésiterait-on à écarter par tous les moyens des résistances qui ne sont qu’apparentes? Si la fonction révolutionnaire du prolétariat est gravée dans les infrastructures du capital, l’action politique qui l’exprime est justifiée comme l’Inquisition par la Providence.”

govern: “There is no dialectic without opposition and without freedom, and there is no opposition nor freedom for long in a revolution. That all known revolutions degenerate – that is no accident: it is that they can never, as institutionalized regimes, be what they were as movements...Revolutions are true as movements and false as regimes.”¹⁷² And this precisely because, as regimes, they were constrained to use violence against dissent, to stifle freedom with terror. Repudiating his position in *Humanisme et terreur*, Merleau-Ponty now refused to classify the use of terror as an even potentially justifiable element of the dialectical movement towards humanism: when the “dialectic in action” “responds to adversity” with “terror exercised in the name of a hidden truth,” he claimed, it “abandons its own line” and comes to a halt.¹⁷³ He articulated this changed attitude, furthermore, from a very familiar Camusian perspective: the perspective of terror’s victims, understood as *révoltés*. “Tomorrow,” he wrote ironically, “those who have been shot will *understand* that they did not die in vain: the only difficulty is that they will no longer be here to do it. Revolutionary violence does them that supreme injury of not taking their revolt seriously: they do not know what they do. Such are the poisoned fruits of the *desired truth*: it authorizes one to advance against all appearances, it is by itself madness.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid., 287: “Il n’y a pas de dialectique sans opposition et sans liberté, et il n’y a pas longtemps d’opposition et de liberté dans une révolution. Que toutes les révolutions connues dégénèrent, ce n’est pas là un hasard: c’est qu’elles ne peuvent jamais, comme régime institué, être ce qu’elles étaient comme mouvement...Les révolutions sont vraies comme mouvements et fausses comme régimes.”

¹⁷³ Ibid., 136: “...la dialectique en action répond à l’adversité par la terreur exercée au nom d’une vérité cachée ou par l’opportunisme, et de toutes façons quitte sa propre ligne.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 183, emphasis in original: “Demain ceux qui auront été fusillés *comprendraient* qu’ils ne sont pas morts en vain: la seule difficulté est qu’ils ne seront plus là pour le faire. La violence révolutionnaire leur fait cette suprême injure de ne pas prendre au sérieux leur révolte: ils ne savent pas ce qu’ils font. Tels sont les fruits empoisonnés de la *vérité voulue*: elle autorise à avancer contre toutes les apparences, elle est par elle-même folie.” Note the existence of a similar passage in Camus’s *L’Homme révolté*: “Plus tard, disent les disciples, vous jugerez. Mais les victimes ne seront plus là pour juger. Pour la victime, le présent est la seule valeur, la révolte la seule action. Le messianisme, pour être, doit s’édifier contre les victimes” (265).

Merleau-Ponty here signaled a momentous shift in his thinking, treating the vaunted ends of socialist revolution as only “desired” truth – quite passionately desired, perhaps, but no more realizable for that. Interestingly, given his earlier treatment of Rousset’s reliance on the categories of “experience” and “witnessing,” he credited his own experience as a witness to history for the fact that he could no longer endorse the notion of a radical break or rupture into a realm of “recognition of man by man.” Marx, he explained, had made “the non-capitalist future into an absolute Other. But we who have been witnesses [*témoins*] to a Marxist revolution, we know quite well that revolutionary society has its weight, its positivity, that it is therefore not the absolute Other.”¹⁷⁵ He also provided a more abstract theoretical grounding for his new position, writing that “a historical solution to the human problem, an end of history, would only be conceivable if humanity were like a thing to know, if in it knowledge could exhaust being, if it could arrive at a state that truly contained all that it had been and all that it could be.” Since this was not the case, “there are no situations without hope, but also no choice that puts an end to deviations, exhausts [humanity’s] power of invention, and dries up its history.” In other words, the notion of a revolution that could put a definitive end to all human conflict was a wishful fiction. “So there is nothing but some progress [*des progrès*].”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, 129: “Marx n’a pu avoir et donner l’illusion d’une négation réalisée dans l’histoire et dans sa ‘matière’ qu’en faisant de l’avenir non-capitaliste un Autre absolu. Mais nous qui avons été témoins d’une révolution marxiste, nous savons bien que la société révolutionnaire a son poids, sa positivité, qu’elle n’est donc pas l’Autre absolu.”

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 36: “Une solution historique du problème humain, une fin de l’histoire ne se concevrait que si l’humanité était comme une chose à connaître, si en elle la connaissance pouvait épuiser l’être, si elle pouvait parvenir à un état qui contienne réellement tout ce qu’elle a été et tout ce qu’elle peut être. Comme au contraire, dans l’épaisseur du social, chaque décision porte des conséquences inattendues, et comme d’ailleurs l’homme répond à ces surprises par des inventions qui déplacent le problème, il n’y a pas de situation sans espoir, mais pas de choix qui termine les déviations, exténue son pouvoir d’invention et tarisse son histoire. Il n’y a donc que des progrès.”

The implications of this for Merleau-Ponty's position on violence were clear: "One does not kill," he wrote severely, "for a relative progress."¹⁷⁷ By employing a distorted echo of his own earlier language, Merleau-Ponty now obliquely suggested that a utopian yearning for history to have meaning had driven his earlier insistence that violence could be justified by the unimaginably different "after" to the revolution: "But what is this *end of history* on which some people make everything depend? They posit a certain frontier beyond which humanity finally ceases to be a senseless tumult [*tumulte insensé*] and returns to the immobility of nature. This idea of an absolute purification of history, of a regime without inertia, without chance and without risks, is the inverted reflection of our anxiety and of our solitude."¹⁷⁸ Remember that in *Humanisme et terreur*, Merleau-Ponty had used the same phrase "senseless tumult," borrowed self-consciously from nationalist writer Maurice Barrès, to describe with fear the pointlessness human history would possess if it transpired that Marx had been wrong. As he now referred disdainfully to "some people's" hope that history could ever be anything *other* than "mad tumult," he distanced himself decisively from his earlier position, suggesting that it had, after all, been based in existential anxiety rather than clear-headed analysis.

Like Camus in 1946, then, Merleau-Ponty faced the question: without Marxism, without revolution, what was left? It was clear that in the absence of hope for a radically new, wholly humanist society, he was unwilling to endorse any project that could require violence ("One does not kill for a relative progress"). What sort of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 307: "On ne tue pas pour un progrès relatif."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 12, emphasis in original: "Mais qu'est-ce que cette *fin de l'histoire* dont quelques-uns font tout dépendre? On suppose une certaine frontière après quoi l'humanité cesse enfin d'être un tumulte insensé et revient à l'immobilité de la nature. Cette idée d'une purification absolue de l'histoire, d'un régime sans inertie, sans hasard et sans risques, est le reflet inversé de notre angoisse et de notre solitude."

politics, then, remained possible? Merleau-Ponty composed his response under the sign of an unlikely patron saint: Max Weber. Weber, Merleau-Ponty wrote, “was not a revolutionary” and indeed saw revolution as “in its essentials, as a military dictatorship and, as for the rest, a carnival of intellectuals costumed as political men.”¹⁷⁹ Weber was, in short, a liberal – but one whose liberalism was “militant, even suffering, heroic.”¹⁸⁰ Weber grasped that liberal values could and did mask violence; he understood that politics, by definition, could never embody a pure morality of intentions. Perhaps the most significant element of Weber’s approach to politics, in Merleau-Ponty’s eyes – that is, the element that most inspired his own new conception of the possibilities and limits of political action – was his respect for the personhood of the political opponent, his refusal to replace dialogue with violence. Weber’s liberalism, Merleau-Ponty wrote admiringly, had little in common with the smug bourgeois variety because “he recognizes the right of his adversaries, does not consent to hate them, does not avoid confrontation with them, and, to cut them down, relies only on their own contradictions and the discussion that reveals these. Nationalism, communism, pacifism, which he rejects, he does not want to outlaw them, he does not give up on understanding them.”¹⁸¹ In insisting on the concrete freedoms of concrete others, even those with whom he passionately disagreed, he thereby insisted that “freedom,” in the abstract, “never be the principle behind a repression.”¹⁸² We might read Merleau-Ponty here as revising his earlier belief that true humanist

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 40: “Il est contre la révolution parce qu’elle n’est pas pour lui révolution, c’est-à-dire création d’un ensemble historique: il la décrit, pour l’essentiel, comme une dictature militaire, et, pour le reste, un carnaval d’intellectuels costumés en hommes politiques.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 41: “Son libéralisme est militant, souffrant même, héroïque...”

¹⁸¹ Ibid.: “...il reconnaît le droit de ses adversaires, ne consent pas à les haïr, n’évite pas la confrontation avec eux et ne compte, pour les réduire, que sur leurs contradictions propres et sur la discussion qui les révèle. Le nationalisme, le communisme, le pacifisme, qu’il rejette, il ne veut pas les mettre hors-la-loi, il ne renonce pas à les comprendre.”

¹⁸² Ibid., 42: “Ainsi fait-il en sorte que la liberté ne soit pas jamais le point d’honneur d’une répression.”

intersubjectivity would only become possible *after* the Marxist revolution: Weber offered him a model for gazing upon and communicating with others that was marked by full recognition of their status as subjects. His “heroic” liberalism operated “as if” mutual recognition were already possible, and in so doing perhaps helped society edge incrementally towards such a state of affairs.

Merleau-Ponty’s description of Weber’s intransigent defense of his political foes also brings to mind Camus, as he agonized in his *Carnets* in late 1945, “I am not made for politics because I am unable to want or to accept the death of the adversary,”¹⁸³ and in 1948 sang the praises of those who are “condemned to comprehension even of that which is an enemy to them.”¹⁸⁴ Like Camus a decade earlier, Merleau-Ponty had now arrived at the position that building a humanist intersubjectivity, a state of “recognition of man by man,” perhaps required not a single revolutionary rupture but an unending process of dialogue amongst men. And, like Camus, he now argued that the possibility for such dialogue was premised on a degree of negative freedom for the individual. In the first instance this meant freedom to live, freedom from bodily terror, and freedom to speak. Merleau now insisted that this negative freedom was not simply a “bourgeois,” individualist value but the basis for human solidarity. *Les Aventures* ended, indeed, with an exhortation to readers to “bear the weight of their freedom, to not exchange it at a loss, for it is not only their possession, their secret, their pleasure, their salvation: it concerns all others.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *Carnets II*, 154: “Je ne suis pas fait pour la politique puisque je suis incapable de vouloir ou d’accepter la mort de l’adversaire.”

¹⁸⁴ “Le témoin de la liberté,” 215: “Par leur vocation, ils sont condamnés à la compréhension de cela même qui leur est ennemi.”

¹⁸⁵ *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, 322: “Rien de pareil ne nous menace, heureux si nous pouvions inspirer à quelques-uns – ou à beaucoup – de supporter leur liberté, de ne pas l’échanger à perte, car elle n’est pas seulement leur chose, leur secret, leur plaisir, leur salut, elle intéresse tous les autres.”

At no point in his book did Merleau-Ponty refer to Camus, whom he seems to have been unwilling to take seriously as a philosopher or political thinker. But, echoing the Camus of “Ni victimes ni bourreaux,” he did propose the founding in France of a “new” “non-communist Left” committed to a “new liberalism”: “like the heroic liberalism of Weber, this one makes even that which challenges it enter into its universe, and it is only justified in its own eyes on condition that it understands this.”¹⁸⁶ In concrete terms, this meant a liberalism that accepted the existence of class struggle, the proletariat’s right to strike, and the legality of the Communist Party, and that even tolerated revolutionary movements “as a useful menace, as a continual call to order,” reminding political actors that if they did not desire the dictatorship of the proletariat, they had to seek other ways to address the “social problem.”¹⁸⁷

But if these actors could not use violence, what sort of meaningful action could they undertake? Merleau-Ponty’s concrete suggestions, offered in the epilogue to *Les Aventures*, relied on a theoretical point he had developed in the long chapter critiquing Sartre. According to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre tended to define “action” as an unmediated “pure action” of a subject upon the object-world (including other humans conceived of in objective terms); this had resulted in an unwarranted conflation in French existentialist thought between the categories of “action” and “violence.”¹⁸⁸ Suggesting that the time had come to “put back in question” the Sartreian conception of the subject and his freedom to act, Merleau-Ponty announced that “the question is to know if, as Sartre says, there is nothing except *men* and *things*, or also this interworld

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 312: “On voit maintenant en quel sens il faut parler d’un nouveau libéralisme... Comme le libéralisme de Weber, celui-ci fait entrer dans son univers même ce qui le conteste, et il n’est justifié à ses propres yeux qu’à condition de le comprendre.”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.: “Si l’on parle de libéralisme, c’est en ce sens que l’action communiste, les mouvements révolutionnaires ne sont admis que comme utile menace, comme continuel rappel à l’ordre, que l’on ne croit pas à la solution du problème social par le pouvoir de la classe prolétaire ou de ses représentants...”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 166: “L’action pure, à la limite, c’est le suicide ou le meurtre.”

[*intermonde*] that we call history, symbolism, truth to make.”¹⁸⁹ If one admitted that symbolic mediation between subjects and the object-world did indeed exist, one could see that the notion of “pure action” was a myth: in fact, “all action, even a war, is always symbolic action.” This meant “action” had a definition that went beyond violence, and here Merleau-Ponty saw expansive implications: “Perhaps thereby one has the most chances to change the world...If all action is symbolic, then books are in their way actions,” and “if politics is not immediate and total responsibility, if it consists of tracing a line in the obscurity of historical symbolism, then it is – it, too – a craft, and it has its technique.”¹⁹⁰ Because in every man played out “the drama of a being who *sees* and who *does*,”¹⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty explained, action could also take the form of an “unveiling [*dévoilement*]” – that is, a symbolic, mediated expression that revealed some truth to others in words or images. (Merleau-Ponty did not use the language of “witnessing” or “testimony” here, but the concept of “unveiling” seems closely related.) An individual who “acts through showing” was, he insisted, “maintaining, by doing so, one of the two components of man.”¹⁹² To act in the world did not necessarily demand violence, and in no case could action escape the mediation of the symbolic and consist exclusively of pure violence. Merleau-Ponty’s surprising new contention that there was *no need* for violence in order to engage in political action was an argument that Camus had never made: it was, indeed, precisely Camus’s

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 278, emphasis in original: “La question est de savoir si, comme le dit Sartre, il n’y a que des *hommes* et des *choses*, ou bien aussi cet intermonde que nous appelons histoire, symbolisme, vérité à faire.”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 279: “Si au contraire on convient que nulle action n’assume tout ce qui se passe, n’atteint l’événement même, que toute action, même une guerre, est toujours action symbolique...si donc on renonce à l’ ‘action pure’ qui est un mythe, et un mythe de la conscience spectaculaire, peut-être est-ce alors qu’on a le plus de chances de changer le monde...Si vraiment toute action est symbolique, alors, les livres sont à leur façon des actions...Si la politique n’est pas responsabilité immédiate et totale, si elle consiste à tracer une ligne dans l’obscurité du symbolisme historique, alors elle est, elle aussi, un métier, et elle a sa technique.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 247, emphasis in original: “Le drame n’est pas seulement celui de la profession d’écrivain. Il est en chaque homme: c’est le drame d’un être qui *voit* et *fait*.”

¹⁹² Ibid., 248: “...[I]l maintient, en le faisant, l’une des deux composantes de l’homme.”

belief that, at certain moments, murder *was* the only available “action” that had led him to feel trapped between the two terrible choices of “silence and murder,” and to offer his two “solutions” of either apolitical witnessing or murder-suicide.

Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, suggested that real modes of non-violent action did indeed exist for the hypothetical “new” non-communist Left – provided it remembered that no radical transformations but only “some progress” would be possible. These modes of actions included public sphere speech and the “heroic” defense of democratic norms that Weber had championed. “Political freedom,” Merleau-Ponty now wrote – freedom to speak one’s mind without fear of state terror – “is not only and not necessarily a defense of capitalism.”¹⁹³ It could also be what Weber had made of it. Imagining a hostile interlocutor who scolded, “The struggle is the struggle for power, or else you condemn a non-communist Left to only exercise power in the parliamentary or bourgeois sense,” Merleau-Ponty responded with a surprisingly vigorous defense of parliamentary politics, observing that “the Parliament is the only known institution that guarantees a minimum of opposition and of truth.”¹⁹⁴ This did not mean, he admitted, that parliamentary politics offered “a solution” to humanity’s problems. But, after all, he no longer believed that there *were* “solutions” in history. Once one recognized that revolutions ineluctably dissolved into terror, one could see that there was “more of a future in a regime that does not claim to remake history from

¹⁹³ Ibid., 314: “Le seul postulat de cette attitude est que la liberté politique ne soit pas seulement et pas nécessairement une défense du capitalisme.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 313: “On dira: mais la lutte est lutte pour le pouvoir, ou bien donc vous condamnez une gauche non communiste à n’exercer le pouvoir qu’au sens parlementaire ou bourgeois...Quant aux limites de l’action parlementaire et démocratique, il en est qui tiennent à l’institution, et elles doivent être acceptés, car le Parlement est la seule institution connue qui garantisse un minimum d’opposition et de vérité.”

the base, but only to change it.” It was this regime that the non-communist Left ought to help build, “instead of entering once again into the circle of revolution.”¹⁹⁵

With his injunction that “one does not kill for a relative progress” the author of *Humanisme et terreur* emerged in 1955, surprisingly enough, in what we might see as an even more conservative position than the author of *L’Homme révolté*. After all, Camus had written with approval of Kalyayev’s assassination of the Grand Duke although it had only conceivably achieved what could be described, at best, as a “relative progress.” Merleau-Ponty’s new insistence that “action” was not a synonym for “violence” meant that he saw no need to address the kind of tortuous moral problems Camus set for himself concerning violence’s illegitimacy versus its sorrowful necessity: he simply ceased to recognize such necessity. The pounding refrain of *Humanisme et terreur* had been that there was no “outside” to violence, since structural violence surrounded us; this contention fell away in *Les Aventures*, leaving Merleau-Ponty to work with a definition of violence even more limited than that which Camus employed. Moreover *Les Aventures* did not argue that the real-world “cases” that had been offered as examples of necessary and desirable political violence in *Humanisme et Terreur* – the Resistance, the *épuration* – were actually illegitimate: it simply omitted any mention of them. Merleau-Ponty was not a “moralist” like Camus: once he had decided that Marxist revolution was not viable, he was uninterested in continuing to theorize in normative terms about whether one could justify the use of violence in this or that situation. Violence remained an agonizing

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 287: “Dès lors, la question se pose de savoir s’il n’y a pas plus d’avenir dans un régime qui ne prétend pas refaire l’histoire par la base, mais seulement la changer, et si ce n’est pas ce régime qu’il faut chercher, au lieu d’entrer une fois de plus dans le cercle de la révolution.”

problem – *the* agonizing problem – for Camus until his death; Merleau-Ponty moved on.

Nevertheless, it is worth lingering over a freeze-frame, so to speak, of these two men in 1955, on the eve of Budapest and before the Algerian War came to dominate French political and intellectual life. Both Camus and Merleau-Ponty had emerged from the years of Nazi occupation galvanized by the example of the Resistance, committed to the project of “revolution” as a rupture with all that had come before, and convinced that revolutionary violence – including retributive violence against traitors to the revolution – could be justified. In the immediate postwar period both were authors of some of the more robust defenses of political violence known to the twentieth century. By 1955, however, a decade after the end of the war, as the immediacy of the Resistance faded, new Cold War dilemmas arose, and a measure of economic prosperity at last arrived in France, both had undergone painful intellectual transformations and had concluded that revolution was impossible and, moreover, that the use of violence to achieve political aims could never be considered a legitimate choice. For neither man had this been a confident or triumphant progression; both *L’Homme révolté* and *Les Aventures de la dialectique* are well described not as revisionist manifestoes but as tentative, tortured, and groping attempts to insist that the refusal to legitimize violence need not equate with quietism. Both authors took a decidedly dark view of their contemporary world, in which “humanism” remained an ideal and never a reality. But both came to believe that engaging in acts of violence did not offer a means of altering this state of affairs. By 1955, in different ways, they had become proponents of a non-revolutionary politics centered on public-sphere dialogue, a politics which professed modest hopes at best but which they still adamantly labeled as Left.

I have underlined these facts at such length in this chapter because of the persistent perception among intellectual historians that the postwar era – until 1974 or, at the least, until Budapest – constituted a period of hegemonic advocacy for revolution and revolutionary violence on the French intellectual Left. In the Introduction, we noted that historian Sunil Khilnani has described an “entire intellectual consensus, founded upon a commitment to rapid and thorough-going social and political change through violent takeover of state power” that existed amongst “almost an entire generation” until the mid-1970s.¹⁹⁶ This perception will not stand up to a sober examination of the French intellectual landscape. It seems to have arisen, in part, through a conflation of the non-communist Left intelligentsia of the forties and fifties with the looming figure of Sartre: thus Khilnani’s book, for example, titled *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* actually approaches the “intellectual left” through readings of only two figures: Sartre and (beginning in the 1960s) Louis Althusser. I do not contest Sartre’s dominance among postwar intellectuals, nor the influence of his writing and his force of personality on the rest of the Left. But dominance does not equate with univocal authority nor with “consensus,” and the belief that Sartre’s political views can be taken as representative of the intellectual Left *in toto* from 1944 to roughly 1968 has led to a distorted periodization of postwar thought. It has therefore been necessary for us to stress that in fact by 1955 unquestionably major actors like Camus and Merleau-Ponty – the latter formerly Sartre’s closest collaborator – did not stand with him on the question of revolution.

We also have lingered for a moment in 1955 to retain a snapshot of the state of intellectual dialogue on political violence before the Algerian War posed a series of

¹⁹⁶ Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

insistent, agonizing new problems for French intellectuals. In 1955, a decade after the end of World War II in France, support for revolutionary political violence had, in fact, reached a relatively low ebb. In the following chapters we will suggest that those historians who see unbroken enthusiasm for revolution sustained from 1944 straight through to 1968 may perhaps be failing to recognize the considerable *re-radicalizing* effects of the Algerian conflict on the French non-communist Left. As France was swept up in the conflict, the kind of theoretical argument against political violence that Merleau-Ponty had offered in *Les Aventures* and Camus in *L'Homme révolté* ceased to seem relevant: meanwhile the animating question of *Humanisme et Terreur* – since violence is everywhere, *whose* violence will you support? – regained its immediacy. Neither Merleau-Ponty nor Camus therefore reversed course, but both were driven to the sidelines of politico-intellectual debate on the Left.

CHAPTER SIX – “Proof in Hand”: Bearing Witness to Torture and Terror in the Algerian War, 1954-1958

Tony Judt concludes his study of postwar French intellectuals’ fascination with Soviet communism between 1944 and 1956 with a brief consideration of the significance of the onset of the Algerian War (1954-1962). “It does not minimize the significance of the Algerian problem,” Judt writes, “nor the moral crisis arising from the use of torture on captured Algerian nationalists, to note that [intellectuals’] newfound interest in the colonial condition had the advantage of directing interest away from communism at a convenient moment.” The urgent new focus on Algeria, Judt argues, meant that problems related to “the theory and practice of communism (past and present) were set aside.” Judt labels political engagement during the Algerian conflict “very much an intellectual success,” and credits this to the fact that the war “posed seemingly straightforward moral choices, in contrast to the complex, opaque ones associated with communism.”¹

In these two final chapters, I challenge Judt’s account of the (non-)relationship between the preoccupations of the immediate postwar period and the onset of the Algerian conflict in two ways. First, I argue that the Algeria War did not precisely entail a “setting aside” of the debates that French intellectuals had engaged in over communism: just as the problem of political violence had been at the heart of intellectuals’ troubled engagement with Marxism, the USSR, and communist ideology, so it remained at the heart of their engagement with the Algerian crisis. The Algerian nationalists’ revolutionary struggle for independence provided the occasion for a rethinking of persistent problems: Was the use of violence for political ends legitimate? If so, by whom? If not, what forms of political intervention remained

¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 283 and 287.

possible? Responses by French intellectual and political elites to the forms of violence involved in the Algerian War – notably torture and terrorism – need not be divorced from earlier “peacetime” debates about the *épuration*, the strikes, the gulag, and Stalinism: indeed, I argue that their responses to the Algerian conflict are more legible when integrated into the story of debates about the limits of violence in politics that began in the weeks after the Liberation.² This contention responds not only to Judt, but to historians of violence in Algeria – or public opinion and intellectual “engagement” concerning that violence – who have generally not seen earlier postwar events and discourses in the metropole, except those directly concerning Algeria, as relevant contexts for their work.³

Second, I argue that there was nothing “straightforward” about the choices that the Algerian conflict presented to French intellectuals, and much that was profoundly agonizing. For most, the Algerian War did not in fact provide, as Judt puts it, “an ideal

² Of course, France was *not* internationally at peace from 1944 until 1954: indeed it was at war for the great majority of the decade. About twenty months after the war in Europe ended, the French entered an eight-year conflict in Indochina; only the catastrophic loss of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 brought that “dirty war” to an end, just as the Algerian War – which itself would drag on for nearly eight years – was poised to begin. The French military meanwhile also engaged in shorter but nonetheless bloody repressions in Madagascar, Morocco, and Tunisia. It has been possible, nevertheless, for us to trace French debates about political violence up to 1954 or 1955 more or less “as if” these conversations were taking place in a nation at peace. One reason for this is that the vast majority of the French population paid little attention to distant decolonizing warfare until Dien Bien Phu. See Alain Ruscio, *L’Opinion française et la guerre d’Indochine (1945-1954): sondages et témoignages* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1991); Alain Ruscio, ed., *L’Affaire Henri Martin et la lutte contre la guerre d’Indochine* (Pantin: Temps de cerises, 2004). Political elites and some intellectuals were, naturally, far more attentive to these conflicts, and were fond of invoking them rhetorically; a few became heavily involved in the North African politics of the early 1950s. But very few – the PCF and Sartre stand as the major exceptions – consistently *prioritized* them in elaborating political and ethical responses to violence. Events taking place either in metropolitan France or in the Soviet Union consistently provided the major contexts and examples for the theorization of violence in this period. This is what would change in the “Algerian years.”

³ Work on French anti-Algerian War activism does often note the French Resistance as a relevant context, because “memory” of it served to motivate individuals to oppose the Algerian War or even offer clandestine support to the FLN. But this literature tends to ignore the decade separating 1944 from 1954, thus failing to examine how narratives about what, exactly, the Resistance constituted were substantially reworked before the onset of the Algerian conflict. For example, see Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Berg: Oxford, 1997).

exit from the Communist imbroglio”: instead, it offered up a difficult new set of political realities that sorely tested all previous schema for approaching the problem of violence in politics.⁴ The conflict confronted French intellectuals not only with “the use of torture on captured Algerian nationalists,” as Judt puts it, but with a confusing welter of violent practices, from the French military’s use of collective repression and mass relocation of populations to the Algerian nationalists’ urban bombings, reprisal killings, and internecine “café wars” in Paris, Marseille, and Toulouse. To these should be added the savage “counter-terrorist” campaign of French Algeria hard-liners, conducted on both sides of the Mediterranean, and police beatings and murders of protesters in Paris. All of these practices were tangled in what was in many respects a civil war, one that involved multiple civilian populations whose antagonisms were fueled in partial, overlapping ways by national, racial, religious, and class identities. None of the problems presented by this situation were simple ones, and if the French intellectuals on the Left who became politically engaged against the war could agree, in the abstract, that state-sponsored torture was wrong, they could often agree on little else.⁵

It is certainly true that the anti-war activism of the non-communist intellectual Left during the Algerian War is easier to present in a heroic light than their political activities in the first postwar decade. In the last few years of the Fourth Republic, every major political party in France (including, after a fashion, the PCF) was actively implicated in supporting France’s military policies in Algeria, and in underwriting the radical expansion of executive and military “special powers;” these policies that

⁴ *Past Imperfect*, 284.

⁵ This observation is not intended to denigrate the significance of left-leaning French intellectuals’ more or less univocal opposition to torture and refusal even to discuss its potential justifications: recent developments in our own country demonstrate, sadly, that it ought not be considered a foregone conclusion that those intellectuals who identify themselves as belonging to the Left will unite behind the notion that state-sponsored torture is impermissible under all circumstances.

helped to facilitate the systematic use of torture and collective repression.⁶ The vast majority of France's media outlets – newspapers, radio, television – did not challenge the government's narrative of the conflict, which portrayed the French military as engaged in a just, humane “security operation” (the French state would not acknowledge that it had constituted a “war” until 1999) against a demonic handful of “terrorists” preying on the defenseless and loyal population. In this context, a small collection of intellectuals, minoritarian political activists, and student, syndical, and religious leaders were the only actors to voice consistent public criticism of French military and police atrocities and to agitate in the French public sphere for Algerian independence.⁷

⁶ The PCF was, of course, in permanent parliamentary opposition in this period. But, infamously, Communist representatives to the National Assembly supported the “special powers” voted to Guy Mollet's government in March, 1956; in practical terms, therefore, the Party helped to deepen and expand the conflict. The Communists' ambivalence and failure to take leadership on Algeria have been extensively studied: see Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991); Grégoire Madjarian, *La Question coloniale et la politique du Parti communiste français. Crise de l'impérialisme colonial et mouvement ouvrier* (Paris: Maspero, 1977); certain documents in Jacob Moneta, *La Politique du Parti communiste français dans la question coloniale, 1920-1963* (Paris: Maspero, 1971); René Dazy, *La Partie et le tout. Le PCF et la guerre franco-algérienne* (Paris: Syllepse, 1990); and Jean-Jacques Becker, “L'intérêt bien compris du Parti communiste français,” in *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 235-244. As for the SFIO, after the February 6, 1956 “day of tomatoes” in Algiers, when a humiliated Guy Mollet capitulated to the *pieds-noirs* “ultras,” no party was more deeply implicated in the Algerian morass. See especially Etienne Maquin, *La Parti socialiste et la guerre d'Algérie. La fin de la vieille maison (1954-1958)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990). As many historians of the French imperial project have pointed out, anti-colonialism was not historically a Socialist position in France: there was nothing particularly shocking about SFIO's commitment to maintaining *Algérie française*. (For example, see Janine Harouelo, *Le SFIO et Madagascar, 1947* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995].) Nevertheless, non-Communist anti-colonialists experienced Mollet's premiership as a terrible and traumatizing betrayal. Pierre Vidal-Naquet noted in his memoirs that he celebrated with champagne upon hearing news of Mollet's death in 1975.

⁷ For overviews of opposition to the war amongst intellectuals, see especially James Le Sueur's superb *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); David Schalk, *War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, eds., *La Guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français* (Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1991); Pierre-Vidal Naquet, “Une fidélité têtue: La Résistance française à la guerre d'Algérie,” *Vingtième siècle* 10 (1986): 3–19; Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). On syndical and student anti-war activism, which often grew out of relationships with Algerian student or worker groups, see Jean-Yves Sabot, *Le syndicalisme étudiant et la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Harmattan, 1995); Michel Branciard, *Un syndicat face à la guerre d'Algérie: la CFTC*

This chapter, after briefly tracing the dominant governmental narrative about the origins and nature of the violence in Algeria, demonstrates that in order to combat the government's narrative, from 1956 to 1958 anti-war activists developed a strategy of "témoignage," defined as public, performative speech-acts of "bearing witness" or "testifying," regarding the atrocities of the French military in Algeria. This project took a number of forms. The editors of *Les Temps modernes*, *Esprit*, *L'Express*, *France-Observateur*, *Le Monde*, and *Témoignage chrétien* and of newly founded clandestine journals such as *Témoignages et documents* and *Vérité-Liberté* sought out first-person testimonials from victims of torture, along with incriminating government or military documents that helped to establish the detailed truth of French atrocities. The few publishing houses run by opponents of the war put out grueling book-length accounts by victims: the most famous of these, and perhaps the most famous book of the entire Algerian War period, was Henri Alleg's *La Question*, published by Éditions de Minuit in 1958. Ex-soldiers "testified" to violence they had seen first-hand, thus "bearing witness" to the suffering of others: some examples in this category include the anonymous *Les rappelés témoignent [The Reservists Testify]* (1957), Robert Bonnaud's 1957 article "La paix des Nementchas," and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie* (1957). "Témoignage" also involved speaking "in the name of" the victims of torture at press conferences and public meetings, in editorials and prefaces, and – increasingly as the war and its encroachments on civil liberties ground on – by "testifying" quite literally on the witness stand or in the dock. Some authors composed extensive, richly detailed, and performatively empathic

qui deviendra CFDT (Paris: Syros, 1984); Alain Monchablon, *Histoire de l'U.N.E.F. de 1956 à 1968* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986); Alain Monchablon, "Syndicalisme étudiant et génération algérienne," in *La Guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français*, 175-190; and (for evidence underlining the lack of widespread labor opposition to the war), Laure Pitti, "Renault, la 'forteresse ouvrière' à l'épreuve de la guerre d'Algérie," *Vingtième siècle* 83 (July-September 2004): 131-143. See footnote 67 below on religious opposition.

accounts of the suffering undergone by one particular victim: for example, the lawyer Georges Arnaud in *Pour Djamila Bouhired* (1957) and Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi in *Djamila Boupacha* (1962). Others became expert in (and obsessed with) tracking down government documents and military officials' testimonials that established the fact of torture: Pierre Vidal-Naquet, author of *L'Affaire Audin* (1958) and "that true maniac of precision" Robert Gauthier at *Le Monde* both come to mind.⁸ Still others – like Pierre-Henri Simon in his 1957 *Contre la torture* – specialized in making the moral case against what they perceived as an attack on elemental human dignity.⁹

Thus "testimony" – and, specifically, "testimony" about the suffering caused by violence – became the privileged genre for criticism of the Algerian War. This was not a foregone conclusion. Indeed, early in the war many anti-colonialists worried that dwelling on victims' experience of atrocities might be counterproductive: it could raise tensions and inflame hatreds, thus keeping the two sides away from the negotiating table. From different points on the political spectrum, for example, both Hubert Beuve-Méry, editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, and Jean-Marie Domenach, at *Esprit*, argued that the anti-war movement should refrain from focusing its energies on documenting extremes of violence. Over time, however, they and other intellectuals came to believe that testimony possessed a power to shape public opinion in France that polemical political commentary did not; they also decided that there existed a moral imperative to speak out in the name of France's torture victims, whether or not this "witnessing" had a political effect. Paradoxically, as well, growing government censorship, repression of information, and prosecution of journalists and publishers

⁸ Vidal-Naquet, *Face à la raison d'état. Un historien dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989), 22: "...cette extraordinaire figure de 'saint laïque,' véritable maniaque de l'exactitude, ce qui nous noua notre amitié, et qui s'appelait Robert Gauthier."

⁹ Pierre-Henri Simon, *Contre la torture* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

contributed to anti-war activists' sense that they were accomplishing a radical act simply by telling the truth about the horrors that were taking place in Algeria.¹⁰

In “testifying” against torture, then, had the non-communist intellectual Left indeed, as Judt suggests, left behind their erstwhile debates, at last embracing an ethical opposition to violence in the name of its suffering victims? Matters were not nearly so simple. As the war continued, atrocity piling upon atrocity, major problems emerged with the model of activism through “*témoignage*” against violence. The most significant of these arose from the fact that not only French forces but their Algerian nationalist opponents were engaged in extreme violence. As the latter’s campaign of terror against Muslim and European civilians alike intensified, French anti-colonialists who “testified” to the suffering of victims in order to voice their opposition to French participation in the war were hard-pressed to explain why the suffering of the Algerians’ victims did not matter, too. Through the terrorism of the FLN, the old problem reemerged: are there some forms of political violence that one should support, in the name of justice and human progress, regardless of the suffering they cause to innocents along the way? Some, like Camus, responded no, insisting on “testifying” to the suffering of *all* victims in Algeria. More radical supporters of Algerian independence such as Francis Jeanson and Jean-Paul Sartre, however, increasingly abandoned the language of “testimony” altogether and – like Merleau-Ponty in 1947 – explained that in fact they were only opposed to *reactionary* violence, not to its “progressive” cousin. The second section of this chapter describes how these

¹⁰ Martin Harrison has demonstrated that censorship in the metropole during the war was often haphazard, and never came close to the levels of suppression suffered by the press in Algerian territory. It was, however, experienced by the editors of frequently seized or prosecuted publications, such as *Le Monde*, *Esprit*, and *L'Express*, as an outrageous violation of democratic freedom of expression. Harrison, “Government and Press in France during the Algerian War,” *The American Political Science Review*, 58.2 (June 1964): 273-285; Benjamin Stora, “Une censure de guerre qui ne dit pas son nom: Algérie, années 1960,” in *Censures : De la Bible aux larmes d'Eros* (Paris: Éditions du centre Pompidou, 1987), 51.

problems began to plague the non-communist intellectual Left by 1958. Far from offering a morally clear-cut release from earlier political and ethical debates over violence, as the interminable decolonizing conflict wore on it forced intellectuals to continually revisit those debates, revise their earlier positions, and confront limitations both of revolutionary violence and of articulating opposition to violence through a discourse of suffering.

The Algerian War began on 1 November 1954 (All Saints' Day) with a coordinated series of nationalist attacks throughout the Algerian territory. However, for the next ten months of intermittent hostilities between French forces and the young, still unstructured Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), a period Benjamin Stora has labeled the "phony war," few in France distinguished the conflict from clashes with Muslim populations elsewhere in French North Africa.¹¹ The scope of the conflict intensified markedly from 20 August, 1955, the second anniversary of France's deposition of Moroccan sultan Mohamed V, when nationalist forces in both Morocco and the North Constantinois region of Algeria launched a fresh wave of assaults on urban agglomerations, targeting European civilian populations along with Muslims viewed as "collaborators" with colonial rule. In Algeria, they killed a total of one hundred twenty-three people – men, women, and children, including fifty-two Muslims – in a gruesome fashion. The French response was immediate and merciless. The army – rapidly expanded by the government's recall of 60,000 reservists, and given unprecedented powers under state of emergency decrees – razed villages suspected of harboring rebels; European civilian militias shot Arabs on sight in the streets. In Philippeville, where particularly grisly murders of European families had

¹¹ Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002).

taken place, city officials gathered all the Muslim men they could find into the local stadium and shot every one of them. Official French figures provided a death toll for the repression of 1,273, but the FLN insisted that as many as 12,000 Muslims were in fact killed, and Matthew Connelly has shown that, off the record, French administrators put forward the extraordinary figure of 20,000 dead.¹² By the end of the year, 160,000 French soldiers from the Armée de la terre were present on Algerian soil; by the end of 1956, despite a short-lived protest movement of young conscripts, there would be 400,000. The war had begun in earnest.¹³

From this point forward, amongst a French political class for whom Algerian independence remained inconceivable, a logic of escalation took hold. In early 1956, the Socialist and Radical “Front républicain” dominated legislative elections on a vague platform of “peace” in Algeria, but new Socialist premier Guy Mollet reversed course on February 6, 1956, surrendering to the demands of angry, tomato-hurling European “ultra” protesters in Algiers. After this infamous “Day of Tomatoes,” Mollet withdrew his initial moderate choice for Minister Resident of Algeria and appointed a hardliner, Socialist Robert Lacoste;¹⁴ with the overwhelming support of all parties including the PCF, Lacoste subsequently piloted “special powers” legislation through the National Assembly. This legislation radically expanded military authority and curtailed civil liberties in Algerian territory.¹⁵ The subsequent events of 1956,

¹² Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86.

¹³ See also Zahir Ihaddaden, “La guerre d’Algérie et les indépendances du Maroc et de la Tunisie,” in *La Guerre d’Algérie au miroir des décolonisations françaises: en l’honneur de Charles-Robert Ageron*, ed. Cécile Thiébault (Paris: Société française d’Histoire d’Outre-mer, 2000); Charles-Robert Ageron, “L’insurrection du 20 août 1955 dans le Nord-Constantinois. De la résistance armée à la guerre du peuple,” in *La Guerre d’Algérie et les Algériens*, ed. Charles-Robert Ageron (Paris: Armand Collin, 1997), 27-50.

¹⁴ We briefly encountered Lacoste in Chapter Two as the Minister for Industrial Production whose “Lacoste decrees” cutting jobs and strengthening management authority sparked the miners’ strike of 1948.

¹⁵ The expansion of “special powers” laws under the Fourth Republic is a vital and under-treated subject. Most of the theoretical and legal scholarship that has burgeoned since September 11, 2001 on

including the October kidnapping of Ben Bella and other FLN leaders and France's disastrous November Suez expedition against the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, put negotiation out of reach; meanwhile the FLN's strength grew and the group commenced its terrifying campaign of urban bombing, targeting cafes, clubs, and bars frequented by the European population. The long Battle of Algiers began in December 1957; although, as historian Raphaëlle Branche has shown, the roots of French torture in Algeria reached far back into the colonial period and expanded steadily through the early years of the war, at this juncture the practice reached new, horrifying heights.¹⁶ General Massu's paratroopers succeeded, after a fashion, in their mission of "pacifying" the city by painstakingly breaking the FLN networks there, but the roughly 60,000 men of the Armée Nationale de la Libération (ALN, the FLN's military arm) continued to expand operations in the countryside, winning important victories over French troops until their arms supply from Tunisia and Morocco was finally cut off by the French in September. The Algerian population, Muslim and European, was horrifically enmeshed in these events. Ordinary Muslims were victims of widespread French torture, arrest, detention, summary execution, "relocation," and collective repression, and, at the same time, were vulnerable to brutal FLN exactions

the "state of exception" and "state of emergency" has emphasized the ways in which such legislation produces the expansion of executive power. But "the executive" is not a singular entity: under France's Fourth Republic, it would appear that the expansion of executive discretion worked in the end not to strengthen "the executive" as a whole but to grant unprecedented powers to the military leadership specifically, powers which were subsequently wielded autonomously, against *all* branches of civilian government. The result was not a strengthened state but rather the disintegration of the regime. "Special powers" played out very differently, however, under the constitutionally (and charismatically) stronger executive of the Fifth Republic. A thorough examination of the French case could help to make more concrete and workable our understanding of the "state of exception" as a historical (and not only an abstract or theoretical) concept. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*, transl. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For a systematic consideration of the effect of laws of exception on civil liberties during the Algerian conflict (though it does not deal openly with the problem of torture), see Arlette Heymann, *Les Libertés publiques et la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1972).

¹⁶ Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 28-34.

and to becoming pawns in rival nationalist groups' struggles for control. The roughly one million European civilian who lived in Algeria, meanwhile, were traumatized by the FLN's use of "blind" terrorism even when they were not direct victims of bomb attacks.

What did all of this bloodshed look like from the metropole? It is crucial, before we begin to examine intellectual discourses about the war, to understand the narrative that the successive administrations of the Fourth Republic produced and disseminated about what was taking place in Algeria. This narrative, which provided unmistakably normative labels for French versus Algerian violence, was adopted by most of the mainstream print media and reflected unquestioningly on government-controlled radio and television as well.¹⁷ It was articulated by two important figures – both, incidentally, with sterling Resistance credentials. These were Jacques Soustelle, a Gaullist who had served under Mendès-France and Faure as Resident Minister in Algeria from 1955 to 1956 and subsequently remained a vocal defender of *Algérie française*, and his successor, Lacoste.¹⁸ Soustelle and Lacoste, as self-identified "liberals," were happy to concede that Algerian Muslims had legitimate social, economic, and even political grievances. The French government, they each

¹⁷ On radio and television representations of the war, see Michèle de Bussierre, Cécile Méadel, and Caroline Ulmann-Mauriat, eds., *Radio et télévision au temps des "événements d'Algérie," 1954-1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). It is important to keep in mind that French propaganda about the conflict (like FLN propaganda) was always intended not only for the French populace but for foreign actors such as the US government and the UN member states. On this – and the "internationalization" of the Algerian War in general – see Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*; Irwin Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Martin Thomas, "France Accused: French North Africa Before the United Nations, 1952-1962," *Contemporary European History* 10.1 (March 2001): 91-121.

¹⁸ The existing biography of Soustelle – Bernard Ullman, *Jacques Soustelle, le mal aimé* (Paris: Plon, 1995) – is unsatisfactory for scholarly purposes. Le Sueur's treatment of him in *Uncivil War*, 28-41, is compelling. Historians like Michael M. Harrison who read Soustelle simply as an "ultra-right-wing Gaullist polemicist" miss a great deal: see his "French Anti-Americanism under the Fourth Republic and the Gaullist Solution," in *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism: A Century of French Perception*, eds. Denis Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik, and Marie-France Toinet, transl. Gerald Turner (London: MacMillan, 1990). On Lacoste, see Jacques Lagrange, *Robert Lacoste (1898-1989): du Périgord et de l'Algérie* (Périgueux : Pilote 24, 1998).

confidently insisted, would shortly implement wide-reaching “reforms” to address these problems. These two men – along with much of the French political class – remained strong believers in France’s “civilizing mission” in the colonies: as Lacoste put it, the French may have initially occupied Algeria by force, “but she conquered [it] by the indisputable right of a civilizing *oeuvre* composed of humanity and generosity.”¹⁹ The task of “reforming” French policy on Algeria would be a natural development of this *oeuvre*.

But if “reforms” were desirable according to Soustelle and Lacoste, the outrageous demand for Algerian independence on the part of the “terrorists” was a homicidal diversion. Adamant that France’s ever-expanding “operations” in Algeria did not constitute a “war” (this would have required acknowledging the FLN as legitimate combatants, and the conflict as an international affair), Soustelle and Lacoste instead insisted that the ever-multiplying French forces in the territory were there to assure “the security of the populations.”²⁰ The French military’s role in the war, in other words – a role Soustelle once referred to, beatifically, as “the pacification of hearts” – was thus assimilated whole-cloth to the original “civilizing mission.”²¹ Supporting the fateful “special powers” law on the floor of the National Assembly in March, 1956, Lacoste’s fellow Socialist Jean Montalat explained the French military’s goals in Algeria in these terms: “to take a series of measures in order to assure the security of the country; to protect lives; [and] to promote a politics of social justice and human emancipation capable of creating a climate that will permit the organization of free elections thanks to which Algerians of all opinions, all races, all

¹⁹ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 8 March 1956, 759: “L’opinion peut être divisée sur les solutions, mais il n’est pas un Français...qui accepte de voir la France chassée d’une terre où elle s’est installée par le droit discutable des armes mais qu’elle a conquise par l’indiscutable droit d’une oeuvre civilisatrice faite d’humanité et de générosité.”

²⁰ “Le rapport de M. Jacques Soustelle,” *Combat*, 13 January 1956.

²¹ Cited in Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 34.

religions, will be able to participate actively in the elaboration of their statute.”²²

French soldiers were in Algeria to serve as guardians and as liberators, Montalat suggested. Their only enemies, therefore, were those who would stand in the way of this project of “human emancipation.” Such language implicitly championed French “universalizing” values as a desirable alternative to the FLN’s “racist” Islamo-nationalism; other speakers were far less subtle. Soustelle, for example, charged that

in Algeria we see a veritable conjuration being established against France, marked with the seal of fanaticism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and racism – for it is on *that* side that racism and totalitarianism are found – a conjuration that does not aim to liberate any people, that does not have for a goal or an ideal the right of peoples to dispose of themselves, but rather the right of certain others to dispose of them – and especially, as a long-term goal, though perhaps already drawing near, to break the Paris-Brazzaville axis that passes as a matter of necessity through Algiers in favor of the axis of pan-Arabism from Cairo to Morocco.²³

Despite the forcefulness with which they made these claims, ultimately it was not “racism” but the use of terrorism against civilians that served as the central element of Soustelle and Lacoste’s demonization of the FLN. According to Lacoste, the nationalists were maniacally devoted to “terror, pitiless terror, primitive, of a

²² *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 29 February 1956, 586: “Pour remédier une situation si sérieusement compromise, il importe de prendre une série de mesures en vue d’assurer la sécurité du pays, de protéger les vies, de promouvoir une politique de justice sociale et d’émancipation humaine capable de créer un climat permettant l’organisation d’élections libres grâce auxquelles les Algériens de toutes opinions, de toutes races, de toutes religions, pourront participer activement à l’élaboration de leur statut.”

²³ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 9 March 1956, 791: “Ainsi, de toutes parts, nous voyons se nouer contre la France en Algérie une véritable conjuration marquée du sceau du fanatisme, de la xénophobie, de l’intolérance religieuse et du racisme – car c’est de ce côté-là que sont l’intolérance, le totalitarisme et le racisme – (*Applaudissements au centre, à droite, à l’extrême droite, et sur plusieurs bancs à gauche*) conjuration qui a pour objet, non pas de libérer quelque peuple que ce soit, non pas pour but et pour idéal le droit des peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes, mais le droit de certains à disposer de ces peuples (*Applaudissements sur les mêmes bancs*) et surtout pour objectif lointain, mais peut-être déjà bien rapproché, de briser l’axe français Paris-Brazzaville qui passe nécessairement par Alger, au profit de l’axe du pan-arabisme le Caire-Maroc.” Soustelle and Lacoste both specialized in fluidly transitioning between blaming the war on various “outsiders,” to the United States government, to, in the next breath, the USSR.

bestial ferocity.”²⁴ The FLN, these “assassins without mercy” (Soustelle) constituted the *enemy*, not the representative, of the defenseless Algerian Muslim population, which in its vast majority remained profoundly attached to France and eager for the incipient “reforms.”²⁵ In Soustelle and Lacoste’s insistent rhetoric, “The Muslims of Algeria,” this faceless and infantilized mass, were pawns and victims as opposed to actors in the war; the FLN were an aberrant band of killers who in no way reflected upon nor represented their society but merely preyed upon it: hence the French government’s harping emphasis on *Muslim* victims of the FLN. “I do not have the right,” Lacoste told the National Assembly, “to keep silent about the fact that they cut the throats of women, children and the elderly; that they decapitate with knives; that they disembowel and mutilate.” The French would be remiss in their paternalistic duties if they did not attempt to protect “the Algerians” from such monsters by continuing to escalate military operations: “These hideously tortured cadavers, these survivors with their lips cut off, will they not bear witness against us?”²⁶

As distorted as French government propaganda was, the FLN did indeed deploy terrible violence against civilians, primarily fellow Muslims. In mid-1957 the French government (now under Radical Maurice Bourgès-Manoury, with Lacoste still at the Algerian ministry)²⁷ took energetic advantage of one particularly ghastly episode, known as the “Melouza” (or “Mélouza”) massacre, in which FLN fighters

²⁴ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 8 March 1956, 760: “La terreur, une terreur impitoyable, primitive, d’une bestiale férocité, a fait le reste.”

²⁵ Quoted in Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 34.

²⁶ *Journal officiel – Assemblée Nationale*, séance du 8 March 1956, 760: “Je n’ai pas le droit de taire qu’on égorge vieillards, femmes et enfants, qu’on décapite au couteau, qu’on éventre et qu’on mutilie. Et j’en appelle à la France. Ces cadavres affreusement torturés, ces survivants dont on a coupé les lèvres, déchiré les oreilles ou arraché le nez, ne témoignent-ils pas contre nous lorsque nous laissons aux mains de fanatiques enivrés de sang ceux dont le crime est d’aimer la patrie commune?”

²⁷ On the byzantine parliamentary politics and constant governmental crisis of the Fourth Republic in this period, see Philip M. Williams, *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964).

slaughtered about 300 unarmed male inhabitants around a single South Kabyle village. The administration facilitated massive media coverage of the event, initially claiming that the population had been punished by the FLN for their loyalty to the French (this was false – they were, rather, supporters of the Mouvement National Algérien, a rival group of nationalists). In a radio address, France’s figurehead President René Coty pleaded with “all civilized peoples” to “refuse to grant any audience to the warmongers and the agents of this hideous terrorism that tramples on all divine and human laws, in contempt of the universal conscience.” He gave his “solemn assurance” to “the families of Melouza who ran to place themselves under our protection” that “France, which wants to guarantee them security and justice, will never abandon them.”²⁸ Reporters and photographers were invited to the site of the massacre. Government-backed campaigns (Soustelle took a prominent role) were organized to provide humanitarian aid to the widows and orphans. Lacoste supervised the publication of a pamphlet *L’Opinion mondiale juge les sanglants “libérateurs” de Mélouza et de Wagram* [*World Opinion Judges the Bloody “Liberators” of Mélouza and Wagram*], featuring gruesome photographs alongside condemnations issued from throughout the so-called “civilized” world; a few months later, his offices released a more elaborate illustrated book titled *Aspects véritables de la rébellion algérienne* [*The Real Appearance of the Algerian Rebellion*], a collection of hundreds of horrific, breathtakingly graphic photographs of severely mutilated victims of FLN violence, the great majority of them Muslims. The photographs were organized according to various categories of innocent victimhood: “Assassinations of children,” “Assassinations of

²⁸ “Un appel de M. René Coty,” *Le Monde*, 2 June 1957: “Je m’adresse à tous les peuples civilisés et je leur demande s’ils n’estiment pas le moment venu de signifier qu’ils refuseront toute audience aux fauteurs et aux agents de ce hideux terrorisme qui foule aux pieds toutes les lois divines et humaines au mépris de la conscience universelle.”

women,” “Assassinations of old people.”²⁹ Lacoste also mailed still more explicit photographs directly to various influential actors in and out of government.³⁰

Supporters of government policy held press conferences declaring that Melouza had demonstrated that “our duty is to stay there, if only to protect those who, if we were to depart, would be massacred.”³¹

The mainstream French media responded dutifully to this well-orchestrated campaign, expressing unveiled outrage at the massacre and covering it in extensive detail over many days. Indeed, from 1955 onward, most sources – even those that aimed for neutrality and did not overtly sensationalize the FLN’s violence – had reported events in Algeria in a fashion that at least implicitly supported the government’s narrative: an endless drumbeat of “attacks,” “killings,” “massacres,” and “urban terrorism” on the part of the “rebels” or “outlaws,” and “defensive” “pacification operations” on the part of the valiant-but-humane French “forces of order.” Although death tolls for the Algerian War are famously controversial, historians agree that the French were directly responsible for considerably more fatalities than were the FLN.³² But a regular reader of *Combat*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, or *Paris-Soir* – that is, of any non-communist national daily, even one skeptical of government policy – would likely have had the impression that the FLN was the author of the vast majority of bloodshed (and certainly the vast majority of *civilian*

²⁹ Ministère de l’Algérie, Cabinet du Ministre, *Aspects véritables de la rébellion algérienne* (Paris: 1957).

³⁰ Le Sueur documents this in *Uncivil War*, 176, having viewed the photos in Germaine Tillion’s personal collection; it is also confirmed in Domenach, *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d’or: journal d’un réfractaire (1944-1977)* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 139 (4 March 1958): “Ce matin, à mon courrier, par délicate attention des services de Robert Lacoste, je trouve un lot de photos: cadavre mutilés d’une famille de colons... Cette nécrophagie de la propagande est devenue intolérable.”

³¹ Georges Bidault, quoted in “Nombreuses protestations contre les massacres,” *Le Monde*, 5 June 1957: “Notre devoir est de rester, ne serait-ce que pour protéger ceux qui, nous partis, seront massacrés.”

³² See Ageron, “Les pertes humaines de la guerre d’Algérie” in Gervereau Rioux, and Stora, *La France en guerre d’Algérie*, 170-175; Kamel Kateb, *Européens, “indigènes,” et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962). Représentations et réalités des populations* (Paris: INED, 2001).

bloodshed) taking place in Algeria. A typical autumn 1956 news article in *Combat*, for example, referred to the FLN in the space of a few short paragraphs as “rebels,” “terrorists,” “gangs,” “outlaws,” “assailants,” and “aggressors” and their actions as “attacks, aggressions, and sabotages” resulting in multiple civilian deaths. French soldiers, meanwhile, were “forces of order” who had come to the rescue of frightened, besieged farmers and with a “prompt riposte” had “set to flight” the terrorists.³³ Some periodicals were far more sensationalist than this: the wildly popular *Paris-Match* illustrated weekly, for example, not only regularly showcased photographs of the FLN’s victims but reveled in gruesome text accompaniments, such as one story in mid-1957 that featured savage FLN members laughing maniacally while they slaughtered Muslim children and their “very Christian, very joyful” young schoolmistresses.³⁴ Melouza, unsurprisingly, not only prompted massive front-page reportage in press organs across the political spectrum but also served as the occasion for many indignant editorials about the “Algerian Oradour.”³⁵

Very early in the war, some information about beyond-the-pale violent acts undertaken by the French military did filter back into the metropolitan press. In particular, reporters documented numerous atrocities committed by French forces in the course of the August 1955 “repression.” *Le Monde*, for example, condemned the Muslim nationalists’ initial attacks as “an insane unleashing of cruelty and barbarism,” but nevertheless published an extraordinary series of reports by the paper’s

³³ “ ‘Conversion’ de l’activité rebelle,” *Combat*, 3 October 1956: “rebelles,” “terroristes,” “bandes,” “hors-la-loi,” “assaillants,” “agresseurs.”

³⁴ Roger Mauge, “Un jour de sang en Algerie,” *Paris-Match* 424 (25 May 1957), 34. *Paris Match*’s average print run as of September 1955 was 1,423,000 copies. On the way in which the journal portrayed the French military, see Marie Chominot, “Le ‘film’ de la guerre. Les débuts de la guerre d’Algérie dans l’hebdomaire illustré Paris Match (novembre 1954-juillet 1956),” in *La Guerre d’Algérie: 1954-2004, la fin de l’amnésie*, eds. Benjamin Stora and Laurent Gervereau (Paris: R. Laffont, 2004), 575-596.

³⁵ “L’Oradour algérien,” *Combat*, 2 June 1956.

correspondent in Algeria, Georges Penchenier, about subsequent French actions.³⁶ Penchenier described French military actions degenerating into a “blind repression;” he detailed the army’s destruction of entire villages, skeptically undermined the government’s low death toll figures, and emphasized the involvement of armed, angry civilians in the frantic “hunt” for Algerians, quoting one European who told him, “I shoot first, and then afterwards I look to see if it was a good one or a bad one.”³⁷ Most shockingly of all, Penchenier claimed on August 25 that in the village of Carrières Romaines, he had personally watched as French troops had moved in and “Fifty old people, women, and children were killed in the place of the men, who had fled into the mountains the night before.”³⁸ In addition to *Le Monde*, newspapers ranging from *Libération* and *L’Humanité* on the left to supporters of colonial rule, like *Le Figaro* and *Combat*, unanimously condemned collective reprisals and in so doing, whether implicitly or explicitly, conceded that they were indeed occurring. Moreover, a serious scandal exploded in late 1955 when Jean Daniel and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber at *L’Express* published a series of photographs showing a French auxiliary gendarme shooting an unarmed Algerian man in the back.³⁹

The principal outcome of such reportage, however, was not a reform of military practices but a sharp government crackdown on the ability of journalists – and in particular photographers – to access French troops. The special powers law of March 1956 both increased the government’s ability to seize publications deemed deleterious to the honor of the army and granted military commanders new powers to

³⁶ Georges-Charles Pignault, “Oued-Zem: un déchaînement démentiel de cruauté et de barbarie,” *Le Monde*, 23 August 1955.

³⁷ Georges Penchenier, “L’heure de la répression dans le Constantinois,” *Le Monde*, 24 August 1955: “Je tire d’abord et puis après je regarde si c’est un bon ou un mauvais.”

³⁸ Penchenier, “La guerre impitoyable,” *Le Monde*, 25 August 1955: “Une cinquantaine de vieillards, de femmes et d’enfants ont été tués, à défaut des mâles, qui s’étaient enfuis la nuit précédente.”

³⁹ “Des faits terribles qu’il fait connaître,” *L’Express*, 29 December 1955.

control journalists' movements in Algeria. Fabrice d'Almeida and Christian Delporte describe the paralyzing effects of the special powers law on journalists:

Difficult before the special powers of March 1956, the work of journalists in Algeria became perilous after it. In Algiers, the 'permanent special envoys' were, most of the time, confined to hotel rooms to await the whim of the military men. To follow combat operations, journalists were accompanied by press officers who limited the possibilities of photo shots and usually conducted the journalists to the battlefields after a delay... Visas or authorizations to come to Algeria were taken away from foreign journalists judged to be undesirable...⁴⁰

Increasingly, the army's public relations wing and photographic bureau (the *Établissement cinématographique et photographique des armées*) generated their own photographs, relying on gifted soldier-photographers like Marc Flament and Marc Garanger. The exceedingly popular weekly *Paris-Match*, too, came to work ever more symbiotically with the army.⁴¹ Thus, while the government and military became increasingly adept at the propagandistic use of images of atrocities committed by the Algerian nationalists, the production of images and accounts of French atrocity virtually ceased. Those that leaked through were swiftly minimized by commentators, who contrasted them to the inhuman violence of the Algerian nationalists; for instance, in mid-1957 a "Libres Opinions" author for *Le Monde* compared the "excesses" of the French military and those of the FLN in these terms:

It is just and necessary to draw attention to the misdeeds of counter-terrorism and blind repression... But it is equally just and necessary to never lose sight of, and never be silent about, the fact that the atrocities of the *fellaghas*, built up into a politico-military system, are infinitely more serious because they are at the origin of the vicious circle... If

⁴⁰ Fabrice d'Almeida and Christian Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France, de la Grande Guerre à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 167. See also Harrison, "Government and Press in France During the Algerian War," and Stora, "Une censure de guerre qui ne dit pas son nom: Algérie, années 1960," in *Censures : De la Bible aux larmes d'Eros* (Paris: Éditions du centre Pompidou, 1987), 51.

⁴¹ Chominot, "Le 'film' de la guerre," 588.

counter-terrorism, a sporadic blind riposte, dishonors France, the atrocities of the FLN, as means of combat employed systematically against a defenseless civilian population, represent a *crime against humanity*...⁴²

As the French military became more and more savvy at controlling media access in Algeria, such justificatory commentary became less necessary: European atrocities simply disappeared. Only those of the FLN remained.

Such was the dominant discursive context into which a handful of French anti-war activists and anti-colonialist intellectuals first attempted to wade in the mid-1950s. This small, disparate collection of individuals should not be conflated with “French intellectuals,” nor even with “French intellectuals on the Left.” Many intellectuals – including those with sterling Resistance credentials – were strong supporters of *Algérie française*, the most important example being, of course, Jacques Soustelle himself, an eminent anthropologist. The war’s fiercest opponents moreover included many figures who would not have embraced the label of “intellectual”: among their ranks were young conscripts and students, priests (especially those whose ministries involved them in social outreach toward poor North African populations in metropolitan cities), and political activists and syndicalists on the far left, particularly those with deep-reaching ties to Algerian labor movements. It is certainly true, however, that intellectuals played an outsized role in the tiny French anti-war movement, and because of the Right’s commitment to *Algérie française* and the

⁴² R. Manfred, “Peut-on traiter avec des assassins?” *Le Monde*, 7 June 1957, emphasis in original: “Il est juste et nécessaire d’attirer l’attention sur les méfaits du contre-terrorisme et de la repression aveugle...Mais il est juste et nécessaire également de ne jamais perdre de vue et de ne point passer sous silence que les atrocités des fellegas érigées en système politico-militaire sont infiniment plus redoutables parce qu’elles sont à l’origine du cercle vicieux...Mais si le contre-terrorisme, aveugle riposte sporadique, déshonore la France, les atrocités du F.L.N. en tant que moyens de combat employés systématiquement contre une population civile sans défense représentent un *crime contre l’humanité*, qui devrait révolter la conscience universelle.”

Communist Party's extended tergiversation on the Algerian question, this group was disproportionately composed of intellectuals on the non-communist Left.

Perhaps the single most important formation of the anti-war movement in the first phase of the conflict was the Action Committee of Intellectuals Against the Pursuit of the War in North Africa. The Committee was founded in November, 1955 by Dionys Mascolo, Robert Antelme, Louis-René des Forêts, and Edgar Morin, for the most part intellectuals recently broken from the Communist Party. (Morin and Mascolo would soon be associated with the Marxist- revisionist journal *Arguments*.) Members and close supporters – these included Sartre, Mauriac, Roger Martin du Gard, Daniel Guérin, Claude Bourdet, J.-B. Pontalis, Georges Bataille, and André Bréton, among many others – possessed varied positions on the best political solutions to “the Algerian problem,” since shared opposition to the war by no means automatically signaled shared support for full independence. Moreover the divergences between strong early supporters of the FLN such as Francis and Colette Jeanson and those who continued to back Messali Hadj's rival MNA threatened to tear the Action Committee apart.⁴³

It was in part to maintain unity in the face of such divisions that the Committee's leaders decided to concentrate their activities on the task of “demystification and positive information” about the situation in Algeria: even those

⁴³ On the tensions that disdain for the MNA on the part of Francis Jeanson and others created within the anti-colonialist left, see Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 141-150; Stora, “La gauche et les minorités anti-coloniales françaises devant les divisions du nationalisme algérien (1954-1958)” in *La Guerre d'Algérie et les français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux, 63-78. An account of these divergences that is deeply sympathetic to Jeanson can be found in Marie-Pierre Ulloa, *Francis Jeanson: Un intellectuel en dissidence de la Résistance à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Berg, 2001). Edgar Morin also provides an interesting first-person narrative of debates about the FLN/MNA divide in *Autocritique* (Paris: Julliard, 1959), 187-193. Ignorance and confusion on the part of French intellectuals about the intricacies of Algerian politics exacerbated these problems: some (like Sartre) were erroneously convinced that the MNA were stoolies of the French government and that no “real” Algerians supported them; Jean Daniel claims that Sartre once gave a speech singing the praises of the glorious FLN to an auditorium full of Algerian workers without ever realizing that they were, to a man, supporters of Messali Hadj and MNA members. *La Blessure; suivi de Le temps qui vient* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 86.

who disagreed sharply regarding how to resolve the crisis could concur that there was a pressing need to debunk the government's narrative. An internal informational bulletin from the Committee in May 1956 described the organization's goals: to "denounce the lies of the government (which controls the majority of the channels of information), reestablish the truth about the Algerian resistance, show the realities of the colonial system, explain to the young soldiers who the men are that they are going to fight, and why these men have taken up arms." Why an emphasis on disseminating information as opposed to direct political action? The bulletin explained, "We are not a political party and there is no question of supporting, alone, a mass movement." Mass action would only be conceivable when the French public understood the truth about the war – and for that to take place, not anti-colonialist theory but brutal truths about the violence involved in France's "pacification operations" against the FLN would be necessary. "Today," the bulletin read, "justifying one's opposition to the war for reasons of principle no longer suffices. To the big newspapers, the radio, the movie-house newsreels that multiply the details and the shock-headlines about the 'guerrilla atrocities,' it is necessary to respond in a fairly concrete fashion, with proof in hand, so to speak."⁴⁴ As anti-war activists sought to arm themselves with such "proof in hand," the movement's strategy of "bearing witness" to French atrocities in Algeria began to take shape. With memories of Gestapo tactics against resisters still

⁴⁴ Comité d'action des intellectuels contre la poursuite de la guerre en Afrique du Nord, *Bulletin d'information* 4 (May 1956): "Nous ne sommes pas un parti politique et il n'est pas question de susciter, par nos seules forces, un mouvement de masses." Instead, they would "dénoncer les mensonges du gouvernement (qui dispose de la plus grand part des moyens d'information), rétablir la vérité sur la résistance algérienne, montrer la réalité du système colonial, expliquer aux jeunes soldats quels sont les hommes contre qui ils vont se battre et pourquoi ces hommes ont pris les armes...[J]ustifier aujourd'hui son opposition à la guerre par des raisons de principe ne suffit plus. À la grande presse, à la radio, aux actualités cinématographiques qui multiplient les détails concrets et les manchettes de choc sur les 'atrocités des felleghas,' il convient de répondre d'une façon aussi concrète, preuves en mains pour ainsi dire."

painfully fresh, it was the French military's practice of torture, in particular, that captured the imagination and drew the indignation of the anti-war movement.

The question, however, remained: how could anti-war activists provide persuasive "proof" of the French side's use of torture and other atrocities? More to the point, since the activists understood that torture and collective repression were not precisely secrets in France but rather "*secrets de Polichinelle*," how could they make the metropolitan population grasp the magnitude, the horror, and the moral outrage of such acts? After the set of brutal photographs reproduced in *L'Express* in late 1955 caused a brief but genuine scandal, some hoped that visual images would offer a privileged medium for provoking comprehension and outrage: members of the Action Committee of Intellectuals threatened Soustelle on January 10, 1956 that "weekly papers with a high circulation possess a large number of photographs of French atrocities that none of them dare to publish. But they will be published, sooner or later."⁴⁵ In the event, however, thanks to the government's crackdown on photojournalistic access to military operations, very few such images ever saw the light of day: even today almost none have surfaced.⁴⁶ Thus as activists' campaigns against the war and its forms of violence took shape from 1956 onward, they fought – in the famous words of Michel Crouzet – "*la bataille de l'écrit*," pouring out an astonishing mass of written words.⁴⁷ And, to a striking extent, their *écrits* followed certain generic conventions by which the author, speaking in the first person,

⁴⁵ Comité d'action des Intellectuels contre la poursuite de la guerre en Afrique du Nord, "Reponse au Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie," 10 January 1956. F Delta 721/91/2, Daniel Guérin Papers, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre, France (hereafter Guérin BDIC).

⁴⁶ The prominent historians of the conflict Benjamin Stora and Laurent Gervereau deplore the fact that "There are no images of the torture practiced in Algeria, or very few. Images showing other violent acts by the French army, for example the use of napalm, likewise do not exist." Therefore "the only ways to make reference to the acts of violence committed by the French rest on the words of witnesses." "Introduction" to *Photographier la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Marval, 2004), 8.

⁴⁷ Crouzet, "La bataille des intellectuels français," *La Nef* 12-13 (October 1962-January 1963), 47.

identified himself as a “witness” to the victimization of others and offered up his testimony.⁴⁸

The most familiar form that such testimony took was a blow-by-blow account of violence and suffering witnessed firsthand, a recital of bald “facts” that drew political conclusions only implicitly. Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the Mendès-France supporter and editor-in-chief of *L'Express*, authored the most important early example in this genre. His 1957 *Lieutenant en Algérie* (of which *L'Express* also printed excerpts) offered a fast-paced first-person narrative, rich in dialogue, of his experiences as a conscripted soldier the previous year. The book showcased, without a great deal of commentary, the “monotone” and senseless violence of the war: Servan-Schreiber simply described his fellow soldiers as they proceeded in numbing succession from one bloody “pacification” operation to another and jostled to be viewed by their comrades as sufficiently “virile.” In so doing, he demonstrated how the constant tension of war produced among them a casually dehumanizing and thereby brutal attitude toward the civilian Muslim population.⁴⁹ Servan-Schreiber ended his book with a sampling of letters from the men he had written about. Meanwhile, Catholic intellectuals including Pierre-Henri Simon and Jean-Marie Domenach organized the publication of a collection titled *Les rappelés témoignent*, a more thorough collection of conscripts’ “testimonials” to the extreme violence involved in the repression. Anti-war editors and publishers began to seek out more

⁴⁸ The texts that I discuss in the following section in order to support this point do not constitute an exhaustive inventory of such literature. For an impressive bibliography of relevant French works produced during the war, which also tackles the primary sources and the historiography up to 1995, see Benjamin Stora, *Le dictionnaire des livres de la guerre d'Algérie: romans, nouvelles, poésie, photos, histoire, essais, récits historiques, témoignage, biographies, mémoires, autobiographies: 1955-1995* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Lieutenant en Algérie* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1971 [1957]), 77: “On n’est pas obsédé, dans l’armée, par la peur de mourir, mais par celle d’être moins viril. On ne dit jamais, ‘Attention, tu vas te faire tuer.’ Mais on repète plusieurs fois par jour: ‘Fais gaffe, tu vas te faire couper les couilles...’”

books and articles by returned soldiers: one important example was the 1957 publication in *Esprit* of the young Robert Bonnaud's "La Paix des Nementchas," a first-hand account of French torture and civilian massacres. The piece was marked by Bonnaud's insistent use of the phrases "I saw" and "I remember," by his moral outrage against his fellow soldiers (and, especially, against the men who had sent them off to war), and by his graphic, hard-boiled style of describing acts of horrific violence in full visual and auditory detail:

The suspect is tied to the table with chains, festooned with wet rags to which they have affixed electrodes. A gendarme turns the handle of a country telephone: he varies the intensity of the shock by changing the rhythm of his movement; he knows that the variations in intensity are particularly painful: he refines, he fiddles, he is in his element. The supplicant shouts, twists himself in his straps, jerks like a burlesque puppet, has the desperate convulsions of a man in agony. "Will you talk, bastard? Will you talk?" The electrodes affix just as easily to the temples, under the tongue, to the penis, or to any other sensitive part of the human body.⁵⁰

Later accounts by soldiers – *Officiers en Algérie* by J.-M. Darboise and others, Roger Barberot's *Malaventure en Algérie*, Jean Le Meur's journal excerpts printed in *Esprit*, and Jean-Louis Hurst's *Le Déserteur* – contained similar graphic, unblinking eye-witness accounts of extreme violence and the pain its victims suffered.⁵¹ These "torture scenes" were not gratuitous: they constituted an attempt to bring home to

⁵⁰ Robert Bonnaud, "La paix des Nementchas," *Esprit* 249 (April 1957), 581: "Le suspect est ligoté sur une table avec des chaînes, garnies de chiffons mouillés, auxquelles on fixe les électrodes. Un gendarme tourne la manivelle du téléphone de campagne; il fait varier l'intensité de la décharge en changeant le rythme de son mouvement; il sait que les variations d'intensité sont particulièrement douloureuses; il raffine, il figole, il est à son affaire. Le supplicé hurle, se tord dans ses liens, a des soubresauts de pantin burlesque, des convulsions désespérées d'agonisant. 'Tu parleras, salopard ? tu parleras ?' Les électrodes se fixent aussi bien aux tempes, sous la langue, au sexe ou à toute autre partie sensible du corps humain."

⁵¹ The publication information for these works is as follows: J.-M. Darboise, M. Heynard, and J. Martel *Officiers en Algérie* (Paris: Maspero, 1960); Roger Barberot, *Malaventure en Algérie avec le Général Paris de Bollardière* (Paris: Plon, 1957); Jean-Marie Domenach and Jean Le Meur, "Histoire d'un acte responsable: le cas Jean Le Meur," *Esprit* 279 (December 1959): 675-708; "Maurienne" [Jean-Louis Hurst], *Le Déserteur* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960).

readers in a way that could not be ignored or whitewashed the kind of violence that was taking place in their names on the other side of the Mediterranean, and to put in human, empathy-inducing terms the terrible suffering of the Muslim “terrorists” on the torturers’ tables.

Activists and intellectuals who did not serve in the military could not provide such eye-witness accounts. And none, of course, could provide first-person testimony to victimhood at the hands of torturers. But there remained myriad other options for “bearing witness” to the truth of torture and other atrocities. First, French publishers and editors could seek out first-person accounts of victimhood from Algerians and disseminate these stories, thus facilitating the act of bearing witness. This was a specialty of the Maspero and Minuit publishing houses: it was Minuit, under Jérôme Lindon, that in 1958 published *La Question*, Algerian Communist Henri Alleg’s shattering account of being tortured.⁵² He wrote the book in order to bear witness in direct and unflinching language to what he had undergone, Alleg wrote, despite the considerable pain it cost him to relive his experiences: such acts of witnessing were necessary because the French “must know what is done here IN THEIR NAME.”⁵³ Lindon agreed. The editorial teams of *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit* also embraced the task of publishing survivors’ accounts; so did a clandestine journal pointedly titled *Témoignages et documents* and headed by a group that included Maurice Pagat, Roland Marin, Robert Barrat, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Claude Bourdet, Jean-Marie

⁵² On publishing houses and the war, see Claude Liauzu, “Intellectuels du Tiers-Monde et intellectuels français. Les années algériennes des Éditions Maspero,” and Anne Simonin, “Les Éditions de Minuit et les Éditions du Seuil: deux stratégies éditoriales face à la guerre d’Algérie,” in Rioux and Sirinelli, *La Guerre d’Algérie et les intellectuels français*, 155-174 and 219-247; Anne Simonin, “La littérature saisie par l’histoire: Nouveau roman et guerre d’Algérie aux Éditions de Minuit,” *Actes de recherche en sciences sociales* 111-112 (1996): 59-75; Benjamin Stora, “La guerre en librairie,” in Laurent Gervereau, Jean-Pierre Rioux and Benjamin Stora, eds., *La France en guerre d’Algérie* (Nanterre: BDIC, 1992) .

⁵³ Henri Alleg, *La Question* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958), 96: “Il faut qu’ils sachent pourtant ce qui se fait ici EN LEUR NOM.”

Domenach, Louis Lalande, Henri-Irénée Marrou, J.-J. Mayoux, Paulette Mounier, Jacques Panijel, André Philip, Jean Pouillon, Paul Ricoeur, Claude Roy, Sartre, Laurent Schwartz, Pierre Stibbe, Edith Thomas, Vercors, Andrée-Pierre Vienot, and the Pasteur Voge.

Writing reviews of and introductions or prefaces to victims' accounts also offered a means of contributing to the project of testimony. The most famous piece in this genre is undoubtedly Jean-Paul Sartre's "Une victoire," first written for *L'Express* as a commentary on *La Question* and eventually printed as an afterword to the book. Sartre insisted that the French already knew what was being done "in their name" in Algeria: torture was an open secret. But Alleg's powerful testimony, written "without useless commentaries, with an admirable precision," broke down public *indifference* to such knowledge: "Readers become passionately incarnate in him, they accompany him up to the extreme of suffering; with him, alone and naked, they hold out."⁵⁴ In its human immediacy, according to Sartre, the suffering and heroic first-person voice of *La Question* accomplished what other forms of commentary could not: "In fact, Alleg's testimony [*témoignage*] – and this is perhaps its greatest merit – completes the dissipation of our illusions."⁵⁵ Such was the power of "*témoignage*": it made more difficult the maintenance of complacency regarding the suffering of the other.

In addition to celebratory reviews such as Sartre's, opponents of the war also produced texts that spoke "in the name of" a particular Algerian victim of torture, telling the story of that person's suffering "as if" they had witnessed it personally. The two most famous examples of this particular kind of "testimony" – both, interestingly,

⁵⁴ "Une victoire" in *ibid.*, 103-104 and 105: "Son auteur, Henri Alleg, détenu, aujourd'hui encore, dans une prison d'Alger, raconte, sans commentaires inutiles, avec une admirable précision, les 'interrogatoires' qu'il a subis... Les lecteurs s'incarnent en lui passionnément, ils l'accompagnent jusqu'à l'extrême de souffrance; avec lui, seuls et nus, ils tiennent le coup."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 122: "Le témoignage d'Alleg, en effet – c'est peut-être son plus grand mérite – achève de dissiper nos illusions."

about female victims – are the lawyer Georges Arnaud’s *Pour Djamila Bouhired* (Minuit, 1957), written for his client, and *Djamila Boupacha* (Gallimard, 1962) by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi.⁵⁶ This latter book piles testimony upon testimony in baroque profusion: first de Beauvoir dramatically introduces readers to Boupacha’s story of sexual torture and rape at the hands of French soldiers, then Halimi, Boupacha’s lawyer, relates the ordeal at length (also providing photocopied original documents), and at last we come to Boupacha’s own words: her official complaint against her torturers, testifying to what she has undergone. But even here the testimony is not over: indeed, it is only after de Beauvoir’s, Halimi’s, and Boupacha’s contributions that the section of the book labeled “Témoignages” begins, offering a kaleidoscope of perspectives on Boupacha’s suffering by everyone from Henri Alleg to politicians Daniel Meyer and André Philip to the novelists Françoise Sagan and Françoise Mallet-Joris. Some of these pieces “testify” only to the general fact of torture or to sympathy with Boupacha, but some – Sagan’s and Mallet-Joris’s, for instance – retell Boupacha’s horrific story in blow-by-blow detail yet again, bearing witness by proxy to the truth of her tale.

Meanwhile, some Catholic writers “testified” not to any specific acts that they had seen or been told of but rather to their intense shame at their country’s use of torture. A 1956 opinion piece in *Le Monde* by Henri-Irénée Marrou titled “France ma patrie” and Pierre-Henri Simon’s 1957 volume *Contre la torture* (Seuil) are both classics in this genre of Christian witnessing; both relied on a religiously-infused language of fundamental morality that called on men to bear witness publicly to God’s values when these were being violated. Such *témoignage* performatively drew its

⁵⁶ For a penetrating reading of de Beauvoir’s contribution, see Judith Surkis, “Ethics and Violence: Simone de Beauvoir, Djamila Boupacha, and the Algerian War,” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, forthcoming.

authority from proximity to *truth*, not to power. Indeed, the more humble the speaker – the more like all other men – the greater the weight of his Christian testimony. As Marrou wrote, “I testify [*témoigne*] here as a simple citizen whose conscience torments him and who has determined that he is not the only one experiencing this heavy discomfort, this inquietude, this anxiety.”⁵⁷ He and Simon both believed, like Sartre, that everyone in France knew perfectly well that torture and other atrocities were taking place in their name: the job of the witness was not to convince the public of the facts but, through acting as an example, to make them recognize the moral relevance of those facts.

Marrou never changed his mind about this moral imperative, but he quickly came to realize that even if the French military’s use of torture was an “open secret,” its opponents would nevertheless have to bear witness to its very existence, not only to its evil. This was because the government’s point blank denials of the use of torture or collective repression in Algeria provided the public with an easy excuse for inaction: after all, the men who were supposed to be France’s leaders said that it wasn’t so. That France was indeed engaged in the systematic use of torture would have to be *proven*, beyond any possible doubt, if activists hoped to dislodge the dominant discourses about the war. Marrou therefore joined forces in 1957 with a set of academics and writers under the leadership of historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet and the mathematician Laurent Schwartz; this group approached the project of giving testimony by fashioning themselves as “expert witnesses.” A young European-Algerian mathematician who belonged to the Algerian Communist Party, Maurice Audin, had “disappeared” while in French military custody during the Battle of Algiers. The military claimed he had

⁵⁷ “France ma patrie,” *Le Monde*, 5 April 1956: “Je ne suis ni journaliste professionnel ni homme politique; je témoigne ici en simple citoyen que sa conscience tourmente et qui constate n’être pas le seul à éprouver cette lourde gêne, cette inquietude, cette angoisse.”

escaped. Vidal-Naquet and Schwartz formed an investigatory committee, the Comité Maurice Audin, to find out his true fate: they believed, correctly, that he must have died under torture. The quest to establish this fact in indisputable terms led Vidal-Naquet on what he would later describe as “a passionate quest for documents,” as he applied all of his historian’s skills to solving the mystery of Audin’s death.⁵⁸ Along the way, he and his fellow Committee members – who included Communists such as Jean Dresch and Madeleine Rebérioux along with Catholics like Marrou – unearthed documentary proof both of the use of torture and of high-level support for it in the government and military. Vidal-Naquet laid out his testimony for the prosecution in sober, concise language in *L’Affaire Audin* in 1958, stressing times and places, names and dates. Schwartz’s introduction underlined Vidal-Naquet’s status as expert witness, not a judge: “He reports facts, as faithfully as possible. He tells us *everything* that he knows about the Audin affair, letting his readers judge between the official version which speaks of nothing but arrest and escape and another one, which implies torture and death.”⁵⁹ Here was the unvarnished truth, laid bare: readers could view it as they wished, but they could not escape it.

Given the central role that the fight to “testify” against torture took on within the anti-war movement by 1958, it is important to stress that as late as 1956 the idea that anti-war activists would be best served by exposing “proof” of French atrocities was in no way self-evident nor uncontested. In fact, many important voices within the non-

⁵⁸ *Face à la raison d’État*, 17.

⁵⁹ Laurent Schwartz, “Préface” to Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L’Affaire Audin (1957-1978)* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1989), 57, emphasis in original: “Il rapporte des faits, le plus fidèlement que possible. Il nous dit *tout* ce qu’il sait sur l’affaire Audin, laissant ses lecteurs juges entre une version officielle qui ne parle que d’arrestation et d’évasion, et une autre, qui implique la torture et la mort.” Schwartz’s preface was part of the original publication of the book *L’Affaire Audin* in 1958, and was also published in slightly different form in *L’Express* on 16 January 1958.

communist Left community of intellectuals believed that “bearing witness” to extreme acts of French violence was a poor strategy. Their reasons for this judgment varied. On the radical reaches of the anti-war movement, the philosopher and *Les Temps modernes* contributor Francis Jeanson insisted that focusing on atrocities distracted from the real issue at hand: the justice of the Algerian people’s claim to independence from French imperialism. This claim would remain *equally* just, Francis Jeanson insisted, even if the French were fighting the FLN according to honorable rules of classical warfare. He wrote to Jean Daniel that while “you are against the excesses of the repression...I confess to you that, as for me, I consider this repression excessive *in its very principle*, and I would fear, if I were to condemn excesses, to thereby justify the principle.”⁶⁰

Meanwhile, for a very different reason, the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, Hubert Beuve-Méry (b.1902), was also reluctant to focus on French atrocities. Beuve-Méry, politically a Catholic centrist with some left-leaning sympathies, was not a proponent of Algerian independence and in principle approved of the repression in its early stages. He regarded the FLN as a group of terrorists and was proud to inform anyone who challenged his patriotism that his oldest son was a conscript serving in Sud-Oranie. Beuve-Méry was indeed horrified as reports of torture by French soldiers came to his ears in 1955 and 1956: they reminded him of the Gestapo treatment of resisters (he had been an FFI lieutenant).⁶¹ But, as he explained in a letter to a reader

⁶⁰ Letter from Jeanson to Daniel, 16 January 1956. F Delta 721/91/3, Guérin BDIC. Emphasis in original: “Vous êtes contre les excès de la répression. Incidemment, je vous avouerai pour ma part que je tiens cette répression pour excessive *dans son principe même*; et je craindrais, en condamnant les excès, d’en justifier le principe.”

⁶¹ Beuve-Méry’s Resistance credentials were strong but slightly complicated: he had participated in Uriage and had written articles that appeared to offer enthusiastic support for Pétain’s “National Revolution.” But after Uriage was shut down at the end of 1942, he entered into the Resistance. After the Liberation, it was at de Gaulle’s specific request that he had founded *Le Monde* to replace the discredited prewar newspaper *Le Temps*. On Beuve-Méry’s biography and his stewardship of *Le Monde*, see Jacques Thibau, *Le Monde. Histoire d’un journal, un journal dans l’histoire* (Paris: Jean-

in late 1956, he was unhappy allowing *Le Monde* to become an arena for such testimonials very often because he loathed the idea of providing ammunition to the Algerian rebels. “In order not to furnish overly serious arguments to the adversary,” he wrote, “we hardly speak in the paper of the methods currently employed not only in the police services but, more and more, in the information services of the troops, who seek to provoke confessions or confidences.”⁶²

Beuve-Méry appears to have taken his journalistic responsibilities too seriously, and to have found the notion of French soldiers torturing too repulsive, to maintain this position for long. Supported by his second-in-command Robert Gauthier, who had begun methodically collecting “*témoignages*” from soldiers, victims, and government officials, and also aided by *Le Monde*’s correspondent in Algeria Robert Raymond, Beuve-Méry mailed a devastating collection of evidence about torture to a set of high government officials including Mollet and Lacoste in late 1956.⁶³ The enclosed documents included accounts by witnesses of “*la torture du telephone*” and “*la torture du tourniquet*,” accounts Beuve-Méry evidently hoped would move their readers with their raw, graphic power. Beuve-Méry wrote that he understood that the government would always prefer to “discretely reprimand in cases of abuse.” But the press, however patriotic, could not take this attitude: to do so would be “to expose

Claude Simoën, 1978); Jean-Noël Jenneney and Jacques Julliard, *‘Le Monde’ de Beuve-Méry, ou le métier d’Alceste* (Paris: Seuil, 1979); Patrick Eveno, *Le Monde, 1944-1995: Histoire d’une entreprise de presse* (Paris: Le Monde Éditions, 1996) and *Histoire du journal Le Monde, 1944-2004* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004); Abel Chatelain, *Le Monde et ses lecteurs sous la IV^e République* (Paris: A. Colin, 1962); Laurent Greilsamer, *Hubert Beuve-Méry: 1902-1989* (Paris: Fayard, 1990); and Beuve-Méry’s own *Paroles écrites. Mémoires*, ed. Pierre-Henry Beuve-Méry (Paris: Grasset, 1991).

⁶² Letter from Hubert Beuve-Méry to M. le Capitaine Yves Gras, 10 December 1956. Folder “1956: Courrier lecteurs,” Carton BM 137, Fonds Hubert Beuve-Méry, Archives d’histoire contemporaine – Centre d’histoire de Sciences-Po (hereafter Beuve-Méry AHC): “Pour ne pas fournir de trop graves arguments à l’adversaire, nous ne parlons guère dans le journal des méthodes employées couramment non seulement dans les services de police mais de plus en plus dans les services de renseignements des corps de troupes pour provoquer les aveux ou les confidences.”

⁶³ Suggestive context for this event, regarding Beuve-Méry’s contentious relationship with Mollet and the latter’s threats to the independence of the newspaper, is provided in Jeanneney and Julliard, *Le ‘Monde’ de Beuve-Méry, 198-205*.

ourselves to the reproaches that we ourselves made toward those Germans who claimed to have seen nothing, heard nothing, known nothing.”⁶⁴ He was sure, Beuve-Méry wrote optimistically, that Mollet and Lacoste shared his desire to put an end to such “excesses”: indeed, “we are [both] pursuing the same task of decontamination, using means that are apparently opposed but which in reality complement one another.”⁶⁵ He would soon realize that exposing the reality of torture did nothing to “complement” the government’s Algerian policy. But *Le Monde* was already on its way to becoming one of the most important venues for the publication of testimonials about torture; it would remain so throughout the war.⁶⁶

At *Esprit*, editor Jean-Marie Domenach also initially regarded the project of “bearing witness” to French atrocities with suspicion.⁶⁷ We briefly encountered

⁶⁴ Letter from Hubert Beuve-Méry to Guy Mollet, 17 October 1956. “Dossier 2, Correspondance de lecteurs,” Carton RGI, Fonds Robert Gauthier, Archives d’histoire contemporaine – Centre d’histoire de Sciences-Po (hereafter Gauthier AHC): “s’exposer aux reproches que nous faisons nous-mêmes à ces Allemands qui prétendaient n’avoir rien vu, rien entendu, rien su.”

⁶⁵ Letter from Hubert Beuve-Méry to Robert Lacoste, 10 October 1956. “Dossier 2, Correspondance de lecteurs,” Carton RGI, Gauthier AHC: “C’est la même oeuvre d’assainissement qui se poursuit par des moyens apparemment opposés mais qui en réalité se complètent.”

⁶⁶ Many scholars of the Algerian War have underlined *Le Monde*’s important role in exposing torture. Mohammed Khane, “*Le Monde*’s Coverage of the Army and Civil Liberties During the Algerian War, 1954-58,” in *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-1962: Experiences, Images, Testimonies*, eds. Martin S. Alexander, Martin Evans, and J.F.V. Keiger (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan 2002), 174-192, however, sharply criticizes the newspaper for its failure to endorse Algerian independence in the period between 1954 and 1958. The author’s argument is moral rather than historical – Khane compares Beuve-Méry’s choices not to choices that others made but to what they “ought” to have been if only his political commitments, worldview, and journalistic objectives were all entirely different.

⁶⁷ This chapter and the next primarily situate Domenach within the spectrum of French intellectual/activist anti-colonialist responses to the Algerian War. It thus takes other left-leaning Catholic intellectuals into account, but does not attempt to fully contextualize Domenach’s views within the entire range of “Catholic” opinion about the war. For literature that does deal more broadly with French Catholics, the Church, and Catholic civic, labor, and student associations during the war, see (among other works) François Bédarida and Etienne Fouilloux, eds., *La guerre d’Algérie et les chrétiens* (Paris: Editions de l’IHTP, 1988); Etienne Fouilloux, *Les Chrétiens français entre guerre d’Algérie et mai 1968* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2008); Valentine Gauchotte, *Les Catholiques en Lorraine et la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999); Pierre Houart *L’Attitude de l’Église dans la guerre d’Algérie, 1954-1960* (Brussels: Livre africain, 1960); André Nozère, *Algérie: les chrétiens dans la guerre* (Paris: Cana, 1979); Sybille Chapeu, *Des Chrétiens dans la guerre d’Algérie: l’action de la Mission de France* (Paris: L’Atelier, 2004); Xavier Boniface, “L’aumônerie militaire française en guerre d’Algérie,” *Vingtième siècle* 77.1 (2003): 47-57; William Bosworth, “The French Catholic Hierarchy and the Algerian Question,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 15. 4 (December 1962): 667-

Domenach in earlier chapters as a strong opponent – along with Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and his mentor at *Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier – of any attempt to elaborate an ethics of witnessing that could function “beyond” or “above” politics and could provide a basis for condemning politically-motivated violence. Domenach, born in Lyon in 1922, was like Beuve-Méry a Uriage participant in the early stages of the Occupation, but also organized resistance to the Germans at the Université de Lyon and joined the maquis in August 1943, ending the war fighting in the Tarn region. Before Mounier invited him to become part of the *Esprit* team, Domenach had directed the bulletin of the Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur, *Aux Armes*, penning revolutionary-themed editorials such as “The Imperious and Simple Law of Public Safety” and “The Time of Incorruptibles.”⁶⁸ His experience in the armed Resistance had helped to cement his belief that if one was opposed to a particular manifestation of violence, that opposition had to be voiced in *political* terms, not simply by reference to the suffering that it caused. His position had softened somewhat by the 1950s – as his formerly cozy relationship with the PCF cooled,⁶⁹ he had begun to acknowledge as morally relevant the immense anguish of gulag inmates, for example. The 1950 death of his mentor Mounier, who had always overshadowed him as an intellectual, a

680. On Protestants, see Geoffrey Adams, *The Call of Conscience: French Protestant Responses to the Algerian War* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier, 1998). On *Esprit* and the Algerian War specifically, see Sandrine Samson, “‘Esprit’ et la guerre d’Algérie,” (Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Caen, 1989); Helenice Rodrigues da Silva, “Le temps de l’action. Le discours d’*Esprit* et des *Temps modernes* sur les réseaux de soutien au FLN et le mouvement des ‘Insoumis,’” *Hermès* 8-9 (1990): 179-187, and “Le discours d’ ‘Esprit’ et des ‘Temps Modernes’ contre la guerre d’Algérie” (Doctorat d’état, Paris-10, 1991); Goulven Boudic, *Esprit, 1944-1982. Les métamorphoses d’une revue* (Paris: Éditions de l’IMEC, 2005), 272-294.

⁶⁸ “La loi imperieuse et simple du Salut public,” *Aux Armes* 7 (April 1945); “Le temps des incorruptibles,” *Aux Armes* 11 (August-September 1945).

⁶⁹ In early 1950 he was unceremoniously purged from the “non-partisan,” anti-war and anti-nuclear association Les Combattants de la Paix by the Communist militants who controlled it, largely because of his sympathy for Tito’s Yugoslavia. The rejection shocked him: “Mais je n’imaginai pas cette violence obstinée et cauteleuse, ce système de terreur qui se révèle tout à coup à celui qui a ouvert la porte et trouve les amis joyeux de tout à l’heure qui l’attendent pour le jugement.” *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d’or*, 61 (5 February 1950), emphasis in original.

Catholic, and a political actor, also aroused in Domenach a new sense of adult responsibility that translated into a heightened interest in suffering: “alone with the terror of having left behind childhood,” he became more cautious about endorsing grand revolutionary schemes that required violence.⁷⁰ But he remained hostile to the practice of drawing political conclusions by pointing to the bodies-in-pain of victims.⁷¹

Domenach was deeply involved in anti-colonialist committee work for Morocco in the early fifties, and engaged early on against the war in Algeria. He viewed the problem in Algeria as a political one and proposed pragmatic political solutions, seeking anti-colonialist compromises that stopped short of full Algerian independence. As an intellectual in a democratic society, he believed that his task was to exert public pressure on the regime to take specific steps – steps that were desirable to him as an anti-colonialist but were also within the realm of the possible – and to do so as persuasively as possible. For example, in a March 1956 *Esprit* editorial, “Negocier en Algérie,” he argued passionately for the French government to enter into negotiation with Algerian leaders (including FLN chiefs) not because the fighting was producing suffering among innocent victims but because “This war cannot be won. We can only avoid losing it, and with it, doubtless, all of North Africa – and with that, perhaps, the institutions of our country.”⁷² In April, Domenach told *Esprit* collaborator

⁷⁰ Ibid., 67-68 (30 September 1950): “Je n’imaginai pas que je connaîtrais cette déréliction, et que je serais laissé seul, avec le sentiment que mon avenir s’effondrait avec mon passé, seul avec la terreur d’être sorti de l’enfance...”

⁷¹ For example, in a 1956 *Esprit* article on “Révolution et la force des choses,” he demanded, “La violence est-elle d’ailleurs le bon critère pour évaluer les régimes et les révolutions?” He concluded that, alone, it was not: a revolution that used violence could nevertheless ultimately help found a less violent, more just world. Means mattered, but ends were ultimately more relevant. “La révolution et la force des choses,” *Esprit* 236 (March 1956), 372.

⁷² Editorial, “Negocier en Algérie,” *Esprit* 236 (March 1956), 322: ““Cette guerre ne peut être gagnée. On peut seulement éviter qu’elle soit perdue, et avec elle, sans doute, toute l’Afrique du Nord, et avec elle, peut-être, les institutions de notre pays.” Domenach almost certainly wrote the piece.

Jean Lacroix that he was “alarmed” to discuss the war with an group of idealistic young Catholic students who “pose the problem on an exclusively moral plane: is the war just or unjust?”⁷³ This immensely complicated political affair demanded political engagement; moral handwringing offered no exit strategy from the conflict.

In June, Domenach coauthored a similarly-themed article with fellow Catholic writer Georges Suffert, railing explicitly against confusing moral and political forms of reasoning about the Algerian problem: too many “leftists,” Domenach and Suffert charged, “deduce from a moral contestation (*France has committed errors in Algeria*) a despairing political conclusion.”⁷⁴ Domenach and Suffert explicitly dismissing “bearing witness” to France’s “excesses” as a useful mode of responding to the war. To shine a light on torture, for example, might be ethically admirable but – because *politically* the goal had to be to end the conflict peaceably, and as soon as possible, at the negotiating table – it was inopportune. “We have read,” they wrote, “many letters from soldiers that prove irrefutably that the orders the French high command has given for moderation remain at times without effect on the little troops overwhelmed by insecurity and by the atrocities of the other side, and who give in to the anger of a low-ranking NCO. We will not publish them: what do these testimonials [*témoignages*] supply, except a bit more despair?”⁷⁵ Domenach and Suffert insisted that testifying to such deeds was meaningless: the only useful task was to agitate for a negotiated peace.

⁷³ Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to Jean Lacroix, 26 April 1956. ESP2.C17-02.04, *Esprit* Archive, L’Institut Mémoires de l’Édition Contemporaine, Caen, France (hereafter *Esprit* IMEC): “Je suis effrayé de voir les jeunes catholiques poser le problème sur un plan exclusivement moral: la guerre est-elle juste ou injuste?”

⁷⁴ Jean-Marie Domenach and Georges Suffert, “Algérie et renaissance française,” *Esprit* 239 (June 1956), 937. emphasis in original: “...deduisent d’une contestation morale (*La France a commis des fautes en Algérie*) une conclusion politique désespérée...”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 939: “Nous avons lu plusieurs lettres de soldats qui prouvent irréfutablement que les consignes de moderation données par le haut commandement français restent parfois sans effet sur de petites troupes excédées par l’insécurité et par les atrocités adverses et qui cèdent à la colère d’un gradé subalterne. Nous ne les publierons pas: qu’apportent ces témoignages, sinon un peu plus de désespoir?”

As long as the conflict continued, the horrors would as well, “according to a logic that pretty words are incapable of stopping.”⁷⁶

By early 1957, however, Domenach changed his mind quite dramatically about the value of “*témoignage*.”⁷⁷ In March he cosigned the introduction to the collection *Les rappelés témoignent*, and in the April edition of *Esprit* he briefly introduced Bonnaud’s “La Paix des Nementchas.” Domenach acknowledged the sharp change in *Esprit* editorial policy that the publication of Bonnaud’s article marked. “For months,” he wrote, “we have not published lived testimonies on Algeria. It is not that we haven’t had them. It is not that they frightened us ... But once this war was begun, we believed that the most effective way to bring an end to evil practices was negotiation.” Publishing witnesses’ accounts of extreme violence would only have fueled French humiliation and anger, “that is to say, delayed that peace that we sought before all else. So we believed.”⁷⁸ Now, however, this policy was formally rescinded. “Our task” from here on, Domenach declared, “is to speak for those who must be silent.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.: “...une logique que les bonnes paroles sont incapables d’arrêter.”

⁷⁷ As did Suffert. In February 1957, after they “hesitated for several weeks,” he and the other editors of *Témoignage chrétien* decided to publish a brochure, *De la pacification à la répression, le dossier Jean Muller*, supplément au numéro 38 de *Témoignage chrétien* (15 February 1957). This was a Catholic Scout’s personal letters describing acts of torture and collective repression he had witnessed in Algeria. The journal’s director Georges Montaron explained that previously, “We remained silent, accepting for ourselves the responsibility of our own silence.” But now, “there is a kind of moral imperative to speak” about the “extreme violence of what they are calling the Algerian War.” Muller’s letters constituted “in no way a political position-taking: simply the interior journey of a man thrown into the universe of violence and trying to contain that violence within reasonable limits...” Approximately 34,000 copies of the *Dossier* were distributed. See Suffert, *Les catholiques et la gauche* (Paris: Maspero, 1960); Tramor Quemeneur, “La messe en l’Église Saint-Séverin et le ‘dossier Jean Müller.’ Des chrétiens et la désobéissance au début de la guerre d’Algérie (1955-1957),” *Bulletin de l’IHTP* 83 (June 2004); Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 157-159; Renée Bédarida, “La gauche chrétienne et la guerre d’Algérie,” in Bédarida and Fouilloux, *La Guerre d’Algérie et les chrétiens*, 88-104.

⁷⁸ Jean-Marie Domenach, “Démoralisation de la nation,” *Esprit* 249 (April 1957), 577: “Depuis des mois, nous n’avions plus publié des témoignages vécus sur l’Algérie. Ce n’est pas qu’ils nous aient manqué. Ce n’est pas qu’ils nous aient fait peur... Mais une fois cette guerre engagée, nous avons cru que le moyen le plus efficace de mettre fin à des procédés iniques était la négociation. Dans le procès mondial mené contre la France, continuer la dénonciation des atrocités commises par nos troupes et notre police, n’était-ce pas renforcer la propagande advers et, chez nous, exaspérer l’humiliation? c’est-à-dire retarder cette paix que nous cherchions avant tout. – Nous l’avons cru.”

This act of bearing witness against limit-case violence was morally necessary for the future of the French nation: “The intransigent affirmation of man against racist brutalities, the protest against torture and the massacre of prisoners, constitute a necessary step in the recovery [*redressement*] of the French conscience.”⁷⁹

What explains Domenach’s volte-face on the desirability of bearing witness to the French military’s violence? The reasons, in fact, appear overdetermined. First, and perhaps most importantly, from the spring of 1956 onward he had observed other intellectuals – including Catholics whom he respected, such as Pierre-Henri Simon – choose the route of “witnessing.” Domenach believed first-person testimonials like *Lieutenant en Algérie* and “apolitical” *cris de coeur* like Simon’s *Contre la torture* were influencing public opinion in a way that pragmatic political interventions had not: he wrote to the Catholic economist Henri Bartoli in April 1957 that “it seems to me that we have moved beyond the stage of petitions and signed protests. The book of Pierre-Henri Simon, the narrative of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the brochure on the *rappelés*, have had a much greater importance than signatures, which people are tired of.”⁸⁰ He was particularly impressed with Simon’s book, whose tone of unvarnished Christian outrage at the moral wrong of torture “was exactly what the public needed.” Works like Simon’s, he believed, were politically “simple-minded” and not, for a sophisticated reader, “up to the level of the subject” of extreme violence.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 578: “Mais notre tâche est de parler pour ceux qui doivent se taire... L’intransigente affirmation de l’homme contre les brutalités racistes, la protestation contre la torture et le massacre des prisonniers, sont une étape nécessaire du redressement de la conscience française.”

⁸⁰ Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to Henri Bartoli, 5 April 1957. ESP2.C18-01.02, *Esprit* IMEC: “D’ailleurs en la matière il me semble qu’on a dépassé le stade des pétitions et des protestations signées. Le livre de P.-H. Simon, le récit de J.-J. Servan-Schreiber, la brochure sur les *rappelés* ont eu beaucoup plus d’importance que des signatures dont on est fatigué.” On the impact of Simon’s book on public debate, particularly among Catholics, see Martin Nicoulin, “*Contre la torture*: un printemps de la conscience française,” in *Témoins de l’homme. Hommage à Pierre-Henri Simon*. Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1994: 71-86.

⁸¹ They had nevertheless, through the discursive power of testimony, “succeeded in piercing the wall of silence and contempt that the authorities and the official press put in the way of the protests of ‘perverse’ and ‘degenerate’ intellectuals.”⁸² What is more, Domenach himself appears to have also been subject to the emotional power of testimony to the war’s violence: when he first wrote to Robert Bonnaud requesting permission to publish “La Paix des Nementchas” in *Esprit*, he confessed to the young author that “I was bowled over [*bouleversé*] by this sincere and human *témoignage*.”⁸³

In addition, the events in Hungary in late 1956 had a strong impact on Domenach’s subsequent approach to the Algerian conflict.⁸⁴ As Michael Scott Christofferson has argued, the Hungarian revolt and Soviet repression produced a turning-point in many French intellectuals’ relationship to the Communist Party, the Soviet Union, and the political logic of Stalinism. I would add that it also appears to have helped accelerate the embrace of “witnessing” as a response to the violence in Algeria. The obfuscatory response of the French Communist Party to the shockingly brutal Budapest repression, particularly in the wake of the Party’s stonewalling about the “secret speech” earlier in the year, shook intellectual Party members like Claude

⁸¹ Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to Albert Béguin, 19 March 1957. ESP2.C18-01.02, *Esprit* IMEC: “Le pamphlet de Pierre-Henri Simon est une bonne oeuvre. C’est exactement ce qu’il fallait au public. Moi, ancien officier français et nourrisson de l’Université, etc. Le ton est brave, un peu benêt. C’est cela qui plaît, mais c’est triste parce qu’il n’est pas à la hauteur du sujet.”

⁸² Jean-Marie Domenach, “Algérie: Propositions raisonnables,” *Esprit* 250 (May 1957), 777: “Un pamphlet retentissant, des témoignages de rappelés, le récit de Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, ont réussi à percer le mur de silence et de mépris que les autorités et la presse officielle opposaient aux protestations d’intellectuels ‘pervers’ et ‘dégénérés.’”

⁸³ Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to Robert Bonnaud, 26 February 1957. ESP2.C18-01.02, *Esprit* IMEC: “J’ai été bouleversé par ce témoignage sincère et humain.”

⁸⁴ Hungary also provoked a terminal crisis within the Committee of Intellectuals, the most coherent anti-war organization that existed at that juncture: some members objected to working alongside Communists, finding it morally incoherent. Domenach, for example, wrote to J.-B. Pontalis that “Personally it is impossible for me to denounce military intervention, the repression of national aspirations, alongside those who approve of these things in other countries...I believe it impossible to continue to collaborate at the heart of a committee of this kind with those who would not publicly condemn the intervention of the Soviet army in Hungary.” Letter, 23 November 1956. ESP2.E1-02.02, *Esprit* IMEC. The Committee died shortly thereafter. See Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 50-54.

Morgan, Claude Roy and Picasso, along with committed fellow-travelers like Sartre (it was at this juncture that Sartre formally broke with the Communists). Intellectuals were particularly upset by the outrageous disjuncture between what they believed with deep certainty they were witnessing – in film footage and photographs pouring out of Budapest, in press reports, in the widely reproduced words of the Hungarian “rebels” – and the Soviet and PCF narrative of a “fascist” plot heroically foiled by Soviet tanks, to the acclaim of a grateful Hungarian populace. This disjuncture revealed, Domenach later wrote, a French communist and *communisant* Left that “showed itself to be cynical and cowardly: auxiliary of violence and no longer defender, at any risk, of men’s freedoms.”⁸⁵

The revolt against the political logic of “efficacy” that demanded such blatant lies or rationalizations from Party members thus took the form of a defense of “truth,” a Dreyfusard rallying of intellectuals to a higher moral purpose that trumped politics. Louis Martin-Chauffier, for example, whom we encountered in Chapter Four as a Catholic fellow-traveler who had nonetheless supported Rousset, founded a “Union of Writers for the Truth” (this name rendered homage to the Dreyfus-era “Union for the Truth”) along with other leftist and ex-PCF or ex-fellow-traveler figures like Édith Thomas, Marc Beigbeder, Jean Amrouche, Jean Cassou, Pierre Emmanuel, Stanislas Fumet, Clara Malraux, Edgar Morin, Georges Friedmann, and René Tavernier.⁸⁶ “It is not agreeable,” Martin-Chauffier conceded, to take the same anti-communist positions as Pétainists, arch defenders of imperialism, and neo-fascists. But “when one grasps the truth – something that is not so easy, nor so common – it is necessary to speak it,

⁸⁵ Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to the 1960 Questitalia Conference attendees in Venice, 8 November 1960. ESP2.A3-02.01, *Esprit* IMEC: “Notre gauche française a perdu alors sa foi en elle-même. Elle s’est manifestée cynique, et lâche: auxiliaire de la violence et non plus défenseur, à tout risque, des libertés des hommes.”

⁸⁶ The Union was intended to rival and replace the CNE. See Louis Martin-Chauffier, “L’union des écrivains pour la vérité,” *Saturne* 11 (January-February 1957), 134.

whatever it costs, whatever the consequences.”⁸⁷ By April, the Union had begun to organize committees to apply these principles to the violence of the Algerian conflict as well.⁸⁸

Figures like Domenach – who had long since disavowed the Party but had continued to identify strongly with Marxism – were profoundly moved by such initiatives. In Domenach’s case, the idea of rallying to the cause of “truth,” in defense of basic human dignity, was particularly attractive because the cruelty of the Soviet repression had shaken some of the essential components of his worldview, and left him grasping for first principles. No long-term political stratagem or concern for “efficacy,” he believed, could justify the kind of violence involved in the Soviet response to the Budapest uprising. If this was “existing socialism,” then even socialism was thrown into question – indeed, as for Merleau-Ponty in the wake of Korea, even Marxism. Marx, Domenach wrote, “had proposed a coherent schema” for human liberation to which the *Esprit* team “all more or less subscribed despite our reserves.” After Budapest, however, it was clear that “on a number of points, the schema has not resisted the test of facts, and we feel the need to once again ask ourselves fundamental questions about the means of liberation that are open to man.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Louis Martin-Chauffier, “Le partage des eaux,” *Saturne* 11 (January-February 1957), 8: “Il n’est pas agréable de paraître pousser les mêmes cris que Monsieur Tixier-Vignacour [*sic*]... Quand on tient la vérité – ce n’est pas si facile ni si fréquent – il faut la dire, quoi qu’il en coûte, et quelles qu’en soient les conséquences.”

⁸⁸ “L’union des écrivains s’organise,” *Saturne* 12 (March-April 1957): 167; Louis Martin-Chauffier, “Toute la vérité, rien que la vérité,” *Saturne* 12 (March-April 1957): 3-13. See also Martin-Chauffier’s *L’Examen des consciences: Algérie an VII* (Paris: Juilliard, 1961) and his “Journal de voyage en marge d’une enquête,” parts I, II, and III, *Saturne* 15 (October-November 1957): 5-10, 16 (December 1957): 7-16; and 17 (January-Feb 1958): 8-23.

⁸⁹ J.-M. Domenach, “Questionnaire” n.d. [1957]. ESP2.B1-01.06, *Esprit* IMEC: “Notre engagement dans un mouvement comme ‘Esprit’ signifie, nous semble-t-il, que nous pensons que l’homme peut se libérer au moins progressivement de ses aliénations et que cette libération constitue l’objectif fondamental de toute action politique et sociale valable. Dans cette perspective, le marxisme avait proposé un schéma cohérent auquel nous avons tous plus ou moins souscrit malgré nos réserves. Mais sur nombre de points, le schéma n’a pas résisté à l’épreuve des faits, et nous sentons le besoin de nous poser à nouveau les questions fondamentales sur les moyens de libération qui sont ouverts à l’homme.”

Groping for a way to articulate values outside of a Marxist worldview, the journal's core group, under Domenach's guidance, seized on the language of "the human" and basic human dignity (defined not within a rubric of human rights but by contrast with extreme suffering and abjection) that had proved so appealing earlier to Camus and Rousset. As one frequent contributor (sociologist Michel Crozier) worded it, *Esprit* now embraced the position that the defining feature of any society, regardless of economic organization, was "the respect that it accords the human person."⁹⁰ Shortly after the death of the review's director Albert Béguin in July of 1957, Domenach took over full leadership of the publication and *Esprit* began a "nouvelle série" oriented around these modified tenets, ones that invited "testimony" to violence, in the name of its victims, in a much more obvious sense than had *Esprit's* earlier guiding principles.

In retrospect Pierre Vidal-Naquet has identified mid-1957, marked by the publication of a flood of "témoignages," as a "sort of high point" of activists' attempt to bear witness to the French military's use of torture in Algeria.⁹¹ It was paradoxically, however, at this same moment that even some of the most dedicated partisans of the project began to recognize problems with the model of bearing witness. Consider the fate of David Rousset's investigatory commission, the Commission Internationale Contre le Régime Concentrationnaire (CICRC). The CICRC, as we noted in Chapter Four, began using their journal *Saturne* to publish dossiers and solicit additional "testimony" on the violence of the French repression in Algeria quite early in the war: in January 1956.⁹² The group, after all, had long been committed to the project of

⁹⁰ Michel Crozier, response to "Questionnaire," 10 November 1957. ESP2.B1-01.06, *Esprit* IMEC: "le respect qu'elle accorde à la personne humaine."

⁹¹ *L'Affaire Audin*, 30.

⁹² See "Un premier dossier sur la répression en Algérie," *Saturne* 6 (January-February 1956), 3-5 and "Un second dossier sur la détention en Algérie," *Saturne* 7 (March-May 1956), 49-68.

“bearing witness” to violent conditions of detainment, and French prisons and triage centers in Algeria fit their mandate. Rousset himself energetically sought out testimonials about prisoner treatment – including torture – for publication. In 1957, following a formal request from various non-communist organizations of former Nazi camp inmates,⁹³ the CICRC launched a full investigation into the conditions of detention in Algeria, sending an international research commission accompanied by French observers Martin-Chauffier and Germaine Tillion.⁹⁴ (Rousset himself coordinated much of the planning.) In his correspondence with Rémy Roure, Rousset stressed the nature of the intervention: “From the beginning, we have affirmed that we would establish the truth wherever a problem existed, without occupying ourselves with social, political, or historical questions.”⁹⁵ The investigatory committee’s July, 1957 report (accompanied by a multi-part first-person testimony from Martin-Chauffier to what he had seen, heard, and felt in the detention centers) cleared the French from the charge of running “concentration camps” in Algeria but related myriad disturbing evidences of torture and abuse. This was “expert witness” testimony in its purest form.

However, the uses to which the report was put in the French press painfully highlighted some of the practical limits, in this particular context, of such a faithful

⁹³ It had at first appeared that the Committee of Intellectuals Against the War might lodge the formal request that the CICRC intervene. But Communists and Sartreians within the Committee balked at association with “the ignoble Rousset.” See Edgar Morin’s revulsed account of the affair in *Autocritique*, 190-191.

⁹⁴ Meanwhile, in the face of increasing pressure, the government itself had agreed to assign a “Commission de sauvegarde” to Algeria, composed of “impartial” public but non-governmental figures, to investigate whether detainees were being treated humanely (the first of two such Commissions that would eventually carry out this mission). Raphaëlle Branche, privy to the archives of many of those involved, dissects the reasons for the Commission’s impotence in “La Commission de sauvegarde pendant la guerre d’Algérie: Chronique d’un échec annoncé,” *Vingtième siècle* 61 (Jan-March 1999): 14-29. On reporting by the Red Cross that was in some ways similar to the work of the CICRC, see Françoise Perret, “L’action du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge pendant la guerre d’Algérie (1954-1962),” *The International Review of the Red Cross* 856 (2004): 917-951.

⁹⁵ Letter from David Rousset to Rémy Roure, 16 April 1956. F Delta 1880/99/2, Rousset BDIC.

attempt to bear disinterested witness to suffering. Far-left news sources did underline the investigators' concerns about torture ("An International Commission Has Certified the Existence of Tortures"), but venues that supported government policy ran headlines like "Algeria: 'No Concentration Camp Regime,' Certifies the Delegation of Former Deportees."⁹⁶ More troubling still, one of the CICRC's principle investigators – Norwegian Resistance heroine Lise Børsum – granted multiple interviews after the report's publication in which she rationalized French violence in Algeria by "bearing witness," in dramatic tones, to the terrorism of the Algerians. *Le Figaro*, for example, quoted Børsum as saying that the "irregularities" the Commission had reported on the French side were "produced especially after strong waves of terror" by the FLN.⁹⁷ She told *La Croix*:

A democracy finds itself in a nearly hopeless situation in confronting terrorism. [The CICRC's] task only touched on a minimal aspect of the Algerian tragedy, while the entire territory is struck by a disaster without end. Daily life is saturated with panic. Terrorists throw bombs everywhere, in meetings of young people, in stadiums, in the streets and in public markets. The [Algerian nationalist] partisans steal and burn in the countryside and hit the population with heavy taxes. They prefer to kill their compatriots and their families, in a manner so cruel that it is necessary to go far back in history to find a similar cruelty.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ "Une commission internationale a constaté l'existence des tortures," *Libération*, 27-28 July 1957; "Algérie: 'pas de régime concentrationnaire' constate la délégation des anciens déportés," *Le Populaire*, 27-28 July 1957.

⁹⁷ "Mes déclarations ont été mal interprétées," *Le Figaro*, 2 September 1957: "Nous avons pu acquérir la certitude que les irrégularités se sont spécialement produites après de fortes vagues de terreur."

⁹⁸ "Jugement nuancé d'une norvégienne sur les excès de la guerre d'Algérie," *La Croix*, 3 September 1957: "Ce que je peux dire, c'est qu'une démocratie se trouve dans une situation presque désespérée pour faire face au terrorisme. Notre tâche ne touchait qu'un aspect minime de la tragédie algérienne, alors que le pays entier est frappé d'un désastre sans fin. La vie quotidienne est saturée par la panique. Les terroristes lancent des bombes partout, dans les réunions des jeunes, dans les stades, dans les rues et sur les marchés publics. Les partisans volent et incendient dans les campagnes et frappent la population de lourds impôts. Ils tuent de préférence leurs compatriotes et leurs familles, d'une manière si cruelle qu'il faut remonter loin dans l'histoire pour trouver une cruauté semblable."

Børsum's renegade personal campaign neutralized the Commission's findings and highlighted the immense challenges, in practical terms, of the project of "apolitically" bearing witness to French violence in Algeria: revelations always could be, and were, dismissed with (perfectly accurate) reminders of the violence of the "other side." Every intervention could be instrumentalized – or ignored. In short, in the context of a brutal, two-sided war that systematically targeted civilian populations, simply objecting to the violence employed by the French military, *qua* violence, and suffering that it caused, *qua* suffering, was a perilous and potentially fruitless project.

It was also one that raised profound moral quandaries. As Michel Winock reminds us, although many of the intellectuals involved in opposing the war and the French military's use of torture saw themselves as "Dreyfusards," their position was in fact more morally complicated than that of Zola writing "*J'accuse*": they were not defending innocent men.⁹⁹ Of course, torture was deployed in Algeria against many, many innocents, "guilty" of such "offenses" as desiring an end to French rule or simply possessing brown skin. But actual FLN members were not – and did not desire to be depicted as – martyrs or saints. They were combatants engaged in a revolutionary war, and they hoped to win it. This put figures who believed that there was a religious or ethical imperative to "bear witness" against *all* violence, like François Mauriac, in an agonizing position. Mauriac first denounced torture in late 1954 in a blazing speech that assimilated its Muslim victims to Christ in agony: was it not strange, he asked, that France's putatively Christian torturers, confronted with "one of these dark faces with Semitic features" wracked with pain "never think ... of

⁹⁹ Michel Winock, "Les affaires Dreyfus," *Vingtième siècle* 5 (January-March 1985), 34. Much literature on intellectual engagement about Algeria offers comparisons to the Dreyfus Affair, drawing on a famous observation by Pierre-Vidal Naquet (in "Une fidélité têtue") that opponents of the war could be categorized as "Dreyfusards," "Third-Worldists," or "Bolsheviks." During the war, some intellectuals – François Mauriac, for example – already consciously saw their intervention as "Dreyfusard."

their God ... that they do not hear in the cries and groans of their victim his beloved voice: ‘It is to me that you do it!’”¹⁰⁰ This Christological analogy to martyrdom collapsed quickly in the face of FLN terrorism: the nationalists, with their horrifying espousal of terror, their wake of mutilated corpses, stubbornly refused to be cast as Christlike victims, even for those like Mauriac who espoused an “infinite pity” for the “suffering” of the Algerian people. Thus although Mauriac continued to loudly denounce French torture throughout the Fourth Republic,¹⁰¹ he was agonized by the FLN’s “horrible, indefensible” acts. “I am not for the murderers in one of the two camps against the murderers in the other,” he wrote in a private letter to Denise Barrat in 1957. “... French crimes, I denounce them, but I am not in solidarity with the Algerians.”¹⁰²

As both the case of the CICRC and Mauriac’s example suggest, the impulse to “bear witness” to French violence in Algeria was immensely complicated by FLN fighters’ status not as “pure” victims or as martyrs but as combatants who themselves

¹⁰⁰ “L’imitation des bourreaux de Jésus-Christ,” speech at the Semaine des intellectuels catholiques, 15 November 1954, reproduced in François Mauriac, Jean Lacouture, and Alain de la Moriandis, *L’imitation des bourreaux de Jésus Christ et Présentation des Bloc-Notes sur la torture* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1984), 21: “Que c’est étrange après tout, ne trouvez-vous pas? qu’ils ne pensent jamais, surtout quand il s’agit d’un de ces visages sombres aux traits sémitiques, à leur Dieu attaché à la colonne et livré à la cohorte, qu’ils n’entendent pas à travers les cris et les gémissements de leurs victimes sa voix adorée: ‘C’est à moi que vous le faites!’”

¹⁰¹ Mauriac largely halted his crusade against torture when de Gaulle’s Fifth Republic came into being, apparently believing guarantees from André Malraux and other Gaullists that such practices would stop on their watch. He continued to criticize the *military* but only insofar as it became increasingly insubordinate to the regime. This fact is sometimes glossed over in celebrations of his moral perspicacity during the conflict: see, for example, Nathan Bracher, *Through the Past Darkly: History and Memory in François Mauriac’s Bloc-Notes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), whose introduction claims that it will examine Mauriac’s denunciation of “crimes perpetrated by French forces of order during the Algerian War from November 1954 through July 1962” (14). In fact – with minor exceptions not directly related to torture – Bracher’s chapter on the Algerian War (94-142) examines only texts produced by Mauriac up through March 1958.

¹⁰² Letter from François Mauriac to Denise Barrat, 4 August 1957, quoted in Violaine Massenet, *François Mauriac* (Paris: Flammarion 2000), 367: “Je ne suis pas pour les meurtriers d’un des deux camps contre les meurtriers de l’autre ... Votre coeur et mon coeur ne sont pas du même côté: les crimes des Français, je les dénonce, mais je ne me solidarise pas avec les Algériens...J’ai une pitié infinie de leur souffrance. Cette jeunesse immolée féroce et stupidement, je ne la sépare pas de notre jeunesse. Mais je ne réagis pas en partisan comme vous faites – comme c’est votre droit, d’ailleurs.”

used terror and slaughtered innocent civilians. One could argue that the FLN's violence was more just because they fought for freedom instead of for continued oppression – but in that case, one was essentially conceding that the case against French military action in Algeria could not really be made through “bearing witness” to the suffering of torture victims. It would have to be made instead with a distinction like Merleau-Ponty's in *Humanisme et terreur*, between “progressive” and “retrograde” violences: a distinction, that is, that operated through referring to *ends*, not to *means*. Alternatively, one could “bear witness” to the suffering produced by both sides – but to what political purpose? As the FLN escalated their use of urban bombing and engaged in massacres such as Melouza, their actions therefore posed agonizing questions to those anti-colonialist French intellectuals who had come to accept the imperative to “bear witness” to the French state's violence.

One approach to this situation was that of the Algerian-born Camus, who insisted that the violence of each side in the conflict was equally unacceptable and therefore deserved to be condemned “with the same force.”¹⁰³ Indeed, Camus wrote, intellectuals had no business whatsoever speaking against French abuses if they fell silent when the topic became the “terrible crimes and the maniacal mutilations of a terrorism that kills civilians, Arab men and women, and adds incalculably to the unhappiness of the Algerian people.”¹⁰⁴ It was “both indecent and harmful to shout against tortures along with those who stomach quite easily Mélouza or the

¹⁰³ Camus, “Avant-Propos” to *Chroniques algériennes, 1939-1958. Actuelles III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 16: “Mais, pour être utile autant qu'équitable, nous devons condamner avec la même force, et sans précautions de langage, le terrorisme appliqué par le F.L.N. aux civils français comme, d'ailleurs, et dans une proportion plus grande, aux civiles arabes.”

¹⁰⁴ Draft quoted by Roger Quilliot, in Camus, *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1844: “Je continuerai pourtant cette action, mais pas avec ceux qui se sont toujours tus sur les crimes affreux et les mutilations maniaques du terrorisme qui tue civils, Arabes et femmes, et ajoutent incalculablement au malheur du peuple algérien.”

mutilation of European children.” Terrorism was a revolting, inhuman “crime,” and to find excuses for it was obscene.¹⁰⁵

This intransigent stance completed Camus’s alienation from French Left and earned him decades of scorn from post-colonial scholars appalled by his refusal to countenance Algerian independence. But in the post-September 11, 2001 period, Camus has been rehabilitated. David Carroll, for example, has recently asserted that Camus was right to insist that “justice demands the recognition of limits and a respect for human lives that must come *before* the pursuit of any cause. Even *before* the cause of freedom, even *before* justice itself.”¹⁰⁶ Champions of Camus such as Carroll point out that he was more unyielding than his critics gave him credit for in decrying the French military’s abuses: he was infuriated by collective repressions and torture (“crimes in which we are all implicated”) and in particular by the execution of captured FLN combatants (from his position as France’s foremost critic of the death penalty, he privately interceded against the implementation of many such sentences).¹⁰⁷ Indeed, he wrote in 1956 that “one does not have the right” to complain about the FLN’s atrocities if one did not likewise denounce “without one concession”

¹⁰⁵ Camus, “Avant-Propos,” 17: “C’est pourquoi il m’a paru à la fois indécent et nuisible de crier contre les tortures en même temps que ceux qui ont très bien digéré Melouza ou la mutilation des enfants européens.”

¹⁰⁶ David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terror, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 185, emphasis in original. See also Albert Camus, *Refléxions sur le terrorisme*, eds. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, Antoine Garapon and Denis Salas (Paris: Nicolas Philippe, 2002), esp. the “Avant-Propos” by Lévi-Valensi (7-8) and “Camus, l’homme obstiné” by Garapon (187-207); Lévi-Valensi argues that Camus has “a message” for the post-September 11, 2001 world, and that “perhaps, if his speech were listened to, we could get out of the infernal cycles we are dragged into by violence practiced or suffered” (39). For major examples of earlier, more critical readings of Camus’s colonial politics, see Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Albert Camus of Europe and Africa* (New York: Viking, 1970). For a nuanced approach to the problems posed by Camus’s Algerian politics, see Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 73-94.

¹⁰⁷ “Avant-Propos,” 15; Roger Quilliot outlines some of this activity in his commentary on the *Chroniques algériennes* in *Essais*, 1844-1846.

the “excesses” of the French.¹⁰⁸ A long-term advocate of social justice and anti-racism in Algeria (unlike most French intellectuals, he had been thinking and writing about the “Algerian problem” for nearly two decades), he also understood from the start that the FLN’s decision to use terrorism “is not the fruit of chance and ingratitude, cunningly combined...In Algeria, as elsewhere, terrorism is explained by the absence of hope.”¹⁰⁹ But “what does it serve,” he asked in 1956, “to brand some, as opposed to others, the victims of the Algerian drama? They are from the same tragic family, and today its members cut one another’s throats in the dark of night, scrambling about without recognizing one another in a *mêlée* of blind men.”¹¹⁰ There were no “nationalists” and “*colons*” in this dark night, no politically disenfranchised Muslims, no “ultras” – only victims and executioners. And soon, Camus warned, “only the dead will be innocent.”¹¹¹

Camus thus painted Algeria as a landscape of terror in which major distinctions between the violence employed by the two sides – distinctions of scope, of duration, of motivation, and of ends – were flattened into irrelevance within a “horrifying fraternity of useless deaths.”¹¹² It did not matter if the Algerian revolt was a counter-violence against colonialism: “After all, Gandhi proved that one could fight

¹⁰⁸ Camus, “La vraie démission,” *L’Express* 25 October 1955 (*Chroniques algériennes*, 145): “Car il est certainement répugnant d’escamoter les massacres des Français pour ne mettre l’accent que sur les excès de la répression. Mais on n’a le droit de condamner les premiers que si l’on refuse, sans une concession, les seconds.”

¹⁰⁹ Camus, “Terrorisme et répression,” *L’Express*, 9 July 1955 (*Essais*, 1867): “Le terrorisme, en effet, n’a pas mûri tout seul; il n’est pas le fruit du hasard et de l’ingratitude malignement conjugués...En Algérie, comme ailleurs, le terrorisme s’explique par l’absence d’espoir.”

¹¹⁰ Camus, “Trêve pour les civils,” *L’Express*, 10 January 1956 (*Chroniques algériennes*, 156): “À quoi sert désormais de brandir les unes contre les autres les victimes du drame algérien? Elles sont de la même tragique famille et ses membres aujourd’hui s’égorgent en pleine nuit, sans se reconnaître, à tâtons, dans une *mêlée* d’aveugles.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* (157): “Bientôt les morts seuls y seront innocents.”

¹¹² Camus, “Premier novembre,” *L’Express*, 1 November 1955 (*Ibid.*, 153): “Sur ce point au moins, la solidarité franco-arabe est totale et il est temps de le savoir. Selon qu’on le voudra, elle se traduira sans l’affreuse fraternité des morts inutiles, ou dans la solidarité des vivants attelés à la même tâche.”

for one's people, and win, without ceasing for one single day to remain honorable."¹¹³ Nor was it even relevant to know if the Algerians' cause was just: "Whatever cause one defends, it will be forever dishonored by the blind massacre of an innocent crowd, where the killer knows in advance that he will hit women and children [*la femme et l'enfant*]." ¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, Camus averred "Whatever the ancient, deep roots of the Algerian tragedy may be, a fact remains: no cause justifies the death of the innocent [*l'innocent*]." ¹¹⁵

Of course, this argument was easier for Camus to make given that – questions of means aside – he did not support the "cause" of the FLN in any case and could not conceive of an Algeria without a French presence. ¹¹⁶ Literature on Camus and the "Algerian question" has long emphasized his *pieds-noirs* roots (or, in Carroll's recent, more forgiving interpretation, "the Algerian part of him") ¹¹⁷ to help account for his outraged opposition to Algerian independence or even to negotiation with the FLN

¹¹³ Camus, "Avant-Propos," 17: "Après tout, Gandhi a prouvé qu'on pouvait lutter pour son peuple, et vaincre, sans cesser un seul jour de rester estimable." References to Gandhi were a staple throughout the war for those willing to concede that the Algerians had legitimate grievances but who were revolted by the FLN. They drove activists like Robert Barrat to distraction: "For one hundred thirty years," he wrote, "the Algerian people has not ceased to have recourse to Gandhian methods of non-cooperation... 'A Gandhi in Algeria? Are you serious?' the old sheik El-Okbi said to me in 1955. 'They would have killed him.' There have existed in Algeria some true martyrs of non-violence – for example the Moussebiline or *volontaires de la mort* – who, during the pacification of Kabylia, presented themselves to our troops chained together, one to the other, like hostages. Our officers had them shot and then razed their villages..." ("Leurs methodes ... et les nôtres," *Vérité-Liberté*, 8 April 1961, 8).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: "Quelle que soit la cause que l'on défend, elle restera toujours déshonorée par le massacre aveugle d'une foule innocente où le tueur sait d'avance qu'il atteindra la femme et l'enfant." Camus did attempt on multiple occasions to directly confront the argument that the FLN's violence was a counter-violence after years of repression. "I know: there is an order to the violence. The long colonialist violence explains that of the rebellion." But he argued that this historical – as opposed to purely moral – point of view could lend sanction to nihilism and anarchy: "by this logic, there is no other ending than an interminable destruction." "Trêve pour les civils" (157).

¹¹⁵ Camus, "Appel pour une trêve civile en Algérie," speech in Algiers, 22 January 1956 (Ibid., 173): "Quelles que soient les origines anciennes et profondes de la tragédie algérienne, un fait demeure: aucune cause ne justifie la mort de l'innocent."

¹¹⁶ Feraoun put the matter in more personal terms: "Camus refuses to accept that Algeria may be independent and that he will be obliged to enter it every time with a passport, he who is Algerian and nothing else." Quoted by Quilliot in *Essais*, 1844.

¹¹⁷ Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian*, xiii.

“terrorists.” The Algerian-born Camus, whose humble family of origin continued to live in Algiers, was indeed far more personally implicated in the conflict than were metropolitan-born intellectuals. To argue that this had no effect on the position he took about the war’s violence would be nonsensical: we can indeed take the anguished Camus at his word that whenever he spoke or wrote publicly about Algeria, he feared providing an “alibi” to “a crazy criminal who will throw his bomb into an innocent crowd that contains those close to me [*les miens*].”¹¹⁸

But to provide a satisfactory account of Camus’s refusal to countenance Algerian terrorism any more than he would countenance French torture, we must go further: after all, a number of other prominent French intellectuals, journalists, and activists who intervened in debates over the conflict were *also* Algerian-born, with family in Algeria, and several of them, all friends and interlocutors of Camus (Jean Daniel, Jules Roy, Jean Amrouche, Jean Sénac), adopted considerably more pro-FLN positions than he did.¹¹⁹ In fact, Camus’s engagement regarding Algeria is best explained in the context of his earlier struggles with the problem of violence in politics: the author of “Sauver les corps,” *Les Justes*, and *L’Homme révolté* was behaving perfectly consistently when he expressed his moral horror at FLN fighters’ willingness to kill civilians if it would advance their cause. Even his infamous 1957 Nobel Prize speech in which he told an Algerian nationalist critic that “I would defend

¹¹⁸ Camus, “Avant-Propos,” 14: “je ne cesse pas de craindre, en faisant état des longues erreurs françaises, de donner un alibi, sans aucun risque pour moi, au fou criminel qui jettera sa bombe sur une foule innocente où se trouvent les miens.”

¹¹⁹ It is puzzling that Carroll’s compelling account of “Camus the Algerian” barely mentions any of these important Algerian-born figures, treating Sartre’s as the only voice that posed a meaningful alternative to Camus’s position. Highlighting *only* Camus and Sartre as exemplars of the range of possible French responses to Algerian terrorism is misleading, particularly because it suggests that the sole available alternative to Sartre’s total endorsement of the extreme means employed by the FLN necessarily entailed Camus’s rejection of the project of Algerian national independence. Donald Reid, *Germaine Tillion, Lucie Aubrac, and the Politics of Memories of the French Resistance* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007) and “Re-viewing the Battle of Algiers with Germaine Tillion,” *History Workshop Journal* 60 (Autumn 2005): 93-115 perform a similar theoretical move, holding up Germaine Tillion’s position as the (only) alternative to Sartre’s stance.

my mother before justice” was in no way a betrayal of earlier principles: since 1946 Camus had refused to legitimize the taking of human life for any reason, including “justice.”¹²⁰ Although his agony over the Algerian case was new and intensely personal, his points of moral reference remained what they had been for many years: he continued to invoke, for example, his beloved 1905 Russian terrorists, declaring that they “would have died (they proved it) rather than stoop to this” – “this” being the use of terrorism against innocent civilians.¹²¹ As had been true for a decade, Camus was particularly appalled by any notion of expiation through the sacrifice not of oneself but of another victim; thus he raged at anti-colonialist metropolitan intellectuals who, from a comfortable distance, sanctioned FLN terrorism as a counter-violence to imperialism. He commented wryly that “if certain French people believe that, for her colonial enterprises,...France is in a state of historic sin, they need not designate the French of Algeria as expiatory victims (‘You go croak, we’ve earned it!’), they ought to offer themselves for the expiation.”¹²²

Camus was also unwavering in terms of the modes of intellectual intervention to which he was, since 1946, willing to lend sanction: deliberately modest projects that aimed not for radical, sweeping solutions and universal justice but rather for the

¹²⁰ “Les Déclarations de Stockholm,” *Le Monde*, 14 December 1957, reproduced in *Essais*, 1882: “Je crois à la justice, mais je défendrai ma mère avant la justice.”

¹²¹ “Avant-Propos,” 17: “Sous la forme où il est pratiqué, aucun mouvement révolutionnaire ne l’a jamais admis et les terroristes russes de 1905, par exemple, seraient morts (ils en ont donné la preuve) plutôt que de s’y abaisser.”

¹²² *Ibid.*, 22: “Si certains Français considèrent que, par ses entreprises coloniales, la France (et elle seule, au milieu des nations saintes et pures) est en état de péché historique, ils n’ont pas à désigner les Français d’Algérie comme victimes expiatoires (‘Crevez, nous l’avons bien mérité!’), ils doivent s’offrir eux-mêmes à l’expiation.” He continued, “I believe in Algeria in a politics of reparation, not a politics of expiation” (23). In an earlier essay, he had similarly insisted: “So let’s recognize once and for all that the fault is collective. But let’s not draw from that the idea of a necessary expiation. For that idea would risk becoming repugnant the instant that the price of the expiation would be left to others. In politics, in any case, one expiates nothing. One repairs and one makes justice. I think that a great, dazzling reparation should be made to the Arab people. But by France as a whole, and not with the blood of French Algerians.” “La bonne conscience,” *L’Express*, 21 October 1955 (*Chroniques algériennes*, 142-143).

preservation, in a landscape of unremitting modern tragedy, of the bare life of “innocents.” Thus, although personally he supported a “federalist” solution to the Algerian problem, nevertheless his major campaign regarding the war (first launched in a *L’Express* editorial on January 10, 1956) was not for any particular settlement but for a “civil truce” situated “outside of any politics” – that is, for a pledge from both sides to stop targeting unarmed civilians as an act of “pure and simple humanity.”¹²³ To take the pledge, Camus stressed, “would not modify, for the moment, any situation. It would aim solely to take away the inexpiable character of the conflict, and to preserve, in the future, innocent lives.”¹²⁴ In the face of what he believed were other intellectuals’ irresponsible, grandiose, and careless interventions in the conflict, Camus insisted that his own goals were vastly more modest: from a podium in Algiers he declared that “Today we must come together shabbily, a few of us, to demand, without yet claiming anything more, only that on a solitary point of the globe a handful of innocent victims be saved.”¹²⁵ Characteristically, Camus claimed that “even if our initiative only saves a single innocent life, it will be justified.”¹²⁶

¹²³ “Appel pour une trêve civile en Algérie” (*Ibid.*, 170); “Premier novembre” (*Ibid.*, 155). An earlier attempt by Camus to intervene in the Algerian crisis was similar, though slightly more ambitious, as it called for a general truce rather than a “civil” one: he proposed in *L’Express* in July 1955 a “conference” of French and “Arab” leaders (“U.D.M.A., Ulémas, et les deux tendances du M.T.L.D”) that “will have the sole and unique object of stopping the bloodshed.” The article was not accompanied by any political mobilization and thus remained in the realm of a theoretical exercise. (“Terrorisme et répression,” *Essais*, 1871). The Committee for a Civil Truce included, in addition to Camus, Mouloud Amrane, Mohamed Labjaoui, Boualem Moussaoui, Amar Ouzegane, Jean de Maisonneul, Louis Miquel, Mauria Perrin, Charles Poncet, Emmanuel Roblès, and Roland Simounet; see Emmanuel Roblès, *Albert Camus et la trêve civile* (Philadelphia: CELFAN Monographs, 1988).

¹²⁴ “Premier novembre” (*Chroniques algériennes*, 153): “Cet engagement ne modifierait pour le moment aucune situation. Il viserait seulement à enlever au conflit son caractère inexpiable et à préserver, dans l’avenir, des vies innocents.”

¹²⁵ “Appel pour une trêve civile en Algérie” (*Ibid.*, 183): “nous devons aujourd’hui nous réunir pauvrement, à quelques-uns, pour demander seulement, sans prétendre encore à rien de plus, que soit épargnée sur un point solitaire du globe une poignée de victimes innocentes.” As limited as this claim appears, it is worth keeping in mind that Camus’s speech was greeted by reactionary European protesters who picketed outside the hall shouting “Death to Camus!”

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* (174).

In the end, the politically naive Committee for a Civil Truce in Algeria could not claim even that: FLN members opportunistically backed the group's appeal only because, as James Le Sueur writes, they believed that "the public failure of [Camus's] committee would force moderate Algerians to fight for independence because it would be clear that there was no longer a viable liberal alternative." The endorsement Camus's project received from Mollet, Soustelle, and Lacoste was hardly less cynical, intended for propaganda purposes. The putatively apolitical intervention not only "lacked structural support," Le Sueur writes, but "fundamentally misread the degree to which violence against civilians had become part of the French and Algerians' armory."¹²⁷ Camus thus came up against the limitations of applying his ethical schema, worked out in abstract hypothetical terms and in reference to past acts of violence (the French Revolution, a single 1905 bombing), to horrific and intractable violence occurring in the present. Being "apolitically" opposed to "violence" in the context of a brutal war defined by guerrilla and counter-terrorist tactics, however ethically admirable a stance on its own merits, in practical terms was fruitless. Camus himself appears to have grasped this fact, with immense despair: after the failure of the "civil truce" he resigned from writing editorials for *L'Express* and decided to cease speaking publicly about Algeria. After meeting with Camus in 1958, the Algerian novelist Mouloud Feraoun wrote, "His pity is enormous for those who suffer, but he knows, alas, that pity or love have no power against the evil that kills, that demolishes, that wants to make a clean slate and create a new world..."¹²⁸

Meanwhile, French intellectuals such as Sartre and his younger *Les Temps modernes* colleague Francis Jeanson, who had steadfastly refused throughout the late

¹²⁷ Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 102.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Quilliot in *Essais*, 1844: "Sa pitié est immense pour ceux qui souffrent mais il sait hélas! que la pitié ou l'amour n'ont aucun pouvoir sur le mal qui tue, qui démolit, qui voudrait faire table rase et créer un monde nouveau..."

forties and early fifties to abandon their support for revolutionary violence, responded in as categorical a fashion as Camus to the FLN's use of terror: they argued that there was no moral conflict or intellectual hypocrisy in deploring French violence while condoning or even celebrating the FLN's use of force. To oppose the French military's defense of colonialism was a political engagement, not a humanitarian intervention; the suffering caused by the war's "excesses" was relevant only insofar as it could be made to powerfully symbolize the inherent wrongs of the imperialist system – as, for example, in Alleg's case. Thus, although Sartre and Jeanson both denounced torture in blazing language (notably in Sartre's "Une victoire"), neither made the campaign against it their primary mode of intervention in the conflict: their overarching goal, after all, was not for the war to be waged more "humanely," but for the Algerians to achieve independence from colonial rule. Indeed, those who took this position tended to see "colonialism" as globally responsible for all the violence of the present war, including that perpetrated by the Algerian side: for example, the radical Catholic anti-colonialist André Mandouze lectured in 1955 that "we must not confuse the author of a drama with its actors... For me, the French people who have been massacred in the course of the riots, just like the Arabs who have been massacred in the course of the repression, are all equally victims of a system that is just as fatal to the former as to the latter: the colonialist system..."¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Mandouze, "Le Maghrib, les maquignons et le sang," *Consciénces Maghribines* 5 (Summer 1955): "M'accordera-t-on à cet égard qu'il ne faut pas confondre l'auteur d'un drame et ses acteurs, que ce drame soit une émeute ou une répression? Pour moi, les Français qui ont été massacrés au cours des émeutes comme les Arabes qui ont été massacrés au cours de la répression sont tous également les victimes d'un système aussi fatal aux uns qu'aux autres, le système colonialiste..." We first encountered Mandouze in Chapter One as a co-founder and the first editor-in-chief of the clandestine *Témoignage chrétien*. In 1946 he had relocated to Algiers to become a professor at the Université d'Alger, and quickly became a militant for Algerian independence. Domenach, driven to distraction by his old friend's propensity for over-simplification of complex issues and by his stubbornness, nevertheless recognized the value of Mandouze's crusader's zeal when it came to Algeria. In early 1958, for example, Domenach recorded in his journal: "Saw Mandouze in Strasbourg. He dealt out insults, as usual. That has an upside: to cut off contact with certain oozing scoundrels [*canailles visqueuses*]. A rupture that is always difficult for intellectuals, who are polite people.... When he says

Jeanson, Sartre, and a few others such as activist Robert Barrat (like Mandouze, a Catholic) approached the problem in a similar fashion.¹³⁰ They might, they conceded, as private individuals, be morally repulsed by certain extreme acts undertaken by the FLN that targeted civilians. But the overall goal being pursued by the “rebel” fighters in Algeria was – just like the goal once pursued by the French Resistance – a politically desirable and “fundamentally just” one, that of achieving freedom from a brutal, foreign, profit-driven, racist occupation. Moral repulsion at the means used to achieve this end was thus worse than irrelevant: it was counter-productive.¹³¹ Jeanson, in particular, was convinced early in the war that the FLN was a genuine revolutionary force acting in the name of the vast majority of the Algerian people; others in his orbit came to believe the same.¹³² They also came to believe Algerian independence would never be granted by the French: it would have to be fought for, inch by bloody inch, by the FLN. For decades, the Algerian had tried every non-violent means possible to achieve reforms, concessions, and recognition from France; they had been rewarded not only with insultingly token or unenforceable administrative concessions but with outright repression, such as the horrific Sétif massacre of 1945 that left not only protesters but thousands of innocent Muslim bystanders dead. Taking all these facts in hand, therefore, the only relevant task for anti-colonialist French intellectuals was to support the FLN in its struggle in whatever ways possible. Criticism of the independence fighters’ methods by French bystanders

‘Pflimlin is an assassin,’ the good society of Strasbourg is scandalized. But it is true.’ Domenach, *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d’or*, 137.

¹³⁰ On Barrat’s explicitly Catholic engagement for North African independence, which began during the Moroccan crisis earlier in the decade, see Claire Guyot, “Entre morale et politique. Le Centre catholique des intellectuels français face à la décolonisation,” *Vingtième siècle* 63 (July-Sep. 1999): 75-86.

¹³¹ Barrat, “Pourquoi nous combattons,” *Témoignages et documents* 4 (May 1958), 8. (Originally published in a seized edition of *France-Observateur* in April, 1956.)

¹³² See Francis and Colette Jeanson, *L’Algérie hors la loi* (Paris: Seuil, 1955).

would not help them to achieve their goal. Moreover for French intellectuals, from the comfort of their Parisian homes, to casually pass down moral judgments about the FLN's use of violence revealed patronizing and colonialist (and utterly hypocritical) pretensions to offer moral "lessons" to the Algerian combatants. As Francis Jeanson wrote in early 1956, "a Frenchman [does] not have the right to say, in relation to the opposition's violence, 'Nothing excuses these massacres.' For even if such massacres are absolutely inexcusable, for a long while already we have not had any say in the matter. These massacres are atrocious, certainly, but I would not feel at ease at this point encouraging my compatriots to condemn them."¹³³

This point of view, which Sartre shared, determined the response of *Les Temps modernes* to the M elouza massacre: stony silence. (This was not typical within the anti-colonialist Left: not only organizations such as the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the F ed eration de l' ducation Nationale but individuals as varied as Claude Bourdet, Jean Daniel, Andr e Philip, Pierre-Henri Simon, Pierre-Vidal Naquet, and even Barrat formally condemned Melouza.)¹³⁴ Sartre later explained his reasoning to Jean Daniel in an unpublished interview: furiously aware that the tiny anti-war movement did not speak for the French people nor even a broader French Left (it was, after all, a "socialist" government that was escalating the war and underwriting the use of torture),¹³⁵ Sartre insisted that activists in France could offer nothing to the Algerian

¹³³ Letter from Francis Jeanson to Jean Daniel, 16 January 1956. F Delta 721/91/3, Gu erin BDIC: "Ces massacres sont atroces,   coup s ur; mais je ne me sentirais pas   ce point   l'aise pour encourager mes compatriotes   en condamner."

¹³⁴ See Charles Robert Ageron, "Les Francais devant la guerre civile algerienne," in *La Guerre d'Alg rie et les Francais*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 53-62; Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 165-179. In general, those who refused to condemn Melouza propounded the thesis that the French army had, in fact, been responsible for the massacre. Such was the position of the PCF and of certain radical figures such as Jacques Verg s.

¹³⁵ For some examples of Sartre's increasingly angry pleas from this period for the broader population to pay attention to what was happening in Algeria, and for his condemnations of Mollet government policy, see "Le colonialisme est un syst me," "Vous  tes formidables," and "Nous sommes tous des assassins," all collected in *Situations*, vol. 5, *Colonialisme et n o-colonialisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

guerillas; they therefore had no right to make “humanitarian” demands on them. He asked rhetorically, “What are we able to promise the FLN? Can we assure them that in exchange for concessions we will help them to industrialize Algeria, to expropriate the colonizers, to enact a redistribution of land?...No, we are only powerless intellectuals asking them to pay attention to moral values...”¹³⁶ Such intervention was politically pointless: “Whatever the FLN is,” he claimed, “it is there, it is the Algerian revolution. One must take it as it is.”¹³⁷ French leftists could perhaps try privately, through personal contacts, to influence the FLN leadership; public condemnation, however, was woefully politically naive. Political maturity, conversely, required understanding that “We are not here to incarnate the university of values. In any case, not publicly. These values led us to make a choice, and we must serve that choice politically.” And to do so, Sartre, explicitly argued, demanded that one refuse to “bear witness” to the suffering caused by the Algerian nationalist side: “I am certain that there are some truths it is *necessary* to hide when one is involved in politics [*qu’il faut dissimuler quand on fait de la politique*]. Politics, we must accept it, implies a constraint to be silent about certain things. Otherwise, one is a ‘beautiful soul’ and thus not behaving politically.”¹³⁸ Those who had spoken out against Melouza and other acts of FLN

¹³⁶ Jean Daniel, interview with J.-P. Sartre, 13 January 1958, in *Le Temps qui reste* (Paris: Stock, 1973), 254: “Et là-dessus, qu’est-ce que nous pouvons promettre au F.L.N? Pouvons-nous lui assurer qu’en échange de concessions nous l’aiderons à industrialiser l’Algérie, à exproprier les colons, à faire une redistribution des terres? ...Non, nous sommes seulement des intellectuels impuissants leur demandant de faire attention aux valeurs morales, et ils n’ont alors confiance en nous, ils nous méprisent, ils m’ont traité d’ ‘intellectuel fatigué.’”

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 252: “Ecoutez, quel que soit le F.L.N., il est là, la révolution algérienne, c’est lui. Il faut le prendre tel qu’il est.”

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 251, emphasis in original: “Cela dit, je suis sûr que ce sont des vérités qu’il *faut* dissimuler quand on fait de la politique. La politique, il faut l’accepter, cela implique une contrainte de taire certaines choses. Autrement on est une ‘belle âme’ et alors on ne fait pas de politique. Regardez pour Melouza. Nous avons fait une erreur...Nous ne sommes pas là pour incarner l’universalité des valeurs. En tout cas, pas publiquement. Ces valeurs nous ont conduits à un choix qu’il faut servir politiquement.”

violence, however ethically intentioned they had been, had committed “an error”: they had “served the enemy.”¹³⁹

If Camus and Sartre represented the two poles of left-leaning French intellectual response to Algerian terrorism, they did not exhaust the range of possibilities. Indeed, in the early years of the war the majority of anti-colonialist, anti-war intellectuals carried out a complicated balancing act, insisting that although the human suffering and degradation caused by *all* extreme violence was ethically relevant and was deplorable, nevertheless additional, explicitly political criteria could be unapologetically taken into consideration when one evaluated the Algerian tragedy. These figures sought, in other words, to preserve a modicum of space for “bearing witness” to suffering on all sides *without*, however, ignoring historical causality or flattening out differences between French and Algerian perpetrators.

Domenach stands as one important, evolving exemplar of this attempt. On a personal level, the FLN’s unapologetic use of terror against civilians bothered him terribly. In January 1957, for example, having perused a copy of the FLN journal *Résistance algérienne*, he grumbled in his diary, “I didn’t expect pacifist sermons. But nevertheless! ... Not a word about terrorism, which might at least pose a question to combatants – we asked it of ourselves during the Resistance.”¹⁴⁰ He was increasingly upset over time by the Algerian nationalists’ propagandizing attempts to compare their reliance on violence to that of the Resistance, protesting that “The leaders of the French Resistance always disavowed atrocities and blind attacks.”¹⁴¹ Even if one accepted that violence might be necessary to achieve certain political goals, could one

¹³⁹ Ibid.: “Or, avec Melouza, nous avons servi l’ennemi.”

¹⁴⁰ *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d’or*, 112 (January 1957): “Certes, je ne m’attendais pas à des prêches pacifiques. Mais quand même!...Pas un mot sur le terrorisme, qui pourrait au moins poser une question à des combattants – nous nous en posions pendant la Résistance.”

¹⁴¹ “Propositions raisonnables,” 782: “Les dirigeants de la Résistance française ont toujours désavoué les atrocités et les attentats aveugles.”

not set certain *limits* on that violence, draw meaningful distinctions between different violent acts (killing armed French combatants versus killing children, for example), and mourn the tragedy of innocent deaths? Could not the FLN agree that certain extreme forms of violence were forever illegitimate in any context, for any reason? “The enemy with whom there will never be negotiations and compromise,” he wrote in *Esprit*, “is all those, whatever their traditions, their religion, the color of their skin, for whom atrocities do not matter.”¹⁴² He was more outraged by FLN leaders’ attempts to *justify* indiscriminate violence than by the inevitable occurrence of atrocities on the ground. In particular, he rejected outright the idea propounded by Fanon (and later implicitly endorsed by Sartre in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*) that FLN terrorism was excusable because every European present in Algeria was a colonist and thus an enemy combatant: according to Domenach this notion was “the terrorism of essences” and was more destructive of human community than actual acts of terrorism.¹⁴³ To combat such “bad philosophy,” Domenach regularly denounced FLN atrocities publicly, in no uncertain language, and wondered in despair at one point if the FLN and the French forces had worked out some kind of secret compromise, “not a compromise of peace, but a collaboration in the extremes of violence.”¹⁴⁴ He reacted with horror to Melouza as “a totality, an act of global extermination, a generic massacre... This collective punishment is situated in the

¹⁴² Jean-Marie Domenach, “Culpabilité collective,” *Esprit* 254 (October 1957), 404: “L’ennemi avec lequel il n’y aura jamais de négociations et de compromis, c’est tous ceux, quels que soient leur costume, leur religion, la couleur de leur peau, pour qui les atrocités n’ont pas d’importance.”

¹⁴³ Jean-Marie Domenach, “Une mauvaise philosophie,” *Esprit* 258 (February 1958), 249: “Pire que le terrorisme du nécessaire, il y a le terrorisme des essences. Il n’est pas la révolution, mais sa parodie. Il prépare les meurtres génériques, la guerre totale. C’est une mauvaise philosophie, indigne d’un peuple en lutte pour sa liberté.” Domenach, responding here to an unsigned article in *El Moudjahid*, does not appear to have been aware that the “mauvais philosophe” in question was in fact Fanon.

¹⁴⁴ “Propositions raisonnables,” 782: “On se demande parfois si une sorte de compromis n’a pas été passé entre le nationalisme algérien et la répression française – non pas un compromis de paix, mais une collaboration dans les extrémités de la violence...”

tradition of mass terror, of Lidice, of Oradour. It is the worst form of modern atrocity.”¹⁴⁵

Such language placed Domenach in the company of numerous anti-colonialist Catholic and secular intellectuals who, rejecting the position of Sartre and Jeanson, insisted that the extreme violence of *both* sides in the conflict was indeed inexcusable and struggled, therefore, with the weight and the limits of their responsibility to “bear witness” to the FLN’s victims’ suffering. However, Domenach remained far indeed from Camus’s position that the ethical implications of French and Algerian violence were identical because “no cause justifies the death of the innocent.” This is because, even as he embraced the turn to “witnessing” from 1957 on, Domenach refused to wholly abandon his earlier “political” approach to the conflict. The effect of the Hungarian uprising was, once again, key here. The Soviet repression had helped to produce Domenach’s newfound resolve to “bear witness” to French state violence regardless of concerns about efficacy. But meanwhile his wholehearted support for the violence of the Hungarian rebels further convinced him that distinctions needed to be drawn – and drawn strongly – between different kinds of violence. The fact that the Hungarians, too, had produced a certain number of suffering “victims” – even objectively innocent ones – obviously did not render them analogous to the Soviet government: distinctions in terms of scope, scale, form, and especially *ends* remained vital to rendering judgment regarding the violence of the various actors in the Budapest uprising and repression.¹⁴⁶ Domenach saw the situation in Algeria in similar

¹⁴⁵ Jean-Marie Domenach, “Les enchères de la terreur,” *Esprit* 252 (July 1957), 104: “Mais Melouza est une totalité, un acte d’extermination globale, un massacre générique. Ce n’est pas un homme qui a été visé, puis un autre, mais la population mâle d’un bourg qui a été exterminée... Cette punition collective se situe dans la ligne de la terreur de masse, de Lydice, d’Oradour. Elle est la pire forme de l’atrocité moderne.”

¹⁴⁶ In the Hungarian case, this was a distinction that even Camus could understand and accept. But he explicitly rejected any analogy to the Algerian situation: “The assimilation of Algeria to Hungary runs up against a historical fact that one can regret but that remains. In Hungary, there were not, installed for

terms: the violence of the French military-and-policing apparatus was quantitatively and qualitatively different from that of the FLN in all sorts of ways. A protest of the Algerian War focused only on “bearing witness” in graphic terms to the suffering undergone by victims of torture could not do justice to these distinctions and would always be subject to easy contestation by those who could offer their own graphic accounts of victims bombed, mutilated, or beheaded by the FLN. Therefore Domenach continued to seek other, more nuanced modalities to “testify” about the war.

He also wrestled with his sense that “bearing witness” to limit-case violence such as torture did not constitute a sufficient response to the French policy with regards to Algerians’ demands for independence. He was pleased that first-person testimonials detailing acts of torture and collective repression appeared to be arousing French public opinion: he hoped such literature would result in a nation “awakened by the horror.”¹⁴⁷ But “indignation,” he wrote pointedly, “is not a political frame of mind. It is good to refuse certain practices, but if one does not blame the system that explains and encourages them, one remains on the edge of truth, and of effectiveness.”¹⁴⁸ By 1957, he had come to believe that this would demand not just “decolonization” but full Algerian independence; the acceptance of such an outcome by the French public and government was therefore the political objective toward which the anti-war movement needed to work. Thus, even as *Esprit* began to publish testimonials on extreme cases

more than a century, more than a million Russians (80% of them modest people) whom the Hungarian insurrection threatened in terms of their lives and their rights, and not only in terms of their privileges. The Hungarian problem is simple: it is necessary to give freedom back to the Hungarians. The Algerian problem is posed differently: it is necessary to assure the freedoms of two populations [*peuplements*]. There is another difference...: not one Russian voice was raised to make justice be rendered to the Hungarian people. Many French voices, for a long time, have been raised in favor of the Muslims of Algeria.” “Lettre à *Encounter*,” June 1957, reproduced in *Essais*, 1878-1879. In an unpublished draft, Camus also noted that the Hungarian cause was “defended, let us add, by men who never practiced civil terrorism towards Moscow.” *Essais*, 1880.

¹⁴⁷ “Démoralisation de la nation,” 578: “réveillée par l’horreur.”

¹⁴⁸ “Propositions raisonnables,” 777: “Mais l’indignation n’est pas un état d’esprit politique. Il est bon de refuser certaines pratiques, mais si l’on ne met pas en cause le système qui les explique et les favorise, on reste au bord de la vérité, comme de l’efficacité.”

of French violence in Algeria and to voice objections to torture in the language of an ethical defense of “the human” from abjection, Domenach also continued to pen attacks on French government policy in Algeria in strictly political, anti-colonialist, pro-independence terms that did *not* refer to the *means* with which the war was being waged. He felt vindicated in this choice at the time of Melouza: “Those for whom French atrocities served as the criterion that made them condemn French policy should [now] condemn Algerian nationalism in the same manner. As for us, we always have criticized France’s Algerian policy as, in itself, inadequate, ineffective, and unjust.”¹⁴⁹ The atrocities would stop, Domenach insisted, when the *war* stopped; energies should therefore be primarily focused not on disseminating knowledge about limit-case violence but on “seeking the end of this war through appropriate political means [*moyens politiques appropriés*].”¹⁵⁰

As the war entered its third year, however, and the anti-war movement could point to no concrete accomplishments, the problem remained: what precisely were these “appropriate political means”? Did they involve an expansion of the project of “bearing witness” to torture, or a different approach altogether? Did they require that anti-colonialists themselves take up arms to help bring the battle for Algerian independence to a close? The various ways in which the anti-colonialist intellectual Left sought to respond to this question during the latter half of the war, as the violence of the conflict seeped into the metropole, is the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁴⁹ “Les enchères de la terreur,” 105: “Ceux pour qui les atrocités françaises sont le critère qui leur fait condamner la politique française devraient condamner le nationalisme algérien de la même manière. Pour notre part, nous avons toujours critiqué la politique algérienne de la France comme inadéquate, inefficace et injuste en elle-même.”

¹⁵⁰ “Propositions raisonnables,” 779: “de rechercher la fin de cette guerre par des moyens politiques appropriés.”

Before moving on, however, we should underline some conclusions concerning the early period of the war. Annette Wieviorka has linked the proliferation of “witnessing” discourses in France beginning in the 1960s (“the era of the witness”) to shifting memory of the Holocaust, prompted in part by the Eichmann trial and in part, “banally enough,” by the simple passage of time.¹⁵¹ We pointed out in Chapter Four that although Wieviorka’s model of Holocaust memory is persuasive, a consideration of David Rousset’s project might serve to temper her strict before-and-after chronology regarding the “witnessing” of concentration camp experience. Here, we will add that our examination of the explosion of “*témoignage*” to torture and atrocity within the non-communist Left during the early years of the Algerian War challenges still further the notion that “the witness” did not emerge as a privileged figure in French discourses on atrocity until the sixties. Moreover the proliferation of texts such as *Lieutenant en Algérie*, “La Paix des Nementchas,” *L’Affaire Audin*, “Une victoire,” *Djamila Boupacha*, and so on prompt questions about whether the realities of the Algerian War, in addition to memories of the Holocaust, first sparked the “era of the witness.” This point is related to the case that Michael Rothberg makes in his important *Multidirectional Memory*, although he accepts Wieviorka’s periodization and focuses on the last two years of the Algerian War, 1961-1962.¹⁵² Wieviorka, of course, is primarily concerned with the witness-as-survivor who testifies to his *own* experience of limit-case suffering; *l’homme-mémoire*, “testifying that the past happened and that it is always present.”¹⁵³ And indeed it appears that the figure of “*le témoin*” has largely taken on this meaning in recent decades. But, as we have seen in

¹⁵¹ Annette Wieviorka, *L’Ère du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998), 86.

¹⁵² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹⁵³ Wieviorka, *L’Ère du témoin*, 118: “l’émergence du témoin, homme-mémoire attestant que le passé fut et qu’il est toujours présent.”

examining sources from the wartime *Témoignage chrétien* to *Djamila Boupacha*, in the 1940s and 1950s the concept of “*témoignage*” was a fluid one that could apply equally to a victim’s own story, the account of an eyewitness, the “expert testimony” of an outsider, or the words of a writer who wished to “bear witness” in the eyes of God and man to his own moral stance. In the next chapter we will see that towards the end of the war its definition expanded still more broadly, to encompass forms of performative action that were not speech acts.

If the Algerian War offered a privileged occasion for the flourishing of many forms of “*témoignage*,” however, they also paradoxically offered continual complications for those who sought to bear witness. In the midst of World War II, the authors of the clandestine *Témoignage chrétien* had referred to the resisters and Jews throughout Europe for whom their publication bore witness as heroes and martyrs, Christ-like in their suffering. When he issued his “Appeal” to bear witness against the gulag, Rousset had depicted its inmates as courageous, unmanned innocents. In his 1957 *Pour Djamila Bouhired*, in contrast, Georges Arnaud had to admit that the torture victim to whose suffering he bore witness was also a terrorist who had herself caused suffering aplenty. Not only did the FLN’s revolutionary violence prevent metropolitan anti-war activists from easily casting those on the torturers’ table as “pure” victims, but it also posed difficult moral problems of its own. Should supporters of Algerian independence condemn Melouza or keep silent? If it was ethically imperative to “bear witness” to the human suffering caused by the French military, then what of the suffering caused by the Algerians? Did the tragedy unfolding in Algeria provide further evidence of the unacceptable horror of all violence, or did the FLN’s war of independence, like the French Resistance, once again demand recognition that certain political ends justified even acts that caused

innocents to suffer? Figures like Mauriac, Camus, Sartre, and Domenach offered entirely different answers to these questions. To all of them, though, it had become painfully clear by 1958 that “bearing witness” to violence – that of the French, that of the FLN, that of both sides at once – would not put a stop to the war and its horrors.

CHAPTER SEVEN – The War Comes Home: Jean-Paul Sartre and the French Intellectual Left, 1958-1962

In early 1958, metropolitan French conversations about violence, terror, and the limits of justification in the Algerian War were still, in a certain sense, abstract: they dealt with a distant reality, in a territory many people in the hexagon had never even seen. In the spring of that year, however, much of this abstraction was removed: as the Fourth Republic collapsed in the wake of a military coup in Algiers, the gangrenous violence of the Algerian War was “brought home” to the metropole, raising fears of domestic political violence and generalized bloodshed that had lain dormant in the country since the last gasp of the 1948 strike wave. General de Gaulle took power in murky democratic circumstances, the military appeared to assume a permanently menacing presence in politics, the Paris police force adopted torture as an “interrogation procedure” against Muslim “suspects,” bombing campaigns by both the FLN and extremist defenders of French Algeria terrorized the hexagon, and the war dragged on without end in sight.

In this context, the intellectual anti-war movement traced in the last chapter experienced a crisis. The events of May 1958 and de Gaulle’s accession to power, in particular, left anti-colonialists with a despairing sense of impotency: despite their years of work to “bear witness” to military atrocities, the French public accepted with equanimity the installation of a regime desired by the same military leaders who had institutionalized torture. Even those activists who held out hope that de Gaulle would not be beholden to Algiers were dismayed at the Left’s display of weakness and disorganization in the face of mounting threats. Activist intellectuals here saw “proof” that their means of protest against the war up to that point – means concentrated on

public-sphere discourse, the dissemination of information, and “testimony” to the horror of torture – had been inadequate.

Thus after May 1958 conversations within the increasingly embittered and radicalized anti-war movement migrated, in large part, from the moral problems posed by FLN terrorism to the question of whether French leftists themselves should be willing to use violence to help the FLN end the war. What circumstances could justify such a choice? What ends? What were the limits to bearing witness peacefully – and the limits to revolutionary violence? In treating these problems – which in crucial ways once again posed to French intellectuals the question of what the French Resistance had been and what its legacy ought to mean – figures like Sartre, Jeanson, Domenach, Paul Ricoeur, Jean Daniel, and Edgar Morin continued a conversation that had begun under the Occupation and had still not been put to rest. This concluding chapter thus turns to the tragic last years of the Algerian War – and, in an important sense, of the era in French history that opened at the Liberation.

The chapter is constructed, in the broadest terms, as an extended “double contextualization” of the most famous piece of writing by a French intellectual from the Algerian War years, Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Preface” to Frantz Fanon’s 1961 *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). The “Preface” is regularly described by intellectual historians as “the most violent text [Sartre] ever wrote.”¹ While this is debatable, the text does constitute one of the more remarkable and remarked-upon justifications for political violence produced in the twentieth century. Across the disciplines of philosophy, intellectual history, and literature, numerous scholars have offered critical readings of the “Preface.” Some of these works place the piece in the framework of Sartre’s lifelong engagement with themes of race, colonialism, and post-

¹ David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Postwar France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 124.

coloniality.² Others consider the “Preface” as an addendum to Sartre’s 1960 *Critique de la raison dialectique* and situate it either within his lifelong development as a philosopher or in a still broader French philosophical trajectory, describing how in the 1960s and 1970s thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Claude Lévi-Strauss offered fundamental critiques of Sartre’s conception of ethical engagement with the Other.³ Here, my task is different. First, I seek to situate Sartre’s “Preface” in the extraordinary circumstances of the last phase of the Algerian War, underlining the ways in which the conflict provoked an evolution in Sartre’s political and ethical thought – and, more specifically, produced the agenda of the “Preface.” This is not a project of contextualization-as-absolution, but rather an attempt to demonstrate that the “Preface,” with all its excesses, is more “legible” when read as an intervention in the excessively violent, and violently excessive, context of metropolitan French political life in the last stages of the Algerian War.

Second, I place Sartre’s writings on political violence from 1958 to 1962 back in dialogue with those produced by other French intellectuals in the period – specifically, those who, like him, were profoundly *engagés* in the struggle against the war and thus, also like him, were compelled to approach the problem of violence in concrete terms of the possibilities and limits of their own political activism. I focus on those people, in other words, whose agreements and disagreements with Sartre were

² For work in this vein that especially emphasizes the problematic of violence, see Judith Butler, “Violence, Non-violence: Sartre on Fanon,” in Jonathan Judaken, ed., *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Hans van Stralen, “Des mots et des armes. Sartre et la question (post)coloniale à l’époque de l’existentialisme,” *Orbis Litterarum* 64.4 (2009): 283-299; N. de Warren, “The Apocalypse of Hope: Political Violence in Sartre and Fanon,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 27.1 (2006): 25-60; Noureddine Lamouchi, *Jean-Paul Sartre et le Tiers-monde: rhétorique d’un discours anti-colonialiste* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

³ See James Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 227-238; Ronald Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Ronald Aronson *Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 209-225; Thomas Anderson, *Sartre’s Two Ethics: From Authentic to Integral Humanity* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1993).

expressed primarily in *political* and *practical* language – usually concerning actual initiatives within the small world of intellectual anti-war activism – rather than primarily in ontological or theoretical terms. Many of these debates burst into the open around 1960, as intellectuals disagreed over the acceptability of philosopher Francis Jeanson’s clandestine project of providing direct assistance to the FLN. If Sartre vehemently supported Jeanson, his old protégé, many did not. Focusing on Jean-Marie Domenach (who was strongly influenced by philosopher Paul Ricoeur), while also discussing secular intellectuals such as Edgar Morin and Jean Daniel, I show how isolated Sartre was in his extreme advocacy of violence even among the most committed members of the anti-colonialist intellectual Left. Even as the violence of the war and in particular that of far-right supporters of French Algeria radicalized the intellectual Left, many intellectuals struggled to maintain the project of resisting the war’s violence by bearing witness against it. These figures were no less anti-colonialist than Sartre and supported Algerian independence no less wholeheartedly than he did; moreover they shared his sense that “useless speeches” were an insufficient response to ongoing injustice and that the project of “testifying” to the fact of torture had produced limited political results.⁴ But rather than therefore embracing the “pure dialectic of violence,” they instead sought to *expand* the concept of “bearing witness,” redefining *témoignage* as a performative enactment of one’s rejection of unjust laws, a set of illegal symbolic acts that demonstrated publicly a stance of absolute solidarity with victims.⁵

⁴ K.S. Karol [Karol Kewes], “Un entretien avec J.-P. Sartre. Jeunesse et guerre d’Algérie,” *Vérité-Liberté* 3 (July-August 1960).

⁵ Domenach, response to Albert Memmi, “La gauche française et le problème nord-africain,” *Arguments* 10 (November 1958), 22: “Lorsque j’ai entendu, à Tunis, il y a six mois, un chef F.L.N. me dire que le seul Français qui avait compris l’Algérie était Soustelle, comment ne me serais-je pas posé des questions? – Comment ne les aurais-je pas posées (car je ne crois pas qu’*Esprit* ait rien voilé de nos certitudes et de nos doutes) – sur un mouvement que certains de ses chefs enfermaient dans une pure dialectique de violence?”

If none of the figures who remained committed to “testimony” as opposed to violent renewal possessed the cultural influence and stature of Sartre – and if, admittedly, their writings lacked the literary qualities of Sartre’s instantly classic texts from the period – nevertheless they provided a powerful counterweight to the *Temps modernes* team within the activist Left. Certainly Sartre himself did not dismiss these steadfast advocates of dialogue, democratic exchange, and “*témoignage*” but rather engaged them in furious dialogue. In my judgment is not fruitful to retrospectively evaluate these angry exchanges in terms of who was, in David Carroll’s words, “more right about Algeria”: indeed one might argue, against Carroll, that the question is moot, given the overall ineffectiveness of the intellectual Left in influencing either the course or the outcome of the war.⁶ For most anti-colonialist French intellectuals, despite the eventual achievement of Algerian independence, their attempts to intervene in the conflict would later remain “*un souvenir très triste*,” not a triumphant legacy.⁷ But reading in all its back-and-forth complexity the debate between Sartre and his supporters against the advocates of non-violent “*témoignage*” allows us to see that by the early 1960s, in contrast to where our story began, a multiplicity of approaches to violence were now available to those intellectuals who claimed an identity within “*la gauche*.”

Around nine o’clock on the evening of May 13, 1958, urgent “Flash Flash” bulletins from Agence France-Presse began going out over the radio in metropolitan France. They announced that after a day of protest that had turned into riots in the streets of

⁶ David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 113.

⁷ This is the title of Jean-Marie Domenach’s contribution to Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, eds., *La guerre d’Algérie et les intellectuels français* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1992), 353-358.

Algiers,⁸ the colonial administration building there had been taken over by a group of French generals and colonels, and further that this group had declared a Committee of Public Safety headed by General Massu, the commander of the Tenth Parachutist Division and the controversial leader of the Battle of Algiers.⁹ The Committee seized control of Radio-Algérie, declared their mission to be “the maintenance of Algeria as an integral part of France,” and called urgently for the creation of a sister Committee in Paris.¹⁰ This last demand was intended – and understood – as an ultimatum against the investiture of Christian democrat Pierre Pflimlin (MRP) as Prime Minister and the negotiated withdrawal that *pieds-noirs* political activists and French military leaders in Algiers feared his ministry would inaugurate. The National Assembly nevertheless held firm and invested Pflimlin during the night of May 13-14, with the Communists abstaining from their customary “no” vote in a show of republican solidarity against the mutinous generals. However, the chain of events that would lead over the next three weeks to the collapse of France’s Fourth Republic and the return of General de Gaulle to power had been set in motion.¹¹

⁸ The riots began as a demonstration against the gruesome killings of three French soldiers by the FLN in the preceding days. It appears that the event devolved into something more unruly only late in the day, and only on the part of certain participants – most notably, right-wing student groups.

⁹ The Committee was composed of some civilians as well as Massu, General Salan, and the colonels Ducasse, Trinquier, and Thomazo. Massu was already famous in France for leading the Battle of Algiers.

¹⁰ Marc Ferro, ed., *Le 13 Mai 1958* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1985), 15.

¹¹ Of course the causes of death of the Fourth Republic must be traced back much further than May 13: in earlier chapters we have already discussed some of the long-term vulnerabilities of the regime, in particular its ambiguous position vis-à-vis extralegal violence, and have stressed the unstable nature of “legitimacy” in the postwar polity. Historians have highlighted numerous other factors that laid the regime open to threat: some point to the 1946 Constitution whose concentration of power in the legislative branch virtually guaranteed immobility and gridlock amongst the parties once *tripartisme* failed; others argue that the ejection of the Communists in 1947 and the alienation of the working class from the remaining parties of government made the Republic ungovernable in the long term (see Chapter Two); still others claim that “in a sense, the Republic died at Dien Bien Phu, though its death certificate was not signed until four years later.” James F. MacMillan, *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society, 1898-1991* (London: Arnold, 1992), 161. A different set of scholars, meanwhile, have examined the internal factors that compelled Army leaders to participate in the May 13 challenge to the regime, outlining the ways in which the exigencies of the Indochinese and Algerian conflicts put in motion an inexorable dynamic by which the Army – that supposed “*grande muette*” – became a

The military leaders involved in the *coup de force*, in large part veterans of the humiliating defeat in Indochina four years earlier, had by 1958 become passionate partisans of *Algérie française*, their interests closely aligned with those of the far-right “ultras” in the *pied-noir* community. Believing that General de Gaulle supported their commitment and moreover possessed the personal authority to impose this vision on the metropole, they now advocated for his return to power.¹² On May 15, General Salan, who had been hastily granted authority over Algiers by Pflimlin’s government in order to provide legal cover to the embarrassingly irregular state of affairs, betrayed the government and began to lead the Algiers crowd in defiant chants of “*De Gaulle au pouvoir!*” Generals Massu and Ély stated that only de Gaulle’s investiture could preserve the unity of the army. The same day, de Gaulle himself, after twelve years on the sidelines of French politics (“in the desert,” as it is often put) formally declared that he stood “ready to assume the powers of the Republic.” On May 19 he

powerful and vocal political actor with interests aligned with those of the *pieds-noirs* “ultras.” See the fine essays collected in Jean-Paul Thomas, Gilles le Béguec, and Bernard Lachaise, eds., *Mai 1958: le retour du général de Gaulle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Brigitte Gaiti, “Les incertitudes des origines. Mai 58 et la V^e République,” *Politix* 47 (1999): 27-62; John Steward Ambler, *The French Army in Politics, 1945-1962* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966); Christophe Nick, *Résurrection: naissance de la V^e République: un coup d’État démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Odile Rudelle, *Mai 58: De Gaulle et la République* (Paris: Plon, 1988) ; Raoul Girardet, ed., *La Crise Militaire Française, 1945-1962. Aspects sociologiques et Idéologiques* (Paris: A. Colin, 1964) ; Jacques Julliard, “*Naissance et mort*”: *La IV^e République (1947-1958)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1968) ; Paul-Marie de La Gorce, *La République et son armée* (Paris: Fayard, 1963). Whether they examine the role of the regime or the military – or of the third major actor in the drama of May, General de Gaulle – scholars generally agree that the Fourth Republic should be thought of as a casualty at least in part of the Algerian War: although economic problems (in particular the decline of the franc) certainly played a role in discrediting the regime, its fall was intimately linked to the conflict, particularly dating from Mollet’s 1956 collapse in the face of “ultra” demands and the subsequent unprecedented expansion of military special powers during the long Battle of Algiers. (However, for a spirited argument that the crisis simply marked the resolution of a decades-long crisis in the French party system, see Gilles Richard’s “Introduction” to *Les Partis et la République. La récomposition du système partisan, 1956-1967*, eds. Gilles Richard and Jacqueline Saintclivier [Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008], 9-18).

¹² Steadfast supporters of the General such as Léon Delbecque were also on the spot in Algiers and helped to persuade the *factieux* that de Gaulle presented the solution to the impasse.

put himself “at the disposal of the country.”¹³ Superbly elusive, he avoided directly condemning the Algiers *factieux* but did not dirty his own hands with any illegal activity.

De Gaulle played the game extraordinarily well. In the midst of rumors that paratroopers were preparing to descend on Paris and stage a genuine *coup d'état* – a threat that appeared realistic at the time, particularly after a handful of paratroopers landed in Ajaccio on May 24 and brought Corsica under a parodic version of military rule – the prospect of allowing de Gaulle to form a government offered the leaders of the Fourth Republic a way out of the Paris-Algiers standoff that would appease the military and the *pieds-noirs* while preserving republican legality. De Gaulle made clear that he would not simply take power within the extant system but would demand a new Constitution and considerable reforms to the organization of state authority. But even to Fourth Republic politicians not already active partisans of a Gaullist outcome (some had been privately agitating for his return for many months) this seemed a reasonable price to pay given the dearth of other options: Salan's early outmaneuvering of Pflimlin hobbled the government in its subsequent attempts to compel the *factieux* to stand down. So, too, did the fact that the Socialists and the MRP were viscerally opposed to a Popular Front response, since that would have required rallying the Communists to a unity government in the name of Republican Defense. As key statesmen such as Pinay, Mollet, and Auriol defected to de Gaulle, a defeated Pflimlin offered his resignation on May 28; on June 1 de Gaulle was invested as the final premier of the Fourth Republic and promptly set to work drafting a new

¹³ Quoted in Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol.2, *L'expansion et l'impuissance (1952-1958)* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 154: “Aujourd’hui, devant les épreuves qui montent de nouveau vers [le pays], qu’il sache que je me tiens prêt à assumer les pouvoirs de la République... À présent, je vais rentrer dans mon village et m’y tiendrai à la disposition du pays.”

Constitution for the regime that would replace it.¹⁴ This Constitution was submitted to a national referendum on September 28 – universally understood as a referendum on de Gaulle himself¹⁵ – and accepted by a crushing 79% majority.

Three aspects of this sequence of events contributed to the radicalization of intellectuals in the anti-war movement. First they were outraged by the intrusion of the military – that supposed “*grande muette*” – into politics. It was unbearable that General Massu, notorious among opponents of the war for his approbation of torture during the Battle of Algiers, had imposed his will on civilian leaders and helped engineer the collapse not only of a government but of a constitutional Republic. This is not to suggest that anti-war activists were *surprised* by the *coup de force*: many believed by late 1957 or early 1958 that civilian supremacy over the military was disintegrating. The scholar and ex-colonial administrator Robert Delavignette warned in 1957 that the war, by facilitating the rise of unbounded military authority and by drawing state agents into systematically covering for illegal violence like torture, was not only undermining the regime but was producing “a decomposition of the State.”¹⁶

¹⁴ De Gaulle’s investiture was opposed by a significant portion of the Assembly: he garnered 329 votes, with 224 voting “nay.” But Jean-Marie Domenach was correct that the “nos” on May 28 included many SFIO deputies who were by-and-large content with the Gaullist outcome, which they understood had sufficient votes to pass, and were engaged in political symbolism. (77 Socialists voted for de Gaulle’s investiture, 74 against.) “Journal d’une débacle” *Esprit* 263 July-August 1958, 126: “Les socialistes s’entêtent. Ils ne veulent pas laisser aux communistes le bénéfice de la résistance. Refusant le front populaire, ils se condamnaient à de Gaulle, dont ils font semblant de ne plus vouloir... Puisqu’aucune défense n’est plus possible, alors ne donnons pas le spectacle du faux courage civique, celui qui s’exerce quand il n’y a plus de danger – celui de ces députés qui, après avoir refusé les moyens de la résistance, s’apprêtent à voter contre de Gaulle, parce qu’ils se savent déjà protégés par lui et des parachutistes et du Front populaire, faisant de ce vote historique la dernière et la plus misérable de leurs hypocrisies.”

¹⁵ Surveys earlier in September showed that although only 15.5% of citizens had read the text of the proposed Constitution, a majority had already decided to vote in favor of it; as Serge Bernstein observes, “l’ampleur de l’approbation et la minceur du désaveu ne s’expliquent pas par les vertus ou les vices supposés du texte soumis à referendum.” *La France de l’expansion*, vol. 1, *La République gaullienne (1958-1969)* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 23.

¹⁶ “Ce qui m’a paru le plus grave, ce n’est pas seulement les atrocités, mais le fait que l’État se détruit lui-même. Nous assistons en Algérie à une décomposition de l’État et cette gangrène menace le pays même.” Quoted in Rioux, *La France de la quatrième République*, vol. 2, 128.

France's savage February 8, 1958 bombing of the Tunisian village of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef (ordered by General Salan) only helped to confirm to the community of anti-colonialists the degree to which the Fourth Republic had been morally bankrupted by the war, as civilian decision-making was held hostage to military imperatives. In his preface to *L'Affaire Audin*, Pierre Vidal-Naquet's painstaking reconstruction of the French military's torture and assassination of a young Algerian mathematician, Sorbonne professor Laurent Schwartz warned of the "decadence" of the French state and "the dangers of the disappearance of democracy in France;" soon, Schwartz insisted, the war's gangrene would spill across the sea and "the Mediterranean will have ceased to be a rampart in the shelter of which the French of the metropole can still judge the Audin Affair as spectators." The text was published on May 12, 1958, mere hours before the May 13 crisis began.¹⁷ Thus longtime activist opponents of the war greeted May 13 as a grim fatality. "The taking of power by General Massu in Algiers is the logical consequence of the [Algeria] policy pursued for the last two and a half years," André Philip (recently excluded from the SFIO) wrote.¹⁸ "The *coup d'État* of General Massu is the culmination of a policy of ignorance, violence, procrastination, and weakness," charged Gilles Martinet.¹⁹ Claude Bourdet added,

¹⁷ Laurent Schwartz, "Préface" to Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L'Affaire Audin, 1957-1978* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1989), 56; 57-58: "Il est temps d'arrêter ce processus de décadence. L'affaire Audin aura été un moment de la prise de conscience de l'opinion publique devant les dangers d'une disparition de la démocratie en France... Mais, le jour où la Méditerranée aura cessé d'être le rempart à l'abri duquel les Français de la métropole peuvent encore juger l'affaire Audin en spectateurs, le jour où nous en serons tous devenus les acteurs volontaires forcés, ce jour-là, il sera trop tard pour parler. Nous n'aurons plus la parole."

¹⁸ André Philip in "Tous unis contre le coup d'État," *France-Observateur* 15 May 1958: "La prise du pouvoir par le général Massu à Alger est la conséquence logique de la politique poursuivie depuis deux ans et demi."

¹⁹ Gilles Martinet, sidebar to "Comment en est-on arrivé là?" *France-Observateur* 15 May 1958: "La coup d'État du général Massu est l'aboutissement d'une politique d'ignorance, de violence, d'atermoiement et de faiblesse."

“The Algerian War has now shown where it drives its protagonists. From torture to the *coup d’État*: the logic is meticulous.”²⁰

Yet despite all the dark prognostications of the preceding year, the events of May, in which the might of the army was wielded to depose a government and (in the slightly longer term) a democratically legitimized regime, still shocked anti-war activists profoundly. Jean-Marie Domenach, for example, wrote in his journal on 17 May that, for months, “I had not stopped repeating to my comrades that the French of Algeria, after the first capitulation of February 6, 1956, would demand another, that the army of Algeria, poorly led, forging a wartime mentality for itself, would impose the law of war on a hesitant, dissolute power.” Yet nothing had actually prepared him for the midnight telephone call from Claude Bourdet announcing, “Massu has taken power in Algeria.” He reflected, “It is startling every time to feel how much one can be surprised by the most expected, the most predicted event....The event always maintains its supremacy; it alone, in the moment, dictates its law.”²¹ That intellectuals had foreseen the *coup* did not prevent them from reacting with shock and outrage to the military’s terrifying success in imposing its will.

The second facet of the crisis that contributed to a radicalization of the anti-war movement was the devastating “failure” of both the organized Left and the French *peuple* to intervene in defense of the Republic. In the immediate aftermath of May 13,

²⁰ Claude Bourdet, “De la torture au coup d’État,” *France-Observateur* 15 May 1958: “La guerre d’Algérie a montré maintenant où elle conduit ses protagonistes. De la torture au coup d’État: la logique est rigoureuse.”

²¹ Jean-Marie Domenach, *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d’or. Journal d’un réfractaire (1944-1977)* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 144: “Je n’avais cessé de répéter à mes camarades que les Français d’Algérie, après la première capitulation du 6 février 1956, en exigeraient une autre, que l’armée d’Algérie, mal conduite, se forgeant une mentalité de guerre, imposerait la loi de la guerre à une pouvoir hésitant, dissolu;” “Il est à chaque fois étonnant de sentir à quel point on peut être surpris par l’événement le plus attendu, le plus prévu...L’événement garde toujours la suprématie, lui seul, dans l’instant, dicte sa loi.” Historians, too, have reflected on the *événementiel* character of May: Rioux, for example, writes, “Le 13 mai est un événement au sens propre, imprévisible et décevant, décisif et pourtant trouble.” *La France de la quatrième République*, vol. 2, 150.

if anti-colonialist intellectuals were enraged they were also, in a sense, exalted: at last, here was irrefutable proof that the Algerian War was rotting French democracy and producing unconscionable abuses of military power – proof that the French public and the French government could not ignore. Domenach, for example, found relief from the struggle of the past two and a half years at the moment of crisis: “At a certain moment, politics must put its affairs in order with regards to reality. We are present for this readjustment. This is why, even through the mad acts of the Algiers fascists, something respectable is appearing, which is *reality*...”²² Meanwhile a bombastic, hopeful Sartre predicted on May 15 that “The shock will wake the sleeping French ...[T]he whole history of the Algerian War – we see it in the true light of day, we begin to understand that the dictatorship of Algiers is exerted, by intermediaries, through our straw-man governments. Now the *Algérois* want to play the dictators themselves; let them try: they will find the French people against them.”²³

These early high hopes, however unrealistic, meant that anti-war intellectuals were severely disappointed by the absence of mass democratic mobilization in May 1958, as the government effectively ceded to the demands of the *factieux*. Why had the parties and *syndicats* of the Left not imposed a Popular Front to stand down the military? Why had the French people – and in particular the French working class – not taken to the streets to defend the Republic, to protect democracy, to condemn the unprecedented intrusion into France’s political life of a military already responsible

²² *Beaucoup de gueule*, 148, emphasis in original: “[À] un certain moment, la politique doit mettre ses affaires en ordre à l’égard de la réalité. Nous assistons à ce réajustement. C’est pourquoi, à travers même les folies des fascistes d’Alger, quelque chose de respectable apparaît, qui est *la réalité*.”

²³ Sartre in “Tous unis”: “Tant mieux s’il [le fascisme] se présente la gueule découverte; tant mieux si le Führer d’Alger s’est acquis dans le monde entier la réputation de bourreau la plus solide: le choc réveillera les Français endormis...[T]oute l’histoire de la guerre d’Algérie, nous la voyons sous son jour véritable, nous commençons à comprendre que la dictature d’Alger s’exerçait par personnes interposées, à travers nos gouvernements de paille. À présent, les Algérois veulent jouer les dictateurs par eux-mêmes: qu’ils essaient: ils trouveront le peuple français contre eux. ”

for outrageous war crimes? Novelist François Nourissier, writing in *La Nef*, decried the “all-powerful *distraction* of the French...these sleeping, silent cities and villages.” The Algerian *colon* population, he wrote, at least “have more than we do between their legs.”²⁴ The Christian socialist Jean Boissonnat bemoaned “the calm – indeed, the indifference – of metropolitan public opinion,” and concluded that prosperity had deprived the people of their “revolutionary soul.”²⁵ Michel Winock, then a Sorbonne student, described himself as wild with anger against the “cowardice” of the people; he sulkily sought comfort in rereading a favorite Emmanuel Mounier passage: “The mass of men prefer servitude in security to risk in freedom...”²⁶ Resistance veteran Françoise Seligmann concluded that the “cult of comfort” had permanently rotted the political will and instincts of the French masses.²⁷

Such responses ignored – or willfully elided – the structural and ideological factors that in fact shaped the response of the populace to the events of May.²⁸ In broad terms, for even those most reluctant to turn to de Gaulle, a fierce aversion to the prospect of civil conflict erupting once again in the hexagon decisively trumped any discomfort with the fact that de Gaulle was rising to power on the backs of the *factieux* in Algiers. In other words, any indignation that the military was using the threat of violence to challenge civilian authority was outweighed by fear – a fear informed not only by Cold War fantasy but by France’s recent history – of what that violence might

²⁴ François Nourissier, “La France distraite,” *La Nef* 19 (July-August 1958), 22-23; emphasis in original: “La toute-puissante *distraction* française;” “Si le problème, c’est ‘avoir ou pas,’ les Algérois en ont plus que nous entre les jambes.”

²⁵ Jean Boissonnat, “La Crise et l’opinion,” *La Croix*, 30 May 1958: “Un peuple qui boit du vin à 150 francs le litre, mange du bifteck à 1000 francs le kilo et brûle de l’essence à 100 francs le litre, ne se sent pas un âme révolutionnaire.”

²⁶ Michel Winock, *La République se meurt, 1956-1958* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 228.

²⁷ Françoise Seligmann, *Liberté, quand tu nous tiens...*, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 141.

²⁸ Interestingly, much historiography uncritically reproduces the narrative of a “failure” of popular response in May 1958: Christophe Nick’s *Resurrection*, for example, refers to the broader public on only three out of its more than 700 pages, in a section titled “The French Remain Passive” (475).

look like in flesh and blood, and what its final result might be.²⁹ The public was not indifferent to the crisis nor entirely passive in the face of it, as intellectuals bitterly charged. Rather, in a context of unremitting uncertainty, limited reliable information, and rampant rumor (the paratroopers were about the land! the paratroopers had landed already! the government had collapsed!),³⁰ French people evinced a passionate interest in and concern about the events transpiring in Algiers – in particular, as Philippe Buton puts it, “a strong anxiety in the face of the risk of civil war.”³¹ Not only did newspaper and transistor radio sales spike, but frantic runs on *épiceries* produced queues that recalled the bad old days of rationing. Mass urban mobilizations and industrial strikes in defense of the Republic did indeed fail for the most part, but this was inevitable given the fierce divisions between communist and non-communist party and syndical leaders: non-communist *syndicats* were paralyzed by their unwillingness to make any moves that might redound to the benefit of the PCF and therefore were reasonably content to permit parliamentary elites to adopt a Gaullist solution.³² Through turning to de Gaulle, the headline of the leading Catholic labor

²⁹ Such fears were also promoted by Fourth Republic Socialists eager to explain their capitulation to the Gaullist solution: Jules Moch, for example, claimed that “Prague in 1948 haunted my sleepless nights, as did Madrid in 1936. In these conditions, to maintain order without spilling blood seemed almost a gamble ... I thought deep down that the tragic adventure of an immediate civil war could not be risked, neither morally nor technically.” “Le témoignage de Jules Moch,” *La Nef* 19 (Jul-August 1958).

³⁰ Both the genuine ambiguity of the situation and a government clamp-down on information ensured that in the early days, confusion reigned in the metropole. Popular newspaper accounts at times suggested that the military leaders had merely taken necessary action to reign in an unruly (and, many newspapers suggested, quite justifiably indignant) *colon* crowd, and used phrases like “a confused political situation” and “the powers that have *accidentally* been confided” in the generals. (Alger: situation politique confuse,” *France-Soir*, 15 May 1958; Robert Bony, “L’avertissement,” *L’Aurore*, 14 May 1958, my emphasis.) Multiple stories emphasized the “positive” side of the coup: the so-called “fraternization” it induced between *colons* and Muslims in the streets of Algiers. The politically immature Muslims, it was said, were reassured at the prospect of strong-man military rule.

³¹ Philippe Buton, “L’opinion publique en 1958 selon les rapports des préfets,” in La Fondation Charles de Gaulle, ed., *L’Avènement de la V^e République: entre nouveauté et tradition* (Paris: A. Colin, 1999), 214.

³² On those protests that did take place, see Danielle Tartakowsky, *Les Manifestations de rue en France, 1918-1968* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997), 649-655; Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le Pouvoir est dans la rue: crises politiques et manifestations en France* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), 135-148.

union's newspaper trumpeted in early June of 1958, "The worst has been avoided!"³³ The majority of the French populace agreed, accepting the ironic assurance given by de Gaulle – the "man of 18 June 1940," who had already "saved" France once before – that he did not intend to embark on a career as a dictator at the age of sixty-seven.³⁴ Brought to power by strictly legal channels, without a single drop of blood being spilled, France's First Resister "enjoyed both legality and legitimacy;" he could hardly be seen as a plotter against the Republic.³⁵

Working-class alienation from the unloved Fourth Republic, an alienation cemented in 1947 and 1948 which bordered on a view of the regime as illegitimate (see Chapter Two), played a role as well in the outcome of the crisis. As Raymond Aron put it in his perspicacious assessment, "The Republic which was restored in 1944 had not regained the legitimacy of consent."³⁶ Thus film critic Raymond Borde reported that when he questioned communist factory militants in Toulouse about why they had not gone on strike, they explained to him, "We didn't want to defend this Republic [*cette République-là*]." He responded that there was an important difference between the concrete instantiation of the Fourth Republic and the still-defensible principles of republicanism; they retorted, sarcastically, "So go explain that to the guys!"³⁷ This skepticism was warranted: as Buton argues, "Above all...the Republic

³³ "Après les journées qui ont ébranlé la nation, le PIRE a été EVITÉ," *Syndicalisme* 679 (June 1958), 1.

³⁴ On the inability of de Gaulle's opponents to associate him convincingly with fascism, see Tartakowsky, *Le Pouvoir est dans la rue*, 143; Buton "L'opinion publique en 1958," 215.

³⁵ Tartakowsky, *Le Pouvoir est dans la rue*, 147.

³⁶ Raymond Aron, *France Steadfast and Changing: The Fourth to the Fifth Republic*, transl. J. Irwin and Luigi Einaudi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 117.

³⁷ Borde, "Le '13 mai' vu de province," *Les Temps modernes* 149 (July 1958), 199: " 'On n'a pas eu envie de défendre cette République-là.' République, mot ambigu. Bien sûr, il faut distinguer la république en soi et l'usage que Gaillard ou Lacoste viennent de faire d'elle: 'Mais va donc l'expliquer aux gars.'"

was little defended in 1958 because the Republic was not threatened,” only the *Fourth Republic*.³⁸

These sorts of considerations made the majority willing – indeed, eager and relieved – to accept de Gaulle’s offer of a way out of the impasse between the impotent regime and the menacing coterie in Algiers. This popular acceptance of de Gaulle was not evidence of a long-simmering Gaullism: the General had not been a serious political force in France for over a decade. In the most recent national elections (1956), his supporters had garnered a negligible 4.4% of votes. Nor was his appeal *after* the events of May evidence of an irrational collapse into messianism or hero-worship: the French remained cool-headed about de Gaulle, with only 44% of those polled in June, for example, expecting that he would sort out France’s economic problems.³⁹ An astonishing 83%, however, were confident that he could make the military obey – that is, could reestablish civilian authority, restore the stability of the French state, and stave off a situation that would end in bloodshed in the metropole or civil war. *This* was the crucial factor, the one that led 79% of voters to support him in the September national referendum.⁴⁰

For the anti-war movement, however, the referendum’s lopsided result represented a devastating verdict on the effectiveness of their own activism over the previous years. This brings us to the third facet of the crisis that spurred the movement’s subsequent radicalization: the return of General de Gaulle. This requires a bit of explanation, for intellectuals did not possess a strong existing enmity for the old

³⁸ Buton, “L’opinion publique en 1958,” 216.

³⁹ Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, vol. 2, 163.

⁴⁰ It is, however, interesting to reflect that the founding of France’s Fifth Republic in the wake of a military putsch, as civilian leaders essentially ceded to the wishes of defiant generals, is clearly not a memory that the French cherish. If 2008 was marked by a tidal wave of memorialization marking the fortieth anniversary of May 1968, meanwhile the semicentennial of May 1958 was passed over almost entirely in silence.

leader of the Resistance. Some of the leading campaigners against torture – François Mauriac, Jean Daniel, even Jean-Marie Domenach – frankly admired him. He was of course not a man of the Left, but after all, figures such as Lacoste and Mollet had demonstrated that affiliation with a traditional Left party was hardly a guarantee of anti-colonialist politics. De Gaulle’s shrewdly chosen first Minister of Information, the venerable writer André Malraux, assured his fellow intellectuals that the General abhorred torture and would not allow it to be practiced on his watch.⁴¹ Nevertheless, for most intellectuals on the Left, the fashion in which de Gaulle arrived in power offered an unmistakable signal of where his loyalties as a ruler would lie: the old military commander, brought to power by military men, would never betray the Army. Some insisted that the General must have been privy to the “fascist” putsch from the beginning;⁴² even those who did not assume that the threat of future coups, future insubordination, would effectively render de Gaulle a hostage to the desires of Massu and Salan. Either way, intellectuals believed, he would be unwilling to negotiate with the FLN, to defy the wishes of the *pied-noir* hard right, and certainly to grant Algerian independence. De Gaulle’s failure to condemn the putschists at any point during the May crisis appeared to confirm this perception; so did his statement to a cheering *pied-noir* crowd in Algiers that June: “*Je vous ai compris* [I have understood you].”⁴³ After the overwhelming passage of the September referendum, intellectuals opposed to the war confronted a popularly supported regime that they believed had come to

⁴¹ See Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l’armée pendant la guerre d’Algérie, 1954-1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 231.

⁴² An entire “conspiracy” literature sprang up to make this case. See Philip M. Williams, *Wars, Plots and Scandals in Post-War France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); for a representative example, see Serge and Merry Bromberger, *13 complots du 13 mai, ou, La délivrance de Gulliver* (Paris: Fayard, 1959).

⁴³ See Berstein, *La France de l’expansion*, vol. 1, 46.

power by illegitimate means, was beholden to the military, and was committed to an endless, criminal war. There seemed to be no way out.

This grim set of circumstances helped provoke Sartre's embrace of "violence" as a new guiding principle for the Left, and set the political agenda that would shape his writing of the "Preface" three years later. Anna Boschetti has offered a reading of Sartre's growing radicalism in the late years of the Algerian War that interprets his stance as the strategic effort of a fading figure to "relocate a role of political avant-garde which was in the process of escaping him."⁴⁴ Such a judgment offers an incomplete explanation of the philosopher's political and intellectual evolution. We must also consider Sartre's profoundly pessimistic analysis of the French political landscape after 1958. In the light of de Gaulle's investiture, he saw this landscape as shaped by three key factors: first, a despicable and paralyzed non-communist Left, held hostage to anti-communism; second, an apathetic and disengaged (and, he sometimes suggested, racist) populace that could no longer be mobilized for revolutionary or even minimally progressive projects; and third, a set of committed, hard-core military "fascists" in Algiers who in his view controlled de Gaulle and were waiting for only the slightest misstep on his part to take power directly. In this dark imaginary, there was no meaningful possibility for day-to-day democratic politics. For Sartre, therefore, the only hope for change lay with a radical, traumatic break from past and present, and "violence" was the only force he deemed capable of producing such a break.

Sartre arrived at this position gradually. While the events of May '58 were unfolding, he offered a vigorous defense of parliamentary representative democracy,

⁴⁴ Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et 'Les Temps modernes': une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 305.

charging that the attraction of the “man of June 18, 1940” was in the realm of the miraculous – the sacred – which had no business in France’s secular-democratic political life:

This bond that must unite us with him – devotion, fidelity, honor, religious respect – has a name: it is the sworn oath [*la foi jurée*] that unites person to person, or, if you prefer, the bond of vassalage. I do not claim that this liaison is without human value: but precisely because these relations are charged with death and with the past, overloaded with the sacred, they are the antipode of the properly democratic relation, which consists of judging men by their acts and not the acts by their men, of communicating through common projects, of sharing responsibilities, of evaluating an action in relation to its goal and its result.⁴⁵

Sartre argued against the Gaullist “strong man” solution by insisting that in a representative democracy it was not men but institutions that mattered: “We must restore *this* run-down State, *this* disparaged Republic, with the same men, all the men who are responsible for its half-failure [*demi-faillite*].”⁴⁶ He angrily rejected the anti-parliamentarism of Gaullists like Michel Debré, who sought to lay blame for the Fourth Republic’s “*immobilisme*” at the feet of the Assembly: this denigration of the “weakness” of legislative democracy was, indeed, Sartre charged, “the greatest Gaullist imposture.” Sartre defended France’s legislators: “I say, to the contrary, that

⁴⁵ Sartre, “Le prétendant,” *L’Express*, 22 May 1958, reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 5, 100: “Ce lien qui doit nous unir à lui – dévouement, fidélité, honneur, respect religieux – il porte un nom: c’est la foi jurée qui unit la personne à la personne, ou, si l’on préfère, le lien de vassalité. Je ne prétends pas que cette liaison soit sans valeur humaine: mais précisément parce que ces relations sont chargées de mort et de passé, surchargées de sacré, elles sont aux antipodes de la relation proprement démocratique, qui consiste à juger les hommes à leurs actes et non les actes sur leurs hommes, à communiquer à travers les entreprises communes, à partager les responsabilités, à apprécier une action par rapport à son but et à son résultat.” Sartre would later feel that he had been “beaucoup trop respectueux” of de Gaulle in this piece: see Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, eds., *Les Écrits de Sartre. Chronologie, bibliographie commentée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 322.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 101, emphasis in original: “nous devons restaurer *cet* État délabré, *cette* République décriée, avec les hommes mêmes, avec tous les hommes qui sont responsables de sa demi-faillite; nous ne lui rendrons sa force institutionnelle que si nous restaurons en même temps, contre tous les rêves de grandeur morte, les droits et les libertés réels des citoyens.”

all the evil has come, in these last years, from an overly strong executive that escaped from the control of the legislative... This authoritarian, uncontrollable executive was named Thierry d'Argenlieu; today it has a hundred names, Massu, Trinquier, Lacheroy, and other 'colonels.' In thirteen years, France has become this militarized country whose sons fight overseas under the orders of our Princes, the Lords of War."⁴⁷

At this juncture, then, Sartre did not valorize "violence" but rather condemned it as the *métier* of his anti-democratic opponents. As he anticipated with disgust that the September referendum would be a success for de Gaulle, he insisted that "the Gaullist regime, until its end and in all its manifestations, will smell of the unlawfulness [*l'arbitraire*] and of the violence of which it was born."⁴⁸ Sartre certainly disliked de Gaulle: "I don't believe in God," he wrote, "but if I had to choose between Him and the actual contender in this plebiscite, I would rather vote for God: He is more modest."⁴⁹ But his objection was much less to the man than to the way he was arriving in power. He predicted that the new regime, with the Algiers fascists holding the General's puppet strings ("De Gaulle is not a fascist," he conceded, "...[but] to vote 'yes' can only be aimed toward fascism"), would inevitably rule by terror: "This power was born of violence, so it will be maintained through violence."⁵⁰ Indeed, at this juncture Sartre not only stigmatized the intrusion of military force into

⁴⁷ Sartre, "Les grenouilles qui demandent un roi," *L'Express*, 25 September 1958, reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 5, 118-119: "C'est ici qu'il faut dénoncer la plus grande imposture gaulliste... Je dis au contraire, moi, que tout le mal est venu, ces dernières années, d'un exécutif trop fort qui échappait au contrôle du législatif... Cet exécutif autoritaire, incontrôlable, il s'est appelé Thierry d'Argenlieu; aujourd'hui il a cent noms, Massu, Trinquier, Lacheroy, et autres 'colonels.' En treize ans, la France est devenue ce pays militarisé dont les fils se battent outre-mer sous les ordres de nos Princes, les Seigneurs de la Guerre."

⁴⁸ Sartre, "La constitution du mépris," *L'Express*, 11 September 1958, reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 105: "La caque sent le hareng: le régime gaulliste sentira jusqu'à sa fin et dans toutes ses manifestations l'arbitraire et la violence dont il est issu."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 107: "Je ne crois pas en Dieu, mais si dans ce plébiscite je devais choisir entre Lui et le prétendant actuel, je voterais plutôt pour Dieu: Il est plus modeste."

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 109: "Je vous le dis: ce pouvoir est né de la violence, donc il se maintiendra par la violence."

French politics but rejected more generally the notion that any form of “pure action,” unbounded by constraints of law and democratic decision-making, had a place in political life. Oddly echoing the critique Merleau-Ponty had issued at *him* three years earlier, he told those planning to vote in favor of de Gaulle in the referendum that “the truth is that you are choosing pure action, that is to say the individual freed from all controls, because of your disgust at the abject swamp where we have been wading since the Liberation. But I have tried to show that the causes are objective and deep-rooted, and that the remedies should be, too.”⁵¹ At this juncture, by “deep-rooted” remedies Sartre had in mind no more than a painstaking, non-violent process of republican renewal.

Yet even as he agitated for reforms *within* the parliamentary republican model, Sartre betrayed a growing disdain for both the organized Left and for the French populace, in particular the working-class which he believed was unable or unwilling to perceive its own interests. This disdain made it difficult to see how he imagined progressive change might still occur in France through peaceful democratic means. Sartre was viscerally angered by the failure of a forceful response to the *putsch* on the part of the parties, unions, and associations of the Left: he diagnosed a “crisis of masochism on the Left” and – although he had broken with the PCF in 1956 over Hungary – blamed paranoid anti-communism for the paralysis. From the third day of the crisis, he claimed, “I understood that the socialists hated one thing in the world more than servitude, death, and the abasement of the country: it was the Popular Front.”⁵² This passive, subordinated Left, moving as though in a “slow and

⁵¹ “Les grenouilles qui demandent un roi,” 129: “La vérité, c’est que vous choisissez l’action pure, c’est-à-dire l’individu soustrait à tous les contrôles, par dégoût de l’abject marécage où nous barbatons depuis la Libération. Mais j’ai tenu de montrer que les causes étaient objectives et profondes et que les remèdes devaient l’être aussi.”

⁵² “Le prétendant,” 91: “Chez nous, dès le troisième jour je compris que les socialistes détestaient une chose au monde plus que la servitude, la mort et l’abaissement du pays; c’était le Front Populaire.”

contradictory dream,” was, moreover, drawn in by the magnetic power of the General, “as if, already despairing of the Republic, it could not stop itself from delivering its hopes, now available, into the hands of General de Gaulle.”⁵³ Present already in these despairing essays of the spring and fall of 1958 was Sartre’s bitter analysis of the failures of the impotent, feminized “respectful Left” – *including* the anti-war movement – that Sartre’s colleague Marcel Péju would famously lay out two years later in *Les Temps modernes* and that Sartre would adopt as his own for many years to come.⁵⁴ Indeed, Sartre took the Left’s failure to fight effectively against the passage of the referendum (with some opponents of torture such as Mauriac actually supporting de Gaulle) as damning proof of the disgusting masochism of the French Left. He would later write, in the 1960 preface to Paul Nizan’s *Aden Arabie* that “The Left ... expired, one day in the fall of 1958, murmuring a final ‘yes.’⁵⁵ Perhaps his harshest – and most memorable – formulation came in the same essay, when he described the Left as “this great cadaver on its back, where the worms are at work. It stinks, this rotting carcass; the powers of military men, dictatorship, and fascism are born, or will be born, from its decomposition...”⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 94: “Ainsi, chacun semblait suivre... un rêve lent et contradictoire, comme si, désespérant déjà de la République, il ne pouvait s’empêcher de remettre ses espoirs désormais disponibles entre les mains du général de Gaulle.”

⁵⁴ Péju, “Une gauche respectueuse,” *Les Temps modernes* 169-170 (April-May 1960): 1512-1520. The title is a play on Sartre’s drama *La putaine respectueuse* (Paris: Nagel, 1946); it therefore feminizes and sexually degrades the Left. For Sartre’s own interpretation of the phrase, see his 1965 lecture “Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels,” in *Situations*, vol. 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 421: “Nous appelons, chez nous, ‘gauche respectueuse’ une gauche qui *respecte* les valeurs de droite même si elle est consciente de ne pas les partager; telle fut ‘notre gauche’ au temps de la guerre d’Algérie.”

⁵⁵ Sartre, “Preface” to Paul Nizan, *Aden Arabie* (Paris: Minuit, 1960), reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 141: “Sa mort fut la fin d’un monde: après lui la Révolution construisit, la Gauche se définit par l’assentissement si bien qu’elle expira, un jour de l’automne 1958, en murmurant un dernier oui.”

⁵⁶ Ibid., 138: “Croit-on qu’elle puisse attirer les fils, la Gauche, ce grand cadavre à la renverse, où les vers se sont mis? Elle pue, cette charogne; les pouvoirs des militaires, la dictature et le fascisme naissent ou naîtront de sa décomposition...”

Sartre also expressed growing scorn for the entire French populace and especially the “depoliticized” working class. Indeed, the violence of his rhetoric against the French public in the autumn of 1958, when it became clear that the September referendum on the new Constitution would pass, was quite remarkable. In essays such as “Vous êtes formidables,” Sartre had already been attacking the French for their indifference to the war crimes occurring in Algeria for two and a half years. “*Nous ne sommes pas formidables,*” he insisted.⁵⁷ These writings, though uncommonly scathing, still tended to employ the first-person plural, thus implicating their author as well in the collective guilt. They also couched their criticisms in a exhortative, prescriptive voice (a voice that he himself would later mock in his “Preface” to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*), informing readers that we, the French, were damned *unless...*⁵⁸ Thus Sartre insisted in May 1957 that “There is still time to scuttle the entrepreneurs of national demolition, it is still possible to break the infernal circle of this irresponsible irresponsibility, of this guilty innocence and of this ignorance that is knowledge,” *if* the French could only face up to the realities of torture.⁵⁹

After May 1958, however, the hopeful conditional faded out of Sartre’s political writing on the French populace. It was replaced by sheer and often feminizing or animalizing contempt. In early September 1958, he wrote that it would be

⁵⁷ Sartre, “Vous êtes formidables,” *Les Temps modernes* 135 (May 1957), reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 5, 62.

⁵⁸ See Sartre, “Préface” to Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 5, 169. Subsequently, this chapter uses Richard Philcox’s excellent translation of the “Preface” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]). Page numbers in the translation and the original, along with the complete French text, are provided in footnotes.

⁵⁹ “Vous êtes formidables,” 66: “Il est encore temps de faire échouer les entrepreneurs de démolition nationale, il est encore possible de briser le cercle infernal de cette responsabilité irresponsable, de cette coupable innocence et de cette ignorance qui est savoir: regardons la vérité, elle mettra chacun de nous en demeure ou de condamner publiquement les crimes accomplis ou de les endosser en pleine connaissance de cause.”

understandable if a handful of people planned to vote for de Gaulle, since there would always exist poor souls “mistreated by life,” who “need to believe in God and especially his incarnation,” along with some “solitary and betrayed women [who] have expanded their resentment to the entire species: all that is human horrifies them, they love dogs and supermen [*surhommes*].” But the fact that “young people and young men...active, sometimes happy, and who in good faith believe themselves to be republicans” should behave like these sexually repressed, emotionally crippled spinsters was outrageous.⁶⁰ The theme of “dogs and supermen,” as a binary that excluded the simply human, ran through the whole of this long, angry essay, with its insulting title borrowed from La Fontaine: “The Frogs Who Demand a King.” The piece, published in *L’Express*, was purportedly a passionate plea to the French to vote “no” in the September 28 plebiscite, warning them that to turn their political affairs over to a single leader would be not only a political error but an abdication of humanist values: giving one man “the right to act, even if it is as a good father, on our destinies,” would be an admission that “the human species is disintegrating in a chain: no longer a man, a superman and some animals.”⁶¹ But since Sartre already understood that the referendum would pass easily (the first sentence of the article was “The ‘yeses’ will be numerous, very numerous”), the text appeared less as an

⁶⁰ “Les grenouilles qui demandent un roi,” 114-115: “[I]l est normal qu’un certain nombre de personnes, maltraitées par la vie, aient besoin de croire en Dieu et surtout en Son Incarnation. Combien de femmes solitaires et trahies ont étendu leur ressentiment à l’espèce entière: tout ce qui est humain leur fait horreur, elles aiment les chiens et les surhommes. Mais il y aura des jeunes gens et des hommes jeunes pour porter leur suffrage au futur monarque: actifs, parfois heureux, intelligents et qui se tiennent de bonne foi pour des républicains.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 137: “S’il existe un homme, dans l’espèce humaine, qui a des lumières que lui seul peut avoir, si ces lumières lui donnent le droit d’agir, fût-ce en bon père, sur nos destins, si ses actes sont toujours valables et bons du seul fait qu’ils expriment son essence, alors l’espèce humaine se désintègre en chaîne: plus un homme; un surhomme et des animaux.”

exhortation than as a merciless tirade against the miserable “frogs” and “dogs” content with their debased lot.⁶²

Sartre’s other favored metaphor for the French people in this period, one that likewise suggested limited agency and consciousness, was “sleepwalkers.” Regarding with disgust the growing momentum for a “yes” vote in the September referendum, he observed, “One would say that the voter is dozing.”⁶³ France as a whole, according to Sartre’s diagnosis, was “drowning in dreams and resentment.”⁶⁴ He did empathically analyze the public’s “apoliticism”⁶⁵ as an effect of living in an apocalyptic, Cold War, H-bomb world, where each man felt powerless to influence the global course of events and so retreated into the private sphere, happy to turn public affairs over to a technician or a Savior. But he could not accept it. The only way for democracy to survive, he wrote, “is for *us* to pull ourselves out of our powerlessness, it is for *us* to design a program, an alliance of parties, an offensive and defensive tactic against all those who would like to attack the French. ‘Yes’ is the dream; ‘no’ is waking up. It is time to find out if we want to get up or to go to bed.”⁶⁶

After the referendum passed overwhelmingly, it seemed to Sartre that the French had made their decision: to continue to sleep. This slumber was deep and deathly; all the anti-war movement’s attempts to “bear witness” to the violence in Algeria had utterly failed to shake the population out of it. The awakening, if there

⁶² Ibid., 113. Sartre had already played with the human/animal binary (disrupted by the non-human, non-animal figure of the vampire) in his dazzling preface to André Gorz’s *Le Traître*, “Des rats et des hommes,” reproduced in *Situations*, vol. 4, 38-81. This piece, written in the summer of 1957, was published in the summer of 1958; see especially 48-49; 60; 65-66; 78-81.

⁶³ Ibid., 114: “On dirait que l’électeur somnole.”

⁶⁴ Ibid., 126: “Un pays paralysé qui se noie dans le rêve et dans le ressentiment.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 144, emphasis in original: “La seule façon d’éviter à la fois ces doucereuses monarchies qui tournent à vide et le coup de main de *commandos* d’Alger c’est que *nous* nous tirions nous-mêmes de notre impuissance, c’est que *nous* concevions un programme, une alliance de partis, une tactique défensive et offensive contre tous ceux qui voudraient attaquer les Français. ‘Oui’ c’est le rêve; ‘non’ c’est le réveil. Il est temps de savoir si nous voulons nous lever ou nous coucher.”

was to be one, would have come differently – it would have to be the product of a break that was radical, absolute, traumatic. This would certainly not come through continuing the work of bearing witness: “the Left,” Sartre sneered, “which has bored the nation for fifteen years with useless speeches, has made their impact depreciate to such an extent that the regime is no longer afraid of words.” Instead, more extreme means would be necessary: “At the point we are at, one can no longer influence public opinion except by transgressing it [*on ne peut plus influencer l’opinion qu’en la franchissant*].”⁶⁷ This is where violence – understood as a “pure action” or a “transgression” that might be capable of shocking the slumbering French into wakefulness – came into Sartre’s political analysis.

Sartre’s embrace of violence as a transgressive “shock therapy” that could achieve a French awakening or renewal was influenced by a radical form of engagement against the war that had begun years earlier, albeit among secretive and minuscule groups on the far fringe of the French Left. While Sartre had continued throughout 1956, 1957, and 1958 to fight against France’s military presence in Algeria in conventional intellectual forums, a scattered handful of metropolitan French activists, later known as the “*porteurs de valises*” and ranging from Catholic priests to lawyers, students, actors, artists, and intellectuals, had come to believe that they could best serve the cause of Algerian independence not by arguing for it in the French public sphere but by offering direct aid to the FLN.⁶⁸ Among them was Sartre’s old disciple and

⁶⁷ K.S. Karol [Karol Kewes], “Un entretien avec J.-P. Sartre. Jeunesse et guerre d’Algérie,” *Vérité-Liberté* 3 (July-August 1960): “Mais la gauche, qui a embêté pendant quinze ans la nation par de vaines paroles a tellement dévalorisé leur portée que le régime n’a plus peur des mots. Au point où nous sommes, on ne peut plus influencer l’opinion qu’en la franchissant.”

⁶⁸ The literature on the *porteurs de valises* is substantial: see the classic Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Les Porteurs de valises. La résistance française à la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979); Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (New York: Berg, 1997); Sisi Mohammed Barkat, ed., *Des Français contre la terreur d’État (Algérie*

collaborator, the philosopher Francis Jeanson, who had started individually assisting FLN members in France in 1956 and by September 1957 had taken on the task of organizing a shadowy network of other French men and women to do the same. The group, later labeled the “*réseau Jeanson*,” transported people, money, and weapons for the FLN. It was dangerous, illegal work, and in April 1958, when the police searched his home, Jeanson chose to go underground to continue the struggle. Months later, as the Fourth Republic collapsed, he founded a small underground paper, *Vérités pour* [*Truths For*]. The paper’s circulation was negligible (5,000 at maximum) but its mimeographed pages provide us with a clear sense of Jeanson’s and his fellow editors’ belief that affairs in France had reached an emergency state in which no meaningful non-violent, democratic means remained available. The editors –Jeanson, Jacques Vignes, Hélène Cuénat, and the young Alain Badiou⁶⁹ – disavowed any interest in the function of “bearing witness” to the violence ravaging Algeria. Their project was, rather, to end the war through an FLN victory, one that they believed would simultaneously revitalize socialist politics in France. “*Vérités pour* was not created to furnish its readers with the empty satisfaction of being informed,” they scolded. “*Vérités pour* addresses itself to militants, to men anxious for efficacy on the political plane.”⁷⁰ “Let’s not be those sad horses that they lead to the slaughter,” the lead editorial of the first issue read. “Maybe one day we will not have any other way out but to courageously confront an inevitable death. But we are not there: we can still choose life, take our destiny back in our own hands, gamble on mankind and, day after

1954-1962) (Paris: Éditions Reflète, 2002). Useful information can also be found in Marie-Pierre Ulloa, *Francis Jeanson: Un intellectuel en dissidence de la Résistance à la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Berg, 2001).

⁶⁹ This was the only way in which Badiou served the network: he did not otherwise aid the FLN.

⁷⁰ “Belles doctrines et bons sentiments,” *Vérités pour* 4 (n.d.), Bordeaux edition: “*Vérités pour* n’a pas été créée pour fournir à ses lecteurs la vaine satisfaction d’être renseignés. *Vérités pour* s’adresse à des militants, à des hommes soucieux d’efficacité sur le plan politique.”

day, back up our gamble.” This gamble, the editorial announced, setting a tone of apocalyptic struggle, would be “against all the forces of human destruction.”⁷¹ So intensely militant was the language in this and other *Vérités pour* articles that “when I received the first issues,” sociologist J.-W. Lapierre confided, “I believed I was dealing with a crude provocation produced by the police.”⁷²

Vérités pour overflowed with disdain for those who still believed after the debacle of May 1958 that the Left’s struggle could be waged using the conventional legal means with which anti-colonialists had been trying for years, without success, to stop the war. To “bear witness” to torture and France’s other atrocities, the clandestine journal argued, was a meaningless gesture at this juncture, one whose sole and pitiful purpose was to salve the conscience of the speaker. “We think,” the editors commented in the summer of 1959, “that the situation right now – and notably since May 13, 1958 – tends to make political work essentially centered on the tasks of information and explanation more and more obsolete and absolutely futile... It will soon be five years that a conscious avant-garde has been working to inform the masses, and the least one can say is that the results are not exactly dazzling...”⁷³ “Testimony” against the limit-case violence of torture fell shamefully short of the response demanded by the emergency state of affairs, the journal’s editors insisted,

⁷¹ “Un mot d’abord sur notre titre,” *Vérités pour* 1 (September 1958): “Ne soyons pas ces chevaux tristes qu’on mène à l’abattoir. Peut-être un jour n’aurons-nous plus d’autre issue que d’affronter courageusement une mort inévitable. Mais nous n’en sommes pas là: nous pouvons encore choisir la vie, reprendre en mains notre destin, parier pour l’homme et soutenir jour après jour notre pari... *Vérités pour*? Oui: *vérités pour nous, pour notre avenir, pour la lutte que nous avons à mener dès maintenant contre toutes les forces de destruction de l’humain.*”

⁷² Letter from J.-W. Lapierre to J.-M. Domenach, 25 April 1960. ESP2.C23-02.04, *Esprit* IMEC: “Quand j’ai reçu les premiers numéros de ‘*Vérités pour*,’ j’ai cru avoir affaire à une grossière provocation policière.”

⁷³ “Entre la maladie infantile et la sénilité précoce,” *Vérités pour* 10 (July 1959): “Nous pensons que la situation présente – et notamment depuis le 13 mai 58 – tend de plus en plus à rendre caduc et parfaitement vain un travail politique essentiellement centré sur les tâches d’information et d’explication... Il y aura bientôt cinq ans qu’une avant-garde consciente travaille à informer les masses: le moins qu’on puisse dire est que les effets n’en sont point éclatants...”

attacking by name even Vidal-Naquet's venerable Comité Maurice Audin; the Comité's obsessive focus on bearing witness to torture translated into their treating it as "a sort of super-violence, perfectly dissociable from the war being waged against the Algerians, which could then be considered as a normal and codifiable violence."⁷⁴ Moreover "testifying" to facts on the ground, through work like the Comité's, was simply insufficient as a form of engagement: "To *know* that fascism is at our door is good for nothing if it is not *to organize ourselves* already for an effective struggle; and the fascists do not fight only with blows of information. To know that M. Debré has chosen extermination for every Algerian who claims his humanity *is good for nothing* if it is not to choose, against M. Debré, the victory of these men. And to choose is good for nothing, if it is only in words."⁷⁵

If the *Vérités pour* team believed that continuing to "bear witness" to French violence was *dépassé*, they insisted that bearing witness to the FLN's violence was a politically counter-productive outrage. The group emphatically rejected the notion that a "higher" ethical imperative called on them to denounce atrocities on both sides. The journal was, after all, titled not *Vérités à tout prix* but *Vérités pour* – for a side, for a cause, for one set of actors against another. "There are no moral problems in a pure state," an editorial announced, introducing the topic of the FLN's recent assassination attempt on Jacques Soustelle.

There are only problems that are moral and social at once, moral and political. No principle in any ethics allows a man to make decisions in the abstract...It is well and good to be against the assassination of M.

⁷⁴ "Belles doctrines," "La torture serait-elle donc une sorte de super-violence, parfaitement dissociable de la guerre faite aux algériens, laquelle pourrait alors être considérée comme une violence normale et parfaitement codifiable?"

⁷⁵ "Entre maladie infantile et sénilité précoce": "*Savoir* que le fascisme est à nos portes n'est rien si ce n'est pas *s'organiser déjà pour une lutte effective*; et les fascistes ne se battent pas seulement à coups d'informations. *Savoir* que M. Debré a choisi l'extermination de tout Algérien qui revendique son humanité *n'est rien* si ce n'est pas choisir, contre M. Debré, la victoire de ces hommes. Et choisir n'est rien, si ce n'est qu'en paroles."

Durant by M. Dupont; it is another thing to condemn a patriot for trying to strike down one of the most perfect symbols, the most conscious perpetrators, of the atrocious repression that has already cost the life of 600,000 of his brothers...Soustelle is the extremely clear-sighted leader of an enormous conspiracy supported by the billions of the big-time colonists.⁷⁶

Therefore, to “bear witness” to the harm done to him because of an ethical opposition to “violence” would be obscene. And, Jeanson himself insisted elsewhere, to withhold one’s whole-hearted support from the FLN on the logic that they ought to use less violent means was to choose deliberately “to remain immobile forever.”⁷⁷ As Merleau-Ponty had emphasized in *Humanisme et terreur*, there were no “pure” causes in the real world, no realm untouched by violence; nevertheless, one had to embrace a side – and even the refusal to do so was an implicit choice. “Our cause is doubtless not all white,” Jeanson wrote defiantly to the members of the French Left who condemned his network’s activities. “But *yours*, what color do you see it as being? For you support a cause – whether you want to or not. And the timid words that you pronounce in one direction will never outweigh the practical consequences, in the other direction, of your submission and your abstentions. *You are on the side of the oppressors.*”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ “120 jours de renouveau français,” *Vérités pour* 1 (September 1958): “Mais ces sortes de questions ne sauraient être posées sans référence au contexte; il n’y a pas de problèmes moraux à l’état pur, il y a seulement des problèmes qui sont à la fois d’ordre moral et social, d’ordre moral et politique. Aucun principe, d’aucune morale, ne peut permettre à un homme de se déterminer dans l’abstraction...C’est fort bien d’être contre l’assassinat de M. Durant par M. Dupont; c’est autre chose de condamner un patriote lorsqu’il tente d’abattre l’un des symboles les plus parfaits, et l’un des auteurs les plus conscients, de l’atroce répression qui a déjà coûté la vie à 600.000 de ses frères...Soustelle est le chef très lucide d’une énorme conjuration soutenue par les milliards du grand colonat.” The notion that “the colonists” in Algeria were almost uniformly agents of class oppression and racist brutality was integral to the network’s manichean analysis of the conflict; Francis Jeanson also insisted that “dans leur quasi-totalité, les Européens d’Algérie demeuraient vichystes et profondément *collaborationistes*.” Interview by Maurice Maschino, *Vérités pour* 18 (September 1960).

⁷⁷ Jeanson, *Notre guerre* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960), 58.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, emphasis in original: “Notre cause n’est sans doute pas toute blanche: mais *la vôtre*, de quelle couleur la voyez-vous? Car vous soutenez une cause – que vous le vouliez ou non. Et les timides paroles que vous prononcez dans un sens n’équilibreront jamais les conséquences pratiques, dans l’autre sens, de votre soumission et de vos abstentions. *Vous êtes du côté des oppresseurs.*”

Sartre and Jeanson had become alienated in 1956 over Hungary, when Jeanson had refused to follow Sartre in his firm denunciation of the Party and the USSR. By 1959, however, sharing Jeanson's blistering scorn for the inefficacy of the "respectful" Left (including the PCF), Sartre was ready for a reconciliation. When Jeanson approached him, he threw his full support behind the work of the *réseau*. According to Jeanson, Sartre declared, "I am 100% in agreement with the action you are pursuing. Use me as you are able."⁷⁹ He also immediately granted an interview to *Vérités pour*. In this interview, as Sartre heaped praise on the FLN, we can first glimpse the view of violence as radically transformative that would so strongly mark his 1961 preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Dismissing the concerns of bien-pensant French universalists about the FLN's Islamic allegiance and Arab nationalist motivations, he claimed that "all of these nationalist movements 'leftify' themselves [*se 'gauchissait'*] as their fight intensifies... Whatever might be the origin of these combatants, whatever significance religious faith might have for them, the circumstances of their struggle lead them toward the Left as those of our Resistance did from 1940 to 1945."⁸⁰ The fight itself would purify their intentions. But Sartre was not only interested in the FLN's movement leftward. By working to support FLN rather than droning on in witness to torture, Sartre lectured hopefully, a small vanguard of French leftists such as the Jeanson *réseau* could help import the Algerian revolutionaries' combativity into France. By drawing on the energies of the so-called "terrorists," joining in their struggle, bringing it home to the metropole, perhaps Jeanson and his supporters could at last awaken the sleeping French.

⁷⁹ Hamon and Rotman, *Les Porteurs de valises*, 155.

⁸⁰ "L'interview de Sartre": "l'ensemble de ces mouvements nationalistes se 'gauchissait' à mesure que leur combat s'intensifiait... Quelle que soit l'origine de ces combattants, quelle que puisse être pour eux l'importance de la foi religieuse, les circonstances de leur lutte les entraînent vers la gauche comme firent celles de notre Résistance entre 40 et 45."

In February 1960, police broke up the Jeanson *réseau*, arresting about two dozen activists of both French and Algerian origin. Francis Jeanson himself escaped arrest and remained “underground,” though hardly a great distance from the surface – he gave a press conference in the middle of Paris on the afternoon of April 15, granted interviews, and published an account of his pro-FLN activities, *Notre guerre*, with Éditions de Minuit. The book came out on June 22 and was seized by police on June 29, just as the government’s attempted peace negotiations with FLN leaders at Melun were breaking apart in failure. Earlier in the year, de Gaulle’s unambiguously forceful stance during the “week of the barricades” (an attempted military insurrection) and his subsequent removal of “*ultra*” sympathizer Soustelle from his cabinet had provoked a temporary wave of goodwill for the government on the part of some anti-colonialist activists. “For the first time since the beginning of the Algerian drama,” Louis Martin-Chauffier had exulted, “the State did not give way in the face of a riot, and the riot was dispersed...The State – in the person of General de Gaulle – believed in its own force and in its own legitimacy. And it had behind it the entire nation, for once awakened.”⁸¹ But with the collapse of the Melun negotiations hope for peace was once again snatched away, and the nightmarish specter of endless war again stretched out into the future. The anti-colonialist Left thus launched into fierce, anguished debate on what options remained to them in their struggle. The trial of the *réseau Jeanson* was at the center of this debate, as others on the Left attacked or defended the Jeansonites’ policy of complicity with the violence of the FLN.

⁸¹ Louis Martin-Chauffier, “Après l’émeute: frapper juste et forte,” *Témoignages et documents* 21 (February-March 1960): “Pour la première fois depuis le début du drame algérien, l’État n’a pas cédé devant l’émeute et l’émeute a été dispersée...L’État – dans la personne du général de Gaulle – croyait en sa force comme en sa légitimité. Et il avait derrière lui la nation toute entière, pour une fois réveillée.”

The arrested members of the Jeanson network – eighteen French men and women, six Algerians – came to trial at the Tribunal Permanent des Forces Armées de Paris in the old Cherche-Midi Prison, where Alfred Dreyfus had once stood in the dock, on September 5, 1960. The previous day, *Le Monde* had published a shocking item, announcing that dozens of French intellectuals had signed a public declaration defending the “right to insubordination” among young conscripts and judging “justified the conduct of French people who consider it their duty to bring aid and protection to Algerians oppressed in the name of the French people.”⁸² This “open letter” to the French government and the French people, quickly labeled the “Manifesto of the 121” for its original 121 signatories, was a media bombshell and – as its creators Jean Schuster, Dionys Mascolo, and Maurice Blanchot intended – its publication shaped the unfolding of the Jeanson *réseau* trial, lending the imprimatur of broad-based support in the intellectual community for the men and women on trial.⁸³ Robert Antelme, Simone de Beauvoir, André Breton, Marguerite Duras, Edouard Glissant, Claude Lanzmann, Henri Lefebvre, publishers Jérôme Lindon and François Maspero, André Mandouze, Maurice Nadeau, J.-B. Pontalis, filmmaker Alain Resnais, novelists Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, the cartoonist Siné, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet were among the original signatories – along with Sartre.

Sartre’s intervention in the debate, by signing the “121” and subsequently putting his name on a letter read aloud in court by the defense, was for many observers

⁸² “Declaration sur le droit à l’insoumission dans la guerre d’Algérie,” reproduced in *La droite à l’insoumission (Le dossier des ‘121’)* (Maspero, 1961), 15-20: “Nous respectons et jugeons justifiée la conduite des Français qui estiment leur devoir d’apporter aide et protection aux Algériens opprimés au nom du peuple français.”

⁸³ Blanchot’s role here is certainly an interesting element in his political-intellectual biography. It was not, however, the outcome of a long-term public engagement against the war, and he cannot be described as a significant presence on the politically active anti-colonialist Left. His comments on the Manifesto to an interviewer for *l’Express* suggest that his position cannot be easily assimilated to that of a Jeanson or a Sartre: he insisted that he had participated “en tant qu’écrivain non politique,” and “non pas comme écrivain politique” (*Le Droit à l’insoumission*, 90 and 92).

the main event of the trial. Earlier in 1960, the philosopher had finished his monumental *Critique de la raison dialectique*, a treatise rich in consideration of the ontological status and the historical role of violence. He had also traveled to Cuba where he believed that he had seen the face of true socialist Third World revolution and “direct democracy.”⁸⁴ Ever since the Jeanson *réseau* members’ arrest, he had offered his vocal support, in terms that made it clear that he approved of the group’s contention that the fates of the FLN and of the French Left were inextricably connected, and that he hoped for the war against military fascism to be “brought home” to France as it should have been in 1958. Sartre’s analysis linked the prospect of young Frenchmen at last willing to fight the “fascists” side by side with their FLN brethren to French dynamism and rebirth; such violence could put an end to France’s “sleepwalking” and force a traumatic break into reality. “There was a day in France,” he told an interviewer in 1960, “when a test of strength began between democracy and the army. It was May 13, 1958...The Left, which believed it had been able to avoid the test of strength thanks to de Gaulle, today sees its nauseated children engage themselves in a violent action and thus place it face-to-face with reality.” Sartre declared that “for me, the only real men of the Left in France today can be found among the twenty year-olds.”⁸⁵ Why? Because these youths were “the only ones who responded to the mystification as was necessary, that is to say through violence.” The young generation alone, “who take action and who provoke a shock in public opinion,

⁸⁴ *France-Observateur*, 24 March 1946; *France-Soir*, 9 July 1960, both cited in Contat and Rybalka, *Les Écrits de Sartre*, 346 and 348.

⁸⁵ Karol, “Un entretien avec J.-P. Sartre”: “Il y a un jour en France une épreuve de force commencée entre la démocratie et l’armée. C’était le 13 mai 1958...La gauche, qui a cru pouvoir éviter l’épreuve de force grâce à de Gaulle, voit aujourd’hui ses enfants écoeurés s’engager dans une action violente et la mettre ainsi en face de la réalité ...La jeunesse est la seule qui a répondu à la mystification comme il fallait, c’est-à-dire par la violence. Elle a eu, et elle acquiert tous les jours une importance de plus en plus capitale. Pour moi, les seuls vrais hommes de gauche en France aujourd’hui se trouvent parmi ceux qui ont 20 ans.”

remind us of the truth that the adults had completely forgotten: the violent character of the Left.”⁸⁶ Very soon, Sartre predicted, the grand battle in the metropole that had been avoided in 1958 would break out: giving his analysis a conventional Marxist flavor by insisting, unreasonably, that “the social problem has never been so acute here since 1848,” he lectured that “we are faced with a situation of force, perhaps on the eve of an explosion.”⁸⁷ And those who had already embraced violent means, joining in the FLN’s struggle against the common fascist enemy, would be at the vanguard of the fight.⁸⁸

A letter purportedly sent from Brazil by Sartre to be read in evidence at the Jeanson network trial on September 20 made similar points, in such ferocious language that much of the press labeled it “the Sartre bomb.”⁸⁹ This testimonial was fact written by his *Les Temps modernes* collaborators Lanzmann and Péju following Sartre’s instructions, not by Sartre himself (Siné forged the signature). It is perilous to analyze in terms of its ideas not only because of the problem of authorship but because it was part of a flagrant but unsuccessful campaign by the philosopher to be arrested, which would have permitted him to wield his prestige to shield other “121” signers

⁸⁶ Karol, “Un entretien avec J.-P. Sartre”: “La jeunesse, qui passe à l’action et qui suscite un choc dans l’opinion, rappelle la vérité que les adultes ont complètement oubliée: le caractère de violence de la gauche.” The emphasis on extreme youth versus “adults” here was hyperbolic, intended to signify the clandestine activists’ role as a force for renewal, against decadence. Based on information given by the defendants at the trial on 5 September 1960, the arrested Jeansonites, while hardly ancient, possessed an average age of thirty-five. The youngest was 25, the oldest 50. Marcel Péju, ed., *Le Procès du réseau Jeanson* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid.: “Le problème social n’a jamais été plus aigu chez nous depuis 1848... Nous sommes devant une situation de force, peut-être à la vieille d’une explosion.”

⁸⁸ *Vérité-Liberté*’s publication of this interview greatly annoyed some of the journals’ editorial board, including Domenach who privately sniped that “depuis vingt ans, [Sartre] n’a été ni assez combattant ni assez militant pour se permettre de donner ainsi des leçons, et qui plus est, des leçons de ‘violence.’” Letter from Jean-Marie Domenach to Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 18 Aug 1960. ESP2.E1-04.13, *Esprit* IMEC.

⁸⁹ For examples from opposite ends of the political spectrum, see Jean Bernard Derosne, “Du fond de Brésil, Jean-Paul Sartre a envoyé une lettre scandaleuse,” *L’Aurore*, 21 September 1960; Editorial, “Sartre et le réseau,” *France-Observateur*, 22 September 1960.

and embarrass the government.⁹⁰ Hence we can set to one side the dramatic statements of solidarity (“If Jeanson had asked me to carry suitcases or to shelter Algerian militants, and I could have done it without risks to them, I would have done it without hesitation”)⁹¹ and simply note that the letter reproduced claims that Sartre had been making for many months: legal methods of protest were impotent, the FLN and the French Left shared a common “fascist” enemy, and the time was rapidly approaching when the war would be brought home to France. Active support for the FLN was politically imperative because the Algerian nationalists represented “the only force that actually struggles today against the common enemy of Algerian freedoms and French freedoms;” the Jeanson network members, therefore, far from being either bleeding hearts or traitors, “work for themselves, for their freedom and for their future... They have been the avant-garde of a movement which will perhaps have awakened the Left, bogged down in wretched prudence, and will have better prepared it for the inevitable test of force with the army, postponed since May 1958.”⁹²

In such statements celebrating the actions of Jeanson and his followers, Sartre not only defended these men and women but also attacked the *rest* of the anti-war movement for their comparatively insufficient commitment to the cause, their timidity and over-attachment to legality and non-violence. Sartre’s remarks contrasting the

⁹⁰ At a December 1 press conference he explained that “Si le gouvernement avait rendu un non-lieu general, je ne me serais pas permis de vous déranger... Mais s’ils ont inculpé trente de cosignataires, et non les autres, nous, les autres, nous nous trouvons dans une situation malsaine et qu’il faut dénoncer... Je réclame donc mon inculpation.” Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, 551. On the authorship of the letter, see Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, 542-543.

⁹¹ Péju, *Le Procès du réseau Jeanson*, 118 : “Si Jeanson m’avait demandé de porter des valises ou d’héberger des militants algériens, et que j’ai pu le faire sans risques pour eux, je l’aurais fait sans hésitation.”

⁹² *Ibid.*, 117-118: “...[L]a gauche est impuissante; et elle le restera si elle n’accepte pas d’unir ses efforts à la seule force qui lutte aujourd’hui réellement contre l’ennemi commun des libertés algériennes et des libertés françaises. Et cette force, c’est le FLN... [Those who aid the FLN] travaillent pour eux-mêmes, pour leur liberté et pour leur avenir... Ils ont été l’avant-garde d’un mouvement qui aura peut-être réveillé la gauche, enlisée dans une misérable prudence, et l’aura mieux préparée à l’inévitable épreuve de force avec l’armée, ajournée depuis mai 1958.”

réseau Jeanson favorably with everyone else on “the Left” targeted not only the large, institutionalized parties of government but also the anti-war movement, ineffectual and emasculated, drowning in “words” where “action” was necessary. But was Sartre’s analysis of the bulk of the anti-war movement accurate? Were the activist intellectuals that he condemned truly “bogged down in wretched prudence,” or can their differences with him be explained in other terms?

To answer these questions, we must briefly return to May 1958. The intrusion of the military into politics and the supposed “failure” of the French people to respond had angered and dismayed other intellectuals in addition to Sartre. But many of them had responded differently to the crisis. Multiple theoretical proposals for “first principles” on which to re-found a viable French Left abounded, and looked little like those “violent” ones that Sartre proposed. Some, indeed, were marked by a total absence of revolutionary rhetoric in favor of moral language about defense of “the human” against extreme violence, and advocacy of a continuation and intensification of the project of “bearing witness.” Sociologist Edgar Morin, for example, the director of the journal *Arguments*, believed like Sartre that May 13 marked not only a “crisis of the regime” but a crisis of French “society,” one that demanded that the Left and especially the anti-war movement engage in a “radical critique” of all their previous principles.⁹³ But for Morin, an ex-Communist, the implied nature of this “radical critique” was entirely different than it was for Sartre: he argued that a Left fascinated with Stalinism and corrupted by a “pseudo-Marxist” concern with efficacy had lost its ability to affect the French public *not* because it was insufficiently militant or “violent” but rather because for too long it had lost its ethical compass. Believing that

⁹³ Edgar Morin, “La crise française,” *Arguments* 8 (numéro special, June 1958), 9, 17.

“torture cannot be absolutely condemned except from the moral point of view,” Morin (incidentally the high-school best friend of Henri Alleg) proposed a redoubling of efforts to “bear witness” to this atrocity:

Today the problem of a political renewal of the Left should take place around the problem of torture, underlying and above the life of politicians [*la vie politique*]. We must reflect on the Dreyfus Affair. From the Dreyfus Affair was born a purification of the Left, a political energy that confronted and broke the Raison d’État and the Taboo of the Army, certainly not outside of political and social conditions but outside of tactics and contrivances, because the question of truth and justice was not subordinated to other questions, but posed in moral passion. Today, in a different context and under distressing conditions, the problem is analogous...A true political redistribution could take place from the scandal of torture, and this redistribution would be much more profound and real than [the redistribution that could come] from the person of de Gaulle or from the word ‘socialism’...Torture stunts cynicisms, realisms, opportunisms. It calls forth that real great force that is lacking today in the desert of pseudo-efficacy: ethics [*la morale*]. You who shrug your shoulders in reading me and murmur, ‘moralism,’ by what authority [*à quel titre*] can you condemn torture? Torture poses the true fundamental questions. The new *cogito* of the Left cannot exist except within the unconditional and universal refusal of torture.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Edgar Morin, “De la torture,” *France-Observateur*, 9 July 1959, reproduced in Morin, *Introduction à une politique de l’homme, suivi de Arguments politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 274-275, emphasis in original: “Car la torture ne saurait être condamnée absolument que du point de vue moral;” “Je veux dire qu’aujourd’hui le problème d’un renouveau politique de la gauche devrait s’effectuer autour du problème de la torture, en dessous et au-dessus de la vie politique. Il faut songer à l’affaire Dreyfus. De l’affaire Dreyfus est née une purification de la gauche, une énergie politique qui a affronté et brisé la Raison d’État et le Tabou de l’Armée, non pas certes en dehors des conditions politiques et sociales, mais en dehors des tactiques et des combinaisons, parce que la question de la vérité et de la justice n’a pas été subordonnée à d’autres questions, mais posée dans la passion morale. Aujourd’hui, dans un contexte différent et dans des conditions funestes, le problème est analogue...C’est une véritable redistribution politique qui pourrait s’opérer à partir du scandale de la torture, et cette redistribution serait beaucoup plus profonde et vraie qu’à partir de la personne de De Gaulle ou du mot socialisme...La torture rabougrit les cynismes, les réalismes, les opportunismes. Elle appelle cette grande force réelle qui manque aujourd’hui dans le désert de la pseudo-efficacité: la morale. Vous qui haussez les épaules en me lisant et murmurez ‘moralisme,’ à quel titre pouvez-vous condamner la torture? La torture pose les vraies questions fondamentales. Le nouveau cogito de la gauche ne peut être que dans le refus inconditionnel et universel à la torture.”

In addition to Morin, the Catholic editor-in-chief of *Esprit* Jean-Marie Domenach was the most important figure on the French Left who responded to May 1958 by urging an expansion of the project of “bearing witness” to torture. The collapse of the Fourth Republic certainly demoralized Domenach and, as avenues for democratic dialogue appeared to shut off one by one, re-radicalized him as they had re-radicalized Sartre. At no point a pacifist, during that spring Domenach was open to the possibility of using of violence to defend the Republic against the military’s forceful intrusion into politics, and resented the role that threats of civil war played in bringing de Gaulle to power. “Munich taught us,” he wrote, “that if one avoids war in ceding to blackmail, sooner or later one will have war, with greater dishonor.”⁹⁵ Domenach never reversed his position – born with his service to the wartime Resistance – that some things were well worth killing for, and that the Republic was prominent among them. “I am not a ‘non-violent,’” he would later lecture. “I would not dare to say that non-violence is ‘the solution to the problems of the day.’ During the Resistance, I took up arms against a violence so brutal that I do not see how I could have done otherwise. And then I maintain a *political* vision of the world – that is to say that I cannot make an abstraction of the violence that remains, in greater or lesser measure, tied to the fight for justice.”⁹⁶ Reflecting on the French populace’s willingness to accept de Gaulle as a way to avoid bloodshed, he bitterly cited Georges Bernanos: “Might it please God that we are still capable of a civil war! To make war,

⁹⁵ “Journal d’une débâcle,” *Esprit* 264 (July-August 1958), 127: “Mais Munich nous a appris que si l’on évitait la guerre en cédant au chantage, on avait la guerre, tôt ou tard, en plus de déshonneur.”

⁹⁶ Domenach, “Pourquoi la non-violence,” *Vérité-Liberté* 2 (June 1960), emphasis in original: “Je ne suis pas un ‘non-violent’; je n’oserais pas dire que la non-violence est ‘la solution aux problèmes de l’heure.’ Pendant la Résistance, j’ai pris les armes contre une violence si brutale que je ne vois pas comment j’aurais pu faire autrement. Et puis je garde une vision *politique* du monde, c’est-à-dire que je ne peux faire abstraction de la violence qui reste, à dose plus ou moins élevée, liée à la lutte pour la justice.”

the French would at least have to look one another in the face.”⁹⁷ Their reluctance to fight struck him, he wrote in his journal, as “the sign of cowardice.”⁹⁸

But if Domenach briefly wondered whether violence would be a necessary resort against the designs of the “fascist” generals, Sartre’s notion that engaging in violence, in itself, could help to create a reinvigorated French Left or a renewal of France’s democratic life was simply foreign to his way of thinking by this juncture. The grinding brutality of the Algerian War, on both sides, had permanently shattered the revolutionary faith he once possessed that to oppose violence with violence – to engage in a “pure dialectic of violence” – could in and of itself produce anything new in the world except more suffering bodies.⁹⁹ Moreover the extended engagement of *Esprit* contributors such as Pierre Emmanuel since 1947 with the project of re-theorizing the French Resistance not as an armed insurrection but as a movement of spiritual opposition to Nazi violence through “witnessing” (see Chapter Three) had already provided Domenach with a language for thinking about heroic, intransigent action as something other than a synonym for violence. Bowing to the unavoidable fact that “the French people did not want civil war,” and were perhaps wise to not

⁹⁷ “Pourquoi non,” *Esprit* 265 (September 1958), 299: ‘Plût à Dieu,’ écrivait Bernanos, ‘que nous soyons encore capables d’une guerre civile!...Pour se faire la guerre, les Français devraient au moins se regarder en face.’”

⁹⁸ *Beaucoup de gueule*, 147. Later in the summer, Domenach would also cast his eye back to 1947, acerbically noting in his journal: “Car ce dilemme de la guerre civile qu’on n’a jamais accepté de la part des travailleurs en grève, on s’y résigne lorsqu’il vient d’une armée en état d’insubordination” (181). Domenach sympathized, certainly, with popular disgust for the men of the Fourth Republic: after the 200,000-strong march to the Place de la République on May 28 (the only genuine mass demonstration that occurred during the crisis, and which came too late to effect the course of events) he recorded disgustedly, “We defended the Republic in marching behind the leaders of the party of Budapest and the party of Suez.” But he asked, echoing Sartre, could not the French understand that “it is not the men who count right now, but the institutions”? (*Beaucoup de gueule*, 162.)

⁹⁹ Domenach, response to Albert Memmi, “La gauche française et le problème nord-africain,” *Arguments* 10 (November 1958), 22: “Lorsque j’ai entendu, à Tunis, il y a six mois, un chef F.L.N. me dire que le seul Français qui avait compris l’Algérie était Soustelle, comment ne me serais-je pas posé des questions? – Comment ne les aurais-je pas posées (car je ne crois pas qu’*Esprit* ait rien voilé de nos certitudes et de nos doutes) – sur un mouvement que certains de ses chefs enfermaient dans une pure dialectique de violence?”

want it – this was “the reflex of an old country where we have only spilled too much blood” – Domenach thus turned his attention to developing new and more robust non-violent modes of “resistance” to the looming threat of fascism.¹⁰⁰ “Bearing witness” to torture through disseminating information had clearly not accomplished enough. What could?

Domenach found inspiration in the “ethic of distress” that philosopher and Protestant friend-of-*Esprit* Paul Ricoeur proposed, in a short 1958 article on a French priest who had helped an FLN leader pass safely to Sweden. The priest had insisted that he did not sanction all of the FLN’s actions, but that he had been reasonably convinced that the man would be tortured if he was captured by French police, and “I want to defend men against suffering.”¹⁰¹ Ricoeur approved: according to his analysis, in a state where disorder reigned, where forms of illegality such as torture were systematically practiced, illegal acts like that of the priest could function as ways of “bearing witness” to state violence. “The treason of legality by the state,” Ricoeur wrote, “can corner the citizen into bearing witness through illegality. The gesture of [the priest] is one of the paths – the path of scandal – by which justice, exiled from official policy, gathers itself [*se recueillir*] and protests.”¹⁰² Ricoeur labeled such acts “testimony to distress [*témoignage de détresse*]” or “testimony to objection

¹⁰⁰ “Pourquoi non,” 300, and *Beaucoup de gueule*, 153: “le réflexe d’un vieux pays où l’on n’a que trop versé de sang.” Pierre Vidal-Naquet has described Domenach as a “crypto-Gaullist;” Galven Boudic, in his thoughtful study of *Esprit*, essentially concurs. Domenach indeed retained an appreciation for de Gaulle’s historic role in the Resistance and could never bring himself to see the General, whom he personally admired, as a fascist. But his treatment of armed uprising as preferable to the Gaullist solution (along with his subsequent campaign against approval of the September referendum) provides evidence that his reluctance to embrace “violence” in the early years of the Fifth Republic, as Sartre did, cannot simply be explained by pointing to his “Gaullism.” Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Face à la raison d’État. Un historien dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989), 14; Galven Boudic, *Esprit, 1944-1962. Les métamorphoses d’une revue* (Paris: Éditions de l’IMEC, 2005), 284-287.

¹⁰¹ “Le ‘cas’ Etienne Mathiot,” *Esprit* 259 (March 1958), 451: “‘De toutes mes forces, je veux défendre les hommes contre la souffrance.’”

¹⁰² *Ibid.*: “La trahison de la légalité par l’État accule le citoyen à témoigner par l’illégalité. Le geste de Mathiot est un des chemins – le chemin du scandale – par lesquels la justice, exilée de la politique officielle, se recueille et proteste. Le geste de Mathiot est celui d’une éthique de détresse.”

[*témoignage de contradiction*],” and concluded that bearing witness to one’s own ethical objection to the State’s projects through illegal acts was, at certain historic junctures, “*what remains*, when all the weight of a community tends to the same side, that of complicity – active or tacit – with the established illegality.”¹⁰³ In a situation where democratic means were failing, where a popular majority could not be mobilized, such “*témoignage*” offered a means *besides* vanguard violence through which even a very small group of men – even a single individual – could make a difference.

Domenach had subsequently drawn on Ricoeur’s logic of witnessing as an active, engaged practice on two occasions before the Jeanson scandal broke. In January 1959, a group of priests in Lyon was indicted for abetting the FLN; their primary “crime” was providing social services and material aid to the struggling families of imprisoned nationalists. In response, Domenach defended this form of succor to the “enemy”: these priests had only extended human kindness to “the most destitute among the destitute,” thus bearing witness against the “established disorder” of Algerians workers’ *de facto* segregation from the rest of the metropolitan community.¹⁰⁴ Their action was a personal risk, a “sacrifice” that placed them in solidarity with the victims of the French state’s violence.¹⁰⁵ Second, in December 1959, he had introduced in *Esprit* excerpts from the journal of a young Catholic Bréton, Jean Le Meur, who had refused to serve in Algeria. Domenach, who would later designate Le Meur as “the man whom I most admire,” saw in the young conscript’s decision a perfect illustration of the “ethic of distress.”¹⁰⁶ Such refusals,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 452: “Le témoignage de la contradiction est *celui qui reste*, quand tout le poids d’une communauté verse d’un même côté, celui de la complicité, active ou tacite, avec l’illégalité établie.”

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Marie Domenach, “Les Français à peur entière,” *Esprit* 269 (January 1959), 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ *Beaucoup de gueule*, 220.

Domenach wrote, were “personal testimonies [*témoignages*], which have the value of protest and of prophecy, which place the legal order at the appeal of a superior order [*qui en appellent de l’ordre légal à un ordre supérieur*].”¹⁰⁷ His belief in the transformative, potentially debate-changing power of acts like Le Meur’s meant that even as his mood darkened throughout 1959 (he observed with outrage that torture was continuing on de Gaulle’s watch and, as he watched the buildup of “counterterrorism” operations in the metropole, feared that they would “make of this country that which Algeria has become, a country of silence and death”),¹⁰⁸ he never reached the pessimistic depths that Sartre did and never concluded that “violence” was the only remaining force for renewal.¹⁰⁹

Domenach’s negative reaction to the Jeanson affair in 1960 emphasizes the difference between the two figures. Despite his avowed non-pacifism, Domenach viewed the Jeanson network’s activities with dismay. “Direct aid provided to the FLN,” he wrote, did not fall under the rubric of the “ethic of distress”: “it is not a matter of non-violent reparation for a disorder, but the deliberate participation in an enterprise in itself violent, political, and military, that finds itself in conflict with the

¹⁰⁷ Domenach, “Histoire d’un acte responsable: le cas Jean Le Meur,” *Esprit* 279 (December 1959), 675: “Aujourd’hui il ne peut s’agir que de témoignages personnels, qui ont la valeur de protestation et de prophétie, qui en appellent de l’ordre légal à un ordre supérieur.”

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Marie Domenach, contribution to ““Hommage à M. Ould Aoudia,” *Témoignages et documents* 13 (June 1959): “L’État a changé, mais ces atrocités subsistent, parce que la guerre, elle, continue...[Le contre-terrorisme] frappera, il continuera de frapper dans ce pays, comme il a frappé en Algérie et comme il a frappé auparavant en Tunisie et au Maroc. Il fera de ce pays ce qu’est devenu l’Algérie, un pays de silence et de mort.”

¹⁰⁹ Helenice Rodrigues de Silva, in “Le Temps de l’action: Le discours d’*Esprit* et des *Temps modernes* sur les réseaux de soutien au FLN et le mouvement des ‘insoumis,’” *Hermès* 8-9 (1990): 179-187, accounts for this divergence differently: she argues that the *Temps modernes* team adopted a “political” approach to the Algerian War while *Esprit* espoused an “moral” one. Besides being something of a circular argument (*why* these different choices?), the distinction will not stand: *Esprit*’s editors always understood themselves to be acting “politically,” but defined “politics” – its means, its ends, its limits – differently than did Sartre and his cohort. The same might be said with regards to the *Temps modernes* editors and acting “morally.”

policy and the army of France.”¹¹⁰ Domenach expressed a certain admiration for the Jeanson *réseau*: they had acted from their hearts in the face of an injustice.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, their actions were morally inadmissible. This position on Domenach’s part cannot be satisfactorily accounted for as evidence of a “wretched prudence”: his critique of Jeanson was not a horrified dismissal but a passionate, troubled attempt by a committed anti-colonialist activist (for few fought longer or harder against the Algerian War than did the editor of *Esprit*) to articulate an alternative normative vision of political action and of the limits to violence. Indeed, his increasing disillusionment with violence as a political means even in a context drenched with violence – and not, as Jeanson’s defenders would charge, an excessive preoccupation with formal legality, an insufficient concern for the fate of the Algerians, or an obstinate personal loyalty to de Gaulle – stood at the heart of Domenach’s objection to the *réseau Jeanson*.¹¹²

In his most complex and thorough response to the *réseau*’s activities, a piece in the May 1960 *Esprit* titled “Résistances,” Domenach offered a two-pronged model for “bearing witness” as a way that French activists could militantly engage against the war *without* participating in, sanctioning, or legitimizing the violence of either side. As

¹¹⁰ Domenach, “Sauve-qui-peut?” *Esprit* 283 (April 1960), 707: “L’aide directe apportée au F.L.N. est d’une autre nature. Il s’agit, non plus de la réparation non-violente d’un désordre, mais d’une participation délibérée à une entreprise elle-même violente, politique et militaire, qui se trouve en conflit avec la politique et l’armée de la France.” Ricoeur agreed: see his “L’insoumission,” *Esprit* 287 (September 1960): 1600-1604.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 710. This admiration was real, and resulted in Domenach – despite all of his harsh criticisms of the *réseau* and his polemical exchanges with Jeanson – personally spearheading efforts in the post-1962 period to obtain amnesty for the *porteurs de valises*. His efforts are documented in ESP2.E2-07.04 (Porteurs de valise),

Esprit IMEC.

¹¹² Domenach was immensely concerned with issues of legality, but this was not the result of a fussy, old-maidish “legalism.” It was, rather, based on the belief, as he observed the machinations at work within the army, that the law was a formal instantiation of norms that stood in the way of anti-democratic violence on the *Right*. And for laws to be socially meaningful, they had to apply to all: “one cannot at the same time demand the obedience of an army that wants to make war on its own behalf and place oneself outside the laws, wanting to make peace on one’s own behalf” (“[O]n ne peut à la fois exiger l’obéissance d’une armée qui veut faire la guerre pour son compte et se mettre soi-même en dehors des lois en voulant faire la paix pour son compte”). *Sauve-qui-peut?* 710.

the article's title suggested, Domenach here attempted deliberately to pluralize the meaning of "resistance" and insist that the legacy of the French Resistance was multiform and did not "belong" to groups such as Jeanson's that now claimed it. First, Domenach advocated a continuation of the project begun in 1956-1957 of "bearing witness" to the war's violence through public-sphere discourse and dialogue. So long as these speech-acts remained even minimally possible in the context of growing censorship, they were preferable to intervention conducted through the force of arms. Domenach was certainly under no illusions about the efficacy of public, "democratic" opposition to the war over the last five years, and sympathized with the impatience of those who felt that they had patiently "born witness" to torture without any result, while meanwhile their military had conducted a genocide.¹¹³ But he rejected the notion that "political failure amounts to a condemnation of political action itself." He deplored the fact that his fellow anti-colonialist activists "have constantly mistrusted banal pathways and slow procedures because they wanted dazzling results, a victory without a shadow."¹¹⁴ There were no such victories in the real world, and therefore the desire for them was dangerous. Yes, the choice to take up arms for one's cause would sometimes be necessary – as it had been in the Resistance, when no meaningful public sphere remained available – but at present, it appeared to him instead as a pernicious escape hatch from the "lowly drudgery of a thankless politics."¹¹⁵ This was an unacceptable abdication of responsibility, a despairing and romantic embrace of

¹¹³ Many on the Left believed in good faith by this juncture that something akin to genocide was taking place in Algeria; historian Pierre-Vidal Naquet, for example, did not hesitate to employ the term: see his *Memoires*, vol. 2, *Le trouble et la lumière, 1955-1998* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 91 and 107. This was one of his only abiding regrets from the Algerian era.

¹¹⁴ Domenach, "Résistances," *Esprit* 284 (May 1960), 798-799: "Je suis frappé de voir avec quelle rapidité certains militants, ayant constaté l'impuissance présente de la gauche passent aux conclusions extrêmes, comme si l'insuccès politique équivalait à une condamnation de l'action politique elle-même... Les plus actifs, les plus généreux ont constamment méprisé les chemins banaux et les procédures lentes parce qu'ils voulaient des résultats éclatants, une victoire sans ombre."

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 799: "les besognes obscures d'une ingrate politique."

violence when the goal needed instead to be an *end* to the violence: “it is not by throwing ourselves, in turn, into this war that we will contribute to the peace,” he insisted, but by awakening the French populace to the demands of justice. “This is why,” he wrote, “I do not believe that we ought to renounce speech [*la parole*] and the hope of convincing [people], when possible.”¹¹⁶

The second element of Domenach’s response was to *acknowledge* the need, given the emergency situation in Algeria and in France itself, for action that went beyond speech acts and worked more quickly than “testimony” to influence public opinion. Claiming to commiserate strongly with young leftists’ “radical disgust with impotent discourse,”¹¹⁷ he published an article to this effect by Jean David in the same issue of *Esprit* and also included an admonishing letter from a young militant in his own piece.¹¹⁸ He agreed entirely with these impatient activists, he insisted: “The Algerians whom we are torturing cannot wait, the young French men who are called up and who ask themselves if they should desert rather than offer their complicity to the horror cannot wait; the Algerian War cannot wait...”¹¹⁹ Could one, in good conscience, recognize this state of emergency but nevertheless refuse to permit the use of violence in responding? Domenach insisted that the answer was *yes* – not only because violence was likely counterproductive but because other radical, intransigent options that did not, themselves, add to human suffering still remained. These were the forms of action described by Ricoeur under the rubric of “*témoignage de détresse*” or “*témoignage de contradiction*.” “It is up to us,” Domenach wrote, “to prove that

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 805-806: “C’est pourquoi je ne crois pas qu’on doive renoncer à la parole et à l’espoir de convaincre, l’occasion aidant.”

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 797: “un dégoût radical pour le discours inopérant.”

¹¹⁸ See Jean David, “La faiblesse des justiciers,” *Esprit* 284 (May 1960): 779-793.

¹¹⁹ “Résistances,” 807: “Les Algériens qu’on torture ne peuvent pas attendre; les jeunes Français appelés, qui se demandent s’ils vont désertier plutôt que d’apporter leur complicité à l’horreur ne peuvent pas attendre; la guerre d’Algérie ne peut pas attendre...”

between useless speech and the recourse to arms there exists a path, and because that of insurrectional resistance is an impasse, there remains that of non-violent resistance, of civil disobedience, of protest that is peaceful, obstinate. We have barely explored it. Lack of imagination, of patience, of courage.”¹²⁰ He observed with astonishment that between the two extremes of either signing petitions or running guns for the FLN, “almost nothing has yet been tried.” What of mass resignations? Of sit-ins and deliberate arrests? Of public acts of *insoumission* like Jean Le Meur’s? These means were difficult, certainly, but “before asking people to risk their lives,” he wrote drily, “we could ask them to risk their jobs.”¹²¹

In calling for such forms of non-violent protest, Domenach was not only drawing inspiration from Ricoeur and from the civil rights activism he had observed on a recent trip to the US. In fact, a tiny collection of French “non-violents,” many Catholic, all inspired by Gandhi, had been carrying out fasts and various demonstrations in the metropole in protest of the war since 1957, under the banner of “Action Civique Non-Violent;” in recent weeks individuals such as Henri-Irénée Marrou, Claude Bourdet, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Germaine Tillion and Robert Barrat had joined them in civil disobedience sit-ins.¹²² Strategies such as theirs, Domenach

¹²⁰ Ibid., 808: “À nous de prouver qu’entre la parole vaine et le recours aux armes il existe une voie, et puisque celle de la résistance insurrectionnelle est une impasse, il reste celle de la résistance non-violente, de la désobéissance civile, de la protestation pacifique obstinée. On l’a à peine explorée. Manque d’imagination, de patience, de courage.”

¹²¹ Ibid., 808-809: “Dans l’ordre de moyens spirituels, presque rien n’a encore été essayé. Avant de demander aux gens de risquer leur vie, on pourrait leur demander de risquer leur situation.”

¹²² On this movement, see Erica Fraters (pseud.), *Réfractaires de la guerre d’Algérie, 1959-1963* (Paris: Syllepse, 2005); Joseph Pyronnet, *Résistances non-violentes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006); Jean Joseph Lanza Del Vasto, *Pacification en Algérie, ou Mensonge et violence* (Bollène: Presses d’Aubin, 1960). On the PSU’s involvement in the non-violent protests of the spring of 1960, see Marc Heurgon’s rich (and engaged) *Histoire du P.S.U.*, vol. 1, *La fondation et la guerre d’Algérie (1958-1962)*, 137. In 1960, *Esprit* began to make an enormous effort to publicize these activities; the journal also gave space to a lengthy piece on Gandhian theory and praxis – Hervé Chaigne, “La non-violence gandhienne: mystique et technique,” *Esprit* 286 (July-August 1960): 1189-1218 – and an article on the atomic bomb by Del Vasto, a Catholic pacifist and mystic who considered himself a disciple of Gandhi: “La désintégration logique,” *Esprit* 281 (February 1960): 193-204. Domenach told Del Vasto in private

now proclaimed, could fulfill the crying demand for “real” action, could imperiously claim a radical break with the scandalous present, and could, like the activities of the Jeanson *réseau*, permit Frenchmen not merely to express their “opinion” about the war but to share in “co-responsibility” and undertake “a risk in solidarity with the victims.”¹²³

An enormous difference nevertheless existed between this kind of illegality and that of the Jeanson network, Domenach insisted, for “the objector, the non-violent, does not oppose power to power, violence to violence, but conscience to the abuse of power...He does not arm himself against power, he disarms, hoping to disarm it...The non-violent uses only symbols – for symbols serve the inexpressible and they do not cause harm to others [*à autrui*].”¹²⁴ Non-violent protest was the quintessential “*témoignage de contradiction*” as Ricoeur had defined it; it was a symbolic but nevertheless absolute engagement in favor not of any violent actor but of morality and truth. “Non-violence,” Domenach lectured that May, “seems to me first of all as follows: it is the decision to bear witness [*témoigner*] all the way for what one believes to be true and just.”¹²⁵

Domenach’s expansion of the notion of “bearing witness” to include not only speech and writing but other forms of symbolism, including illegal non-violent protest, helps illuminate how far the diffuse, open-ended notion of “*témoignage*” as an

correspondance on July 4, 1960 that “ je voudrais faire à toutes les expériences de non-violence la plus large place dans *Esprit*.” ESP2.C23-04.03, *Esprit* IMEC.

¹²³ “Pourquoi la non-violence?” : “[Recent non-violent protesters] allaient plus loin que l’expression d’une opinion; ils demandaient une co-responsabilité, ils acceptaient un risque solidairement avec les victimes.”

¹²⁴ “Résistances,” 801-802: “L’objecteur, le non-violent, n’oppose pas pouvoir à pouvoir, violence à violence, mais la conscience à l’abus de pouvoir...Il ne s’arme pas contre le pouvoir, il se désarme en espérant le désarmer...Le non-violent n’utilise que des symboles – car les symboles servent à l’inexprimable et ils ne causent pas de dommage à autrui.”

¹²⁵ “Pourquoi la non-violence?”: “La non-violence m’apparaît d’abord ainsi: elle est la décision de témoigner jusqu’au bout pour ce qu’on croit vrai et juste.”

alternative to violence had now migrated since his friend Jean Lacroix's 1945 *Esprit* article "Témoignage ou efficacité." Lacroix had defined "témoignage" as a contemplative spiritual practice in contradistinction to (inevitably violent) political action and had believed, in the immediate wake of the Resistance experience, that one ineluctably had to choose between the two. "Témoignage," according to Lacroix, was in the realm of martyrs and saints and only coincided at exceptional moments in history with the practice of politics. Now, however, authors in *Esprit* celebrated "witnessing" as a form of action in itself, one potentially *more* powerful than violence. Contributor Casamayor, for instance, in a short piece in June 1960 on a non-violent sit-in at Vincennes, paid homage to the protesters there who "bore witness" to injustice: fighting wrongdoing with violence, he wrote, "brings nothing durable except death" whereas symbolic non-violent protest had the potential to change hearts and minds.¹²⁶ Domenach himself now insisted that bearing witness to the violence done to powerless victims, not joining in as a violent actor oneself (for "it isn't a few revolvers or a few machine guns that can foil the plans of fascism, as some romantic boys imagine") was the "the most direct, the most efficacious" means of protest available to those who sought to face down the modern forms of barbarism.¹²⁷

Jeanson and Sartre, of course, could hardly agree with this assessment.

Jeanson's responses in various venues to Domenach – whom he had bitterly resented

¹²⁶ Casamayor, "La police avec nous," *Esprit* 285 (June 1960), 1142-1143: "...les armes n'offrent que des significations successives, contradictoires, suivant le flux et le reflux de la fortune, ne tiennent dans l'histoire que la place étroite des faits matériels, et n'apportent de durable que la mort. Les signes, au contraire...donnent aux hommes le moyen de franchir les chemins escarpés, de traverser les séparations les plus imperméables...Les non-violents de Vincennes ne venaient pas pour calmer leurs nerfs, ni pour se donner bonne conscience: ils témoignaient."

¹²⁷ "Pourquoi la non-violence?": "Ce ne sont pas quelques revolvers ou quelques mitraillettes qui sont capables de faire échec aux entreprises du fascisme, comme se l'imaginent des garçons romantiques...Quant à moi, je n'y vois pas [in non-violent protest] un absolu, un millénarisme prophétique, mais l'éternelle protestation, la plus directe, la plus efficace, contre les entreprises des barbares."

ever since the older man had refused *L'Algérie hors la loi* for publication at Seuil in 1955 – were furious, withering.¹²⁸ He accused Domenach of only caring about fascism if it hurt “a Western people.”¹²⁹ Then, pointing out that his *réseau* and others like it (such as “Jeune Résistance,” broken up just after the *réseau Jeanson*) drew heavily on eighteen-to-twenty-five year-old deserters, Jeanson portrayed Domenach as a fossil of a Eurocentric, cautious, paralyzed Old Left being swiftly replaced by dynamic, vital youth: “The Left is escaping you more and more,” he informed Domenach in June. “For several months it has not ceased to deeply transform itself, behind the back of its managers. The Left is on the move, dear Domenach, and you will have to run if you want to catch up with it. Your article [“Sauve-qui-peut”] is dated, your tone appeared to me that of an aged man: but this old country of France possesses surprising resources of Youth.”¹³⁰

Beyond such attacks, Jeanson also offered a substantive rejection of the notion that non-violent protest, as a form of “*témoignage*,” could replace engagement on one side or the other of the violent conflict. There was, perhaps, a place in political life for such acts of witnessing, Jeanson conceded. On occasion they could help move public opinion; indeed, “*témoignage* can become important [*capital*].”¹³¹ But, in an interesting and subtle argument that – like Sartre’s response to Rousset – refused to conceive of the possibility for empathy with suffering that was not pure identification,

¹²⁸ Seuil ultimately published the book, on Paul Flamand’s decision, despite Domenach’s objections. In his journal, Domenach described the interview that he had with Jeanson about the text as “le pire scène depuis dix ans à *Esprit*.” *Beaucoup de gueule*, 103.

¹²⁹ “Lettre de Francis Jeanson à J.-M. Domenach en réponse de son article paru dans la Revue *Esprit*,” *Vérités pour* 16 (June 1960): “...car enfin – n’est-ce pas – le fascisme en Algérie n’est pas aussi redoutable que le nazisme ou le franquisme, puisqu’il ne prend pas d’emblée pour cible un peuple occidental...”

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: “La gauche vous échappe de plus en plus: depuis quelques mois elle n’a cessé de se transformer en profondeur, à l’insu de ses responsables. La gauche est en marche, cher Domenach, et bientôt il vous faudra courir si vous voulez la rattraper. Votre article date, votre ton m’a paru celui d’un homme âgé: mais ce vieux pays de France a d’étonnantes ressources de Jeunesse...”

¹³¹ Jeanson, *Notre guerre*, 78.

Jeanson maintained that the strategy of “bearing witness” through non-violent protest was an insufficient response when adopted by “*non-victims* to protest against a situation perpetrated against victims *who, themselves, do not adopt it.*” It was one thing for Gandhi to embrace non-violent protest, Jeanson wrote, but quite another for an intellectual comfortably installed in the elite of the oppressor nation to do so. “It has always seemed to me,” Jeanson wrote, “that if one is perfectly authorized to turn the other cheek, one is much less authorized to turn *that of one’s neighbor*... If you are not victims at all, where are you getting the justification for a merely passive attitude?”¹³² It would certainly have been convenient for French leftists like Domenach if the Algerian people had adopted a non-violent strategy of agitating for their independence, Jeanson remarked, but they had not: a typical Algerian today fervently desired “the victory of the combatants in the *maquis*.”¹³³ How dare metropolitan Frenchmen, then, presume to give lessons in what the response to the overwhelming violence of French colonialism “ought” rather to be? Non-violent protesters, Jeanson charged, want “to substitute yourself for the victims, to render yourselves day after day *greater victims than them*, in suffering all that they suffer and in not responding to it as they respond.”¹³⁴ Thus, the play-acting of non-violent protest (“going and sitting, now and then, in the streets”) from French citizens who, after all,

¹³² Ibid., 79-80, emphasis in original: “[J]’ai peine à concevoir qu’elle puisse être efficacement adoptée par des *non-victimes* pour protester contre la situation faite à des victimes *qui, elles, ne l’adoptent pas*... Il m’a toujours semblé que si l’on était parfaitement autorisé à tendre sa joue droite, on l’était beaucoup moins à tendre *celle du voisin*... [S]i vous n’êtes pas victimes de tout, d’où tirez-vous la justification d’une attitude simplement passive?”

¹³³ Ibid., 79: “lesdites ‘victimes’ refusent précisément de se considerer comme telles: cette mère algérienne qui eut les deux jambes coupées en traversant la frontière pour se réfugier en territoire marocain n’envisage la situation de son pays qu’en termes de lutte et n’imagine pas d’autre avenir que la victoire des combattants du *maquis*...”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 80, emphasis in original: “Mais vous ne pouvez pas aimer les bourreaux des autres: votre ultime ressource serait donc de vous substituer aux victimes, de vous rendre jour après jour *plus victimes qu’elles*, en subissant tout ce qu’elles subissent et en n’y répondant pas comme elles y répondent.”

belonged to “a collectivity that assassinates and tortures another” was both shameful and tragically “insufficient.”¹³⁵

Whatever its merits, Jeanson’s argument here did not win over much of the anti-war movement. Those who concurred with Domenach were numerous, and they were not negligible intellectuals. They included openly Gaullist writers such as François Mauriac, who believed that the General was on course to end the war and grant Algeria independence and therefore dismissed the Jeansonites’ action as “insane.”¹³⁶ They also included figures like the Algerian-born, Jewish journalist for *L’Express* Jean Daniel, a partisan of Algerian independence (his close friendship with Camus ended over the issue) who had nevertheless over years of tireless work covering the war concluded that “Violence has posed the problem; it will not be sufficient to resolve it. What’s more: we have arrived at an equilibrium of violences, an exasperation of two nationalisms, a mutual aid society between two extremisms. To encourage one is to reinforce the other.”¹³⁷ Edgar Morin likewise refused to endorse the actions of the Jeanson network, arguing against direct aid to the FLN both from a moral perspective (because of the means the nationalists employed) and a political perspective (because such action tended to radicalize the conflict and thereby to favor the probability of military strong-man rule in the future independent Algeria – and, for that matter, in France as well).¹³⁸ Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber at *L’Express* and Claude Bourdet

¹³⁵ Ibid., 80: “Mais aller s’asseoir de temps à autre dans les rues, en signe de protestation, quand on se réclame d’une collectivité qui en assassine et torture une autre, cela – oui, je l’avoue – me paraît encore insuffisant.”

¹³⁶ Mauriac, “Bloc-Notes,” *L’Express*, 28 April 1960, reproduced in Mauriac, *Bloc-Notes*, vol. 2, 1958-1960, ed. Jean Touzot (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 417.

¹³⁷ Jean Daniel, “Socialisme et anti-colonialisme,” *Esprit* 284 (May 1960), 810: “La violence a posé le problème; elle ne suffit pas à le résoudre. Davantage: on en est arrivé à un équilibre des violences, une exaspération de deux nationalismes, une entraide de deux extrémismes. Encourager l’un, c’est renforcer l’autre.”

¹³⁸ Morin, “Les intellectuels et l’Algérie,” *France-Observateur*, 29 September 1960, reproduced in *Introduction à une politique de l’homme*, 284-286.

and Gilles Martinet at *France Observateur* – all key organizers of the small new anti-war Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), founded in the wake of May 1958 – objected that the Jeanson *réseau*'s actions were courageous but misguided.¹³⁹ The PSU's Comité Politique National (albeit after a good deal of painful wrangling) formally distanced itself from the *réseau*'s endorsement of clandestinity and illegality, along with the PCF, SFIO, the FEN, the CFTC and other labor unions, and the militantly anti-war student group UNEF.¹⁴⁰ At *Le Monde* – an enormously important site for the communication of anti-war and especially anti-torture information and opinion – both Maurice Duverger and Jacques Fauvet penned editorials condemning the network's activities, as did “Libres opinions” contributors such as Pierre-Henri Simon.¹⁴¹ Others who took similar positions included Merleau-Ponty and Rousset, as well as Roland Barthes, Jean Cassou, and Daniel Mayer. In fact, far more intellectuals and academics than signed the “121” opted to put their names to a more moderate alternative anti-war petition, quickly put together by Merleau-Ponty, that pointedly did *not* endorse direct aid to the FLN. (Signatories included Barthes, Cassou, Domenach, Claude Lefort, Morin, Paul Ricoeur, and Raymond Aron, whose signature Merleau-Ponty personally sought out.)

¹³⁹ Because by literally providing the FLN with ammunition that might be used to kill young French men, they were cutting the Left off from the masses and rendering democratic mobilization against the war far more difficult. Martinet's objection was moreover specifically to the equation Jeanson (and Sartre) drew between the objective interests of the FLN and those of French socialism. If there were “grandes possibilités de coopération” between the French Left and the leaders of the Algerian revolution, Martinet insisted, nevertheless “les causes que nous défendons ne sont pas identiques.” Gilles Martinet, “Les déserteurs,” *France-Observateur*, 21 April 1960. On the origins of the PSU in the aftermath of May 1958, see Heurgon, *Histoire du P.S.U.*, vol. 1, 19-125.

¹⁴⁰ See Heurgon, *Histoire du P.S.U.*, 149-195. This is not to say that militants within these parties and groups were united. Many students in UNEF, for example, supported the Jeanson *réseau* and there were significant ties between UNEF and a similar, younger group of activists called Jeune Résistance. UNEF's president Pierre Gaudez, however, prevailed in calling for national mass protest as “une dernière carte du côté de l'action de type démocratique et légal.”

¹⁴¹ Maurice Duverger, “Les deux trahisons,” *Le Monde*, 27 April 1960; Jacques Fauvet, “La limite à ne pas franchir,” *Le Monde*, 22 April 1960; Pierre-Henri Simon, “Révolte des intellectuels,” *Le Monde*, 28 September 1960. Editor-in-chief Hubert Beuve-Méry's shared these authors' overarching sentiments.

Even among the signers of the “121,” who at first glance we might assume were aligned with Sartre and Jeanson, a surprising number insisted that their signatures were *not* endorsements of the Jeanson network’s actions. Actress Simone Signoret, for example, told *L’Express* that she had only signed to express “that I do not like that they torture, that they mutilate, in my name.” And Françoise Sagan said that although she had put her name on the Manifesto for the same reason expressed by Signoret, she had “hesitated” to do so because “never in my life would I offer aid, material aid, for war, no matter who it was for.” Maurice Nadeau, too, was a “121” signatory who nevertheless ultimately had more in common with Domenach than Sartre: “Personally,” he told an interviewer, he would never have provided aid to the FLN. “Our role as intellectuals is to bear witness [*témoigner*], to tell the truth, to speak for all those who are silent.”¹⁴² To uphold testimony as an alternative to violence, in other words.

It is not difficult to understand why in late 1960 even intellectuals like Nadeau who did not approve of the *réseau Jeanson*’s actions felt compelled to make a dramatic statement of solidarity against the policies of the French state and the supporters of *Algérie française*. The *réseau*’s trial helped underline the yawning gap that separated the anti-war movement’s perception of reality from that endorsed by the government and military. As hard-right, pro-*Algérie française* protesters outside chanted “Shoot them!” and “Death to traitors!”, inside the military tribunal’s courtroom the judges refused to allow the word “war” to be used about the 6 year-old conflict in Algeria in

¹⁴² See also the comments of signatories Jean-Charles Pichon, Jean-Louis Bory, and Olivier de Magny in *Le Droit à l’insoumission*, in addition to the statement of Maurice Blancot, one of the authors of the petition, who insisted that the Manifesto “ne prétend à aucune efficacité immédiatement politique” and described his motivation in these terms: “la responsabilité propre des intellectuels: lorsque l’ordre démocratique s’altère ou se défait, il leur appartient, à l’écart de toute appartenance purement politique, de dire, en une parole simple, ce qui leur paraît juste.” *Droit à l’insoumission*, 92.

which over a million Frenchmen had now served, and the Commissaire du Gouvernement, after a long disquisition on the beneficent project of French colonialism in Algeria since 1830 (“The French have the right to be proud”), insisted indignantly that no member of the French forces of order had ever employed torture (“The gendarmerie has always comported itself, wherever it was, as a perfectly correct arm, against whom no reproach can be made”).¹⁴³ The government cracked down on the “121” signatories, suspending those among them who served as public functionaries such as university professors, banning all of them from public airwaves and theaters, and opening criminal investigations against some. Meanwhile, in what had now become routine operations, police raided the offices of *Esprit* and seized the October edition of *Les Temps modernes*. On October 3, a crowd hard-line supporters of *Algérie française* assembled on the Champs Elysées to protest the “121,” shout “Power to Salan!” or “Shoot Jean-Paul Sartre!”, smash windows, and ransack the offices of *L’Express*. That same day the military tribunal’s sentences were handed down: a range of ten- and five-year prison terms from a system that, it is worth noting, had yet to sentence a single individual for involvement in torture or war crimes.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the war’s violence, it seemed, was indeed “coming home” to the metropole – not through the efforts of the Jeanson network, but through those of the Paris Police and the FLN’s Fédération de France. In the autumn of 1958, the FLN inaugurated a brief but frightening, highly visible campaign of bombings in the hexagon that particularly targeted major cities like Marseille. De Gaulle’s Prime

¹⁴³ Ibid., 169 and 175: “Qu’était l’Algérie à cette époque? Un pays divisé, d’évolution tres arriérée, dont la population constamment décimée par les luttes intestines, la maladie, la misère, comptait environ 1.800.000 inhabitants ...[L]es Français ont le droit d’être fiers;” “La gendarmerie s’est toujours comportée, partout où elle était, comme une arme parfaitement correcte et à laquelle il n’y a rien à reprocher.”

¹⁴⁴ On the French judiciary and the Algerian War, see Sylvie Thénault, *Une drôle de justice: les magistrats dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Découverte, 2001).

Minister, Michel Debré, launched a new push for “pacification” in the hexagon in late 1959, targeting the powerful Fédération de France and, in truth, the entire immigrant Algerian population; the goal was to choke off collection of funds for the FLN’s army. Notably, Debré approved the creation of “Auxiliary Police Forces” (FPA) in the Seine département. This was a supplementary security force composed entirely of Algerians, under the authority of now-infamous Paris Prefect of Police Maurice Papon, recently transferred from Constantine.¹⁴⁵ Reports of metropolitan police use of torture had already leaked out in 1958 and 1959, and gained some publicity with the 1959 publication of a powerful new collection of victims’ *témoignages*, titled *La Gangrène*.¹⁴⁶ Now, with the birth of the FPA to carry out the police’s “dirty work” – dedicated torture chambers in the basements of Paris hotels were set aside for them – the “gangrene” spread further. So, too, did mass round-ups, indefinite detention, and arbitrary relocations of families of Algerian origins. The Paris police forces, no less than their counterparts in Algiers, believed that they were at war. The FLN’s Fédération de France agreed: it multiplied its attacks targeting police officers and military men on leave in the metropole. From 1956 up to the moment of the Jeanson trial, *Le Monde* reported, the Algerian nationalists had succeeded in killing at least 39 policemen and soldiers in the metropole, wounding 273,¹⁴⁷ by the war’s end, according to the Ministry of Interior, the FLN’s metropolitan victim tally was 53 police officers and 13 soldiers dead, 279 of the first group and 140 of the latter wounded.¹⁴⁸ There were also FPA casualties: these included 24 fatalities and 57

¹⁴⁵ On all of this activity, see Linda Amiri, *La Bataille de France: la guerre d’Algérie en métropole* (Paris: R. Laffont, 2004), 69-89; Ali Haroun, *La VIIe Wilaya. La guerre du FLN en France (1954-1962)* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

¹⁴⁶ Anonymous [Béchir Boumaza, Mustapha Francis, Benaïssa Souami, et. al.], *La Gangrène* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959).

¹⁴⁷ “Le terrorisme a fait en métropole 2998 tués et 7287 blessés” *Le Monde*, 3 December 1960.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Stora, *Ils venaient d’Algérie. L’immigration algérienne en France, 1912-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 207.

injuries.¹⁴⁹ These numbers were positively dwarfed, of course, by the death figures in the MNA-FLN “civil war” that had raged among the Algerian population in metropolitan France throughout the conflict,¹⁵⁰ but they were far more publicized and provoked a veritable tidal wave of anti-“terrorist” outrage, both in the mainstream media and within the police corps: at the funeral of a slain officer on October 3, 1961, Papon vowed, “For one blow given, we will give back ten!”¹⁵¹ Such was the atmosphere of escalating violence and rage in which the October 17, 1961 police massacre of Algerians and the February 8, 1962 tragedy at Charonne, where eight French peace protesters were crushed to death in the mouth of a Paris métro station, took place.¹⁵²

The FLN was not the only group to employ terrorism in the metropole in the final years of the Algerian War: as de Gaulle both reinforced civilian state authority over the military in Algeria and moved step-by-step toward accepting Algerian independence, hard-core defenders of *Algérie française* within the military, the European population of Algeria, and – in smaller numbers – civilians in the metropole

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ For these figures, see Ageron, “Les Français devant la guerre civile algérienne,” in Jean-Pierre Rioux, ed., *La Guerre d’Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1990): 53-62. Ageron accepts the January 1962 estimate of the *Ministre des affaires algériennes*: “En six ans de guerre – de 1956 à 1961 – les agressions entre Algériens auraient eu pour conséquence en France 3889 morts et 7678 blessés algériens” (54). In *Histoire de la guerre d’Algérie*, Stora, meanwhile, uses the figures provided by *Le Monde* on 20 March 1962, which counted more than 4000 deaths and more than 9000 injuries for the total period of the war. This still represented a lower toll than the FLN/MNA war had exacted in Algerian territory (about 6000 deaths and 14,000 injured).

¹⁵¹ Jean-Paul Brunet, *Police contre FLN: le drame d’octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 87.

¹⁵² There is now an extensive literature on both of these tragedies. On the events of October 17, see especially Jean-Luc Einaudi, *17 octobre 1961: un massacre à Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); Jim House and Neil MacMaster, eds., *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Olivier le Cour Grandmaison, ed., *Le 17 octobre 1961: un crime d’État à Paris* (Paris: La Dispute, 2001); Linda Amiri, *La Bataille de France. On Charonne*, Alain Dewerpe, *Charonne, 8 février 1962: anthropologie historique d’un massacre d’État* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) is monumental and superb; see also Jean-Paul Brunet, *Charonne: lumières sur une tragédie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003). Tartakowsky, *Les Manifestations de rue en France*, 661-693, provides an indispensable contextualization concerning street protest, violence, and counter-violence during the 1958-1962 period.

radicalized their campaign against “abandon.”¹⁵³ In early 1961, leaders of the “week of the barricades” exiled in Spain founded the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS); the group enjoyed an influx of men after another attempted military putsch in Algiers in April ended in a decisive triumph for de Gaulle (though not before hours of terror and uncertainty in the metropole, as a sleepless Paris again scanned the night sky for descending paratroopers). The OAS, which fiercely denied the notion that it was a racist or colonialist organization, invoking the “fraternization” of May 13, 1958, claimed to defend the interests of the vast majority of the Muslim Algerian population against the depredations of the FLN. It drew illustrious politicians – and, moreover, old Resistance heroes like Jacques Soustelle and Georges Bidault – into its illegal activities.¹⁵⁴ Under the supreme command of General Salan, the OAS commenced a

¹⁵³ On de Gaulle’s efforts to “repandre en main l’armée,” see Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 198-204; Michel Hardy, Hervé Lemoine and Thierry Sarmant, *Pouvoir politique et autorité militaire en Algérie française, hommes textes, institutions, 1945-1962* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ Soustelle had abandoned his Gaullism as he saw, with horror, that the General intended to abandon *Algérie française*. “Je pense,” he said in 1961, “que le général de Gaulle est mort, entre 1951 et 1958 à Colombey-les-Deux-Églises. Malheureusement on ne s’en est pas aperçu. L’homme qui porte ce nom aujourd’hui incarne exactement le contraire de ce que symbolisa, de 1940 à 1944, le chef de la Résistance française.” (“M. Jacques Soustelle qualifie le régime de ‘dictature tempérée d’anarchie,’” *Le Monde*, 5-6 November 1961.) Bidault, head of the Conseil national de la Résistance at the time of the Liberation and one of the founders of the MRP, now went into exile and founded a new Conseil national de la Résistance; his 1965 justificatory memoir, published after amnesty measures allowed him to return to France from his Argentine exile, was titled *D’une Résistance à l’autre* (Paris: Les Presses du Siècle, 1965). The OAS called frequently on an attachment to the ideals of the Resistance and on a Resistance-based ideology that distinguished mere legality from moral legitimacy; OAS texts thus often echoed the words of those on the far left who sought to justify the violence employed by the FLN and its French supporters. It moreover shared the radical Left’s critique of the de Gaulle regime as illegitimate and anti-democratic (or democratic only in a formal sense). As Todd Shepard has documented, the OAS made this case overwhelmingly in a language long understood as the property of the Left, the language of *republicanism*: “republican principles (the territorial inviolability of the Republic, the irrevocability of citizenship), republican ideals (the policy of assimilation, secularism), and republican methods (respect for the constitution and the laws).” Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 90. The OAS also frequently sounded many of the same notes regarding violence as the pro-FLN far Left: the need for a radical break out of decadence, the importance of youth and dynamism, the impotence of non-violent politics. There are nevertheless important reasons the French extreme Left and extreme Right of 1960-1962 cannot be conflated nor even, in some domains, reasonably compared. Chief among these are the extent to which they *actually* employed violence. The political wing of the OAS and the extreme Left also possessed profoundly different attitudes about military power, Western

policy of assassinations, intimidation, kidnappings, prison break-ins, and bombings on Algerian soil (in particular in Algiers and Oran), a policy which escalated into a horrific scorched-earth campaign of terror during the lead-up and especially the aftermath to the Evian peace treaty of March 1962. Meanwhile, the OAS branch in the metropole also turned to violence, favoring “*plastiquages*” (bomb attacks) of the homes and offices of partisans of Algerian independence. These, too, escalated as the Evian talks moved forward: 40 in the week beginning January 15, 1962 (25 of these in the region of Paris), 33 the following week (23 in the Paris region), and 34 from 5-11 February (27 in the Paris region).¹⁵⁵

Aside from Gaullist administrators, intellectuals and journalists who favored Algerian independence were the primary targets for OAS *plastiquages* in the metropole.¹⁵⁶ OAS members attacked Sartre’s apartment twice; the offices of *Esprit*, *L’Express*, *Les Temps modernes*, *Le Monde*, *Témoignage chrétien*, the *Chronique sociale* in Lyon, and *France-Observateur*, among others, all suffered bombings. Thus in the final months of the war, much of the organizational energy of the anti-colonialist Left was redirected towards the “anti-fascist” struggle against the OAS and those within the Paris police and national government perceived as complaisant towards its violence or frankly complicit in it. As we have seen, in a post-Munich,

dominance, and the desirability of socialism. And, in structural terms, the extreme Left was smaller, was almost exclusively metropolitan, and did not benefit, as did the OAS, from sympathies within the police, the judiciary, and the parliament.

¹⁵⁵ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 96. On the OAS in general, see Anne-Marie Duranton-Crabol, *Le Temps de l’OAS* (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1995); Rémi Kauffer, *OAS, histoire d’une guerre franco-française* (Paris: Seuil, 2002); Olivier Dard, *Voyage au coeur de l’OAS* (Paris: Perrin, 2005); Guy Pervillé, “L’Algérie dans la mémoire des droites,” in Jean-François Sirinelli, ed., *L’histoire des droites en France*, vol. 2, *Cultures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 621-644; Alexander Harrison, *Challenging de Gaulle: The O.A.S. and the Counterrevolution in Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Serge Berstein, “Le peau de chagrin de ‘l’Algérie française,’” in Jean-Pierre Rioux, ed., *La Guerre d’Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 202-217, esp 209.

¹⁵⁶ This is not to say that the OAS was hostile to *intellectuals* as a group – they actively sought (and in some instances received) the support of right-wing writers and scholars. See Duranton-Crabol, *Le Temps de l’OAS*, 99-106.

post-Resistance France even the most vocal advocates of non-violence among political and intellectual elites were not strict pacifists; thus the willingness to take up arms against the OAS in simple self-defense, once they ascertained that the police would not protect them, was relatively uncomplicated even for stalwarts of the “respectful Left.” The Marseille Socialist Gaston Defferre told the SFIO Federation of Bouches-du-Rhône “It is necessary that they know it: we will not accept being only rabbits, we are resolved also to be hunters. You will fight, if necessary, for freedom and for the Republic.”¹⁵⁷ Jurist, political scientist, and *Le Monde* columnist Maurice Duverger condemned the “failure of the State” to protect victims from the OAS and argued that this failure automatically granted citizens the right to protect themselves:

Democracy does not consist of making speeches in the face of people who are attempting to assassinate you...If the parachutists had come in here at this moment, naturally we would have invited them to sit down and talk with us, hoping that they would accept. But if they stuck machine-guns in our cheeks, our duty would be likewise to seek machine-guns: our duty, moreover, would be to have them already at hand. Democracy consists, first of all, of defending freedom. And when there is no other way to defend freedom than with weapons in hand, it is indeed necessary to defend it like that.¹⁵⁸

In the following months, as the explosives attacks multiplied, “*Groupes d'autodefense*” formed to guard likely targets of the *plastiqueurs* such as the Centre Landy where the anti-war *Témoignages et documents* was published and PSU headquarters. After de Gaulle himself narrowly escaped an OAS assassination attempt

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in “OAS,” *Témoignages et documents* 33 (December 1961): “Il faut qu’on le sache, nous n’accepterons pas seulement d’être des lapins, mais nous sommes résolus à être aussi les chasseurs. Vous vous battez si c’est nécessaire pour la liberté et pour la République.”

¹⁵⁸ Maurice Duverger, “Carence d’État et défense des libertés,” *Témoignages et documents* 30 (June-September 1961): “La démocratie ne consiste pas à faire des discours en face des gens qui cherchent à vous assassiner....Si les parachutistes entraient ici en ce moment, nous les inviterions bien entendu à s’asseoir et à discuter avec nous, en souhaitant qu’ils acceptent. Mais s’ils nous mettaient en joue avec des mitraillettes, notre devoir serait de chercher aussi des mitraillettes: notre devoir serait d’ailleurs de les avoir déjà préparées. La démocratie consiste d’abord à défendre la liberté. Et quand il n’y a pas d’autre moyen de défendre la liberté que les armes à la main, il faut bien la défendre ainsi.”

in September, the PSU announced that “the country now lives under the threat of civil war” and subsequently began organizing self-defense units and patrols in collaboration with the UNEF, the CFTC, and the Club Jean Moulin.¹⁵⁹ Ad hoc groupuscules such as the ephemeral Committee for Antifascist Action of the Students of Business Schools (*Écoles de Commerce*) announced that they, too, would be fighting back, “through witnessing [*témoignage*] first, and if all else fails, and if they obligate us to, by violence.”¹⁶⁰

Sartre, too, engaged passionately in the struggle against the OAS, whose campaign he labeled a “terrorism of rich people.”¹⁶¹ However, his interest was not self-defense. He saw in anti-OAS mobilization a terrain where anti-fascist, pro-social democratic forces in France could at last unite their energies and, recognizing their shared interests with the struggle of the FLN, bring the revolution “home” to France. The OAS’s use of extreme violence in the hexagon, in Sartre’s view, was objectively desirable: it was pushing an already tense situation toward open confrontation – that is, toward a revolutionary state of affairs – and compelling otherwise reluctant French people to take up arms. “Terrorism,” he lectured, “is helping the French population to emerge from its lethargy.”¹⁶² The sleepwalkers were at last being roused.

In early 1962 Sartre co-founded (with Laurent Schwartz and Jean-Pierre Vigier) the Ligue d’Action Pour le Rassemblement Antifasciste, an anti-OAS organization populated primarily by intellectuals and PSU figures.¹⁶³ In his speaking

¹⁵⁹ Comité politique du PSU, quoted in Huerigon, *Histoire du P.S.U.*, vol. 1, 301. On these counter-clandestine groups see Duranton-Crabol, *Le Temps de l’OAS*, 202-206.

¹⁶⁰ *Urgence. Organe du comité d’action antifasciste des élèves des écoles de commerce* 1 (2 February 1962), preserved in Folder “Lutte contre OAS,” Boîte 195, NAF 28091, Bourdet BNF: “Il faut répondre, par le témoignage d’abord, et si le reste est vain, et s’ils nous y contraignent, par la violence.”

¹⁶¹ “Comment faire face au terrorisme,” *France-Observateur*, 18 May 1961: “terrorisme de riches.”

¹⁶² *Ibid.*: “...le terrorisme aide la population française à sortir de sa léthargie.”

¹⁶³ A sub-group of the Ligue intended specifically to promote intellectual mobilization was subsequently created in the aftermath of Charonne: the Front d’Action et de Coordination des Universitaires et Intellectuels pour un Rassemblement Antifasciste (FACUIRA, or FAC). Sartre sat on

engagements for the organization, he assiduously avoided using the language of “republican defense” to rally support against the extreme right, employing revolutionary formulations instead. Even as it appeared more and more obvious to observers that the de Gaulle government was on the verge of successfully completing the Evian peace accords, to the murderous displeasure of the OAS, he continued to insist that the government and the OAS were part of the same bloc of interests and that therefore, “We must make clear that to fight the OAS is at the same time to fight the government.”¹⁶⁴ In the wake of the Charonne police-brutality tragedy, he exulted that “it is impossible that a single one of you, now, after Thursday [the day of the massacre], thinks that we can fight against the OAS without also fighting against the government.”¹⁶⁵ He was also insistent that confrontations such as Charonne demonstrated that those who opposed fascism “at home” needed to align themselves with the FLN, a group infused with the vibrant, youthful, revolutionary dynamism so desperately lacking in the French Left: “We have the same adversaries here and over there. They are named colonists [*colons*] on the other side of the Mediterranean and here fascists... Why, then, would we persist in considering ourselves separate from [the FLN], for, after all, we are not racists and it is not a matter of a policy of individual support for the Muslim resistance, it is a matter of solidarity of principle and of the masses, of peoples.”¹⁶⁶

the “Bureau” that oversaw the FAC’s activities. Letter from the Ligue d’Action to multiple recipients, 1 March 1962. Folder “Lutte contre OAS,” Boite 195, NAF 28091, Bourdet BNF.

¹⁶⁴ “Répondre à la violence par la violence?” *France-Observateur*, 1 February 1962: “Il faut donc préciser que combattre l’O.A.S., c’est en même temps combattre le gouvernement.”

¹⁶⁵ Sartre, Speech at the February 11, 1962 assises de la Ligue d’Action pour le Rassemblement Antifasciste, reproduced in the *Bulletin intérieur du Front d’Action et de Coordination des Universitaires pour un Rassemblement Antifasciste (FAC)*. Folder “Journaux,” Boite 195, NAF 28091, Bourdet BNF: “Or, il est impossible qu’il y ait un seul de vous, maintenant, après jeudi, qui pense que l’on puisse lutter contre l’OAS sans lutter aussi contre le Gouvernement (*applaudissements*)... “Est-ce que je veux dire que le Gouvernement de Gaulle est Fasciste? Non, techniquement non, si vous voulez: il n’est pas fasciste. C’est le pouvoir personnel... L’OAS lui sert contre le peuple.”

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: “Eh bien, d’abord, constatez-le, nous avons les mêmes adversaires ici et là-bas. Ils s’appellent colons de l’autre côté de la Méditerranée et ici fascistes... Pourquoi donc nous obstinerions-nous à nous

Sartre was not speaking metaphorically or in the language of “spiritual resistance” with his calls for a “fight,” a “struggle,” or a “battle” against the de Gaulle government and the OAS at once: “For me,” he proclaimed, “the essential problem is to reject this theory according to which the Left had better not respond with violence to violence. We can denounce the people who give money to the OAS or who publicly declare themselves OAS. But in my opinion – and I don’t want to speak further – this doesn’t seem sufficient to me.”¹⁶⁷ Mass action would not be necessary to start with, Sartre suggested: clandestine or semi-clandestine shock troops of the Left could respond to OAS bombings (his own apartment had just suffered its second attack) with targeted bombings of their own. What was necessary was “a genuine action, not necessarily a defensive action but also an action of counter-attack... It is certain that our goal is not to philosophize about fascism but to find the means with which to crush it.”¹⁶⁸

In the spring of 1961, the Martiniquan psychiatrist and visionary anti-colonial scholar Frantz Fanon, who had joined the leadership of the FLN and become, for the metropolitan readership, its most important “voice,” asked Sartre to write a preface for his forthcoming *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). Sartre penned the preface in the late summer of 1961 (at almost the same moment he was writing his eloquent eulogy for Merleau-Ponty, dead in a car wreck that spring). The book was

considérer comme séparés d’eux, car enfin, nous ne sommes pas racistes et il ne s’agit pas ici d’une politique de soutien individuel à la résistance musulmane, il s’agit d’une solidarité de principe et de masse, de peuples.”

¹⁶⁷ “Répondre à la violence par la violence?": “Pour moi le problème essentiel est de rejeter cette théorie selon laquelle la gauche se devrait de ne pas répondre par la violence à la violence. On peut dénoncer les gens qui donnent de l’argent à l’O.A.S. ou qui, publiquement, se déclarent O.A.S. Mais à mon avis – et je ne veux en dire davantage – cela ne me paraît pas suffisant.”

¹⁶⁸ Speech at the February 11, 1962 assises: “Il s’agit cette fois-ci d’une véritable action, pas nécessairement une action défensive mais aussi une action de contre-attaque (*applaudissements*)... Il est certain que notre but n’est pas de philosopher sur le fascisme mais de trouver des moyens pour l’écraser (*applaudissements*).”

issued from Fanon's habitual publisher Maspero that fall, just in time for a Fanon dying of leukemia to hold it in his hands. Sartre's contribution to it marks the point in his intellectual career at which he veered farthest into endorsing violence not merely for instrumental reasons – as a tool among others, sometimes necessary to produce a desirable political end – but as a good for the polity in and of itself. As we have seen, at this juncture many French intellectuals, despite hesitations and discomfort, remained unapologetically committed to the Resistance “lesson” that violence would sometimes be necessary for justice to prevail. In the bombastic, seething “Preface,” however, Sartre moved considerably beyond this “practical” concession to celebrate the unique capacity of violence to provoke a longed-for radical break with the status quo, to revitalize the body politic, and to heal the trauma caused by the past violence of History.

Often read strictly as a commentary on colonial and decolonizing violence in Algeria, the “Preface,” directed both performatively and actually to a French audience, is in fact more comprehensible in light of Sartre's desire to align the French Left with the FLN and at last bring the war “home” to the metropole. Of course, the bulk of the piece was devoted to a consideration of the violence of the *indigène* and that of the *colon*. In part, it provided an extended and more vivid defense of the argument Sartre had already laid out in the 1960 *Critique de la raison dialectique*:

Only one way out [of the colonial system]: to oppose total negation with total negation, violence with equal violence... Thus the Algerian insurrection, in its character of desperate violence, is simply an adoption of the despair in which the colonist maintained the colonized; all its violence is a negation of the impossible... The violence of the insurgent *is* the violence of the colonist; there was never any other.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 686-687, emphasis in original: “Une seule issue: à la négation totale opposer la négation totale, à la violence une violence égale... Ainsi l'insurrection algérienne, par son caractère de violence désespérée, n'est que l'assomption

The “Preface” “staged” the dialectical movement described in the *Critique*, narrating a larger-than-life pantomime theater performance starring “the colonist” and “the native;” indeed, up to a point, we might read it as “dramatizing” elements of the *Critique* in the same way that *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*) once “dramatized” elements of Sartre’s earlier philosophical masterwork, *L’Être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*). Thus the “Preface” echoed the *Critique*’s argument about counter-violence, but with a set of indelible similes: violence “reflecting back at us like our reflection bouncing back at us from a mirror;” violence as “the boomerang” that “flies right back at us.”¹⁷⁰

If this insistence that Algerian violence was a counter-violence to French colonialism had been the extent of Sartre’s intervention in the “Preface,” the text would have hardly provoked comment: as we have seen, an array of figures had been making this case since 1954.¹⁷¹ Indeed, by late 1961, the question of whether or not the FLN had initially been justified in taking up arms to fight for independence was hardly the most pressing issue confronting the metropolitan Left: it had become an academic point after seven devastating years of war. Even when Sartre alluded to the FLN’s use of extreme or limit-case violence – he sneeringly berated as “racists” those members of the French Left who maintained that “there are limits” to the forms of violence even a legitimate revolt could employ – he did not raise issues that he and others had not dealt with exhaustively, in similar terms, on many previous

du désespoir où le colon maintenait le colonisé; toute sa violence est négation de l’impossible...Le violence de l’insurgé *c’est* la violence du colon; il n’y en a jamais eu d’autre.”

¹⁷⁰ Sartre, “Preface” to *The Wretched of the Earth*, li and liv; [178, 181]: “la même rejaillissant sur nous comme notre reflet vient du fond d’un miroir à notre rencontre.” “C’est le moment du boomerang, le troisième temps de la violence: elle revient sur nous, elle nous frappe et, pas plus que les autres fois, nous ne comprenons que c’est la nôtre.”

¹⁷¹ Most recently, defendants in the *réseau Jeanson* had made it at length from the witness stand – for example, see Jean-Claude Paupert’s declaration in *Le procès du réseau Jeanson*, 221.

occasions.¹⁷² And his fierce attack on “non-violents” recapitulated his own 1952 dismissal of Camus, albeit in searingly memorable language:

The pacifists are a fine sight: neither victims nor torturers! Come now! If you are not a victim when the government you voted for and the army your young brothers served in commits ‘genocide,’ without hesitation or remorse, then you are undoubtedly a torturer. And if you choose to be a victim, risking one or two days in prison [a clear reference to ACNV civil disobedience], you are simply trying to take the easy way out. But you can’t; there is no way out. Get this into your head: if violence were only a thing of the future, if exploitation and oppression never existed on earth, perhaps displays of nonviolence might relieve the conflict. But if the entire regime, even your nonviolent thoughts, is governed by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passiveness serves no other purpose but to put you on the side of the oppressors.¹⁷³

This was certainly sharply worded, but it was not new: besides the fact that it took the additional step of explicitly equating recent non-violent protest and civil disobedience with “pacifism” and “passiveness,” it was, indeed, a neat summary of the position Sartre had taken since World War II and especially since 1958, as his analysis of the political situation in France had increasingly pitted him against the “respectful Left.”

One element of Sartre’s argument in the “Preface,” however, represented a strain of reasoning that, since the heady days of the Liberation, had been present only

¹⁷² Sartre, “Preface” to *The Wretched of the Earth*, liv [182]: “La Gauche métropolitaine est gênée: elle connaît le véritable sort des indigènes, l’oppression sans merci dont ils font l’objet, elle ne condamne pas leur révolte, sachant que nous avons tout fait pour le provoquer. Mais tout de même, pense-t-elle, il y a des limites: ces guérillos devraient tenir à cœur de se montrer chevaleresques... Nos belles âmes sont racistes.”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, lviii [186]: “Ils ont bonne mine, les non-violents: ni victimes ni bourreaux! Allons! Si vous n’êtes pas victimes, quand le Gouvernement que vous avez plébiscité, quand l’Armée où vos jeunes frères ont servi, sans hésitation ni remords, ont entrepris un ‘genocide,’ vous êtes indubitablement des bourreaux. Et si vous choisissez d’être victimes, de risquer un jour ou deux de prison, vous choisissez simplement de tirer votre épingle du jeu. Vous ne l’en tirerez pas: il faut qu’elle y reste jusqu’au bout. Comprenez enfin ceci: si la violence avait commencé ce soir, si l’exploitation ni l’oppression n’avaient jamais existé sur terre, peut-être la non-violence affichée pourrait apaiser la querelle. Mais si le régime tout entier et jusqu’à vos non violentes pensées sont conditionnées par une oppression millénaire, votre passivité ne sert qu’à vous ranger du côté des oppresseurs.”

in subterranean ways in the French intellectual Left's debates. This was his claim that violence – including extreme violence – on the part of the Algerians was not only necessary, justifiable, and legitimate, but was, in and of itself, a quasi-miraculous practice that could heal the traumas of history, transforming its perpetrators – whether individual fighters or entities such as “the Algerian nation” or “the French Left” – from broken, alienated beings into rebuilt, liberated “new men.” Consider this justly famous passage, worth quoting at length:

[The French Left] would do well to read Fanon; he shows perfectly clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither a storm in a teacup nor the reemergence of savage instincts nor even a consequence of resentment: it is man reconstructing himself. I believe we once knew, and have since forgotten, the truth that no indulgence can erase the marks of violence: violence alone can eliminate them. And the colonized are cured of colonial neurosis by driving the colonist out by force. Once their rage explodes, they recover their lost coherence, they experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves; from afar we see their war as the triumph of barbarity; but it proceeds on its own to gradually emancipate the fighter and progressively eliminates the colonial darkness inside and out. As soon as it begins it is merciless. Either one must remain terrified or become terrifying – which means surrendering to the dissociations of a fabricated life or conquering the unity of one's native soil. When the peasants lay hands on a gun, the old myths fade, and one by one the taboos are overturned: a fighter's weapon is his humanity. For in the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity: killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free...¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Iv [182-183]: “Elles auront profit à lire Fanon; cette violence irrépressible, il le montre parfaitement, n'est pas une absurde tempête ni la résurrection d'instincts sauvages ni même un effet du ressentiment: c'est l'homme lui-même se recomposant. Cette vérité nous l'avons sue je crois, et nous l'avons oubliée: les marques de la violence, nulle douceur ne les effacera: c'est la violence qui peut seule les détruire. Et le colonisé se guérit de la névrose coloniale en chassant le colon par les armes. Quand sa rage éclate, il retrouve sa transparence perdue, il se connaît dans la mesure même où il se fait; de loin nous tenons sa guerre comme le triomphe de la barbarie; mais elle procède par elle-même à l'émancipation progressive du combattant, elle liquide en lui et hors de lui, progressivement, les ténèbres coloniales. Dès qu'elle commence, elle est sans merci. Il faut rester terrifié ou devenir terrible; cela veut dire: s'abandonner aux dissociations d'une vie truquée ou conquérir l'unité natale. Quand les paysans touchent des fusils, les vieux mythes pâlisent, les interdits sont un à un renversés: l'arme d'un combattant, c'est son humanité. Car, en ce premier temps de la revolte, il faut tuer: abattre un Européen

Here, in the very act of killing, the very moment of murder – in the space of a single sentence – an objectified “*opprimé*” is transformed into a subject, an actor, a “*libre*” homme. The man who kills is “emancipated” not merely from foreign rule, but from trauma: “Just let them try to talk about a ‘dependency complex’ in an ALN soldier” Sartre scoffed.¹⁷⁵ According to this scenario, then, by a sort of homeopathic logic, violence alone can provide the “cure” to traumas brought on by history’s terrible violence: the man who kills his oppressor shakes off the weight of History itself. He becomes a “son of violence,” breaking loose from the human lineage that tied him to history in all its wretchedness. Indeed, according to the vision of the “Preface,” embracing violence permits man to break into a radically different, essentially postapocalyptic future: “on the other side of torture and death,” a soldier would become “[a]nother man: a man of higher quality.”¹⁷⁶

Sartre was particularly emphatic that violence not only healed individual psyches but also fused battered *collectivities*: drawing implicitly on the theorization of fraternal groups that he had laid out in the *Critique*, he insisted that once the revolution began, “Tribal conflicts diminish and tend to disappear...The nation moves forward: every comrade in arms represents the nation for every other comrade. Their brotherly love is the reverse side of the hatred they feel for you: linked as brothers by the fact that each of them has killed and can at any moment kill again.”¹⁷⁷ Violence

c’est faire d’une pierre deux coups, supprimer en même temps un oppresseur et un opprimé: restent un homme mort et un homme libre...”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., lvi [184]: “Qu’on vienne un peu nous parler du ‘complexe de dépendance’ chez le soldat de l’A.L.N.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., lvii [185]: “Nous trouvons notre humanité en deçà de la mort et du désespoir, il la trouve au-delà des supplices et de la mort...Fils de la violence, il puise en elle à chaque instant son humanité: nous étions hommes à ses dépens, il se fait homme aux nôtres. Un autre homme: de meilleure qualité.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., lvi [183]: “Les discordes tribales s’atténuent, tendent à disparaître...La nation se met en marche: pour chaque frère elle est partout où d’autres frères combattent. Leur amour fraternel est l’envers de la haine qu’ils vous portent: frères en ceci que chacun d’eux a tué, peut, d’une instance à l’autre, avoir tué.”

against the radically other Enemy, the “*colon*,” thus rendered the body politic a totally unitary “group in fusion,” (Sartre’s language from the *Critique*), a utopian collectivity-as-singularity in which *internal* differences were erased by outwardly-directed action, in which the “brotherly love” of comrades-in-arms made even democracy, with its assumption of a plurality of subjects, superfluous. And once violence had entirely eliminated the Enemy, this fraternal utopia would be permanent: “With the last of the colonists killed, re-embarked, or assimilated, the minority species disappears, giving way to socialist brotherhood.”¹⁷⁸

From the start of the “Preface,” Sartre signaled that he was interested in the use of violence to produce the disappearance of “tribal conflicts” and the instantiation of “socialist brotherhood” not only in Algeria, but in France as well. We must take seriously his statement that he had written a preface for this book that “has no need for a Preface” as an act of appropriation, of theft: “I, a European, am stealing my enemy’s book and turning it into a way of healing Europe,” Sartre claimed.¹⁷⁹ And the “Preface” was indeed an attempt to “steal” not merely Fanon’s words but the violent revolutionary élan of the entire FLN. However profound Sartre’s support for the Algerian cause, the “Preface” did *not* portray the Algerian Revolution by itself as “the” revolution that would usher in a “break” and a new era in human history. This would come about only when the dialectic of History was pushed “*jusqu’au bout*” – that is, when decolonization came home to roost in decaying, bloodstained Europe.¹⁸⁰ The present struggle in North Africa was thus *itself* a “preface” of sorts for the real battle to come – and Fanon’s entire masterpiece, in a breathtakingly appropriative

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., lvii [184]: “avec le dernier colon tué, rembarqué ou assimilé, l’espèce minoritaire disparaît, cédant la place à la fraternité socialiste.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., xlix [175]: “Européen, je vole le livre d’un ennemi et j’en fait un moyen de guérir l’Europe.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., lvii [186]: “Ce livre n’avait nul besoin d’une préface. D’autant moins qu’il ne s’adresse pas à nous. J’en ai fait une, cependant, pour mener jusqu’au bout la dialectique...”

move, was “stolen” to become “preface” for the vision expounded in Sartre’s “Preface.”

Thus, according to Sartre, Europe would be “healed” just like Algeria had been: through violence. The last paragraphs of the text rehearsed Sartre’s now-familiar narrative of French history since 1958: “in order to delay the final reckoning and the hour of truth,” the French had turned to de Gaulle, “a Grand Magician...whose function is to keep us in the dark at any cost.”¹⁸¹ But de Gaulle could only hold off the inevitable confrontation with the forces of fascism for so long. Now, as the OAS set off bombs in the metropole (“if they find no one at home, they blow up the concierge and the house,” Sartre commented, in a bitter allusion to his own experience),¹⁸² the Paris police tortured, and the military leadership plotted against the government, the apocalyptic confrontation was looming: the violence of colonialism, “blockaded everywhere, comes back to us through our soldiers, internalizes itself and possesses us. Involution begins: the colonized reintegrate themselves and we, the reactionaries and the liberals, the colonists and the metropolitans, disintegrate.”¹⁸³ “Terror,” Sartre asserted, “has left Africa to settle here,” in France.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, whether “the hardliners of the spineless Left [*les durs de durs de la Gauche molle*]” were ready or not, the battle was beginning.¹⁸⁵

Sartre announced this news not with dismay but with excitement: it was precisely this battle that would at last render France whole, producing a radical break out of sordid history into a new, unimaginably different future: “Will we recover?” he

¹⁸¹ Ibid., lxi [191]: “pour retarder le règlement de compte final et l’heure de la vérité, ils ont mis à notre tête un Grand Sorcier dont l’office est de nous maintenir à tout prix dans l’obscurité.”

¹⁸² Ibid., lx [190]: “en cas d’absence, ils font sauter leur concierge et leur maison.”

¹⁸³ Ibid., lx [189]: “aujourd’hui la même, partout bloquée, revient sur nous à travers nos soldats, s’intériorise et nous possède. L’involution commence: le colonisé se recompose et nous, ultras et libéraux, colons et ‘métropolitains’ nous nous décomposons.”

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., lxi [190]: “La terreur a quitté l’Afrique pour s’installer ici.”

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., lxi [191].

asked, referring to the French people as a body. “Yes. Violence, like Achilles’ spear, can heal the wounds it has inflicted...Every day we shrink back from the fight, but rest assured it will be inevitable. The killers, they need it; they will swoop down on us” – a reference to paratroopers descending on Paris, the Left’s nightmare vision since 1958 – “and lash out haphazardly. The time for illusionists and wizardry is over: either you fight or you rot in the camps.”¹⁸⁶ Sartre’s use of this binary – fighting actively or rotting in the camps – is of great interest, since it signaled his rejection of any revamped narrative of the meaning of the war years and of the Resistance: concentration camp inmates here were figured not as heroes and quasi-saints in their suffering and witnessing, not as the *essence* of the Resistance project, but as despicably passive individuals who had somehow *chosen* to “rot” rather than to fight. For Sartre, the only *real* resistance was violent. And now France was on the brink, he declared – nearly gleeful – to a Left that had rejected Jeanson, a Left still obstinately unwilling to embrace this truth.

This is the last stage of the dialectic: you condemn this war but you don’t yet dare declare your support for the Algerian fighters; have no fear, you can count on the colonists and mercenaries to help you make up your mind. Perhaps then, with your back to the wall, you will finally unleash this new violence aroused in you by old, rehashed crimes. But, as they say, that is another story. The history of man. The time is coming, I am convinced, when we shall join the ranks of those who are making it.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., lxi [192]: “Guérirons-nous? Oui. La violence, comme la lance d’Achille, peut cicatriser les blessures qu’elle a faites...Nous reculons chaque jour devant la bagarre mais soyez sûrs que nous l’éviterons pas: ils en ont besoin, le tueurs; ils vont nous voler dans les plumes et taper dans le tas. Ainsi finira le temps des sorciers et des fétiches: il faudra vous battre ou pourrir dans les camps.”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., lxii [192-193]: “C’est le dernier moment de la dialectique: vous condamnez cette guerre mais n’osez pas encore vous déclarer solidaires des combattants algériens; n’ayez crainte, comptez sur les colons et sur les mercenaires: ils vous feront sauter le pas. Peut-être, alors, le dos au mur, débriderez-vous enfin cette violence nouvelle que suscitent en vous de vieux forfaits recuits. Mais ceci, comme on dit, est une autre histoire. Celle de l’homme. Le temps s’approche, j’en suis sûr, où nous nous joindrons à ceux qui la font.”

The “Preface” ended with these blazing, magnificent words of prophecy – failed prophecy, as the case would be, since de Gaulle’s government successfully concluded the peace with the FLN several months later and, although enormous bloodshed accompanied the late stages of the conflict on Algerian soil, the war never came “home” to the hexagon. The “Preface,” aside from its status as a dazzling work of literature, thus stands as an artifact of this feverish, terrible, frightening last year of the Algerian War.

It also – and this point should now be clear – stands as the artifact of the long-running *debate* about violence within the French Left. The audience invoked by the “Preface,” both implicitly and explicitly, was neither the Algerian people nor even the French reading public, but rather Sartre’s fellow intellectuals on the Left who had clashed with him again and again over the years about the problem of violence. The “Preface” was, in other words, a contribution to the conversation that we have been tracing throughout this dissertation, even if it was a bombastic one that did not appear to invite future dialogue. As we have seen, burning questions about the relationship between violence and justice, violence and politics, violence and witnessing, had been at the beating heart of French intellectual debate since 1944. (And not in a vacuum of academic speculation, but in a context of often extreme violent practices.) By 1961 Sartre’s answers to those questions were hardly the only ones on offer, even within the most politically committed strata of the non-communist intellectual Left, and even as that Left confronted the frightening specter of the OAS. What is more, those who opposed Sartre now expressed their disagreement in what was by this point a well elaborated argumentative discourse that drew on an expansive definition of the

meaning of “resistance” and a language of “witnessing” as the supremely ethical response to violent acts.

It is not surprising, then, that although Camus and Merleau-Ponty lay dead, many voices arose to contest the author of the “Preface.” For example, the journalist and anti-colonial activist Jean Daniel incredulously read the “Preface” from his hospital bed (he had been wounded unintentionally by paratrooper gunfire in Bizerte): “Brilliant. Appalling. Everything against which I have fought up to now. Apology for violence, rage for the apology, glorification of Evil which is in the direction of History ... It is not the arrival of a new man that is announced here, it is the arrival of the new executioner; Caliban transformed into Caligula is sung about by a suicidal Prospero, a demented Scipio.”¹⁸⁸ Daniel, having lived intimately with the violence of the war for many years as a journalist, scoffed at the idea that bloodshed was able to produce untraumatized subjectivities and radical breaks out of history. He admitted that, as a partisan of Algerian independence, he admired but had been unable to adopt the position vis-à-vis the violence of history that his old friend Camus had taken, that of a pure and unbiased “witness [*témoin*] for morality.” But there were other alternatives to Sartre’s embrace of violence, Daniel suggested: his own position, for example, which he described as that of an “engaged informant” who tried to enact a more modest kind of witnessing than that of Camus, a day-by-day project of giving testimony to the facts on the ground. This work would not produce any “new men,” Daniel wrote, but

¹⁸⁸ Jean Daniel, *La Blessure, suivi de Le Temps qui vient* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 60: “Génial. Épouvantable. Tout ce contre quoi j’ai lutté jusque-là. Apologie de la violence, rage de l’apologie, gloire du Mal qui est dans le sens de l’Histoire... Ce n’est pas l’avènement de l’homme nouveau qui est ici annoncé, c’est l’avènement du nouveau bourreau; Caliban devenu Caligula est chanté par un Prospero suicidaire, un Scipion dément.” The reference is to Camus’s 1944 play *Caligula*. Daniel was also disturbed by Fanon’s text, and discussed it extensively. But it did not enrage him as did the “Preface”; see for example 65: “Mort de Frantz Fanon aux États-Unis à trente-sept ans. A peine subi le choc de son livre, voici qu’il faut donner un destin à son message. Lui au moins va s’en tirer. Pas le préfacer.” And, in the same journal entry, 67, “Ce n’est pas à Fanon que j’en ai, c’est à Sartre.”

perhaps it might help to make the course of history “more human, and to stop the massacres.”¹⁸⁹

Jean-Marie Domenach, meanwhile, gave Sartre’s “Preface” its own book review in the March 1962 edition of *Esprit*.¹⁹⁰ Domenach agreed with Sartre that the horror of the Algerian War – “two million people displaced, seven or eight hundred thousand dead, two hundred thousand interned, torture at an industrial dosage” – was a scandal sufficient to call the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Europe into question.¹⁹¹ Indeed, “the abasement of Europe,” he pointed out, “is not, after all, a discovery of the season. Some things have happened here over the last thirty years: fascism, racism, extermination camps...”¹⁹² Domenach thus conceded that he shared with Sartre “the sense of a European responsibility, a conscience horrified by a forfeiture and a disavowal.”¹⁹³ He also freely admitted that Sartre’s argument about FLN-violence-as-counterviolence was correct. But he could not accept that the way out of this nightmare of European degradation was still more violence. Sartre had come to this horrifying conclusion, according to Domenach, because of two faulty judgments. First, Sartre (who, Domenach commented sarcastically, “as far as I know” had never been a combatant) related to violence as an abstract, “aesthetic,” and quasi-religious category – “the sacrament of violence” – thus obscuring the fact that “violence is above all an affair of organization,” a depressing business of planning and

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 85: “[Camus] était témoin de moralité; j’étais informateur engagé. Il m’est sans doute arrivé de déborder mes limites et de regretter que Camus ne prît pas son parti de l’inéluctable comme j’avais engagé Jules Roy à le faire – ne fût-ce d’ailleurs que pour rendre cet inéluctable plus humain, et pour en finir avec les massacres...”

¹⁹⁰ He wrote a separate and more moderately critical review of the body of Fanon’s book for the April issue: review of ‘Les damnés de la terre,’ *Esprit* 305 (April 1962): 634-645.

¹⁹¹ Domenach, “‘Les Damnés de la terre’ I: Sur une préface de Sartre,” *Esprit* 304 (March 1962), 457: “...deux millions de personnes déplacées, sept ou huit cent mille morts, deux cent mille internés, la torture à dose industrielle...”

¹⁹² Ibid., 455: “L’avilissement de l’Europe, ce n’est quand même pas une découverte de la saison. Il s’en est passé des choses depuis trente ans: le fascisme, le racisme, les camps d’extermination...”

¹⁹³ Ibid., 457: “nous avons au moins en commun le sens d’une responsabilité européenne, la conscience épouvantée d’une déchéance et d’un reniement.”

executing painful deaths rather than a glorious drama of psychological cleansing.¹⁹⁴ Second, like Merleau-Ponty in 1955, Domenach insisted that Sartre's entire philosophy mistakenly conflated "violence" and "action" when, in reality, there *did* exist non-violent modes of action. Sartre's model of radical historical change through violence, Domenach asserted, permitted no role for the mediating effects of speech – and in particular witnessing – no way of relating to the other's otherness except by exterminating it, no possible space in which political change could be achieved using symbolic action as opposed to deadly violence: "Sartreism lends itself marvelously to this exultant carving into antagonistic categories. In consequence there is no longer any possible discussion, no longer a common language. We do not speak to you; we inform you of your situation, radical, incommunicable."¹⁹⁵ He continued, still echoing Merleau-Ponty's *Les Aventures de la dialectique*: "The political method of Sartreian existentialism is distinguished by this refusal of mediations: in situations of total opposition, every speech act is a lie, there is no longer any communication possible except violence."¹⁹⁶

Domenach himself emerged from the Algerian years convinced that "communication" was possible, and that in fact the symbolic action of "bearing witness," whether in speech or in other symbolic deeds that demonstrated solidarity with victims, offered a way to respond meaningfully to History's violence without adding to it. Indeed, he suspected that on a certain level even Sartre subscribed to this view, despite himself. "There is" he insisted, "a way – and Sartre, who has not

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 459: "Or la violence est surtout une affaire d'organisation...Sartre, je le crains, en reste à une vision de la violence plus esthétique qu'il ne convient."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 458: "Le sartrisme se prête merveilleusement à cet exaltant découpage en catégories antagoniques. En conséquence il n'y a plus de discussion possible, plus de langage commun. On ne vous parle pas; on vous signifie votre situation, radicale, incommunicable."

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 459: "La méthode politique de l'existentialisme sartrien se distingue par ce refus des médiations: dans des situations d'opposition totale, toute parole est mensonge, il n'y a plus de communication possible que la violence." The phrase "le sacrement de la violence" appears on 462.

dispensed with writing, must be convinced of it – there is a way to get out of the circle of this violence curled in on itself: speech, political action, revolutionary engagement, solidarity that affirms itself otherwise than in a fraternity of terrorists.”¹⁹⁷ This list described the methods that proponents of “bearing witness” – from Domenach, Ricoeur, and the Catholic activists of the ACNV to Morin, Rousset, and Daniel – had relied on and had elaborated in theoretical terms throughout the war. In endorsing their choices as preferable to the vision expounded in Sartre’s “Preface,” Domenach could hardly adopt a triumphant tone: the non-violent anti-war movement had fought a long, terrible, and profoundly ineffectual battle and could make no claim to having meaningfully influenced the course of events. Nevertheless, against Sartre, his voice here represented another fully articulated vision of the ethics, possibilities, and limits of revolutionary violence that existed within the intellectual French Left by the end of the Algerian War.

The war certainly did not have a simple and unidirectional effect on debates over political violence within this group. Its terrible violence, which increasingly trickled into the metropole after 1958, presented intellectuals with agonizing new questions that were at once philosophical and practical. A belief in the innate justice of decolonization and a concomitant desire to justify the revolutionary violence of the FLN contributed to a radicalization or re-radicalization of some Left intellectuals; so, too, did a growing, despairing sense that the war would never be stopped by peaceful democratic, popular means. By late 1961, moreover, some intellectuals were matter-of-factly participating in militia trainings as they prepared to fight back against the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 462: “Il y a moyen – et Sartre, qui ne se dispense pas d’écrire, doit en être convaincu – il y a moyen de sortir du cercle de cette violence bouclée sur elle-même: la parole, l’action politique, l’engagement révolutionnaire, la solidarité qui peut s’affirmer autrement que dans la fraternité des terroristes.” (This final phrase clearly referenced Sartre’s *Critique de la raison dialectique* and its theorization of fraternity and Terror.)

OAS, which was bombing their apartments and places of business with the tacit support of the police. It had been one thing to decide in the early fifties, in the abstract, that one opposed “violence;” it was quite another to turn the other cheek when, as Maurice Duverger put it, someone was sticking a machine-gun in one’s face.

But even as the war’s violence produced a recurrent pattern of radicalization on the intellectual Left, it *also* provided the occasion for a massive, concerted project of “bearing witness” to the suffering that violence produced. Many intellectuals found themselves voicing their opposition to the war not primarily in the political idiom of revolutionary anti-imperialism but rather in the personal, graphic, and self-consciously “ethical” language of “testimony” to the experience of victims of the French military’s use of torture. This effort was beset with two major problems: first, difficult questions about why the FLN’s violence, which after all caused extreme suffering as well, was any more legitimate than that of the French military; and, second, rising accusations after May 1958 that “words” were an insufficient response to a emergency situation in which “action” was necessary. However, these challenges did not produce a collapse of the intellectual attempt to “bear witness” but, instead, an *expansion* of the project both in theory (Ricoeur, Domenach, Morin) and in practice (the ACNV, Jean Le Meur, sit-ins). The intellectuals responsible for this work fought back passionately against claims by Sartre and Francis Jeanson that violence represented the only meaningful form of political action against the war, that engaging in violence could produce a rupture into a new and better history, and that whoever rejected violence was exhibiting an insufficient commitment to human justice. Sartre could rage magnificently at these figures for their embrace of “witnessing,” but he could not convert them. By 1962, much of the Resistance generation of intellectuals no longer believed in any sense whatsoever that “violence can heal the wounds it has inflicted.”

CONCLUSION

The final months of the Algerian War in 1961 and 1962 were a moment of highly contentious debate on the French intellectual Left, a debate that centered on the problem of violence. By the end of the Algerian War in March 1962, most non-communist members of the anti-war movement considered themselves in radical opposition to the government and had come to embrace or at least tolerate the necessity of engaging in illegal action to protest state policies they considered immoral or criminal. Where the intellectual Left divided, however, was over whether this illegality should take violent form. As the editorial team of *Esprit* put it just after the hostilities ended, “the French partisans of peace in Algeria, roughly speaking, divided between two camps,” one typified by Sartre in the “Preface” to *The Wretched of the Earth* and the other (where *Esprit* placed itself) committed to the idea that certain forms of bodily violence such as torture and terrorism had to be condemned “no matter what their justifications are.”¹ This split was not a gentle squabble but, rather, highly acrimonious. It was also not an academic matter, involving differing philosophies competing on paper: intellectuals such as Francis Jeanson really did assist the FLN with obtaining money and weapons, while meanwhile his opponents attended civil disobedience sit-ins. The publication of Sartre’s “Preface” marked a climax of this internal struggle about violence within the non-communist intellectual Left, as Sartre accused his fellow writers of racist cowardice for voicing moral opposition to FLN terrorism and they answered in fury.²

¹ “Congrès Esprit 1962.” ESP2.B1-02.04, *Esprit* IMEC. “Les partisans français de la paix en Algérie se sont, en gros, divisés entre deux types de réaction.”

² Which often took equally offensive form. Michel Crouzet, for example, responded that the “Preface” was “the work of a drunken monkey, armed with razor blades” (“l’oeuvre d’un singe ivre, muni de lames de rasoir”). Quoted in Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mémoires*, vol. 2, *Le trouble et la lumière, 1955-1998* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 145.

In truth, however, the war in Algeria only deepened a preexisting rupture among postwar left-leaning intellectuals. For the ten years leading up to the beginning of the Algerian conflict in 1954, this varied assortment of writers, journalists, and editors had already been involved in a series of debates that hinged on disagreement about whether or not the use of violence could be justified in the name of the violent actors' political goals. In the early and mid-1950s, the issue of the Soviet Union's use of "revolutionary" violence against its own citizens had bitterly separated Sartre from former friends and collaborators such as David Rousset and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. But the roots of the split do not lie there, either. They go back to the early aftermath of World War II, as left-leaning intellectuals took part in a broader French conversation about what the French Resistance had been, what role the use of violence had played in its overall project, and what its legacy should be for the postwar world. A short-lived concurrence on these issues broke down quickly, and intellectuals on the non-communist Left found themselves in profound disaccord about what "lessons" the Resistance offered concerning the justifiability of violence. Some steadfastly maintained that the Resistance had demonstrated that lethal physical force, whether or not it was legal, was a legitimate and necessary tool in the hands of those who fought for justice. But over the course of the *épuration* and its afterlives many members of the non-communist intellectual Left came to agree with Catholic author Jean Lacroix's 1945 suggestion that it was possible to recast the Resistance project in non-violent terms, as one of "bearing witness" against *Nazi* violence.

All of this discussion took place in a context of continued and sometimes intense violence, as well as one of sharp anxiety about future catastrophe. The intellectual debates cannot be studied without taking these circumstances into account, and it makes little sense to consider French intellectuals' views on "revolution" as

something separate from the conditions in which they lived. Intellectuals in this period were not engaged only in “abstract” discussions about the concepts of violence, revolution, political justice, and terror but in politically motivated dialogue about concrete, ongoing *acts*, from the executions of the *épuration* period to the torture and bombings of the Algerian War. Even if it might at first glance appear that French intellectuals on the Left were able to offer “irresponsible” commentary on problems such as the gulag from a safe distance, their arguments need to be situated in light of the ways that Cold War violence directly and indirectly shaped life in France: bloody government-striker clashes, a mainstream media and political class that gave credence to the “Black Legend” about wholesale Communist-orchestrated massacres at the Liberation, and crippling fears of a third World War. Violence, in other words, posed an insistent *problem* for postwar French intellectuals on the Left. But the terms of the problem shifted over time as different kinds of violence, undertaken by different kinds of actors, became the focus of debate.

I have traced the way in which, over the course of these years and especially from the late 1940s, a disparate collection of intellectuals within the non-communist Left shaped a discourse of “bearing witness” or “testifying” to the extreme suffering caused by violence. They thereby argued against the legitimacy of violent acts in a way that bypassed (or explicitly rejected as irrelevant) questions about the intentions of perpetrators, the greater good that violent deeds might be serving, or the differences between revolutionary and reactionary ways of being violent. Moral imperatives, they argued, above all required speaking the truth about the immediate *effects* of violence on individuals, thereby defending the basic human dignity of victims; this task trumped the goal of building a radically better or different world. Not all the proponents of such arguments formally renounced “violence” per se, or declared that it

would always and everywhere be illegitimate – David Rousset, for example, claimed only the extreme brutality of the concentration camp interested him, while Catholic authors such as Pierre Emmanuel and Alban-Vistel attempted to argue that the Resistance had possessed a core anti-violence ethos but never claimed that its violent wartime endeavors had been illegitimate. Jean Daniel opposed terrorism, not all elements of the Algerian nationalists’ armed struggle. Nevertheless, over the course of the postwar years, all of these figures contributed to building an alternative vision of what the guiding values of the Left (and in particular the non-communist Left) ought to be: not socialist revolution, not rupture with the unjust present, but rather protecting the bare life and the essential dignity of human beings through serving as witnesses to violence against the powerless. This vision, though certainly still contested, is a commonplace one today; it certainly was not in 1944. The intellectuals who articulated it in the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s were thus not simply rejecting revolution but actively crafting a language in which to do so.

What has been the larger point of analyzing the evolution of this language? My goals have been twofold. First, by drawing out in detail the arguments made against political violence in these years, I have demonstrated that the better-known arguments in *favor* of violence were dialogic elements in series of dynamic disagreements, not static position statements of a “consensus” view. We can better understand those intellectuals who continued to defend political violence between 1944 and 1962 by placing their choices in relation to those of their contemporaries, rather than holding them up against a supposedly timeless ideal of responsibility. This does not mean making excuses – it simply means thinking historically. Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s comments on the gulag in 1950, for example, appear if not more sympathetic then at least more comprehensible when we see the strengths and weaknesses of Rousset’s

argument about “bearing witness” to which they were directly responding. Francis Jeanson’s choice to support the FLN makes more sense if it is interpreted as an explicit rejection of the project of offering ream after ineffectual ream of “testimony” to torture. In other words, exploring the discursive contributions of those who advocated witnessing as the correct response to violence helps to restore some depth to the picture of the postwar intellectual Left, and this brings all the participants into sharper focus.

Second, my exploration of the language of witnessing in the period between the Liberation and the end of the Algerian War – and the language its opponents used to respond – has challenged schematizing histories of an “ethical turn” or a movement “from revolution to ethics” that took place among French intellectuals beginning in the 1970s. Such narratives depend on assumptions that I have argued will not stand. French intellectuals on the Left were not uniformly proponents of revolutionary violence in the earlier postwar period, and those who voiced opposition to violence often did so in explicitly and self-consciously “ethical” terms – that is, by arguing that individual acts of violence were necessarily morally wrong, since they constituted a willful violation of the Other’s bodily integrity and human dignity, and by insisting that the morally correct response to such acts was to establish solidarity with the victims through “bearing witness” to their human plight. My point in establishing this fact has been, in part, to argue that more contemporary “ethical” language and discourses of “witnessing” have roots in the postwar period. But it is *not* to insist in consequence that the “turn” “from revolution to ethics” simply happened earlier than historians have until now realized: instead, I prefer to problematize the very notion of such a “turn.” After all, proponents of revolution in the postwar years were not somehow “outside” or “against” ethics: indeed, Sartre would have argued that it was

his opponents within the Left, not him, who lacked a fully committed ethical approach to the suffering that French colonialism had wrought amongst the Algerian people. Multiple understandings of ethics coexisted within the postwar intellectual Left – some compatible with revolution, some not. What is more, language of collective “turns” does not do justice to a history marked more by fragmentation and conflict amongst intellectuals than by agreement.

Thus by 1962, as the Algerian War ended, the members of France’s non-communist intellectual Left had not definitively “solved” the problem of political violence in one fashion or another. They had only raised it, repeatedly and in different contexts, in hope, in anguish and in anger, over many years. Jean Daniel wrote in his journal that his fellow intellectuals were “haunted” by violence. And after all, he wondered, “Shouldn’t everyone be?”³

³ Jean Daniel, *La Blessure*, 55.

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