


stronger, this reframing of the worldliness of African literatures is no doubt the book's most salient achievement, one on which Africa scholars can draw for many years to come.

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Algerian Chronicles

By ALBERT CAMUS

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Algerian Chronicles is the 2013 English translation of a selection of articles published by Algerian-born French writer, 1957 Nobel prize laureate, Albert Camus, under the original title *Actuelles III*. It was originally released by Camus in June 1958 when the Algerian war of independence triggered the fall of the Fourth Republic and the return of General de Gaulle to power.

The *Chronicles* is composed of articles that Camus published in various newspapers, spanning his career as a journalist, from his debut at *Alger Républicain* (June 1939) to *Combat* (May 1945) to *L'Express* (October 1955–January 1956). There is also a moving “Letter to an Algerian Militant,” Aziz Kessous, the editor of *Communauté algérienne* (October 1955) and letters published in *Le Monde* to defend his imprisoned friend, the architect Jean de Maisonseul (May–June 1956). Camus added a foreword and statements written in 1958 to clarify his position on the “New Algeria.” The appendix is composed of letters addressed to President Coty asking for mercy for condemned Algerian militants, the text of a 1937 lecture on “Indigenous Culture: The New Mediterranean Culture,” a 1938 piece on the cargo *La Martinière* with fifty-seven Algerian prisoners on board heading to the penal colony, and pieces on the Nobel Prize Conference Incident, brilliantly elucidated by Alice Kaplan in her historical introduction, putting the text into context.

If Camus has been criticized for being too cautious over the fate of Algeria, his articles are anything but. He calls attention to the Algerian political tragedy and urges for structural political change, a message not every French person wanted to hear.

Algerian Chronicles is a repertoire of stories about Algeria from 1939 to 1958, from the time when Algeria was a near blind spot on French minds to the time Algeria took over the French news and became a center-stage obsession. However, these *Chronicles* are more than mere chronica of the time. They illuminate Camus's reasoning over the course of the Algerian turmoil.

In 1939, as a young reporter, Camus deplores the excesses of colonialism—but not yet colonialism itself—in an attempt to alert his fellow countrymen of the dire and scandalous living (dying) conditions of the Kabyle people who “are ready for greater independence and self-rule” (70). He is also offering a set of concrete proposals for the betterment of the local population.

In 1945, in *Combat*, he pleads the cause of the Arabs who “are not inferior except in regard to the conditions in which they must live, and we [the French] have as much to learn from them as they from us,” reminding the reader that “hundreds of thousands of Arabs have spent the past two years fighting for the liberation of France” (90, 91).

In 1958, he denounces the use of torture on the French side and the practice of terrorism by the FLN:¹ “The government’s duty is not to suppress protests against the criminal excesses of repression ... it is rather to suppress the excesses themselves and to condemn them publicly ... both camps must be condemned” (27). It seems that it is only in September 2018, sixty years later, that the French government heard Camus (and others) when President Emmanuel Macron officially acknowledged the responsibility of France in the torturing and killing of French-Algerian communist mathematician Maurice Audin, after having denounced colonization as “a crime against humanity” during his 2017 presidential campaign.

But Camus prefers reform to revolution in his vision of a federated destiny for the “Algerian populations.”² At a moment when the events in Algeria have inflamed the country, the clash also goes to the heart of the debate over which solution to favor for the future of Algeria. Camus supports the Arab rejection of “colonialism and its abuses” (176) and reparations for the Arabs as a measure of justice. He also deems illegitimate their demands for national independence. He reads it as part of the new Arab imperialism led by Nasser in Egypt and the Arab claim to belong to “a spiritual or temporal Muslim empire of some sort,” but he states that “there has never been an Algerian nation” (177). He sees all native populations living in Algeria as indigenous (Arabs, Berbers, French, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Turks). Camus’s growing sense of the sociopolitical malaise and deepening divide between the French and the Algerians is also captured through the use of substantives to describe the situation: first, he writes of the Algerian question (91), then the Algerian affair (97), the Algerian problem (114), and the Algerian’s misfortune (150), to conclude with the Algerian tragedy (152, 211). His senses of justice and empathy are felt everywhere in these pages. In his 1956 *Call for a Civilian Truce in Algeria* (149–59), he renders the human tragedy in his concise style: “No cause justifies the death of innocent people” (152). He offers proposals for structural political reforms, but the critics on all sides rejected his deal-making ethos.

His imaginary return to the Algeria he is losing before his eyes is also evoked here. Since 1994 and the release of *The First Man*,³ the reader knows that while writing these articles, being actively involved in a cease-fire effort, defending his friends from Algeria, both Europeans and Muslims, winning the Nobel prize, and getting caught in the controversy that ensued, Camus was also writing *The First Man*, revisiting his own family history through fiction, dramatizing and contextualizing the fate of the poor French of Algeria.

¹ National Liberation Front, the Algerian independentist organization. Camus also condemned the Melouza massacre: in May 1957, the FLN killed more than 300 villagers in Melouza on the pretext that they were supporters of the rival organization MNA, National Algerian Movement (28).

² He does not forget the religious minorities, notably the Jewish populations “caught for years between French Anti-Semitism and Arab distrust” (127).

³ Albert Camus, *Le Premier homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

The translation by Arthur Goldhammer is elegant, faithful to the spirit of Camus's style and content, but not necessarily to the letter.⁴ Here is an example: In Camus's *avant-propos* (translated as "preface" and not by the more literal "foreword"), Camus gives the following famous definition of the mission of the intellectual:

Le rôle de l'intellectuel est de discerner, selon ses moyens, dans chaque camp, les limites respectives de la force et de la justice. Il est donc d'éclairer les définitions pour désintoxiquer les esprits et apaiser les fanatismes, même à contre-courant. (Gallimard edition, 24)

In Goldhammer's nonliteral translation, it becomes:

The role of the intellectual is to seek by his own lights to make out the respective limits of force and justice in each camp. It is to explain the meaning of words in such a way as to sober minds and calm fanaticisms, even if this means working against the grain. (32)

"Discerner" is not "to seek to make out," "éclairer les définitions" is not "to explain the meaning of words," and "désintoxiquer" is not exactly "to sober," but his translation does convey the spirit of Camus's statement. The medical metaphor also runs through the *Chronicles*.⁵ In the end, one is tempted to read Camus's articles as a gradual progression from a medical diagnostic he stated in 1939 ("Misery in Kabylia," *Alger Républicain*) to repeated sounding alarms (*Combat*, 1945, *L'Express* 1955–56) toward a last encounter at the Algerian bedside. Camus, the powerless doctor, sits at the bedside of his dying Algeria in 1958. Another fitting title for *Algerian Chronicles* could have been *The Chronicles of a Death Foretold*, the death of his Algeria. His "dream of a happy Algeria" (151) is fading away, making way instead for a "definitive divorce" (155). This is what those chronicles record: the long road from the urgency to denounce the colonial injustice to offering constructive proposals to change the situation of the colonized to the recording of the incremental degradation of the situation, fueled by extremist rhetoric and bloodshed actions on both sides to the lucidity of the intellectual in recognizing the point of no return.

Reading the *Chronicles* in 2019 is not only apt to understand present-day Algeria but also complex ongoing political struggles such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The fact that in 2015, Italian journalist Roberto Saviano, who lives under police protection for denouncing the crimes of the camorra in his book *Gomorra*,⁶ identifies with Camus in his introduction to the new Italian translation of *The Stranger*⁷ is a reminder that Camus's words and predictions are not only of pertinence to the colonial dynamics of his times, but also bear universal relevance.

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⁴ As Arthur Goldhammer states in the translator's note: "To mimic the French structure slavishly is to betray the spirit of the text" (XI).

⁵ He writes to Aziz Kessous in 1955: "Algeria is where I hurt at this moment, as others feel pain in their lungs." (113) and Camus had tuberculosis.

⁶ Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006).

⁷ Albert Camus, *Lo Straniero*, trans. Sergio Claudio Perroni (Milan: Bompiani, 2015).